

THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF, ISLAMIC WORK ETHICS AND ISLAMIC LEADERSHIP ON PERFORMANCE: EXPLORING MEDIATING ROLE OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract: The primary objective of this research is to investigate the impact of organizational culture and various religious factors, such as religious belief, Islamic Leadership Justice, and Islamic work ethics, on job performance with employee engagement as a mediating factor. The study focuses on the workforce within the SME sector as the target population. Data were gathered from respondents through a questionnaire developed based on an extensive review of existing literature. The questionnaire was distributed utilizing the convenience sampling technique, resulting in the inclusion of 300 valid responses in the analysis. The collected data underwent examination using the SPSS. The findings of the research indicate that religious belief, Islamic Leadership Justice, Islamic work ethics, and organizational culture significantly influence employee engagement. Furthermore, job performance is significantly impacted by employee engagement. The outcomes affirm that employee engagement serves as a noteworthy mediator in the relationships between religious belief, Islamic Leadership Justice, Islamic work ethics, and job performance. The study extensively discusses the theoretical and practical implications derived from these findings.

Keywords: Religious Belief, Islamic Leadership Justice, Islamic Work Ethics, Culture, KSA.

1. INTRODUCTION

The organizational success hinges upon the pivotal factor of employee performance, underscoring the imperative for organizational managers to direct their attention towards the enhancement of employee performance (Zafar et al., 2017). The manner in which an employee executes their professional responsibilities is intricately tied to their adherence to religious doctrines. Challenges encountered within the workplace are likewise navigated in accordance with religious principles and guidelines. Crucial decisions undertaken by the employee are informed by the illumination provided by religious teachings. Consequently, the employee's professional trajectory is characterized by success. In aggregate, the organizational workforce, through individual performances, engenders a competitive advantage for the organization (Fanggidae et al., 2020). Hence, organizations consistently prioritize the identification and recruitment of proficiently skilled employees. Emphasizing considerations related to religion has the potential to enhance the overall performance of the workforce. The imperative to augment employee performance is underscored by the intense competition prevalent in the market. Simultaneously, this emphasis on performance assumes paramount significance as it serves as a linchpin for the attainment of organizational objectives (Dakhoul, 2018).

Religion constitutes a significant facet of an individual's existence, exerting a pivotal influence on personal well-being. The role of religion extends to shaping the emotional orientation of employees vis-à-vis their organizations. Individuals who adhere to a religious faith exhibit a heightened concentration of their actions directed towards their spiritual beliefs (Etherington, 2019). The tenets of religion entail that the conduct of adherents align with the doctrines of their religious community. Notably, extant studies within the realm of management services have often neglected the consideration of religious dimensions. Religion assumes a pivotal role in shaping employee engagement and exerts a positive influence on their overall performance (Abualigah et al., 2021).

Ethical principles manifest themselves across technology, religion, and art. Employees adhering to the ethical teachings embedded within their religious framework exhibit heightened productivity in their professional endeavours. The ethical foundations rooted in religious precepts play a substantial role in shaping the work behaviour of employees (Raies, 2021). Within the framework of Islamic work ethics, there is a perceived enhancement in individual performance through the infusion of creativity and innovation within the workplace, concurrently fostering commitment among employees. Ethics, in this context, denote the acceptable behaviours exhibited by employees in the realm of work. Islamic work ethics are underpinned by four fundamental principles, namely transparency, competition, responsible behaviour, and exerted effort (Akhmadi et al., 2023).

Derived from these four principles, it becomes evident that organizations should be constructed upon the foundational tenets of Islamic ethics. The examination of attitudes and characteristics related to job performance in Hadith serves as a basis rooted in the religious teachings of Islam (Mohammad et al., 2018).

The organizational success is contingent upon the element of effective leadership (Ibrahim et al., 2019). The leaders within an organization are consistently regarded by employers as the source of direction and guidance. Consequently, it becomes crucial for a leader to integrate culture into their leadership style. The leader assumes a central role within the organization, being the architect behind the formulation of all operational procedures and policies. The leadership style employed is instrumental in orchestrating the success of the organization, as it concurrently engages with both management and staff (Shao et al., 2016). Within the Islamic framework, the concept of leadership holds significant importance. Islamic teachings posit that a leader is tasked with guiding followers in accordance with Islamic principles, and in the Islamic context, leadership is considered Allah's Amanah, a sacred trust. This pivotal role is integral, capable of resolving the challenges faced by others, thereby underscoring its paramount importance in the religious context (Mohiuddin, 2022).

The contemporary organizational landscape places paramount emphasis on employee engagement, constituting a pivotal concern. Employee engagement denotes the emotional bond between the organization and its employees, serving as a critical determinant for assessing employee performance (Al-dalalmeh et al., 2018). An actively engaged employee not only demonstrates motivation and commitment to their responsibilities but also contributes to the organizational growth, innovation, and productivity. The influence of engaged employees extends to their co-workers and the overall work environment. Paradoxically, prior research has often underestimated the significance of employee engagement. Some employers, erroneously, perceive the provision of salary and time to employees as an inefficient allocation of resources (Vasani et al., 2019). However, the involvement of employees is imperative for the success and competitiveness of the organization.

The performance and engagement levels of employees are primarily contingent upon the organizational culture (Hakro et al., 2023). Employees within the organization are deemed to operate within a positive cultural milieu when the organization affords them opportunities for professional development, offers rewards, and fosters a balance between work and personal life (Tasoulis et al., 2023). Within a positive organizational culture, employees consistently exhibit a constructive response to change, fostering their commitment to the organization and, consequently, positively influencing organizational performance. Consequently, the

objective of this study is to scrutinize the impact of religious factors on employee engagement and performance within the context of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) situated in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Employee Engagement and Job Performance

Performance is appraised as the assessment of the attainment of targets in both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Employees consistently striving for skill enhancement exhibit commendable performance. Employee performance is construed as the culmination of the quantity and quality achieved by an individual in their professional endeavours. The organizational success is contingent upon the factor of employee performance (Aziez, 2022). Various factors influence employee performance, with employee engagement emerging as a pivotal element. Within the literature, employee engagement is delineated as the manner in which an employee establishes a connection with and contributes to the organization (Al-dalameh et al., 2018). It signifies the cognitive and affective dedication of the employee to the organization. Emotionally connected employees consistently exhibit commitment and enthusiasm toward their performance. Employees within an organization consistently articulate themselves during task execution, with the fervour of a proficient employee evident in their work. Manifestations of passion are discernible through heightened productivity and enthusiasm in tasks. A proficient employee exerts additional effort and proactively initiates actions to attain objectives. Employee engagement is fostered by the availability of resources instrumental for accomplishing organizational tasks (Aboramadan et al., 2020). Engaged employees demonstrate heightened acumen in the pursuit of organizational goals.

Enhancing job performance necessitates a strategic emphasis on work engagement, a crucial indicator of organizational health, given its substantial impact on employee performance (Noercahyo et al., 2021). Furthermore, it plays a crucial role in enhancing organizational profitability, success, customer satisfaction, reducing turnover rates, and fostering job satisfaction. Engaged employees consistently attribute significance and meaning to their work, maintaining a positive attachment to both their tasks and the workplace (Riyanto et al., 2021). There is a strong likelihood that engaged employees will go the extra mile and exert additional effort to accomplish their objectives. Engaged employees consistently immerse themselves fully in assigned tasks, showcasing unwavering enthusiasm in their professional

endeavours (Ismail et al., 2019). The state of employee engagement is delineated by the active participation of employees in attaining optimal performance levels. The enhancement of employee performance can be significantly facilitated by the element of employee engagement, which possesses the capability to contribute financial support to the organization. Job performance encompasses a multitude of supplementary tasks and roles. The study by Sittar et al. (2020) examined the impact of employee engagement on job commitment and ascertained that employee engagement exerts a notably positive influence on job performance.

H1: *Employee engagement have positive significant effect on job performance.*

2.2 Islamic Work Ethics and Employee Engagement

The paradigm of Islamic work ethics (IWE) is discernible within the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad and the Quranic teachings (Bulut et al., 2021). "Oh you who believe, persevere and outlast all others in endurance, be ready, and do your responsibility to Allah so that you may succeed". In accordance with Islamic teachings and the Quran, the effective performance of duties by employees within the workplace is deemed imperative. Employee conduct is underscored as significant, with IWE exerting a pivotal influence on shaping their behavioural patterns. The conceptualization of Islamic work ethics emerged as an initiative to integrate religiously grounded values into the life of employees. Islam advocates for the promotion of professional commitment among employees. Furthermore, Islamic work ethics instructs adherents to actively contribute to and support the broader societal well-being. Contemporary perspectives recognize organizations as integral constructs within society (Tufail et al., 2017). Consequently, a symbiotic connection exists between Islamic work ethics and employee engagement. The fundamental tenet of Islam emphasizes labouring for the welfare of others. The conceptual framework of Islamic work ethics is derived from the Quran and the Sunnah. Existing literature delineates four dimensions of Islamic work ethics, encompassing perspectives on leisure, temporal considerations, wealth, and livelihood (Mohammad et al., 2016).

In recent years, several investigations have been undertaken to scrutinize the correlation between Islamic work ethics and employee engagement. Among these inquiries, a notable study was conducted by Azhari et al. (2023) that indicated a noteworthy positive impact of Islamic work ethics on employee engagement. The study's author advocated for additional investigations into this relationship within diverse communities. Drawing upon previous research endeavours, it becomes apparent that numerous other studies have similarly explored the association

between Islamic work ethics and employee engagement, consistently reporting a positive influence of Islamic work ethics on employee engagement (Udin et al., 2022). An individual adhering to Islamic principles will willingly forgo personal pursuits in favour of advancing the collective well-being of the organization.

H2: *Islamic work ethics have significant effect on employee engagement.*

2.3 Islamic Leadership Justice and Employee Engagement

Leadership constitutes a paramount attribute, exerting a pivotal influence on organizational success. The competitive dynamics within the market necessitate the presence of adept leaders, as their proficiency is indispensable for the triumph of any organization (Uhl-Bien et al., 2018). The principal responsibility of leadership should be centred on the cultivation and advancement of the professional growth of subordinates within an organizational framework. Consequently, the leadership's significance is paramount in the realization of objectives for all personnel. Within the Islamic paradigm, leadership is construed as a fiduciary duty, akin to a trust. In the Islamic ethos, a leader is obliged to fulfil the divine mandates outlined by Allah, who holds the ultimate authority and provides guidance concerning the ethical obligations of individuals towards others (Salamun et al., 2022). From an Islamic standpoint, the foundation of leadership is rooted in the principles of Islam, with the doctrine of Tawheed serving as its fundamental underpinning. The dynamics of leadership within an Islamic framework are shaped by additional facets of the religion, culminating in the enhancement of the well-being of those associated with the leader (Senam et al., 2018).

The leaders' mandate encompasses safeguarding employees and fostering a workplace environment that promotes comfort. To effectively engage employees, leaders must cultivate a proclivity for attentiveness, actively listening to their followers, and incorporating employee input into decision-making processes for organizational advancement (Scott-Jackson et al., 2018). Leaders who possess genuine dedication to the organization will exert diligent efforts to enhance employee engagement (Sammari, 2023). A leader, characterized by sagacity and professionalism, offers guidance to others, thereby fostering sustained engagement among the followers with the organization. Within the purview of Islamic teachings, a leader is enjoined to provide direction to others concerning the fundamental principles of Islam. The study of Chaman et al. (2023) and Meiyani et al. (2019) reveal a noteworthy positive correlation between Islamic leadership and employee engagement.

H3: *Islamic leadership justice have significant effect on employee engagement*

2.4 Religiosity (Religious Belief) and Employee Engagement

The concept of religiosity has been a subject of discussion in various scholarly investigations, with some studies alternatively referring to it as religious belief. Religiosity encompasses the faith in a deity and the adherence to divine regulations. Past research underscores the influential role of religion in shaping individual behavioural traits. Within the framework of religiosity, distinct factors are identified, several of which are associated with an employee's job. The fundamental constituents of religiosity comprise a sense of belonging, adherence to beliefs, ethical conduct, and interpersonal connections (Saroglou et al., 2020). Each of these factors possesses the capacity to influence an individual's disposition towards others and their role within a professional milieu. In a separate study, a categorization of religiosity into five distinct dimensions was documented, comprising experimental, intellectual, consequential, ideological, and ritualistic aspects (Yeniaras et al., 2017). The conduct of individuals is moulded by religious practices such as fasting and prayer, as indicated by scholarly accounts that “engagement in religious activities, and belief in God provide individuals with a sense of significance, positive emotions, self-esteem, positive relations, sense of meaning, and purpose in life” (Hashemi et al., 2017).

Several distinct research endeavours have highlighted the significance of religion in fostering employee engagement and enhancing job performance within the workplace. In essence, religiosity exerts a substantial influence on both employee performance and engagement (Brien et al., 2021). Various scholarly investigations have established the association between religion and organizational outcomes. A similar inquiry was undertaken in the mentioned study by Tennakoon et al. (2021) that scrutinized the impact of religion on Human Resources (HR) factors and organizational objectives, discovering a noteworthy influence of religiosity on employee engagement within Sri Lankan institutions. Additionally, certain studies contend that engagement in religious activities contributes to the enrichment of Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) (Nwachukwu et al. (2021)). An individual of this nature exhibits a sense of belonging, leading to a desire for sustained engagement with the employer. Such individuals consistently acquire knowledge from others and accord respect based on religious considerations. Moreover, they demonstrate an inclination to accommodate others in accordance with their religious beliefs. In essence, religion plays a significant role in fostering employee engagement within the

workplace (Abu Bakar et al., 2018). Research underscores the pivotal role of religion in instilling a sense of responsibility and fostering engagement among individuals within the organization Nwachukwu et al. (2021). Hence, religiosity exerts a direct impact on employee engagement.

H4: *Religious belief have significant effect on employee engagement*

2.5 Organizational Culture and Employee Engagement

The literature has examined organizational culture as comprising attitudes, values, behaviours, habits, and knowledge cultivated by an organization. These elements are formulated to guide the employees of the organization in the pursuit of organizational objectives (Brenyah et al., 2017). Organizational culture is construed as knowledge derived from experiential learning. To assist individuals functioning within an organization, cultural values are cultivated, playing a pivotal role in performance enhancement. These values offer guidance for problem resolution, addressing challenges within the workplace. The organizational culture significantly influences an employee's performance, interactions, emotions, and cognitive processes (Fidyah et al., 2020).

Numerous studies have recorded the capacity of organizational culture to influence the demeanour and conduct of employees. Several investigations have further indicated that employee engagement with work is contingent upon organizational culture. A positive organizational culture is asserted to yield significant advantages in fostering employee engagement within the workplace. Various dimensions of employee culture are taken into account to cultivate and enhance employee engagement (Abdullahi et al., 2021).

Brenyah et al. (2017) asserted that a close association exists between employee engagement and organizational culture. An organizational culture oriented towards overarching organizational objectives provides employees with opportunities to engage in creative and out-of-the-box thinking (Zawawi et al., 2019). In such a context, these employees consistently display confidence in undertaking diverse actions to attain their objectives. Consequently, it is imperative for organizational decision-makers to prioritize endeavours that enhance employee engagement through organizational culture. By directing attention to this factor, organizational productivity and long-term performance can be enhanced (Hasan et al., 2020).

When an employee is acquainted with the organizational culture, a sense of commitment and belongingness ensues (Zawawi et al., 2019). Consequent to this emotional investment, employees exhibit heightened levels of job engagement, consequently fostering increased productivity and performance. Cultures that

prioritize open communication and emphasize the cultivation of trust consistently contribute to the establishment of engagement among employees (Bui et al., 2023). Similarly, organizational cultures that promote teamwork and collaboration exhibit elevated levels of employee engagement (Al Shehri et al., 2017).

H5: *Organizational culture have significant effect on employee engagement.*

H6: *Employee engagement mediates among organizational culture and job performance.*

H7: *Employee engagement mediates among Religious belief and job performance.*

H8: *Employee engagement mediates among Islamic work ethics and job performance.*

H9: *Employee engagement mediates among Islamic leadership justice and job performance.*

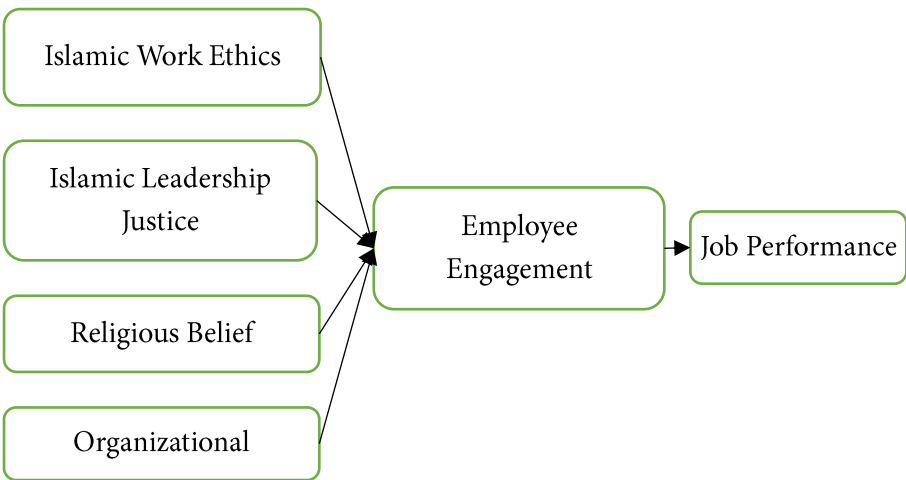


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework.

3. METHODOLOGY

The current investigation scrutinizes the influence of Islamic work ethics, Islamic leadership justice, religious beliefs, and organizational culture on job performance. Additionally, it explores the mediating function of employee engagement in the association between Islamic work ethics, Islamic leadership justice, religious beliefs, organizational culture, and job performance. The research adopts a quantitative research methodology for data collection and analysis, employing questionnaires as the primary instrument for data gathering through a survey-based approach.

3.1 Sample and Data Collection

The research employed a cross-sectional research design, utilizing a quantitative research methodology. Data collection was executed through a well-constructed questionnaire utilizing a survey-based approach. The unit of analysis comprised employees from SMEs in the KSA. A convenience sampling technique was applied for sample selection, wherein the researcher visited multiple organizations and engaged with the target population. Following an elucidation of the study's purpose and concept, the researcher obtained consent from the respondents and gathered their personal information, including contact numbers and email addresses. The distribution of the questionnaire was conducted via email, resulting in the dissemination of 500 questionnaires, of which 300 were successfully returned.

3.2 Measures

All variables in the present study were assessed using items of established reliability and validity from previous research endeavours. Islamic work ethics were gauged through a six-item scale, Islamic leadership justice through a six-item scale, religious beliefs through a four-item scale, and organizational culture through a four-item scale. Job performance was measured using a nine-item scale. Each variable exhibited satisfactory reliability and validity in prior research studies. Additionally, a seven-point Likert scale was employed for response recording, where 1 denoted "strongly disagree" and 7 denoted "strongly agree".

3.3 Data Cleaning

Following the completion of the data collection phase, it is imperative to undergo a thorough screening and cleaning process. Initially, a missing values analysis was executed, and any identified missing values were imputed using the averaging method in SPSS. Questionnaires characterized by more than 80 percent missing values or containing ambiguous entries, such as repeated responses, were excluded from further analysis. Outliers were also removed from the dataset to ensure unbiased results and facilitate accurate analysis. Subsequent to the screening and cleaning procedures, 251 responses remained available for further analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

Following the meticulous process of data cleaning and screening, data

analysis was conducted utilizing the SPSS. The hypothesized model underwent testing in the subsequent analytical phase.

3.5 Demographics

For a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under scrutiny and a thorough examination, demographic analysis of the respondents is crucial. Among the 251 participants, 75.7% were male, and 24.3% were female. In terms of age distribution, 63.8% fell within the 20 to 35 years range, 27.9% were aged between 35 to 50 years, and 8.3% were above 50 years. In educational attainment, 40.3% held undergraduate degrees, 47.8% were graduates, and 11.9% possessed postgraduate qualifications.

Table 1: Demographic Profile.

Variable	Groups	Frequency	%Age
Gender	Male	190	75.7%
	Female	61	24.3%
Age	20–35 years	160	63.8%
	35– 50 years	70	27.9%
	> 50 years	21	8.3%
Education	Undergraduate	101	40.3%
	Graduate	120	47.8%
	Postgraduate	30	11.9 %

4. CORRELATION AND THE RELIABILITY

The table 2 presented below indicates a statistically significant relationship between all independent variables and the dependent variable. Moreover, the reliability coefficients for all variables surpass the threshold of 0.70 (Hair Jr et al., 2021). Consequently, the data is deemed suitable for subsequent analysis.

Table 2: Mean, Correlation and Reliability.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	α
WE	3.62	1.29	1						0.83
RB	5.51	1.51	.42**	1					0.89
LJ	4.47	1.23	.33**	.59**	1				0.86
OC	4.31	1.12	.42**	.53**	.51**	1			0.75
EE	4.65	1.30	.36**	.64**	.64**	.50**	1		0.88
JP	4.28	1.35	.45**	.54**	.61**	.54**	.64**	1	0.91

4.1 Model Testing (Mediational analysis)

The researcher examined the mediational model in SPSS employing a two-step modelling approach.

Table 3: Mediation Analysis.

	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Standardized B	Sig	Adjust R2	T Value
1	Islamic work ethics	Job Performance	0.45	0.000	0.20	8.03
	Islamic leadership justice		0.61	0.000	0.38	9.45
	Religious Belief		0.54	0.000	0.29	9.22
	Organization Culture		0.54	0.000	0.29	10.13
2	Mediation of Employee engagement					
	Islamic work ethics	Job Performance	0.25	0.000	0.46	5.08
	Islamic leadership justice		0.34	0.000	0.48	5.79
	Religious Belief		0.21	0.000	0.44	3.53
	Organization Culture		0.29	0.000	0.47	5.47

The presented table 3 elucidates the outcomes of a two-stage regression model. In the initial stage, all estimate values are statistically significant, signifying a substantial impact of the independent variables on the dependent variable. Upon introducing the mediator, a positive R2 is observed, accompanied by a decline in the estimate values, indicating significant mediation in the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable.

Specifically, Islamic work ethics exert a significant positive influence on job performance ($\beta=0.45$; $P<0.001$). Employee engagement positively and significantly mediates the relationship between Islamic work ethics and job performance ($\beta=0.25$; $P<0.001$). Similarly, Islamic leadership justice significantly contributes to job performance ($\beta=0.61$; $P<0.001$), and employee engagement serves as a positive and significant mediator in the relationship between Islamic leadership justice and job performance ($\beta=0.34$; $P<0.001$). Religious beliefs also positively and significantly impact job performance ($\beta=0.54$; $P<0.001$), with employee engagement acting as a positive and significant mediator in this association ($\beta=0.21$; $P<0.001$). Furthermore, organizational culture positively and significantly influences job performance ($\beta=0.54$; $P<0.001$), and employee engagement positively and significantly mediates the relationship between organizational culture and job performance ($\beta=0.29$; $P<0.001$).

5. DISCUSSION

The conduct exhibited by individuals is grounded in religious teachings.

Employees within organizational settings similarly execute their responsibilities guided by religious principles. Essentially, religion serves as a determinant shaping the behaviour and attitudes of employees. The manner in which an employee fulfils their duties and engages with others is congruent with the religious doctrines they adhere to. Consequently, this study was formulated to investigate the influence of religiosity, employee engagement, organizational culture, Islamic leadership justice, and Islamic work ethics on job performance. The study was specifically conducted within the Saudi SME sector.

The study's results unveiled the significance of Islamic leadership justice in fostering employee engagement, aligning with similar findings documented in previous research by Chaman et al. (2023). Employees within SMEs in the KSA perceive their managers as adhering to principles of fairness in accordance with religious teachings. In alignment with religious guidance advocating equal opportunities for subordinates, SME managers provide an equitable chance for employee advancement. Furthermore, these managers actively eschew favouritism within the workplace, maintaining a balanced and unbiased perspective on all employees. Consistent with religious principles emphasizing impartiality, managers treat all employees under their supervision equitably, distributing workload and financial benefits uniformly. When confronted with decision-making, managers ensure fairness by considering Human Resource (HR) factors in accordance with Islamic guidelines. Overall, leaders adopt an Islamic justice style, fostering prolonged employee engagement, as these individuals exhibit unwavering dedication to their assigned tasks.

The study outcomes demonstrate a substantial impact of religious beliefs, or religiosity, on employee engagement. Employees who adhere to religious beliefs, particularly in the context of Islam, draw guidance for their daily activities from their faith. They believe in divine assistance through regular prayers and exhibit unwavering commitment to their tasks, considering it a religious obligation. The awareness of being constantly observed by a higher power deters deceptive behaviour in the workplace. Moreover, individuals with religious beliefs tend to make ethically sound decisions, aligning with religious principles that emphasize ethical conduct in interpersonal relations. Additionally, these employees show respect for the diverse beliefs of their colleagues, contributing to a positive and productive organizational environment. This collaborative ethos among employees, driven by shared goals, fosters mutual assistance in goal attainment. Ultimately, the overarching objective for every employee is the achievement of organizational goals, compelling collaborative

efforts and support for one another. Earlier research by Nwachukwu et al. (2021) also substantiates these findings.

Moreover, the results substantiated the assertion posited in the study, indicating a positive influence of Islamic Work Ethics on employee engagement (Udin et al., 2022). The plausible rationale for these findings may be attributed to employees adhering comprehensively to the tenets of Islam as their guiding religious framework within the workplace. Such individuals exhibit heightened diligence in their work, as Islamic teachings discourage lethargy during work hours. Furthermore, for religiously inclined employees, dedication to their tasks is considered virtuous. The belief in the principles of generosity and justice, inherent in the Islamic faith, motivates these employees to contribute positively to societal welfare within the workplace. Given the religious directive to assist others, these employees willingly extend their efforts beyond the norm to support both internal and external stakeholders. In summary, the confluence of their religious beliefs and work ethos serves to maintain their focus and commitment in the workplace. They diligently fulfil assigned tasks from leadership and actively engage in collaborative efforts with colleagues, all working harmoniously towards the attainment of shared organizational objectives.

Furthermore, the study's results underscore the statistically significant role of organizational culture as a predictor of employee engagement. The study participants express a profound sense of attachment to their organization, perceiving it as a unique and closely-knit community. They view the workplace as an extension of their familial bonds. A considerable number of respondents manifest a willingness to innovate and undertake risks in pursuit of assigned tasks, propelled by the perception of their organization as an entrepreneurial environment. Additionally, respondents believe in the goal-oriented nature of their organization, wherein the primary objective is the efficient completion of assigned tasks. Task recipients are characterized as competitive and possess a goal-oriented orientation. The SME, in which these employees operate, is portrayed as a highly formalized establishment, featuring a structured framework that aids employees in task execution. This structured framework delineates clear guidelines and procedures for employees to follow. The outcomes of this study align with the conclusions drawn from prior research by (Al Shehri et al., 2017) from the literature.

In conclusion, the findings corroborate the hypothesized notion that employee engagement exerts a significant impact on the job performance of employees, consistent with prior research findings of Sittar et al. (2020) as well.

The study participants express the view that at times, they lose track of time while engaged in their tasks due to their high level of involvement in their jobs. Furthermore, they perceive that their employment consumes a significant portion of their daily twenty-four hours. Their deep immersion in their work is identified as a contributing factor to their success in accomplishing assigned tasks and enhancing overall performance. These individuals consistently meet the criteria and objectives associated with their roles, underscoring their sustained engagement and commitment to their assigned responsibilities.

6. LIMITATION, FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND CONTRIBUTION

In the continually escalating competitive landscape of the SME sector, both within the KSA and globally, the workforce has emerged as a critical organizational asset that necessitates effective engagement for optimal performance in the contemporary market milieu. Given this context, it becomes imperative to regularly assess employee performance and implement strategies to enhance their efficacy. Consequently, this study endeavours to explore the impact of various religious & HR factors on the improvement of job performance and employee engagement.

The theoretical contributions of the study are noteworthy. The findings reveal that religiosity, organizational culture, Islamic leadership justice, and Islamic work ethics exert a positive influence on employee engagement. Additionally, employee engagement demonstrates a significant impact on employee performance. Hence, the present research underscores the interconnectedness of religiosity, organizational culture, Islamic leadership justice, and Islamic work ethics in enhancing both performance and engagement. Furthermore, the study underscores the crucial role of religious factors in fostering employee commitment to the organization. This research not only contributes to the existing body of literature but also addresses the dearth of studies leveraging religious factors to engage employees within the SME sector of KSA.

From a managerial standpoint, this research serves as a guiding framework for strategists within the SME sector, offering insights on leveraging employees as valuable assets for competitive positioning in the marketplace. The outcomes underscore the significance of incorporating religious elements within the SME sector. Moreover, the sustained viability of organizations in the marketplace can be augmented over the long term through the enhancement of organizational culture and the integration of religious principles into organizational practices.

This study has certain limitations worth acknowledging. Firstly, the research was confined to the KSA, and it remains to be seen whether the proposed model

would yield comparable results in other Asian nations. Secondly, the study exclusively focused on employees within the SME sector. Subsequent research endeavours could consider applying a similar model to the workforce in the education sector, given its pivotal role in a nation's success. Furthermore, it is pertinent to note that the proposed framework of the study includes only one mediator. Future studies might explore the incorporation of a technological-based moderator to enhance the applicability and depth of the framework. The findings of this research hold practical implications for SME sector policymakers seeking to enhance job performance, and academicians may find utility in this study as a foundation for future research endeavours.

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Appendix

<i>Measure</i>	
Religious belief	
1. I believe Allah see everything I do 2. I feel disappointing when I leave prayers 3. Allah will grant my prayers 4. When I pray I believe my problems are solved	Brien et al. (2021).
Islamic Work Ethics	
1. Laziness is a vice 2. Dedication to work is a virtue. 3. Good work benefits both oneself and others. 4. Justice and generosity in the workplace are necessary conditions for society's welfare 5. Producing more than enough to meet one's personal needs contributes to the prosperity of society as a whole 6. One should carry work out to the best of their ability	Al-Shamali et al. (2021).
Islamic Leadership Justice	
1. My manager acts fairly about promotions 2. My manager is being fair to his/her subordinates 3. My manager always avoids favoritism (e.g. Nepotism) 4. My manager equally employs the rules for everyone 5. My manager acts fairly regarding the decisions about his/her subordinates 6. My manager allocates the workload fairly	Zaim et al. (2022).
Organizational Culture	
1. My organization is a very special place. It is like an extended family. People seem to share a lot of themselves. 2. My organization is a very dynamic and entrepreneurial place. People are willing to take risks and be vulnerable. 3. My organization is very production oriented. A major concern is with getting the job done. People are very competitive and achievement oriented. 4. My organization is a very formalized and structured place. Bureaucratic procedures generally govern what people do.	(Jabeen et al., 2018).
Job performance	
1. Achieves the Objectives of the job. 2. Meet criteria of the performance. 3. Demonstrate expertise in all fields of the job. 4. Fulfils the requirement of the job. 5. Could manage more responsibility than typically assigned. 6. Appears suitable for higher level role. 7. Competent in all areas of the job. 8. Performs well in overall job by varying out the tasks as expected. 9. Plans and organize to achieve objectives and meet deadlines.	Zahrah (2015).
Employee Engagement	
1. Job engagement I really "throw" myself into my job. 2. Sometimes I am so into my job that I lose track of time. 3. This job is all consuming; I am totally into it. 4. I am highly engaged in this job	(Saks, 2006)