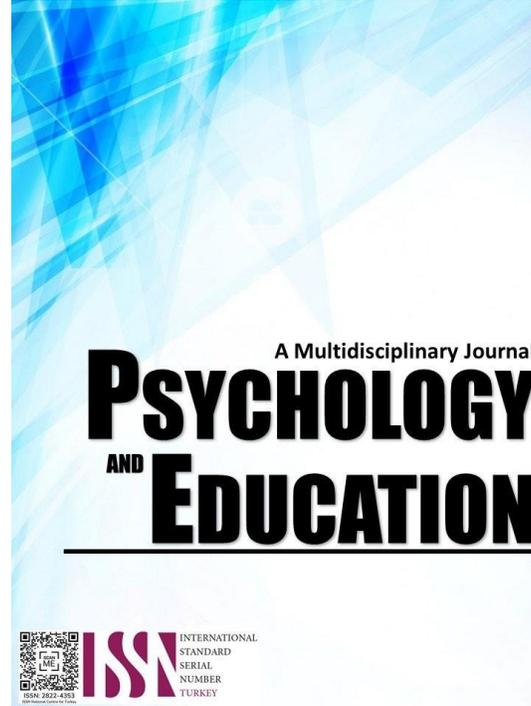


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Factors Affecting Engagement Among New-Generation Employees in an Airline Company

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Abstract

This study explores the multifaceted factors influencing employee engagement among new-generation employees (born ≥ 1980) in a Chinese private airline, J Airlines. Anchored in Social Exchange Theory and Personality-Job Fit Theory, the research adopted a quantitative correlational design involving 174 stratified randomly selected participants. Using a researcher-developed questionnaire and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), the study examined how organizational factors—rewards and recognition, leadership effectiveness, work environment, career development, corporate culture, and governance mechanisms—interact with demographic profiles to shape engagement outcomes. Descriptive and inferential analyses revealed that rewards and recognition had the strongest positive influence on engagement ($\beta = 0.513, p < 0.001$), followed by leadership effectiveness and career development. Engagement was significantly higher among younger employees, while longer tenure was associated with reduced engagement levels. The final regression model explained 59.3% of the variance in engagement. Findings highlight the critical role of customized HR strategies that align with generational expectations, emphasizing transparent promotion paths, inclusive governance, and meaningful recognition. This research provides empirical insights for workforce retention and productivity enhancement in aviation and comparable service-driven industries, with implications for policy development and organizational culture transformation in emerging markets.

Keywords: *airline, employee engagement, new-generation employees, reward policies.*

Introduction

In today's competitive and service-driven industries, employee engagement has emerged as a pivotal determinant of organizational effectiveness, especially in sectors such as aviation where safety, service quality, and customer satisfaction are directly influenced by workforce commitment (Alola & Alafeshat, 2021).

Among emerging workforce cohorts, new-generation employees—typically born in or after 1980—present unique challenges and opportunities. They bring technological fluency, value diversity, and prioritize work-life balance, but often exhibit lower organizational loyalty and heightened expectations for career advancement and recognition (Zhou et al., 2024). These traits necessitate a reassessment of traditional human resource management (HRM) strategies to retain and engage this evolving employee demographic.

Extant literature offers several theoretical lenses through which engagement can be understood. Social Exchange Theory (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) frames engagement as a reciprocal relationship where employees respond positively to perceived organizational support.

Meanwhile, the Personality-Job Fit Theory (Edwards, 1991) underscores the importance of alignment between individual traits and job demands, suggesting that optimal fit enhances engagement. Studies have shown that organizational culture, leadership, and reward systems significantly affect engagement (Gulyani & Sharma, 2018; Popli & Rizvi, 2016), but research specifically contextualized within China's private aviation sector remains limited.

Despite the growing importance of employee engagement, there is a research gap concerning how demographic characteristics such as age, education, and tenure interact with organizational factors to influence engagement levels, particularly in privately owned airlines in emerging economies. Moreover, most existing models do not comprehensively account for how governance structures and leadership effectiveness interplay with career development and rewards in shaping engagement outcomes.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating the factors affecting engagement among new-generation employees in a private Chinese airline. Specifically, it aims to determine how organizational elements such as rewards, leadership, work environment, and career development relate to engagement, and whether demographic differences moderate these relationships. Through the integration of Social Exchange Theory and Personality-Job Fit Theory, this research offers a multidimensional understanding of engagement and provides evidence-based insights for HR policy enhancements in aviation and similar service-oriented industries.

Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. To describe the demographic profile and engagement levels of new-generation airline employees.
2. Identify key organizational factors influencing engagement.
3. Test the significance of demographic and organizational predictors of engagement.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, correlational research design to explore the relationships between demographic profiles, organizational factors, and the extent of employee engagement among new-generation employees in a private Chinese airline. A correlational approach was deemed appropriate as the primary aim was not to manipulate variables but to examine naturally occurring associations among multiple constructs (Creswell, 2014). By adopting this design, the study could statistically assess the predictive power of engagement determinants while maintaining ecological validity within the organizational setting.

Respondents

The population consisted of all new-generation employees (born in or after 1980) employed at J Airlines, a private aviation company in China. From a total workforce of 306, a sample of 174 employees was drawn using stratified random sampling, which ensured proportional representation across demographic subgroups (i.e., age, gender, education, tenure). The sample size was calculated using Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error and 95% confidence level. Stratification was justified to improve the precision of subgroup estimates and reduce sampling bias, particularly given the study's interest in generational dynamics and subgroup differences.

Instrument

The study used a mixed-instrument approach that combined a researcher-developed questionnaire (54 items) measuring organizational factors and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli et al., 2002) to measure employee engagement.

The study utilized a mixed-instrument approach comprising a researcher-developed questionnaire and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) to capture both organizational factors and engagement levels. The researcher-developed instrument assessed perceptions of six key engagement-related organizational dimensions: corporate culture, leadership effectiveness, work environment, career development, rewards and recognition, and governance mechanisms. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The tool was constructed based on a comprehensive literature review and underwent content validation by a panel of three experts in human resource and organizational psychology.

To ensure construct validity, the instrument was subjected to exploratory factor analysis during a pilot test. Meanwhile, the UWES was employed to measure the extent of employee engagement through three validated dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Responses were rated on a 7-point frequency scale from 0 (never) to 6 (always). The UWES was selected due to its established psychometric properties and widespread application in cross-cultural organizational research.

Reliability Testing: A pilot study involving 45 participants confirmed the internal consistency of the instruments. Cronbach's alpha values were: demographic profile ($\alpha = 0.75$), engagement factors ($\alpha = 0.86$), and UWES ($\alpha = 0.89$), indicating acceptable to high reliability.

Procedure

Data were collected from January to May 2025 through an online survey administered via Questionnaire Star, a widely used platform in China that ensures secure data transmission. Participants received a consent form, confidentiality statement, and a unique access link. The system prevented multiple submissions and ensured anonymity. This online mode was chosen for its efficiency, accessibility, and minimal disruption to operations, particularly suitable for airline employees with rotating schedules.

Before full deployment, the survey was pilot-tested for clarity and technical performance. Completed responses were reviewed for completeness and consistency before being included in the final analysis.

Data Analysis

Data were coded and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, were utilized to summarize the demographic profile and levels of employee engagement. To examine relationships between variables and test the study's hypotheses, Cramer's V and Gamma correlation coefficients were employed to assess associations between categorical and ordinal variables, such as demographic characteristics and engagement-related factors.

Additionally, multiple linear regression using the stepwise method was conducted to identify the most significant predictors of employee engagement. All regression assumptions including normality, multicollinearity, linearity, and homoscedasticity, were tested and met. The application of parametric tests was justified by treating Likert-scale responses as interval data, a widely accepted approach when data approximate normal distributions in large samples (Norman, 2010).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Central Philippine University Research Ethics Review Board. All participants provided informed consent, and the study complied with the principles of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any time. Data were anonymized and stored on a password-protected cloud drive accessible only to the research team.



Results

Table 1 shows the profile of the respondents in terms of age group, sex, educational attainment, and number of years in the workplace. It could be seen that nearly 40 percent of the respondents (38.5%) were born in 1989 and earlier (Group A), while sixty percent of the new generation employees were born in 1990 and above (Group B) (61.5%), 55 percent of them were male (55.2%), while around 45 percent were female (44.8%).

In terms of educational attainment, 6 in every 10 were college/ university degree holder and below (86.2%), and almost 4 out of 10 were master’s degree holder and above (13.8 %).

In terms of the number of years in the workplace, a little more than a quarter (25.9 %) had 2-5 years work experience, and around forty percent (39.1) employees have worked in the company for 2-5 years, and thirty five percent (35.1%) of them worked for more than 5 years.

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents

Category	f	%
Entire Group	174	100.0
Age Group		
1989 and earlier	67	38.5
1990 and above	107	61.5
Sex		
Male	96	55.2
Female	78	44.8
Educational Attainment		
College/University or Below	150	86.2
Master's Degree and Above	24	13.8
Number of Years in the Workplace		
Less than 2 Years	45	25.9
2 - 5 years	68	39.1
More than 5 Years	61	35.1

Table 2 presents the factors affecting engagement among new-generation employees, focusing on various workplace variables such as work environment, rewards and recognition, company culture, leadership effectiveness, career development, and governance mechanisms. The table categorizes the levels of engagement into three distinct categories: "moderately affecting," "affecting," and "highly affecting." The percentages of employees in each category are provided for each factor. 46% of employees identified Rewards and Recognition as having the highest "Highly Affecting" impact among all factors, followed by Work Environment (43.1%) and Leadership Effectiveness (40.2%). Notably, Governance Mechanisms demonstrated the highest average score (mean=3.77), closely trailed by Work Environment (mean=3.74) in overall ratings.

Table 2. Factors Affecting Engagement among the New Generation Employees

Variable	Levels of Engagement								SD	Mean	Description
	Moderately Affecting		Affecting		Highly Affecting		Total				
	f	%	f	%	f	%					
Work Environment	69	39.7	30	17.2	75	43.1	174	100	1.09	3.74	Affecting
Rewards and Recognition	59	33.9	35	20.1	80	46.0	174	100	1.04	3.68	Affecting
Company Culture	72	41.4	39	22.4	63	36.2	174	100	1.06	3.56	Affecting
Leadership Effectiveness	72	41.4	32	18.4	70	40.2	174	100	.94	3.70	Affecting
Career Development	72	41.4	34	19.5	68	39.1	174	100	.91	3.70	Affecting
Governance Mechanisms	73	42.0	37	21.3	64	36.8	174	100	.83	3.77	Affecting

Legend: Highly Affecting (4.21 – 5.00), Affecting (3.41 – 4.20), Moderately Affecting (2.61 and Below)

Table 3 presents the extent of engagement among new-generation employees, categorized into three levels: "moderately engaged" "engaged," and "highly engaged." The table provides the frequency (f) and percentage (%) of employees who fall into each of these categories.

It can be observed that the majority of new-generation employees (40.8%) are reported to have an “engaged” level of employee engagement, which means that the new generation employees are moderately enthusiastic and committed, resulting in a satisfactory level of performance and dedication. While thirty five percent of them (35.6%) were highly engaged, signifying that the new generation



employees are extremely enthusiastic, committed, and involved in their work, resulting in exceptional performance and dedication. However, a little less than a quarter (23.6%) are moderately engaged at their workplace, which indicates that the employees particularly enthusiastic resulting in an average level of performance. With an overall engagement rating of 4.1, the 174 new generation employees were deemed "engaged."

Table 3. Extent of Engagement among the New Generation Employees

Variable	Extent of Engagement								SD	Mean	Description
	Moderately Engaged		Engaged		Highly Engaged		Total				
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%			
Extent of Engagement	41	23.6	71	40.8	62	35.6	174	100.0	1.41	4.10	Engaged

Legend: Highly Engaged (4.81 – 6.00), Engaged (3.61 – 4.80), Moderately Engaged (2.41 and Below)

Table 4 presents the relationships between Generation workers' work environments and factors influencing their engagement. Statistical analysis reveals a statistically significant weak positive correlation between age groups and employee engagement (Gamma=0.358, p=0.004). This means that age category and employee engagement in terms of work environment are generally related.

Gender demonstrated no significant association with engagement outcomes (Cramer's V=0.113, p=0.329), failing to meet the 0.05 significance threshold. Similarly, educational attainment showed no statistically significant relationship with work environment-related engagement. Notably, workplace tenure exhibited a statistically significant weak negative correlation with engagement intensity (Gamma=-0.214, p=0.033), suggesting that longer-serving employees reported lower engagement levels related to work environments compared to newer staff.

Table 4. Relationship between New Generation Employees' Profile and Factors Affecting Engagement in terms of Work Environment

Variable	Factors Affecting Engagement in terms of Work Environment								
	Moderately Affecting		Affecting		Highly Affecting		Total		
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Age Group									
1989 and earlier	35	52.2	11	16.4	21	31.3	67	100.0	
1990 and above	34	31.8	19	17.8	54	50.5	107	100.0	
Total	69	39.7	30	17.2	75	43.1	174	100.0	
Gamma = .358	p = .004								
Sex									
Male	41	42.7	13	13.5	42	43.8	96	100.0	
Female	28	35.9	17	21.8	33	42.3	78	100.0	
Total	69	39.7	30	17.2	75	43.1	174	100.0	
Cramer's V = .113	p = .329								
Educational Attainment									
College/University or Below	61	40.7	24	16.0	65	43.3	150	100.0	
Master's Degree and Above	8	33.3	6	25.0	10	41.7	24	100.0	
Total	69	39.7	30	17.2	75	43.1	174	100.0	
Gamma = .049	p = .778								
Number of Years in the Workplace									
Less than 2 Years	11	24.4	9	20.0	25	55.6	45	100.0	
2 - 5 years	31	45.6	9	13.2	28	41.2	68	100.0	
More than 5 Years	27	44.3	12	19.7	22	36.1	61	100.0	
Total	69	39.7	30	17.2	75	43.1	174	100.0	
Gamma = -.214	p = .033								

Table 5 shows the relationship between the new generation employees' profile and the factors affecting their engagement in terms of rewards and recognition. Age group correlated positively with engagement in Rewards & Recognition (Gamma=0.497, p<0.001), reflecting significant generational differences. No gender disparities emerged (Cramer's V=0.021, p=0.962), with similar proportions of male (45.8%) and female (46.2%) employees reporting high impact. Educational attainment showed no association (Gamma=-0.140, p=0.400). Notably, workplace tenure demonstrated a weak negative correlation (Gamma=-0.285, p=0.004), indicating senior employees perceived Rewards & Recognition as less impactful.

Table 5. Relationship between New Generation Employees' Profile and Factors Affecting Engagement in terms of Rewards and Recognition

Variable	Factors Affecting Engagement in terms of Rewards and Recognition								
	Moderately Affecting		Affecting		Highly Affecting		Total		
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Age Group									



1989 and earlier	34	50.7	14	20.9	19	28.4	67	100.0
1990 and above	25	23.4	21	19.6	61	57.0	107	100.0
Total	59	33.9	35	20.1	80	46.0	174	100.0
Gamma = .497	p = .000							
Sex								
Male	32	33.3	20	20.8	44	45.8	96	100.0
Female	27	34.6	15	19.2	36	46.2	78	100.0
Total	59	33.9	35	20.1	80	46.0	174	100.0
Cramer's V = .021	p = .962							
Educational Attainment								
College/University or Below	51	34.0	27	18.0	72	48.0	150	100.0
Master's Degree and Above	8	33.3	8	33.3	8	33.3	24	100.0
Total	59	33.9	35	20.1	80	46.0	174	100.0
Gamma = -.140	p = .400							
Number of Years in the Workplace								
Less than 2 Years	9	20.0	9	20.0	27	60.0	45	100.0
2 - 5 years	24	35.3	12	17.6	32	47.1	68	100.0
More than 5 Years	26	42.6	14	23.0	21	34.4	61	100.0
Total	59	33.9	35	20.1	80	46.0	174	100.0
Gamma = -.285	p = .004							

Table 6 shows the relationship between new generation employees' profile and factors affecting engagement in terms of company culture. The research results indicate that age positively correlated with corporate culture engagement (Gamma=0.353, p=0.005), with post-1990 employees reporting stronger impacts than pre-1990 cohorts. Gender (Cramer's V=0.066, p=0.683) and education (Gamma=0.014, p=0.936) showed no significant associations. Years of service negatively correlated (Gamma=-0.220, p=0.024), with <2-year employees rating culture as more impactful.

Table 6. Relationship between New Generation Employees' Profile and Factors Affecting Engagement in terms of Corporate Culture

Variable	Factors Affecting Engagement in terms of Company Culture							
	Moderately Affecting		Affecting		Highly Affecting		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Age Group								
1989 and earlier	38	56.7	10	14.9	19	28.4	67	100.0
1990 and above	34	31.8	29	27.1	44	41.1	107	100.0
Total	72	41.4	39	22.4	63	36.2	174	100.0
Gamma = .353	p = .005							
Sex								
Male	37	38.5	22	22.9	37	38.5	96	100.0
Female	35	44.9	17	21.8	26	33.3	78	100.0
Total	72	41.4	39	22.4	63	36.2	174	100.0
Cramer's V = .066	p = .683							
Educational Attainment								
College/University or Below	63	42.0	32	21.3	55	36.7	150	100.0
Master's Degree and Above	9	37.5	7	29.2	8	33.3	24	100.0
Total	72	41.4	39	22.4	63	36.2	174	100.0
Gamma = .014	p = .936							
Number of Years in the Workplace								
Less than 2 Years	12	26.7	15	33.3	18	40.0	45	100.0
2 - 5 years	28	41.2	13	19.1	27	39.7	68	100.0
More than 5 Years	32	52.5	11	18.0	11	29.5	61	100.0
Total	72	41.4	39	22.4	63	36.2	174	100.0
Gamma = -.220	p = .024							

Table 7 shows the relationship between new-generation employees' profiles and the factors affecting engagement in terms of leadership effectiveness. The data reveals that age groups showed no significant correlation with leadership effectiveness engagement (Gamma=0.050, p=0.701), with similar distributions across pre/post-1990 cohorts. Gender demonstrated a marginally non-significant association (Cramer's V=0.180, p=0.060), with males (40.6% high impact) and females (39.7% high impact) reporting comparable responses.

Educational attainment trended toward a weak negative correlation (Gamma=-0.299, p=0.094), with Master's degree and above employees reporting lower high-impact ratings (25.0%) compared to college-level staff (42.7%). Work experience showed no significant relationship (Gamma =-0.016, p=0.883), with consistent engagement patterns across experience brackets.



Table 7. Relationship between New Generation Employees' Profile and Factors Affecting Engagement in terms of Leadership Effectiveness

Variable	Factors Affecting Engagement in terms of Leadership Effectiveness							
	Moderately Affecting		Affecting		Highly Affecting		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Age Group								
1989 and earlier	28	41.8	14	20.9	25	37.3	67	100.0
1990 and above	44	41.1	18	16.8	45	42.1	107	100.0
Total	72	41.4	18	16.8	45	42.1	174	100.0
Gamma = .050	p = .701							
Sex								
Male	45	46.9	12	12.5	39	40.6	96	100.0
Female	27	34.6	20	25.6	31	39.7	78	100.0
Total	72	41.4	18	16.8	45	42.1	174	100.0
Cramer's V = .180	p = .060							
Educational Attainment								
College/University or Below	59	39.3	27	18.0	64	42.7	150	100.0
Master's Degree and Above	13	54.2	5	20.8	6	25.0	24	100.0
Total	72	41.4	18	16.8	45	42.1	174	100.0
Gamma = -.299	p = .094							
Number of Years in the Workplace								
Less than 2 Years	18	40.0	6	13.3	21	46.7	45	100.0
2 - 5 years	3	44.1	14	20.6	24	35.3	68	100.0
More than 5 Years	23	39.3	12	19.7	25	41.0	61	100.0
Total	72	41.4	18	16.8	45	42.1	174	100.0
Gamma = -.016	p = .883							

Table 8 shows the relationship between the profile of the respondents and their level of work engagement in terms of career development. The data reveals that career development engagement did not significantly correlate with age groups (Gamma=0.187, p=0.137), though post-1990 employees reported higher high-impact responses (44.9%) compared to older cohorts (29.9%). A weak gender difference emerged (Cramer's V=0.139, p=0.187), with females (46.2% high impact) slightly more likely than males (33.3%) to cite strong career development effects.

Educational attainment trended negatively (Gamma=-0.106, p=0.534), as college-educated employees (40.7% high impact) reported stronger engagement than Master's degree and above staff (29.2%). Work experience inversely correlated with engagement intensity (Gamma=-0.224, p=0.019), with <2-year employees showing the highest high-impact ratings (53.3%).

Table 8. Relationship between New Generation Employees' Profile and Factors Affecting Engagement in terms of Career Development

Variable	Factors Affecting Engagement in terms of Career Development							
	Moderately Affecting		Affecting		Highly Affecting		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Age Group								
1989 and earlier	30	44.8	17	25.4	20	29.9	67	100.0
1990 and above	42	39.3	17	15.9	48	44.9	107	100.0
Total	72	41.4	34	19.5	68	39.1	174	100.0
Gamma = .187	p = .137							
Sex								
Male	42	43.8	22	22.9	32	33.3	96	100.0
Female	30	38.5	12	15.4	36	46.2	78	100.0
Total	72	41.4	34	19.5	68	39.1	174	100.0
Cramer's V = .139	p = .187							
Educational Attainment								
College/University or Below	62	41.3	27	18.0	61	40.7	150	100.0
Master's Degree and Above	10	41.7	7	29.2	7	29.2	24	100.0
Total	72	41.4	34	19.5	68	39.1	174	100.0
Gamma = -.106	p = .534							
Number of Years in the Workplace								
Less than 2 Years	12	26.7	9	20.0	24	53.3	45	100.0
2 - 5 years	29	42.6	16	23.5	23	33.8	68	100.0
More than 5 Years	31	50.8	9	14.8	21	34.4	61	100.0
Total	72	41.4	34	19.5	68	39.1	174	100.0



Gamma = -.224 p = .019

In terms of governance structures, Table 9 illustrates the connection between the characteristics of new-generation employees and the elements influencing engagement. Age correlated weakly positively with governance engagement (Gamma=0.238, p=0.060), with post-1990 employees reporting higher high-impact ratings (42.1%) than pre-1989 cohorts (28.4%). Gender showed no significant association (Cramer’s V=0.017, p=0.976), with males (36.5% high impact) and females (37.2% high impact) reporting similar responses.

Educational attainment trended weakly negatively (Gamma=-0.129, p=0.494), with college-level employees (37.3% high impact) slightly more engaged than Master's degree and above staff (33.3%). Work experience demonstrated a weak negative trend (Gamma=-0.143, p=0.168), with <2-year employees showing the highest high-impact ratings (40.0%).

Table 9. Relationship between New Generation Employees’ Profile and Factors Affecting Engagement in terms of Governance Mechanisms

Variable	Factors Affecting Engagement in terms of Governance Mechanisms							
	Moderately Affecting		Affecting		Highly Affecting		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Age Group								
1989 and earlier	33	49.3	15	22.4	19	28.4	67	100.0
1990 and above	40	37.4	22	20.6	45	42.1	107	100.0
Total	73	42.0	37	21.3	64	36.8	174	100.0
Gamma = .238	p = .060							
Sex								
Male	40	41.7	21	21.9	35	36.5	96	100.0
Female	33	42.3	16	20.5	29	37.2	78	100.0
Total	73	42.0	37	21.3	64	36.8	174	100.0
Cramer’s V = .017	p = .976							
Educational Attainment								
College/University or Below	61	40.7	33	22.0	56	37.3	150	100.0
Master's Degree and Above	12	50.0	4	16.7	8	33.3	24	100.0
Total	73	42.0	37	21.3	64	36.8	174	100.0
Gamma = -.129	p = .494							
Number of Years in the Workplace								
Less than 2 Years	15	33.3	12	26.7	18	40.0	45	100.0
2 - 5 years	27	39.7	16	23.5	25	36.8	68	100.0
More than 5 Years	31	50.8	9	14.8	21	34.4	61	100.0
Total	73	42.0	37	21.3	64	36.8	174	100.0
Gamma = -.143	p = .168							

Table 10 displays the relationship between the profile of new generation employees and their level of employee engagement. Age positively correlated with engagement intensity (Gamma=0.499, p<0.001), with post-1990 employees reporting higher high engagement (44.9%) than pre-1989 cohorts (20.9%). Age has a significant impact on employee engagement, according to James' research, with younger workers being more involved than older workers (James et al., 2011). This agrees with the findings of the present study.

Gender showed no significant association (Cramer’s V=0.075, p=0.616), The findings of this study contradict those of Banihani (2013). However, Khodakarami et al. (2020) contended that a variety of factors, including the field in which the job is done, influence the association between gender and participation. Therefore, a specific analysis of the issue of whether an employee's gender can affect their degree of engagement is required.

The Gamma value of -0.048 (p = 0.793) reveals a weak, negative association between educational attainment and the level of employee engagement. The p-value of 0.793 indicates that the relationship is not statistically significant. The findings of this study contradict those of a study by Yuan et al. (Yuan et al.,2012) that found a negative relationship between education and both perceptual and rational dedication, with the more educated a person, the less dedicated they are.

Work experience inversely correlated with engagement (Gamma=-0.294, p=0.003), The results align with those of Vereb (2025), which indicates that as years of service rise, employee engagement may exhibit a declining tendency.

Table 10. Relationship between New Generation Employees’ Profile and their Extent of Employee Engagement

Variable	Factors Affecting Engagement in terms of Extent of Employee Engagement							
	Moderately Engaged		Engaged		Highly Engaged		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Age Group								
1989 and earlier	26	38.8	27	40.3	14	20.9	67	100.0



1990 and above	15	14.0	44	41.1	48	44.9	107	100.0
Total	41	23.6	71	40.8	62	35.6	174	100.0
Gamma = .499	p = .000							
Sex								
Male	24	25.0	36	37.5	36	37.5	96	100.0
Female	17	21.8	35	44.9	26	33.3	78	100.0
Total	41	23.6	71	40.8	62	35.6	174	100.0
Cramer's V = .075	p = .616							
Educational Attainment								
College/University or Below	35	23.3	61	40.7	54	36.0	150	100.0
Master's Degree and Above	6	25.0	10	41.7	8	33.3	24	100.0
Total	41	23.6	71	40.8	62	35.6	174	100.0
Gamma = -.048	p = .793							
Number of Years in the Workplace								
Less than 2 Years	4	8.9	21	46.7	20	44.4	45	100.0
2 - 5 years	15	22.1	28	41.2	25	36.8	68	100.0
More than 5 Years	22	36.1	22	36.1	17	27.9	61	100.0
Total	41	23.6	71	40.8	62	35.6	174	100.0
Gamma = -.294	p = .003							

Table 11 shows the relationship between new generation employees' profile and their extent of employee engagement in terms of work environment. The Gamma value of 0.559 ($p = 0.000$) indicates a moderate positive relationship between the work environment and the extent of employee engagement, consistent with Mahfuz Judeh (2021).

Rewards & recognition showed the strongest association. The Gamma value of 0.699 ($p = 0.000$) indicates a strong positive relationship between rewards and recognition and the extent of employee engagement. This implies that as the level of rewards and recognition increases, the likelihood of employees being highly engaged also increases.

The Gamma value of 0.586 ($p = 0.000$) indicates a strong positive relationship between company culture and the extent of employee engagement. This implies that as company culture becomes more influential, the likelihood of employees becoming highly engaged increases significantly.

The degree of employee engagement and leadership effectiveness are strongly positively correlated, as indicated by the Gamma value of 0.666 ($p = 0.000$). This suggests that there is a large increase in the likelihood of highly engaged employees when leadership effectiveness rises.

The degree of employee engagement and career development has a moderate, positive association, as indicated by the Gamma value of 0.575, $p = .000$. This implies that employees are more likely to become highly engaged when career development opportunities have a greater impact.

The degree of employee engagement and governance mechanisms has a substantial positive correlation, as indicated by the Gamma value of 0.689, $p = .000$. This indicates a substantial correlation between employee engagement and the efficacy of governance mechanisms. Employees are more likely to say they are extremely interested in their work when governance systems gain traction.

Table 11. Relationship between Factors Affecting Employee Engagement and the Extent of New Generation Employee Engagement

Variable	Factors Affecting Engagement in terms of Extent of Employee Engagement							
	Moderately Engaged		Engaged		Highly Engaged		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Work Environment								
Moderately Affecting	28	40.6	27	39.1	14	20.3	69	100.0
Affecting	6	20.0	19	63.3	5	16.7	30	100.0
Highly Affecting	7	9.3	25	33.3	43	57.3	75	100.0
Total	41	23.6	71	40.8	62	35.6	174	100.0
Gamma = .559	p = .000							
Rewards and Recognition								
Moderately Affecting	30	50.8	22	37.3	7	11.9	59	100.0
Affecting	8	22.9	18	51.4	9	25.7	35	100.0
Highly Affecting	3	3.8	31	38.8	46	57.5	80	100.0
Total	41	23.6	71	40.8	62	35.6	174	100.0
Gamma = .699	p = .000							
Company Culture								
Moderately Affecting	27	37.5	34	47.2	11	15.3	72	100.0
Affecting	7	17.9	22	56.4	10	25.6	39	100.0
Highly Affecting	7	11.1	15	23.8	41	65.1	63	100.0



Total	41	23.6	71	40.8	62	35.6	174	100.0
Gamma = .586	p = .000							
Leadership Effectiveness								
Moderately Affecting	28	38.9	36	50.0	8	11.1	72	100.0
Affecting	6	18.8	19	59.4	7	21.9	32	100.0
Highly Affecting	7	10.0	16	22.9	47	67.1	70	100.0
Total	41	23.6	71	40.8	62	35.6	174	100.0
Gamma = .666	p = .000							
Career Development								
Moderately Affecting	29	40.3	31	43.1	12	16.7	72	100.0
Affecting	5	14.7	19	55.9	10	29.4	34	100.0
Highly Affecting	7	10.3	21	30.9	40	58.8	68	100.0
Total	41	23.6	71	40.8	62	35.6	174	100.0
Gamma = .575	p = .000							
Governance Mechanisms								
Moderately Affecting	29	39.7	37	50.7	7	9.6	73	100.0
Affecting	7	18.9	19	51.4	11	29.7	37	100.0
Highly Affecting	5	7.8	15	23.4	44	68.8	64	100.0
Total	41	23.6	71	40.8	62	35.6	174	100.0
Gamma = .689	p = .000							

Table 12 presents the results of a multiple linear regression analysis using the stepwise Method to examine the variables influencing employee engagement among new-generation employees. The analysis identifies several predictors and assesses their contributions to the model.

The regression analysis indicates that rewards and recognition, leadership effectiveness, career development, work environment, and corporate culture all significantly contribute to employee engagement. Of these, rewards and recognition has the highest impact on engagement, followed by career development and leadership effectiveness. The model explains a substantial proportion (59.3%) of the variation in employee engagement, suggesting that these factors are crucial in fostering a highly engaged workforce among new generation employees.

The results, which put high regard on rewards and recognition, it is consistent with the findings of Chen (2023). Therefore, rewards and recognition can increase the motivation of the employees to perform in their jobs, which, in turn, raises the level of engagement of employees in the organization (Gulyani & Sharma, 2018).

Following rewards and recognition is leadership effectiveness; the findings aligns with the results of the study of Dari (2018), stating that the behavior of a leader will encourage the motivation of employees to work effectively and play important roles in developing a positive working environment.

Work environment has proven to have a positive and significant relationship with employee engagement. Gensler (2011) as cited in Kamanja et al. (2019) found a strong relationship between work conditions and quality of work performed by employees in organizations.

Corporate culture is also a driver of employee engagement, it is closely related to the work environment and has a crucial impact on employee dedication (Popli, & Rizvi, 2016). The similarity of this finding was found to be consistent with the previous study which shows there is a significant relationship between organizational culture and employee engagement (Karthikeyan et al., 2013).

Table 12. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis using Stepwise Method Showing Variables that Employee Engagement among the New Generation Employees Model Summary

Model	r	2	Adjusted r2	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					r2 Change	F Change	df1	f2	Sig. F Change
1	.570a	.325	.321	709	.325	790	1	72	.000
2	.681b	.464	.457	344	.139	179	1	71	.000
3	.727c	.529	.521	055	.065	641	1	70	.000
4	.756d	.571	.561	884	.042	439	1	169	.000
5	.770e	.593	.581	728	.022	9.038	1	168	.003

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Rewards and Recreation
- b. Predictors: (Constant), Rewards and Recreation, Leadership Effectiveness
- c. Predictors: (Constant), Rewards and Recreation, Leadership Effectiveness, Career Development
- d. Predictors: (Constant), Rewards and Recreation, Leadership Effectiveness, Career Development, Work Environment
- e. Predictors: (Constant), Rewards and Recreation, Leadership Effectiveness, Career Development, Work Environment, Company Culture

<i>Model</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Constant	-1.949	4.824***	.000
Rewards and Recreation	.513	7.077***	.000
Leadership Effectiveness	.330	3.971***	.000
Career Development	.336	3.923***	.000
Work Environment	.226	3.180**	.002
Company Culture	.238	3.006**	.003

p < 0.01, *p 0.001

Regression Equation:

Predicted (EE) = 0.513 (RR) + 0.330 (LE) + 0.336 (CD) + 0.226 (WE) + 0.238 (CC) - 1.949

where

EE = Employee Engagement

RR = Rewards and Recognition

LE = Leadership Effectiveness

CD = Career Development

WE = Work Environment

CC = Company Culture

Discussion

This study set out to investigate the organizational and demographic factors influencing employee engagement among new-generation employees at J Airlines, grounded in Social Exchange Theory and Personality-Job Fit Theory. The findings confirmed the study's central premise: that engagement among younger employees is significantly shaped by perceived organizational support, recognition, leadership, and opportunities for career growth. These results not only affirm prior research but also extend its relevance into the underexplored context of China's private aviation sector.

The strong predictive power of rewards and recognition ($\beta = 0.513$, $p < 0.001$) aligns with the findings of Gulyani and Sharma (2018), who argued that reward systems remain a primary motivational lever, especially among millennial and Gen Z cohorts. These employees place a high value on acknowledgment and equitable compensation structures. This preference reflects the broader generational shift toward purpose-driven and feedback-oriented work cultures, as discussed by Zhou et al. (2024). Furthermore, our data show that employees with fewer years of tenure reported higher sensitivity to reward systems, suggesting that early-career employees require tangible affirmation of their contributions to sustain engagement.

Leadership effectiveness also emerged as a robust predictor of engagement. This supports the findings of Dari et al. (2018), and Musico et al. (2022), who emphasized the centrality of leadership style in shaping psychological safety and team alignment. However, our results provide a nuanced view: while leadership was important across all demographic groups, its influence was more pronounced when aligned with participative and transformational qualities, suggesting that hierarchical or authoritarian styles may hinder engagement among newer generations. This points to the need for leadership development initiatives that prioritize inclusivity and emotional intelligence.

The significance of career development opportunities ($\beta = 0.336$, $p < 0.001$) resonates with studies by Setiyani et al. (2019) and Susanto (2022), which emphasized that clarity in promotion pathways and access to skill-enhancement programs are critical for retaining young professionals. Our study adds empirical weight to these claims in the aviation sector, where job roles can be rigid and upward mobility constrained. Notably, older employees perceived career development as less impactful a possible reflection of plateauing opportunities or unmet expectations, which merits further longitudinal investigation.

Work environment and corporate culture also positively influenced engagement, albeit to a lesser extent. The results are consistent with Judeh (2021) and Karthikeyan et al. (2013), who highlighted the importance of supportive environments and value alignment. However, in our study, governance mechanisms which are often linked to transparency and inclusion showed weaker correlations. This suggests a potential organizational blind spot where decision-making processes may be perceived as top-down or opaque. While SET posits that reciprocal transparency strengthens engagement, our findings reveal that this exchange is not fully realized in the case organization, which may limit the long-term sustainability of engagement gains.

Interestingly, demographic variables such as age and tenure demonstrated meaningful associations with engagement levels. Younger employees (born ≥ 1990) exhibited higher engagement, particularly when rewards and career development were perceived as "highly affecting" ($\text{Gamma} = 0.499$, $p < 0.001$). This contrasts with the weaker engagement reported among longer-tenured staff, aligning with Vereb et al. (2025), who suggest that prolonged service without perceived growth may lead to disengagement. Gender and education, on the other hand, showed no significant impact challenging assumptions made in earlier works like Banihani et al. (2013), and supporting more recent claims by Khodakarami and Dirani (2020) that gender's effect on engagement may be industry- or culture-specific.

Despite the robustness of the data, several limitations must be acknowledged. The study was confined to a single private airline, limiting generalizability across the broader aviation sector or international contexts. Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of the research precludes causal inference. Self-reported data may also introduce response bias, despite efforts to ensure anonymity and instrument reliability. Future studies may benefit from longitudinal designs, comparative industry samples, and mixed-methods approaches to capture deeper insights into engagement dynamics.

The study contributes a nuanced understanding of employee engagement among new-generation workers in the aviation industry. It affirms that rewards, leadership, and career development are not only significant predictors but also culturally and generationally contingent. These findings underscore the urgency for aviation HR leaders to adopt more individualized, transparent, and future-focused engagement strategies—aligning organizational goals with evolving workforce values. Further research should explore the intersection of digital transformation, remote work, and generational expectations to future-proof engagement in this critical sector.

Conclusions

This study offers a significant contribution to the understanding of employee engagement in the context of new-generation workers within the private aviation sector in China. By integrating Social Exchange Theory and Personality-Job Fit Theory, the research provides a theoretically grounded and empirically validated explanation of how organizational factors particularly rewards and recognition, leadership effectiveness, career development, and work environment influence engagement among younger employees. Unlike prior studies that often-treated engagement as a generalized construct, this work disaggregates key drivers and demonstrates their varying degrees of influence across demographic profiles, thus refining our understanding of engagement's multidimensional nature.

Scientifically, the study advances the field by contextualizing engagement within a generational and sector-specific framework, revealing that engagement is not only shaped by organizational structures but also by evolving employee expectations rooted in age and career stage. Practically, the findings offer actionable insights for HR practitioners and airline executives, suggesting that tailored engagement strategies such as transparent promotion systems, participatory leadership styles, and customized recognition programs are essential to retain and motivate new-generation employees in high-pressure, service-intensive industries.

This research also opens new avenues for future inquiry. Longitudinal studies are recommended to capture the dynamic nature of engagement over time and to examine how digital transformations, hybrid work models, and technological interventions (e.g., AI-enabled HR systems) may reshape engagement paradigms. Comparative studies across national or organizational cultures could further validate the generalizability of the results and refine engagement strategies globally.

This study not only responds to the urgent need for generationally responsive engagement frameworks in aviation but also sets the stage for broader, cross-industry applications. By aligning organizational practices with the values of an emerging workforce, businesses can cultivate sustained engagement, drive performance, and ensure competitive advantage in an increasingly dynamic labor market.

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