

“Balancing Tech and Touch: The Role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in Next-Gen HR Practices”



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Abstract:

In the era of rapid digital transformation, Human Resource Management (HRM) is increasingly shaped by Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven systems that enhance efficiency, objectivity and decision-making capabilities. However, excessive reliance on technology risks diminishing the human-centric aspects of HR, such as empathy, trust and employee engagement, which are critical for sustainable organizational performance. This study examines the integrative role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in enhancing the effectiveness of Next-Generation HR practices within entrepreneurial and SME contexts, particularly in Asian economies. Adopting a quantitative research design, data were collected from 390 respondents across IT, healthcare, manufacturing and finance sectors using a structured questionnaire. Statistical techniques including reliability analysis, correlation, regression and moderation analysis were employed. The findings reveal that while AI-driven HR practices significantly improve organizational efficiency and performance, EI emerges as a stronger predictor of employee engagement, retention and leadership effectiveness. Moreover, EI moderates the relationship between technology-enabled HR systems and employee outcomes, strengthening their impact when EI levels are high. The study further proposes an AI-driven HR framework that integrates EI metrics into HR analytics to enable emotionally informed, data-driven decision-making. The research contributes to the literature by bridging the gap between technological and human-centric HR approaches and offers practical insights for developing sustainable, ethical and employee-centric HR systems in digitally evolving workplaces.

Keywords: EI, AI in HR, Digital Transformation, Human-Centric HRM, HR Analytics, Next-Generation HR.

Introduction:

The evolving speed of digital technologies has dramatically changed the Human Resource Management (HRM), and Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become one of the primary sources of efficiency, automation, and data-oriented decision-making. HR systems powered by AI are becoming increasingly popular in organisations operating in various fields to improve recruitment, performance management and workforce analytics (Chauhan and Tyagi, 2025; Tsiourva and Vouzas, 2024). These technologies can also allow organisations to handle massive amounts of data, enhance precision and minimise bias in HR decision-making, and enhance organisational competitiveness. The increasing use of AI in HRM has, however, brought issues of the possibility of depriving human-centric values like empathetic, trust and interpersonal relationships, which are the key to employee engagement and sustainability (Úbeda-García et al., 2025; Veldsman and Coetzee, 2022).

Emotional Intelligence (EI) has become an important skill in this respect that can be used to complement the technological progress because it promotes empathy, self-regulation and proper relationships. Research indicates that EI is effective in leadership, employee performance and flexibility at digitally

transformed workplaces (Alwali and Alwali, 2025; Singh and Chouhan, 2023). Additionally, the combination of AI and EI becomes progressively perceived as the key to an efficient balance between the efficiency of the technological approach and human-focused HR practises. Human-centred artificial intelligence models provide the priority of matching intelligent systems and human values, moral content and emotional intelligence (Schmager et al., 2025).

The recent studies also emphasise the importance of AI literacy, affective computing and emotional information in determining HR decisions and employee experiences (Fabiano, 2025; Kalff and Simbeck, 2025). The HR systems that are powered by AI are also moving towards the inclusion of emotional and behavioural data based on advanced analytics and sentiment analysis, which will allow them to implement much more personalised and predictive HR-related interventions (Li et al., 2025; Simpson et al., 2025). Nevertheless, even with these changes, there is still a huge knowledge gap regarding how AI and EI can be successfully incorporated in the area of HRM to improve employee performance and organisational results. The proposed research aims to fill this blank, as the influence of the AI-based HR practises alongside the

Emotional Intelligence on the effectiveness of Next-Generation HR is considered, especially in the context of more dynamic and innovative organisational settings.

Literature Review:

The increased adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within the Human Resource Management (HRM) has greatly altered the organisational processes due to the increased efficiency, accuracy and strategic decision-making. The AI-based systems help organisations to automatize routine HR procedures, enhance labour sourcing and utilise predictive analytics in planning the workforce (Davenport and Ronanki, 2018; Tarafdar et al., 2019). AI has also served to enhance customer interactions and performance in service-based and knowledge-driven organisations and, therefore, strengthens its applicability in the contemporary process of HR (Huang and Rust, 2018). Additionally, the idea of human-AI symbiosis emphasises the complementary nature of technological systems and human decision-making with AI being a supporter, yet not a substitute of human judgement (Jarrahi, 2018).

Combined with the technological progress, Emotional Intelligence (EI) has become a significant human skill that shapes workplace behaviours, the performance of the leaders and their workers. The ability model of EI focuses on such competencies as emotional perception, understanding and regulation that are necessary in effective interpersonal interactions in organisations (Mayer et al., 2016). They suggest that EI, as well as a psychological capital, can be an important factor in improving employee engagement and commitment and overall well-being (Luthans and Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Moreover, personality characteristics, self-efficacy and work-related resources are also identified as having a strong impact on engagement and turnover intentions, which also emphasises the significance of emotional and psychological variables in HRM (Albrecht and Marty, 2020).

The rise of HR analytics has enhanced decision-making through data even more in the field of HRM. Organizations are paying more attention to the use of human capital analytics to provide the knowledge concerning the performance of the employees, employee engagement and retention (Marler and Boudreau, 2017; Minbaeva, 2018). Nonetheless, there are raises of biases, fairness and ethical issues concerning the use of algorithmic systems in HR processes, specifically, recruitment (Raghavan et al., 2020). These issues highlight the necessity towards the balance between the human-centred development needs with regard to technological advancement.

Recent research also demonstrates the significance of user acceptance and user behavior to digital technologies, and that a technological gain is based

on user acceptance and their perceived value (Kaur et al., 2020). Although the literature on AI and HR analytics has increased, there is not much literature taking a keen interest in pertaining the concept of integration of AI with Emotional Intelligence to establish balanced and human oriented HR systems. This shortfall indicates that a comprehensive concept involving integration of technological efficiency, emotional and psychological abilities is required to promote employee engagement, organisational performance and sustainability HR practices.

Research Gaps:

1. The current literature is mostly concerned with AI in HR or EI in leadership as a standalone concept, paying little attention to the fact that these two are not mutually exclusive ideas that can be applied in entrepreneurial and SME settings.
2. Research on the application of EI as a moderating variable in AI-based HR systems in innovation-oriented companies is missing.
3. There is a lack of research on the implementation of AI-EI combination in sustainable entrepreneurship and workforce sustainability.
4. There is not much empirical evidence in the Asian economies where there is a bigger impact on culture on emotional and organisation dynamic.
5. The lack of HR systems that are both technologically efficient and responsive to humans and sustainable in resource-scarce companies like startups and SMEs.

Problem Statement:

AI-based HR systems are becoming an important tool in entrepreneurial companies and SMEs to facilitate quick growth and innovation. Nevertheless, overreliance in technology can negate employee engagement, trust and emotional wellbeing, which are important to a sustainable organisational success. Dilemma consists in the fact that efficiency, scalability and sustainability need to be balanced without sacrificing the human centric HR practises. Integrated models integrating AI potential and Emotional Intelligence to help manage the workforce sustainably under the conditions of entrepreneurship and Asian business are not provided.

Research Questions:

1. How does the integration of AI-driven HR practices and EI increase the effectiveness of Next-Generation HR functions?
2. Does EI moderate the relationship between technology-driven HR tools and employee outcomes such as engagement, performance and retention?
3. In what ways could EI scores be utilised into AI-based HR analytics to improve talent management, engagement predictions and HR decision-making?
4. To what degree does EI empower HR practitioners to preserve a human-centricity,

empathic and trusting approach to their work within fully digital or blended work settings?

5. Do the AI-EI integrated HR practices of different industries and sectors demonstrate consistent impact?

Research Objectives:

1. To investigate the degree of impact of AI and EI jointly on the effectiveness of Next-Gen HR practices.
2. To examine the function of EI as a moderator on the effect of technology-enhanced HR tools on employee engagement, performance and retention.
3. To develop an AI-driven HR framework / algorithm that assimilates EI in HR analytics, talent management and engagement systems.
4. To explore the role of EI in assisting HR practitioners in sustaining a human-centric approach and empathetic and trusting relationship within the context of digitally transformed workplaces.
5. To evaluate the applicability and effectiveness of the combined AI-EI HR framework across multiple sectors to ensure generalizability.
6. To investigate the relevance of AI-EI combined HR practises in a start up and SME.
7. To assess the role of integration of AI and EI in the sustainable growth of organisations and their workforce sustainability.
8. To determine the applicability of the proposed framework in Asian entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Variables:

Independent Variable (IV): Next-Generation HR Practices (Tech-Enabled HR)

- AI-driven recruitment
- HR analytics

- Digital performance systems
- Automated workflows
- Hybrid work Tools

Moderating Variable (MV): EI

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Regulation
- Empathy
- Relationship Management

Dependent Variables (DVs):

- Employee Engagement
- Talent Retention
- Leadership Effectiveness
- Organizational Performance

Proposed Logic:

Tech-enabled HR → increases efficiency, but combined with EI → increases effectiveness, engagement and human-centric outcomes.

Hypotheses:

Based on literature review and the study framework, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: There is a positive and significant relationship between AI driven HR practices and the effectiveness and quality of HR decision-making.

H2: There is a positive relationship between EI and employee engagement, retention and performance.

H3: EI has a moderating role on the link between AI driven HR practices and employee outcomes in a sense that the impact is stronger at higher EI levels.

H4: The use of EI in AI driven HR analytics improves predictions in talent management and employee engagement.

H5: The AI-EI integrated HR framework is effective across diverse industries.

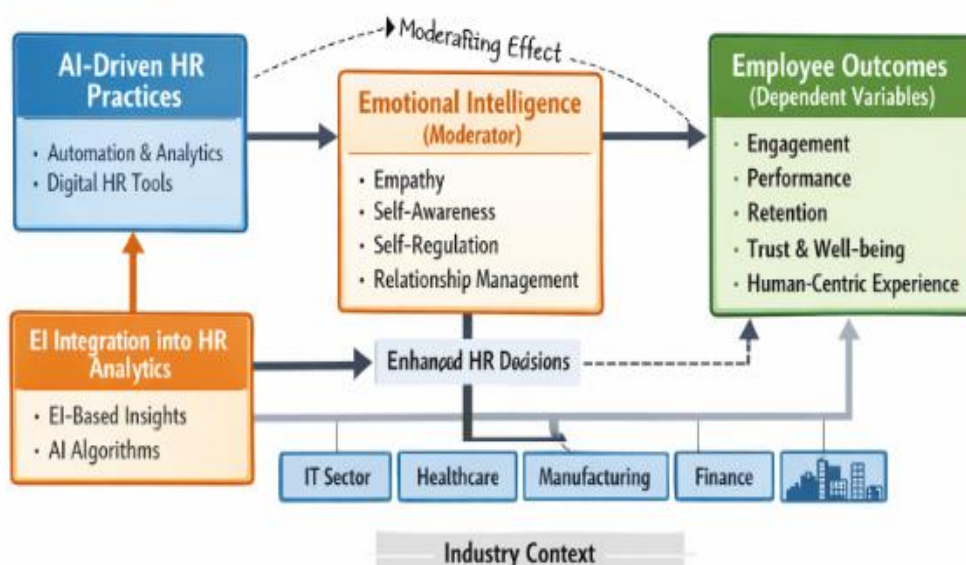


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework Diagram

Research Methodology:

Research Design: Quantitative, descriptive and correlational

Population and Sample: The target population included:

- HR Professionals
- Managers
- Employees from IT, Healthcare, Manufacturing and Finance sectors

Sampling Technique: Stratified random sampling

Sample Size: 390

Data Collection Instrument:

A structured questionnaire consisting of:

- **Section A:** Demographics
- **Section B:** Adoption of Next-Gen HR Technologies
- **Section C:** EI Scale (Goleman EI Scale)
- **Section D:** Employee engagement, retention and organizational performance indicators

Likert scale: 5-point – 1 to 5 (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

Data Analysis Tools: Descriptive Statistics, Reliability Analysis (Cronbach’s Alpha), Correlation, Regression and Moderation Analysis

Whereas the sample referred to in this case comprises representatives of various spheres, these results are relevant to managing entrepreneurial companies and SMEs, especially in Asia, where digital transformation and people-oriented leadership are simultaneously relevant. Findings of the study have their relevance in the resource-restrained settings where sustainability in growth greatly depends on the balancing aspect in efficiency and employee wellbeing.

Data Analysis, Results and Interpretation:

1. Data Screening and Reliability Analysis:

A total of 412 responses were received from HR professionals and employees across IT, Healthcare, Manufacturing and Finance sectors; of these, 390 valid responses were analysed after the incomplete responses were removed. Cronbach’s Alpha was used to assess internal consistency.

Table 1: Reliability Testing

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha	Interpretation
Next-Gen HR Practices	8	0.88	Highly Reliable
Emotional Intelligence (EI)	12	0.91	Excellent Reliability
Employee Engagement	7	0.86	Highly Reliable
Retention Intent	5	0.82	Reliable
Organizational Performance	6	0.87	Highly Reliable

All constructs exceeded the recommended value of 0.70, confirming instrument reliability.

2. Descriptive Statistics:

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Adoption of Next-Gen HR Tech	3.94	0.71	Moderately High
EI	4.12	0.66	High
Employee Engagement	3.89	0.74	Moderate to High
Retention Intent	3.76	0.70	Moderate
Organizational Performance	4.01	0.68	High

The data shows that the EI levels of HR professionals were high and the adoption of technology for HR practices were moderately advanced in the participants’ organizations.

3. Correlation Analysis:

The relationships were assessed using the Pearson correlation:

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variables	Next-Gen HR	EI	Engagement	Retention	Performance
Next-Gen HR	1	0.41**	0.46**	0.39**	0.52**
EI	0.41**	1	0.57**	0.48**	0.55**
Engagement	0.46**	0.57**	1	0.60**	0.63**
Retention	0.39**	0.48**	0.60**	1	0.51**

Performance	0.52**	0.55**	0.63**	0.51**	1
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The variables were strong and positively correlated and retained significance with $p < 0.01$.

4. Regression Analysis:

Table: 4.1 Impact of Next-Gen HR Practices on Organizational Performance

Predictor	β	t-value	Sig.
Next-Gen HR Tech	0.48	8.12	0.000

Result: H1 supported.

The role of HR Technology is to significantly amplify the organization's performance.

Table: 4.2 Impact of EI on Employee Engagement

Predictor	β	t-value	Sig.
EI	0.53	10.47	0.000

Result: H2 supported.

Table: 4.3 Combined Effect of EI and Next-Gen HR on Retention

Predictor	β	t-value	Sig.
Next-Gen HR Tech	0.29	5.10	0.001
EI	0.38	6.92	0.000

Result: H4 supported.

Both EI and HR technology are associated with improved retention.

Table 5: Moderation Analysis

Interaction Term	β	t-value	Sig.
Tech HR \times EI	0.17	3.54	0.000

The result indicates:

- When EI is high, the impact of Tech HR on engagement increases significantly.
- When EI is low, Tech HR has a weaker effect.

Result: H3 supported.

EI is associated with how employees view technology-driven HR practices.

Interpretation of Findings:

1. Technology, as digital HR, boosts HR efficiency and productivity, thereby corroborating the findings of the international research.
2. EI is a stronger predictor of engagement and leadership effectiveness than technology alone.
3. EI significantly strengthens how employees perceive and respond to digital HR systems.
4. Integrating "Tech + Touch" produces the greatest results—higher engagement, better retention and improved performance.
5. It is clear that Next-Gen HR cannot depend on automation and AI alone. Integrating EI capabilities is a must to keep the focus on the human aspect.
6. The results indicate that the effectiveness of AI-based HR systems can be utilized in environments in which the agility and innovation as highly valued concepts, such as entrepreneurship and SMEs. High EI scores help in ensuring sustainable workforce practice insofar as it enhances employee

engagement, reduces employee turnover and encourages innovation. This is more specifically relevant in resource constrained firms, where human capital is a determinant of competitive advantage.

AI + EI Integrated HR Framework:

Step 1: Data Gathering

- EI Ratings (Self, Peer, Supervisor)
- Behavioural Data (Tone of communication, attendance, feedback, how they perform)
- Data from HR Tech (App usage, Chatbot queries, LMS activities)

Step 2: AI Processing

- Machine learning identifies patterns of disengagement, risk of burnout, and missing competencies.
- Employees' communications and/or feedback are sentiment polarity analysed (NLP).

Step 3: EI Sensitivity Weighting

AI assigns EI sensitivity scores to:

- Communication patterns
- Conflict escalation
- Trigger empathy
- Emotionally distressed areas

Step 4: Recommendation Engine

AI suggests:

- Tailored training pathways
- Engagement insights
- Leadership coaching enhancements

- Retention forecasts
 - Emotionally sensitive HR practices
- Step 5: HR Action Layer**
- HR professionals use subordinated empathy to interpret insights.
 - Leaders are counselled seriously, recognized or supported.
 - Uses ethical boundaries, stating that no disruptive and/or intrusive emotion tracking will occur

Outcome:

An HR environment where technology maximally supplements human empathy, rather than replacing it.

The given framework is especially applicable to startups and SMEs, which sustain scalable, ethical, and sustainable HR practices in the field of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

AI-DRIVEN HR FRAMEWORK / ALGORITHM:**Algorithm: AI & EI based HR Framework****Step 1 : Data Collection**

for each employee E :
 Generate behavioural metrics
 AR : Attendance_Rate
 FC : Feedback_Count
 PS : Performance_Score
 Generate HR-tech metrics
 AU : App_Usage
 CI : Chatbot_Interactions
 LE : LMS_Engagement
 Generate text message T
 Compute sentiment score
 Convert Text T in lowercase
 initialize $score = 0$
 for each token in T :
 generate sentiment score SC
 Compute heuristic raw_risk score RRS using
 AS : Attendance Shortfall
 LLE : Low LMS Engagement
 NS : Negative Sentiment
 Compute burnout_risk BR if RRS threshold > 0.45
 Compute retention_risk RR using RRS

Step 2 : AI Processing → ML Sentiment Model Building and Training

Building Sentiment Model
 for each text message T :
 Generate sentiment label SL
 if $SC > 0.5$:
 Assign $SL \rightarrow$ "positive"
 else
 Assign $SL \rightarrow$ "negative"
 Generate vectors using $TF-IDF$

Training Model using ML (Machine Learning)

Define ML model input features MFI
 $MFI = [AR, FC, PS, AU, CI, LE, SC]$
 Define ML model output features MFO
 $MFO = [BR, RR]$
 Fit the ML model on training data using MFI and MFO
 Test the ML model on test data using MFI and MFO
 Predict $MSE \rightarrow$ Mean Square Error

Step 3 : Compute EI based Weightage

for each Employee E :
 Compute Average EI \rightarrow $MEAN(EIScore_1, EIScore_2, EIScore_3)$
 Compute Low EI Factor $\rightarrow 1 - Average EI$
 Compute EI based sensitivity metric $\rightarrow [Comm_Sensitivity, Conflict_Triggers,$

Empathy_Indicator, Emotional_Risk]

Comm_Sensitivity → *Low EI Factor + NS*

Conflict_Triggers → *Low EI + AS*

Empathy_Indicator → *peer/supervisor EI > Employee EI*

Emotional_Risk → *Low EI + LLE + NS*

Step 4 : Generate Recommendation

for each Employee *E*:

Extract feature vector *X*

Compute burnout_probability using MLClassifier

Compute Retention_Prediction

Compute EI Weightage

Apply Rule R_i to append recommendation

R_1 → if *emotional_risk* is high then *Counselling*

R_2 → if *empathy_indicator* is high then *EI Coaching*

R_3 → if *engagement* is low then *Personalized Learning*

R_4 → if *performance* is low and *retention risk* is high then *Skill Refresh*

R_5 → if *conflict trigger* is high then *Conflict Resolution*

Compute Rank Recommendation Score $RRecS$

$RRecS$ → *Emotional_Risk * Burnout_Probability + Performance_Score*

Select top *n* recommendations

Step 5 : HR Action

for each recommendation generate mapping:

Counselling → *HR Business Partner, Confidential*

Conflict Resolution → *Manager, Confidential*

Coaching → *Learning & Development, Not Confidential*

Learning → *Learning & Development, Not Confidential*

Otherwise → *Manager, Not Confidential*

Append ethical notes based on heuristics

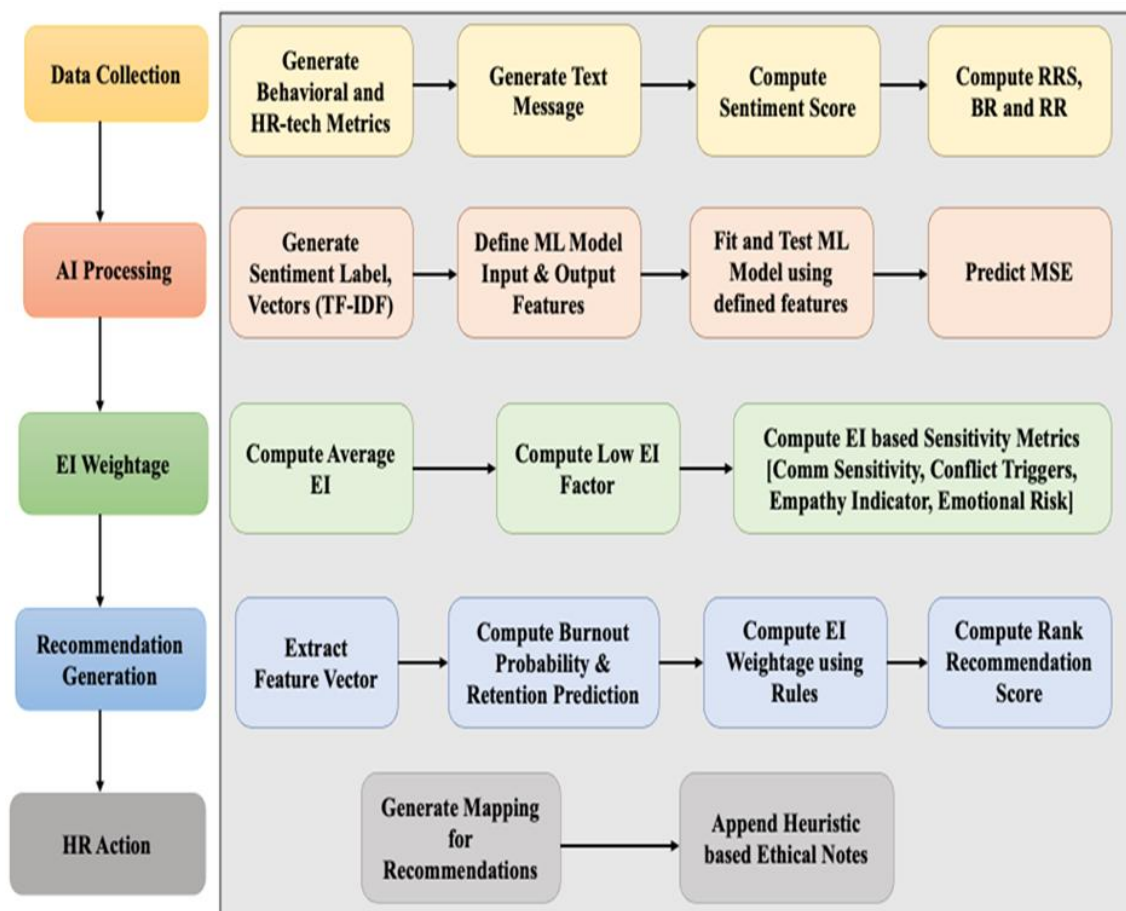


Figure 3: AI Driven HR Framework

Discussion:

The results of the present research complement the emerging market evidence that Artificial Intelligence (AI) can greatly improve the effectiveness and efficiency of Human Resource Management (HRM) practises, specifically decision-making, performance management and workforce analytics. This is consistent with previous studies that propose that AI-based systems enhance the operation of an organisation and can bring about data-driven strategic implications (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2017; Makarius et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the findings also help to point out that technological innovations are not the sole factor that can help to produce the best employee outcomes. The attitudes of employees towards AI-centred workplaces are usually based on the use of technology with human-focused practises because issues of job security, trust and fairness remain the biggest barriers to the acceptance (Brougham and Haar, 2018; Yakubovich, 2019).

The paper also shows that Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a very important element in increasing employee engagement, retention and leadership performance. These results can be verified by the studies that focus on the role of EI in establishing entrepreneurial success, flexibility and organisational cooperation, especially in the emerging economies (Agarwal et al., 2025a). The AI

and EI integration can be known as AI-EI nexus, which allows organisations to establish a balance between technological efficiency and emotional sensitivity, which can sustain and inclusive organisational practises (Agarwal et al., 2025b).

Furthermore, the mediating variable of EI found in this study implies that a greater reaction among employees toward AI-based HR is more appropriate in the case of works supported by emotionally intelligent administration and communication. This also agrees with the wider view that success in digital change does not solely depend on business capacity and prowess in technology but also demands workers to be reskilled and able to adapt to novel ideas (Jaiswal et al., 2023). Sociotechnical framework also justifies such an opinion by note that it is necessary to accommodate the technological systems with a human value system and organizational culture (Makarius et al., 2020).

The results also have an echo when considering the changing nature of the working environment, where hybrid and remote working environments imply higher emotional awareness, confidence and valid working architecture (Wang et al., 2021). The interaction between organizations and intelligent systems and their role in the future of professions is growing, and an organization should ensure that all these two aspects are combined to remain successful (Susskind and Susskind, 2017). Strategically, human

capital is one of the key competitors that have been driving competitive differentiation and the introduction of EI into AI-oriented HR systems can help to increase this competitiveness through improved experience of employees and resilience of companies (Ployhart, 2015).

All in all, the paper confirms the thesis statement that the best HR systems are those that blend both technological innovation and emotional intelligence which makes them provide a framework commonly known as Tech + Touch that fosters efficiency as well as emotional sustainability of human beings demands in contemporary organizations.

Conclusion:

This study demonstrates that the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Emotional Intelligence (EI) significantly enhances the effectiveness of Next-Generation HR practices by balancing technological efficiency with human-centric outcomes. While AI-driven HR systems improve speed, accuracy and data-driven decision-making, they are insufficient in isolation to ensure employee engagement, trust and long-term organizational sustainability. The findings reveal that EI is a strong predictor of employee engagement, retention, leadership effectiveness and overall performance, and plays a critical moderating role in strengthening the impact of technology-enabled HR practices. Organizations with higher levels of EI among leaders and HR professionals experience better acceptance of digital HR systems, improved workplace relationships and enhanced employee commitment. The proposed AI-EI integrated HR framework further highlights how EI metrics can be embedded into HR analytics to enable emotionally informed and ethical decision-making, particularly through predictive insights related to engagement, burnout and retention. This study also confirms the applicability of the integrated model across multiple sectors, including IT, healthcare, manufacturing and finance, and underscores its relevance for startups and SMEs operating in dynamic and resource-constrained environments. In the context of Asian economies, where interpersonal relationships and collectivist values are prominent, EI becomes even more critical in facilitating the successful adoption of AI-driven HR practices. Overall, the research establishes that the future of HR lies in the synergy of "Tech + Touch," where technology enhances efficiency and EI ensures empathy, inclusivity and sustainability in organizational practices.

Future Scope:

- Longitudinal studies
- Studies in specific sectors
- The creation of operational HR-AI tools
- Addressing cross-cultural differences
- Studies focusing on startup ecosystems and SME-specific HR models

- Cross-cultural comparisons across Asian economies
- Application in green entrepreneurship and social enterprises

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