

## Fitting in to Thrive: Role of Sociocultural Adaptation in Shaping Engagement among Interstate Migrant Professionals in India

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### ABSTRACT

In today's globalized world, businesses are increasingly reliant on a mobile workforce, with professionals frequently relocating for work opportunities. This presents a challenge, as successful integration into a new sociocultural environment can significantly impact an employee's engagement and overall contribution to the organization. This research explores the link between sociocultural adaptation and engagement among 122 young interstate migrant professionals in India. It reveals a significant positive correlation between sociocultural adaptation and work engagement, indicating that strong adaptation predicts higher work engagement. Gender differences were absent in both variables, but professionals aged 28-35 showed greater adaptation and engagement compared to younger peers (21-27 years). These findings are vital for businesses undergoing tech-forward changes. A workforce that adapts well and is engaged is crucial for successful technology adoption and innovation. Understanding sociocultural adaptation factors can help businesses support migrant professionals and optimize their performance in evolving work settings.

**Keywords:** *Sociocultural Adaptation, Engagement, Acculturation, Motivation, Migration, Diversity, Job Satisfaction*

India's rich sociocultural tapestry is evident across its states, reflecting diverse aspects such as language, cuisine, customs, and festivals. Inter-state migration, driven by economic opportunities, sees an annual average of 9 million migrants relocating within India (Economic Survey of India, 2017; Sharma, 2017). Despite this, 67% of migrant professionals report challenges in adapting to new environments (Swaminathan, 2019). Adaptation involves internal changes to function effectively in a new culture, with effective integration positively impacting work engagement. Engaged employees, invested in their work, exhibit satisfaction, and organizational loyalty (Gavrić et al., 2020). The correlation between cultural competence and intention to remain among migrant employees is influenced by sociocultural adaptation and job satisfaction (Tsang & Nguyen, 2023). Recognizing and addressing sociocultural adaptation is crucial for fostering engagement and productivity among interstate migrant professionals. Successful adaptation enhances collaboration, teamwork, and problem-solving, while difficulties may lead to isolation and reduced performance. This underscores the importance of empirical research and policy

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initiatives to support migrant professionals and promote inclusive growth across India's diverse states.

**Sociocultural adaptation** involves individuals adjusting to new environments, encompassing mental assets, interpersonal connections, and identity reshaping (Aibazova, 2022; Chernikova et al., 2022; Dumnova & Mukha, 2022). Factors like motivation and social networks influence this process (Cavicchi & Hegnes, 2021), with both academic and daily life settings posing challenges. Integrating academic pursuits with problem-solving approaches is crucial for enhancing adaptability in various spheres of life. Understanding sociocultural adjustment mechanisms is vital for effectively assimilating individuals into new cultural environments. Sociocultural adaptation in **migrants** profoundly impacts their personal and professional lives, influencing work performance and career progression. Access to adaptation resources, clear plans, and feedback are crucial for effective adaptation and readiness for independent work. Ethnic identity's influence on adaptation in educational settings directly affects professional adjustment to socio-economic changes (Kayupova, 2022). Successful adaptation is linked to heightened job satisfaction, increased engagement, and overall workplace well-being, promoting enhanced professional development and performance.

Various theories, including acculturation theory and Bandura's Social Learning theory, inform our understanding of sociocultural adaptation (Fargion & Schwartz, 2019). Acculturation theory highlights different adaptation strategies like assimilation and integration. Bandura's theory emphasizes learning through observation and interaction. As individuals immerse themselves in a new culture, they learn its norms and behaviors, enabling effective functioning. Additionally, socioeconomic adaptation is examined through bionic principles and robust management mechanisms, while ethnocultural adaptation research underscores its dynamic nature and influence on identity formation (Akhanteva, 2022). Sociocultural adaptation fosters effective communication, collaboration, and productivity in multicultural workplaces (Chernikova et al., 2022). Successful adaptation correlates with higher job satisfaction, engagement, and performance among migrant workers (Chernikova et al., 2022). It is crucial for navigating market shifts, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Kapsdorferová et al., 2023). Motivation and external factors, including migration policies, influence adaptation success (Wilson, 2021). In sum, sociocultural adaptation is essential for thriving in diverse work environments and remaining competitive amidst professional upheavals.

**Engagement**, a pivotal concept in psychology, involves focused attention, positive emotions, and active involvement in tasks (Nahum-Shani et al., 2022). In organizational psychology, it is essential to foster exceptional performance through vigor, dedication, and absorption (Maisyuri & Ariyanto, 2021). Vigor entails high energy and resilience, dedication involves commitment and significance in tasks, and absorption denotes full concentration and happiness in work. These dimensions have been known to significantly impact job performance and employee well-being. **Work engagement**, which positively affects employee well-being and organizational outcomes, is distinct from burnout and workaholism (Fulmore et al., 2022). Factors such as resource provision and stressor reduction in the work environment influence work engagement (Salanova, 2023). Organizational change engagement, driven by self-efficacy and meaningful work experiences, reflects employees' active involvement in supporting change. However, debates

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persist regarding the enduring nature of engagement and its potential negative consequences, such as work-life imbalance and burnout (Levack et al., 2018).

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) highlights intrinsic motivation's role in engagement (Meany, 2023), emphasizing autonomy, competence, and relatedness as core needs (The Oxford Handbook of Self-Determination Theory, 2023). Schaufeli et al.'s Three-Component Model categorize engagement into cognitive, emotional, and physical aspects (Huang et al., 2022), influenced by authentic leadership (AL). Sustainable employability (SE) is crucial for goal achievement, with engagement mediating between SE and performance (Prieto-Díez et al., 2022). Kahn's Job Crafting Theory underscores employees' active role in shaping work experiences for engagement, involving task, relationship, and perception adjustments (Irawati & Sinambela, 2023). Understanding these theories informs interventions for fostering workforce engagement.

Sociocultural adaptation facilitates seamless integration into new environments, promoting effective communication and collaboration. Work engagement reflects active participation and dedication, driving exceptional performance. Nurturing these aspects is crucial for supporting migrant professionals and promoting inclusive growth amidst cultural diversity. By addressing these dimensions, stakeholders can develop targeted interventions to cultivate supportive environments and foster sustainable development across diverse Indian states.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The well-being and health of Northeast migrant workers in Delhi was investigated by Meetei (2024). Data was gathered from 120 respondents through questionnaires and interviews, then analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. Findings revealed uneven distribution of self-reported health issues, with anxiety being commonly reported among migrant workers. Social factors like socio-cultural disparities, discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes significantly impacted migrants' health and well-being in their new environment.

Tsang and Nguyen (2023) surveyed 636 Vietnamese migrant laborers in Taiwan, aiming to explore the correlation between cultural competency, sociocultural adjustment, job satisfaction, and their inclination to continue employment. Their findings revealed that sociocultural adaptation and job satisfaction act as complete mediators between cultural competency and the workers' intention to stay in their positions. Moreover, they observed that fluency in the local language and length of residency bolster the association between cultural competency and sociocultural adaptation, though not job satisfaction.

The SCAS was tested in a study, with 266 international students in Los Angeles to examine its dimensions for assessing adaptation to Western culture and its consistency across genders. Valenti and colleagues (2022) found that the SCAS proves effective in pinpointing both strengths and areas for improvement in adaptation, delineating three main facets: Diversity Strategy, Social Interaction, and Geographical Shifts and Lifestyle Adjustments. Gender differences were not significant across these factors.

The impact of work engagement on expatriation knowledge management, particularly regarding openness to change and the decision to work abroad or depart from the organization, was explored in a research investigation. Cristo-Andrade et al. (2018) employed a quantitative methodology to present a theoretical framework connecting openness to change with the inclination to work abroad or depart from employment. The

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research highlighted work engagement as a crucial element that moderates the association between openness to change and the inclination to work abroad or exit from the organization.

Stress factors faced by highly skilled migrants from South Korea working in Japan and how they dealt with them during the acculturation process was studied by Lee and others (2016). They interviewed eight South Korean Highly Skilled Migrants (HSMs) in Japan. The study identified three main sources of work-related stress among South Korean HSMs in Japan: job demands, forming relationships, and company culture, which were attributed to cultural differences or unique aspects of Japanese organizations.

Selmer and Luring (2015) studied 640 self-initiated expatriate academics in Greater China, finding that dedication and vigor positively influence intercultural adjustment, especially among older expatriates. However, high absorption should be approached cautiously. Overall, higher work engagement is linked with better job adaptation and faster proficiency. Vigor has the strongest positive effect, followed by dedication, while absorption has the weakest impact on intercultural adjustment.

Lu et al. (2011) sought to explore the individual variations among professional Chinese immigrants regarding their attitudes toward acculturation and how these attitudes relate to work engagement in Australian workplaces. They conducted a survey involving 220 professional immigrants to examine these aspects. Results showed that professional Chinese immigrants in Australia predominantly prefer to maintain their home culture. Furthermore, individuals embracing an assimilation approach demonstrate notably elevated levels of work engagement in contrast to those opting for separation and marginalization attitudes.

Existing research on migrant experiences focuses on blue-collar workers, expatriates, and students, with a dearth of studies on white-collar professionals. Further, studies on sociocultural adaptation often involve homogeneous populations migrating to vastly different cultures, neglecting India's diverse cultural landscape across states. Exploring how white-collar professionals navigate these cultural differences and their impact on engagement is crucial for enhancing well-being and optimizing contributions to the workforce.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### ***Aim***

This study aims to assess the effect of sociocultural adaptation on engagement among interstate migrant professionals in India.

#### ***Research Objectives***

- To study the differences in sociocultural adaptation and engagement between genders of interstate migrant professionals.
- To study the difference in sociocultural adaptation and engagement between age groups of interstate migrant professionals.
- To study the relationship between sociocultural adaptation and engagement among interstate migrant professionals.
- To study sociocultural adaptation as a predictor of engagement among interstate migrant professionals.

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### *Hypotheses*

- **H1** - There is a significant difference in sociocultural adaptation and engagement between genders.
- **H2** - There is a significant difference in sociocultural adaptation and engagement between age groups.
- **H3** - There is a significant relationship between sociocultural adaptation and engagement.
- **H4** - Sociocultural adaptation is an effective predictor of engagement.

### *Research Design*

A cross-sectional quantitative study examined the correlation between sociocultural adaptation and engagement, comparing genders. The sample, representing the target population, was selected through purposive and convenience sampling. Data collected using the Revised Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS-R) and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) treated sociocultural adaptation as the independent variable and engagement as the dependent variable. Participants were early to mid-adults. IBM SPSS 21 analyzed the data.

### *Variables Utilised*

The study's independent variable is Sociocultural Adaptation, with Work Engagement as the dependent variable. Control variables include age (21 to 35 years), current employment in a white-collar job, and employment (non-remote) in a state within India other than their domicile state.

### *Description of the Sample*

The study included a cross-sectional sample from various regions of India, totaling 122 participants, consisting of both males (N= 69) and females (N= 53). The sample consisted of young adults aged 21 to 35, employed in white-collar jobs across different industries, and residing in a state other than their home state (inter-state migrants). Purposive and snowball sampling methods were employed to gather data.

### *Instruments Used*

- This study employed the **Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS-R)**, a revised version introduced by Wilson in 2012. The respondents evaluated 21 statements using a 5-point Likert scale, addressing various areas including interpersonal communication, academic/work performance, personal interests, community involvement, ecological adaptation, and language proficiency. Wilson's validation confirmed high reliability, demonstrating a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .92.
- **The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)**, developed by Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova in 2006, was used in this study. Initially, it consisted of 17 items rated on a 6-point Likert scale. The shorter version UWES-9, was later introduced, measuring three aspects of work engagement: Vigor, Dedication, and Absorption. The UWES-9 has shown robust internal reliability, yielding Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging between .75 and .90. Test-retest reliability over periods of two weeks to one year ranges from .66 to .91. Its alignment with other measures of job satisfaction and work engagement establishes its reliability and validity.

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### *Procedure of Investigation*

The study began with clarifying objectives and reviewing relevant literature. Participants received a questionnaire via email and messaging platforms after giving informed consent. Two scales, SCAS-R, SWEIMS, and UWES-9, measured sociocultural adaptation's impact on and prediction of engagement among interstate migrant professionals. Participant inquiries were handled via email. Data were organized in Excel and analyzed using IBM SPSS, with results presented comprehensively.

### *Statistical Analysis Employed*

This study utilized quantitative methods to collect and analyze data. Quantitative data was gathered and processed using IBM SPSS 21. Inferential and descriptive statistics were both used. Pearson correlation analysis examined the relationship between sociocultural adaptation and engagement. Linear Regression analysis assessed the impact of sociocultural adaptation on engagement and determined its predictive value. T-test analysis compared sociocultural adaptation and engagement between genders and age groups.

## **ANALYSIS OF RESULTS**

The data collected was run through relevant functions on IBM SPSS 21 to obtain the necessary statistical results for analysis.

*Table No. 1 Statistical Description of Variables*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Sociocultural Adaptation	122	1.9	4.5	3.7	0.53
Engagement	122	2.4	6	4.7	0.82

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics that inform us about the nature of the data. The size of the data (N) is 122. Sociocultural adaptation has a Mean (M) of 3.7 and Standard Deviation (SD) OF 0.53 indicating high levels of sociocultural adaptation among the participants. Engagement is also high among the participants with a Mean of 4.7 and an SD of 0.82.

*Table No. 2 Gender Differences in Variables*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
Sociocultural Adaptation	Female	53	3.69	0.5033	0.818
	Male	69	3.712	0.5474	
Engagement	Female	53	4.589	0.7754	0.456
	Male	69	4.701	0.8612	

In Table 2 the gender differences among the variables have been shown. It exhibits that there is no statistically significant difference in sociocultural adaptation scores between females and males ( $p = 0.818$ ). There is also no statistically significant difference in work engagement scores between females and males ( $p = 0.456$ ).

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**Table No. 3 Age Group Differences in Variables**

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
Sociocultural Adaptation	>= 28	45	3.838	0.5487	0.034
	< 28	77	3.623	0.5002	
Engagement	>= 28	45	4.904	0.6229	0.004
	< 28	77	4.505	0.892	

Table 3 shows the differences between age groups among the variables. There is a statistically significant difference in sociocultural adaptation scores between individuals aged 28 or older and those younger than 28 ( $p < 0.05$ ). There is also a statistically significant difference in work engagement scores between individuals aged 28 or older and those younger than 28 ( $p < 0.01$ ).

**Table No. 4 Correlation Between Sociocultural Adaptation and Engagement**

<i>Pearson's Correlation</i>	<i>Sociocultural Adaptation</i>	<i>Engagement</i>
Sociocultural Adaptation	1	0.555 <sup>3</sup>
Engagement	0.5552 <sup>3</sup>	1

<sup>3</sup>Correlation is significant at 0.01 level.

Table 4 shows a significant linear correlation between Sociocultural Adaptation and Engagement ( $r = 0.555$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Additionally, the correlation is averagely high and positive between sociocultural adaptation and engagement.

**Table No. 5 Analysis of Sociocultural Adaptation as a Covariate of Engagement**

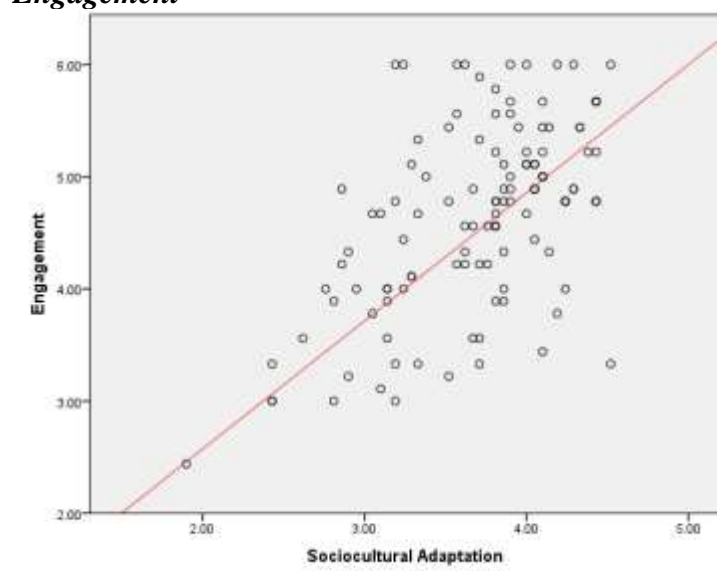
<i>Model</i>	<i>Unstandardized Coefficients</i>		<i>Standardized Coefficients</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Beta</i>			
	(Constant)	1.438	0.444		3.239	0.002
1	Sociocultural Adaptation	0.868	0.119	0.555	7.313	0.000 <sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Dependant Variable: Work Engagement

Table 5 shows the degree of effects of the predictor variable (sociocultural adaptation) on the outcome variable (engagement). Sociocultural adaptation has a coefficient (B) of 0.868 indicating that it has a statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) effect on Engagement. This implies that Sociocultural Adaptation is an accurate predictor of Work Engagement.

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**Figure 1: Scatter Plot showing Correlation between Sociocultural Adaptation and Engagement**



### DISCUSSION

Sociocultural adaptation and engagement are crucial for migrant professionals adjusting to new environments. This study, grounded in psychological and sociological theories, investigates their connection among interstate migrants in India. It aims to understand how adaptation influences engagement and vice versa, while also validating a proposed framework of adaptation. Gender and age differences in this relationship are also explored. The study focused on 122 urban professionals aged 21 to 35 who relocated to India for white-collar jobs. It employed the Revised Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS-R) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) to assess participants. Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS, examining correlations between sociocultural adaptation and engagement. Linear Regression investigated the influence of sociocultural adaptation on work engagement among migrant professionals in urban settings.

A comparative analysis in SPSS using t-tests examined demographic differences in the sample based on gender. Results as seen in Table 2 showed no significant difference between males and females in sociocultural adaptation or engagement, leading to the non-acceptance of the first hypothesis (H1). This suggests that males and females in the sample may experience similar levels of sociocultural adaptation and engagement, reflecting comparable personal, professional, and social experiences. This finding aligns with a study on health promotion interventions in Russia, which also found no gender differences necessitating adaptation of intervention approaches (Grau et al., 2013). Thus, gender may not significantly influence sociocultural adaptation in certain contexts, consistent with the current study's findings.

Results in Table 3 revealed significant differences between age groups (21-27 years and 28-35 years) for sociocultural adaptation ( $p = 0.034$ ) and engagement ( $p = 0.004$ ), with older individuals scoring higher. This corresponds with research on ageing experiences in OECD countries (Chen et al., 2021). Thus, the hypothesis (H2) was supported, indicating that experience in a new sociocultural environment can enhance adaptation efficiency and recognition over time, leading to increased engagement at work. This finding aligns with



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transformative learning theory (Volet & Jones, 2012), suggesting that critical discourse and reflection can drive behavioral changes and heightened engagement.

The third hypothesis (H3) was supported by Table 4, indicating a significant positive correlation between Sociocultural adaptation and Engagement ( $r = 0.555$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This suggests that changes in sociocultural adaptation levels correspond with similar shifts in engagement levels which has been illustrated by Figure 1. Previous studies have highlighted how expatriates facing challenges like unfamiliar environments and cultural differences often experience varying levels of work stress, affecting their job engagement (Hadla, 2022). These findings corroborate the correlation analysis results in our study.

The study's regression analysis as seen in Table 5 confirmed sociocultural adaptation as a robust predictor of workplace engagement, supporting hypothesis H4. This suggests that enhancing sociocultural adaptation could increase engagement. Previous research emphasizes the significance of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) in boosting engagement, especially when combined with employees' idiocentrism-allocentrism and adaptive organizational culture (Sou et al., 2022). Another study underscores the positive impact of work engagement, including job dedication, on the adjustment and innovative work behavior of mid to senior-level professionals, such as expatriates. This highlights engagement's critical role in improving professional outcomes in diverse cultural settings (Chen et al., 2023).

In summary, this study highlights the importance of cross-cultural competence for enhancing work engagement in multinational organizations. Simply addressing maladjustment isn't enough; organizations must prioritize strategies that promote both sociocultural adaptation and motivation. Integrating these elements into processes, policies, and culture fosters greater engagement among employees, both physically and psychologically.

### *Implications of the Study*

The study underscores the significance of fostering sociocultural adaptation and intrinsic motivation among interstate migrant professionals in India to enhance work engagement. Organizations should prioritize strategies that facilitate employees' adjustment to new sociocultural environments and nurture their intrinsic motivation. This could involve providing cultural orientation programs, mentorship, and recognition of individual strengths and values. Additionally, efforts to enhance intrinsic motivation, such as promoting autonomy, mastery, and purpose in work, can lead to greater engagement. By prioritizing these aspects, organizations can create a conducive environment for maximizing the potential and commitment of their diverse workforce, ultimately fostering a more engaged and productive workforce.

## **CONCLUSION**

This quantitative study delved into the relationship between sociocultural adaptation and engagement among interstate migrant professionals in urban India. Significant correlations were found, underlining the pivotal role of sociocultural adaptation in fostering positive professional engagement. It emerged as a robust predictor and covariate of engagement. While age-based differences were noted, no significant gender-based disparities were observed. These insights provide valuable guidance for creating inclusive environments for migrant professionals. Understanding age-specific dynamics is crucial for effective support.

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This study lays the groundwork for further research and targeted interventions to enhance the well-being and effectiveness of migrant professionals in urban settings.

### *Limitations*

This study, completed within a short timeframe, faces inherent limitations. Time constraints may have reduced data collection depth, resulting in a smaller sample size and limited variable exploration. The topic's complexity, requiring a nuanced understanding of sociocultural dynamics, might not be fully captured in a single semester. Logistical challenges in studying interstate migrant professionals in India, including access and language barriers, could affect the findings' generalizability. The interdisciplinary nature of the study poses challenges in fully integrating diverse theoretical frameworks. Moreover, the absence of longitudinal data limits understanding of changes in sociocultural adaptation, motivation, and engagement over time. Thus, the study provides a snapshot rather than a comprehensive understanding of these phenomena among interstate migrant professionals in India.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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