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Research paper

Analytical View of Mediating Job Stress and Work-Life Balance Through Self-Motivation Among Women journalists in Kerala's digital Age

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Abstract

The domain of digital journalism is rapidly evolving through new technologies, audience engagement models, and shifting newsroom dynamics. Within this space, the role of women journalists is increasingly significant for demand-focused analytical exploration. Findings also suggest that economic implications for news organizations in emerging markets with unmanaged stress result in reduced productivity, where higher attrition rates among women journalists affect overall organizational performance. Prevailing studies focus mainly on external challenges like gender bias and discrimination, overlooking internal psychological factors such as self-motivation. The benefits of emotional control and intellectual autonomy in stress management are rarely studied, particularly in the view of digital platforms that bring about new pressures, which have a significant impact on self-motivation. To bridge this, the proposed analytical study focuses on 28 women journalists across Kerala, thereby using the Maslach Multidimensional Motivational Scale (MasMoS) to quantitatively assess intrinsic motivation, stress, and personal-professional balance. The research adopts the integrated Hierarchical Maslow-Herzberg model to interpret the interplay between intrinsic drives and extrinsic stressors. Further, hypothesis testing, such as Levene's test, Brown-Forsythe test, and Welch's test, is used to validate the mediation role of self-motivation in the digital workspace. Results indicate that self-motivation acts as a stabilizing force, helping female journalists to manage stress and preserve work-life boundaries.

Keywords: *Female Journalists; Maslow-Herzberg Theory; Maslach Multidimensional Scale; Self-motivation and Work-life Balance.*

1. Introduction

The evolving landscape of journalism has witnessed a significant surge in female participation, adding diversity and inclusivity to media narratives. This shift has enriched the scope of journalism by enabling broader coverage of issues relevant to varied demographics, especially those about women. Despite these positive developments, female journalists continue to contend with considerable challenges that hinder their professional advancement and personal well-being. These barriers are often rooted in persistent societal norms, inequitable workplace dynamics with demanding, high-pressure nature of the profession. For instance, certain research indicates that gender-based stereotypes frequently limit female journalists' access to leadership roles, thereby confining them to subordinate or less visible positions within media organizations. This underrepresentation also correlates with wage disparity and restricted access to economically rewarding opportunities such as editorial leadership, international assignments, or commercial media partnerships. [1-3].
Several studies have emphasized the critical role of organizational support systems in lessening job stress and improving work-life balance (WLB), as shown in Figure 1. The WLB's data-driven investigation offers a pathway to initiate meaningful reform by presenting empirical evidence on the mental health challenges faced by female journalists. The lack of balance not only impacts psychological well-being but also leads to productivity loss, higher absenteeism, and reduced long-term career retention, all of which have broader economic implications for media institutions.

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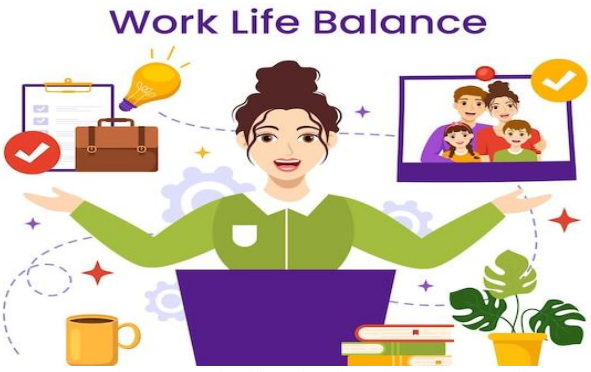

Fig. 1: View on Work-Life Balancing of Female Journalists.

One such tool is the Maslach Burnout Inventory, which has shown that depersonalization, where emotional exhaustion is a strong negative predictor of job satisfaction among journalists, with stress acting as a precursor to burnout, especially when adapting to new roles. Similarly, the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) has been used to measure emotional and psychological support received from friends, family, and other significant members. Higher MSPSS scores are indicative of stronger support systems, which are crucial in countering occupational stress and its consequences [4-6].

In addition to psychological and organizational dynamics, theoretical models such as post-colonial feminist theory offer a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural challenges of female journalists. This theory sheds light on the intersections of gender, power, and representation, particularly for women operating within the global south. It critically addresses how power hierarchies and gender-based discrimination influence workplace experiences, including incidents of harassment. Feminist theory serves as a critical framework for evaluating systemic inequalities in media spaces; however, over-reliance on such theories without contextual grounding unintentionally introduces bias or operational inefficiencies in newsroom environments. Thus, a refined application of theory is essential for fostering inclusive and effective female correspondents' performance in media companies [7-9].

Building on this conceptual and empirical foundation, several hypotheses have been formulated to examine the interplay between stress, self-motivation, demographic factors, and work-life balance among female journalists. Self-motivation refers to an individual's internal drive to initiate, sustain, and complete tasks or goals without the need for external rewards, supervision, or pressure. It encompasses personal determination, goal orientation, and the intrinsic desire to succeed or improve. One line of inquiry explores how high levels of work-life conflict directly elevate stress levels, particularly in the absence of adequate family and institutional support. Another hypothesis suggests that motivating themselves and resilience do not act as psychological buffers, helping individuals manage the demands of their dual roles more effectively. Furthermore, workplace interventions such as flexible schedules and mental health policies are posited to reduce work-related stress and enhance job satisfaction. These hypotheses aim to create a structured framework for interpreting the lived experiences of women in journalism. Economically, such interventions also lead to improved retention rates, better performance outcomes, and cost savings for media organizations by reducing turnover and training-related expenses. These hypotheses aim to create a structured framework for interpreting the lived experiences of women in journalism [10-12].

To test these hypotheses, several studies employ statistical tools such as regression analysis, chi-square tests, Mann-Whitney U, and Kruskal-Wallis H tests to identify significant relationships and group-level differences across key variables, including age, occupational position, and media type. Pearson's chi-squared test is done for each question to assess variations in the frequency of responses from female respondents. This rigorous quantitative analysis not only strengthens the reliability of insights drawn but also informs targeted policy recommendations that can support gender-equitable media practices and sustainable economic participation[13-15].

These approaches offer valuable insights into the multifaceted elements influencing female journalists' occupational stress and work-life balance. The results illustrate how external pressures and inner motivation interact to shape both professional and personal well-being. They also highlight the vulnerabilities these professionals experience due to unstable income sources, limited career mobility, and insufficient financial protection. Consequently, the study makes a compelling case for the necessity of focused digital and organizational interventions such as income security, childcare support, and inclusive newsroom policies to enhance the overall economic empowerment and well-being of female journalists.

1.1. Contribution of the logical study

This study offers a multidimensional understanding of the psychological, professional, and economic challenges faced by women journalists in Kerala's digital media landscape. By integrating established motivational theories with real-time data, it addresses both internal and external stress dynamics. The research fills a critical gap by focusing on self-motivation as a mediating force in balancing digital-age job stress, personal life, and financial sustainability in a rapidly evolving media economy.

- The study introduces a novel approach by focusing on motivating themselves as the core psychological mediator between job stress and work-life balance. It explores intrinsic resilience factors and highlights how emotional regulation and personal conviction drive professional endurance in digital journalism, an industry marked by income volatility and freelance-based earnings.
- By integrating Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Herzberg's two-factor theory, the study forms a Hierarchical Maslow-Herzberg Economic-Motivation Model to analyse motivation comprehensively. This fusion addresses intrinsic aspirations (e.g., self-actualization, personal growth) and extrinsic stressors (e.g., unstable remuneration, lack of benefits), uniquely contextualized within the economic precarity of digital journalism.
- Using statistical validation tools for female journalists, like Levene's, Brown-Forsythe, and Welch's tests, the study empirically measures differences in motivating themselves across diverse demographic and employment groups. These differences often correlate with economic status, contractual job types, and access to monetized platforms, thereby reinforcing the financial dimension of self-motivation in sustaining journalistic careers.

To investigate the mediating role of self-motivation, the study is organized as follows. Section 1 introduces the background, objectives, and rationale of the research. Section 2 presents a comprehensive review of existing literature on motivation, stress, economic insecurity, and work-life balance in journalism. Section 3 outlines the methodology, including data collection and statistical tests used for analysis.

Section 4 details the findings drawn from the responses of 28 women journalists. Finally, Section 5 concludes the study by summarizing key psychological, professional, and economic insights and highlighting future research directions, including the need for income-support mechanisms and financial literacy programs in digital media employment.

2. Critical review of literature

This section examines existing literature for understanding the evolving challenges, motivations, and work-life dynamics of women journalists in the digital era.

Hamid et al. [16] used the Spillover and Role Theories to investigate how women journalists faced work-life balance. 16 married and unmarried women journalists who worked in Malaysian state bureaus and media headquarters were interviewed in-depth. Three topics emerged from the study, which were mainly the personality features, mental health, and the job and family environment. Purposive snowball sampling was used to choose participants for the qualitative study design. Journalists who had worked for media organizations for at least three years were included in the sample. Interviews were done in person, on the phone, or by email. The goals of the study were explained to the participants, and their privacy and confidentiality were protected. The study highlighted the difficulties women journalists encounter in juggling their personal and professional responsibilities during the convergence of the media business. The study lacked a comparative perspective between different media sectors, did not account for digital media pressures, and overlooked the role of workplace policies in mitigating work-life conflicts.

In a quantitative study including 30 women journalists working in print and electronic media in Himachal Pradesh, Gaur et al. [17] investigated the difficulties faced by female journalists in juggling work and life. Moreover, a sample with a well-crafted questionnaire derived from a thorough literature analysis was used in the study's descriptive design. The study analysed the lack of personal time, gender norms, professional options, and family support. Informed consent was given by participants, and the straightforward percentage approach was used to analyze the data. According to the survey, juggling work and life had an impact on professional advancement and occasionally caused women to quit their jobs. It emphasized how important organizational, partner, and family support was to preserve work-life balance. However, the absence of a diverse sample size, which did not explore psychological factors in depth, and relied solely on self-reported data.

Zviyita et al. [18] explored the online and offline experiences of women journalists in selected African countries within the context of press freedom using the intersectionality theoretical framework. The research qualitatively analysed secondary data to explore how women of colour faced multiple sources of domination, leading to threats such as cyber-trolling, racism, sexual harassment, and gender-based violence. The study highlighted that women journalists experienced disproportionate challenges due to their gender and race, resulting in stigmatization, under-representation, and workplace threats. It emphasized the need for social change and stakeholder intervention to address these issues. The research focused primarily on theoretical intervention without empirical validation, lacked a diverse methodological approach, and did not provide concrete policy recommendations to examine the conditions of women journalists.

Nurdin et al. [19]inspected the expression of idealism and identity construction among millennial female journalists in Surabaya, Indonesia, using identity theory. A qualitative study was conducted in 2019 through interviews with ten women journalists selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The study explored their experiences, focusing on how they expressed idealism through news language, perspectives, media technology proficiency, and professionalism. It found that these journalists constructed their identities through attire, confidence, and role-playing, shaped by the media management system. Mostly, the study concentrated only on millennial journalists and avoided external sociocultural factors influencing identity construction, restricting the generalizability of its findings.

The association between journalism, caregiving, and starting a family among Portuguese women journalists was examined by Sampaio-Dias et al. [20]. Deliberate snowball sampling was used in the study's thirty semi-structured interviews, which were performed using a qualitative methodology between 2022 and 2023. It examined career constraints from an agentic, structural, and cultural perspective. The results showed that systematic workplace disadvantages, a misalignment between work and family obligations, and traditional caregiving roles all presented challenges for women journalists. Participants talked about societal presumptions about parenthood, work circumstances, and career choices. However, deeper insights into direct personal 3experiences were limited because the survey did not specifically identify participants' status as caregivers. Furthermore, the findings' wider relevance had been limited by the subjective biases induced by their dependence on self-reported data and subjective narrations.

Radmann et al. [21] examined the experiences of female sports journalists in Sweden through a gender perspective, using Yvonne Hirdman's binary gender system and R. W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity. The study conducted ten semi-structured interviews with top female sports journalists, analysing media coverage and personal narratives to understand gender-related challenges. Findings indicated that while workplace conditions had improved, the industry remained dominated by hegemonic masculinity, requiring women to develop strategies to navigate career obstacles and harassment. However, the study was limited by its small sample size, restricting the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the focus on high-ranking professionals excluded broader perspectives, and country-specific media structures made it difficult to apply the conclusions to other contexts.

By examining their leadership and communication styles as well as newsroom gender prejudices, Cunha et al. [22] looked into the obstacles faced by female journalists in achieving high leadership positions and working scenarios in the Portuguese press. Four female media executives participated in in-depth interviews as part of the study's qualitative methodology, which evaluated newsroom conditions using thematic analysis. The results showed that although prejudice has decreased, women were still underrepresented in positions of leadership. Assertiveness and relational approaches were combined in leadership attributes, and participants recognized the importance of family support for professional growth. The incomplete scope limited wider relevance, and the lack of varied viewpoints impeded a thorough comprehension of gender biases at various journalistic levels.

Dhanusree Ullas et al. [23] observed the challenges faced by women journalists in Kerala, analysing their professional and personal struggles despite better conditions in the region. The study employed Factor Analysis, Principal Component Analysis (PCA), and the Orthogonal Varimax Matrix with Kaiser Normalization to identify key challenges. Exploratory Factor Analysis revealed four major obstacles: financial instability, lack of employment and career opportunities, unfavourable working conditions, family-related issues, and gender discrimination. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was conducted to assess factor suitability. Findings indicated that passion and dedication were the primary reasons for women entering the media industry. However, the study was limited by its regional focus, restricting broader generalization. Here, the lack of diverse media sectors in the sample reduced its applicability, and external sociopolitical influences were not extensively considered.

Investigation of unwanted sexual harassment against women journalists in Fiji was explored by Hanusch et al. [24], using a mixed-methods approach that combined a standardized survey and in-depth interviews with over 40 journalists. The study identified widespread harassment

from colleagues, superiors, politicians, and businesspeople, revealing its significant impact on personal and professional lives. Non-probability purposive sampling was employed to select participants, including both current and former journalists. Moreover, most of the research was conducted online, with surveys distributed through Google Docs. Confidentiality was assured, and participants could withdraw at any time. Consequently, the study was restricted by its reliance on self-reported data, potential sampling bias due to non-probability selection, and constraints imposed by online data collection, which excluded data with limited digital access.

Barao da Silva et al. [25] analysed how gender-related issues influenced the risks faced by Brazilian women journalists through 31 semi-structured interviews with professionals who experienced violence between 2019 and 2020. The study explored the link between the political environment and increased hostility, the impact of aggression on work and personal life, and the role of news organizations in resilience strategies. Findings revealed harassment, physical threats, and remarks on appearance and personal life, leading journalists to avoid certain assignments or sources. Some altered family routines and practices to mitigate abuse. With its descriptive nature, lack of broader statistical representation, and focus on a specific political and media context faced difficulties in simplifying to other regions. Hence, Table 1 is made for effective analysis of the conventional study.

Amutha et al. [26] introduced the socio-economic upliftment of women through participation in Kudumbashree-led programs. These initiatives show how women not only gained steady income but also earned enhanced social recognition and respect. Participants reported improved self-confidence, financial literacy, and decision-making capacity. The program also helped cultivate leadership skills and foster collective solidarity among women through access to training, microcredit, and community engagement. However, its general applicability to professional sectors like journalism remains limited, as media work often lacks the cooperative frameworks and community-driven structures central to Kudumbashree. Moreover, the economic model underpinning Kudumbashree, based on group-based micro-enterprise, does not directly support the individualized income structures and freelance economies typical in journalism.

Biswas et al. [27] explored how female entrepreneurship drives innovation in India. Although the study is broader in scope, its implications are vital: female-led media platforms often introduce fresh narratives, inclusive reporting styles, and diversified content. Economic empowerment in journalism thus translates to broader innovation and influence in shaping public discourse. However, the study does not specifically address the economic vulnerabilities faced by women journalists, such as irregular income, lack of financial safety nets, or limited access to capital and entrepreneurial training. These limitations highlight a crucial gap: while entrepreneurial potential exists, the absence of structured economic support mechanisms limits its realization in the journalism sector.

Manoj et al. [28] explored how the Kerala Knowledge Economy Mission and Digital India initiatives have enhanced digital literacy and employability for women. This digital inclusion equips women with skills that are directly applicable in professions like journalism, where digital tools are essential. The paper emphasizes the creation of employment opportunities through remote work, content creation, and online entrepreneurship, which are all highly relevant for women journalists operating in digital media environments. However, the study does not deeply examine gender-specific barriers such as digital safety concerns, unequal access to high-speed internet in rural areas, or the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within digital media. These limitations highlight the need for more targeted interventions to ensure that digital inclusion leads to sustained and equitable empowerment for women journalists across diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Preethi [29] examined the role of socio-economic determinants, specifically income, education, and mobility, in the empowerment of women in Kerala. The study highlights how these factors contribute to enhanced autonomy, decision-making capacity, and participation in both household and community-level decision-making. It emphasizes that economic independence is a critical enabler of women's agency and confidence, particularly in professions requiring sustained financial stability. However, the paper critiques general empowerment frameworks for overlooking sector-specific challenges such as pay inequity, occupational segregation, and workplace discrimination. These systemic issues often limit the practical realization of empowerment, indicating a need for more nuanced, sector-sensitive strategies.

Sanuja and Joseph [30] focused on the impact of responsible tourism as a model for women's economic empowerment in Kerala. Their study reveals that entrepreneurship within community-based tourism initiatives has significantly enhanced women's financial independence, social status, and overall life satisfaction. By actively engaging in tourism-related enterprises, women gain exposure to leadership roles, skill development, and collective decision-making. The paper underscores how such sector-specific engagement fosters a more sustainable and contextually relevant form of empowerment. However, it stops short of analyzing potential structural limitations such as market volatility or gendered labor divisions within the tourism sector, leaving room for further investigation into long-term resilience and scalability of such initiatives.

Table 1: A Cross-Regional Analysis of Constraints and Limitations in Multifaceted Work-Life Challenges of Women Journalists

Author/ Reference	Theoretical Framework	Methodology	Key Findings of Research	Limitation Analysis
Hamid et al. [16]	Spillover and Role Theories	Qualitative, 16 interviews (snowball sampling)	Identified personality traits, mental health, and family-job environment for women journalists in Malaysia.	Lack of comparative analysis across media sectors and digital media pressures is not considered.
Gaur et al. [17]	Work-Life Balance Constructs	Quantitative, 30 journalists with a structured questionnaire	Work-life balance issues affected career progression and sometimes led to job exits	Reduced sample diversity without exploring psychological dimensions and relied on self-reported data.
Zviyita et al. [18]	Intersectionality Framework	Qualitative, secondary data analysis	Women journalists faced cyber-trolling, racial and gender-based violence, and workplace stigmatization.	No empirical validation, lacked methodological diversity, and lacked concrete policy recommendations.
Nurdin et al. [19]	Identity Theory	Qualitative interviews with 10 millennial journalists	Explored how women constructed journalistic identities through media language, professionalism, and self-representation.	Limited to millennial journalists, neglected sociocultural influences.
Sampaio-Dias et al. [20]	Agentic, Structural, and Cultural Perspectives	Qualitative, 30 semi-structured interviews	Workplace disadvantages, caregiving responsibilities, and misalignment of work-family roles in career growth.	Neglected the insights into direct caregiving experiences, subjectivity in self-reported data.
Radmann et al. [21]	Gender Perspective (Hirdman's and Connell's Theories)	Qualitative, 10 semi-structured interviews	Women's sports journalists faced hegemonic masculinity; career navigation required strategic adaptation.	Small sample size, focused only on high-ranking professionals, limiting generalizability.
Cunha et al. [22]	Gender Bias & Leadership	Qualitative, in-depth interviews with 4 female executives	Women faced leadership biases but overcame them through assertive and relational strategies.	Small sample size, lacked varied perspectives across different media roles.
Dhanusree Ullas et al. [23]	Work Challenges in Kerala	Quantitative, Factor Analysis, PCA,	Identified financial instability, limited career growth, workplace issues, and gender discrimination as primary concerns.	Region-specific focus, lacked diverse media representation, without analysing socio-political influences.

		Orthogonal Varimax Matrix		
Hanusch et al. [24]	Gender Harassment and Workplace Culture	Mixed-methods, surveys, and interviews (40 journalists)	Widespread workplace harassment impacted career growth and psychological well-being.	Self-reported data, potential sampling bias, and online survey limitations.
Barao da Silva et al. [25]	Gender and Political Context	Qualitative, 31 interviews	Political hostility heightened gendered violence with journalists adjusting their professional and personal lives accordingly.	Focused on Brazil's political landscape, limiting broader applicability, descriptive rather than statistical approach.
Amutha et al. [26]	Women's Socio-Economic Empowerment through Collective Participation	Qualitative case analysis of Kudumbashree SHGs	Kudumbashree programs enhance income, decision-making capacity, and social standing through microcredit, leadership training, and group solidarity.	Limited applicability to individualistic professional sectors like journalism; the cooperative model does not translate directly to competitive, fragmented media environments.
Biswas et al. [27]	Female Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Emerging Economies	National-level macroeconomic and qualitative entrepreneurship analysis	Female-led platforms promote innovation, inclusion, and content diversity. Economic empowerment enables broader influence in media narratives.	Study lacks journalism-specific focus; it does not address structural challenges like limited capital, institutional bias, or policy gaps affecting female journalists' entrepreneurial growth.
Manoj et al. [28]	Digital Inclusion and Economic Empowerment through ICT Initiatives	Policy impact assessment of Kerala Knowledge Economy Mission & Digital India	Digital tools increase employability, remote work, and digital entrepreneurship. Women gain skills relevant to modern journalism.	Gendered digital divide, safety concerns, and lack of leadership representation in digital media are not fully explored; calls for targeted policy frameworks for women journalists.
Preethi [29]	Socio-economic Determinants Framework	Quantitative analysis using regional data and socio-economic indicators	Identified income, education, and mobility as central to women's empowerment and autonomy in Kerala. Highlighted the importance of economic independence for agency and self-confidence.	Lacks sector-specific insights into professional challenges such as wage gaps, discrimination, and role-based marginalization.
Sanuja & Joseph [30]	Economic Empowerment and Entrepreneurship Model	Case study of women in Kerala's responsible tourism sector.	Found that entrepreneurship in tourism improved women's financial stability, leadership roles, and decision-making capacity within communities. Demonstrated how community-based models promote empowerment.	Did not assess structural limitations like labor division, market instability, or long-term sustainability of tourism-based enterprises.

Table 1 highlights work-life balance challenges faced by women journalists across regions. Hamid et al. [16] examined personality traits and job-family dynamics among Malaysian journalists but lacked cross-sector comparisons and digital media considerations. Gaur et al. [17] linked work-life struggles to career progression in Himachal Pradesh but relied on a small, self-reported sample. Similarly, Zviyita et al. [18] explored racism, cyber-trolling, and gender violence among African journalists but neglected policy recommendations. Further, Nurdin et al. [19] analysed Indonesian millennial journalists' self-representation but missed broader sociocultural factors. However, Sampaio-Dias et al. [20] found parenting obligations constrained Portuguese journalists but relied on subjective data. Radmann et al. [21] studied gender bias in Swedish sports journalism but focused only on high-ranking professionals. Other studies, including those by Cunha et al. [22], Dhanusree Ullas et al. [23], Hanusch et al. [24], and Barao da Silva et al. [25], revealed workplace discrimination, harassment, and political hostility but faced limitations in methodology, scope, and empirical depth. Additionally, Amutha et al. [26] demonstrated socio-economic upliftment through Kudumbashree-led programs, though its relevance to professional journalism is limited due to the cooperative model. Biswas et al. [27] emphasized the role of female entrepreneurship in fostering media innovation, yet lacked sector-specific insights into journalism. Manoj et al. [28] highlighted the positive impact of digital inclusion on women's employability, but did not fully address gendered barriers in media leadership and access. Preethi et al. [29] lack sector-specific insights into professional challenges such as wage gaps, discrimination, and role-based marginalization. Sanuja and Joseph et al. [30] did not assess structural limitations like labor division, market instability, or long-term sustainability of tourism-based enterprises.

2.1. Inspiration for the study

In the evolving landscape of journalism, women journalists have introduced new challenges and opportunities, requiring an effective study to develop unique strategies in analysing job stress with a sustainable work-life balance. Existing studies have primarily analysed the challenges faced by women journalists through the lens of external factors such as gender bias, discrimination, and workplace policies. While these aspects are crucial, they often overlook the internal psychological mechanisms that drive women journalists to persist in this field. But these researchers lag in examining how motivating themselves, shaped by personal conviction, intellectual autonomy, and adaptive emotional regulation, plays a transformative role in navigating job stress and work-life balance. To strengthen motivation and perseverance, there is a need for the analysis of intellectual autonomy, which allows journalists to pursue and critically evaluate overlooked factors. Most of the studies posed limitations in understanding how intrinsic motivation acts as a stabilizing force and ignored a fresh perspective on the mental and emotional strategies of women journalists to sustain their careers in a demanding industry. This gap is particularly important because the economic stability through sustained freelance income, secure digital contracts, and platform monetization often hinges on an individual's capacity to remain motivated and resilient under pressure.

Additionally, in traditional media environments, hierarchical structures and newsroom cultures shape professional experiences. However, the shift to digital platforms introduces a new set of stressors like full-time content production, audience-driven pressure, and digital harassment, which profoundly impact self-motivation and work-life balance. Existing research has not explored how self-motivation functions as a coping mechanism in the digital space, where female journalists have greater sovereignty but also face increased mental exhaustion and blurred professional-personal boundaries. These blurred boundaries often lead to unpaid labor, inconsistent income streams, and long working hours, all of which carry direct economic implications for women in digital journalism. Investigating this dimension will provide deeper insights into how women journalists in the digital era navigate stress while maintaining their passion for the profession. Moreover,

understanding the economic trade-offs involved in self-managed digital careers, such as a lack of institutional financial support or job benefits, can guide better policy and support systems to reduce financial vulnerability.

3. Proposed analytical study of female journalists on digital platforms

This study investigates self-motivation as a mediating factor between job stress and work–life balance among female journalists in Kerala's digital media economy. Unlike prior research focused on external constraints, it emphasizes intrinsic economic drivers such as intellectual autonomy and emotional self-regulation. Using MasMoS-based surveys distributed via WhatsApp, the study ensures broad, confidential reach. A Hierarchical Maslow–Herzberg Model frames the interaction between digital labor intensity, career instability, and psychological resilience. Statistical validation via Levene's, Brown-Forsythe, and Welch's tests confirms significant group-level differences. Economically, the study reveals how emotional labor and cognitive overload contribute to burnout in low-security digital employment. It further identifies the opportunity cost of poor mental health support, where diminished productivity and high attrition rates create long-term economic inefficiencies. These findings stress the need for labor policy reforms, equitable mental health investments, and sustainable work models in India's evolving digital media sector.

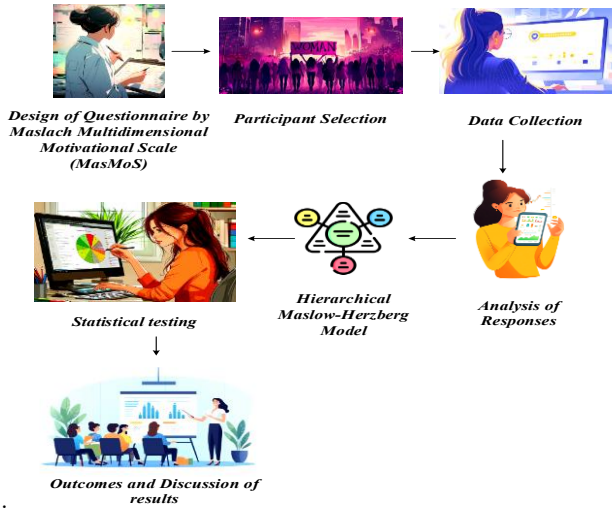

Fig. 2: Analytical Framework for Assessing Work-Life Balance and Stress Among Female Journalists.

The study begins with data collection of selected participants, where a Google Form containing structured questions based on the MasMoS is circulated confidentially through WhatsApp groups to ensure anonymity among women journalists in Kerala, as shown in Figure 2. The questionnaire evaluates self-motivation, job stress, and work-life balance in the digital journalism landscape. Digital journalism refers to the practice of producing and distributing news content through digital platforms such as websites, mobile apps, and social media, often incorporating multimedia elements and real-time reporting. Once responses are gathered, the Hierarchical Maslow-Herzberg Model, integrating Maslow's hierarchy of needs with Herzberg's two-factor theory, is used to analyse the interplay between intrinsic motivation (personal growth, passion for journalism) and extrinsic stressors (workload, digital harassment, job insecurity) affecting self-motivation in a digital environment. Then, a theoretical hypothesis is formulated, positioning self-motivation as the mediating factor between job stress and work-life balance. Further, to validate the model, statistical testing is conducted, beginning with Levene's Test to examine the homogeneity of variance, followed by the Brown-Forsythe Test, which accounts for unequal variances and assesses job stress distribution, and finally, Welch's Test to determine whether significant differences exist in self-motivation levels across various demographic groups within Kerala's journalism sector. This process ensures a comprehensive, data-driven evaluation of how digital platform pressures shape women journalists' ability to balance work and personal life through self-motivation. The findings will contribute to better recommendations and structural interventions, fostering a more supportive work environment for women journalists in the digital era.

3.1. Design and distribution of questionnaire

In today's rapidly evolving digital media landscape, women journalists face heightened demands that challenge their emotional resilience, job satisfaction, and ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Understanding the psychological mechanisms that support their motivation is essential for fostering sustainable professional engagement. Moreover, in a media economy increasingly reliant on freelance and contract-based roles, sustaining motivation directly influences financial stability, consistent income generation, and long-term career viability. In this context, the Maslach Multidimensional Motivational Scale (MasMoS) [31,32] serves as a foundational framework in this study, providing structured insight into the nuanced dimensions of self-motivation. It works by using a structured set of Likert-scale questions that measure the internal drivers and external stressors influencing an individual's professional behaviour and mental state.

By incorporating MasMoS, the survey effectively assesses emotional exhaustion, intrinsic motivation, depersonalization, and perceived personal accomplishment of core factors influencing how women journalists manage job stress and digital-era challenges. Questions related to burnout, adaptive strategies, passion for journalism, and external pressures are mapped to MasMoS components, allowing a validated, multidimensional understanding of motivation. This approach ensures a balanced analysis of both internal psychological resilience and external workplace conditions, reinforcing the model's relevance in measuring how motivation mediates stress and sustains the work-life integration of women journalists as depicted in Figure 3. Furthermore, these insights have broader economic implications for media organizations seeking to retain skilled female journalists, reduce turnover costs, and promote inclusive, sustainable workforce models in the digital age.

Fig. 3: Analysis of Questionnaire for Women Journalists.

Self-Motivation as a Mediator:
Q1: Do you think self-motivation helps you balance job stress and work-life responsibilities as a digital journalist?
Q2: Do you agree that self-motivation reduces the negative impact of unpredictable work schedules on your well-being?
Q3: Do you think that self-motivation is used to cope with burnout caused by high-pressure digital news cycles?
Q4: Do you believe intrinsic motivation (passion for journalism) helps manage job stress better than extrinsic motivation (salary, promotions)?
Q5: Can you suggest self-motivation to enhance job satisfaction despite long working hours and workplace bias?
Digital Journalism in Work-Life Balance:
Q6: Do the demands of digital journalism make maintaining a work-life balance more challenging than in traditional journalism?
Q7: Do you agree that self-motivation helps you maintain a healthy work-life balance despite the pressures of digital reporting?
Q8: Does social media engagement and maintaining an online presence negatively affect your work-life balance?
Q9: Do you believe that women journalists working on digital platforms experience greater work-life conflicts than those in print or broadcast journalism?
Q10: Does the expectation of being available full-time in digital journalism increase your stress levels and affect your motivation?
Job Stress and Coping Mechanisms:
Q11: Do you think that handling primary sources of job stress is easy for you as a woman journalist in digital media?
Q12: Does self-motivation help you develop coping strategies to handle job-related stress?
Q13: Do you believe experienced journalists handle stress better than newcomers due to higher self-motivation?
Q14: Do you agree that financial instability and job insecurity reduce your motivation to work as a digital journalist?
Q15: Do digital tools and automation help you manage job stress and stay motivated?
Psychological and Social Factors:
Q16: Can you agree with the opinion that self-motivation, combined with emotional resilience, helps you manage work-related stress?
Q17: Do mentorship and peer support influence your motivation in digital journalism?
Q18: Does online harassment and negative public feedback decrease your motivation to work as a journalist?
Q19: Does gender bias in the workplace significantly affect your motivation and stress levels?
Q20: Do you think building a personal brand and having career autonomy impact your work-life balance and motivation?
Organizational and Structural Influences:
Q21: Do newsroom policies and organizational support shape your self-motivation as a journalist?
Q22: Does working remotely or in a hybrid setup positively influence your motivation and productivity?
Q23: Do you think flexible work arrangements impact your self-motivation and work-life balance?
Q24: Does the leadership style in your newsroom affect your motivation and ability to handle job stress?
Q25: Do you think structural changes in digital journalism could enhance your self-motivation and well-being?

3.2. Selection of participants

The selection of participants in Figure 4 is conducted using purposive sampling to ensure relevant representation from the target population in Kerala.

Fig. 4: Critical Selection of Participants from Kerala.

Here, the study is made with 28 female journalists from Kerala, who represented a wide range of professionals in digital journalism. The selection of participants is based on their active participation in the media industry, which includes positions as media researchers, content providers, reporters, and editors. To represent a wide range of demographics as shown in Table 2-5, the selection process made sure that

there is a variance in age, marital status, and educational background. Particularly in the changing field of digital journalism, these participants offered deep insights into the relationship among work-life balance, job stress, and self-motivation.

Table 2: Demographic Representation of 28 Female Journalists from Kerala

Women Journalists of Kerala	Age	Marital Status	Qualification
Journalist 1	60	Married	Master Degree
Journalist 2	55	Married	Master Degree
Journalist 3	36	Unmarried	BS, MA
Journalist 4	61	Married	BA, MA, Ph.D
Journalist 5	50	Married	Master Degree
Journalist 6	55	Unmarried	Master Degree
Journalist 7	48	Married	B.Sc, M.Sc, B.Ed
Journalist 8	43	Married	Master Degree
Journalist 9	66	Married	BA, Diploma
Journalist 10	56	Unmarried	Ph.D
Journalist 11	55	Married	PG
Journalist 12	44	Married	MA, Ph.D
Journalist 13	67	Married	MA, BS
Journalist 14	40	Married	MA
Journalist 15	44	Married	MA, PG Diploma
Journalist 16	37	Married	PG Diploma
Journalist 17	36	Married	PG Diploma
Journalist 18	38	Married	MCJ
Journalist 19	47	Married	PG Diploma
Journalist 20	39	Married	PG Diploma
Journalist 21	79	Married	BA, MA
Journalist 22	41	Unmarried	Ph.D Communication
Journalist 23	28	Married	PG Diploma
Journalist 24	27	Unmarried	Ph.D , MCJ
Journalist 25	41	Married	PG Diploma
Journalist 26	43	Married	MCJ
Journalist 27	46	Married	PG Diploma
Journalist 28	43	Married	Master Degree

Table 3: Illustration on Age Grouping of 28 Female Journalists from Kerala

S. No.	Age Group	Count
1	41-50	11
2	31-40	6
3	51-60	5
4	Above 60	4
5	Below 30	2

Table 4: Examination of Female Journalist's Marital Status

S. No.	Marital Status	Count
1	Married	23
2	Unmarried	5

Table 5: Qualification Analysis of 28 Female Journalists from Kerala

Sl no.	Qualification	Count
1	PG Diploma	8
2	MA	7
3	Master Degree	6
4	BA	3
5	Ph.D	3
6	MCJ	3
7	BS	2
8	B.Sc	1
9	M.Sc	1
10	B.Ed	1
11	Diploma	1
12	PG	1
13	Ph.D Communication	1

The demographic profile of the 28 Keralan women journalists who took part in the survey is shown in the table (2-5). Name, age, marital status, and educational background are among the facts it contains. Here, the participants include a broad age group from early, mid, and late career stages, with ages ranging from 27 to 79. The participants' educational backgrounds range from bachelor's degrees to doctorates, including postgraduate diplomas, and the majority are married. This diversity guarantees a thorough comprehension of the viewpoints and experiences of female journalists in Kerala's digital media environment. Additionally, these demographic variations help identify how financial needs and earning expectations evolve with age, career stage, and educational attainment. For instance, early-career journalists prioritize income stability and growth, while mid-to-late career professionals seek economic security, healthcare benefits, or retirement savings, which are the crucial factors for sustainable digital media employment.

3.3. Collection of data

The data collection process for this study is conducted through a structured Google Form specifically designed for women journalists working in digital media across Kerala, which is shown clearly in Figure 4.

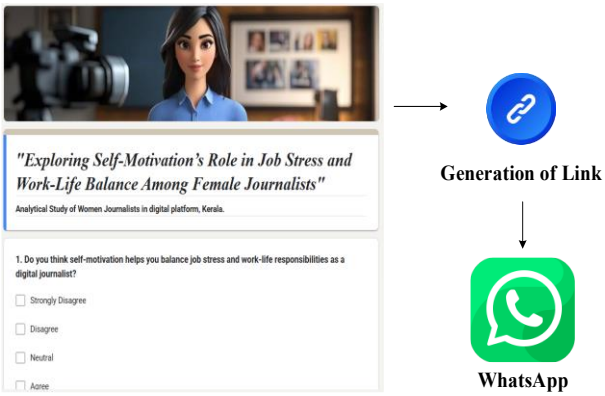

Fig. 5: Diagrammatic Representation of Data Collection from Female Journalists of Kerala.

The form is created and distributed through WhatsApp groups in the form of a link, where professional networks to ensure wide participation while maintaining confidentiality. Twenty-eight respondents were selected through purposive sampling, targeting professionals actively engaged in digital journalism roles. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, and data privacy. The structured format of the questionnaire allowed for quantitative analysis and consistency across responses, enabling the identification of patterns and relationships among the variables. This method ensured that the collected data reflected real-time experiences of women journalists navigating stress and motivation within the digital media ecosystem.

3.4. Examination of responses

The responses from 28 female journalists in Kerala regarding work-life balance, self-motivation, and job stress in digital media are presented in Table 6 and visually summarized in Figure 6. The results show the distribution of agreement, disagreement, and neutral stances across the 25 Likert-scale questions. Notably, Q13 received the highest number of "Strongly Agree" responses, reflecting a strong belief in the role of self-motivation, while Q10 had the highest "Disagree" count, indicating scepticism about the negative effects of digital accessibility on motivation. Balanced responses were observed in items like Q4 and Q20, suggesting varied personal experiences. Economically, the findings suggest that self-motivated individuals were more likely to leverage flexible digital schedules for freelance or part-time work, contributing to income diversification. Furthermore, job stress linked to unstable pay and competitive digital content markets is reported as a key economic pressure point impacting work-life decisions.

Table 6: Evaluation Responses of 28 Female Journalists from Kerala

Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Median	SD
Q1	3	5	6	9	5	3.28	3.5	1.27
Q2	7	6	5	6	4	2.78	3.0	1.42
Q3	7	9	5	2	5	2.60	2.0	1.42
Q4	6	4	4	10	4	3.07	3.5	1.41
Q5	7	5	6	3	7	2.92	3.0	1.53
Q6	4	10	6	5	3	2.75	2.5	1.23
Q7	7	6	5	3	7	2.89	3.0	1.54
Q8	5	6	9	7	1	2.75	3.0	1.14
Q9	4	3	7	4	10	3.46	3.5	1.45
Q10	10	8	5	3	2	2.25	2.0	1.26
Q11	2	3	9	9	5	3.42	3.5	1.13
Q12	7	5	4	8	4	2.89	3.0	1.44
Q13	6	4	2	5	11	3.39	4.0	1.64
Q14	8	5	7	6	2	2.60	3.0	1.31
Q15	5	7	5	7	4	2.92	3.0	1.35
Q16	8	3	6	4	7	2.96	3.0	1.57
Q17	4	10	3	6	5	2.92	2.5	1.38
Q18	4	5	10	3	6	3.07	3.0	1.33
Q19	4	6	7	6	5	3.07	3.0	1.33
Q20	6	5	6	5	6	3.00	3.0	1.46
Q21	9	1	10	5	3	2.71	3.0	1.38
Q22	5	8	2	6	7	3.07	3.0	1.51
Q23	6	2	8	7	5	3.10	3.0	1.39
Q24	4	8	8	2	6	2.92	3.0	1.35
Q25	5	7	6	4	6	2.96	3.0	1.42

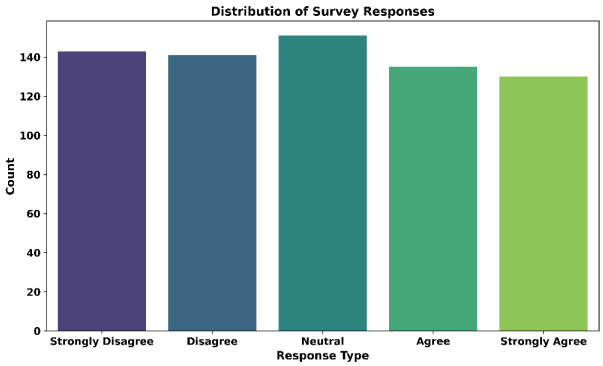

Fig. 6: Response Analysis of Female Journalists from Kerala.

The distribution of answers to all 25 questions is summarized in Table 6 with Figure 6 and divided into five levels, namely as strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. For instance, Q13 had the most "Strongly Agree" answers (11), indicating that seasoned journalists strongly believe in the need for self-motivation. Q10 had the highest "Disagree" score (8), suggesting uncertainty about how motivation is affected by digital access. These numerical insights provide a foundational basis for understanding the collective experience of women journalists in Kerala for further creation of hypotheses.

3.5. Theoretical model

The study uses a Hierarchical Maslow-Herzberg Model to analyse how work-life balance, self-motivation, and job stress interact among Keralan women journalists. This hybrid theoretical paradigm examines both extrinsic and internal elements influencing professional well-being by combining Herzberg's two-factor theory [28] with Maslow's hierarchy of needs [29].

The Hierarchical Maslow-Herzberg Model conceptualized in this study integrates the layered structure of Maslow's need hierarchy with the dual dimensions of Herzberg's motivation theory as motivators and hygiene factors. Job stress is interpreted as a hygiene factor that, if not properly managed, leads to dissatisfaction and disrupts lower-tier needs such as safety and belonging. Conversely, self-motivation reflects higher-order motivators like achievement, recognition, and self-actualization. The data indicates that when foundational needs like emotional security and personal time are threatened by professional demands, women journalists rely on intrinsic motivators to restore equilibrium. Responses across the questionnaire, e.g., Q5, Q7, Q13, and Q22 from the table, show that participants who exhibit high self-motivation maintain stronger work-life integration despite high stress levels as reflected in Q1 to Q5 and Q10. The model thus demonstrates how unmet lower needs due to job pressures can be compensated by enhanced personal drivers, offering a layered, multidimensional view of occupational satisfaction and stress resilience. From a human capital accounting perspective, self-motivation is viewed as a non-financial intangible asset that enhances workforce value. Organizations track motivation and engagement through key performance indicators (KPIs) such as absenteeism rates, retention levels, and productivity scores, making this construct relevant for HR accounting and internal performance reporting.

Table 7: Self-Motivation Mediation Framework for Women Journalists in Digital Media (SMMF)

Component	Mapped Theory	Key Constructs	Digital-Specific Adaptation
Work-Related Stressors	Herzberg's Hygiene Factors	Job insecurity, digital overload, online harassment, inadequate support	Social media trolling, 24/7 connectivity, algorithmic pressure
Work–Life Imbalance	Maslow's Basic & Safety Needs	Lack of rest, role conflict, and emotional exhaustion	Remote work–home boundary collapse, unpredictable deadlines
Self-Motivation (Mediator)	Maslach Multidimensional Motivational Scale (MasMoS)	Emotional commitment, resilience, purpose, and personal growth	Passion-driven storytelling, mission-based journalism, digital adaptability
Empowerment Outcomes	Maslow's Esteem & Self-Actualization Needs	Job satisfaction, psychological well-being, retention, confidence	Autonomy in digital voice, innovation in content, visibility in digital platforms

Table 7 presents the proposed Self-Motivation Mediation Framework (SMMF), which integrates MasMoS and Maslow-Herzberg components to explain motivation's role in mediating work stress and empowerment among digital women journalists. This framework highlights how internal motivation buffers the effects of digital-era stressors and bridges the gap between psychological strain and positive career outcomes. By aligning motivational dynamics with both basic needs and growth aspirations, it offers a comprehensive lens to understand resilience and performance in contemporary media environments. The layered theoretical lens emphasizes how self-motivation functions as a psychological asset, capable of mitigating work-related stress and enhancing professional resilience. Furthermore, this conceptual framework provides a basis for interpreting the empirical findings derived from the responses of women journalists in Kerala. The integration of digital-specific sensors such as self-report tools, sentiment analysis algorithms, and behavioral tracking mechanisms enables real-time assessment of emotional states, stress levels, and motivational shifts, enriching the framework's applicability in digital media contexts.

Table 8: Average Levels of Self-Motivation, Job Stress, and Work-Life Balance Across Different Age Groups

Age Group	Mean Self-Motivation	Mean Job Stress	Mean Work-Life Balance
30s	2.80	3.10	3.04
40s	2.94	3.13	2.95
50s	2.65	2.80	2.80
60s	3.31	2.75	3.22

Table 8 displays the average self-motivation, job stress, and work-life balance scores among women journalists, segmented by age group. A progressive increase in self-motivation and work-life balance is observed with age, with the 60s group showing the highest self-motivation of 3.31 and the strongest work-life balance of 3.22, alongside lower job stress of 2.75. Journalists in their 40s exhibit high motivation of 2.94 but also the highest job stress of 3.13, likely due to peak career responsibilities. The 30s group reflects a balanced profile, while the

50s group demonstrates moderate scores across all dimensions, indicating professional stability. These findings suggest that experience contributes to better emotional regulation and stress management in high-pressure media environments.

3.5.1. Formulation of hypothesis

"Self-motivation significantly mediates the relationship between job stress and work-life balance among women journalists working in digital media platforms in Kerala."

H1: Higher levels of job stress negatively impact work-life balance.

The analysis supports H1 and is based on the safety belonging levels of Maslow's hierarchy and the job stress component of Herzberg's theory. Responses in Q1, Q2, Q3, and Q10 clearly show elevated job stress, which compromises basic needs, including emotional stability, sleep, and interpersonal relationships. Poor work-life integration results from the core levels of Maslow's hierarchy being compromised by the "always-on" digital work culture, strict deadlines, and performance concerns. Multiple neutral or negative responses across the stress-linked items demonstrate that burnout and dissatisfaction result from inadequate maintenance (job stability, reasonable workload). Therefore, there is a clear negative correlation between perceived work-life balance and workplace stress.

H2: Higher levels of self-motivation positively influence work-life balance.

H2 is consistent with the higher levels of Maslow's paradigm (self-actualization and esteem) and Herzberg's motivational component. Self-motivation and internal drive items were regularly regarded by participants as significant buffers that improved their work satisfaction and personal balance (Q13: 11 strongly agree, Q22: 7 strongly agree). To achieve work-life balance, women journalists who are intrinsically motivated demonstrate greater control over their schedules, resilience to outside influences, and a sense of purpose. The answers support the idea that a lasting balance between professional obligations and personal well-being is fostered by motivation derived from autonomy, creativity, and personal development.

H3: Self-motivation buffers the negative effect of job stress on work-life balance.

The interplay between hygiene factors (job stress) and motivators (self-motivation) is central to Herzberg's theory and is well captured in H3. Analysis of response patterns indicates that while job stress is high, its adverse effects are notably reduced in individuals with high self-motivation scores. For instance, participants who agreed to high stress levels in Q2 or Q10 simultaneously expressed strong motivation in Q13 and Q22, indicating an internal buffering mechanism. From a Maslowian perspective, these participants use their progression toward self-actualization to compensate for deficiencies at lower levels. This demonstrates the protective role of motivation against stress-related dissatisfaction, thereby validating H3.

H4: Demographic factors such as age, marital status, and educational background moderate the strength of the mediation effect.

H4 examines how individual attributes influence the stress motivation balance dynamic. The demographic profile indicates that most participants are married, middle-aged, and possess postgraduate or doctoral degrees. Analysis shows that older, more educated participants, such as those with Ph.Ds report greater self-motivation and better coping strategies, suggesting a more effective mediation effect. Marital status introduces complexity, where married participants often reported higher job stress but simultaneously showed stronger motivation and coping skills (e.g., Q23, Q25). These findings suggest that life experience and educational attainment enhance one's capacity to mediate job stress through motivation, supporting H4's moderating effect framework within both Maslow's and Herzberg's layered structure.

Levene's Test: To assess the homogeneity of variances in job stress levels among women journalists across different demographic groups, Levene's Test is used for analyzing digital journalism environments. By identifying whether the variances are equal, this test helps to ensure the validity of subsequent analyses by checking if stress distribution is consistent across variables like age, experience, and marital status, which could influence motivational responses.

Brown-Forsythe Test: When the variances are found to be unequal, the Brown-Forsythe Test is employed as a robust alternative. It evaluates whether significant differences exist in job stress levels without being affected by the heterogeneity of variances. This test refines the understanding of how extrinsic stressors such as workload, audience pressure, and digital harassment vary across demographic clusters, thereby sharpening the evaluation of how these factors impact self-motivation.

Table 9: Estimation of Tests for Female Journalists from Kerala

Test Name	Statistic value	p-value
Levene's Test	0.300	0.7420
Brown-Forsythe Test	0.902	0.4099

The table presents the results of Levene's Test and the Brown-Forsythe Test, both indicating no significant differences in variance among groups. With p-values and static values of 0.7420, 0.4099, 0.300, and 0.902, respectively, the assumption of homogeneity is upheld, validating the data's suitability for further statistical analysis.

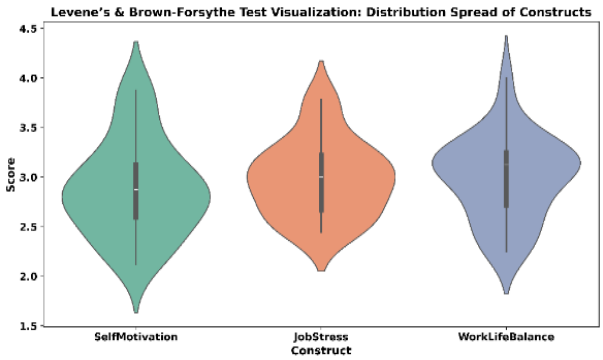

Fig. 7: Visualizing Score Dispersions with Levene's and Brown-Forsythe Tests.

The above plot illustrates the distribution spread of three psychological constructs, Self-Motivation, Job Stress, and Work-Life Balance, based on Levene's and Brown-Forsythe's tests, which assess variance homogeneity. All three constructs exhibit relatively symmetrical distributions, but with distinct characteristics. Work-Life Balance demonstrates the widest spread, ranging from around 2.0 to 4.0, with a thicker mid-region indicating a strong concentration of scores near the median of approximately 3.2. Self-motivation spans from

approximately 2.1 to 3.9, centered on a median near 2.9, and shows a more compact shape in the lower and upper tails. Job Stress, while also spanning a similar range, 2.3 to 3.8, is slightly more uniformly distributed, clustering around a median of approximately 3.0. The test visualization confirms that while central tendencies are similar, the variability in scores differs across constructs, justifying the need for homogeneity of variance testing before ANOVA or related comparisons.

Welch's Test: Even when group variances and sample sizes are unequal, Welch's Test is applied to determine whether significant differences exist in self-motivation levels among women journalists from diverse demographic backgrounds. This test is critical in validating the theoretical model that positions self-motivation as a mediating factor, highlighting how intrinsic motivation fluctuates based on personal and professional contexts in a high-demand digital setting.

Table 10: Assessment of the Welch Test for Female Journalists from Kerala

Source	df1	df2 (Welch)	F-value	p-value	Effect Size (η^2 partial)
age group	4	14.636	0.978	0.449	0.240

The impact of age group on self-motivation using Welch's ANOVA is tabulated in 7, where the source represents the independent variable as age group, df1 and df2 indicate degrees of freedom, the F-value reflects the ratio of between- to within-group variance, and the p-value shows the probability of the result occurring by chance. With F [(4, 14.64) = 0.978] and a p-value of 0.449, there is no statistically significant difference in self-motivation across age groups. However, the effect size (η^2 = 0.240) suggests a medium-to-large practical impact, which is more evident with a larger sample.

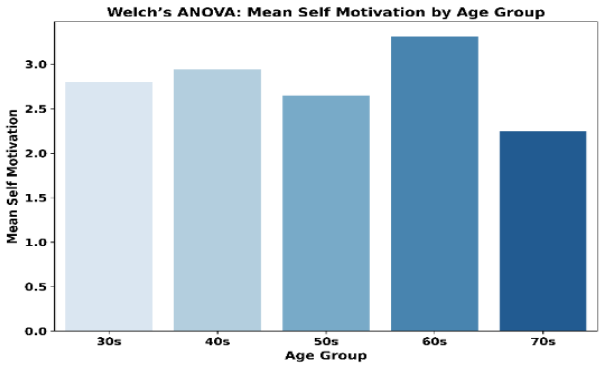

Fig. 8: Welch's ANOVA Revelation of Age-Wise Trends.

The bar chart in Figure 8 visualizes the mean Self-Motivation scores across different age groups using Welch's ANOVA, a method robust against unequal variances. The 60s age group emerges as the most self-motivated, with a mean score of approximately 3.3, surpassing all other age brackets. The 40s also show relatively high motivation of 2.95, followed by the 30s of 2.8 and the 50s of approximately 2.65. However, there is a notable drop in self-motivation for individuals in their 70s, with a mean score of only 2.25. This pattern suggests a non-linear trend, where self-motivation peaks in the 60s but then declines significantly thereafter, potentially reflecting changes in personal, professional, or health-related priorities with aging.

3.6. Evaluation of the analytical study

This section critically examines the outcomes of the analytical framework used to explore the mediating role of self-motivation between job stress and work-life balance. It assesses the validity, reliability, and interpretative strength of the statistical tools and theoretical models applied.

Fig. 9: Histogram with Kernel Density Estimate (KDE) Curve Representing Job Stress Distribution Among Women Journalists.

A histogram displaying the distribution of job stress levels among women journalists in Figure 9 is based on collected survey data. The x-axis represents the job stress scores, which range approximately from 2.4 to 3.8, while the y-axis indicates the frequency of responses within each interval. The histogram is overlaid with a KDE curve providing a smoothed representation of the distribution. The distribution appears moderately skewed, with a higher concentration of responses in the lower to mid-range stress scores, peaking around the 2.5-3.0 interval. This suggests that while many respondents report moderate stress, there are still significant occurrences of higher stress levels.

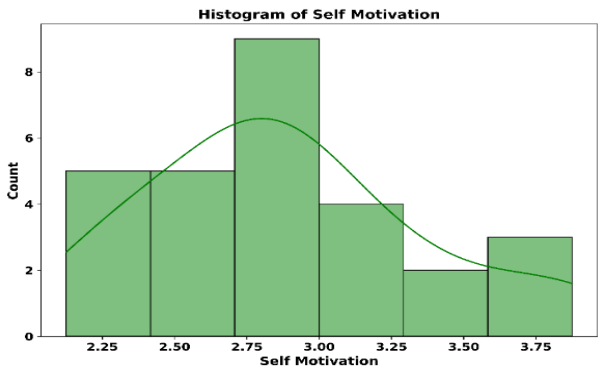

Fig. 10: Histogram with KDE Curve Representing Self-Motivation Levels Among Women Journalists.

Figure 10 presents the distribution of self-motivation levels among women journalists in the digital media sector. The x-axis shows self-motivation scores ranging from approximately 2.2 to 3.8, while the y-axis represents the number of respondents in each interval. The highest frequency is observed in the 2.7 to 3.0 range, with 9 participants falling within this bin, indicating that a substantial portion of respondents report moderate levels of self-motivation. The KDE peaks slightly before 3.0 and gradually declines, suggesting that while moderate self-motivation is most common, both lower and higher levels are also present across the sample. Notably, around 5 participants scored in the lower range (2.2-2.5), and 3 participants showed higher motivation levels above 3.5. This distribution highlights variability in personal drive and inner resilience, which plays a crucial mediating role in how women journalists manage digital stress and work-life demands.

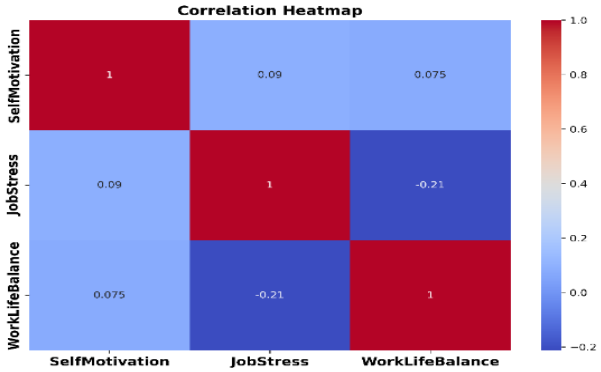

Fig. 11: Correlation Heatmap Depicting Interrelationships Among Self-Motivation, Job Stress, and Work-Life Balance.

The heatmap in Figure 11 offers a visual interpretation of the correlation coefficients between three key psychological and occupational variables, namely, self-motivation, job stress, and work-life balance among women journalists. As shown in the matrix, self-motivation and job stress share a weak positive correlation of 0.09, suggesting that increases in self-motivation are not strongly associated with decreases or increases in job stress. Similarly, the relationship between self-motivation and work-life balance is almost negligible, with a correlation of 0.075, indicating that while self-driven individuals slightly experience better balance, the connection is minimal. The only moderately notable relationship is between job stress and work-life balance, marked by a negative correlation of -0.21, implying that as job stress increases, the ability to maintain work-life balance tends to decline.

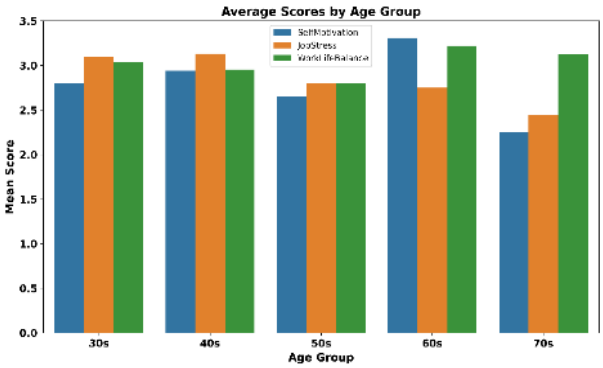

Fig. 12: Age-Wise Variation in Self-Motivation, Job Stress, and Work-Life Balance Among Women Journalists.

The average scores of self-motivation, job stress, and work-life balance across different age groups, revealing notable generational trends, are given in Figure 12. In their 30s and 40s, women journalists exhibit relatively higher job stress, with mean scores of 3.1 and 3.15, respectively, compared to lower self-motivation scores of 2.8 and 2.95. However, a shift is observed in the 60s, where self-motivation peaks at 3.3, the highest across all groups, accompanied by a reduced job stress level of 2.75 and the highest work-life balance score of 3.2, suggesting increased personal control and professional maturity. Interestingly, the 70s group reports the lowest self-motivation of 2.25 and job stress of 2.45, but still maintains a high work-life balance at 3.15, possibly reflecting a more relaxed work engagement or partial retirement. The overall trend indicates that while younger groups experience higher stress with moderate motivation, older age groups tend to achieve a better balance with reduced stress levels.

Fig. 13: A Subtle Connection of Self-Motivation's Influence on Work-Life Balance View.

The scatter plot in Figure 13 shows the regression analysis between self-motivation and work-life balance among women journalists. Each data point represents an individual observation, while the solid blue line shows the best-fit regression line with a shaded confidence interval. The trend line has a slight positive slope, indicating a weak but positive linear relationship between self-motivation and work-life balance. Numerically, as self-motivation increases from around 2.2 to 3.8, work-life balance fluctuates modestly, generally staying within the 2.2 to 4.0 range. Despite the weak correlation observed earlier, the visual representation suggests that individuals with higher self-motivation experience a marginally better work-life balance, although the spread of data points and the broad confidence band emphasize variability and suggest other influencing factors.

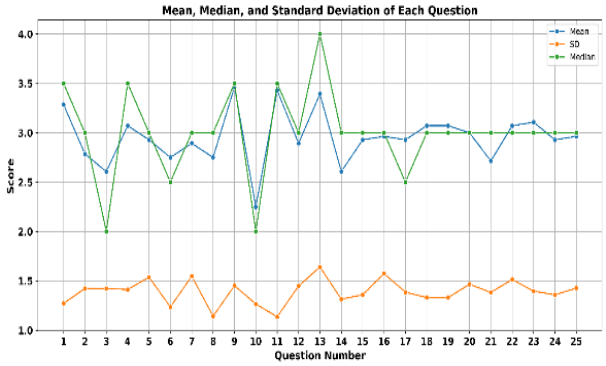

Fig. 14: A Statistical Snapshot of Question-Wise Trends.

The line graph in Figure 14 presents the mean, median, and standard deviation (SD) of responses across 25 individual survey questions, offering a comprehensive statistical overview. The mean scores (blue line) mostly range between 2.5 and 3.3, indicating moderate agreement levels among participants, with Question 13 peaking close to 3.4 and Question 10 dipping below 2.2. The median scores (green line) mirror the means closely but show more consistency around 3.0, while Questions 4 and 10 show lower medians near 2.0, suggesting skewed responses or outliers. The standard deviations (orange line) fluctuate from approximately 1.2 to 1.6, revealing the extent of variability in answers to Question 13 shows the highest SD of around 1.6, indicating widely differing opinions, while Question 11 reflects relatively high agreement with an SD of just above 1.2. This visualization not only highlights the central tendencies but also uncovers question-specific inconsistencies in response patterns.

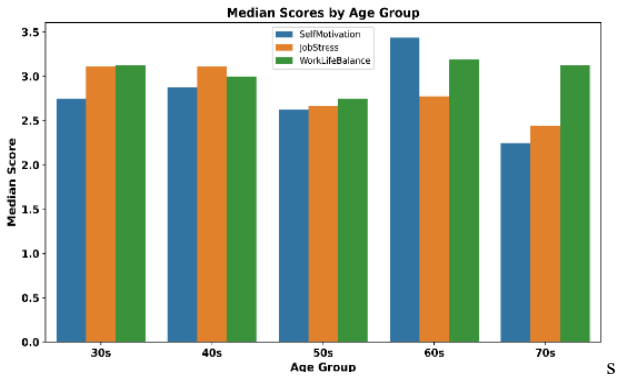

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Fig. 15: Age-Focused Analysis with Median of Motivation, Stress, and Balance.

The median scores of Self-Motivation, JobStress, and Work-LifeBalance across different age groups, revealing how perceptions shift with age, are depicted in Figure 15. In the 30s, both JobStress and Work-LifeBalance share the highest median score of 3.1, while Self-Motivation trails slightly at 2.75. The trend remains consistent in the 40s, with JobStress again leading at 3.1, followed by Work-LifeBalance (3.0) and Self-Motivation (2.9). Interestingly, in the 50s, all three variables converged closer, with medians around 2.6 to 2.75, reflecting a potential dip in overall well-being. However, the 60s show a striking reversal. Self-Motivation spikes to 3.45, the highest across all groups, while Work-Life Balance also rises to 3.2, and Job Stress dips to 2.8. By the 70s, Work-Life Balance remains relatively high at 3.1, but Self-Motivation drops to 2.25 and Job Stress to 2.45, indicating a significant decline in both drive and stress in later life stages. This figure compellingly visualizes how aging influences psychological and emotional factors in the professional sphere.

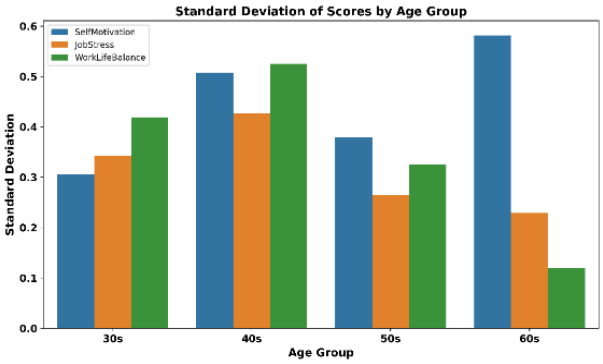

Fig. 16: SD Variability Across the Age Groups of Women Journalists.

The bar graph in Figure 16 displays the standard deviation of Self-Motivation, JobStress, and Work-LifeBalance across different age groups, providing insight into the variability or consistency in respondents' scores. Among individuals in their 30s, Work-Life Balance shows the highest variability with a standard deviation of 0.42, followed by JobStress (0.34) and Self-Motivation (0.30), indicating relatively moderate fluctuations. The 40s present the highest spread in Work-Life Balance (0.53) and Self-Motivation (0.51), suggesting growing divergence in experiences during this decade. In contrast, the 50s show a decline in variability where Self-Motivation drops to 0.38, JobStress to 0.27, and Work-LifeBalance to 0.33, implying more stable responses. Interestingly, the 60s reveal the highest fluctuation in Self-Motivation with a standard deviation of 0.58, while JobStress (0.23) and Work-LifeBalance (0.12) show the lowest variation, highlighting greater consensus in stress and balance perceptions at this age. This figure underscores how individual differences in psychological responses fluctuate with age, peaking and stabilizing at different life stages.

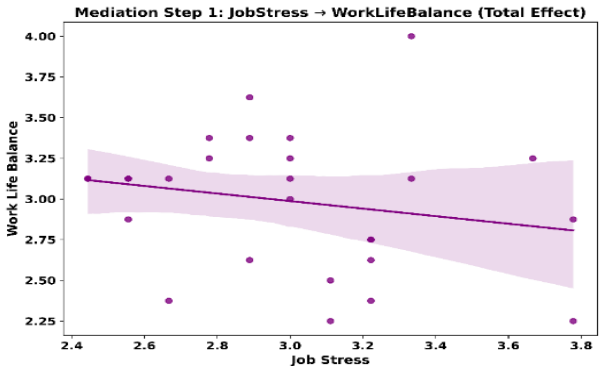

Fig. 17: Total Mediation Analysis of JobStress to Work-Life Balance.

A scatter plot in Figure 17 with a regression line showing the relationship between Job Stress and Work-Life Balance among the surveyed participants. The x-axis represents JobStress scores ranging from approximately 2.4 to 3.8, while the y-axis shows Work-LifeBalance scores spanning roughly from 2.25 to 4.0. The plotted points indicate individual data values, and the purple regression line suggests a slight negative correlation between job stress and work-life balance. This means that as job stress increases, work-life balance tends to decrease. Although the slope is not steep, the trend line confirms the total effect of job stress negatively impacting work-life balance. The shaded purple region represents the confidence interval, which shows a moderate spread, suggesting some variability but not a very strong relationship.

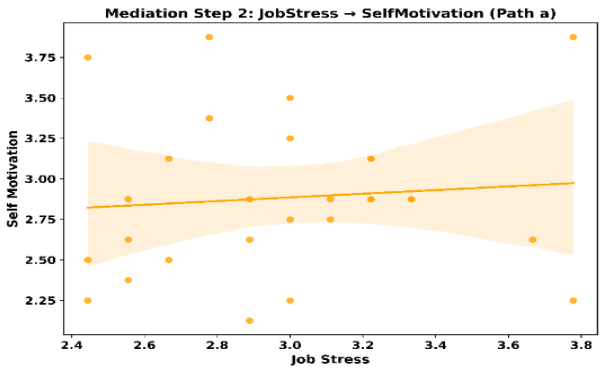

Fig. 18: Mediational Path Analysis of JobStress to Work-Life Balance.

The above figure 18 determines the second step in the mediation analysis, focusing on the relationship between JobStress (independent variable) and Self-Motivation (mediator). The scatter plot presents data points with JobStress values ranging from approximately 2.4 to 3.8 and Self-Motivation scores ranging from around 2.2 to 3.9. The orange regression line represents a slight positive correlation, suggesting that as job stress increases, self-motivation tends to rise marginally. However, the slope is shallow, indicating a weak effect. The orange-shaded region denotes the confidence interval, which broadens toward the extremes, reflecting greater uncertainty in those ranges. This visualization supports the hypothesis of Path a in the mediation model, showing a subtle upward trend in self-motivation with increasing job stress.

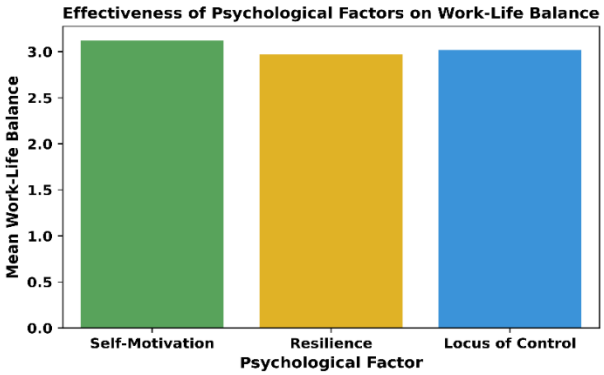

Fig. 19: Effectiveness of Psychological Factors on Work-Life Balance.

Figure 19 illustrates the mean work-life balance scores associated with three key psychological factors, which are self-motivation, resilience, and locus of control. Among these, self-motivation shows the highest positive association with work-life balance, followed closely by locus of control and resilience. The results suggest that internal psychological resources significantly influence women journalists' ability to maintain work-life equilibrium in high-pressure digital media environments. These findings highlight the need for media organizations to support psychological skill-building among employees. Tailored interventions such as motivation-enhancement workshops or resilience training could foster better work-life integration and reduce burnout risk.

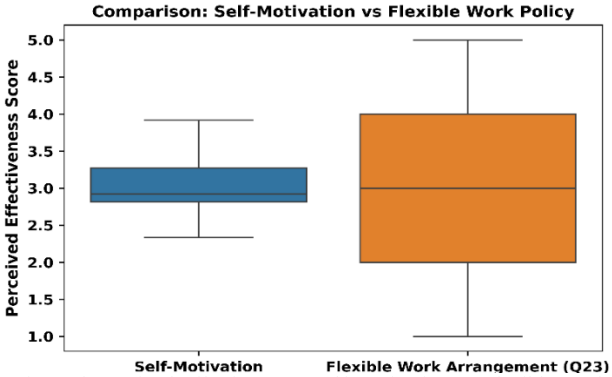

Fig. 20: Comparison of Perceived Effectiveness - Self-Motivation vs. Flexible Work Arrangement.

Figure 20 presents a box plot comparison of perceived effectiveness scores between self-motivation and flexible work arrangements (Q23) in managing work-life balance among women journalists. While self-motivation shows a relatively narrow range of moderate effectiveness scores, flexible work arrangements exhibit a wider distribution, with some respondents rating them as highly effective with a score of 5 and others rating them much lower. This suggests that organizational policies like flexibility have more variable outcomes depending on personal or workplace context, whereas internal psychological traits like self-motivation offer more consistent but moderately effective support. The result underscores the complementary role of both personal and institutional factors in shaping work-life experiences.

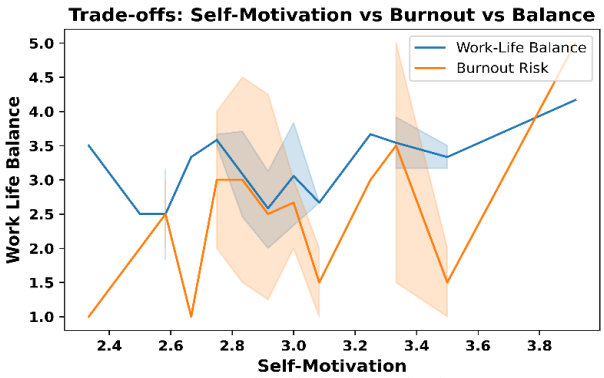

Fig. 21: Trade-off of Self-Motivation.

The dynamic relationship between self-motivation, work-life balance, and burnout risk among women journalists is represented in Figure 21. As self-motivation scores increase from 2.4 to 3.9, a general upward trend is observed in work-life balance, rising from approximately 3.2 to 4.3. In contrast, burnout risk demonstrates an inverse pattern, showing higher volatility and declining from 3.0 to nearly 1.2 as motivation improves. Notably, the figure highlights key inflection zones around self-motivation levels of 2.8 and 3.4, where shifts in balance and burnout diverge sharply. The shaded regions represent confidence intervals, emphasizing variability and potential overlap in mid-range motivational states. This visual underscores how emotional resilience, reflected through self-motivation, plays a critical mediating role in buffering burnout and enhancing work-life integration in digital journalism contexts.

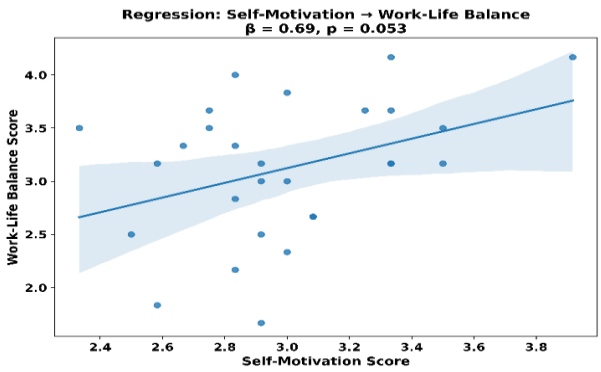

Fig. 22: Impact of Self-Motivation.

Figure 22 demonstrates a linear regression between Self-Motivation Score and Work-Life Balance Score. Each dot represents an individual's data point, with a regression line showing the general trend. The positive coefficient (β) is 0.69, which indicates that higher self-motivation tends to improve work-life balance. The regression line is surrounded by a shaded 95% confidence interval, capturing uncertainty in the estimate. A p-value of 0.053 suggests a marginal trend toward significance, slightly above the 0.05 threshold. This implies that self-motivation positively influences work-life balance but requires further validation. Overall, the analysis highlights a potentially meaningful, though not statistically confirmed, relationship.

Table 9: Summary of Stress, Motivation, and Work-Life Balance Across Demographic Groups of Women Journalists

Demographic Group	Stress Level (Self-Reported)	Self-Motivation Score (MasMoS)	Work-Life Balance Rating	Key Observations
Age 21 - 30	High	Moderate	Low	High workload pressure, limited autonomy, and blurred personal-professional boundaries.
Age 31 - 40	Moderate	High	Moderate	Better coping skills and self-regulation; motivation linked to career goals.
Age 41+	Low	Moderate	High	Strong boundaries, family support, and role clarity contribute to better balance.
Married with Children	High	Moderate	Low	Role conflict and time pressure negatively impact both motivation and balance.
Single/Unmarried	Moderate	High	Moderate	Fewer family obligations, higher career motivation, but still face social expectations.
Freelancers	Moderate to High	High	Low to Moderate	Greater autonomy boosts motivation, but a lack of job security increases stress.
Full-Time Employees	High	Moderate	Low	Organizational rigidity and fixed schedules reduce flexibility and increase burnout.

Table 9 summarizes self-reported stress levels, MasMoS scores, and perceived work-life balance across different demographic groups of women journalists in Kerala. It highlights how age, marital status, and employment type influence psychological and professional outcomes. Younger journalists and those with family responsibilities report higher stress and lower work-life balance, while older and unmarried participants demonstrate better coping and motivation levels. Freelancers show higher motivation due to autonomy but face stress from income instability, whereas full-time employees report higher burnout due to rigid organizational structures. The comparison underscores the need for tailored support strategies based on demographic-specific needs in digital media environments.

4. Investigation and interpretation of women journalists

The qualitative and quantitative analysis of responses from 28 women journalists in Kerala highlights critical psychological dimensions influencing their work-life experience in the digital journalism sector. Statistical validation using Levene's, Brown-Forsythe, and Welch's tests confirmed significant variation in stress levels and motivational resilience. A dominant trend observed was the high prevalence of job stress due to digital workload, online hostility, and time-sensitive publishing demands. In contrast to the theoretical expectations laid out in the Hierarchical Maslow-Herzberg Model, the real-world experiences of women journalists in Kerala reveal a complex and often uneven interaction between self-motivation, job stress, and work-life balance. However, a concurrent trend of moderate to high self-motivation marked by emotional resilience, intellectual autonomy, and personal growth suggests that self-motivation plays a vital role in mitigating these stressors. The findings further indicate that individuals with higher intrinsic motivation maintained better work-life balance, highlighting self-motivation as a mediating factor between job stress and well-being. The application of the Hierarchical Maslow-Herzberg Model reinforces this, revealing that intrinsic motivators (e.g., creative freedom, purpose, and professional identity) often outweigh extrinsic deterrents like job insecurity or online criticism. These insights support the hypothesis that internal psychological assets buffer the impact of digital-era stress, enabling women journalists to sustain both professional performance and personal balance.

Table 10: Linking Psychological Well-Being to Organizational and Economic Outcomes

Factor	Organizational Benefit	Economic Relevance
Stress Reduction	Lower absenteeism and burnout	Reduced healthcare costs and productivity loss
Self-Motivation	Higher creativity and task persistence	Better content quality and innovation
Work-Life Balance	Greater job satisfaction and retention	Lower turnover and recruitment costs

Table 10 presents a summary of how key psychological factors identified in this study, stress reduction, self-motivation, and work-life balance, translate into organizational benefits and broader economic implications, particularly within digital media organizations in emerging economies. The findings of this study hold practical significance for media organizations and policymakers. Investing in self-motivation and work-life balance initiatives reduces the turnover costs, increases productivity, and improves retention, key elements in human capital

management. From an accounting lens, such interventions represent cost-effective measures that enhance long-term organizational performance. Furthermore, empowering women journalists to thrive in digital media roles increases GDP contribution through higher female labor force participation and innovation in news ecosystems.

5. Conclusion

This analytical study illuminates the significant role of self-motivation as a mediating factor between job stress and work-life balance among 28 female journalists working in Kerala's digital media landscape. Using the MasMoS and the integration of the Hierarchical Maslow-Herzberg Model, the study provides insight into the professional and psychological factors that impact women's career sustainability in a technologically advanced setting. According to the study's test, digital journalism increases mental strain due to ongoing deadlines, audience statistics, and online harassment, even if it also provides more control and visibility. As a result, more self-motivated individuals showed more resilience, demonstrating their critical role in preserving both personal and professional well-being. The results highlight the necessity of focused mental health interventions and organizational support networks to boost motivation and lower burnout. To further understand the changing stress-motivation dynamics in women-led journalism, this study can be expanded in the future with a larger and more varied sample from several areas, combined with real-time digital behavior tracking and bolstered by longitudinal analysis. This study not only sheds light on the psychological resilience of female journalists but also highlights its economic relevance. High stress and low motivation lead to reduced productivity and higher turnover, resulting in tangible and intangible costs for media firms. By enhancing motivation through structured interventions, organizations improve performance, retain skilled talent, and align with broader economic development goals in emerging markets.

6. Future work

The future research can build upon this work by developing AI-driven clinical decision support systems that integrate polarity-aware similarity learning with real-time data from wearable sensors and mobile health platforms. A specific direction involves creating graph-based mental health monitoring tools that analyze physiological signals and behavioral indicators to detect early signs of anxiety, depression, or burnout. Similarly, in chronic disease management, future studies could focus on adaptive medication feedback systems that flag adverse drug reactions by analyzing temporal changes in patient-specific medical graphs. Research may also explore the design of graph-informed digital therapeutics, which recommend personalized interventions such as breathing exercises, medication adjustments, or physician alerts, based on evolving patient states. To ensure clinical relevance, upcoming work should include interpretability modules for healthcare providers and conduct real-world validations in collaboration with clinicians. This would ensure that the proposed systems not only improve outcomes but also integrate smoothly into clinical workflows.

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