Work Autonomy and Task Variety on Employee Innovative Behavior in Chinese Media Industry, Intrinsic Motivation as a Mediator

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Abstract

Based on the job characteristic theory and component theory, this research proposed and tested a mediation model in which intrinsic motivation was mediated the effect of work autonomy and task variety on employee innovative behavior. The participants in the study were 255 employees of a media industry company in China. The results indicated that work autonomy and task variety were interactively associated with greater employee innovative behavior through the mediation mechanism of intrinsic motivation. In other words, employees who perceive greater work autonomy and task variety are more likely to be motivated by positive inner motivation to perform the frequency in innovative behavior. This research made a significance in the theoretical and practical implications for the media industry.

Keywords: Work Autonomy And Task Variety, Intrinsic Motivation, Employee Innovative Behavior.

Introduction

In the context of China's aspiration to enhance its international influence, the Chinese media industry has garnered increasing attention. Although there is a dearth of studies on the nature of work and employee innovative behavior in this industry, it is indisputable that employees are required to exhibit high levels of innovation in their news production Yang, n.d. (2023). Work autonomy and job variety emerge as two salient characteristics of media job tasks. For instance, journalists are responsible for independently identifying news hotspots, while weaving together various tasks such as writing, shooting, and broadcasting through their creative prowess. The characteristics of autonomy and task diversification can stimulate employees' innovative potential (Yoo et al., 2019), and we aim to explore the detailed process.

This study proposes an intrinsic motivation mediation model examined the impact of media work autonomy and task variety on employee innovative practices based on the job characteristics theory and component theory. According to the component theory proposed by Amabile et al. (1996), intrinsic motivation emerges as a crucial factor in employees'

generation of innovative behaviors. Additionally, (Zhou & Shalley, 2003) highlighted in their comprehensive review article on the impact of contextual and personal factors on creativity that further efforts should be directed towards examining mediating factors related to internal motivation. The following section will provide a comprehensive analysis of several key concepts and their intricate interrelationships.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development Employee Innovative Behavior (EIB)

Employee innovative behavior (EIB) plays a pivotal role in the development and success of organizations. It encompasses employees actively engaging in creative and innovative activities to enhance work performance and achieve organizational objectives (Černe et al., 2017). EIB is widely recognized as a crucial driver of innovation and competitiveness within today's rapidly evolving business landscape. Anderson et al. (2014) distinguished between creativity and innovative behavior, asserting that while creativity primarily focuses on generating novel ideas, innovative behavior emphasizes tangible outcomes. Building upon this definition framework, this article categorizes employee innovation into Behavior Generation which comprises both creative actions and their resultant effects. The objective of this study is to investigate how internal motivation and job characteristics interact to influence EIB within the context of media professionals' autonomy and diversified work attributes, with the aim of identifying effective factors for stimulating and motivating EIB.

Work Autonomy

Based on job characteristics theory proposed by Hackman & Oldham (1976), work autonomy has been extensively studied in the field of job characteristics due to its central role in the incentive-based approach to job design (Zuberi & Khattak, 2021). It refers to employees' ability to take initiative and is characterized by the degree of freedom and independence they have when performing work tasks (Wang & Cheng, 2010). Recent research has identified three distinct dimensions of autonomy at work: "arrangement," "method," and "decision-making power." However, it was recognized that these aspects can be conceptualized as different facets of autonomy rather than separate constructs (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006). Therefore, The Work Design Questionnaire (WDQ) was developed constructing the work characteristics scale which expanded on this concept by integrating these categories into a broader category of autonomy. This comprehensive perspective allows for a more detailed understanding that encompasses not only the level of freedom and independence granted by work but also factors such as organizational structure, decision-making discretion, and task performance methods (Wood & Sevastos, 2002).

Work Autonomy on Employee Innovative Behavior (EIB) and Intrinsic Motivation (IM)

Hatcher et al. (1989) highlighted that job autonomy exert a significant positive influence on employees' innovative performance. Granting employees autonomy in their tasks and providing challenging assignments enhance their innovative behavior (Wang & Cheng, 2010). A positive impact on creativity performance was observed as a result of the interaction between job autonomy and goals. Specifically, when employees are granted a high level of autonomy along with clear objectives, they are more likely to engage in creative acts (Battistelli et al., 2013). Subsequent research has further confirmed that work autonomy stimulates employee innovative behavior by triggering intrinsic motivation and facilitating knowledge acquisition.

Additionally, the level of work autonomy, which refers to the extent of independence and control an employee possesses over their tasks, can indeed exert a positive impact on intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation denotes an internal inclination and drive to engage in a specific task or activity driven by sheer enjoyment, satisfaction, or personal interest rather than external rewards or incentives. Autonomy fosters creative thinking and problem-solving abilities as it grants employees the freedom to experiment and innovate (Nili & Tasavori, 2022). Consequently, they are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation due to perceiving a direct correlation between their ideas and outcomes (Auger & Woodman, 2016). Therefore, this paper puts forward the following hypothesis:

H1a: Work Autonomy has a positive effect on employee innovative behavior (EIB).

H1b: Work Autonomy has a positive effect on intrinsic motivation (IM).

Task variety

Task variety is a crucial aspect of the work environment, encompassing the extent to which job roles necessitate employees to undertake a diverse array of tasks (Montani et al., 2014). This encompasses integrating tasks that vary in complexity, requisite skills, and purpose. In an ever-evolving world where the nature of work continues to transform, comprehending the role of task diversity within the workplace has assumed heightened significance. Incorporating a multitude of distinct work activities can render work more captivating and engrossing. A heterogeneous work environment often fosters ingenuity by stimulating creativity. When confronted with diverse tasks and challenges, employees are more inclined to devise innovative solutions and ideas. Conversely, monotonous and repetitive tasks can precipitate burnout and escalate stress levels. Engaging in a range of tasks thus presents employees with challenges while enabling them to cultivate a broader skill set (Zaniboni et al., 2013). Consequently, this can enhance motivation and engagement at work while rendering employees more prone to generating innovative endeavors.

Task variety on Employee Innovative Behavior (EIB) and Intrinsic Motivation (IM)

Task variety exerts a significant influence on both Employee Innovative Behavior (EIB) and Intrinsic Motivation (IM), with interconnected and mutually reinforcing effects. It can exert diverse impacts, providing employees with exposure to a wide range of tasks and challenges that stimulate creativity and generate novel ideas by encouraging them to think beyond their routine responsibilities. Moreover, the presence of various tasks often necessitates creative problem-solving, enabling employees to enhance their problem-solving abilities and thereby increasing the likelihood of engaging in innovative behaviors.

Subsequently, task variety facilitates the alignment of employees' interests and skills, thereby fostering intrinsic motivation. This alignment with personal passions and preferences can significantly enhance individuals' intrinsic motivation, as they are naturally inclined towards activities that they find engaging and fulfilling (Hirst, 1988). Moreover, for certain employees, the diverse range of tasks itself can be intrinsically rewarding, leading to heightened levels of motivation. Consequently, task variety not only offers opportunities for skill development and personal growth but also serves as an intrinsic motivator for individuals who prioritize continuous learning and self-improvement (Zheng et al., 2011).Therefore, there proposed the following hypothesis:

H2a: Task variety has a positive effect on employee innovative behavior (EIB).

H2b: Work Autonomy has a positive effect on intrinsic motivation (IM).

Mediating Effects of Intrinsic Motivation

Innovative work necessitates substantial investment and entails greater risks. Sustaining such work can be challenging if one lacks interest in the task itself or lacks spontaneous enthusiasm for innovation. Amabile et al. (1996) proposed component theory posits that intrinsic motivation significantly influences employees' desires and behaviors, serving as a crucial psychological driving force behind innovative behavior. Intrinsic creative motivation among employees is defined as the psychological impetus that stimulates interest, curiosity, and competitiveness in the activity of innovation itself. It can be considered one of the most critical factors contributing to employees' formation of innovative behavior and plays a vital role during idea generation and verification stages (Shin & Zhou, 2003; Zhang & Bartol, n.d.). Consequently, this article proposes the following hypotheses:

H3: Intrinsic motivation (IM) has a positive effect on employee innovative behavior (EIB).

Additionally, the job characteristics theory posits that different job characteristics elicit distinct psychological states, which in turn produce varying outcomes. Work autonomy primarily impacts employees' psychological experience of being accountable for results. When given decision-making autonomy in work planning and processes, employees feel a greater sense of responsibility for the quality of their work output to some extent. As influenced by job autonomy, higher levels of perceived autonomy lead to increased willingness to take on responsibility (Chae et al., 2015). Secondly, it is the experience of work meaning - the degree to which employees perceive their work as meaningful and valuable - that plays a crucial role in this process, and task variety is key factors here. With the psychological experience triggered by work autonomy and task variety closely linked to individual motivation, creativity, quality performance (Yoon & Choi, 2019). Therefore, this paper puts forward the following hypothesis:

H4a: Intrinsic motivation (IM) mediating the relationship between Work Autonomy and employee innovative behavior (EIB).

H4b: Intrinsic motivation (IM) mediating the relationship between Task variety and employee innovative behavior (EIB).

In summary, our study aims to investigate the mediation model of job characteristics and employee innovative behavior in fostering workplace creativity. Initially, we examine the direct impact of autonomy and skill diversity on individuals' engagement in innovative activities. Subsequently, we assess the direct influence of intrapersonal motivation on individual innovative practices, as well as its mediating role between job characteristics and innovative behavior. The hypothesized model for this study is depicted in Figure 1.



Figure 1 Hypothesized research model.

Research Methodology

Data Collection

Based on the geographical distribution of Chinese media industry, we selected two provincial media units from each region (east, central, and west), resulting in a total of six provincial media units for this survey. We obtained electronic questionnaires by seeking support from the Human Resources Director and ensured participants that their responses would be used solely for research purposes and treated with strict confidentiality. Ultimately, 310 employees responded to our survey. After screening, 255 valid responses were included for data analysis (response rate = 88.2%). The average age of participants was 33 years, with an average tenure of seven years. Among the respondents, 46% were female, 54% were male. The largest professional group consisted of journalists (51.8%), followed by editing technicians (38.5%). The remaining participants belonged to administrative staff roles (9.7%).

To assess the constructs in this study, we employed established measurement methods that have been validated in the existing literature. Given that most of the survey instruments used were originally developed within a Western context, The translation of all items into Chinese was conducted by the first author and a bilingual professor of business administration. Subsequently, to ensure utmost accuracy in conveying the questionnaire's content, another bilingual professor back-translated it into English (Brislin, 1970).

Measurement

Work autonomy and task variety was measured by scale WDQ (Work Design Questionnaire), which used in the study of designing innovative jobs (Cangialosi et al., 2021). WDQ developed by Morgeson and Humphrey (2006), which is a measure to tap work characteristics Examples of items are "The job allows me to decide on my own how to go about doing my work" and "The job involves performing a variety of tasks". All measures of job characteristics are based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Intrinsic motivation measurement for innovative activities, as utilized by Tierney (1999), Venketsamy & Lew (2022) and Yuan & Woodman (2010) in recent research, consists of a 5item scale. Sample items include "I derive enjoyment from solving complex problems". All measures are assessed on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

Employee innovative behavior is assessed through self-report measures, as employees who engage in innovative tasks are the primary perceivers and implementers of such behavior (Hsu & Chen, 2017). To evaluate employee innovative behavior, a 6-item scale originally developed by Scott and Bruce (1994) is utilized, with items including "I will generate creative

ideas." All assessments of employee innovative behavior employ a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all characteristic to 5 (Very characteristic).

Common Method Variance

Given that our study relied on a single data source encompassing the same participants for all variables, it is susceptible to common method variance. To address this concern comprehensively, we implemented technical measures to evaluate the potential impact of common method variance. Following the recommendations of Kock & Lynn (2012) as well as Kock (2015), we conducted tests for full collinearity by regressing all variables against a shared variable (Table 1). If the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was found to be \leq 3.3, it would indicate an absence of bias stemming from the single source data. Our analysis revealed VIF values below 3.3; thus confirming that any potential single source bias does not significantly affect our dataset.

Table 1

Full Collinearity Testing

Variable	Employee Innovative Behavior	Intrinsic Motivation	Work Autonomy	Job Variety	
VIF	2.657	2.063	1.474	1.398	

Note: Independent variable = Random1

Data Analysis and Results

The measurement and structural model was tested using partial least squares (PLS) and SmartPLS 4.0 (Hair et al., 2018) as the statistical tools since they do not require a normality assumption, and survey research is typically not normally distributed (Chin et al., 2003). Initially, we assessed the measurement model's validity and reliability by adhering to the guidelines proposed by Hair et al. (2019). Subsequently, we conducted an analysis on the structural model to test our formulated hypotheses.

Measurement model

For the measurement model we assessed the loadings, average variance extracted (AVE) and the composite reliability (CR). The values of loadings should be ≥ 0.5 , the AVE should be ≥ 0.5 and the CR should be ≥ 0.7 . As shown in Table 2, the AVEs are ranged from 0.688 to 0.703 all higher than 0.5. The CR values ranged from 0.804 to 0.905 are all higher than 0.7. The loadings were also acceptable with more than 0.708 (Hair et el., 2019).

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Measurement Model for Constructs						
Constructs	Items	Loadings	AVE	CR		
	EIB_1	0.855	0.688	0.892		
Employee Innovative Behavior	EIB_2	0.871				
	EIB_3	0.803				
DEITAVIOI	EIB_4	0.821				
	EIB_5	0.795				
	IM_1	0.875	0.719	0.905		
	IM_2	0.768				
Intrinsic Motivation	IM_3	0.922				
	IM_4	0.82				
	IM_5	0.846				
	WA_1	0.869	0.709	0.867		
	WA_2	0.866				
	WA_3	0.855				
	WA_4	0.841				
Work Autonomy	WA_5	0.854				
	WA_6	0.857				
	WA_7	0.758				
	WA_8	0.767				
	WA_9	0.785				
Job Variety	JV_1	0.836	0.703	0.804		
	JV_2	0.822				
	JV_3	0.818				
	JV_4	0.861				

Table 2

Then, we assessed the discriminant validity using the HTMT criterion suggested by Henseler et al. (2015) and updated by Franke and Sarstedt (2019). The HTMT values should be ≤ 0.85 the stricter criterion and the mode lenient criterion is it should be ≤ 0.90 . As shown in Table 4, the values of HTMT were all lower than the stricter criterion of ≤ 0.85 as such we can conclude that the respondents understood that the 9 constructs are distinct. Taken together both these validity test has shown that the measurement items are both valid and reliable.

Table 3 Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

	1	2	3	4
1. Employee Innovative Behavior				
2. Intrinsic Motivation	0.680			
3. Work Autonomy	0.530	0.502		
4. Job Variety	0.561	0.479	0.334	

Testing the structural model

following the suggestions of Hair et al. (2019) we reported the path coefficients, the standard errors, t-values and p-values for the structural model using a 5,000-sample re-sample

bootstrapping procedure (Ramayah et al. 2018). Also based on the criticism of Hahn and Ang (2017) that p-values are not good criterion for testing the significance of hypothesis and suggested to use a combination of criterions such as p-values, confidence intervals and effect sizes. Table 4 shows the summary of the criterions we have used to test the hypotheses developed.

First, we tested the effect of the 3 predictors on EIB, the R² was 0.567 which shows that all the 3 predictors explained 56.7 % of the variance in EIB. Work Autonomy (β = 0.154, p< 0.01), Job Variety (β = 0.186, p< 0.01) and Intrinsic Motivation (β = 0.183, p< 0.01) were all positively related to EIB, thus H1a, H2a and H3 were supported. Next, we tested the effect of Work Autonomy and Job Variety on IM, with an R² of 0.457 which indicates that Work Autonomy (β = 0.224, p< 0.01) and Job Variety (β = 0.168, p< 0.01) explains 45.7% of the variance in Intrinsic Motivation which gives support for H1b, H2b. Figure 2 illustrates PLS results of structural model.

To test the mediation hypotheses, we followed the suggestions of Preacher & Hayes (2008) by bootstrapping the indirect effect. If the confidence interval does not straddle a 0 then we can conclude that there is significant mediation. As shown in Table 4, Work Autonomy -> IM -> EIB

(β = 0.031, p< 0.05) and Job Variety -> IM -> EIB (β = 0.041, p< 0.05) were all significant. The confidence intervals bias corrected 95% also did not show any intervals straddling a 0 thus confirming our findings. Thus, H4a and H4b were also supported.



2 PLS results of structural model.

Figure

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Table 4	
Hypothesis	Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	BCI LL	BCI UL	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1a	Work Autonomy -> EIB	0.154	0.054	0.067	0.244	2.849	0.002	Supported
H1b	Work Autonomy -> IM	0.224	0.057	0.132	0.319	3.919	0.000	Supported
H2a	Job Variety -> EIB	0.186	0.055	0.093	0.275	3.363	0.000	Supported
H2b	Job Variety -> IM-	0.168	0.058	0.073	0.262	2.898	0.002	Supported
Н3	IM -> EIB	0.183	0.066	0.072	0.287	2.780	0.003	Supported
H4a	Work Autonomy -> IM -> EIB	0.031	0.016	0.008	0.060	1.902	0.029	Supported
H4b	Job Variety -> IM -> EIB	0.041	0.019	0.014	0.075	2.179	0.015	Supported

Note: EIB = Employee Innovative Behavior, IM = Intrinsic Motivation. We use 95% confidence interval with a bootstrapping of 5,000.

Discussion

We integrate the job characteristics theory proposed by Hackman and Oldham (1980) with the component theory developed by Amabile et al. (1996) to investigate the influence of two dimensions of job characteristics, namely job autonomy and task variety, on employee creativity. Additionally, we examine intrinsic motivation as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between these dimensions and employee creativity. Our analysis reveals that employees' experience of autonomy and exposure to diverse tasks positively contribute to their creative output. Moreover, our findings highlight the significant mediating role played by intrinsic motivation in these relationships.

Theoretical Implications

We categorize the work attributes of media professionals into autonomous decision-making and task diversification in order to elucidate the relationship between the fundamental characteristics of media work and creativity. Our findings demonstrate a significantly positive influence of both work process autonomy and task diversity on employees' creative behavior, providing robust evidence for the impact of task attributes on creativity. These results align with Yoo et al. (2019) report, emphasizing the necessity for a nuanced comprehension of job attributes when designing tasks and work structures to foster employee creativity. Specifically, we find that the process of autonomous decision-making is intricately linked to individual employees' inner emotions and motivations at work. When employees experience heightened levels of positive emotions during their job engagement, it maximizes their intrinsic motivation towards innovative endeavors. Simultaneously, when the task content exhibits diverse characteristics, it also fosters employee motivation to challenge themselves. The greater the drive for self-challenge, the higher the level of internal motivation and innovation momentum. Consequently, we establish a connection between job attributes and internal innovative motivation, integrating innovative behavioral practices into a situational motivation continuum. In other words, when employees perceive autonomy in task determination and encounter diverse challenges within their tasks, it stimulates their intrinsic sense of autonomy and inclination towards embracing challenges. This psychological state propels individuals' internal energy to reach an exceptionally high level and subsequently facilitates individual innovative behavior.

Our findings, based on empirical data collected in the field, provide compelling and robust evidence regarding the influence of job autonomy dimensions and task variety on employee innovative behavior. Simultaneously, we have also received favorable responses from

employees concerning the three aspects of work autonomy that we introduced: "arrangement," "method," and "decision-making power." This research will facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of how autonomy can be effectively harnessed in future work endeavors. Furthermore, it can assist media companies in prioritizing and enhancing employees' decision-making autonomy as well as diversifying their tasks when assigning work responsibilities, thereby fostering improved innovative performance among employees and yielding substantial benefits for corporate development.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Our study design has several limitations. Firstly, although our data collection encompasses diverse regions and organizations, the analysis is based on a single-source dataset, with both independent and dependent variables derived from the same respondents. If data on independent variables and dependent variables can be collected separately at multiple time points, and multi-source datasets can be acquired, the research findings will exhibit enhanced precision. Secondly, the dependent variable of this study was employees' innovative behavior, which was measured based on their self-evaluations of their perceptions of creative performance. Although self-reported measures have some bias, researchers widely recognize the validity of self-reported creativity because employees are capable of perceiving and internally realizing that their work leads them to engage in creative behaviors (Janssen, 2000). However, researchers still note that this approach increases the possibility that common method variance affects the results (Axtell et al., 2000; Baer, 2012). They emphasize the importance of obtaining evaluations on each member's creative behavior from colleagues and team supervisors as well as seeking judgments from the team and experts regarding the team's output after task completion. Despite employing statistical remedies in this study, it remains valuable to establish objective measures for assessing creativity, and we anticipate utilizing multiple methods in future studies for more rigorous and specific outcomes. Finally, while our sample surveys of the media industry by selecting appropriate business practitioners from the east, middle and west of China support our findings' feasibility in this sector, further research is necessary to confirm whether these results hold across a broader range of industries.

Conclusion

This research provides a better and more comprehensive understanding of the underlying reasons for employees' innovative behavior in the workplace. The study primarily investigated the impact of job characteristics theory (JCT), specifically autonomy and task variety, on employees' innovative behavior. It additionally examined an intervening factor based on the JCT theoretical model: internal motivation as a significant component of the three aspects of creativity proposed by Amabile et al. (1996). This integration significantly enhances the refinement of these theories. Furthermore, the aim of this research was to investigate the background factors influencing the creativity of professionals in the Chinese media industry. Thus, this study also validates the applicability of the JCT theory in explaining employee innovation behavior in the Chinese business environment, particularly when examining Western theories in an Eastern cultural context.

This research has also achieved remarkable significance in management practice. Understanding the influencing factors behind employee innovative behavior holds significant implications for the entire Chinese media industry. It guides managers in formulating strategies that encourage innovation and enhance employee job satisfaction. Implementing

an innovation-driven management approach can stimulate intrinsic motivation among employees, fostering both innovation capabilities and teamwork. Additionally, the findings aid companies in identifying and strengthening the key elements influencing employee innovative behavior. Encouraging innovative behavior among employees in the innovationdriven integrated media industry can propel companies to adapt to market changes and gain a competitive edge.

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