



OPTIMIZING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE THROUGH COMPENSATION AND WORK MOTIVATION: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF JOB SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of compensation and work motivation on employee performance, with job satisfaction as a mediating variable, in Kedai Minumku MSME in Semarang City. A quantitative causal approach was applied using a census sampling technique involving 102 employees. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). The results show that compensation and work motivation have positive and significant effects on job satisfaction and employee performance. Work motivation has a stronger influence on job satisfaction, indicating that intrinsic factors play a more dominant role in shaping employee attitudes. In addition, job satisfaction significantly affects employee performance and partially mediates the relationships between compensation and performance, as well as motivation and performance. These findings suggest that improving employee performance in MSMEs requires a balanced approach between financial compensation and motivational strategies. While compensation ensures fairness and stability, motivation and job satisfaction contribute more strongly to employee engagement and productivity. Therefore, MSME owners are encouraged to create a supportive work environment while maintaining fair compensation systems to achieve optimal performance.

Keywords: compensation; job satisfaction; motivation; MSMEs; performance

INTRODUCTION

The acceleration of globalization and digital transformation has intensified competition across industries, including micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) (Idrus et al., 2024). In this increasingly dynamic environment, competition extends beyond products and pricing strategies to encompass service quality and the effectiveness of human resource performance (Agustian et al., 2023). Human resources are no longer perceived merely as operational support but as strategic assets that determine organizational sustainability and long-term competitiveness (Salim, 2024). Organizations that successfully manage their human capital tend to develop inimitable competitive advantages, reinforcing their position in highly competitive markets (Alfawaire & Atan, 2021).

MSMEs, as defined under Law No. 11 of 2020 and Government Regulation No. 7 of 2021, represent independent productive enterprises categorized based on asset ownership and annual turnover. This classification serves not only regulatory purposes but also facilitates targeted development policies aimed at enhancing MSME resilience and growth (Dharmajaya et al., 2023). Within the broader economic landscape, MSMEs play a pivotal role in employment generation, income distribution, and the strengthening of local economic structures (Alie, 2025; Harsono et al., 2025). Despite their strategic contribution, MSMEs continue to face structural challenges, particularly in the domain of human resource management, including limited managerial capabilities, low workforce professionalism, and insufficient attention to employee welfare.

Among the determinants of employee performance, compensation and work motivation have been consistently identified as critical factors. Compensation functions not only as a financial reward but also as a mechanism to influence employee attitudes, motivation, and organizational commitment (Ma, 2021). Meanwhile, work motivation drives employees to exert effort and achieve performance targets, making it a key behavioral determinant of productivity (Nuriman, 2021). The interaction between these variables becomes particularly important in shaping employee outcomes, especially in resource-constrained organizational settings such as MSMEs. This relationship can be theoretically grounded in Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which distinguishes between hygiene factors and motivator factors (Francis, 2023). Hygiene factors, including compensation, working conditions, and organizational policies, are essential to prevent dissatisfaction, whereas motivator factors such as achievement, recognition, and personal growth enhance intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction (Balbino, 2023). Importantly, the theory emphasizes that improving performance requires a balanced approach, where the absence of dissatisfaction alone is insufficient without the presence of motivating factors (Alejandro et al., 2025). This perspective is particularly relevant in MSME contexts, where managerial practices are often informal and less structured.

In practice, MSMEs frequently implement compensation systems and motivational strategies in a relatively simple and unstructured manner (Nawang Sari et al., 2023). Compensation is often determined based on short-term financial capacity rather than fairness or competitiveness, potentially leading to dissatisfaction among employees (Katabalo & Mwita, 2024). Additionally, business owners tend to prioritize operational and revenue-generating activities, resulting in limited focus on employee motivation and development (Kartikaningrum, 2025). Such conditions may negatively affect job satisfaction, which in turn influences employee performance.

Semarang City, as one of the economic growth centers in Central Java, has witnessed a significant rise in MSMEs, particularly in the food and beverage sector. The increasing number of beverage businesses has intensified competition, requiring firms to enhance service quality and employee productivity to remain competitive (Annur et al., 2025; Bikefe & Daniel, 2022). However, many MSMEs still lack structured human resource management practices, which poses challenges in maintaining consistent employee performance.

Kedai Minumku, an MSME operating in the beverage sector in Semarang City, reflects this condition. Its business operations rely heavily on employee performance in delivering services, maintaining product quality, and sustaining customer satisfaction (Saaidin, 2024; Astuti, 2023). Nevertheless, limitations in compensation management and employee motivation practices remain evident, potentially affecting job satisfaction and overall performance outcomes. A recurring issue in MSMEs is the relatively low level of job satisfaction among employees (Kayoe, 2023). Job satisfaction is shaped by employees' perceptions of compensation fairness and their intrinsic motivation (Zehao, 2024). Inadequate compensation relative to workload may lead to dissatisfaction and decreased performance (Katolik et al., 2023), while low motivation can reduce engagement and organizational commitment (Sugiarto & Suryani, 2022). These issues highlight the need for a more integrated approach to managing compensation, motivation, and job satisfaction.

Although prior studies have examined the relationships between compensation, motivation, job satisfaction, and employee performance, most have focused on large organizations, banking, or manufacturing sectors (Nurdiansyah et al., 2020). Empirical research within MSMEs, particularly in the beverage sector at the local level, remains limited (Wahyuni et al., 2022). Differences in organizational scale, management practices, and work environments suggest that

findings from large enterprises may not be directly applicable to MSMEs (Rosalia et al., 2020). This indicates a clear contextual research gap that warrants further investigation.

From an academic perspective, this study contributes to the development of Human Resource Management literature by examining the applicability of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory within MSMEs (Srivastava & Agarwal, 2024). It also provides empirical evidence on the role of compensation and work motivation in influencing job satisfaction and employee performance, incorporating job satisfaction as a mediating variable to offer a more comprehensive analytical framework (Pramesti & Yuswono, 2025; Amrullah et al., 2025).

From a practical standpoint, the findings are expected to provide insights for MSME owners in designing more effective human resource management strategies, particularly in balancing compensation and motivational practices (Karman et al., 2022; Amindrawati et al., 2025). These insights may also serve as a reference for similar MSMEs seeking to improve employee productivity and organizational competitiveness (Maria, 2022; Urban, 2022). Therefore, this study aims to examine the effect of compensation and work motivation on employee performance, with job satisfaction as a mediating variable, in Kedai Minumku MSME in Semarang City. By doing so, this study seeks to provide both theoretical enrichment and practical implications for improving human resource management practices in MSMEs.

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative research design with a causal approach to examine the relationships between compensation, work motivation, job satisfaction, and employee performance. The design is intended to test both direct and indirect effects among variables, particularly the mediating role of job satisfaction in explaining the relationship between independent and dependent variables (Waruwu et al., 2025; Susanto et al., 2024). The empirical context of this research is Kedai Minumku, an MSME operating in the beverage sector in Semarang City, Indonesia. This setting is considered relevant due to its reliance on employee performance in delivering service quality and maintaining customer satisfaction. In MSMEs, human resource management practices, particularly compensation systems and motivational strategies, are often implemented in a relatively informal and unstructured manner, making this context appropriate for examining the proposed research model (Kristanti et al., 2024; Yuiandini et al., 2023).

The study involves four main variables. Compensation (X1) and work motivation (X2) are treated as independent variables. Compensation refers to both financial and non-financial rewards provided by the organization in return for employee contributions, while work motivation reflects the internal drive that encourages employees to perform effectively. Job satisfaction (Z) is positioned as a mediating variable, representing employees' emotional responses toward their work (Giovanni & Ie, 2022). Meanwhile, employee performance (Y) serves as the dependent variable, defined as the level of work achievement based on organizational standards (Seku & Andriyani, 2023).

All variables are operationalized based on established theoretical frameworks, particularly Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, and are measured using multiple indicators adapted to the MSME context. Compensation is assessed through salary fairness, wage equity, incentives, benefits, and payment timeliness. Work motivation is measured through achievement drive, recognition, responsibility, opportunities for self-development, and work enthusiasm. Job satisfaction includes satisfaction with the job itself, supervisors, work environment, reward systems, and career opportunities. Employee performance is evaluated based on work quality, quantity, timeliness, discipline, and teamwork. All indicators are measured using a five-point

Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, allowing for systematic quantification of respondents' perceptions (Ondeng & Rahman, 2025).

The population of this study consists of all employees of Kedai Minumku MSME, totaling approximately 100 individuals. Given the relatively small population size, this study adopts a census (saturated sampling) technique in which all members of the population are included as respondents. This approach minimizes sampling bias and enhances data representativeness (Choiri, 2025; Ferlia et al., 2022). Employees are selected as the unit of analysis because they directly experience the compensation system, work motivation, job satisfaction, and performance expectations within the organization (Silitonga & Faddila, 2023).

Data collection is conducted using both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data are obtained through structured questionnaires distributed to all respondents. The questionnaire is designed based on the research indicators to capture perceptions related to compensation, work motivation, job satisfaction, and employee performance (Jabnabillah & Fahlevi, 2023). In addition, observational methods are used as a complementary technique to gain contextual insights into working conditions, employee interactions, and organizational practices within Kedai Minumku (Arafat & Darmawati, 2021). Secondary data are collected from academic literature, journal articles, and relevant organizational documents to support theoretical and contextual analysis (Febrianto & Siroj, 2024).

Data analysis is performed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with a Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach, supported by SmartPLS software. This method is selected due to its ability to analyze complex relationships among latent variables and its suitability for relatively small sample sizes and non-normal data distributions (Sofyani & Survei, 2025; Rahman et al., 2025). The analysis includes evaluation of the measurement model to assess validity and reliability, as well as evaluation of the structural model to examine relationships among variables through path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2).

Hypothesis testing is conducted using the bootstrapping method to determine the significance of both direct and indirect effects. A hypothesis is accepted if the t-statistic exceeds 1.96 and the p-value is below 0.05 at a 5% significance level (Junaedi & Wahab, 2023). In addition, mediation analysis is performed to evaluate the role of job satisfaction in mediating the relationship between compensation and employee performance, as well as between work motivation and employee performance (Andriani et al., 2025). Through this approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the structural relationships among the variables.

RESULT

The demographic profile of respondents provides an overview of the workforce composition in Kedai Minumku MSME. Gender, age, and education are considered relevant factors as they may influence work behavior, motivation, and performance.

Table 1.
Respondent Groups Based on Gender

Gender	f	%
Female	62	60.78
Male	40	39.22

In terms of gender, female employees dominate the workforce, accounting for 60.78% of the total respondents, while male employees represent 39.22%. This indicates a higher participation of female workers in operational roles within the MSME.

Table 2.
Respondent Groups Based on Age

Age Group	f	%
18–25	93	91.18
26–35	8	7.84
36–45	1	0.98%

With regard to age, the majority of respondents fall within the 18–25 age group (91.18%), indicating that the workforce is largely composed of young employees in their early productive stage. Older age groups are minimally represented, suggesting limited workforce diversity in terms of age.

Table 3.
Respondent Groups Based on Education Level

Education Level	f	%
Elementary	2	2.9
Junior High	4	3.9
Senior High	93	91.2
Bachelor	3	2.9

In terms of educational background, most respondents have completed senior high school (91.2%), while only a small proportion hold lower or higher educational qualifications. This reflects the typical labor structure of MSMEs, where operational roles are primarily filled by workers with moderate educational levels.

Table 4.
AVE

Variable	AVE
Job Satisfaction	0.888
Employee Performance	0.911
Compensation	0.897
Motivation	0.862

The measurement model demonstrates strong validity and reliability. All indicators show outer loading values above 0.70, indicating adequate convergent validity (Hair et al., 2021). This is further supported by AVE values exceeding 0.50 for all constructs, confirming that the indicators sufficiently explain their respective latent variables. Discriminant validity is established as each construct shows higher values compared to its correlations with other constructs. Reliability results also indicate high internal consistency, with Cronbach’s Alpha and Composite Reliability values exceeding 0.90 across all variables.

Table 5.
R-Square

Variable	R ²
Job Satisfaction	0.563
Employee Performance	0.771

The structural model shows satisfactory explanatory power. The R² value for job satisfaction is 0.563, indicating a moderate level of explanation by compensation and motivation. Meanwhile, employee performance shows a strong explanatory level with an R² value of 0.771.

Table 5.
Effect Size (f²)

Relationship	f ²
Compensation → Satisfaction	0.377
Motivation → Satisfaction	0.874
Compensation → Performance	0.495
Motivation → Performance	0.262
Satisfaction → Performance	0.333

Effect size analysis indicates that motivation has the strongest influence on job satisfaction, while compensation has the greatest direct effect on employee performance. The model also demonstrates good predictive relevance, as indicated by Q² values greater than zero.

Table 6.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Coefficient	Result
H1	Compensation → Job Satisfaction	0.406	Supported
H2	Motivation → Job Satisfaction	0.618	Supported
H3	Compensation → Employee Performance	0.396	Supported
H4	Motivation → Employee Performance	0.336	Supported
H5	Job Satisfaction → Performance	0.418	Supported

The findings indicate that both compensation and motivation significantly enhance job satisfaction and employee performance. Motivation shows a stronger effect on job satisfaction, suggesting that intrinsic factors play a dominant role in shaping employee attitudes.

Mediation analysis further reveals that job satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between compensation and performance, as well as between motivation and performance.

Table 7.

Mediation Effects

Relationship	Coefficient	Result
Compensation → Satisfaction → Performance	0.170	Supported
Motivation → Satisfaction → Performance	0.259	Supported

These results confirm that job satisfaction acts as a partial mediator, meaning that compensation and motivation influence performance both directly and indirectly. This finding aligns with Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory, which emphasizes the importance of both extrinsic and intrinsic factors in shaping employee outcomes. From a practical perspective, the results suggest that MSMEs should adopt a balanced approach in managing human resources. While compensation remains important, enhancing motivation and job satisfaction appears to be more impactful in improving employee performance. In other words, improving performance is not solely about financial rewards, but also about creating a supportive and motivating work environment.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show a consistent pattern of positive and significant relationships among compensation, work motivation, job satisfaction, and employee performance. Compensation has a significant effect on job satisfaction, indicating that appropriate and fair rewards contribute to how employees perceive their work. This is in line with the Two-Factor Theory proposed by Herzberg, where compensation is classified as a hygiene factor that does not directly create satisfaction but prevents dissatisfaction when properly fulfilled (Herzberg, 1968). In the context of UMKM Kedai Minumku, compensation does not merely function as financial income, but also reflects recognition of employees’ contributions. When employees feel that what they receive is fair, a sense of comfort and acceptance naturally develops, which then shapes their job satisfaction. This finding is consistent with previous research stating that compensation plays a fundamental role in forming job satisfaction (Wiyoga et al., 2025).

In addition, work motivation shows a stronger influence on job satisfaction compared to compensation. This suggests that intrinsic aspects such as recognition, achievement, and sense of purpose have a more dominant role in shaping employee satisfaction. According to Herzberg, motivational factors are the main drivers that create satisfaction (Herzberg, 1968). In small business environments such as UMKM, where financial resources are often limited, motivation becomes a very strategic factor. Simple things like a supportive work environment, appreciation from supervisors, or a sense of belonging can significantly increase employees’ internal drive. This result is supported by Rulianti and Nurpribadi (2023), who found that motivation has a

significant impact on job satisfaction and often becomes the key factor influencing employees' attitudes toward their work.

Furthermore, compensation and motivation both have a direct and significant effect on employee performance. Compensation contributes to performance by creating a sense of fairness and stability, allowing employees to focus more on their tasks. Even though it is categorized as a hygiene factor, compensation still plays an important role in maintaining work balance and preventing dissatisfaction that could reduce performance. This is supported by Aprilia and Meiriyanti (2023), who state that proper compensation can improve employee productivity, especially in the UMKM sector. Meanwhile, motivation acts as an internal driving force that encourages employees to work more optimally. Employees with high motivation tend to show better initiative, consistency, and adaptability in their work. This finding is also in line with Dahman and Kunci (2023), who emphasize that motivation has a strong influence on improving employee performance.

Job satisfaction itself is proven to have a significant effect on employee performance. Employees who feel satisfied with their work tend to demonstrate better productivity, responsibility, and work quality. This supports the general perspective in human resource management that job satisfaction is closely related to employee performance (Latif et al., 2025). In the context of UMKM Kedai Minumku, employees who feel comfortable and satisfied are more likely to provide better service and maintain a positive attitude in their daily tasks. This indicates that job satisfaction is not only an emotional outcome but also a factor that directly influences work results.

Another important finding is that job satisfaction acts as a mediating variable in the relationship between compensation and motivation toward employee performance. The results indicate partial mediation, meaning that compensation and motivation influence performance both directly and indirectly through job satisfaction. This shows that there are two pathways in explaining employee performance. On one side, compensation and motivation directly affect how employees perform. On the other side, these variables first influence employees' psychological condition, particularly their level of satisfaction, which then contributes to improved performance. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies, highlighting that job satisfaction plays an important role as a bridge between organizational factors and employee outcomes (Rulianti and Nurpribadi, 2023; Wiyoga et al., 2025).

Overall, the results of this study indicate that although compensation remains an essential factor, motivation appears to have a more dominant influence in shaping job satisfaction. Job satisfaction then becomes a key element that strengthens employee performance. The interaction among these variables reflects a balance between extrinsic and intrinsic factors in influencing employee behavior. In the context of UMKM, this finding suggests that improving performance does not always depend on financial aspects alone. Efforts to increase motivation and create a satisfying work environment can be equally effective in enhancing employee performance.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that compensation and work motivation have positive and significant effects on both job satisfaction and employee performance. Among the two, motivation shows a more dominant influence on job satisfaction, indicating that intrinsic factors play a stronger role in shaping how employees perceive their work. Compensation, although categorized as a basic factor, remains important in maintaining fairness and preventing dissatisfaction. Furthermore, job satisfaction is proven to significantly influence employee performance and also acts as a mediating variable in the relationship between compensation, motivation, and

performance. The mediation effect is partial, meaning that compensation and motivation affect performance both directly and indirectly through job satisfaction. This highlights that employee performance is not only driven by external rewards but also by internal psychological conditions.

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