

## Time Acceleration and Human Aspirations in Urban India

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### Abstract

Time has always been valuable for individuals in fulfilling their aspirations because things tend to go smoothly when they happen on schedule. This study focuses on the impact of time acceleration on human aspirations in contemporary urban India. Building upon Hartmut Rosa's (2013) concept of social acceleration, this research examines the experiences of individuals who have relocated to urban centers such as Kolkata in search of improved opportunities. Through semi-structured interviews with 30 respondents aged 30 to 50, the study explores how these individuals navigate the fast pace of city life. Oftentimes, they adopt a machine-like efficiency to meet societal demands. By analysing their experiences, the research uncovers the potential effects of time acceleration on personal and professional fulfilment. The study also finds that compared to rural areas, life in cities is multiplied, leading individuals to constantly chase aspirations that never seem to end. These findings have broader implications for individual well-being in the modern urban landscape.

**Keywords:** HRM, Time Acceleration, Migration, Aspiration, Urbanisation

### Introduction

Time, a finite resource, has always been a pivotal factor in human life. Its efficient utilization has been a cornerstone of societal expectations, often tied to notions of success and productivity (Gregg, 2018). The adage "time is money" underscores the economic significance of time management,

both in personal and professional spheres. As societies have evolved and become increasingly interconnected, the pace of life has accelerated, demanding individuals to adapt to a more rapid rhythm.

Hartmut Rosa's (2013) concept of social acceleration provides a valuable theoretical framework for understanding the phenomenon of time acceleration. Rosa posits that societies are experiencing a rapid increase in the pace of social change, technological innovation, and economic activity. This acceleration leads to a sense of time scarcity and an unrelenting pressure to keep up with the ever-evolving demands of modern life. In the context of urban India, where rapid urbanization and economic growth have transformed the landscape, individuals are confronted with a particularly intense experience of time acceleration.

Kolkata, a bustling metropolis with a rich history, exemplifies the effects of time acceleration in contemporary India. The city's rapid growth and development have created a fast-paced environment where individuals must constantly adapt to new challenges and opportunities. The influx of people from rural areas seeking better economic prospects has further intensified the pressure to succeed within a limited timeframe.

In today's rapidly evolving work environment, the concept of time acceleration is becoming increasingly relevant in Human Resource Management (HRM). Time acceleration refers to the perception that time is moving faster due to technological advancements, increased workload, and the ever-accelerating pace of organizational change. This phenomenon has profound implications for HR professionals, influencing everything from recruitment and employee engagement to performance management and organizational culture.

Upon completing their education, individuals are often equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to contribute to society through their work (Hilton et al., 2013). This journey of professional development serves as a means to fulfill personal aspirations, whether it be financial stability, career advancement, or making a meaningful impact.

However, the path to achieving these goals is often fraught with challenges and demands. The pressures of work, deadlines, and performance expectations can be overwhelming, leaving individuals feeling constantly engaged and under time constraints. To meet their obligations and succeed in their chosen fields, individuals must often prioritize their work, sometimes at the expense of personal time and well-being. This delicate balance between professional and personal life is a constant struggle for many, and the ability to navigate it effectively is a critical skill for success in today's fast-paced world.

Migrants arriving in cities from rural areas often experience a sense of wonder and awe at the bustling pace of urban life (Allen, 1999). The initial novelty of the city can quickly give way to a realization of the impersonal nature of urban interactions, where individuals may appear more focused on their own pursuits than on building relationships. Over time, however, many migrants become accustomed to the city's fast-paced lifestyle and even adopt its rhythms as their own. This transition can lead to strained relationships with friends and relatives back in their rural communities, who may complain about the perceived lack of time and attention. The demands of city life, such as work, commuting, and navigating the complexities of urban living, often require significant time commitments, making it difficult for migrants to maintain the same level of connection with their rural roots.

Time acceleration, characterized by a rapid increase in the pace of social change, technological innovation, and economic activity, has profound effects on individuals (Southerton & Southerton, 2020). The relentless pressure to keep up with the ever-evolving demands of modern life leads to increased stress, anxiety, and burnout. Moreover, the constant sense of time scarcity negatively impacts individuals' relationships, personal well-being, and overall quality of life. In addition, time acceleration contributes to a culture of overwork and neglect of personal needs, resulting in physical and mental health problems. In order to develop strategies to mitigate the negative effects of time acceleration and promote a more balanced and sustainable way of life, it is crucial to

understand the psychological and social implications of this phenomenon. Therefore, this study aims to test the theory in a real-world context.

## **Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative research approach to analyse the experiences of migrants who have relocated to Kolkata from neighbouring states, including Bihar, Odisha, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh. These individuals, seeking better economic opportunities, have become integral components of the city's workforce. To gain insights into their perceptions and experiences, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse group of participants.

The semi-structured interview format allowed for flexibility in the exploration of key themes while ensuring consistency across the data collected. The interviews focused on understanding the migrants' perceptions of the pace of life in Kolkata compared to their rural origins. Additionally, the study drew upon Hartmut Rosa's (2013) theory of Social Acceleration as a theoretical framework to analyze the experiences of the participants.

Rosa's theory of Social Acceleration posits that societies are experiencing a rapid increase in the pace of social change, technological innovation, and economic activity. This acceleration leads to a sense of time scarcity and an unrelenting pressure to keep up with the ever-evolving demands of modern life. In the context of urban India, where rapid urbanization and economic growth have transformed the landscape, individuals are confronted with a particularly intense experience of time acceleration.

This qualitative study examines the experiences of migrants from Bihar, Odisha, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh who have relocated to Kolkata. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 to 50 years old participants employed in formal organizations to explore their perceptions of time acceleration, challenges adapting to urban life, and its impact on their aspirations. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis, ensuring participant anonymity and ethical considerations throughout.

This study explores how time acceleration affects individuals' perceptions of time, aspirations, coping strategies, and overall well-being in urban India. It examines whether the pressure to achieve more in less time leads to stress, anxiety, or a more balanced approach to life. The study aims to understand the complex relationship between time acceleration and human aspirations in the modern world.

### **The Phenomenon of Time Acceleration**

Time acceleration, characterized by the perception that tasks, processes, and changes occur at an increasingly rapid pace, significantly impacts Human Resource Management (HRM) (Barkema et al., 2002). This phenomenon is driven by several factors. Firstly, technological advancements have revolutionized HR processes through the proliferation of digital tools and platforms, enhancing efficiency but also necessitating swift adaptation and ongoing learning. For example, the incorporation of AI and automation in HR tasks has made operations more efficient. However, it has also placed a demand on HR professionals to constantly enhance their skills to stay up to date with technological advancements. One respondent explains:

*"When I first arrived in Kolkata, I was without a job. However, within a year, my schedule became so busy that I often don't even have time for meals because of the demanding tasks I must manage. This is just the reality of living in a city."*  
(Shyam, 35 years old).

Individuals transitioning from rural to urban areas often experience a shift in their daily lives as they search for employment. Initially, their pace of life may be relatively relaxed with fewer engagements. However, once they secure work and become integrated into the city's rhythm, their lives accelerate significantly. The demands of urban employment and the fast-paced environment often leads to a more hectic lifestyle, with increased responsibilities and time pressures. This rapid acceleration in daily routines reflects the broader impact of urbanization on personal life, where the transition from rural calm to urban intensity profoundly alters one's pace and engagement.

Secondly, the increased workload resulting from organizational growth and globalization presents HR departments with more complex and diverse challenges, creating a heightened sense of urgency and pressure. As organizations expand and evolve, HR practitioners must manage a broader range of issues, further intensifying the demand for timely responses. Lastly, the modern business environment is characterized by frequent restructuring, mergers, and strategic shifts, which accelerates the need for HR professionals to be agile and responsive. This continuous change underscores the necessity for HR departments to adapt rapidly to maintain effective operations and support organizational objectives.

### **Implications for Human Resource Management**

The acceleration of time has profound implications for Human Resource Management (HRM) across several key areas (Strohmeier, 2020). In recruitment and talent acquisition, the need for rapid hiring and onboarding has intensified, requiring HR professionals to leverage technology and data analytics for efficient candidate screening and decision-making, especially with the rise of remote work and global talent pools (Eshwari et al., 2024). Employee engagement and retention are also impacted, as the fast-paced environment can affect morale, necessitating strategies to address burnout and cultivate a supportive work culture through flexible arrangements and mental health resources. As one respondent elaborates:

*“As the HR Head, I am responsible for executing the recruitment, hiring, and selection processes. Today’s world is highly dynamic, and employees do not wait if they find better pay elsewhere. This creates a challenge for us in maintaining a pipeline of suitable candidates to meet our workforce needs.” (Rimu, 39 years old).*

The statement from Rimu, an HR Head, highlights a critical challenge in contemporary recruitment and retention. The dynamic nature of the modern job market, characterized by swift changes in employee preferences and competitive compensation offers, demands that HR departments be highly agile and proactive. Rimu’s experience underscores the difficulty in sustaining a steady pipeline of qualified

candidates due to the tendency of employees to quickly move to better-paying opportunities. This situation emphasizes the need for HR professionals to develop more effective strategies for talent acquisition and retention, including competitive compensation packages, robust employee engagement initiatives, and efficient recruitment processes to mitigate the impact of high turnover and ensure a reliable workforce.

Traditional performance management systems are becoming inadequate, pushing for continuous feedback and real-time tracking to align with the swift changes in the workplace (Disselkamp, 2009). Additionally, the rapid pace of technological and organizational change demands dynamic learning and development programs that incorporate e-learning and micro-learning to keep pace with evolving skill requirements. Finally, the accelerated work environment can strain workplace culture, necessitating proactive efforts from HR to maintain a positive, resilient culture through open communication, recognition, and a strong sense of community.

### Strategies for Adapting to Time Acceleration

To effectively address the challenges posed by the rapid acceleration of time and technological advancement, HR professionals must implement several key strategies (Whysall et al., 2019). Embracing technology is paramount; this includes utilizing AI-driven analytics, automating HR processes, and incorporating digital collaboration tools to boost efficiency and streamline operations (Chandratreya, 2024). As one respondent aptly notes,

*"No one can deny that today we are living in a rapidly changing world, shifting from wired telephones to keypad mobiles, multimedia devices, and Android smartphones. This rapid evolution demonstrates how quickly markets adapt to technological changes, and it is crucial for us to remain adaptable in this dynamic environment to avoid falling behind."* (Shantanu, 48 years old).

Shantanu's statement highlights the rapid pace of technological advancement and its impact on market dynamics. He emphasizes the importance of adaptability in a

world where markets must constantly evolve to accommodate new technologies. The transition from wired telephones to smartphones serves as a prime example of this rapid change. Shantanu's perspective suggests that those who are resistant to change may find themselves at a disadvantage in today's competitive landscape.

Thus, staying ahead of technological trends and fostering a culture of adaptability within HR practices are essential for navigating the complexities of modern workplaces effectively. Additionally, fostering agility within HR practices – through flexible policies and a culture of adaptability – enables quick responses to business changes. Transparent and regular communication with employees is essential for managing stress and maintaining engagement, while investing in employee well-being through mental health programs, wellness initiatives, and work-life balance policies supports overall job satisfaction. Finally, focusing on continuous learning by offering opportunities that align with industry demands and promoting a culture of lifelong development ensures that employees remain skilled and adaptable in a rapidly evolving environment.

## **Conclusion**

The phenomenon of time acceleration presents both challenges and opportunities for Human Resource Management. As organizations navigate this fast-paced environment, HR professionals must be agile, forward-thinking, and proactive in adapting their strategies. By embracing technological advancements, fostering a supportive workplace culture, and focusing on continuous improvement, HR departments can effectively manage the impacts of time acceleration and drive organizational success in the modern era. This article corroborates Hartmut Rosa's (2013) theory of time acceleration, illustrating its relevance in the field of HR and migration through qualitative data. The theory's emphasis on the rapid pace of societal and technological changes underscores the necessity for HR professionals to remain adaptive. As such, integrating Rosa's insights into HR practices not only validates the theory's applicability but also highlights the imperative for HR strategies to evolve in

response to the accelerating dynamics of contemporary work environments. This integration of theory into practice ensures that HR departments are well-positioned to harness the benefits of time acceleration while mitigating its challenges.

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