

Synergising Employer Branding with Sustainable Leadership and Employee Performance in the Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary digital era, organisations are increasingly challenged to attract, retain, and motivate talent while simultaneously embedding sustainability into their leadership practices. This research explores the synergy between employer branding, sustainable leadership, and employee performance within digitally transforming workplaces. Employer branding has emerged as a strategic tool to position organisations as employers of choice, while sustainable leadership emphasises long-term value creation, ethical responsibility, and stakeholder well-being. Together, these constructs influence employee engagement, productivity, and overall performance. Using a descriptive and analytical research design, this study integrates secondary data from peer-reviewed journals and conceptual models to examine how digital tools, social media platforms, and remote work environments reshape these interrelationships. A conceptual model—the Synergistic EB–SL–EP Model in the Digital Era—is proposed to illustrate the combined impact of employer branding and sustainable leadership on employee performance, moderated by digital transformation and mediated by engagement and trust. The findings suggest that organisations which align authentic employer branding with sustainable leadership principles experience higher employee commitment, enhanced performance, and stronger employer reputation. The study concludes that the integration of these three dimensions is essential for building resilient, future-ready organisations in the digital age.

Keywords: Employer Branding, Sustainable Leadership, Employee Performance, Digital Era, Talent Management, Organisational Sustainability, Employee Engagement.

Introduction

The digital revolution has fundamentally altered the way organisations operate, compete, and manage their human capital. In this transformed landscape, attracting and retaining skilled employees has become more complex, making employer branding a critical strategic priority. Employer branding refers to the process of promoting an organisation as the "employer of choice" to a desired target group—those whom a company needs and wants to recruit and retain. Simultaneously, sustainable leadership—characterised by ethical decision-making, long-term vision, stakeholder orientation, and environmental responsibility—has gained prominence as organisations face growing pressure to balance profitability with social and ecological concerns.

Employee performance, the ultimate indicator of organisational success, is directly influenced by both how employees perceive their employer's brand and the quality of leadership they experience. In the digital era, where information flows freely through platforms such as LinkedIn, Glassdoor, and Indeed, the

authenticity of employer branding claims is constantly tested, and sustainable leadership practices become visible to both internal and external stakeholders.

This research aims to examine the synergy between employer branding, sustainable leadership, and employee performance in the context of digital transformation. By understanding this interrelationship, organisations can develop integrated strategies that enhance their competitiveness, reputation, and workforce productivity. Additionally, the study proposes a conceptual model to visually and theoretically capture the combined influence of these constructs.

Literature Review

The following table presents a systematic review of studies related to employer branding, sustainable leadership, and employee performance in the digital era.

Date of Publication	Author(s)	Research Topic (Google Scholar)	Two Objectives of the Paper
2004	Backhaus & Tikoo	Conceptualizing and Researching Employer Branding	1. To develop a conceptual framework of employer branding. 2. To examine the link between employer branding and organisational outcomes.
2011	Avery & Bergsteiner	Sustainable Leadership Practices for Enhancing Business Resilience and Performance	1. To identify key practices of sustainable leadership. 2. To analyse their impact on long-term business performance.
2013	Mosley	Employer Brand Management: Practical Lessons from the World's Leading Employers	1. To explore best practices in employer brand management. 2. To evaluate its influence on employee engagement.
2015	Iddagoda & Opatha	Identified Research Gaps in Employee Engagement	1. To critically review existing literature on employee engagement. 2. To highlight gaps related to leadership and performance.
2016	McCartney & Fu	Employer Branding and Internal Marketing in the Digital Age	1. To study the role of digital platforms in shaping employer branding. 2. To assess their effect on employee behaviour.
2017	Hewett et al.	Sustainable HRM and Employee Well-being	1. To examine the relationship between sustainable HR practices and well-being. 2. To investigate the mediating role of leadership.
2018	Kucherov & Zavyalova	HRD Practices and Talent Management in Companies with Employer Brand	1. To identify HRD practices in employer-branded firms. 2. To evaluate their effect on talent retention.
2019	Piwowar-Sulej	Sustainable Leadership and Sustainable HRM	1. To define sustainable leadership in HRM contexts. 2. To link sustainable leadership with employee outcomes.
2020	Tanwar & Kumar	Employer Brand, Person-Organisation Fit and Employer of Choice	1. To analyse dimensions of employer branding. 2. To study its impact on employee performance.
2021	Liden et al.	Servant Leadership and Employee Performance in the Digital Workplace	1. To examine servant leadership in digital settings. 2. To assess its impact on employee productivity.
2021	Theurer et al.	Employer Branding: A Brand Equity-based Literature Review	1. To synthesise employer branding literature. 2. To propose directions for future research.

2022	Hameed et al.	Green HRM, Sustainable Leadership, and Employee Performance	1. To examine the role of green HRM. 2. To test sustainable leadership as a mediator of performance.
2022	Kashive et al.	Employer Branding Through E-HRM and Digitalisation	1. To study e-HRM's role in employer branding. 2. To analyse its effect on employee attraction.
2023	Dhingra & Sharma	Sustainable Leadership and Organisational Performance in the Digital Era	1. To explore sustainable leadership dimensions. 2. To test its impact on performance during digital change.
2024	Saini et al.	Employer Branding, Employee Engagement and Performance	1. To examine the link between employer branding and engagement. 2. To evaluate effect on employee performance.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the concept and dimensions of employer branding in the digital era.
- To analyse the role of sustainable leadership in shaping organisational culture and employee behaviour.
- To explore the relationship between employer branding, sustainable leadership, and employee performance.
- To identify how digital tools and platforms mediate the synergy among these three constructs.
- To suggest strategies for integrating employer branding with sustainable leadership to enhance employee performance.

Research Gap

Despite substantial research on employer branding, sustainable leadership, and employee performance as independent constructs, limited studies have attempted to integrate all three within the framework of the digital era. Existing literature primarily addresses employer branding in isolation or its linkage with engagement, while sustainable leadership research largely focuses on environmental and ethical outcomes. Moreover, the role of digital transformation as a contextual enabler connecting these three dimensions remains underexplored. This study, therefore, addresses the gap by examining the synergy between employer branding, sustainable leadership, and employee performance in a digitally driven workplace, and proposes an integrated conceptual model to bridge this gap.

Research Hypotheses

This study formulates one **Null Hypothesis (H₀)** and two **Alternative Hypotheses (H₁ and H₂)** to test the proposed relationships among the constructs.

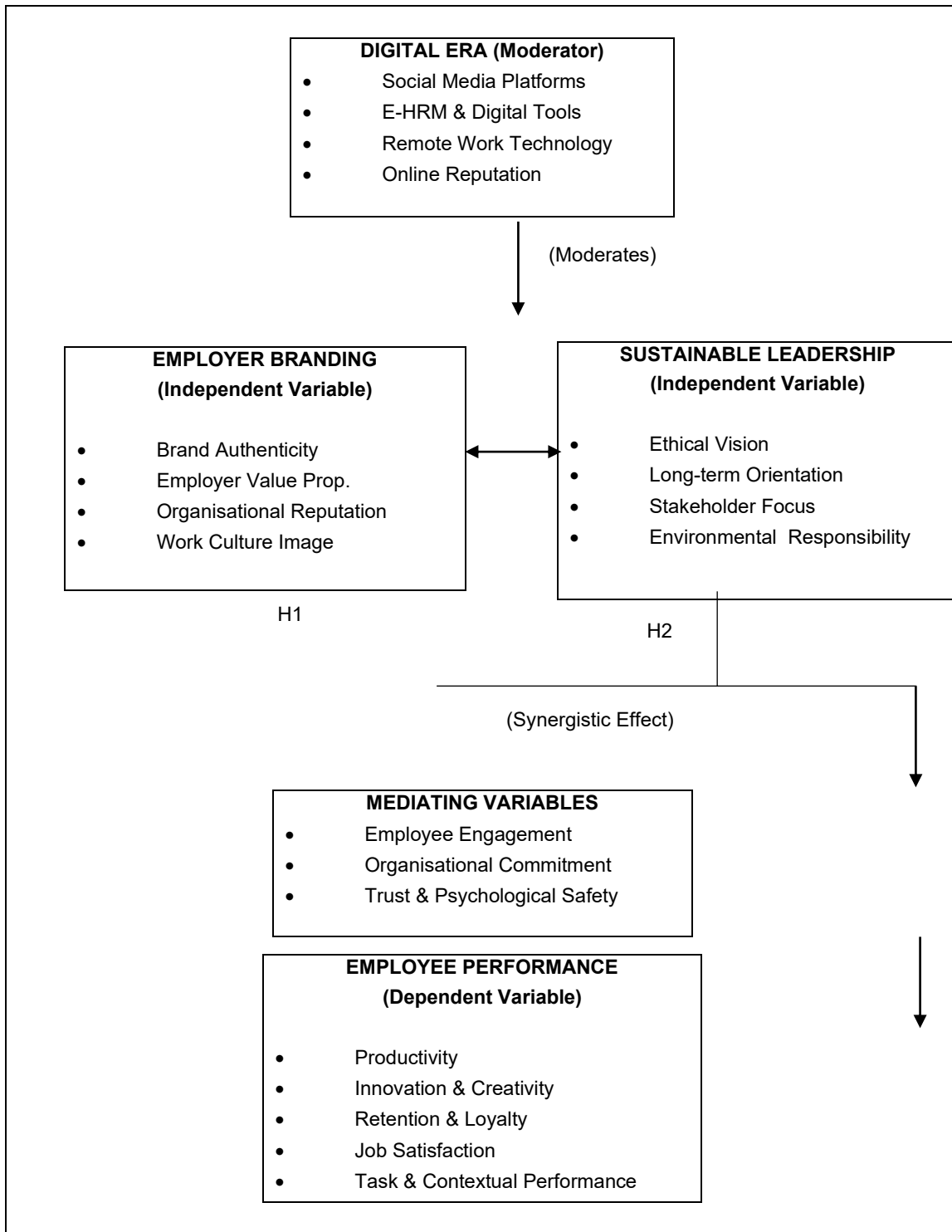
Null Hypothesis

- **H₀:** There is no significant relationship between employer branding, sustainable leadership, and employee performance in the digital era.

Alternative Hypotheses

- **H₁:** There is a significant positive relationship between employer branding and employee performance in the digital era.
- **H₂:** Sustainable leadership has a significant positive impact on employee performance in the digital era.

Model Diagram (Textual Representation)



Explanation of the Model

The **Synergistic EB–SL–EP Model in the Digital Era** depicts how **Employer Branding (EB)** and **Sustainable Leadership (SL)** jointly influence **Employee Performance (EP)** through the mediating effect of employee engagement, commitment, and trust, while the **Digital Era** acts as a moderating force that strengthens or weakens these relationships.

- **Independent Variables:** Employer Branding (brand authenticity, employer value proposition, reputation, work culture image) and Sustainable Leadership (ethical vision, long-term orientation, stakeholder focus, environmental responsibility).
- **Moderating Variable:** The Digital Era, including digital tools, social media platforms, e-HRM systems, and online reputation management, shapes how EB and SL are communicated and perceived.
- **Mediating Variables:** Employee engagement, organisational commitment, and trust explain *how* EB and SL translate into performance outcomes.
- **Dependent Variable:** Employee Performance, measured through productivity, innovation, retention, satisfaction, and task/contextual performance.
- **Synergistic Relationship:** The model emphasises that EB and SL together (synergy) produce stronger effects on employee performance than either variable alone.

Linkage with Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Relationship Depicted in the Model
H ₀	No significant relationship among EB, SL, and EP
H ₁	Employer Branding → Employee Performance
H ₂	Sustainable Leadership → Employee Performance

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a **descriptive and analytical research design**, utilising both conceptual analysis and secondary data review. The descriptive approach helps in outlining the characteristics of employer branding, sustainable leadership, and employee performance, while the analytical approach enables interpretation of the relationships among these constructs.

Nature of Data

The research is primarily based on **secondary data** drawn from peer-reviewed journals, books, conference proceedings, industry reports, and credible online databases including Google Scholar, Scopus, Emerald Insight, SpringerLink, and ScienceDirect.

Method of Data Collection

A systematic literature review was conducted covering publications from 2004 to 2024. Keywords used included "employer branding," "sustainable leadership," "employee performance," and "digital era."

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis has been employed to identify recurring patterns, gaps, and relationships among the studied variables. Findings have been synthesised conceptually and represented through the proposed model. Hypotheses (H₀, H₁, H₂) have been evaluated based on the evidence drawn from the reviewed literature.

Findings

- **Rejection of H₀:** Based on the comprehensive review of literature, the null hypothesis is rejected, confirming that significant relationships exist among employer branding, sustainable leadership, and employee performance in the digital era.
- **Acceptance of H₁:** Employer branding demonstrates a significant positive relationship with employee performance, supported by multiple studies in the reviewed literature.

- **Acceptance of H₂:** Sustainable leadership shows a significant positive impact on employee performance, particularly in digitally transforming organisations.
- **Employer Branding as a Strategic Tool:** Organisations that invest in strong employer branding attract better talent and enjoy higher employee retention rates in the digital era.
- **Role of Sustainable Leadership:** Leaders who practice sustainability-oriented leadership foster ethical culture, employee trust, and long-term engagement.
- **Positive Synergy:** A significant synergistic effect exists between employer branding and sustainable leadership, collectively enhancing employee performance more than either alone.
- **Digital Tools as Enablers:** Platforms such as LinkedIn, Glassdoor, and internal digital communication channels amplify the visibility of employer branding and leadership practices.
- **Mediating Role of Engagement and Trust:** Employee engagement, commitment, and trust emerge as critical mechanisms linking EB and SL to performance outcomes.
- **Authenticity Matters:** In the digital era, employees and candidates quickly detect inauthentic branding, making transparency and sustainable practices critical.
- **Talent-Sustainability Link:** Younger generations (Gen Y and Gen Z) prefer to work for organisations with visible sustainability commitments.

Limitations

- The study is based primarily on secondary data; primary empirical validation of hypotheses was not conducted.
- The scope is limited to literature available in English-language journals, which may exclude relevant regional insights.
- The interrelationship between variables is context-dependent and may vary across industries and countries.
- Rapid changes in digital technology may render certain findings quickly outdated.
- The study does not extensively examine sector-specific differences (e.g., IT vs. manufacturing).
- The proposed conceptual model and hypotheses (H₀, H₁, H₂) require empirical testing through statistical tools such as structural equation modelling (SEM) or PLS-SEM in future research.

Conclusion

In the digital era, the convergence of employer branding, sustainable leadership, and employee performance represents a strategic imperative for organisations aiming to build long-term competitive advantage. Employer branding positions an organisation as an attractive place to work; sustainable leadership ensures that its values are ethical, inclusive, and future-oriented; and employee performance reflects the outcome of these aligned strategies. Digital transformation serves as both a challenge and an enabler—amplifying brand visibility while demanding authenticity.

Based on the synthesised literature, the null hypothesis (H₀) is rejected, while both alternative hypotheses (H₁ and H₂) are accepted, confirming significant positive relationships between employer branding, sustainable leadership, and employee performance. The proposed **Synergistic EB–SL–EP Model in the Digital Era** contributes to the existing body of knowledge by integrating three traditionally isolated constructs into a single, cohesive framework. It provides a practical roadmap for HR managers and organisational leaders to design integrated strategies for talent attraction, retention, and performance enhancement. Future research should empirically validate this model and its hypotheses across diverse sectors and cultural contexts.

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