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# Intrinsic motivation, digital enablement and brand relationship quality: investigation in higher education



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## Purpose

This study examines the impact of intrinsic motivation elements – job autonomy, competence and relatedness – on employee–brand relationship quality (EBRQ) in higher education institutions (HEIs), focusing on the moderating role of digital enablement within the context of digital sustainability.

## Design/methodology/approach

Data were collected from 399 employees of Pakistani HEIs and analyzed using Smart PLS-SEM 4. The analysis explored the relationships between intrinsic motivation elements, digital enablement and EBRQ.

## Findings

The findings indicate that while job autonomy does not directly influence EBRQ, competence and relatedness significantly enhance the relationship between employees and their university's brand. Digital enablement significantly moderates these relationships, promoting collaboration, professional growth and alignment of employee attitudes and behaviors with the university's brand concepts, thereby supporting digital sustainability.

## Research limitations/implications

Future research should consider a broader geographic scope and explore additional intrinsic motivation elements and digital enablement factors. Limitations include the focus on Pakistani HEIs, which may affect generalizability.



## Practical implications

To strengthen institutional branding, HEIs should invest in digital tools that support intrinsic motivators especially competence and relatedness, thereby creating more engaged and aligned employees in the digital era.

## Originality/value

This study provides novel insights into how intrinsic motivation and digital enablement interact to shape employee–brand relationships in the higher education sector, offering practical strategies for universities to strengthen their brand and advance digital sustainability.

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**Keywords:** Higher education, Intrinsic motivation, Digital enablement, Employee–brand relationship quality, Job autonomy, Competence, Relatedness, Smart PLS-SEM

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