Transformational HR Practices in Employer Branding For Strategic Business Growth in SME of India

[1]Debashish Das, [2]Dr. Nidhi Chowdhry

[1]Research Scholar, Sushant School of Business, Gurgaon, India, Email:debad2911@gmail.com, Email: debashishdas.phd21@sushantuniversity.edu.in
[2]Associate Professor, Sushant School of Business, Gurgaon, India, Email: nidhichowdhry@sushantuniversity.edu.in

Abstract
The distinction between organizational brand and employer brand has diminished, with employer branding now integral to enhancing an organization's visibility and reputation. Effective employer branding attracts and retains high-quality talent, influencing work culture, employee commitment, and loyalty. While employer branding and the resulting Employee Value Proposition have traditionally differentiated large organizations, they are increasingly critical for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This article examines the impact of employer branding on strategic business growth as a transformational human resources practice within SMEs. Transformational HR practices contribute to inclusive, sustainable business growth. Employer branding ensures long term business impact as it enhances retention , attracts talent and builds a more inclusive society and work environment. Detailed digital application-based survey was conducted on 350 plus SME in NCR, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Pune, Udaipur to collect primary data. The data was analysed with SPSS based statistical tools. The study reaches a conclusion that employer branding plays a crucial role in strategic business growth of SME in India. The study also brings to focus the moderating effect of employer branding with transformational HR and best practice adoption. Notably, a gap exists in the literature regarding specific employer branding strategies and their implications for SMEs, and this research is the first of its nature to examine this aspect in SME in India. The study uses a mixed approach contributing to the research area in both quantitative and qualitative terms. The findings in the study addresses this gap by providing insights into the unique challenges faced by SMEs and demonstrating how tailored employer branding strategies can drive sustainable business growth.

Keywords: *transformational HR for SME in India, employer branding amongst SME in India, sustainable SME of India, inclusive growth*

1. Introduction

According to Allen et al. (2010), "talent" refers to the human resources that organizations wish to attract, retain, and develop their strategic business growth objectives. As per Giffee and Jones
(2007), talent is the set of attitudes, knowledge, and skills that leads to the potential to produce more with the same resources available.
According to Veloso (2018), the term employer branding came up at a conference in 1990, where Simon Barrow (Chairman of People in Business) used the term for the first time. The first publication of this concept came six years after the authorship of Alnico et al.(2012). According to the Unstop Forbes Campus Employer Branding Report (2022) employer branding is the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company.
Quality Talent in the form of human resources is an appreciable resource in business. A good campus hire may become a future leader in the organization. Large organizations, which are also great products, and service brands follow this principle.
However, in the majority of SME organizations, product brands are looked at separately from employer brands. This may be due to legacy practices and the non-existence of similar practices in other peer SME. In the evolved business environment post Covid 19, digital presence has played a major role.
For SMEs, Unicorn nurturing employee satisfaction is a crucial concern, as a disengaged workforce can result in lower productivity, more absenteeism, and a high and costly churn rate, as per Bhardwaj et al. (2019). ("Employer Branding for SMEs: Nice to have or Essential?") SMEs, Unicorn, which do not focus on their employer brand, may lose talent to competitors. This shift towards seeking more fulfilling work is a step-change from the past. Now, businesses can no longer afford to concentrate solely on bottom-line Bell (2006) and Clarke (2001).
According to Ambler and Barrow (1996), EB is the organization's set of efforts to promote, both internally and externally, a clear vision that makes it different and desirable as an employer. This increased engagement helps SMEs and Unicorns drive revenue and build a reputation as a great workplace, which will help them recruit more talent. Fitz-Enzi (1990).
Employees and candidates research the organization they are planning to join. Employees associate the organization brand socially with the brand's image as an employer. Employees in social
gatherings attempt to boast about their company culture and practice, which offers enhanced social equity.

SME organizations need this practice as part of the transformational HR agenda to attract and retain quality talent. Positive employer branding leads to higher insulation to attrition, increased
productivity, and enhanced morale. Employees in superior branding organizations tend to refer to candidates who have a positive effect on hiring costs.
Moreover, Backhaus and Teko (2004) claim that the concept of employer branding is applied in business but underexplored by universities. Thus, the underlying theoretical basis for the employer, "the brand," has not yet been fully developed. ("Employer Branding Applied to SMEs: A Pioneering Model Proposal for ...") Therefore, companies do not always receive the expected returns. Joon & Mclean (2006). defined employer branding as the process of identifying and creating the company brand and applying marketing tools and principles to achieve the status of the employer of choice; the employer branding philosophy uses aspects of organizational identity, reputation, and image that are transmitted to potential employees. ("Employer Branding Model for SMEs: Strategies for Talent ... - Studocu") As per Banality (2011), Gamage (2015), Lumpkin & Jerome (2007) Employer branding can also be designated as a company's multiple efforts to communicate to current and potential
employees that it is a desirable workplace.
The definition of employer branding has evolved in line with the emerging employment practices .
There are the following four areas in which questions to explore and evaluate employer branding vibrance in an organization may be answered to build a construct of Employer Branding in SME.

1.1Digital presence :
Being present digitally is a starting point for any business and is particularly critical for SME, as the brand must engage with more existing and prospective customers and consumers.
1. Career section on company website : As per the survey conducted by the researcher among SME, it was found that % of organizations do not have a career section on their website.
Those who had it did not know how to use it to attract and create employer branding by building traction of candidates, linking it to various social media forums, and creating meaningful engagements and conversations.
2. Organisation page on social media such as LinkedIn: Social media creates a lot of influence on the candidates and stakeholders to create perceptions about the brand. Organizations
present with official company pages and regular interactions ; followership creates a sense of credibility than those who do not have any presence on social media.
3. Digital Thought Leadership :
Candidates, employees, customers, and stakeholders build the perception of a brand based on the engagement and communication of leaders on social media. Notably, LinkedIn and X are the most popular professional social media platforms. The presence of key leaders linked to X or any other thought leadership forum adds credibility.
4. Opportunities Digitally visible : Opportunities posted on social media sites have a higher chance of being viewed by passive candidates. These are candidates who are doing well in
the current system and would be interested in joining a credible brand, even if it is a smaller company. Online reputation is an important determinant in building an image.

1.2Campus Hiring :
One of the conventional methods for building an employer brand is to organize campus placements. Students who will be business leaders in the future provide an accurate employer brand strength of a company.
1. Campus Hiring Programme: Is there a campus hiring programme of the organization the first point to explore?Many SME organizations do not wish to visit campuses. The curiosity of fresh management interns may be one of the reasons for the low willingness to break legacy paradigms of work practice.
2. Employer Brand in Campus: Does the Organisation present and showcase its brand on campus ? Once a brand reaches the campus, the verbal and signage-based recall of the brand, testimonials, and stories of employee breakthrough must be shared.
3. Campus Connect: Is there a regular industry connect engagement where organization leaders visit the campus to interact and share their experiences as visiting faculty and industry experts? Leaders who visit the campus at least once a quarter not only get an opportunity to spot new talent, but also newer workplace practices.
4. Alumni Connect: Alumni is a powerful medium for engaging with students and employer brands.

1.3Interview Experience :
1. First touchpoint experience: What was the first touchpoint experience ? Interviews with the candidate are the first but most vital point of interaction. What was the interview communication, travel, ease of locating the last mile, ushering, waiting, and initial documentation? All of these go a long way in building the image and reflect upon the culture of the organization.
2. Interviewing Competency: Were interviewers capable of interviewing the position?
Competency-based interviewing has a different capability than functional interviews. How was the entire experience of the interview perceived by the candidate, and did the candidate find the entire experience world class and of top quality ? Did the experience create a desire for the candidate to join the organization? Did the candidate buy the dream?

3. Position the organisation: Did the interviewers position the organization and its culture and legacy effectively? The candidate must leave complete knowledge about the deep legacy and history of the organization. When it started, the history behind the name, initial days, etc.
4. Candidate communication: How were the non-selected candidates communicated and
responded to? How did the candidate receive communication, especially those who were not selected? Was feedback received during the interview process?

1.4 Onboarding and Induction Programme :
1. Induction and Onboarding Programme: Is there a structured Induction Programme ? Organization culture alignment occurs in an induction Programme by instilling the right values.
2. Leadership Onboarding Programme: Is there a structured induction program for leadership ? Leaders who are lateral hires need a common understanding of their culture and values.
3. Director session in Onboarding: Are Directors and owners involved in the onboarding and induction processes? The presence of directors and owners in induction programs indicates the seriousness with which the organization lays emphasis on induction.
4. Culture download: Who checks the culture, values, belief download, and implementation? The final checkpoint is the transfer of the actual philosophy on the ground and ensuring that cultural attributes are manifested.

1.5 Sustainable Development challenges in SME of India :
Sustainable development in Indian SME experience challenges due to limitation of finance , high cost of green technology , low awareness of sustainability practices. Inability to attract skilled staff due to employer branding challenges adds further.

1.6Best practice of SDG adoption in SME business:
Integrating SDG in employer branding accelerates attraction of talent, retention by demonstrating a company's commitment to purpose driven work. This is especially relevant for Gen Z and millennials. Key SDG such as Gender equality (SDG 5), decent work (SDG 8), climate action (SDG 13) leverage organization reputation, trust, employee engagement. SDG driven employer branding drives talent attraction, Employee Value Proposition (EVP), increase in trust and engagement. Sustainability focused employer
branding is relevant to attract Gen Z .

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development:
In this section, to contextualize the issues addressed in our investigation and its interconnections, we present the current state of the art on employer branding, the main trends and perspectives, strategies, applicability in attracting and retaining talent, and human resource management, giving special attention to people and talent management in SMEs. ("Employer Branding Applied to SMEs: A Pioneering Model Proposal for ...") Small and medium enterprises which are growing at an exponential pace in emerging economies such as India are witnessing talent shortage due to the lack of Transformational HR practices especially in employer branding and talent management practices. This is the top agenda of concern for academia, practicing managers, and investors
(Cellar-Molina et al., 2019). Besides the product, services being offered by the organization are now a standard protocol of talent attraction to communicate effectively about the organizational culture, values, and value proposition as an employer. In fact, it is essential that they are disclosed.
Alnico et al. (2014) argue that in transformational HR a company's employer branding should always be in line with the corporate brand, as well as with the company's vision and mission. The construction of an employer branding model applied to companies should not be universal, and to build a model, it is important that several factors are considered (Ambler & Barrow (1996) Marchington, (2017). ("Employer Branding Applied to SMEs: A Pioneering - ProQuest")
The proposed model aims to combine the various elements of the transformational HR framework and establish a reference tool for SME and unicorns to build transformational HR best practices that will impact business growth. An exploratory approach was adopted to develop the Transformational HR model incorporating employer branding and talent management applied to SMEs, based on
prior widely referenced studies of generic employer branding models and frameworks and extensive studies of literature reviews, real case studies, association industry publications, and news-paper
reports.
The proposed questions arose entirely from these theoretical and practical background models and frameworks explained in the literature review, as well as from the accuracy of the dimensions and
variables described. Notable case studies of the real business world and reference publications were also referred to and researched, especially in the emerging economy of India.
The Transformational HR model directed at SMEs (Figure 1) has, as its main component, the dimension of employer branding and talent management, which will be effective when best practices of HR are adopted. Employee engagement is practiced regularly, and perceptions of current employees and ex-employees are captured. For SME and Unicorn in emerging economies, especially in India, it is critical to attract and retain talent without effective employer branding. In most research studies, obtaining good talent and building a good team are the top challenges for SME and unicorns. Talent Management includes

induction onboarding, performance management, career progression, succession planning, individual development plans, and building talent for growth, expansion, and stability of the organization. Needless to mention the bedrock and foundation of talent management is vision, value, culture and competency Barrow & Mosley (2005), Berthon et al. (2005), one of the most recognized authors in the academic arena with regard to organizational culture, culture is described as something that was learned and developed by employees through experiences that ended up becoming a defence for them. Cable and Judge (1996) understand that norms and values are the codes of an organization's professionalism and behaviours that clearly demonstrate the values of individuals.

Both of these will be effective subject to the adoption of best practices in Transformational HR. This is specifically singled out due to the volatile, dynamic nature of the business scenario within SME, especially in 2022 post-covid and the era of hyper digitalisation. Norms are getting renewed very quickly, and organizations that are agile and receptive to fast-changing best practices have a higher chance of being competitive in the market. According to Marchington (2017), the Marchington employer business brand model states that organizational culture is at the core, strengthening the idea that it is the epicentre, considered as the starting point. Additionally, Smith et al. (2001) and Ambler and Barrow (1996) refer to their model that the creation of organizational culture is one of the main foundations and that for that reason, organizational culture must be well defined, as observed by Singh (2004).

Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) linked reputation to company performance given that the value of reputation is recognized as a differentiation tool for successful companies. Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) highlight the relationship between good reputation and good company performance, as the value of reputation is recognized as a differentiation tool for successful companies ("Comparison of Two Fortune Magazine's Corporate Reputation Rating ...")

From the perspective of Joon et al. (2006), for a company to achieve its objectives, it is important to define the strategic business goals to be adopted. The author also states that strategic business goals consist of the actions that the company will take to achieve its objectives, and they must be established based on the objectives to be achieved, always influenced by the mission, vision, and previously defined values. That said, it is essential that the company think strategically so that it can survive the constant changes in the market and grow in a sustainable way, as suggested by Mani (2009). Green HR implementation in SME organisations have indicated better employer branding through progressive practices as explored by Sohu et al. (2026). Studies on sustainable HR practices such as hybrid working, inclusive work practices, AI driven hiring enhance employer branding.

This point of sustainable HR is further supported by R. Naik.et al. (2022). They further add the element of practical implications by suggesting sustainable HR to be part of broader policy framework in SME HR policies. These initiatives of sustainable entrepreneurship through employer branding create superior employee value proposition along with inclusive growth. This builds resilience and dynamic business environment within SME Ghag et al. (2023) Thierer et al. (2018) reinforce that the strategy is the path, or the action formulated and deemed adequate, to reach the established objectives and overcome the challenges identified, so that the firm may have a better positioning in view of its environment. ("Employer Branding Model for SMEs: Strategies for Talent ... - Studocu") Timespan et al. (2020) also defines strategy as the creation of a unique and valuable position, involving a different set of activities. That said, companies that do not have a well-defined strategic business goal may have a shorter life cycle and may survive for a while; however, in the long run, they do not remain sustainable. In this scenario, survival requires significant organization, control, and innovation.

When Marchington (2015) developed a model of an employer's brand ecosystem, strategic business goals were one of the assumptions. "According to the author, although the employer's brand strategy is limited, it should be revised." ("Employer Branding Model for SMEs: Strategies for Talent ... - Studocu") For a strategy to be well evaluated, the strategic decisions for a given company must be made in phases, the first phase being aimed at identifying possible threats and opportunities that involve the business, both in the present and in the future. These phases allow conclusions to be reached that support the decision concerning the company's strategic business goal, as per Bun and Huberts (2018).

From Walker's (2001) perspective, the rewards system is a set of devices created by companies to repay the contributions of their employees. Wilden et al. (2010) understand by rewards everything that can be offered to employees in exchange for their work, regardless of whether it is financial or not, as further explained by Onyije (2015).

York and Kim (2005) defined reward systems as a set of principles and guidelines previously defined by companies targeting their employees, whether of material or immaterial origin, and in return for the work performed. Camara et al. (2013) highlight that reward systems, in addition to encouraging employees to collaborate with the organization's growth, create a greater degree of commitment to the company and its productivity.

Ahmad (2016) conceptualizes that, "in the knowledge society in which we are immersed, skills cannot be

well managed without good reward management". This finding was supported by Sander and Lee (2014). In addition, a company's strategic business goals must also be analysed to understand how short-, medium-, and long-term objectives are defined. Stone D.L et al (2015), Flores H (2017).

When examining the model, the next step is aimed at the company's reputation. Note that the model is aimed at SMEs and Unicorn, and this factor can significantly influence the entire path of the firm.

In SMEs, employees often live within a firm's radius, making opinions easily communicated. The reputation they have with society turns out to be truly relevant, and their opinions and experiences with the company can be central to retaining talent. Employer branding in strategic business goals once integrated with sustainable entrepreneurship results in triple bottom line output of profit, people and planet. Employer branding builds social equity in families through employees. Used strategically in CSR activities and ESG initiatives which impact at ground level go a long way to build the employer brand and enhance the employee value proposition by highlighting the morale of the employees. SME organisations which strategically build employer branding through SDG goals open their business opportunities to global Fortune 500 companies as preferred business partners.

The employer branding initiatives impact the business as well. N. Subramaniam et al. (2022), Dev Prakash et al. (2025)

For the model to be applied to SMEs, Unicorn, the questionnaire in Table 1 must be answered to understand the current situation of the company. Table 1 explains the relationship between the variables in the transformational HR of the employer branding and talent management model directed at SMEs, with the dimensions that are intended to be evaluated, indicating the relevant questions to ask to analyse the company.

As previously mentioned, this questionnaire will help understand how companies are doing and what measures should be taken or implemented so that they can return.

2.1 Employer Branding Models:

Ambler et al. (1996) and Backhaus et al. (2004) proposed the first employer branding model, which includes three main assets (value proposition, organization identity, and organizational culture) that promote brand loyalty and brand associations. By creating this model, the authors presented a conceptual framework based on the aim of helping the understanding of all the dynamics associated with the concept of employer branding and the relationship between marketing and human resources.

The benefits that stakeholders receive are also considered value propositions, including wages or even projects in which employees are involved (Marchington, 2005).

Human capital adds value to the organization, in which branding aims to ensure a psychological contract regarding training, career, and personal development. Brand value is a result of the employer's activities, which make the organization's culture solid (Marchington, 2006). We can see employer branding as a distinction in terms of the features of each organization compared to its competitors. The way employees perceive brands is decisive in creating a long-term link between the organization and the consumer. Therefore, building strong brand associations is a priority for many companies (Marchington, 2010).

The construction of an employer branding model applied to companies should not be universal. To build a model, it is important to consider several factors (Marchington, 2015).

Furthermore, Marchington (2017) designed a model aimed at leaders on the topic of strategic structure. The objective was to develop and perfect the strategic structure, with a focus on developing, implementing, and managing the employer's brand strategies.

2.2Relationship between Transformational HR practices and Strategic business growth:

SME link business growth to operation, sales, production, marketing but rarely to HR and much rare to transformational HR. Transformational HR in India has aligned to the rapid economic growth and shift from only manufacturing to professional service-based economies driving national growth (Aegagri et, al 2011). Transformational HR is a key factor in ensuring good quality talent is attracted, retained, productive to business (Ulrich 1997). Non availability of quality to SME in india against established brands due to superior transformational HR practices pose a risk to strategic business growth of SME. (Alnico et al 2014). SME in India must focus on building a professional transformational HR function as part of strategic business growth. Prevalent higher focus on operations and transactions will cause sustainable weakness in the foundation and impact strategic business growth of SME. Therefore, transformational HR practices in SME have become a powerful and significant research topic, with a growing impact on strategic business growth. Less literatures on India based SME study on this topic were found, Post Covid 19. Now the emphasis being "Make in India" and "Viksit Bharat" this has become more relevant. The relationship transformational HR practice and how it affects strategic business growth has not been studied extensively by many researchers.

Since the business environment did not require this sector to be investigated, this topic, particularly in SMEs in India, did not receive much attention.

Therefore, the following statement is made based upon literature review:

H1: Transformational HR practices are positively related to Strategic Business Growth

2.3 Relationship between transformational HR practices and Best Practice Adoption

Unlike large organizations SME do not have the access and the practice of adopting best practices outside of production, manufacturing and operational system (Allen D et al 2010, Clarke K.F. et al 2001). In HR there are negligent access, adoption of best practices in SME. Legacy, lack of professional transformational HR department which works on progressive HR agenda than routine hiring, training, HR compliance, HR operations, HR payroll add to this absence of best practice (G.T. Lumpkin et al. 2007). Business owners also do not have clear visibility of the tangible business outcome of best practice adoption in HR (Cable D et al 1996, Cassel C et al 2002). Managing HR of skilled professionally qualified talent without reference of best practice becomes a journey without direction. This results in the hypothesis which is:

H2: Transformational HR practices are positively related to Best Practice Adoption

2.4Employer Branding in Strategic Business Growth

SME organisations most often lose the battle of employer branding to better established brands. (Alnico et al 2012). The concept of employer branding has evolved from a niche to mainline strategic business growth practice (Barrow et al 2005). SME organisations now in India proudly display the employer branding badges such as "Great Place to work" as part of the overall brand strategy (Edwards M.R. 2017 et al, Kook, J et al 2003). With the vision of India becoming a super economy attracting, retaining and getting productivity from people will be a key strategic business growth agenda. Therefore, the hypothesis stated is:

H3: Employer Branding has positive impact on Strategic Business Goal

2.5Relationship between Employer Branding and Best Practice Adoption

The organization's brand may have a correlation impact due to talent attrition and talent attraction (Edwards M.R. et al 2017, Jens Baier et al 2021). Superior Employer Brand reduces the effort to get good candidates and ensures retention for a longer time (Karmas A, et al 2020) . However, this is more prevalent as a practice in large organizations than in small size business. Employer Branding being a progressive and futuristic practice needs best practice reference in SME and surely has significant Strategic business growth impact (Martin R,et al 2025). This gives rise to the hypotheses:

H4: Employer Branding has positive impact on Best Practice Adoption

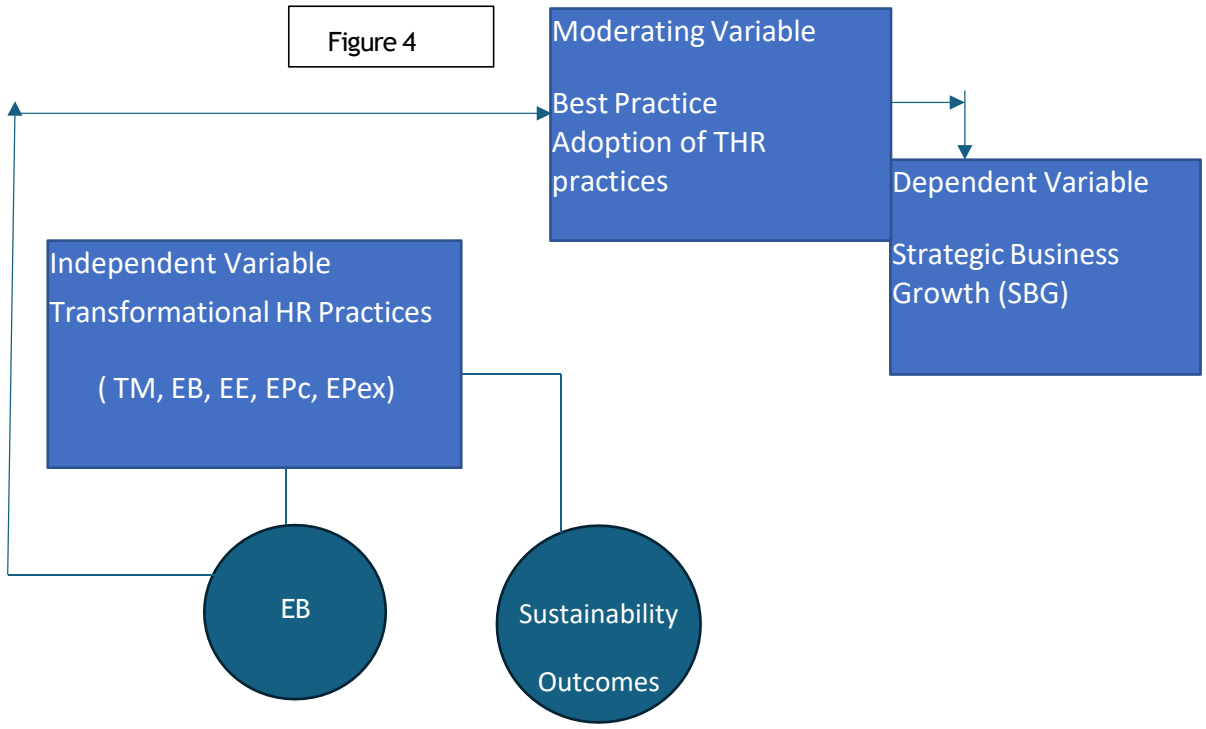
2.6Moderating effect of Employer Branding on strategic business growth and best practice adoption:

In the evolving landscape of business of post Covid 19 especially in India when SME forms the basis of an emerging , powerful economy integration of multiple elements of Transformational HR derived from best practices will directly affect the strategic growth of business(Singh K et al 2004, Thierer, et al 2018) , especially in the small and medium business which have a higher apetite and opportunity to scale up. Talent management will focus on the growth and optimization of quality talent which will be influenced by employer branding activities (Vancheswaran A, et al 2011), higher engagement will ensure the perception and productivity of current and ex-employees is superior (Wright P.M. et al 2003). Best practices of successful large enterprises will help and be a referral point for impact on strategic business growth of SME. Based on the above the research has the following hypothesis:

H5: Employer Branding has moderating effect on the relationship between Strategic business growth and Best Practice Adoption

H6: Employer branding has an impact on sustainability outcome for strategic business growth

3.Conceptual framework:
Employer Branding has moderating effect on Strategic business growth and Best Practice Adoption Figure 4 displays this:



Employer Branding is introduced in Figure 4, which illustrates the relationship between strategic business growth and best practice adoption. A three-variable system was assumed in the model. Prior to the introduction of the mediator, employer branding, a direct and significant association between best practice adoption and strategic business growth was formed. From then on, the
relationship between best practice adoption and strategic business growth becomes either significant or non-significant.

4.Research Methodology :
(Wilden R, et al 2020) The methodology proposed for the research will be descriptive, mixed, quantitative, and qualitative approaches with a conceptual framework. Secondary data from established and credible published reports were used in this study.

4.1Survey Elements:
A questionnaire was developed to assess awareness, extent of implementation, and factors of successful implementation of transformational HR and employer branding . The aspect of sustainable development in SME was important due to talent attraction , employer value
proposition, trust and integrity factors which have high relevance in transformational HR of SME business in India .The questionnaire uses ordinal and 5 point Likert scale. A sample of 350
respondents was gathered using purposive sampling. The focus group of the sample size was internal employees and decision makers at the level of executive, leadership, managerial cadres such as Owner/Founder, CEO, MD, Director, COO, VP, GM, Departmental head until manager,
team leader , and Mid-Sized companies based on Delhi NCR, Mumbai, Bangalore, who formed the universe. The results and findings will have bearing to introduce employer branding practices in SME business of India to strengthen sustainable practices of business .Verbal informed consent was obtained from each participant for participation in the study.

4.2 Sample Criteria and Sample Size:
Primary data through a survey were collected over a sample size of 350 respondents across NCR, Mumbai, Bangalore, Udaipur. The respondents were at the level of executive, leadership, managerial cadres such as Owner/Founder, CEO, MD, Director, COO, VP, GM, Departmental head ,SME owners. The questionnaire has an ordinal 5-point Likert scale.

The survey questionnaire contained questions covering all seven variables: three independent and four dependent variables. Reliability was validated using Cronbach's alpha and found to be highly reliablefor all variables. The researcher used SPSS statistical tools to analyze the data and identify variable interactions.

5. Results Analysis

SPSS version 26 was used to test the hypothesised model. The measurement model proved validity and reliability as per tests conducted.

5.1 Measurement Model

Using the SPSS reliability was tested Cronbach's Alpha. All the constructs had Cronbach's alpha value above .60 indicating their reliability. Figure 1. Statistical tools were used on SPSS to. check ANOVA based correlation. As the coefficient correlation is .627 it is statistically significant. The p value was < 0.01. This finding was further validated using a paired t-test. The mean of Employer Branding was 3.28, and strategic business growth was 3.38, indicating a high level of correlation. Hence, these indicate a linear correlation between Employer Branding and strategic business growth.

The coefficient correlation is 1, it is statistically significant. The p value was < 0.01. Hence, these indicate a linear and positive correlation between employer branding and best practice adoption.

Best-practice adoption and strategic business growth have a positive linear link. Since the p-value was less than0.05, the correlation coefficient of .690 was statistically significant. These indicate that continuous implementation of employer branding in SME of India will yield long term sustainable impact .

The correlation coefficient was .690, the changes in the correlation were negligible, and the p-value was <0.05, indicating statistical significance. This indicates employer branding introduced in SME of India through transformational HR builds sustainable business practices and crates enhanced resilience.

5.2Hypothesis testing

A structured co variance-based software in SPSS version 26 was used to evaluate hypothesis H1 to H4. SPSS based correlation ANOVA was used assess mediation in H5.

5.3 Other results

Employer branding and sustainability link up in the areas of Employer Value Proposition, talent attraction , trust, integrity and inclusive work practices.

6. Views and Indications:

6.1 Employer Branding:

Four sub-parameters were evaluated through the survey:website use, campus hiring rigor, interview experience, and induction onboarding.

The survey response brough to the fact that the use of websites and digital tools to attract talent in SMEwas used to a medium extent in 57% of SME in the service sector and 43% in the manufacturing sector, with employees ranging from 100 to 1000 employees in companies of turnover from Rs.150 to Rs.1000crore.

In further discussions it was identified that the "career" page in company website was either missing or inactive and the use of "career "page on company website was not done actively tosource and seek talent for hiring.

The campus hiring program, which is a very common practice in established large enterprises, was also used only to a moderate extent, and many SME were using campus hiring to attract shop floorworkers. 63% of SME in the service sector were not using it or were unsure about its usage in the turnover range of 200 to over Rs.1000 crore with an employee base of 200 employees to over 1000 employees. The interview experience feedback of the candidate at all levels was practiced in amedium to ineffective manner. 70.8 Of the organizations, 70.8% were from the service sector, with a turnover ofRs. 200 crores to over Rs. 1500 crore, with an employee size of 200 employees to 1000 employees.

Formal systems were not in place but were gathered through informal methods. Structured Induction and on boarding for new joiners was practiced in a low implementation mode.56% of theorganizations where this was seen were in the manufacturing sector with an employee base of 200 to 1000 employees and turnover of Rs. 50 crores to 2000 crore. The interesting part is that 70% of these organizations, where the practices were absent, have HR heads either as family members, directors, or employees. Therefore, the need for transformational HR may be possible.

6.2 Sustainable business impact :

Another important dimension of the research was the connect with the triple bottom line concept. Many SME in India is now exporter of services. Sustainable practices provide an edge to SME owners in international market . SME owners who practice employer branding have higher component of triple bottom line factors such as Profit, People, Planet. Employer branding through transformational HR practices keeps people in the center. The other two factors therefore get positively impacted. This is established in sustainable entrepreneurship theory. There is a very long lasting impact employer branding has on morale of employees which is carried inside families and therefore the society. Practicing responsible employer branding activities creates inclusive growth with sustainable business impact .

7. Findings :

EB has positive impact on SBG
By observing the findings of the Pearson correlation between Employer Branding and Strategic Business Growth, all Employer Branding practices show a positive correlation with Strategic
Business Growth (Table 4.29), and there is a linear positive correlation between Employer Branding and Strategic Business Growth. The coefficient correlation was .627 and was statistically significant because the p-value was less than 0.05. This was further validated by the paired correlation between SBG and EB with a value of .627 (Table 4.31). The standard deviation of employer branding is .544, and Strategic Business Growth is .658 (Table 4.30).
The above findings show a positive relationship between Employer Branding and Strategic Business Growth, which is consistent with previous research in this field. The link between
employers and strategic business growth is critical. Better Employer, also known as EVP (Employer value proposition), creates a perception of a good company, and the main factor is its people
practice since people are dynamic brand ambassadors. How attractive the brand is digitally to campus students and what response it receives on campus hiring are important considerations for Strategic Business Growth.
Employer branching has a moderating effect on the relationship between Strategic Business Growth and Best Practice Adoption.
A linear positive correlation exists between Strategic Business Growth and Best-Practice Adoption
(Table 4.65). The coefficient correlation was .690 (Table 4.69) and was statistically significant when the p-value was less than 0.05. Employer Branding has mediating correlation between Strategic Business Growth and Best Practice Adoption. Thus, it measures the association between Strategic Business Growth and Best Practice Adoption while mediating the association between Employer
Branding, and the two variables are correlated. There are existence of inclusive growth which has
high impact on people , profits and planet . Employer branding has long term impact on employees , families and society .

7.1Theoretical implication:
This study contributes significantly to the theoretical contributions by exploring the various elements of employer branding in the strategic business growth of SME in India. HR as a subject has been extensively studied. More recently research on SME has happened but mostly in labour, hiring, training at city or state level. The employer branding aspect part of transformational HR and its impact on strategic business growth in SME of India has received less attention. This study to the best of knowledge is the first to introduce this topic and the moderating effect of employer branding with strategic business growth and best practice adoption in SME of India. This study also establishes that with focus on Viksit Bharat; it is imperative that more research in this area is conducted. Future studies will not only get more data but also dive into more areas such as employer value proposition, using employer branding as an asset etc. Due to the lack of research in SME of India in transformational HR area including employer branding this becomes an important area of independent study. This study may be referred at a global scale for SME.

7.2Managerial and Business Implication:
In practice the study has significant contribution to the business development of SME in India. The India growth story to be a global giant by 2047 will be scripted through the SME of India and the winner in the war of talent will have significant edge and advantage. Employer Branding builds the traction to attract, retain quality talent. This study will provide practical and clear direction about employer branding practices and the confidence that this is not a public relation activity but a
planned and designed strategic business growth activity. This will provide clear model and direction SME in India to adopt employer branding and compete with bigger brands. This study also links with the SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) based on sustainable entrepreneurship theory of
focussing on the triple bottom line of Profit, People, Planet. By enhancing employer value proposition, talent attraction, integrity. Employer branding fosters innovation and transformation in the organisation culture due to higher level commitment to the brand by employee. The long-term
gains of employer branding through sustainable practices is both economic and non-economic gains for the society.

8. Conclusion :
The relationship between the extent of an organization's adoption of effective Transformational HR practices and the impact on SME businesses is positive and strong. Transformational HR practices positively influence Strategic Business Growth affecting the business management of SME.
Therefore, SME companies in India need to continuously enhance Transformational HR practices such as Employer Branding, Talent Management, Employee Engagement, Employee Perception of current employees, and Employee Perception of ex-employees to boost employees' attraction,
retention, and productivity in the SME space, where obtaining quality human resources is a challenge. Any impact on these factors directly affects SME business operations, expansion,
growth, and continuity. It was clearly established and concluded by over 65% respondents that best practice adoption practices of transformational HR such as Induction and Onboarding to be taken by Directors / Board members needs to be adopted by

SME organizations. 35% SME organizations agreed that hiring managers is not trained on a competency-based interviewing technique, which is an advanced version of the selection of qualified talent. Most organizations do not have it, possibly because there is a lack of qualified and certified interviewers in SME organizations.

Nearly 62% of respondents agreed that using company websites and digital media to actively seek and attract candidates is a good and effective practice. This was considered a very powerful best

practice of Employer Branding, which not only saves the cost of hiring but also provides a constant flow of candidate resumes, thereby increasing supply per position. This reduces the transactional time of HR, which may be used in more transformational work of selection through psychometric assessment and competency-based interviews, which are also best practices. This method of selection through the "pull" strategy of talent attraction will not only ensure better retention, but also better productivity because the talent has chosen to join the employer brand. 47% of the respondents agreed to the best practice of campus hiring for employer branding as a strategic business tool. This was also statistically proven using the correlation. Campus hiring ensures good employer branding as students who are young leaders of the future see and experience the brand and wish to connect. Campus hiring also provides young vibrant minds that bring energy to the system and bridges the generation gap. The organization is always vibrant, with youth emerging as future leaders to transform and grow the business. This concludes with certainty the impact of employer branding as the best practice for strategic business growth. 38% of SME organizations agreed to interview experience as a best practice tool in powerful employer branding. 44% agreed with the best practice of induction, with onboarding as the most effective way to create an employer brand. This is akin to the hosting of an aircraft and gives an impression of the journey ahead. The presence of leadership, including board members, ensures the needful focus and seriousness of the program.

2026 is the age where Gen Z is the emerging workforce worldwide. In India SME have a significantly large Gen Z workforce. Employer Branding is extremely critical as a business strategy. Employer Branding practices attract sustainable work practices which contribute significantly in the promotion of profit and planet along with people. Sustainable work places as part of employer branding create culture of integrity, trust, inclusive workplace, innovation which create high employer value proposition and attract talent especially gen Z who value and prefer sustainable workplaces. In India sustainable eco systems aligned to employer branding are emerging but the adoption needs more pace. This study provides insights to policy makers to look at building integration of sustainable policy with employer branding for SME in India, Asia and the world.

Transformational HR and within it employer branding is a strategic business direction which may be accelerated through sustainable practices. This eco system needs to be created. There need to do more research in related areas to explore employer branding through sustainable practices in SME.

The above concludes that employer branding is an effective best practice that will provide a strategic business growth impact in SME organizations.

9. Recommendation & Limitations:

This study had some limitations. To carry out the literature review, the greatest limitation was

related to the scarcity of scientific articles on Transformational HR in SME, unicorn especially in India as well as Employer Branding applied to SMEs, as well as the lack of employer branding models aimed at SMEs, which resulted in this pioneering model proposal. Limited exploration of sustainable practices in SME was experienced .

The application of the questionnaire was one of the main limitations in carrying out this study due to the worldwide pandemic crisis (Covid-19)—which was a barrier to what was initially designed. This barrier meant that the model could not be validated in companies, since no face-to-face meetings were possible with those responsible for them. On the one hand, employees and managers alike were in a layoff situation; on the other hand, firms were provisionally closed. Finally, it is suggested that this model be applied to SMEs regardless of the area of activity and core business so that its implementation can be studied and even improved if necessary. It is further suggested that SME adopt sustainable business practices within Transformational HR in employer branding such as ethical hiring practices , green HR , CSR activities . It is recommended that SME adopt ESG driven employer branding as part of transformational HR . Building a transformational HR focus in business at leadership level is the starting point of change .

10. Disclosure Statement:

No potential conflict of interest was reported by author.

11. Author Contributions Statement:

Author- contributed to the conceptualization, design, acquisition of data, analysis, and interpretation. drafted and provided intellectual content and provided the final version to be published. as the author agrees to be accountable for aspects of the work related to its accuracy and integrity.

Co Author- contributed in the supervision and guidance .

Figures and Tables

Figure 1 – Reliability Test of questionnaire used in case study survey

Cronbach's Alpha
.691

Figure 2- Profile of organizations in case study

Type of Organisation						
Service Organisation – 65.63%			**Manufacturing Organisation – 34.38%**			
Sales of Organisation(All Figures in INR)						
0 to 50cr.-	51cr. to	101cr	201cr.	501cr. to	750cr. to	Over 1000cr.-
37.50%	100 cr. –	.to	to500	750 cr. –	1000cr. –	18.75%
	18.75%	200 –	cr. –	3.12%	3.12%	
		6.25	12.50%			
		%				

Position Occupied in the organisation		
MD/Founder/Director/ Owner CEO/President/CEO – 65.62%	CXO/VP/HOD – 31.25%	Others – 3.13%

Number of employees in the organisation							
0 to 50 –	51 to 150	151 to	251 to	501 to	1001 to	2001 to	More than
17%	– 21%	250 –	500 –	1000 –	2000 – 12%	5000 –	5000 – 9%
("Study of Employer Branding and Talent Management Practices in SME ...") ("Study of Employer Branding and Talent Management Practices in SME ...")		12%	19%	7%		3%	

Figure 3 - Variables

S. No.	**Variable**		
I	Employer Branding	Mean	Std. D
1.1	Company website and digital medium is actively used to seek and attract candidates.	3.63	.83

1.2	Campus Hiring Programme is active to seek talent.	3.46	.95
1.3	Feedback on interview experience is taken from candidates	3	1.13
1.4	A structured onboarding and induction Programme is established for all new joiners.	2.86	1.56

S. No	Transformation al HR Area	Activities	Implementa tion status	Extent of implementation
1.	Employer Branding	Use of digital and website	3.6	Medium
		Campus hiring	3	Medium
		Interview Experience	3	Medium
		Induction and Onboarding	2.86	Low
2.	Talent Managemen t	Job Description, hierarchy available	4.1	Medium
		Skill and role-based compensation in practice	4.23	Medium
		KRA of new joiner ready at joining, reviewed monthly with feedback	4	Medium
		Managers have adequate span of control	3.83	Medium
		Clarity to employee on reporting relationship	4	Medium
		Clear skill and competencies defined and reviewed at each level	3.9	Medium
		System to identify High Potential employees	3.26	Medium
		Clarity about career growth plan in next 3 to 5 years	3.43	Medium
		Managers trained in IDP	3	Medium
		Learning development plans linked to business for employees	3.13	Medium
		Wealth creation opportunity for employees	3.33	Medium

Table 4.10: Employer Branding and Strategic Business Growth Correlations

		EB	**SBG**
EB	Pearson Correlation	1	.627**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	9.767	7.415
	Covariance	.296	.225
	N	34	34
SBG	Pearson Correlation	.627**	1

	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

Source: Output of SPSS.

Table 4.11: Employer Branding and Strategic business growth Paired Samples Statistics

Mean			N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	EB	3.2868	34	.54402	.09330
	SBG	3.3824	34	.65818	.11288

Source: Output of SPSS

Table 4.12: Employer Branding and Strategic Business Goal Paired Samples and Correlations

	N		Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	EB & SBG	34	.627	.000

- Pearson's coefficient correlation was used to identify the relationship between Employer Branding and strategic business growth. Preliminary analysis to validate and confirm no violation of the assumption of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. A positive correlation between Best Practice Adoption and Strategic business growth was established.
- As the coefficient correlation is .627 it is statistically significant. The p value was < 0.01. This finding was further validated using a paired t-test. The mean of Employer Branding was 3.28, and strategic business growth was 3.38, indicating a high level of correlation.
- Hence, these indicate a linear correlation between Employer Branding and strategic business growth. Hence, the researcher's null hypothesis is rejected, which means that Ho is rejected. Hence, the hypothesis that Employer Branding is positively related to strategic business growth is proven.

Table 4.13: Employer Branding and Best Practice Adoption Correlations

		EB	BPA
EB	Pearson Correlation	1	1.000**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	34	34
BPA	Pearson Correlation	1.000**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	34	34

Source: Output of SPSS.

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

- Pearson's coefficient correlation was used to identify the relationship between Employer Branding and best practice adoption. Preliminary analysis to validate and confirm no violation of the assumption of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. A positive correlation between Best Practice Adoption and Strategic business growth was established.
- Because the coefficient correlation is 1, it is statistically significant. The p value was < 0.01. Hence, these indicate a linear and positive correlation between employer branding and best practice adoption. Hence, the researcher's null hypothesis is rejected, which means that Ho is rejected.
- Hence, the hypothesis that Employer Branding is positively related to Best Practice Adoption is proven.

Employer branching has a moderating effect on the relationship between strategic business growth and Best Practice Adoption.

Table 4.14: Employer Branding has moderating effect on Strategic Business Growth and Best Practice Adoption

H5, Equation 1	R Square			
		F	Sig.	Durbin-Watson
EB--SBG	.395	20.862	.000	2.081

Source: Output of SPSS.

Table 4.15: Employer Branding has moderating effect on Strategic Business Growth and Best Practice Adoption

H5, Equation 2	R Square			
		F	Sig.	Durbin-Watson
BPA--SBG	.477	29.153	.000	1.886

Source: SPSS output. a. Predictors: (constant) SBG. b.Dependent variable: BPA

Table 4.16: Employer Branding has moderating effect on Strategic Business Growth and Best Practice Adoption

H5, Equation 3	R Square			
		F	Sig.	Durbin-Watson
EB and BPA -- SBG	.560	40.806	.000	2.039

Source: SPSS output.

a. Predictors: (constant) SBG. Dependent Variable: EB and BPA To validate the mediation effect of employee branding, the following conditions must be established. The first independent variable, strategic business growth, must affect mediator employee branching in the first equation; second, the independent variable Strategic business growth must affect the outcome variable Best Practice Adoption in the second equation; and third, the mediator Employer Branding must affect the result of the outcome variable Best Practice Adoption in the third equation. If all of these conditions are established, then the effect of the independent variable on the outcome variable will be less in the

third equation than in the second.The model is consistent with partial mediation if the impact of independent factors on the outcome variable with the mediator variable is diminished (in the regression coefficient, but still significant). The mediator variable Employer Branding has no significant effect (p>.05) in the third equation on the relationship between Best Practice Adoption and Strategic business growth.

Table 4.17: Employer Branding has moderating effect on Strategic Business Growth and Best Practice Adoption Correlations

		SBG	BPA
SBG	Pearson Correlation	1	.690**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	34	34

Source: SPSS output.

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

- Pearson's coefficient was used to check the connection between strategic business growth and best practice adoption. A preliminary analysis was performed to ensure that the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were not broken. It was discovered that best practice adoption and strategic business growth were positively correlated.
- Best-practice adoption and strategic business growth have a positive linear link. Since the p-value was less than0.05, the correlation coefficient of .690 was statistically significant.
- This hypothesis links best practice adoption with strategic business growth while managing employer; hence, we have a measure of the association between best practice adoption and strategic business growth. When employer branding was eliminated, we discovered that the two variables were correlated.
- The correlation coefficient was .690, the changes in the correlation were negligible, and the p-value was <0.05, indicating statistical significance.
- This implies that the correlation between strategic business growth and best practice adoption has little impact if we control for the mediator variable. Thus, this hypothesis was validated.

Reference of Figures:

Figure Number	Description
1	Reliability test of questionnaire used in case study
2	Profile of organizations in case study
3	Variables
4	Employer Branding moderating effect between Strategic Business Goal and Best Practice adoption

Reference of Tables:

Table Number	Description
Table 4.10	Correlation between Employer Branding and Strategic business growth

Table 4.11	Standard Deviation Employer branding and Strategic business growth
Table 4.12	Paired correlation Employer branding and Strategic business growth
Table 4.13	Correlation between Employer branding and Best Practice Adoption
Table 4.14	Employer branding has moderating effect on Strategic business growth and best practice adoption
Table 4.15	Employer Branding has moderating effect on Strategic business growth and Best Practice Adoption
Table 4.16	Employer Branding has moderating effect on Strategic Business Growth and Best Practice Adoption
Table 4.17	Employer Branding has moderating effect on Strategic business growth and Best Practice Adoption

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