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From Digital HRM to ESG Performance: A Micro to Macro Framework of Green HRM, Work Engagement, and Employee Green Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Digital transformation and sustainability have become central to contemporary organizational strategy, increasing the need to understand how technological systems support measurable Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) performance. Although Digital Human Resource Management (Digital HRM) and Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) have received growing scholarly attention, research integrating digital HR infrastructures with sustainability-oriented HR practices and employee-level outcomes remains limited. This study develops an integrated conceptual framework linking Digital Human Resource Management, Green Human Resource Management, green work engagement, employee green behavior, and ESG performance. Grounded in the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) theory, the framework proposes a sequential mechanism through which digitally enabled HR systems institutionalize green HR practices, enhance employee engagement with environmental objectives, stimulate pro-environmental workplace behavior, and ultimately contribute to organizational ESG performance. By advancing a micro-to-macro explanation of digitally supported sustainability implementation, the study bridges digital transformation and green HRM research and clarifies the behavioral foundations of ESG outcomes. The proposed model provides a structured basis for future empirical examination of digitally enabled sustainable organizational performance.

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Introduction

Digital transformation and sustainability have become central to contemporary organizational strategy, increasing the need to understand how technological systems support measurable Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) performance. Although Digital Human Resource Management (Digital HRM) and Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) have received growing scholarly attention, research integrating digital HR infrastructures with sustainability-oriented HR practices and employee-level outcomes remains limited. This study develops an integrated conceptual framework linking Digital Human Resource

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Grounded in the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) theory, the framework proposes a sequential mechanism through which digitally enabled HR systems institutionalize green HR practices, enhance employee engagement with environmental objectives, stimulate pro-environmental workplace behavior, and ultimately contribute to organizational ESG performance. By advancing a micro-to-macro explanation of digitally supported sustainability implementation, the study bridges digital transformation and green HRM research and clarifies the behavioral foundations of ESG outcomes. The proposed model provides a structured basis for future empirical examination of digitally enabled sustainable organizational performance.

Literature Review

Digital HRM as an Enabler of Green Human Resource Management

The increasing digitalization of human resource management has transformed HR from an administrative support function into a technology-driven strategic system. Contemporary research demonstrates that artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and electronic HR platforms are restructuring recruitment, training, appraisal, and workforce management processes (Roul et al., 2025). The automation of HR activities through digital systems enhances transparency, data accuracy, and operational integration, thereby embedding organizational policies into routine workflows rather than leaving them dependent on managerial discretion (Kanani & Alkshali, 2025). This structural embedding is crucial for translating strategic objectives into consistent HR implementation.

Artificial intelligence applications further strengthen this infrastructure by automating resume screening, candidate profiling, and interview coordination, thereby reducing manual intervention and improving process efficiency (Rahman et al., 2025). Beyond efficiency gains, AI-driven recruitment reduces paper consumption, minimizes travel requirements, and lowers carbon emissions associated with traditional hiring processes, directly linking digital HR systems to environmental sustainability outcomes (Rahman et al., 2025). Similarly, digital HR technologies have been associated with improvements aligned with sustainable development goals by stabilizing resource consumption and supporting socially responsible workforce management (Sova et al., 2023). These findings indicate that digital HRM provides the operational foundation for institutionalizing sustainability-oriented HR practices.

The integration of big data analytics further enhances HR system effectiveness by enabling evidence-based decision-making. Big data–driven HR practices allow organizations to forecast turnover, reduce recruitment bias, and improve employee engagement through data-supported insights (Mateen et al., 2024). HR analytics applies statistical modeling techniques to workforce data, facilitating predictive decision-making and aligning HR strategies with organizational objectives (Mohammed, 2019). By combining electronic HR platforms with analytics-driven practices, organizations create measurable and continuously monitored HR systems rather than symbolic policy frameworks.

Collectively, the literature suggests that digital HRM does not independently generate sustainability performance; rather, it operates as an enabling mechanism that institutionalizes structured HR practices. Through AI-enabled recruitment, analytics-based appraisal systems, and data-integrated workforce management, digital HRM creates the technological architecture needed to implement green HRM practices systematically and measurably. Thus, digital HRM forms the infrastructural precursor to green human resource management by embedding environmental and social objectives within everyday HR operations.

Green Human Resource Management and Green Work Engagement

Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) reflects the strategic integration of environmental priorities within fundamental HR functions, including recruitment, training, performance appraisal, and reward systems. By embedding sustainability criteria into formal HR processes, organizations institutionalize ecological values within everyday routines and performance expectations. Such institutionalization signals that environmental responsibility constitutes a central organizational objective rather than a peripheral initiative (Gupta & Jangra, 2024). In this context, employees are more likely to interpret sustainability as an integral component of their role identity, thereby reshaping how they cognitively and emotionally engage with their work.

Empirical research indicates that GHRM practices influence work engagement by strengthening the psychological foundations that underlie employee involvement. Green competence-building initiatives enhance employees' environmental knowledge and skills, equipping them with the capacity to contribute effectively to sustainability goals. Motivation-enhancing practices, particularly those linking appraisal and rewards to environmental performance, reinforce discretionary effort directed toward ecological objectives. Structured involvement mechanisms further create participative spaces in which employees can actively contribute to environmental decision-making and problem-solving processes (Adeel et al., 2022). The interaction of these practices cultivates heightened levels of vigor, dedication, and absorption in sustainability-related tasks.

Evidence from higher education institutions substantiates this relationship, demonstrating that formal GHRM systems significantly predict employee engagement in green initiatives, especially when environmental policies are coherently aligned with leadership and institutional structures (Umair et al., 2024). The formalization of sustainability within HR frameworks reduces ambiguity regarding environmental expectations and strengthens employees' perceptions of organizational authenticity in pursuing ecological objectives. This clarity and alignment deepen psychological investment in green initiatives. Green training plays a particularly pivotal role in reinforcing engagement by enhancing both competence and perceived meaningfulness. Sustainability-oriented training initiatives expand employees' environmental capabilities while simultaneously strengthening their sense of purpose in contributing to broader ecological outcomes.

Empirical findings indicate that such training increases motivation and innovative capacity, thereby elevating engagement levels (Bilal & Khan, 2025). Through the simultaneous development of capability and value alignment, organizations intensify employees' emotional and cognitive commitment to sustainability efforts. The accumulated empirical evidence demonstrates that GHRM establishes both structural and psychological conditions conducive to green work engagement. By embedding environmental priorities within formal HR architectures, organizations cultivate sustained employee commitment to sustainability initiatives. Engagement, however, represents a psychological state of involvement; its strategic significance emerges only when this investment manifests in observable pro-environmental behavior.

Green Work Engagement as a Precursor to Green Behavior

Green Work Engagement represents a sustainability-specific psychological state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption directed toward environmental tasks (Lu, 2025). Unlike general engagement, green work engagement reflects employees' emotional and physical engagement in ecological responsibilities embedded within their work roles. It captures not merely awareness of sustainability, but a motivational condition in which environmental goals become personally meaningful. Empirical evidence indicates that engagement operates as a central mechanism through which HR practices translate into behavioral outcomes. Drawing on social exchange theory, employees who perceive organizational commitment toward sustainability reciprocate through elevated engagement, which subsequently manifests in discretionary pro-environmental behaviors (Aboramadan, 2022). Engaged employees demonstrate stronger in-role green behaviors, such as adhering to environmental policies and reducing resource waste, as well as extra-role behaviors, including voluntary participation in environmental initiatives and the efforts that facilitate green innovation. The mediating role of green work engagement has received increasing empirical validation. Lu (2025) demonstrates that GWE significantly transmits the effects of GHRM practices onto both in-role and extra-role green behaviors within higher education institutions. This finding suggests that structural HR interventions alone do not guarantee behavioral outcomes; rather, behavioral transformation occurs when employees internalize sustainability objectives and channel psychological energy toward environmental tasks.

The broader engagement literature further supports this behavioral conversion mechanism. Work engagement has been empirically linked to knowledge sharing and innovative work behavior, both of which are essential for sustainable organizational development (Kim & Park, 2017). Engaged employees invest cognitive and emotional resources into idea generation, promotion, and implementation processes, thereby increasing innovative capacity. When engagement is directed toward environmental objectives, this innovative orientation takes the form of green innovative work behavior. Engagement with green initiatives also contributes directly to sustainable environmental performance. Umair et al. (2024) demonstrate that employee engagement in green initiatives significantly predicts sustainable environmental performance in higher education institutions. This relationship indicates that engagement functions not merely as an attitudinal state but as a performance-relevant driver of ecological outcomes.

The link between engagement and environmental performance is further reinforced by evidence that engaged employees contribute to waste reduction, pollution control, and environmentally responsible organizational practices (Abdelhakim, 2024). Engagement strengthens the intensity and consistency of pro-environmental behavior, thereby enhancing environmental performance at the organizational level. Taken together, the literature establishes green work engagement as the psychological bridge between sustainability-oriented HR systems and observable employee green behavior. Engagement transforms environmental expectations into motivated action by aligning cognitive focus, emotional commitment, and discretionary effort toward ecological objectives. Green behavior, therefore, is not an automatic consequence of policy enforcement; it emerges when employees become energetically and meaningfully involved in sustainability initiatives.

Employee Green Behavior as the Behavioral Infrastructure of ESG Performance

The realization of a sustainability strategy into measurable ESG outcomes ultimately depends on employee-level behaviors. Although ESG operates at the firm level, its effectiveness is enacted through daily practices, compliance routines, and discretionary pro-environmental actions. Recent scholarship positions employee green behavior as a micro-foundational mechanism through which sustainability commitments are operationalized. Camacho (2025) argues that discretionary employee behaviors serve as the behavioral conduit linking corporate citizenship initiatives to effective ESG performance. Without such voluntary conduct, ESG commitments risk remaining symbolic rather than substantive. Pro-environmental and citizenship-oriented behaviors strengthen environmental compliance, ethical conduct, and social responsibility in organizational operations.

Empirical evidence reinforces this behavioral pathway. Wang and Hu (2025), drawing on data from 1,285 employees in Chinese e-commerce firms, demonstrate that perceived ESG performance significantly predicts employee green behaviors via green psychological climate. Employees who perceive stronger ESG commitment engage more actively in resource conservation, waste reduction, and environmentally responsible task execution, thereby contributing directly to environmental, social, and governance performance indicators. A comprehensive review of GHRM literature further supports this micro-to-macro logic. Efranto et al. (2026) show that employee green behavior serves as a mediating mechanism linking green HR practices organizational sustainability outcomes. Integrating AMO and social exchange perspectives, the review explains how structured HR interventions translate into environmental efficiency, social sustainability, and economic performance through behavioral enactment. Taken together, ESG performance emerges not merely from formal reporting systems but from sustained employee green behavior embedded in daily work practices. Sustainability strategy establishes direction; employee behavior determines realization.

Theoretical Foundation: Integrating AMO Theory into the Green HRM-Sustainability Framework

The theoretical foundation of this research is anchored in the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) framework, which suggests that employees' performance outcomes arise from the combined influence of three interconnected factors: employees must possess the necessary abilities, be sufficiently motivated, and be provided with opportunities to contribute (Appelbaum et al., 2000). In sustainability research, AMO has increasingly been adopted to explain how HR systems translate into pro-environmental behavior and environmental performance. Recent empirical work demonstrates that AMO provides a structured explanation for employee green behavior. Sibian and Ispas (2021) apply the AMO framework to green employee behavior in the hospitality sector and show that environmental knowledge and training (ability), intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (motivation), and supportive organizational context (opportunity) jointly determine pro-environmental conduct. Their findings emphasize that environmental behavior is not spontaneous but systematically shaped by HR-related mechanisms.

Similarly, Iftikar et al. (2022) explicitly examine the green HRM–pro-environmental behavior nexus through the AMO lens. Their results confirm that green HR practices enhance employee pro-environmental behavior by strengthening green self-efficacy and green entrepreneurship, reinforcing the idea that HR interventions build both competence and motivational orientation toward sustainability. The study validates AMO as a mediating logic connecting structured HR practices to behavioral outcomes. The AMO framework has also been extended to broader performance domains. Pandey and Risal (2025) demonstrate that green HRM practices significantly influence employee performance through ability-enhancing (green recruitment and training), motivation-enhancing (green rewards and appraisal), and opportunity-enhancing mechanisms. Their findings reinforce the argument that environmental performance outcomes are contingent upon the systematic

alignment of HR practices with sustainability objectives. At the organizational level, Tay et al. (2023) link AMO-enhancing HRM practices to corporate environmental citizenship. Their study distinguishes between ability-, motivation-, and opportunity-enhancing practices and shows that these dimensions contribute to environmentally responsible corporate behavior. This perspective supports the micro-to-macro logic underlying the present study: employee-level capabilities and behaviors aggregate into firm-level sustainability outcomes.

Integrating these strands of literature, AMO theory provides the explanatory architecture for the proposed model. Digital HRM strengthens ability through data-driven recruitment, green training analytics, and competency mapping. It enhances motivation by linking environmental performance metrics to appraisal and reward systems. It expands opportunity by creating participative digital platforms that enable employee involvement in sustainability initiatives. These HR configurations institutionalize Green HRM practices, which cultivate green work engagement. Engagement, as an energized psychological state, transforms ability and motivation into discretionary green behavior. Sustained green behavior subsequently contributes to measurable ESG performance at the organizational level. AMO therefore functions as the theoretical spine of the framework. It explains why HR systems influence psychological states, how those states translate into behavior, and how aggregated behaviors shape sustainability performance. Without the AMO logic, the proposed chain would appear fragmented; with it, the progression from Digital HRM to ESG performance becomes theoretically coherent and structurally defensible.

Conceptual Model Development

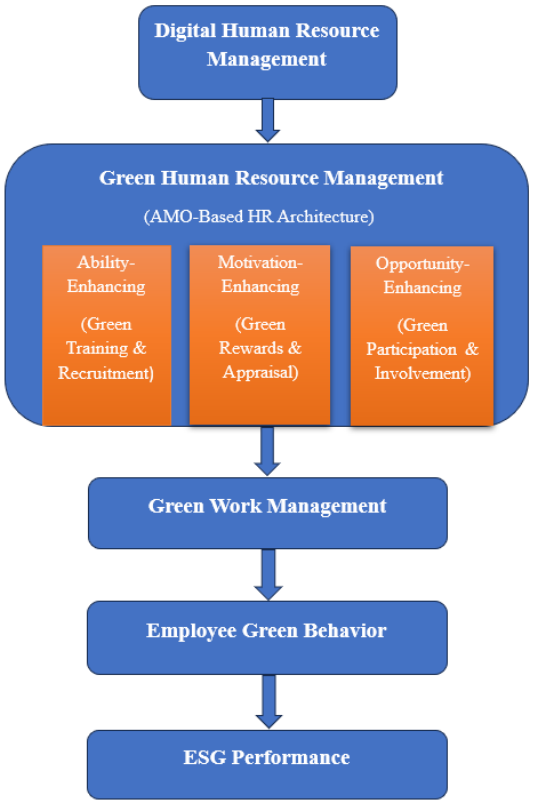


Figure 1. Presents the Conceptual Framework Developed in this study
Source : Author, 2026

Figure 1. Illustrates the sequential structure of the proposed model, positioning Digital Human Resource Management as an enabling infrastructure that supports AMO-based Green Human Resource Management practices. These practices foster green work engagement, which translates into employee green behavior and ultimately contributes to ESG performance.

Building upon the preceding literature review and the theoretical grounding provided by the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) framework, this study proposes an integrated conceptual model explaining how digitally enabled HR systems contribute to organizational sustainability outcomes. Existing research has

largely examined digital HR practices, GHRM, employee engagement, and sustainability performance in isolation. The present framework integrates these streams by proposing a sequential mechanism through which digital transformation in HRM influences ESG performance through employee-centered processes. The model proposes that Digital Human Resource Management serves as an enabling infrastructure that facilitates the effective implementation of Green Human Resource Management practices. Digital technologies enhance the transparency, consistency, and monitoring of HR activities, allowing organizations to systematically embed environmental objectives within recruitment, training, performance appraisal, and employee involvement practices.

Through these mechanisms, digital HRM strengthens the organization's ability to institutionalize sustainability-oriented HR systems aligned with the ability, motivation, and opportunity dimensions emphasized by AMO theory. The integrating model further suggests that GHRM practices influence employees at the psychological level by fostering Green Work Engagement. When environmental priorities become integrated within HR policies and organizational routines, employees develop stronger cognitive and emotional attachment toward sustainability initiatives. This engagement represents an energized state that encourages employees to actively participate in environmentally responsible activities. Engaged employees are more likely to translate their commitment into Employee Green Behavior, reflecting voluntary and task-related actions that support environmental objectives within the workplace.

At the organizational level, the aggregation of employee green behavior contributes to improved Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) performance. Sustainability outcomes emerge when individual behaviors collectively reinforce environmental efficiency, social responsibility, and governance compliance across organizational operations. Accordingly, the proposed model advances a micro-to-macro explanatory pathway in which digital HR capabilities shape HR systems, HR systems influence employee engagement, engagement drives behavior, and behavior ultimately strengthens organizational sustainability performance.

Propositions Development

Drawing upon the preceding literature synthesis and the theoretical grounding provided by the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) framework, the present study advances a set of propositions explaining how digital transformation in human resource management contributes to organizational sustainability outcomes. The proposed relationships reflect a sequential mechanism through which organizational systems influence employee psychology, behavior, and ultimately firm-level ESG performance. Digital Human Resource Management represents a technology-enabled approach that enhances the efficiency, transparency, and integration of HR practices. Digital platforms facilitate systematic monitoring, data-driven decision-making, and standardized implementation of organizational policies. Within the sustainability context, these capabilities enable organizations to embed environmental objectives into HR processes, thereby strengthening the implementation of GHRM practices. Accordingly, digital HR systems are expected to support the institutionalization of environmentally oriented HR policies and practices.

Proposition 1

Digital HRM positively influences GHRM practices.

GHRM integrates environmental values into recruitment, training, performance appraisal, and employee participation systems. Such practices communicate the organization's liability to sustainability and shape employees' perceptions of environmental responsibility. When sustainability is embedded within HR structures, employees develop a stronger psychological attachment to environmental initiatives, leading to higher engagement with green organizational goals.

Proposition 2

GHRM positively influences Green Work Engagement.

Green work engagement reflects an energized psychological state characterized by dedication and involvement in sustainability-related activities. Employees who are highly engaged with environmental objectives are more likely to internalize organizational sustainability goals and translate this psychological investment into concrete workplace actions. Engagement, therefore, serves as a critical mechanism linking organizational practices with observable employee behavior.

Proposition 3

Green Work Engagement positively influences Employee Green Behavior.

Employee green behavior represents the practical enactment of sustainability initiatives within organizational operations. Pro-environmental behaviors, such as responsible resource use, adherence to environmental

policies, and voluntary participation in sustainability initiatives, collectively contribute to organizational performance outcomes. As employee behaviors accumulate across the organization, they strengthen environmental efficiency, social responsibility, and governance effectiveness.

Proposition 4
Employee Green Behavior positively influences ESG Performance.
Taken together, the proposed relationships suggest a progressive transformation pathway through which digital HR capabilities enable green HR systems, foster employee engagement, stimulate pro-environmental behavior, and ultimately enhance ESG performance. The framework, therefore, advances a micro-to-macro explanation of organizational sustainability grounded in HR-driven behavioral mechanisms.

Theoretical Contributions
This research offers multiple significant conceptual advancements to the body of knowledge concerning sustainable human resource management and corporate sustainability. By integrating Digital Human Resource Management, Green Human Resource Management, green work engagement, employee green behavior, and ESG performance within a single conceptual framework, the study addresses the fragmented nature of prior research that has typically examined these constructs independently. The proposed model advances existing knowledge by positioning digital HRM as a foundational enabler that facilitates the systematic implementation of sustainability-oriented HR practices, thereby extending digital transformation research into the sustainability domain. Furthermore, the study contributes to Green HRM literature by incorporating employee psychological processes, demonstrating that sustainability outcomes do not emerge solely from organizational policies but through the development of green work engagement that motivates employees to internalize environmental objectives. In doing so, the framework provides a behavioral explanation of how HR systems translate into observable pro-environmental actions within organizations.

The study also contributes to ESG research by offering a micro-foundational perspective, conceptualizing ESG performance as an outcome shaped by aggregated employee green behavior rather than exclusively strategic or reporting-driven mechanisms. Finally, by applying the Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) theory within a digitally enabled sustainability context, the study extends the theoretical scope of AMO beyond traditional performance outcomes and highlights its relevance in explaining how technological and HR systems jointly influence sustainable organizational transformation.

Practical Implications
The proposed framework offers meaningful insights for organizations attempting to align digital transformation with sustainability objectives in an increasingly ESG-driven business environment. As organizations continue to adopt digital HR systems, the findings indicates that technology is not expected to be viewed merely as an efficiency tool but as a strategic mechanism capable of embedding sustainability values within everyday organizational practices. Digitally enabled HR processes allow environmental objectives to become integrated into recruitment, employee development, performance evaluation, and participation systems, thereby strengthening the consistency with which sustainability initiatives are implemented across the organization. The framework further highlights that sustainable organizational performance depends significantly on how employees experience and respond to HR practices. When environmental priorities are reflected in training opportunities, evaluation systems, and workplace participation, employees are more likely to develop a stronger psychological attachment toward sustainability goals. Such engagement encourages employees to move beyond formal job requirements and actively contribute to environmentally responsible practices within their work roles. This perspective shifts managerial attention from policy formulation toward cultivating employee involvement as a central driver of sustainability success.

The study also provides important insight for sustainability leaders and ESG practitioners by emphasizing that organizational ESG outcomes are ultimately realized through employee behavior. Investments in sustainability reporting or strategic commitments alone may produce limited impact unless supported by everyday workplace actions. Strengthening green engagement and encouraging pro-environmental behavior through HR systems can therefore enhance the effectiveness and credibility of ESG implementation. In this way, digitally supported HR practices emerge as a practical pathway through which organizations can translate sustainability intentions into measurable and long-term organizational performance.

Future Research Directions

The increasing integration of digital technologies with sustainability initiatives has created new avenues for research in human resource management and organizational performance. Although the present study develops a conceptual framework linking Digital HRM, Green HRM practices, employee engagement, and ESG performance, empirical investigation of these relationships remains an important direction for future studies. Subsequent research may examine the proposed framework across different organizational contexts and industries to better understand how digital HR systems influence sustainability outcomes over time. Attention may also be given to organizational and institutional factors, such as leadership support, technological readiness, and regulatory environments, which may shape employee engagement and green behavioral responses. Furthermore, future studies may consider the role of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence and advanced HR analytics, in strengthening sustainability-oriented HR practices. Such efforts can further refine the proposed framework and contribute to a deeper understanding of digitally enabled sustainable organizational transformation

Conclusion

The convergence of digital transformation and sustainability has fundamentally altered the strategic role of HRM within contemporary organizations. This study developed an integrated conceptual framework demonstrating how Digital Human Resource Management enables the effective institutionalization of GHRM practices, cultivates green work engagement, stimulates employee green behavior, and ultimately strengthens ESG performance. By grounding the framework in the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity theory, the study provided a coherent explanation of how digitally supported HR systems translate sustainability intentions into behavioral and organizational outcomes. The proposed model advances sustainability scholarship by clarifying that ESG performance emerges not merely from strategic commitments or disclosure practices, but from structured HR systems that shape employee capabilities, motivation, and participation. In doing so, the study underscores the fundamental role of HRM in digitally enabled sustainable transformation. As organizations continue to pursue both technological advancement and environmental responsibility, integrating digital HR infrastructures with sustainability-oriented HR practices becomes essential for achieving durable and credible ESG performance. The framework developed in this study contributes to a deeper theoretical understanding of this transformation and establishes a foundation for future empirical inquiry into digitally driven sustainable organizational development.

Acknowledgments

The increasing integration of digital technologies with sustainability initiatives has created new avenues for research in human resource management and organizational performance. Although the present study develops a conceptual framework linking Digital HRM, Green HRM practices, employee engagement, and ESG performance, empirical investigation of these relationships remains an important direction for future studies. Subsequent research may examine the proposed framework across different organizational contexts and industries to better understand how digital HR systems influence sustainability outcomes over time. Attention may also be given to organizational and institutional factors, such as leadership support, technological readiness, and regulatory environments, which may shape employee engagement and green behavioral responses. Furthermore, future studies may consider the role of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence and advanced HR analytics, in strengthening sustainability-oriented HR practices. Such efforts can further refine the proposed framework and contribute to a deeper understanding of digitally enabled sustainable organizational transformation.

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