

Corporate Sustainability in the Digital Age: The e-HRM Approach" A Study on the SMEs in Bangladesh

¹Shahin Alom, ²Emrul Hasan, ³Nazmul Islam Ashif, ⁴Abdul Kader Jilany

¹Department of Human Resource Management, Faculty of Business Administration Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, Bangladesh.

²Department of Management, Faculty of Business Development, National Research University, Higher School of Economics, Russia.

³Department of Management, Faculty of Business Administration Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, Bangladesh.

⁴Department of Management, Faculty of Business Administration Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, Bangladesh.



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Corresponding Author:
Shahin Alom

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Abstract: Purpose-This research explores the contribution of Electronic Human Resource Management (e-HRM) to corporate sustainability (CS) in Bangladesh, among the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It especially investigates the role that e-recruitment & selection, e-training and e-performance management have to play in the environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainability.

Methodology-A sample size of 432 HR professionals in SMEs was identified where issued with a structured questionnaire survey, which received 398 valid responses (87.27% response rate). Cronbach alpha was used in testing the reliability of the data and analysis of correlation and multiple regressions was done using SPSS.

Findings-Each of the three e-HRM functions was significantly and positively related to CS. The highest influence was observed on e-recruitment & selection ($R^2 = 0.586$, $p < 0.01$) and e-performance management ($R^2 = 0.504$, $p < 0.01$) and e-training ($R^2 = 0.470$, $p < 0.01$). These findings show that e-HRM is not only efficient but also promotes transparency, equity and optimum use of resources.

Discussion-The evidence above puts emphasis on the idea that implementing e-HRM helps SMEs leap over resource limits and attain sustainable practices. This interdependence of digital HR functions only enhances their strategic importance and makes e-HRM more than an administrative support system instead of becoming a facilitator of resilience and the overall sustainability of an organization.

Contribution and Implications-The research has a valuable contribution to the theory because it advances the value of digital HR toward sustainability in SMEs and is useful to policymakers and practitioners to enhance the ability of digital infrastructure and digital HR.

Keywords: e-HRM, Corporate Sustainability (CS), SMEs, Recruitment and Selection, e-Training, e-Performance Management, Bangladesh.

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Introduction

In the era of digital transformation, organizations are rethinking traditional business processes to enhance efficiency, transparency, and accountability (Sharma et al., 2024). Electronic Human Resource Management (e-HRM) is one of the changes that have offered a way of managing human capital with the use of modern digital platforms. E-HRM is defined as the application of web-based technologies to execute processes of the Human Resource Management (Mamatha et al., 2022). Not only does this transformation automates HR functions, but also integrates them,

strategically, with organizational ones, including sustainability (Fenwick et al., 2024).

On the other hand, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone in most of the economies owing to their capability of innovation, job creation and contribution to GDP. The concept of the SMEs is differently interpreted for various different countries in Bangladesh, as mentioned by the Bangladesh Bank (2020), SMEs are enterprises that have less than 250 employees with assets (without excluding the land and buildings) not more than BDT 30 million for small and BDT 100 million for medium enterprises.

SMEs make up more than 90% of total industrial enterprises in Bangladesh and contribute about 25% of the GDP while providing employment to about 7.8 million people (BBS, 2022).

Despite their crucial role, the SMEs in Bangladesh are confronted with various challenges such as limited access to finance, technological gaps, low HR capacity and under compliance with the standards of sustainability (Meng et al., 2021). Such constraints deter their long-term development and their eventual integration into the global market that is increasingly focusing on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) metrics. In this case, the use of e-HRM comes to its fore. For SMEs, e-HRM systems can automate HR processes, improve employee engagement, reduce administrative costs, and compliance with labor standards, as well as with environmental standards to sustainability success (Wakabi et al., 2024).

Moreover, the interconnection between e-HRM and corporate sustainability (CS) is improve attention in twain academic and professional domains. Corporates are for e-HRM due to the benefits associated to them on two levels; this is efficiency and effectiveness of HRM operation. The efficiency of e-HRM can be achieved through the increased accuracy level of the data, the diminishing of the time of the process required to cover the paperwork, and the decrease in the number of individuals at the HR department (De Alwis et al., 2022). Effectivity can also be realized in e-HRM through increased competence of the managers and the employees in the quicker decision making and more so e-HRM adds value to the HR drive of some of the practices such as the knowledge management, creation of smart and public wealth (Alqarni et al., 2023).

CS is an ability of a business concerned with its sustainability, where the firm can operate economically, environmentally and socially aware (Dzhengiz & Hockerts, 2022). E-HRM helps in integrating sustainability as it facilitates HR processes where green initiatives are facilitated (paperless offices, remote working, etc) via digitization (Yusliza et al., 2020). Properly implemented, e-HRM can equip SMEs with the ability to make their operational strategies compatible with the sustainable development goals (SDGs) therefore; they will be more competitive in a globalized market.

However, the practice of e-HRM in the Bangladeshi SMEs is still not common and this is mostly because of issues such as the lack of awareness, the poor condition of the digital infrastructure, the reluctance to change, and the factors which make the implementation seem costly (Rahman et al., 2021). These barriers hinder the SMEs to utilize the e-HRM to the maximum, especially in CS (Javed et al., 2023). This gap identifies a critical issue that requires strategic attention of the policymakers and business leaders.

To address this issue, this study scrutinizes the effect of e-HRM on corporate sustainability, particularly, on the SMEs of Bangladesh. Under this research, there are three major dimensions that corporate sustainability is assessed using: environmental concern, social responsibility, and economic measures. Although there is a growing recognition of sustainability as the strategic goal of modern businesses, little is known about the involvement of e-HRM in helping the SMEs to establish sustainable practices, especially in less economically developed countries. This research aims to investigate how e-HRM methods can contribute to sustainable corporate outcomes and address the challenges that limit their practical implementation in the SME sector.

Literature Review and Hypothesis

SMEs and Sustainability

Studies have shown that while most SMEs do not use the term CS, they are familiar with the concepts of CSR or sustainability (Das & Rangarajan, 2020). In the case of Australian SMEs, Moyeen & Jerry (2012) found that managers are well aware of CSR and have included CSR principles in their business strategies. However, in countries such as Lithuania, Cyprus, Latvia and Poland, the CSR concept is present in SMEs but has not yet been strongly adopted in daily business activities (Kučera, 2022). Most SMEs view sustainability as helping them achieve balance among social responsibility, economic measure and environmental factors. Such businesses take steps to reduce their effects on society and the environment and also try to gain skills and abilities that benefit both people and the planet (Crossley et al., 2021). Chinese SMEs are part of community initiatives and follow some ethical codes. Still, they often fall behind in adopting sustainable business strategies (Waheed & Zhang, 2022). Likewise, Czech SMEs seem to be aware of sustainability, but this knowledge is not fully applied to their business strategies (Šebestová, 2020).

Electronic Human Resources Management (e-HRM)

As the meaning of e-HRM is not agreed upon universally, different explanations have been proposed in the literature. Among the different definitions, the one by Bondarouk & Ruël (2019) is often the most highly quoted. They define e-HRM as the use of filigree technologies to carry out HR strategies, policies and practices. Brockbank & Ulrich (2005) state that understanding new technologies are important for an HR professional to be successful in their duties. Its main purpose is to help HR teams with transnational tasks, including recruitment, training, selecting employees and managing performance, thus making routine HR processes more streamlined (Groenewald et al., 2024). It means using web-based tools and networks to offer HR services that help achieve the organization's objectives. It uses information technology to connect human resource management and improve the way people and processes are handled in an organization (Alzoubi, 2022). According to Bissola and Imperatori, (2022) technology in HR allows the organization to transform old methods by making them more flexible and responsive. They believe that e-HRM can make HR services within organizations more effective and outstanding.

e-HRM and Corporate Sustainability (CS)

e-HRM is increasingly recognized as a potential enabler of CS, especially for resource-constrained SMEs. By digitizing HR processes, e-HRM supports paperless operations, remote work arrangements, and improved employee engagement all of which contribute to environmental and social sustainability (Alqarni et al., 2023). Additionally, e-HRM can make it easier to ensure HR policies are aligned with sustainability goals using data analytics, monitoring success and improved ways of communicating (L'Écuyer & Raymond, 2023). Bissola & Imperatori (2013) stress that linking e-HRM to sustainability improves the company's training and education of employees about environmental responsibility. The process supports sustainability by prioritizing hiring and appraising employees based on their values and how they work toward set environmental and social goals (Groenewald et al., 2024).

In the context of developing countries like Bangladesh, the potential for e-HRM to drive sustainability is substantial but under explored. When SMEs in Bangladesh use digital tools, it opens a door for them to include sustainable practices in their development using e-HRM (Olurin et al., 2024). The use of e-HRM helps develop a workplace where everyone is honest and responsible which supports the sustainability of the business. HR teams can train staff on sustainable practices through e-HRM, observe their development in these skills and implement sustainability into performance reviews (Alqarni et al., 2023). This way, sustainability becomes much more than just a phrase guiding the company's actions (Cornelissen, 2023).

H₁: e-HRM has a significant positive impact on CS in SMEs in Bangladesh

e-Recruitment and Selection

It is common to refer to e-Recruitment or online recruitment, as the procedure of attracting candidates online, for example, on websites, job sites and platforms such as LinkedIn (Rahaman, 2022). It allows organizations to find applicants from a larger group, hire personnel faster and cheaper and automate many office tasks. Parry & Tyson (2008) explain that using e-recruitment increases hiring speed and quality while also supporting sustainability by using less paper and other physical resources.

Online tools and methods such as online tests, meetings over video and AI software are used in e-selection to assess and choose candidates (Mamatha et al., 2022). It helps organizations base their decisions on real-time data and performance indicators. The use of online selection tools helps ensure that hiring decisions are objective, free from human bias and ethical (Okon et al., 2024).

Many large companies have embraced e-Recruitment and selection systems, but SMEs usually encounter problems including limited IT resources, low digital understanding and not enough resources (Zhou et al., 2021). Yet, the increase of budget-friendly HR software and use of cloud technologies give small businesses new ways to use digital recruitment (Bradač Hojnik & Hudek, 2023). Among SMEs in Bangladesh, HR functions are moving towards digital transformation, especially to gain an edge over rivals by managing talent efficiently. Companies now often use online job sites like Bdjobs and LinkedIn to get skilled applicants and begin using digital methods for hiring (Hosain & Mamun, 2023). By adopting e-recruitment and selection, SMEs can reduce their environmental impact, improve transparency and fairness, and align HR practices with broader corporate sustainability objectives (Adawiah & Putra, 2024). These technologies not only support operational efficiency but also contribute to the development of a sustainable, inclusive, and agile workforce (Kocot et al., 2024).

H₂: e-Recruitment and Selection positively influences CS

e-Training

The main form of e-training in e-HRM is conducting training through technology and online tools for employees. Many businesses, particularly SMEs, are using this method because it is easy to use and meets their CS goals (Epebinu & Abiola-Oke, 2023). e-training enables organizations to provide flexible, on-demand learning opportunities that are not bound by physical or geographic constraints. This is particularly relevant for SMEs in developing countries like Bangladesh, where resource limitations

often restrict access to conventional training infrastructure (Tarhini et al., 2018).

e-training promotes continuous literature by offering employees autonomy over their study pace and content, which enhances insight retention and engagement. e-training decreases carbon footprints by reducing travel needs, paper waste and expenses for training buildings AI (Aina, R., and Faisal, 2024). It encourages both learning and creativity which play an important role in making a company sustainable over time (Jabbour and Santos, 2019).

Moreover, e-training, remote or marginalized areas receive the same educational opportunities as other workers. (Wang et al., 2020). Having a resilient and equitable workplace supports the sustainable growth of SMEs.

In the Bangladeshi SME context, digital training platforms offer a scalable and affordable solution for capacity-building. Organizations in Bangladesh are introducing e-training among other digital HR practices to stay ahead of competitors and address labour shortages. Using these initiatives uplifts productivity and helps companies focus on good business practices that benefit the environment (Islam and Nasir, 2020). To summarize, e-training contributes greatly to helping SMEs achieve corporate sustainability. It helps to develop a knowledgeable team that supports the goals of environmental, social and economic areas (Faal, 2020).

H₃: e-Training positively influences CS

e-Performance Management

e-Performance Management is an important activity in e-HRM that helps supervise, measure and aid in improving employee performance through online tools (Epebinu et al., 2024). In Bangladesh, where SMEs are mainstays, using e-performance management saves both time and money, allowing firms to better support their sustainable corporate goals (Kwatinyuy, 2018). In terms of sustainability, e-performance management systems reduce the need for paperwork, business trips and additional admin help, benefiting the environment. Moreover, digital platforms facilitate a culture of continuous improvement and accountability, which is essential for long-term organizational resilience and social responsibility (Jabbour & Santos, 2010).

Bondarouk & Ruël (2019) state that electronic tools for HRM such as e-performance management, help link HR to the organization's efforts to be sustainable. To ensure employees follow sustainability, organizations include KPIs for environmental, social and ethical issues in their work (Yusliza et al., 2020). Most Bangladeshi SMEs are limited by resources in putting effective HR systems in place. Fortunately, thanks to adaptability and scalability, e-performance management platforms allow these businesses to manage formal reviews without causing major costs (OLADELE & Mohammed, 2024). Islam & Nasir (2020) found that SMEs in Bangladesh are increasingly using digital HR systems to ensure their employees stay responsible and help achieve company goals related to sustainability. Furthermore, HR managers are able to use these systems to base their decisions on data, detect weaknesses in employees skills, encourage improvement and improve employees performance. They are vital for forming a team that can adapt and contribute to making the business environment sustainable (Parry & Strohmeier, 2014).

In conclusion, e-performance management allows SMEs to bring about positive changes in environmental, social and economic sustainability (Javed et al.,2023). By aligning employee goals with corporate sustainability objectives, these systems help embed a performance culture that is transparent, accountable, and future-focused.

H₄: e-Performance Management positively influences CS

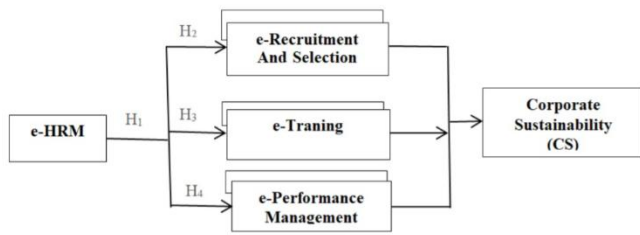


Figure-1: Conceptual Proposed Model

Methodology

Data Collection

The respondents were full time HR professionals of SMEs within Bangladesh that were the study population. The decision to use convenience sampling was based on the fact that access to an extensive database of SMEs does not exist, and no previous literature attempting to study SMEs in a developing economy exists (Shamsudin et al., 2024).The questionnaire consists of the first part demonstrate the demographic data of respondents which are (Gender, Position, Year of experience, and Educational level). Whereas in the second part, it explored the independent variable which is comprised of e-HRM. There were three dimensions that were measured on the other hand which is (e-recruitment & selection, e-training, e-performance management). Apart of 495, the total number of surveys that were distributed was 432 (response rate 87.27%). Nevertheless, 34 of the surveys could not be included in the data analysis because of the validity. On these grounds therefore, the ultimate acceptable surveys to the statistical analysis will be 398.

Analysis and Results

The researcher used a first generation statistical package; that is, a Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) in order to answer

the research questions and test the hypothesis. Cronbachs Alpha test was also used to test reliability and consistency of the data collection instrument as well as multiple and simple regressions to test the research hypothesis (Malapane & Ndlovu,2024). This section will bring out the findings of the survey conducted on the respondents of the questionnaire. These findings are according to the availability of the research respondents.

Reliability and Validity

The displays of the reliability analysis are provided in table 1. Reliability is interpreted as the extent to which a variable maintains itself over whatever is suggested to be measured (Deng et al., 2018) Cronbachs Alpha value has been utilized to determine whether the items used in assessing each of the variables: e-HRM (e-recruitment and selection, e-training, e-performance management) and CS are reliable. A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.70 or above indicates strong scale reliability (Alkhodary,2021) according to the test results, all values exceeded the required minimum value of 0.70.

Table: 1 Reliability Test

Variables	Number of Statements	Values of Alpha
Corporate Sustainability (CS)	9	0.821
e-Recruitment & Selection	8	0.765
e-Training	8	0.798
e-Performance Mangement	8	0.805

Note: CS=CorporateSustainability **Source:** SPSS, Compiled by Author

The reliability test has been conducted by carrying out Cronbach alpha test, which provides the outcome of the internal consistency of the questionnaire, that is, how closely the questions and the variables used are dependent on each other. As stated in the results of this study, the used measurement is reliable, because the results of alpha equal (0.70) or more so it is accepted (Alkhodary, 2021).

Table: 2 Connection Matrix and Expressive Analysis

Dimensions	e-Recruitment & Selection	e-Training	e-Performance Mangement	e-HRM	Corporate Sustainability
Mean	4.231	4.012	3.852	4.021	4.153
SD	.527	.762	.773	.598	.621
e-Recruitment & Selection	1.000	.732**	.583**	.627**	.649**
e-Training	.715**	1.000	.613**	.892**	.611**
e-Performance Mangement	.655**	.765**	1.000	.851**	.754**
e-HRM	.851**	.798**	.827**	1.000	.688**
CS	.769**	.689**	.712**	.871**	1.000

Source: SPSS, Compiled by Author

Note: SD=Standard Deviation. **Correlation is remarkable at the 0.01 Level.

In table 2 the expressive statistics show the values of mean and standard deviation for each variable, and it provides the results of the correlations between these variables. In accordance with

Möttus (2022), values between (0.30 and – 0.70) indicate a moderately positive (negative) correlation. Table 2 shows that correlations between independent and dependent variables are likable.

Table: 3 Regression Analyses

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables								
	e-HRM								
	e-Recruitment & Selection			e-Training			e-Performance Mangement		
	R	Adjusted R ²	Sig.	R	Adjusted R ²	Sig.	R	Adjusted R ²	Sig.
CS	0.769	0.586	0.000	0.689	0.470	0.000	0.712	0.504	0.000

Note: Sig.=Significance. **P<.01.N=398

Source: SPSS, Compiled by Author

As per the findings of regression analysis (table-3), the association of e-HRM and CS is significant at the statistical level as (sig. >0.05). Therefore, hypothesis H₁ is supported (there exists a strong positive relationship between e-requirement & selection and CS). That is, e-requirement & selection contributes positively and significant effects on CS in another word. Moreover, (R²= .586) which implies that strategic flexibility identifies 58.6% of the variance in CS, since, (sig. >0.05), the relationship between e-training and CS are statistically significant (sig. > 0.05). Assisted hypothesis H₂ (the positive correlation of both CS and e-training exists) is that the e-training and CS have a positive and significant relationship with one another (R²= 0.470). In line with this, e-training accounts to 47.0% of the CS variance. According to the outcomes of regression analysis, the correlation between e-performance management and CS is of a significant level (sig. > 0.05). Both the plus e-performance management and CS have positive correlations with one another (R²= .504). So, 50.04 % of the variations in CS have been explained by e-training. In turn, H₃ (existence of favorable relationship between e-performance management and CS) is supported. In yet another word, e-training has good and significant impacts on CS. Regression analysis further affirms that, the whole encompassing area in e-HRM that is e-recruitment & selection, e-training, and e-performance management, highly and significantly influences CS.

Review Findings and Research Proportions

It has been found through this study that e-HRM, especially e-recruitment & selection, e-training, and e-performance management, helps improve CS in SMEs in Bangladesh. It was found in the regression analysis that all e-HRM components play a

positive and major role in achieving CS, confirming the hypothesis starting with H₁ though H₄.

Results showed that e-recruitment & selection (R² = 0.586, p < 0.01) plays the leading role in influencing CS among all three areas examined. The benefits researcher discovered with digital hiring match the same ones stated by Rahaman (2022) & Oberst et al. (2008). Using less paper, saving on recruiting costs and reaching a wider group of people in hiring are all ways that e-recruitment & selection help sustainability in both social and environmental ways. This proves that automating recruitment through technology is important even when resources are limited in companies in Bangladesh.

In a similar way, the research showed that e-training made a strong contribution to CS (R² = 0.470, p < 0.01), as explained in the works of Jabbour & Santos (2019) & Wang et al. (2020). Digital learning methods offer convenient, adaptable, that's why these features are especially useful for SMEs that have little to work with. It appears from the results that digital training improves skills individually and also helps the organization improve its commitment to sustainability.

The relationship between e-performance management, and customer success management was confirmed by the analysis (R² = 0.504, p < 0.01), as stated in H₃. The findings support earlier research pointing out that digital performance systems support accountability, ongoing improvement and KPIs that promote environmental and social progress (Yusliza et al., 2020; Javed et al., 2023).

This paper establishes that e-HRM especially e-recruitment is critical where the concept of sustainability is embedded in SMEs. SMEs tend to have restricted resources unlike big companies yet digital HR has empowered the SMEs in a way that costs are saved, it is transparent and inclusive. The above findings add to the previous findings that e-HRM benefits not only efficiency but also

makes SME align to environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainability.

Implications

The lessons from this study are valuable for both theoretical research and real world applications in small businesses of developing nations, especially Bangladesh. According to theory, the research discovery provides more evidence that e-HRM is important for leading a business toward corporate sustainability. Previously, studies have concentrated on corporations with large budgets, but this study reveals that e-HRM elements work equally well in smaller resource settings. People realize that e-HRM serves administrative purposes as well as supports sustainability among employees. Finding that each e-HRM dimension is related to CS in a statistically significant manner supports the theories that place digital HR at the heart of a company's resilience, adaptability and future success in emerging markets.

From a points of view, the study shares useful advice for small business owners, HR staff and managers who aim to improve their organization's sustainability and staff management. Researcher found that using digital methods for recruiting supports transparency, is cheaper, brings more diversity to recruiting and is less harmful to the environment. Also, e-training provides accessible and flexible courses that help close skill gaps and support a sustainability focused group of employees. Additionally, e-performance management systems support companies in making sure their workers achieve both CS and personal goals using quick access to and evaluation of real-time data. SMEs that want to compete well and act responsibly in the global business world can especially gain from these methods, even with small budgets and infrastructure. Consequently, making use of e-HRM technologies is required to help small companies achieve economic, environmental and social objectives all at once rather than viewed just as a technology change.

Conclusion

This research explored the relationship between using e-HRM approaches like e-recruitment & selection, e-training, and e-performance management and CS in Bangladeshi SMEs. Results suggest that all the three main e-HRM components have significantly and positively influenced sustainability outcomes, just as was expected by the hypothesis. e-recruitment & selection had the biggest impact, indicating that digital recruitment improves efficiency and fairness and helps reach small planet goals. Relying on e-training and e-performance management encourages diversity in learning and saves resources. The results point out that e-HRM aids in achieving sustainability by freeing up resources in organizations. This research supports the literature showing that digital transformation helps make sustainability possible. It is suggested that e-HRM in SMEs, besides making handling personnel simpler, also fuels a strong determination to sustainably running a business for a long period. That is why encouraging the use of e-HRM can help Bangladesh and other developing countries reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and develop more responsible, robust enterprises.

In conclusion, e-HRM plays a key role in sustaining the business of the SMEs in Bangladesh. The practice which affected the most among the three was e-recruitment & selection, then e-performance management and e-training. These results indicate that by embracing digital HR products, SMEs will be able to execute

sustainability objectives with limited resources. Promotion of e-HRM on large scale may enable SMEs in Bangladesh and other developing countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Limitations and Future Research

A few limitations are present in this study which should be acknowledged. Because convenience sampling was used, the results may not reflect the situation for all SMEs in Bangladesh. In addition, all the data came from questionnaires that respondents themselves filled out, so there could be some bias in their answers. The third point is that with a cross-sectional study, only a brief moment is measured and there is no record of how situations evolve over time. What's more, the study only included three e-HRM components, while additional important topics such as e-compensation or digital employee engagement were not looked at. Researchers concentrated solely on small businesses in Bangladesh, so the results may have restrictions on other types of companies.

The suggested criteria for future studies are to be models based on a longitudinal study, the incorporation of other HR dimensions (e-compensation, digital engagement), and cross-country comparisons. The significance of the government policy and the digital infrastructure would also be worth investigating in regard to understanding the adoption of e-HRM in SMEs.

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