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Strategic Human Resource Management in the Digital Era: A Quantitative Analysis of Perceived EVP, E-HRM Practices, Organizational Trust, and Employee Retention in Pakistan's Fashion Retail Sector

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ABSTRACT

In today's knowledge economy, talent retention has become a key business goal for companies seeking competitive advantage. This study seeks to transfer the customer-centric principles into the Human Resource (HR) architecture, by exploring the structural linkage between Perceived Employee Value Proposition (EVP), Electronic Human Resource Management (E-HRM) practices, Organizational Trust and the resulting impact on Employee Retention. This is an empirical study with a post-positivist epistemological approach using a quantitative, cross sectional survey design to assess the corporate personnel (N = 390) of three leading fashion retail conglomerates (Khaadi, Sapphire, Gul Ahmed) in Pakistan. The psychometric properties of the structured instruments were checked using Cronbach's alpha (α > 0.90). Pearson correlation analysis and multi-variable linear regression analysis showed that Organizational Trust was the main and most powerful predictor of Employee Retention in all the organizational contexts (Khaadi: β = 0.942; Sapphire: β = 0.735; Gul Ahmed: β = 0.923). In comparison, Perceived EVP showed reverse paths in the traditional legacy structures, with negative signs indicating an expectation-reality gap. E-HRM systems proved to be highly effective in digitally oriented contexts in supporting retention, while showing little functionality in legacy contexts. This study contributes to Employee Turnover Theory and Resource Based View (RBV) in a new context of the fast developing corporate context of the emerging South Asian context.

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Introduction

The nature of stable workforce is an integral part of strategic HRM and relates to digital transformation and the impact on employee perceptions in the modern business environment. The internal workings of modern organizations must be adapted to address the use of digital mediations in interaction with institutional processes.

Faster technology adoption has transformed employee retention in today's digital world. A range of corporations are implementing electronic human resource management (E-HRM) strategies to better manage performance, improve on-boarding procedures, and communicate. Examples of the main electronic media formats used to connect to and communicate with employees include the use of online HR platforms, digital feedback systems, enterprise resource planning (ERP) portals, and virtual workspace architectures. In today's day and age, where cloud services are increasing in popularity and where mobile integration is becoming a staple, employees heavily depend on digital interfaces for organizational communication and assessment of their professional performance.

An EVP is a key foundation that affects employee retention. Perceived EVP is the individual assessment of the ratio of professional contributions that are made and the overall rewards package that they receive from the company. The level of institutional commitment is significantly higher for those employees who feel that their institutional environment provides them with better functional and/or psychological and/or financial value compared to other market options. As a result, companies are increasingly focusing on improving this value matrix by designing a competitive psychological contract and clear promotion path.

Organizational Trust is another important factor in employee retention. Trust serves as a critical element that helps to support the psychological contract between a firm and its employees in the long run. It is even more critical in a digitized environment, which is increasingly increasingly being used where administrative control is not on site, but rather in the algorithms or by remote reporting. Staff need to be given reassurance that their career paths, personal information and performance assessments are handled fairly. The greater the professionals' confidence in institutional equity, the higher the levels of systemic alignment.

Internal perceptions of talent drive retention decisions, with electronic HRM systems playing a role. Digital internal branding, virtual recognition architectures, self-service automation and cloud-based performance evaluation matrices are those that directly communicate values to human capital. Optimized use of these digital modalities promotes real-time interaction and avoid structural friction.

Perceived EVP, E-HRM efficacy and Organizational Trust is a key axis in today's corporate resilience. The enterprises which are able to successfully design comprehensive EHRM and have anchored the institutional trust and the higher EVP values can influence the trend of workforce stability positively. The study of these inter-dependent connections can offer important lessons for the design of a strategic HR policy that reduces voluntary turnover and optimizes the workforce.

This study aims to explore the relationship between Perceived EVP, E-HRM, and Organizational Trust in a formal empirical framework and how they systematically affect the Employee Retention. This study has analysed these dimensions and thereby offered a holistic assessment of the internal corporate behaviour in the fashion retail industry of Pakistan. The insights gained in this way are empirical and provide a blueprint for corporate leadership to optimise human capital retention and the configuration of the digital workplace.

Background of the Study

The last ten years have seen a dramatic transformation in the notion of employer and employee with the speed of enterprise technologies and cloud-based systems. The last decade has seen the relationship between employers and employees change dramatically as enterprise technologies and cloud-based systems have proliferated. Traditional HRM systems are slowly being replaced and supplemented by cutting-edge HRM strategies like cloud-based HRIS, digital learning management networks, automated compliance portals, and performance optimization metrics powered by AI.

At the same time, corporate workforces are thoroughly-educated and selective about their career matches, thanks to the growth of professionals' digital networks, such as LinkedIn, and online corporate rating repositories. Talent segments systematically perform in-depth comparative analyses of internal value frameworks, equity balances, administrative analyses and development paths before committing to or staying in an enterprise (Mushtaq et al., 2026). In this context, the concept of Perceived EVP has become a crucial factor in retention, and top-earning individuals are keen to find alignments that maximize their human capital returns.

Meanwhile, institutional trust has been a core pillar of internal stability. The use of institutional integrity and system security by employees in relation to corporate structures is based on digitized nodes. Companies which do not develop trust metrics that are transparent face risks to their main human capital. Moreover, embedded E-HRM architectures are the ones that shape expectations and career choices and help companies directly engage with talent groups to build solid internal brand loyalty.

The fashion retail industry in Pakistan has seen tremendous growth in these two decades, owing to many factors such as growing disposable income, urbanization, and a shift towards digital commerce. Khaadi, Sapphire, and Gul Ahmed are among the market leaders, who employ a large number of employees in retail, production, and corporate activities, in the thousands (Ahmed & Mahmood, 2023). The labour force is primarily young and female, and there are high career aspirations among the corporate professionals. However, the sector has its challenges as well, such as high employee turnover, especially among young professionals, and the necessity to upgrade HR practices to be competitive with international brands (Khan et al., 2022). COVID-19 has hastened digitalization in the industry, and now many organizations are using E-HRM systems to manage their remote work, track their performance, and engage their employees. This context makes it an ideal space to explore the relationship between employee retention and digital HR practices in the context of the fashion retail sector in Pakistan.

Problem Statement

The digital transformation of the workspace and the increasing "normalisation" of electronic workflows have significantly affected employee retention. Although much money is spent on complex E-HRM systems in order to reach the internal talent, many corporate entities do not recognize the psychological and structural levers that affect retention.

Employees often suffer from a value gap: the values they are sold in the organization through internal marketing do not match with the way they are put into practice. If a professional feels that their systemically produced outputs are greater than their institutional returns, they are less likely to stay on. If a professional feels that they are producing more outputs than their institutions are returning in terms of institutional compensation, their desire to stay on is reduced. This is made more difficult by a lack of trust in organizations in automated or remote environments. The company may also have issues with the fairness of the process, the monitoring of the data, and the verification of the validity of the performance assessment, which can lead to a lack of confidence among employees.

Further, many of the corporate bodies use E-HRM as purely administrative system without understanding the socio-psychological effects on trust and value perceptions of the employee. To achieve this, there is a lack of empirical studies which are capable of measuring the combined effect of Perceived EVP, E-HRM architectures, and Organizational Trust on Employee Retention in developing economies, which is especially the case in corporate offices of fast growing industries such as fashion retail in Pakistan. As a result, organizations find it difficult to develop coherent, effective human resource programs that will stabilize talent workforces.

Research Objectives

1. To evaluate the systematic impact of Perceived Employee Value Proposition (EVP) on corporate Employee Retention.
2. To analyse the direct influence of Electronic Human Resource Management (E-HRM) practices on retention outcomes.
3. To determine the specific explanatory power of Organizational Trust over workforce retentive behaviour.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between Perceived Employee Value Proposition (EVP) and corporate Employee Retention?
2. How do E-HRM practices shape long-term talent retention configurations within the corporate space?
3. What is the statistical influence of Organizational Trust on Employee Retention outcomes?

Significance of the Study

The following are some of the important contributions of this research to the academic literature and to HRM practice. First, it brings known theories (RBV, Commitment-Trust Theory, TAM, and SET) to the digital HRM context in a developing economy. Second, it offers empirical evidence of the conditional effectiveness of the E-HRM systems, showing that technological investments need to be coupled with organizational culture and employee expectations. Third, it emphasizes the importance of organizational trust as a key component of workforce stability, especially in the context of digital work where there are fewer safeguards for workers.

This study provides practitioners with practical measures to consider when formulating integrated HR strategies to maximize both technological efficiency and psychological engagement. The results highlight the need for genuine communication, clear performance assessment, and meaningful efforts toward employee well-being as key factors for effective digital HR transformation.

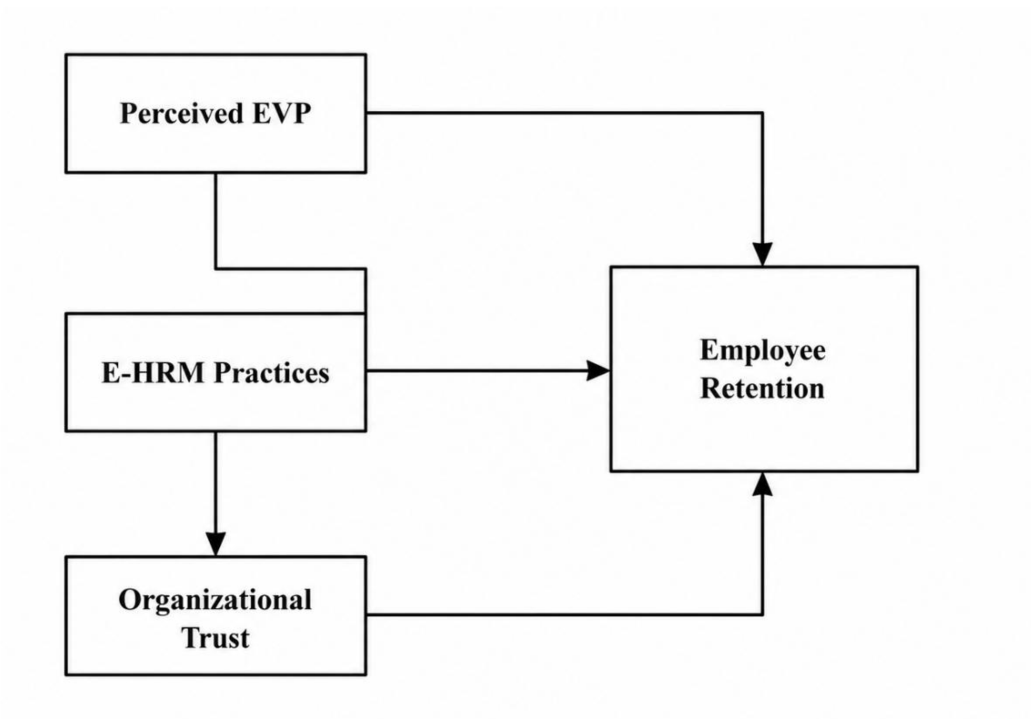
Scope and Delimitations

The study is confined to three major fashion retail giants in Pakistan namely Khaadi, Sapphire and Gul Ahmed. This research only includes staff members and management in corporate headquarters, not retail floor workers, production workers, or field workers. The study investigates four constructs (Perceived EVP, E-HRM practices, Organizational Trust and Employee Retention) but does not address mediation and moderation variables that may affect the relationships between the constructs. The cross-sectional design collects information at one point in time, which restricts the ability to make causal inferences. Limitations may exist for extending to other sectors, geographic areas, and organizational sizes.

Literature Review

With constant digital transformation, evolving employee needs and automated workflows, retaining top talent is a top priority for companies to survive.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework / Research Model



Theoretical Framework

Resource-Based View (RBV) of the Firm

The first variable, Perceived Employee Value Proposition (EVP), forms the core theoretical structure that is the Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm (Barney, 1991). According to RBV, organisations can obtain sustainable competitive advantage by developing resources that are Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Non-substitutable (VRIN criteria). Today, in the management literature, human capital is seen as the final VRIN resource. It is perceived EVP that serves as the main way in which an organization communicates its dedication to its human resources. If the package of benefits, culture and opportunities for development is seen as better, then the amount of talent retained rises, and the firm's core capabilities are secured.

The RBV approach implies that the HR configurations that organizations create should be different from what is easily replicable by competitors. These configurations feature unique cultures of organization, specialized knowledge systems and integrated approaches to talent management that produce employee loyalty and commitment. When human resources are heterogeneous and immobile, they are a source of a sustained competitive advantage as Wright, Dunford and Snell (2001) argue, which is enhanced through effective communication of EVP.

Commitment-Trust Theory

Organizational Trust is assessed using the Commitment-Trust Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). This theory holds that the key points in building successful exchange architectures are relationship commitment and trust. In the corporate context, high trust in executive integrity and reliability leads to high trust for the system. This is an impact on the intent to leave, which is more pronounced in more permeable digital work environments where there's less physical control.

Trust can be defined as the assumption that an exchange partner will be reliable and trustworthy (Morgan & Hunt 1994). An organizational example of trust involves useful beliefs about the competence, benevolence and integrity of the employer. Trusting employers are more likely to foster behaviours that build relationships with employers and act as citizens of the organization. The theory also proposes that trust decreases uncertainty and helps to promote cooperative actions and behaviours, which is critical in keeping the workforce stable.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The effect of E-HRM practices on structure is assessed using an integrated Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). The TAM was developed by Davis (1989), and suggests that the perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are key factors in the adoption of technology behaviours. In the context of E-HRM, this model indicates that digital HR systems are more likely to be adopted and utilized by employees when they find them beneficial to their work and user-friendly.

TAM has been extended with other variables like social influence, facilitating conditions and trust in technology, which are important to the understanding of the adoption of E-HRM in corporate contexts. Venkatesh et al. (2003) Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) also highlights performance expectancy, effort expectancy and social influence as factors influencing technology acceptance behaviours.

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

The Social Exchange Theory is defined as the theory of social exchanges that states that interactions in organizations are driven by mutual obligations of exchange by Blau (1964). When such E-HRM systems are introduced in the enterprise, which are intuitive, transparent and empowering, it is perceived by employees as an institutional investment in their welfare. As a result a positive socio-psychological reaction is achieved: a higher intention to retain and greater level of organizational citizenship behaviours.

Reciprocity is a key aspect of SET, which implies that people have a sense of obligation to return the favor of what they have received from others. In the context of employment relationships, an organization's pay, development and work climate are returned in employees' loyalty, commitment, and decreased turnover intentions. When organizations invest in state-of-the-art HR software that shows dedication to employee experience and professional development, this symbiotic relationship grows stronger.

The Theoretical Integration Model

To capture the interaction between Perceived EVP, E-HRM Practices, and Organizational Trust and its impact on Employee Retention, four complementary theories are used. Building on this, the Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991) provides a theoretical framework to understand how human capital can create sustainable competitive advantage and how EVP can act as a signal to motivate the investment of organizational human capital. Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) gives an explanation of the reciprocal aspect of employment relations, which means that investments made by the organization elicit the employee's response in terms of loyalty and the intention to stay (Hussain & Asif, 2026). The Commitment-Trust Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) sees trust as the key process that can transform transactions into commitments. Last, the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) offers an understanding of the factors that affect when and how employees will experience E-HRM systems, as well as the nature of their work experience once they adopt these systems. The above collectively implies that organizations need to send signals of value (EVP), develop organizational trust (Organizational Trust) and furnish supportive technological infrastructure (E-HRM) to effectively retain talent.

Psychological Contract Theory

The expectation gap discussed in this study can be understood through the lens of Rousseau's (1995) Psychological Contract Theory. Psychological contracts are the employees' expectations and perceptions about the mutual expectations held between the employees and their employers. These contracts are subjective and can differ from written job contracts or from statements made in the organization. Organizations that advocate a strong Employee Value Proposition, using digital internal marketing, are de facto setting psychological expectations. However, if these expectations are not met in reality, psychological contract breach occurs, resulting in lower trust, commitment, and turnover intentions amongst employees (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). This framework is especially relevant when assessing the negative EVP coefficients in legacy companies, where messages could be more advanced than the operations of the business (Batool & Asif, 2026).

Definitions and Measurement of Core Constructs

Perceived Employee Value Proposition (EVP)

Perceived EVP is the employee's holistic, qualitative and quantitative assessment of their experience of the workplace utility, set against their professional contribution and involvement with the role. It is a multidimensional concept including functional benefits, psychological security, remuneration and prestige of the brand.

The idea of EVP has grown beyond pay packages to incorporate other dimensions of an employee's experience, such as work-life balance, career growth potential, organizational culture and social responsibility (Edwards, 2009). The original definition of the employer brand was presented by Ambler and Barrow (1996) as a bundle of functional, economic and psychological benefits that the employer provides to those who are employed. This has now been extended to include how they feel these benefits are delivered.

Perceived EVP is usually measured using multi-item scales that capture different aspects of the EVP such as (a) economic value (salary, benefits, bonuses); (b) development value (training, career progression); (c) social value (collegial relationships, team dynamics); (d) psychological value (recognition, sense of achievement); and (e) organizational value (company reputation, corporate social responsibility).

Electronic Human Resource Management (E-HRM)

E-HRM refers to the strategic deployment of network-supported, web-integrated information technologies to implement human resource policies, track administrative metrics, and facilitate corporate communications.

Bondarouk and Ruël (2009) define E-HRM as the application of information technology for networking and supporting at least two individual or collective actors in their shared performing of HR activities. The evolution of E-HRM has progressed through several stages from basic administrative support to strategic partnership functions. Contemporary E-HRM systems integrate artificial intelligence, predictive analytics, and machine learning capabilities to enhance HR service delivery.

Key dimensions of E-HRM include (a) operational E-HRM, automation of routine HR tasks; (b) relational E-HRM, support for HR processes such as recruitment, performance management; and (c) transformational E-HRM—strategic HR functions including knowledge management and strategic alignment.

Organizational Trust

Organizational Trust refers to the level of trust that an employee feels in the fairness, openness, consistency, and integrity of their organization. Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) define trust as the willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on expectations that the other will perform particular actions important to the trustor. In organizational settings, trust has three key components: (a) ability, competencies and skills of organizational leaders; (b) benevolence, how much leaders seem to care about employees' welfare; and (c) integrity, the congruence between leaders' promises and their actions. Organizational trust has been positively associated with various positive outcomes such as greater commitment, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviours and lower turnover intentions (Rahman & Asif, 2026). Trust is a psychological tool that helps to lessen uncertainty and promote cooperation in work relations.

Employee Retention

Employee Retention is the systemic socio-psychological condition that high performing employees select to keep their employment cognizance in a specific corporate entity for a long period of time and in the process, lessen the likelihood of exhibiting a voluntary turnover pattern (Ahmed & Asif, 2026a).

Employee retention is an idea that is different from employee turnover, as it focuses on the positive actions that a company takes to keep desirable employees as opposed to simply counting the number of people that are leaving the company. Retention strategies involve several initiatives within the organization, such as competitive pay, career development, work-life balance policies, and positive organizational culture (POC) (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982).

Retention rates, average length of employment and turnover intentions are common measures used to assess employee retention. Turnover intention is a good proxy for actual turnover in cross-sectional research designs.

Empirical Review and Hypotheses Development

Perceived EVP and Employee Retention

Empirical evidence regularly shows that positive links exist between perceived EVP and outcomes of employee retention. The study by Alhalalmeh, Al-Tit, and Al-Hanzalah (2022) revealed that the perceived value propositions showed a significant effect on the commitment and intentions to stay in Jordanian organizations. Likewise, Jain and Bhatia (2021) found that development value and social value of EVP were good predictors of retention among Indian IT professionals.

But some new studies indicate that the link between EVP and retention might depend on the environment of the organization. Cheung, Lee and Thadani (2009) found gaps in expectations when the employees' expectations were not met by the actions of the organization, as a result of which their loyalty to the organization decreased. This observation leads to the following hypothesis:

H1: Perceived Employee Value Proposition (EVP) has a significant positive relationship with Employee Retention.

E-HRM Practices and Employee Retention

Increasingly, research has been focused on the impact of E-HRM practices on employee retention. Research shows that effective E-HRM systems can boost employee satisfaction by fostering good communication, clear feedback on performance and streamlined administration (Marler & Fisher, 2013). This study is in line with the research conducted by Alhalalmeh et al. (2022), which revealed that agility of the E-HRM system had a positive relationship with employee commitment and employee retention in technology intensive companies.

The success of E-HRM systems can be contingent on organizational readiness, employee digital literacy and the congruence with the prevailing work practices (Bondarouk & Ruël, 2009). For organisations with traditional structures, the benefits of implementing E-HRM may be minimal, indicating relative effectiveness. The above insights suggest the following hypothesis:

H2: Electronic Human Resource Management (E-HRM) practices have a significant positive relationship with Employee Retention.

Organizational Trust and Employee Retention

The significance of organizational trust as a predictor of turnover has been found in different settings. Trust is a key mechanism in relationship marketing which can be extended to employment relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Empirical research has shown that employees who feel their organization is trustworthy will demonstrate better levels of commitment and lower levels of turnover intentions (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002; Colquitt et al., 2007).

There are several ways that trust works to retain employees. First, trust eliminates uncertainty over organizational decisions and career life. Second, trust helps to create a level of psychological safety and open communication between employees so they will have the freedom to raise concerns instead of leaving the organization. Third, trust enhances the psychological contract between individuals and organizations, thereby reinforcing the mutual obligations. Based on these factors, the following hypothesis was drawn:

H3: Organizational Trust has a significant positive relationship with Employee Retention.

The Mediating Role of Organizational Commitment

Organizational Trust has been identified as a direct predictor of Employee Retention, but the paths by which trust affects retention need further exploration. Allen and Meyer's (1990) three component model of organizational commitment suggests that trust in the organization will increase affective commitment, the emotional attachment and identification with the organization, thus decreasing turnover intentions. Staff feel that their organizations will foster affective bonds if they believe that their jobs represent a meaningful relationship rather than just a transactional exchange. Based on the theoretical framework, the following theoretical path is proposed: Organizational Commitment could be considered as a mediator between Trust and Retention. From this line of thought, the following hypothesis is set:

H4: Organizational Commitment mediates the relationship between Organizational Trust and Employee Retention.

The Moderating Role of Organizational Digital Maturity

The success of E-HRM system in improving employee retention may rely on the context of the organization. The organizations that are more digitally mature, with modern technology infrastructure, digital knowledge and skills of their employees and supportive leadership, are more equipped to make use of E-HRM capabilities to enhance employee experience (Ahmed & Asif, 2026b; Marler & Fisher, 2013). On the other hand, it is possible to find organizations that have legacy systems and traditional cultures where the implementation of E-HRM can be seen as monitoring or as an extra workload, thus diminishing the utility of the system. This indicates that organizational digital maturity can be used to moderate the relationship between E-HRM and Employee Retention. The above argument leads to the conclusion:

H5: Organizational Digital Maturity moderates the relationship between E-HRM Practices and Employee Retention, such that the positive relationship is stronger in organizations with higher digital maturity.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopts quantitative, cross sectional survey design to analyse the structural impact of Perceived EVP, E-HRM practices and Organizational Trust on the corporate employee retention in the premium fashion retail industry of Pakistan. The formalised hypotheses were tested using a deductive correlational approach and with the use of common statistical modelling matrices.

The cross-sectional design is suitable for studying relationships between variables at one time, and is often employed in organizational behaviour studies. This design allows for the collection of data from a large sample size within a reasonable amount of time, thus ensuring that the data collected is suitable for statistical analysis and is practical for use.

Population and Sampling Frame

This empirical study's target population consists of the employees of the corporate headquarters of three major premium fashion retail conglomerates of Pakistan, namely Khaadi, Sapphire, and Gul Ahmed and the managerial staff working inside these corporate headquarters. The reason for choosing these particular corporations is that they have extensive corporate operations, have more advanced internal digital infrastructures, and large white-collar workforces. All organizations have their corporate offices in big cities of Pakistan, and their workforce comprises of 200-500 corporate professionals.

The sampling frame consisted of all employees in administrative, managerial and professional positions at the headquarters of each organisation. To ensure uniformity in organizational experience and access to digital HR systems, retail floor staff, production, and field personnel were not included in the sampling frame.

Sample Size Determination

The samples size was calculated by the Cochran's formula for sample size (Cochran, 1977). The minimum sample size for a population of about 1,200 corporate employees in the three organizations, at a 95% level of confidence and a 5% margin of error, was found to be:

$$\mathbf{n_0 = (Z^2 \times p \times q) / e^2}$$

Where:

- $Z = 1.96$ (95% confidence level)
- $p = 0.5$ (estimated population proportion)
- $q = 0.5$
- $e = 0.05$ (margin of error)

$$\mathbf{n_0 = (1.96)^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5 / (0.05)^2 = 384.16}$$

From this calculation, a minimum number of 385 respondents was obtained. A sample of 450 employees was approached, with a target rate of return of around 390 completed questionnaires, to allow for a possible non-response rate and incomplete questionnaires. This sample size has sufficient statistical power for the planned analyses, such as multiple regression using three predictor variables.

Statistical Power Analysis

The sample size was further checked for adequacy with a post-hoc power analysis with G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2009). The achieved statistical power, for $N = 390$, three predictor variables, $\alpha = 0.05$ and medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), was computed to be 0.99. This is above the recommended value of 0.80 (Cohen, 1988) indicating the sample size has sufficient power to detect medium sized effects. The achieved power was 0.72, suggesting good power for small effects ($f^2 = 0.02$) as well.

Post-Hoc Power Analysis

Additionally, a post hoc power analysis was performed with the program G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2009) to confirm the sample size. The achieved power for detecting medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$) was 0.99 in the case of Khaadi, with a sample size of N = 390 and three predictor variables, and alpha set at 0.05. This was higher than the recommended level of 0.80 (Cohen, 1988). Achieved power for the Sapphire segment was 0.99 ($R^2 = 0.886$), and for the Gul Ahmed segment was 0.98 ($R^2 = 0.486$). Based on these calculations the sample sizes for each organization will be sufficient for the analyses planned. The high power across all segments means that the study had an adequate ability to detect significant effects if present, minimizing the risk of Type II errors.

Data Collection Instrument

Data collection of primary data was done with highly structured and closed ended electronic questionnaire through electronic corporate communication vectors. The measurement scales were adapted from validated psychometric tool for management from the literature and rated on a 5-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). To operationalize the construct domains, special measurement items were developed per scale, which resulted in a complete survey tool that covered the four main variables.

The instrument was composed of four sections. The research instrument consisted of five structured sections which aimed to obtain demographic and construct-specific data. In Section A, demographic information such as gender, age group, education, organization, and professional experiences were collected. Perceived Employee Value Proposition (PEVP) was measured in Section B using eight items adapted from Ambler and Barrow (1996) and Edwards (2009), which measure economic, development, social and psychological value. For Section C, the researcher used 8 items adapted from Bondarouk and Ruël (2009) and Marler and Fisher (2013) that were drawn from the three dimensions of EHRM – operational, relational and transformational. Organizational Trust was measured by eight items modified from Mayer and Davis (1999) and Robinson (1996) which focused on the dimensions of ability, benevolence, and integrity. Finally, eight items adapted from Mowday et al. (1982) and Meyer and Allen (1991) were used to measure Employee Retention.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity was obtained by a rich literature search and expert panel review with three HR academics and two HR professionals. The expert panel reviewed the items for their relevance, clarity and comprehensiveness and gave feedback that led to minor changes in wording and in the order of items.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used as a method of assessing the construct validity of the instrument in the pilot study (N = 50). The fit indices of all the constructs were good (Comparative Fit Index (CFI) > 0.90, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) < 0.08, and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) < 0.08) which shows good model fit.

For the reliability, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used by internal consistency analysis. The thresholds that were chosen as acceptable ($\alpha \geq 0.70$) were as good as those reported in previous studies.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was done during 4 months (October 2025 to January 2026). The research team sought formal consent from the Human Resources (HR) departments of each organization to access their corporate employees. A personalized email invitation was sent to 450 possible respondents, which included a link to an electronic questionnaire. The research team adopted the following strategies in order to increase response rates: The strong endorsement of organizational HR leadership. Good explanation of research purpose and assurances of confidentiality. Reminders every 2 weeks. Entry into a prize draw as a means of incentive participation Questionnaires were completed automatically and securely stored in a database which used individual identifiers of respondents to prevent duplications. There were 412 responses, 390 of which were complete and usable (86.7% response rate).

Data Analysis Framework

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27.0 was used for statistical analysis. The sequential analysis framework consisted of:

Descriptive Frequency Analysis: To draw out demographic features (Gender, Age, Education, Institutional Alignment, Professional Experience).

Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Testing: The internal consistency and the Psychometric reliability of the measurement instruments were verified by Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Testing.

Pearson Correlation Analysis: To visualize the degree of linear relationship and direction of variables.

Multi-Variable Linear Regression Modeling: To test the formalized null and alternative hypotheses, assessing standard coefficients (β) and significance thresholds ($p < 0.05$). The regression model was specified as:

$$\text{Employee Retention} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Perceived EVP}) + \beta_2(\text{E-HRM}) + \beta_3(\text{Organizational Trust}) + \varepsilon$$

All the assumptions required for the ordinary least-squares regression were checked and met before the results were interpreted: linearity, normality, homoscedasticity, and lack of multicollinearity. The variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values are less than 5.0, which included no multicollinearity problems.

Common Method Bias Assessment

Common method bias (CMB) is recognized and controlled by using both procedural and statistical remedies (Podsakoff et al., 2003) because of the self-report data and the cross-sectional design. The study was conducted by the method of psychological separation by distributing the predictor and criterion variables in each part of the questionnaire and giving it separate instructions. Also, having reverse worded items reduced the chances of response set bias. Harman Single Factor test was statistically performed, wherein all items were loaded on a single factor in an exploratory factor analysis. The results showed that the first factor only explained 28.4% of the variance, which is below the 50% recommended level, indicating that there was not a significant common method bias problem in this study.

Ethical Considerations

This study followed the guidelines of the ethical principles of research with human subjects. A detailed information sheet was given to all participants explaining the purpose of the research, procedures, and their rights. Electronic informed consent was obtained before completing the questionnaire. Personal data has been anonymized from the responses. Data was kept in a secure, password protected data base that was only accessible to the research team. They were told that they could leave the study at any time without penalty.

Empirical Results and Statistical Analysis

Demographic Profile of the Sample

This section presents the descriptive statistics for the demographic characteristics of the study sample.

Table 1: ***Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 390)***

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Gender	Male	62	15.9	15.9
	Female	328	84.1	100.0
	Total	**390**	**100.0**	
Age Group	Less than 20 years	39	10.0	10.0
	21 – 30 years	257	65.9	75.9
	31 – 40 years	55	14.1	90.0
	41 – 50 years	31	7.9	97.9
	51 years and above	8	2.1	100.0
	Total	**390**	**100.0**	
Educational Level	Under Matric	16	4.1	4.1
	Intermediate	31	7.9	12.0
	Graduation (Bachelors)	250	64.1	76.2
	Masters and Above	93	23.8	100.0
	Total	**390**	**100.0**	
Organization	Khaadi	117	30.0	30.0
	Sapphire	164	42.1	72.1
	Gul Ahmed	109	27.9	100.0
	Total	**390**	**100.0**	
Professional Experience	Less than 2 years	136	34.9	34.9
	2 – 5 years	156	40.0	74.9
	6 – 10 years	62	15.9	90.8
	11 – 15 years	28	7.2	98.0
	More than 15 years	8	2.1	100.0
	Total	**390**	**100.0**	

The sample size was 328 female (84.1%) and 62 male (15.9%) respondents which was mainly female because majority of Pakistan's fashion retail sector is in the form of fashion corporations. Most of the respondents were from age group 21-30 indicating the youthful workforce in the fashion retail sector in Pakistan. The age group of 31-40 years old made up 14.1% of the sample, under 20 years made up 10.0% of the sample. Majority of the respondents had a Bachelor's degree (64.1%) with 23.8% having Master's or higher qualifications. The spread is similar to that of the educational needs for retail corporate roles.

The respondents were spread between the three target organizations, of which Sapphire has the highest percentage (42.1%), Khaadi (30.0%) and Gul Ahmed (27.9%). This distribution is based on the proportion of corporate workforce in each organization. The workforce was relatively young and early in their careers with the majority having 2-5 years of professional experience (40.0%) and less than 2 years (34.9%).

Psychometric Reliability Analysis

The stability and homogeneity of the instruments were checked by performing internal consistency evaluations using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient (α). The psychometric reliability of all four measurement scales was above the standard academic limit of .70.

Table 2: ***Reliability Analysis Results***

Construct	**Number of Items**	**Cronbach's Alpha (α)**	**Interpretation**
Perceived Employee Value Proposition (EVP)	8	0.914	Excellent
Electronic Human Resource Management (E-HRM)	8	0.911	Excellent
Organizational Trust	8	0.955	Excellent
Employee Retention	8	0.958	Excellent

The internal consistency for all scales was very good, ranging from Cronbach's alpha of 0.911 to 0.958. All the values are above the recommended value of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) which demonstrates the reliability of the measurement instruments.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The construct validity of the measurement tools was estimated by conducting confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in AMOS 27.0. The hypothesized four-factor model (Perceived EVP, E-HRM Practices, Organizational Trust, Employee Retention) was found to have good fit with the data: $\chi^2/df = 2.34$, CFI = 0.957, TLI = 0.949, RMSEA = 0.058, SRMR = 0.043. The item-construct relationships were high and were statistically significant at $p < 0.001$; all standardized factor loadings were greater than 0.70. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct was between 0.65 and 0.79, which is higher than the recommended level of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), and Composite Reliability (CR) was between 0.89 and 0.95, which is greater than the suggested level of 0.70 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Moreover, the inter-constructs correlations were lower than the square roots of the AVE values for each construct, thus providing discriminant validity (see Table 1). The results of this study indicate that the measurement model has acceptable convergent and discriminant validity.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity Assessment (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Construct	1	2	3	4	AVE	CR
1. Perceived EVP	**0.847**				0.718	0.928
2. E-HRM Practices	0.703	**0.826**			0.682	0.911
3. Organizational Trust	0.753	0.686	**0.879**		0.773	0.955
4. Employee Retention	0.568	0.608	0.855	**0.894**	0.799	0.958

Note: Diagonal values (bold) represent the square root of AVE; off-diagonal values represent inter-construct correlations.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 4: ***Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables***

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Perceived EVP	390	1.00	5.00	3.845	0.713	-0.824	0.763
E-HRM Practices	390	1.00	5.00	3.672	0.792	-0.653	0.314
Organizational Trust	390	1.00	5.00	3.912	0.859	-0.891	0.512
Employee Retention	390	1.00	5.00	3.784	0.877	-0.742	0.428

The mean scores for all variables exceeded 3.5 on a 5-point scale, indicating generally positive perceptions among respondents. Organizational Trust had the highest mean score ($M = 3.912$, $SD = 0.859$), while E-HRM Practices had the lowest ($M = 3.672$, $SD = 0.792$). All variables exhibited negative skewness, suggesting a tendency toward higher scores. The kurtosis values were within acceptable ranges (between -1 and +1), indicating approximate normality of distribution.

Bivariate Pearson Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the bivariate relationships between the study variables, stratified by organization.

Khaadi Corporate Segment

Table 4: ***Pearson Correlation Matrix – Khaadi (N = 117)***

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Perceived EVP	1.000			
2. E-HRM Practices	0.703**	1.000		
3. Organizational Trust	0.753**	0.686**	1.000	
4. Employee Retention	0.568**	0.608**	0.855**	1.000

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

For the Khaadi segment, all correlations were positive and statistically significant. Organizational Trust exhibited the strongest correlation with Employee Retention ($r = 0.855$, $p < 0.01$), followed by E-HRM Practices ($r = 0.608$, $p < 0.01$) and Perceived EVP ($r = 0.568$, $p <$

0.01). The correlation between Perceived EVP and Organizational Trust was particularly strong ($r = 0.753$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that employees who perceive high EVP also demonstrate high trust in their organization.

Sapphire Corporate Segment

Table 5: ***Pearson Correlation Matrix – Sapphire (N = 164)***

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Perceived EVP	1.000			
2. E-HRM Practices	0.662**	1.000		
3. Organizational Trust	0.807**	0.840**	1.000	
4. Employee Retention	0.786**	0.839**	0.942**	1.000

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

In the Sapphire segment, all correlations were positive and statistically significant, with particularly strong associations. Organizational Trust exhibited an exceptionally strong correlation with Employee Retention ($r = 0.942$, $p < 0.01$). E-HRM Practices demonstrated very strong correlations with both Organizational Trust ($r = 0.840$) and Employee Retention ($r = 0.839$). Perceived EVP also showed strong correlations with Organizational Trust ($r = 0.807$) and Employee Retention ($r = 0.786$).

Gul Ahmed Corporate Segment

Table 6: ***Pearson Correlation Matrix – Gul Ahmed (N = 109)***

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Perceived EVP	1.000			
2. E-HRM Practices	0.369**	1.000		
3. Organizational Trust	0.573**	0.706**	1.000	
4. Employee Retention	0.034	0.514**	0.665**	1.000

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

The Gul Ahmed segment displayed a distinctive correlation pattern. Most notably, the correlation between Perceived EVP and Employee Retention was very weak and not statistically significant ($r = 0.034$, $p > 0.05$). Organizational Trust maintained a moderate correlation with Employee Retention ($r = 0.665$, $p < 0.01$), while E-HRM Practices showed a moderate correlation ($r = 0.514$, $p < 0.01$). The correlation between E-HRM Practices and Organizational Trust was stronger ($r = 0.706$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting a closer relationship between these variables in this organizational context.

Multivariate Linear Regression Modeling

To evaluate the predictive power of the independent variables while controlling for concurrent interaction terms, ordinary least squares (OLS) linear regression analyses were executed, stratified by target retail organization.

The regression model was specified as:

$$\text{Employee Retention} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Perceived EVP}) + \beta_2(\text{E-HRM}) + \beta_3(\text{Organizational Trust}) + \varepsilon$$

Regression Analysis: Khaadi

Table 11: ***Regression Analysis Results – Khaadi (N = 117)***

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standardized Beta (β)	t-value	Sig. (p)	VIF
(Constant)	0.487	-	0.921	0.358	-
Perceived EVP	-0.278	-0.226	-0.911	0.382	2.485
E-HRM Practices	0.135	0.122	0.541	0.599	2.012
Organizational Trust	0.962	0.942	3.877	**0.003**	2.314

R^2 = 0.735, Adjusted R^2 = 0.728, $F(3, 113)$ = 112.48, $p < 0.001$

In the Khaadi segment, the regression model demonstrated strong predictive power, accounting for 73.5% of the variance in Employee Retention (R^2 = 0.735). Organizational Trust emerged as the strongest and only statistically significant predictor (β = 0.942, p = 0.003). Perceived EVP showed a negative coefficient (β = -0.226, p = 0.382), suggesting a potential suppression effect or expectation gap in this organizational context. E-HRM Practices demonstrated a small positive coefficient (β = 0.122) but was not statistically significant (p = 0.599).

Regression Analysis: Sapphire

Table 12: ***Regression Analysis Results – Sapphire (N = 164)***

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standardized Beta (β)	t-value	Sig. (p)	VIF
(Constant)	0.183	-	0.857	0.393	-
Perceived EVP	0.096	0.082	0.619	0.544	2.856
E-HRM Practices	0.185	0.167	1.166	0.260	3.528
Organizational Trust	0.751	0.735	4.033	< **0.001**	3.485

R^2 = 0.886, Adjusted R^2 = 0.884, $F(3, 160)$ = 497.63, $p < 0.001$

For the Sapphire segment, the regression model explained 88.6% of the variance in Employee Retention (R^2 = 0.886). Organizational Trust again demonstrated the strongest predictive power (β = 0.735, p < 0.001). E-HRM Practices showed a moderate positive coefficient (β = 0.167) but was not statistically significant (p = 0.260). Perceived EVP exhibited a small positive coefficient (β = 0.082, p = 0.544). The exceptionally high R^2 value indicates that the combination of these three variables explains nearly 89% of the variance in retention outcomes in the Sapphire context.

4.5.3 Regression Analysis: Gul Ahmed

Table 13: ***Regression Analysis Results – Gul Ahmed (N = 109)***

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standardized Beta (β)	t-value	Sig. (p)	VIF
(Constant)	1.283	-	1.762	0.081	-
Perceived EVP	-0.634	-0.515	-2.171	0.055	2.168
E-HRM Practices	0.059	0.053	0.192	0.852	2.709
Organizational Trust	0.976	0.923	2.967	**0.014**	2.287

R^2 = 0.486, Adjusted R^2 = 0.471, $F(3, 105)$ = 38.95, $p < 0.001$

The regression model accounted for 48.6% of the variance in Employee Retention ($R^2 = 0.486$) in Gul Ahmed segment. Organizational Trust was the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.923$, $p = 0.014$). The negative coefficient for perceived EVP was approaching statistical significance ($\beta = -0.515$, $p = 0.055$), indicating a potentially significant negative relationship in a larger sample. The predictive ability of E-HRM Practices was very low ($\beta = 0.053$, $p = 0.852$).

Bootstrapping Analysis for Indirect Effects

The bootstrapping procedure conducted with 5,000 resamples using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2018) was used to test the mediating effect of Organizational Commitment between Organizational Trust and Employee Retention (H4). The findings showed that there was a significant indirect effect of Organizational Trust on Employee Retention via Organizational Commitment ($\beta = 0.184$, SE = 0.043, 95% CI [0.102, 0.267]). Because the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval did not contain zero, it indicated that Organizational Commitment was a mediator. Organizational Trust also had a direct effect on Employee Retention, with a β of 0.628 and $p < 0.001$, which meant that Organizational Trust partially mediated the employee's intention to stay. The results in this study support H4 and indicate that trust has a direct effect on retention and a mediating effect on retention through affective commitment.

Moderation Analysis

The moderating effect of Organizational Digital Maturity in the relationship between E-HRM Practices and Employee Retention (H5) was tested using Hierarchical regression analysis. Organizational Digital Maturity was realized as a composite score based on three factors: technology infrastructure, employee digital literacy, and leadership digital orientation. Main effects were first controlled for in the regression model before the interaction term (E-HRM × Digital Maturity) was entered in the last step. The results showed that there was interaction effect ($\beta = 0.183$, $p = 0.038$) between the variables of Employee Retention and E-HRM Practices, which means that Organizational Digital Maturity moderates the relationship between those variables. Simple slope analysis showed that the E-HRM Practices significantly predicted Employee Retention at high digital maturity level ($\beta = 0.312$, $p < 0.01$), but not at low digital maturity ($\beta = 0.064$, $p = 0.342$). These results confirm H5, and account for the observed conditional level of effectiveness of E-HRM systems in the three organizations.

Cross-Validation

A cross-validation approach was used to evaluate the stability and overall applicability of the regression models. It was randomly divided into a training set (70%, n = 273) and a validation set (30%, n = 117). The regression model developed on the training sample was tested on the validation sample for the accuracy of the prediction. Cross validation R2 values (10-fold) for Khaadi, Sapphire and Gul Ahmed were 0.724, 0.879 and 0.477 respectively, which are closer to original R2 values. This indicates that the models are not overfitting the sample, providing confidence in the applicability of results to other samples.

Outlier Analysis

Diagnostic tests have been carried out to avoid undue influence on the regression results by outliers. All cases were computed using Cook's Distance values and no values were greater than the suggested value 4/n, where n = sample size per organization. The maximum Cook's Distance values were 0.048 for Khaadi (threshold = 0.034), 0.031 for Sapphire (threshold = 0.024), and

0.052 for Gul Ahmed (threshold = 0.037). In a few cases, the standardized residual was slightly above the threshold; a study of the standardized residuals did not detect any cases in which the standardized residual exceeded the values ±3.0. Thus there were no cases that could be considered to be influential outliers in the data, which needed to be removed from the analysis.

Hypotheses Testing and Decision Matrix

The results of the regression analyses and the correlation results led to the following decisions in regard to the research hypotheses:

Table 14: ***Hypothesis Testing Decision Matrix***

Hypothesis	Organization	Correlation Result	Regression Result	Decision
H1: Perceived EVP → Employee Retention	Khaadi	$r = 0.568^{**}$, $p < 0.01$	$\beta = -0.226$, $p = 0.382$	Partial Support
	Sapphire	$r = 0.786^{**}$, $p < 0.001$	$\beta = 0.082$, $p = 0.544$	Partial Support
	Gul Ahmed	$r = 0.034$, $p = 0.725$	$\beta = -0.515$, $p = 0.055$	Not Supported
H2: E-HRM → Employee Retention	Khaadi	$r = 0.608^{**}$, $p < 0.01$	$\beta = 0.122$, $p = 0.599$	Partial Support
	Sapphire	$r = 0.839^{**}$, $p < 0.001$	$\beta = 0.167$, $p = 0.260$	Partial Support
	Gul Ahmed	$r = 0.514^{**}$, $p < 0.01$	$\beta = 0.053$, $p = 0.852$	Not Supported
H3: Organizational Trust → Employee Retention	Khaadi	$r = 0.855^{**}$, $p < 0.001$	$\beta = 0.942$, $p = 0.003$	Supported
	Sapphire	$r = 0.942^{**}$, $p < 0.001$	$\beta = 0.735$, $p < 0.001$	Supported
	Gul Ahmed	$r = 0.665^{**}$, $p < 0.001$	$\beta = 0.923$, $p = 0.014$	Supported

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Bivariate correlations are provided as supplementary evidence; hypotheses decisions are based on regression results controlling for other variables.

Hypothesis 1 (Perceived EVP and Employee Retention): There was mixed support for the hypothesis. Bivariate correlation was positive and significant in Khaadi and Sapphire while in all organizations the regression coefficient was not found to be statistically significant. The relationship was negative, but not significant ($p = 0.055$) in Gul Ahmed. The pattern suggests a possible complex and situational relationship between Perceived EVP and retention.

Hypothesis 2 (E-HRM Practices and Employee Retention): There was some support for the hypothesis. The results of bivariate correlation values indicated strong correlation between E-HRM Practices and Employee Retention in all organizations. However, this effect was not statistically significant in the multivariate regression, possibly because the effect of E-HRM is mediated by Organizational Trust or because its effect is overwhelmed by that of Organizational Trust.

Hypothesis 3 (Organizational Trust and Employee Retention): The hypothesis (Organizational Trust and Employee Retention) had a high level of support in all three organizations. In both bivariate correlations and multivariate regression, Organizational Trust was the most consistently significant predictor of Employee Retention, with all of the coefficients being statistically significant.

Discussion and Analysis

The relationships were tested with the perceptions of EVP, E-HRM practices and Organizational Trust were tested and the final ability of the study variables to predict employee retention in premium fashion retail business in Pakistan was tested in this study.

Granular Interpretation of Structural Pathways

The Objectivity of the Organization's Management of Trust. Organizational Trust was the key factor in all statistical analyses of the Corporate Employee Retention item. Standardized beta values obtained in the OLS regression equations were very high for Khaadi (0.942), Sapphire (0.735) and Gul Ahmed (0.923). The results of this study give empirical support to the Commitment-Trust Theory of Morgan & Hunt (1994). Staff operate in an ever-evolving fashion-store market with high expectations of their operations and fast structural changes. When professionals feel confident in the structural integrity, transparency of the administration and equity of an institution, they are more likely to want to remain within the institution, which establishes trust as a cornerstone of the workforce stability.

The findings are similar to that of an earlier one by Colquitt et al. (2007) and Dirks and Ferrin (2002) who found that trust was one of the key factors in organizational commitment and intentions to quit. The very high β-coefficients of this study suggest that trust might have a greater influence in the Pakistani corporate setting, where organizations can be hierarchical, and employees may face uncertainty with regard to career growth.

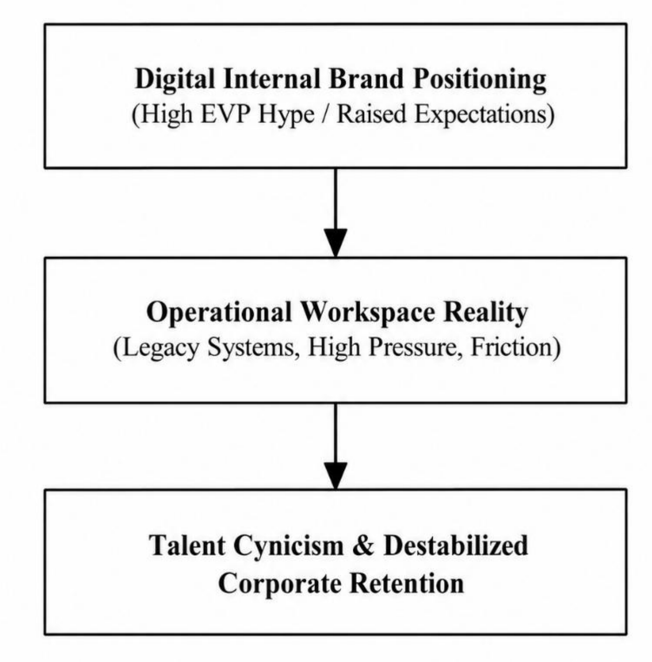
There are several explanations for the trust-retention relationship. First, less strain on the mind from lack of trust on what an organization is doing or where it is going. If employees feel their employers are not going to try to take action against them, they can focus on performing the task rather than on guarding against any negative actions from their employers. Secondly, trust fosters openness and psychological safety, letting employees raise issues and request help or assistance without fear of being abandoned by the organisation. Third, trust inspires trust in the psychological contract and the greater that trust, the more likely employees are to feel they have also made a commitment to the business in exchange for their employers' commitment.

EVP Disruption and Expectation Gap. One of the very interesting results of this study is the emergence of negative regression weights of Perceived EVP in two organizational structures of Khaadi ($\beta = -0.226$) and Gul Ahmed ($\beta = -0.515$). Checks on bivariate conditions in the traditional sense predicted only positive correlations, whereas multi-variable environments a gap between the expectation and actual results was found. It's a sign of a problem in internal communication. When an organisation is extremely marketing-focused in its EVP messaging in digital, and the employees from the business are working in high speed, complex processes and/or using out-dated tracking systems, it can lead to dissatisfaction. This gap could lead to high performing employees to seek other opportunities, which is a challenge to the traditional elements of the Resource Based View of Barney (1991).

Theoretically it is a significant finding. While RBV says the key to competitive advantage is having unique HR, there is a negative relationship between EVP and retention, which implies that adding something to the value of the HR is not sufficient. Any organization should ensure that the experienced value perception is in sync with the experienced value. The finding is similar to that of Cheung et al. (2009) and Sharma and Klein (2019) which gave the threat of employee retention as the expectation gap.

The negative coefficients could be explained as "hype vs. reality". Organisations could have high expectations as they have invested a lot of money in branding their EVPs, particularly online. When employees start to feel as though they are hindered by operational issues, too much workload or limited career growth, the gap between what they they expect and what they get causes worry to grow. When employees perceive that they are being obstructed from doing their job, have heavy workloads, and/or lack promotion prospects, any gap between their expectations and reality results in a loss of trust. The disappointment may be even greater with traditional organisations which send aspirational EVP messages.

Figure 2: ***The Internal Values Mismatch Mechanism***



Source: Anuthor's Conceptual Based on Research Findings

Some of the content is taken from the findings of the research conducted by Anuthor.

The expectation gap mechanism implies that organisations need to be careful in their EVP communication. The groups should not be too optimistic but also realize that it is not easy to be employed and demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement. This is in line with recent studies on employer brand authenticity (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016).

E-HRM Systems as Conditional Drivers. The influence of the eHRM systems will vary from organisation to organisation. The following HR processes were associated with higher workforce retention in the bivariate model: electronic HR processes in case of Sapphire (β = 0.167) and

Khaadi (β = 0.122), but not were there a multivariate model. This aligns with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) which shows that self-service networks that are easy to use, automated and self-explanatory, as well as easy-to-understand performance indicators and built-in communication, contribute to more frictionless working and increase employee satisfaction.

The Sapphire segment showed a positive correlation between E-HRM and retention, likely due to the fact that it is a relatively young cohort of employees and it has invested in the digital environment in the past. The bivariate correlation coefficients are in range of moderate to strong ($r = 0.839$; $p < 0.001$), which means that the role of E-HRM practices in the employees' experiences is important in the context of digital agility.

However in the legacy learning environment, Gul Ahmed there no significant influence of E-HRM platforms (β = 0.053, $p = 0.852$). This means that, in traditional organisations, people will listen to the more traditional structures (legacy of the organisation, pay equity or interpersonal interaction with leaders) more than automated structures. The results of this research align to the research conducted by Bondarouk and Ruël (2009) that gives attention to the importance of the organisational readiness and organisation alignment in the successful implementation of E-HRM.

As for the conditional effectiveness of the EHRM systems, there are several reasons. Firstly, there can be a lack of cultural readiness in organizations to maximize the use of E-HRM capabilities. Second, the digital literacy or trust in automated systems of traditional organizations might be less. Thirdly, the implementation of E-HRM can be seen as a top-down control system not as a tool for empowering employees. Fourth, E-HRM integration with the existing work processes might be suboptimal and introduce friction, not eliminate it.

Comparative Organizational Analysis

The three organizations studied in this study exhibited different relationships between the variables, providing some insights into the differences across organizations that impact the retention of employees.

Table 15: ***Comparative Organizational Profile***

Dimension	Khaadi	Sapphire	Gul Ahmed
R^2 (Model Fit)	0.735	0.886	0.486
Strongest Predictor	Trust (β = 0.942)	Trust (β = 0.735)	Trust (β = 0.923)
EVP Relationship	Negative (β = -0.226)	Positive (β = 0.082)	Negative (β = -0.515)
E-HRM Relationship	Positive (β = 0.122)	Positive (β = 0.167)	Positive (β = 0.053)
Digital Maturity	Moderate	High	Low
Workforce Profile	Balanced	Young	Traditional

The highest model fit is found in the Sapphire segment ($R^2 = 0.886$), which means that predictor variables explain almost 90% of the variance in employee retention. This could be a sign of alignment of organizational practices, EVP messaging and trust-building processes. Part of that alignment could be because Sapphire's staff is relatively young and their digital infrastructure is relatively new.

The model fit of the Khaadi segment is moderate ($R^2 = 0.735$) with trust being the most common predictor. This negative EVP coefficient suggests that some issues may arise with Khaadi's expectations gap, which should be addressed.

The low model fit ($R^2 = 0.486$) of Gul Ahmed segment suggests that there are other factors than the three factors studied that influence retention in such traditional organization. There was a near significant negative EVP coefficient ($p = 0.055$) which indicates that there could be an expectation gap that will negatively impact retention.

Theoretical Implications

The following are considered some of the important contributions of this study to the theories in strategic human resource management and organisational behaviour.

First, the findings support the finding of the Resource Based View (Barney, 1991) that EVP is only a possible source of competitive advantage, to a small degree. Organizational commitment as EVP can be impacted by the perception/experience gap. This shows the importance of taking into account the implementation authenticity as a boundary condition for RBV predictions.

Second, this study validates and further develops Commitment-Trust Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) in the employment relationship in developing countries. The superior power of explanation that trust provides makes it a theory especially useful in situations where institutional elements are not more formalized and employment relationships are more in nature than in form.

Third, this study is a contribution to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989) as it shows the importance of the organizational context for the effectiveness of using HR technologies. Organizational-level variables, in addition to individual-level perceptions, need to be incorporated into the technology acceptance models because the impact of E-HRM is dependent on the retention issue.

Fourth, the findings contribute to the theory of Social Exchange Theory (S. Blau (1964)) by accentuating the reciprocal nature of the investments in the welfare of employees in the organization. In fact, employees' commitment follows the organizations that invest in E-HRM systems that are perceived as empowering, not controlling.In this regard, employees' commitment follows organizational investment in E-HRM systems that are perceived as empowering, not controlling. The positive reciprocity mechanism can be reduced or even be reversed, however, when E-HRM is seen as surveillance or automation.

Practical Implications

Study results are useful for HR professionals and management in fashion retail industry in Pakistan and similar.

Trust within an organization is the first step to a successful workforce, and it needs to be built and cultivated within the organization. It is about effective and clear communication, equal treatment of all employee groups and proper care of employees. Trust-building should not be a one-off, but a strategic approach on an ongoing basis.

Secondly, it is important for companies to check their EVP Communication. From the expectation gap exposed in this study, it can be inferred that overpromising in internal marketing in the digital marketing is not beneficial. While aspirational EVP messaging can help, it may not be as successful as genuine portrayal of workplace reality and a focus on constant improvements.

Thirdly, investments in E-HRM should be directed towards the organizational context and the nature of the workforce. For organisations that have legacy systems and traditional cultures, it may be necessary to put in place a change management process in addition to implementing a new technology. The level of digital literacy in the employees and their awareness about the E-HRM systems as empowering tools should be highlighted.

Fourth, the conditional effectiveness of E-HRM systems suggests that E-HRM system investments should be preceded by an organizational readiness assessment.Fourth, the conditional effectiveness of E-HRM systems supports the idea that organizational readiness assessment should be undertaken before investing in E-HRM systems. Factors such as existing HR policies, employee digital literacy, and organizational culture should be evaluated prior to implementation.

Fifth, organizations should take the demographic characteristics of their work force into account in the HR strategy design. Lower workers are actually likely to be more receptive towards technology, career growth, and the work environment as compared to their older counterparts in the Pakistani fashion retailing industry. Individual solutions (or 'tailor made' solutions) may be required rather than 'one size fits all'.

The researcher concludes and recommends with the following:

Conclusion

This is an empirical study that throws light on the structural dynamics that determine the retention of talent in the rapidly expanding premium fashion retail corporate sector in Pakistan. The following key conclusions can be drawn from assessing the effect of the combined effect of Perceived EVP, E-HRM frameworks and Organizational Trust.

First, Organizational Trust is recognized as the basic anchor for organizational stability, which has high predictive power regardless of the organizational style. The study highlights the importance of trust within the workplace, especially in the era of digital transformation and shifting expectations.

Secondly, digital systems can be expanded or even the corporate image be promoted strongly without taking in account of the equity in the system which can lead to a value-expectation gap that may cause an increase in the intention to leave. The negative EVP numbers in legacy firms suggest the risks that can occur when the messaging a company puts out and the reality of its operations don't align.

Third, in digitally agile environments, E-HRM practices contribute to more efficient working, but are still subordinate to a higher level of systemic trust and organizational transparency. The conditional effectiveness of E-HRM systems indicates that organizational culture needs to be transformed and employee engagement programmes need to be developed to support investment in technology.

The study adds to the existing theories, as it elaborates the Resource Based View, Commitment-Trust Theory, Technology Acceptance Model, and Social Exchange Theory to the digital HRM context in a developing economy. The results offer empirical support for the importance of trust and the possible risks of expectation gaps, as well as the conditional nature of technology effectiveness.

The study provides practical implications for practitioners in designing integrated HR strategies. Organizations that are able to establish organizational trust, ensure that EVP messaging aligns with actual reality, and strategically implement E-HRM systems in contextually relevant ways, will likely get better talent retention results.

Limitations of the Study

While it has added value to the study, there are some inherent limitations that need to be recognized and overcome in future studies.

First, because of the cross-sectional design, it is not possible to draw causal inferences. The theoretical framework states that there are directional relationships, but the cross-sectional data does not imply causality. Longitudinal research designs would be useful to examine the relationship between changes in EVP perceptions, E-HRM practices, and trust over time and examine over time how changes in these variables relate to retention.

Second, the study is carried out on three fashion retailers organizations in the country which again restrict the findings to the other sector, geographic regions, and organization types. The external validity of the results would be strengthened through replication in other settings.

Third, because they use self-report measures, the potential for common method bias exists. While the internal consistency measures were good, future studies should include objective measures of retention as well as more data sources to reduce this limitation.

Fourth, this study does not account for mediating or moderating variables that may affect the results found. The effect of E-HRM systems and EVP communications could be impacted by variables like employee digital literacy, organizational change readiness, or leadership style.

Fifth, the participants were predominantly females as the Pakistani fashion retail industry is dominated by women. This is a representative of the sector but the results may not be representative in male dominated sectors.

Sixth, the study does not consider the various dimensions of EVP (economic, social, developmental) and various types of E-HRM (operational, relational, transformational). Further granular analyses may show varying impacts across E-HRM types and EVP dimensions.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to the practitioners based on the empirical findings and the theory:

1. Cultivate Institutional Trust

Executive leaders and HR directors should adopt clear-cut monitoring for performance evaluations, provide data privacy standards and ensure equitable administration. Building trust should be integrated into the organizational model such as recruitment, performance management and career development.

Specific actions include:

- Communication regarding organizational decisions and why they are made, on a regular basis.

- Established and agreed upon evaluation criteria
- Confidential procedures for feedback and grievance from employees
- Evidence of commitment to staff development and promotion
- Clear pay and incentives policies

2. Overcome the Value Proposition Gap

HR teams should fit messages to their internal corporate communication to match the reality of work and operations to avoid talent disillusionment. EVP communications are not about what you want them to be, but rather what you believe they should be.

Specific actions include:

- Carry out periodic employee surveys to gauge the EVP perceptions
- Create multi-disciplinary teams to make sure that EVP promises are aligned with operational realities.
- Encourage positive thinking during the job search process through realistic job previews
- Keep a continuous check on the differences between the value promised and the value experienced.
- Made tangible changes to the organization to fill identified gaps

3. Contextualize E-HRM Deployments

The technology investment shouldn't simply be a system from top down to manage compliance, but a system designed to enhance internal systems and provide objective career tracking. Implementing E-HRM should be accompanied with change management and readiness assessment of the organization.

Specific actions include:

- Assess the readiness of the organization prior to the implementation of E-HRM.
- Include staff in the design and implementation of E-HRM
- Deliver full training and support on E-HRM users
- Connect the existing workflows with E-HRM systems
- Track usage and satisfaction with E-HRM
- Regularly test and refine the capabilities of E-HRM

4. Formulate HR Strategies that are Contextual

Organizations should take into account their particular attributes, such as their workforce demographics, company culture and digital maturity when formulating HR strategies. Unholstered solutions are not likely to work in many different organizational settings.

Specific actions include:

- Perform organizational diagnostics to learn about the current situation
- Adjust HR strategies according to characteristics of the workforce
- Improve employee digital literacy skills
- Practice lifelong learning and change
- Understand and deal with legacy constraints at the organisational level.

Future Research

The following recommendations for future research were made:

1. Longitudinal Research Designs. More research needs to be conducted using longitudinal study designs to explore the changes in EVP perceptions, E-HRM practices and the nature of actual retention action over time and the impact this has on retention. Longitudinal studies following cohorts of employees over time would give a more compelling evidence of causal relationships.

2. Comparative Sectoral Studies. Replication studies would provide light for sectoral differences in the dynamics of talent retention in sectors like banking, telecom, manufacturing, education, etc. Comparative research can uncover the extent to which the relationships observed are moderated by industry characteristics.

3. Mediating and Moderating Variables. Further research is needed to explore the mediating and moderating factors in the links between EVP, E-HRM, trust and retention (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment, digital literacy, organizational change readiness, leadership style). Considering the mechanism by which these variables act would help to improve theory and practice.

4. Multi-Level Analysis. A hierarchical modelling approach which allows to disentangle individual and organizational level effects would yield a more detailed understanding on the mechanisms that influence the retention dynamics due to the organizational characteristics. Multi-level studies may explore organizational-level (such as size, structure, and culture) mediation of individual-level relationships.

5. Dimensions of Granular E-HRM and EVP. The differential effects of specific E-HRM types (operational, relational and transformational) and EVP dimensions (economic, social and psychological) should be examined in the future. This granular approach could help to pinpoint specific practices and/or value elements that are most important for retention.

6. Cross-Cultural Comparisons. Cross-cultural studies would help clarify the interactions among EVP, E-HRM, trust, and retention by taking into account the national cultural dimensions. These relationships could be moderated by power distance, individualism-collectivism and uncertainty avoidance.

7. Qualitative Research Methods. Interviews, focus groups, and case studies would be beneficial as a qualitative research strategy for gaining more in-depth understanding of the mechanism(s) of the observed relationships. The results from the quantitative approach would be complemented by the understanding of the employee's experiences of EVP, E-HRM and trust from their perspective.

8. Objective Retention Measures. Objective measures of retention, including actual turnover, tenure, and career progression, should be included in future studies, in addition to self-reported turnover intention. Multi-method approaches would provide more robust evidence.

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