

CAN CONTEMPORARY STRATEGIES CREATE MULTIPLE IMPACT? REDEFINING EMPLOYER BRANDING THROUGH SUSTAINABILITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract: This paper explores how contemporary corporate strategies can create synergy and generate multidimensional impact by integrating employer branding, sustainability, and stakeholder engagement within a unified organizational and communication framework. It analyzes a qualitative case from the pharmaceutical industry—an experiential sustainability initiative known as STADA EXPO—designed to connect employees and external stakeholders through immersive, value-driven experiences. The study investigates whether sustainability communication, when co-created with employees, can simultaneously strengthen internal engagement, enhance external reputation, and raise public awareness of corporate responsibility. A qualitative case-study approach combines document analysis, company publications, and secondary literature on employer branding and stakeholder management. The results indicate that experiential sustainability projects can transform corporate communication into multidimensional platforms that build emotional connection, reinforce authenticity, and foster collaboration across functions and geographies. By engaging employees as ambassadors and hosts, organizations translate abstract environmental, social, and governance (ESG) commitments into tangible human experiences that inspire both the current and future workforce as well as the wider community. The paper concludes that employer branding must evolve beyond image management toward purpose-driven engagement as a strategic enabler of resilience and shared value, emphasizing the integration of sustainability storytelling and employee participation into HR and communication strategies to achieve measurable, long-term impact across social, cultural, and business dimensions.

Keywords: employer branding, sustainability, stakeholder engagement, corporate culture, employee experience, shared value.

Field: Social sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly competitive labor market, an organization's reputation has become one of the most decisive factors in attracting high-quality candidates. In this context, the significance of employer branding can hardly be overstated. According to a recent report by Apollo Technical (2025), as many as 75 percent of job seekers research an employer's reputation and brand before applying for a position. This shift confirms that employer branding has evolved from a peripheral marketing tool into a strategic determinant of organizational attractiveness and long-term competitiveness (Reis, Sousa, & Dionísio, 2021; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Within the broader sustainability discourse, contemporary scholarship highlights the growing importance of Green Human Resource Management (Green HRM)—the systematic inclusion of environmental and social goals across HR practices, from recruitment and training to performance appraisal and employee engagement. As Chowdhury, Mendy, and Rahman (2023) observe, Green HRM models increasingly underpin sustainable organizational identities and provide frameworks for redefining success through ecological and social contribution. In parallel, Mazur (2025) introduces the concept of employee-driven branding for sustainability, emphasizing that employees themselves are becoming brand co-creators who project organizational values and purpose both internally and externally.

Against this backdrop, the present study explores how purpose-driven innovation can redefine employer branding and foster cross-sector collaboration by aligning human capital management with environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles (Deloitte, 2023, 2024). Drawing upon the case of STADA EXPO, an experiential sustainability platform developed by the STADA Group and its Serbian affiliate Hemofarm, the paper examines how immersive, employee-centric communication initiatives can generate multiple impact—simultaneously strengthening talent attraction, internal engagement, stakeholder trust, and the organization's broader social legitimacy (Rašković, 2023; Stada, 2023).

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2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopts a qualitative case-study design, suitable for examining complex organizational phenomena within their real-life context. The selected case—STADA EXPO—represents an innovative corporate initiative combining experiential learning, multimedia digital communication, and sustainability education (Hemofarm, 2024; NIN Business Club, 2024). The initiative was developed and implemented by the STADA Group, with its Serbian affiliate Hemofarm, and designed as a mobile, interactive exhibition constructed entirely from recycled and repurposed shipping containers. These four interconnected containers form a dynamic, walk-through narrative about the company's heritage, values, and commitment to sustainable development (Rašković, 2023).

Each section of the EXPO presented a different thematic dimension through digital, sensory, and participatory storytelling. The first container introduced visitors to the history and evolution of STADA through a large-format immersive film projection, tracing its milestones and contributions to public health and community well-being. The second container focused on the company's global production network, displayed via an illuminated world map visualizing the locations of STADA's manufacturing sites.

A subsequent interactive zone employed a holographic representation of the human body, allowing visitors to explore the relationship between pharmaceutical research and various aspects of human health—without referring to or promoting specific branded medication, in compliance with legal standards regulating pharmaceutical communication.

The following segment illustrated corporate culture and values through employee testimonials projected on digital walls, demonstrating how STADA's purpose is translated into everyday work practices. A virtual production tour, experienced through VR headsets, further showcased the company's production processes and its commitment to precision, quality, and technological innovation. Finally, an ESG zone invited visitors to interact with touch-sensitive panels to explore how small, everyday actions—such as reducing waste or conserving water—can collectively contribute to a more sustainable future (Stada, 2023).

Data sources included company publications, sustainability reports, and media materials, as well as scholarly literature on employer branding, CSR, and stakeholder engagement (Reis et al., 2021; Porter & Kramer, 2011). A thematic content analysis was applied to identify patterns related to employee engagement, stakeholder interaction, and brand authenticity within the experiential framework of the project.

3. RESULTS

Within its first twelve months of operation in 2023, the EXPO achieved significant outreach and engagement: a 12-month European tour, four interconnected recycled containers equipped with 4.5 tons of multimedia technology, seven cities in four countries (Serbia, Romania, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina), over 11,000 visitors, and more than 300 media publications (Hemofarm, 2024; Stada, 2023). The initiative later expanded with visits to the United Kingdom (Clarke, 2024) and Germany, where it was ceremonially opened in Bad Vilbel (STADA Arzneimittel AG, 2024).

Beyond visibility, tangible employer-branding outcomes were recorded. Internal HR analytics indicated an increase of over 10 percent in received CVs at locations where the EXPO was hosted, compared with previous recruitment cycles. Although detailed HR data remain confidential and cannot be publicly disclosed, this correlation suggests that experiential sustainability communication can positively influence both the perception of the employer brand and the organization's talent pipeline. These findings support previous research identifying employer branding as a strategic tool for talent attraction and retention within competitive labor markets (Reis et al., 2021) and align with corporate insights highlighting the link between ESG engagement and employer appeal (Deloitte, 2024). Moreover, recent analyses indicate that well-designed sustainability communication enhances corporate credibility and stakeholder perception, which in turn strengthens employer attractiveness, candidate engagement, and long-term talent retention (Borges et al., 2023; Mazur, 2025).

The exhibition's design encouraged learning through experience rather than passive observation. Visitors progressed through interactive zones combining film projections with new digital technologies such as holographic visualizations, virtual-reality equipment, and touch-sensitive panels that illustrated sustainability principles and everyday contributions to environmental care. This digital and multisensory setup enabled visitors to grasp complex topics—such as the relationship between science, community, and health—through accessible, emotion-based engagement (Weder & Stranzl, 2025).

A defining feature of STADA EXPO, as a technology-driven and experience-centered event, was

the inclusion of employee hosts—volunteers from various departments and sites—who served as guides and storytellers throughout the exhibition. Their participation added a strong human dimension to the experience, reinforcing authenticity and emotional resonance. Visitors frequently remarked that the stories felt personal and genuine, particularly when they recognized their hosts in the video testimonials displayed within the exhibition. This recognition consistently elicited positive emotional responses and strengthened the perceived credibility of the experience.

In addition, the modular design of the EXPO allowed for relocation and adaptation across multiple contexts, including internal employee events, local community gatherings, and university environments where talent sourcing or stakeholder engagement was strategically significant. This versatility confirmed its value as a contemporary engagement tool, bridging corporate communication and community outreach (Fobbe, 2024; Mazur, 2025).

4. DISCUSSION

The findings affirm that contemporary corporate initiatives such as STADA EXPO can produce multiple impact—enhancing organizational culture, brand reputation, and social value—when sustainability, employee engagement, and stakeholder collaboration are meaningfully integrated. The case exemplifies the transformation of employer branding from a marketing instrument to a holistic process of shared meaning creation, consistent with the inside-out model of brand building (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Barrow & Mosley, 2011).

Through the creative use of new technologies—such as virtual reality headsets, holographic projections, and interactive touch-based installations—the EXPO generated a powerful multisensory experience. This technological layer did not serve as mere visual enhancement but created a synergy between learning, emotional engagement, employer branding, and ESG communication, reinforcing the overall impact of the initiative.

By empowering employees to act as narrative agents, STADA EXPO transformed internal engagement into a visible expression of organizational culture and purpose. Instead of relying on externally crafted messages, the initiative enabled employees to communicate sustainability values through authentic interaction — a practice that strengthens the perception of brand trustworthiness and integrity (Mazur, 2025; Fobbe, 2024). This model reflects the evolution of experiential employer branding, where credibility arises from shared experience rather than top-down messaging (Reis et al., 2021; Borges et al., 2023).

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that integrating sustainability, employee participation, and stakeholder collaboration creates multidimensional values: economic, social, and reputational. The STADA EXPO project demonstrates that corporate responsibility can evolve beyond compliance and philanthropy into a platform for innovation, learning, and organizational identity development. By aligning HR, CSR, and communication functions, companies are able to internalize sustainability as daily practice and reinforce employees' sense of belonging, pride, and purpose (Mazur, 2025).

Sustainability communication should therefore progress from the transmission of information to the creation of experiences that actively engage employees as storytellers and co-creators of authentic narratives. This participatory approach transforms organizations into agents of shared value and cultural resilience, capable of fostering trust, inclusion, and a deeper sense of collective responsibility across all stakeholder groups. In this way, sustainability becomes not only an ethical imperative but also a communicative and cultural process that binds people to shared purpose.

At a theoretical level, this research contributes to the growing body of literature linking experiential sustainability communication with employer branding and stakeholder engagement (Reis et al., 2021; Fobbe, 2024). It advances existing models by illustrating how employee-driven initiatives operationalize the idea of creating shared value (Porter & Kramer, 2011) and demonstrates that authenticity, rather than image management, represents the core of a sustainable corporate reputation (Borges et al., 2023; Weder & Stranzl, 2025).

At the same time, the findings carry important practical implications for organizations seeking to integrate ESG, talent engagement, and creative communication into a unified strategic framework. The STADA EXPO case illustrates that experiential initiatives—when designed as mobile, inclusive, and emotionally resonant formats—can strengthen recruitment outcomes, enhance employee pride, and build long-term stakeholder trust. By moving sustainability narratives closer to communities, campuses, and production sites, companies can expand their social footprint and reinforce their legitimacy in an

increasingly purpose-driven economy.

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