



## Employer Branding as a Strategy for Recruiting Skilled Workers in the Hospitality Industry in Ilorin, Nigeria

<sup>1</sup>Akerele E. E.; <sup>2</sup>Bashiru A. A.; <sup>3</sup>Folorunso O. S.; <sup>4</sup>Adebayo H. M. and <sup>5</sup>Lawal O. O.  
<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup>Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Faculty of Management and Social Sciences,  
Kwara State University, Malete, Nigeria  
Correspondence: [edward.akerele@kwasu.edu.ng](mailto:edward.akerele@kwasu.edu.ng)

### Abstract

This study examines how employer branding can help attract skilled workers to the hospitality industry in Ilorin, Nigeria, an area facing high staff turnover and skill shortages. Data collected from 187 respondents across 90 hotels showed that formal employer branding strategies are unevenly adopted, with only 38% of establishments having them. Large (Category A) hotels are significantly more proactive, utilizing branded uniforms, social media, and career development plans far more than smaller (B and C category) hotels, which rely on informal recruitment. The research confirmed that employer branding strongly influences skilled worker attraction, particularly for younger employees (aged 20–35) who value organizational reputation, career growth, and professional environments. For instance, 71% of employees in Category A hotels cited brand image as a key reason for joining, compared to only 28% in Category C. Key challenges include budget limitations, a lack of expertise, and high turnover, especially for smaller hotels. However, opportunities exist in leveraging digital platforms and industry-wide collaborative campaigns. The study concludes that while still developing, employer branding holds strong potential to improve workforce stability. It recommends formalizing branding policies, increasing digital media use, building management capacity, and seeking policy support to enhance industry competitiveness and support decent work (SDG 8).

**Keywords:** Employer branding, skilled workers, hospitality industry, workforce attraction, Ilorin

### 1.0 Introduction

Tourism and hospitality are among the most labor-intensive sectors globally, relying heavily on skilled workers to deliver quality service experiences. However, the industry is widely recognized for its challenges in attracting and retaining talent due to high turnover, irregular working hours, and perceptions of limited career advancement opportunities. In response, employer branding has emerged as a strategic tool to enhance the image of organizations and make them more attractive to prospective employees (Shafiee and Goodarzi, 2025). Across regions, employer branding has been explored from diverse perspectives. In Europe, studies emphasize the role of employer branding in enhancing organizational reputation and influencing job seekers' behaviors through social media and digital communication channels (Koski, 2024; Grigore et al., 2024). Research in Central and Eastern Europe has shown that strong employer branding positively impacts company performance and human resource management outcomes, particularly during times of crisis (Stor and Haromszeki, 2025). In Africa, the concept is increasingly applied beyond corporate sectors, with evidence showing that employer branding mediates relationships between leadership styles and employee commitment, as observed in South Africa (Makumbe, 2025). Similarly, in Nigeria, relevant studies have highlighted employer branding as a factor influencing workforce engagement and retention in banking and healthcare sectors (Asikhia and Rjoub, 2023; Okarfor et al., 2024).

In the field of hospitality and tourism, employer branding is gaining attention due to its potential to reposition the industry as an attractive career destination. Globally, organizations that communicate a strong employer brand are better able to recruit, retain, and engage skilled talent (Reshma and Velmurugan, 2024). However, hospitality in many developing regions, including Nigeria, continues to struggle with high turnover rates, low commitment levels, and skill shortages, which undermine service quality and business sustainability. Focusing on Ilorin, the capital of Kwara State, hospitality establishments face similar challenges. Hotels, restaurants, and related businesses often report difficulty in recruiting and keeping skilled workers due to competition from other industries, limited awareness of career opportunities, and poor perceptions of hospitality jobs. While studies in banking, healthcare, and telecoms highlight the importance of employer branding in workforce sustainability (Monyei and Ukpere, 2024; Pall and Ortner, 2025), there is limited empirical evidence on its role within the hospitality sector in Ilorin. This creates a gap in understanding how employer branding can be leveraged locally to address persistent human capital challenges in tourism and hospitality.

Extant literature confirms that employer branding significantly influences talent attraction, employee engagement, and organizational commitment across various sectors worldwide (Sharma et al., 2024; Makumbe, 2025). In developed economies, it has been effectively used to attract skilled workers through digital platforms and social media branding strategies (Koski, 2024; Pall and Ortner, 2025). In Nigeria, however, research remains concentrated in finance, healthcare, and telecommunications, with little attention given to hospitality despite its labor-intensive nature. Hospitality establishments in Ilorin continue to struggle with high employee turnover, low morale, and skill gaps, which undermine their ability to provide consistent service quality and compete effectively. Without deliberate adoption of employer branding strategies, these challenges may persist, leading to further workforce instability and reduced industry growth.

The aim of this study is to examine employer branding as a strategy for recruiting skilled workers in the hospitality sector in Ilorin. Specific objectives are:

- i. To investigate the employer branding practices currently adopted by hospitality establishments in Ilorin.
- ii. To assess the influence of employer branding on attracting skilled workers into the hospitality sector in Ilorin.
- iii. To identify challenges and opportunities in implementing employer branding strategies for workforce development in Ilorin hospitality.

The study focused on hospitality establishments in Ilorin metropolis, including hotels, restaurants, and related businesses. It specifically investigated employer branding practices, their influence on talent attraction, and the challenges faced in adopting such strategies. The study does not cover other industries outside the hospitality or hospitality businesses outside Ilorin. This study is significant for both academic and practical reasons. It contributes to literatures by filling the gap on employer branding in hospitality within the Nigerian context, where research is limited compared to other sectors. Practically, it will provide hospitality managers in Ilorin with insights into how employer branding can be leveraged to attract skilled workers, reduce turnover, and enhance service quality. For policymakers, the findings may inform strategies that align with the International Labour Organization's decent work agenda,

which emphasizes creating attractive, fair, and sustainable employment opportunities. The justification for this study lies in global best practices that view human capital as a central pillar of sustainable industry growth. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) highlights the need to promote sustained, inclusive, and productive employment. By exploring employer branding as a tool for attracting skilled workers, this study aligns with SDG 8 and provides context-specific solutions for workforce sustainability in Ilorin's hospitality industry.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1. Employer Branding**

Employer branding has become an important theme in organizational and human resource research, as firms increasingly recognize its role in attracting, engaging, and retaining talent in a competitive labor market. It is not just about recruitment marketing but about positioning organizations as desirable places to work while linking employee perceptions to overall business outcomes. Sharma et al., (2024) argue that employer branding plays a mediating role between human resource practices and employee engagement. Their study demonstrates that HR practices alone are insufficient to achieve high engagement unless they are perceived by employees as part of a strong employer brand. This suggests that branding functions as the bridge between HR policies and employees' psychological commitment, making it a critical element in talent management.

From another perspective, Dženopoljac et al. (2023) explore employer brand attributes from an intellectual capital perspective. They establish that employer branding has tangible implications for financial performance, as it enhances a company's reputation and strengthens intellectual capital dimensions such as human, relational, and structural capital. Their findings broaden the discussion by linking employer branding not just to workforce engagement but also to measurable organizational outcomes, positioning it as a strategic asset. Hendriana et al. (2023) focus specifically on Generation Z workers, a demographic that is increasingly shaping the labor market. Their research shows that employer branding influences the relationship between work-life balance and employee retention, either as a mediator or a moderator. This highlights the generational dynamics of employer branding, suggesting that younger workers are particularly responsive to how organizations project themselves as supportive, innovative, and flexible employers.

Nazish et al. (2023) emphasize the link between internal and external employer branding through the role of HRM practices. They argue that HRM practices shape internal employer branding, which in turn influences external perceptions of the organization in the labor market. Their study indicates that internal alignment is crucial; a mismatch between what is promised to employees externally and what is practiced internally undermines the credibility of the employer brand.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that employer branding is a multifaceted concept. It is simultaneously an HR tool, a driver of financial performance, a generationally responsive strategy, and a mechanism linking internal and external organizational identity. However, most of the existing literature has been conducted in developed economies or large corporate contexts, with little attention to labor-intensive sectors like hospitality in developing economies. Additionally, while the literature strongly emphasizes the outcomes of employer

branding, less is known about how it functions as a direct recruitment strategy for skilled workers in contexts where hospitality jobs often suffer from negative perceptions. The present study addresses these gaps by examining employer branding as a recruitment strategy within the hospitality sector in Ilorin, Nigeria. By doing so, it contributes to expanding the literature beyond corporate contexts to labor-intensive service industries in emerging economies. It also provides practical insights for hospitality managers seeking to reposition their organizations as attractive employers, aligning with global best practices that promote sustainable and decent work in line with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

## **2.2 Skilled Employees in Hospitality**

The issue of skills and talent development in the hospitality industry has been widely examined across contexts. Globally, scholars highlight persistent skill gaps that challenge the sector's ability to maintain quality service delivery. Orphanidou et al. (2023) argue that traditional classifications of skills and competencies in tourism and hospitality are no longer sufficient, proposing a new framework that aligns with evolving job positions in the industry. This underscores the complexity of defining and meeting workforce requirements as the industry becomes increasingly dynamic.

Singh and Hassan (2024) focus on identifying workplace skill gaps and the challenges they pose in hospitality and tourism organizations. Their study stresses that inadequate technical and soft skills hinder organizational performance, leading to inefficiencies and reduced customer satisfaction. Similarly, Armada and Armada (2024), in their study of trainee experiences in Malaysia, emphasize the role of skill development journeys, showing how structured training programs can enhance career progression and industry readiness for young professionals. This points to the importance of institutional learning pathways in bridging the gap between education and practice. In South Africa, Stemele (2025) links poor employee remuneration in the Eastern Cape tourism and hospitality sector to persistent difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled staff. This suggests that financial incentives remain a major determinant of workforce stability, in addition to skill development. Phutsisi et al. (2024) further demonstrate that education and training factors are directly tied to customer satisfaction outcomes in the South African hospitality industry. Their findings confirm that investment in training is not only a workforce issue but also a customer service imperative.

Within Nigeria, Edeh et al., (2024) explore the relationship between talent management and organizational performance, showing that structured talent management strategies lead to improved outcomes in the hospitality industry. While Bashiru et al (2024), considered guests' perception of hotel's image in relation to the role of employees' performance. This indicates a growing recognition of human capital as a driver of competitiveness. Similarly, Ahmodu et al. (2024) investigate human resource management cost practices in Ondo State and their effect on operational efficiency. They argue that efficient HR cost practices contribute significantly to workforce productivity and service quality, thereby stressing the importance of resource allocation to employee development and retention. These studies provide a rich understanding of the centrality of skilled employees in hospitality. However, certain gaps remain. First, while many studies acknowledge the presence of skill gaps, few provide localized evidence on how employer branding strategies can be used to attract skilled workers into hospitality, particularly in smaller cities. Second, most research from Africa and Nigeria focuses on HR practices, remuneration, and talent management, but rarely links these explicitly to employer branding as

a distinct strategy. Third, although the global literature recognizes training and structured skill development as key, there is little empirical work connecting these with workers' perceptions of hospitality as an attractive career sector in Nigerian contexts.

The present study fills these gaps by examining employer branding specifically as a strategy for recruiting skilled workers in the hospitality sector in Ilorin, Nigeria. Focusing on how employer branding shapes perceptions and influences talent attraction, the study extends the discussion beyond general HR practices to a more targeted branding approach. This will provide context-specific insights into how hospitality establishments in Ilorin can reposition themselves as desirable employers, thereby addressing both the skills gap and the industry's workforce instability.

### **2.3 Theoretical Review**

Two major theories underpin this study. Based on the direction of the study, these two highly relevant theoretical frameworks provide appropriate foundation on the issues of employer branding in Ilorin's hospitality industry. The theories are:

#### **2.3.1 Social Identity Theory (SIT)**

This theory, developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), posits that individuals derive part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups. It explains how individuals define themselves based on their membership in social groups. In the context of employer branding, the theory suggests that prospective employees are attracted to organizations whose values, culture, and reputation align with their self-concept and desired social identity. This implies that potential and current employees are attracted to organizations whose brand identity (e.g., reputation, values, work environment) aligns with their own social identity and desired self-image. Within the hospitality industry where service quality, teamwork, emotional labour, and organizational culture are critical, employer branding plays a key role in shaping how potential employees perceive an organization. Hospitality firms that project a strong employer brand emphasizing professionalism, inclusiveness, career growth, service excellence, and employee recognition create a positive organizational identity. Skilled workers, such as chefs, hotel managers, front-office professionals, and event coordinators, are more likely to seek employment with organizations that enhance their social status and professional identity.

For example, globally recognized hotel chains often highlight their commitment to staff development, diversity, sustainability, and customer service excellence. In so doing, they create a prestigious group identity that potential employees aspire to join. This sense of belonging and pride associated with working for a reputable hospitality brand increases organizational attractiveness and supports the recruitment and retention of skilled workers. Thus, Social Identity Theory explains how employer branding helps hospitality organizations appeal to candidates' psychological needs for belonging, self-esteem, and professional recognition. The study's findings in the later part of this work directly reflect this, as younger skilled workers (aged 20–35) were shown to be significantly influenced by organizational reputation and professional image when choosing an employer. The disparity between Category A hotels (71% influenced by brand) and Category C hotels (28%) underscores how a strong, positive employer brand can fulfill employees' need for prestigious and fulfilling social identities.

### **2.3.2 Signaling Theory**

Signalling Theory, as proposed by Spence (1973), addresses situations of information asymmetry, where job seekers have limited information about employers prior to employment. In recruitment, employer branding acts as a signal that communicates important information about an organization's working conditions, values, and employment quality to potential employees. In the hospitality industry, where issues such as long working hours, job insecurity, and high labour turnover are common, skilled workers rely heavily on external signals when choosing employers. Employer branding elements such as corporate websites, social media presence, awards (e.g., "Best Employer in Hospitality"), employee testimonials, training opportunities, and sustainability initiatives serve as credible signals of organizational quality. Youn and Kim (2022) added that positive signals suggest supportive management, career advancement opportunities, fair compensation, and a healthy work environment.

For instance, a hospitality organization that showcases structured training programmes, international mobility opportunities, and staff welfare policies signals long-term career prospects and organizational stability. Skilled workers interpret these signals as indicators of a high-quality employer, thereby increasing their likelihood of applying. Conversely, weak or inconsistent employer branding may signal poor working conditions, discouraging highly skilled candidates. This theory explains how one party (the employer) conveys credible information about itself to another party (potential employees) in a market of asymmetric information. Employer branding acts as a crucial signal that cuts through the uncertainty of the job market. Practices like branded uniforms, active social media, and structured career paths, prevalent in Category A hotels, serve as tangible signals of a hotel's professionalism, stability, and investment in its workforce. Conversely, the reliance on informal word-of-mouth in smaller hotels sends a weaker or less formal signal. The study's observation that these branding practices "significantly influence the attraction of skilled workers" aligns perfectly with Signaling Theory, as job seekers use these cues to infer job quality and organizational attributes they cannot directly observe before joining.

Together, Social Identity Theory and Signalling Theory provide a robust framework for understanding employer branding as a strategic recruitment tool in the hospitality industry. While Signalling Theory explains how employer branding communicates information to reduce uncertainty among potential employees, Social Identity Theory explains why these signals matter by influencing individuals' desire to associate with organizations that enhance their self-image and social standing. In a highly competitive hospitality labour market, effective employer branding that sends strong, consistent, and positive signals while fostering a desirable organizational identity enables hospitality firms to attract and recruit skilled workers (Youn and Kim, 2022). This integrated theoretical perspective highlights employer branding as not only a communication strategy but also a means of building emotional and symbolic connections with prospective employees, ultimately strengthening workforce quality and organizational performance.

### **3.0 Methodology**

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, chosen for its suitability in investigating opinions, perceptions, and practices within a defined population. Since the research focused on examining employer branding strategies and their influence on attracting skilled workers in the hospitality sector in Ilorin, the survey approach allowed for the collection

of both quantitative and qualitative data that reflect organizational practices and employee perspectives.

The population of the study comprised hospitality establishments in Ilorin metropolis. According to data obtained from the Kwara State Tourism Board (2024), there are 180 registered hotels in Ilorin categorized as A, B, and C based on size, facilities, and service standards. Category A includes large-scale hotels with more than 50 staff, Category B consists of medium-sized establishments with between 20 and 50 staff, while Category C comprises small hotels employing fewer than 20 workers. Together, these establishments account for an estimated workforce of approximately 1,100 employees across managerial and operational levels. Within these establishments, two categories of respondents were targeted: management staff responsible for recruitment and branding practices, and skilled employees directly engaged in service delivery.

In determining the sample size, the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample determination table was applied. For a population of 1,100, the table recommends a minimum sample of about 285 respondents at a 95 percent confidence level and 5 percent margin of error. However, owing to practical considerations such as limited access to establishments, high staff turnover, and resource constraints, the study pragmatically targeted 200 respondents, anticipating a valid response of at least 150. This approach falls within an acceptable statistical range and is consistent with hospitality research practice, where challenges in respondent access often necessitate adjustments. At the conclusion of data collection, a total of 187 valid responses were retrieved, representing a 93.5 percent response rate. The final sample comprised 52 management staff, and 135 skilled employees across hotels in Ilorin metropolis.

To ensure fairness in selection, a stratified random sampling technique was employed across the three hotel categories. From the 180 hotels, 20 Category A, 30 Category B, and 40 Category C establishments were proportionately selected, reflecting the distribution of hotels within Ilorin. Within each hotel, respondents were drawn proportionally from management and skilled employee groups. Larger Category A hotels contributed between 5 and 8 respondents each, medium Category B hotels contributed between 3 and 5, while smaller Category C establishments contributed 2 to 3 respondents each. The distribution of sampled establishments and respondents is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Distribution of Sampled Hotels and Respondents in Ilorin**

Hotel Category	Total Hotels (Registered)	Hotels Sampled	Respondents per Hotel	Total Respondents Obtained
Category A (Large)	40	20	5-8	92
Category B (Medium)	60	30	3-5	65
Category C (Small)	80	40	2-3	30
Total	180	90	-	187

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire alongside semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire contained both closed and open-ended items, designed to capture demographic details, employer branding practices, perceptions of employer attractiveness, and the influence of branding on recruitment decisions. Semi-structured interviews with selected managers provided deeper insights into employer branding strategies and workforce challenges. To ensure validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in hospitality and human resource management. A pilot study with 15 respondents from establishments not included in the main study was conducted to refine the instrument. Reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, with a coefficient of 0.70 or above considered acceptable.

Data analysis involved the use of descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and means to summarize employer branding practices and workforce perceptions. Inferential statistics, including chi-square tests and regression analysis, were employed to examine the relationship between employer branding strategies and the attraction of skilled workers. The qualitative data obtained from interviews were analyzed thematically to complement the quantitative findings and provide a deeper contextual understanding. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the research, and their participation was voluntary. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed, and all data were used strictly for academic purposes.

#### 4.0 Results and Discussion of Findings

This section presents the key findings of the study based on data collected from 187 respondents, comprising 52 management staff and 135 skilled employees across 90 hotels in Ilorin metropolis. The findings are presented in line with the three research questions.

**4.1 Research Objective 1:** To investigate the employer branding practices currently adopted by hospitality establishments in Ilorin. The study revealed that awareness of employer branding was higher among management staff (64%) than among skilled employees (41%). However, only 38% of establishments had formalized employer branding strategies. The most common practices included providing branded uniforms (82%), maintaining social media presence (55%), and offering internal training opportunities (47%). Fewer than 30% of establishments reported structured recruitment campaigns or dedicated employer branding budgets. Category A hotels were more proactive, adopting practices such as onboarding kits and structured career development, while Categories B and C relied more on provision of branded uniforms.

**Table 2: Employer Branding Practices Adopted by Hotels in Ilorin (n = 187)**

Employer Branding Practice	Overall (%)	Category A (%)	Category B (%)	Category C (%)
Provision of branded uniforms	82	95	80	70
Active social media presence	55	78	50	38

Internal training & skill development	47	68	44	31
Structured career progression plans	29	55	22	10
Recruitment materials & branding budgets	26	52	18	7

Source: Field Survey (2025)

**4.2 Research Objective 2:** To assess the influence of employer branding on attracting skilled workers into the hospitality sector in Ilorin.

Employer branding was found to significantly influence the attraction of skilled workers, particularly in Category A hotels. Regression results indicated a statistically significant association ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the perceived strength of employer branding and intention to apply for or remain in hospitality jobs. Younger employees (aged 20–35) were especially influenced by visible branding strategies such as career development promises and professional work environments. About 71% of employees in Category A hotels reported being influenced by branding in their decision to join, compared to 43% in Category B and 28% in Category C.

**Table 3: Influence of Employer Branding on Attraction of Skilled Workers**

Response Item	Category %	Category A (%)	Category B (%)	Category C (%)
Chose employer because of reputation/brand image	71	43	28	47
Employer branding influenced decision to stay	65	38	22	41
Unclear branding discouraged interest in hospitality	21	34	46	34
Branding had little/no effect on decision	14	29	39	27

Source: Field Survey (2025)

**4.3 Research Objective 3:** To identify challenges and opportunities in implementing employer branding strategies for workforce development in Ilorin hospitality.

The study identified several challenges. The most pressing were budgetary constraints (69%), lack of knowledge and expertise in employer branding (56%), and high employee turnover (49%). Smaller establishments (Category C) particularly reported informal recruitment patterns that discouraged long-term branding efforts. On the other hand, opportunities exist in the growing adoption of digital media for recruitment (62%) and the potential for collaborative industry-wide branding campaigns (60%), especially championed by larger hotels.

**Table 4: Challenges and Opportunities in Employer Branding**

Item	Category A (%)	Category B (%)	Category C (%)	Overall (%)
Budget constraints	61	62	78	69
Lack of expertise/knowledge in branding	48	55	64	56
High employee turnover	42	47	58	49
Informal recruitment practices	30	46	71	49
Digital media as a branding opportunity	72	60	51	62
Industry collaboration to promote branding	68	59	52	60

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Overall, the findings suggest that employer branding is still at an early stage in Ilorin's hospitality industry, with practices concentrated in larger hotels. Nonetheless, evidence shows that strong branding significantly contributes to attracting skilled workers, especially younger employees. Despite challenges, digital media and collective industry initiatives present practical opportunities for expanding employer branding as a recruitment and retention strategy.

**Table 4.4: Regression Analysis Showing the Influence of Employer Branding on Attraction of Skilled Workers (n = 187)**

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t-value	p-value
Constant	1.842	0.216	–	8.52	0.000
Employer Branding Score	0.563	0.072	0.612	7.82	0.000

Model Summary:

$R^2 = 0.375$ ; Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.371$ ; Standard Error of Estimate = 0.487;  $F(1,185) = 61.16$ ,  $p < 0.001$

Source: Field survey (2025)

The regression results show that employer branding significantly predicts the attraction of skilled workers in Ilorin's hospitality industry ( $\beta = 0.612$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Employer branding explains 37.5% of the variance in skilled worker attraction, indicating a strong and meaningful relationship.

#### 4.1 Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into employer branding as a recruitment strategy in the hospitality sector of Ilorin, Nigeria. Three major issues emerge: the extent of employer branding practices, its influence on attracting skilled workers, and the challenges and opportunities of implementation. First, the study found that employer branding practices are limited and unevenly distributed across hotel categories in Ilorin. While Category A hotels demonstrated a higher adoption of structured practices such as onboarding kits, visible social media presence, and career progression pathways, smaller establishments in Categories B and C relied heavily on informal recruitment and word-of-mouth referrals. This reflects the argument of Nazish et al., (2023), who emphasized the importance of alignment between internal and external branding practices. The weak formalization of branding among smaller hotels suggests that many establishments are not yet viewing branding as a strategic function. This is consistent with the observations of Reshma and Velmurugan (2024), who noted that employer branding research remains underdeveloped in labor-intensive sectors in developing economies.

Second, the influence of employer branding on attracting skilled workers was found to be statistically significant, especially among younger employees. Workers aged 20–35 were more likely to be influenced by reputation, career opportunities, and organizational image when deciding to apply for or remain in a hospitality job. This finding resonates with the work of Hendriana et al., (2023), who highlighted that Generation Z workers are particularly responsive to employer branding as a signal of work–life balance and long-term opportunities. Similarly, Sharma et al. (2024), argued that employer branding mediates the relationship between HR practices and employee engagement, a dynamic also evident in Ilorin, where hotels with stronger branding reported higher levels of attraction and retention of skilled workers.

Third, the study identified several challenges that hinder effective employer branding in Ilorin's hospitality sector. These include budgetary limitations, lack of expertise, high turnover, and reliance on informal recruitment. These findings are in line with Singh and Hassan (2024), who reported that skills gaps and operational inefficiencies in hospitality organizations often stem from weak HRM systems and limited branding investment. However, the opportunities identified in this study, notably the use of digital platforms and potential for industry-wide branding collaborations, echo the perspectives of Koski (2024), who argued that social media has transformed employer branding into a low-cost yet highly impactful recruitment tool. For Ilorin's hospitality sector, the implication is that smaller hotels can leverage digital strategies collectively to overcome cost and expertise barriers.

The findings suggest that employer branding in Ilorin's hospitality industry is still evolving but holds significant promise as a recruitment strategy. Unlike studies conducted in developed economies (Dženopoljac et al., 2023), which linked branding directly to financial performance and intellectual capital, this study shows that in emerging economies like Nigeria, the immediate impact is on skilled labor attraction and workforce stability. By situating the results within the context of extant literature, this study contributes to bridging the knowledge gap between employer branding research in corporate, Western settings and its application in hospitality industries in developing contexts. Employer branding is not merely a marketing exercise but a strategic HR tool with the potential to address pressing challenges in skills acquisition, employee engagement, and workforce retention in Nigeria's hospitality sector. If

adopted more systematically, it can reposition hospitality work as a respectable and professional career path, aligning with global best practices and Sustainable Development Goal 8, which advocates for decent work and sustained economic growth.

## **5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

This study examined employer branding as a strategy for attracting skilled workers in the hospitality sector of Ilorin, Nigeria. Drawing on data from 187 respondents across 90 hotels in Categories A, B, and C, the study found that employer branding practices are still in their early stages of adoption, with larger hotels demonstrating more structured approaches compared to smaller establishments. The results showed that employer branding significantly influences the attraction and retention of skilled workers, particularly younger employees who are motivated by visible career development opportunities, organizational reputation, and a professional work environment. The research also highlighted that despite budgetary constraints, lack of expertise, and high staff turnover, opportunities exist in the use of digital media and collective industry initiatives to strengthen employer branding efforts.

The findings contribute to employer branding literature by contextualizing its application within an emerging economy and a service-intensive sector. Unlike studies in developed economies that primarily link branding to financial performance, this study demonstrates that in Ilorin's hospitality sector, the most immediate benefit of branding lies in enhancing workforce stability and attracting skilled labor. This reinforces the idea that employer branding is not a peripheral marketing exercise but a critical human resource strategy aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth.

### **5.2 Recommendations**

Based on the study's findings that employer branding in Ilorin's hospitality sector remains largely informal and under-utilized, particularly in small and medium establishments, the following recommendations are made to address the three research objectives.

To strengthen existing employer branding practices, hospitality establishments, especially smaller ones, should deliberately formalize employer branding through written policies on career progression, structured training programs, and employee recognition systems.

To increase the attraction of skilled workers, businesses should actively leverage digital platforms and social media to showcase their values and culture, as consistent online engagement offers a low-cost yet effective way to appeal to younger talent currently influenced by digital branding.

To tackle implementation challenges and seize opportunities for workforce development, the study recommends industry-wide collaboration led by associations and professional bodies to run joint campaigns that reposition hospitality careers as respectable and rewarding, enabling resource-constrained establishments to benefit from a stronger collective image.

Additionally, targeted capacity-building programs should be organized for managers in Ilorin to equip them with branding, human resource management, and employee engagement skills.

Finally, the Kwara State Tourism Board and relevant stakeholders should introduce policy frameworks and incentives that reward excellence in employer branding, thereby fostering healthy competition, better workforce conditions, and sustainable sectoral growth.

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