

Global Management Journal for Academic & Corporate (GMJAC) Studies
Fall 2022, Vol 12 No.2, PP. 52-67
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Corporate Studies
Published by Bahria Business School, Bahria University Karachi Campus

Facebook as the Tool for E-Recruitment for SMEs amid Covid-19: A Conceptual Model To Extend Benefits Of E-Recruitment Towards Firm's Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 forced almost all forms of firms to opt for digitized business models. This impact was also found true for SMEs. In fact, the impact of pandemic was much drastic and therefore use of e-business models was opted not only to succeed but also to survive in the times of crises. However, there is severe knowledge and research gap with respect to the use of e-recruitment during pandemic and firm's sustainability. Especially with respect to SMEs the research inventory is not satisfactory to highlight impact of e-recruitment on firm's performance or sustainability. However, sustainability was the real issue and area for concern specially for SMEs at the wake of pandemic. Thus, this study has been conducted purposively to reflect the impact of e-recruitment through social media platform on sustainability of SMEs at the wake of pandemic. The research population includes top management of SMEs operating in Karachi and data has been collected through loose quota sampling. Analysis of data has been done through structural equation modeling which indicated that Facebook is perceived as an effective tool for e-recruitment by SMEs amid COVID-19.

Keywords: e-recruitment, social media platforms, facebook, SMEs, sustainability

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1. INTRODUCTION

Outbreak of pandemic creates significant impact on every single country. In fact, lockdowns resulted in severe negative impact upon industries having high sensitivity &

importance for humanity & society like hospitals and retail industries (Bai et al., 2021). However, the impact of pandemic is much severe on small and medium sized firms (SMEs) & therefore economies that rely more upon their SME sector faced severe issues and threats. In

fact, similar has been highlighted by the prior studies that SMEs are the major contributor to the economies of the world and also are the most vivid source of employment in several under served and vulnerable segments of the world. Therefore, SMEs are required to adopt online mode of business in order to survive in critical conditions through effective management of resources during pandemic. Although digital transformation of SMEs required not only support from the government but also thorough research but SMEs with limited online availability receives hardest hit by the pandemic. Therefore, government and major stake holders perceived digitization of SMEs as the corner stone for the stability of the economy (Bai et al., 2021).

In fact, the recent era is the era of electronic business models like E-Business, E-Marketing & E-HRM etc (Alkhodary, 2021). On the other side HRM has been perceived as one of the key organizational function & to leverage this key function in optimal manner there is a need to shift towards E-HRM practices in order to avoid challenges associated with COVID-19.

However, management of this crisis is an intense challenge especially for those crises that are surprise like COVID-19. It has also been evident that sudden crises like SARS resulted in decline in sustainability ratio of firms, resulted in deduction of employee benefits and make employees opted for long leaves (Mwita, 2020). Thus, legitimate to declare that emergence of COVID-19 cause's severe increase in research work related with

the impact of pandemic on economic activities in different parts of the globe. Reasons for the disruption of economic activities were lockdown that were implemented by almost all the countries in order to restrict spread of the contagious virus (Bularafa & Adamu, 2021). Although the impact of COVID-19 was much severe on SMEs as SMEs normally does not have sufficient resources & therefore impositions of lockdowns created severe negative impact on their performance. Although under developing sides of the world the dream of economic growth was not possible without the growth and stability of SMEs sectors (Kumar et al., 2020).

1.1. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Competition, environmental degradation and corporate sustainability are perceived as major predictor for using electronic business model (Alkhodary, 2021). Thus, SMEs are trying to be leveraged with digitized business model since long time in order to leverage their performance through uses and capabilities of digital technologies (Klein & Todesco, 2021). However, outbreak of COVID-19 was the main reason that raises the need of online resources by SMEs (Kumar et al., 2020).

Although, research stream on linkage of COVID-19 and response by SMEs are still in its infancy stage (Klein & Todesco, 2021). Regardless of the fact that use of digitization is creating positive impact upon public crises response strategies of SMEs. Higher the

degree of Digitization better will be the public crises response strategies of SMEs (Guo et al., 2020). In fact, use of E-HRM perceived as a substantial tool to fight challenges associated with COVID-19 (Mwita, 2020).

Although e-recruitment practices are still new in territories of Pakistan & mostly preferred by reputed companies with well-structured HR department (Kubar et al., 2021). However, e-recruitment has the tendency to produce several benefits for applicants as well as organizations (Poorangi et al., 2011). Therefore, use of latest technologies has been recommended to foster organizational performance and due to the outbreak of COVID-19 it became feasible for organizations to use online recruitment strategy (Kubar et al., 2021).

1.2. THEORITICAL FRMAEWORK & DELIMITATIONS

This study posited institutional theory as the base of firm's digitization. Theory reflected that firm has thorough knowledge of standards that needs to be implemented.

Moreover, theory is also a base for understanding the major cause(s) or factor(s) behind the digitization of the firm. On the other hand, study also pinpointed resource-based theory as one of the reliable views for the digitization of the firm as the theory reflects effective and efficient use of firm's resources to overshadow the competition (Bai et al., 2021).

Especially the use of internet and media has high significance in the process of recruitment and the performance of top ranked HR functions may become more optimized through leveraging these functions with internet and media. In fact, leveraging the linkage may push companies towards competitive edge in long-run (Yaseen & Marwan, 2016). Poor recruitment my also resulted in poor selection process therefore making recruitment effective is not only the challenge but also the prime task for any of the company. Hence, e-recruitment was the best way to cope up with the alarming conditions posited by the wake of COVID-19 and the best technique to attain firm's sustainability in the long-run (Abbas, Shah & Othman, 2021). E-Recruitment has several advantages among these one of the top ranked is cost saving (Vashisthaa, Goelb & Dhimanc, 2021). However, use of use of e-recruitment also entails benefits like time saving, interaction between employees and applicants and development of database (records) for future use & reference (Nguti & Mose, 2021).

However, cost reduction and time saving are the main benefits that may effectively be associated with sustainability of SMEs. Moreover, development of database as well as linkage between employees and applicants will ultimately resulted in reduction of cost and time in the process of recruitment and selection. Hence in association with Vashisthaa et al. (2021) and Nguti and Mose (2021), three major benefits i.e., cost saving, time saving and

vacancies fill are used in order to reflect the impact of e-recruitment with sustainability of SMES amid COVID-19. In fact, use of social media found to be an effective source for e-recruitment as well as for making brand identity. Moreover, e-recruitment through social media is also effective way to attract active as well as passive job-seekers (Mallik & Ptel, 2020). Thus, social media has been preferred by most of the private and public sector organizations all over the globe (Yaseen & Marwan, 2016). On the other side Facebook is the form of social media that has more than 80% user base from countries other than USA & Canada. Among these users around 65% are under the age bracket of 40 years. On the other side average Facebook user spent around 16 hours per month on Facebook surfing (Mallik & Ptel, 2020) therefore Facebook along with LinkedIn is perceived as best tool for e-recruitment (Caers & Castelyns, 2011).

Moreover, managers from Asian Pacific region use Facebook more often as compared to other social media sites for the purpose of e-recruitment. Hence this study is specific to e-recruitment through Facebook due to pandemic by SMEs in order to reflect the impact on firm sustainability (Gajanova et al., 2020).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Lockdowns resulted in severe shortage of human, technological and transformational resources (Bularafa & Adamu, 2021). However, we also evidence high rates of layoffs which

cause significant shift in supply and demand of human resources but restrictions on movement and lockdown created severe hindrance to companies in recruitment process (Mwita, 2020). Hence with the wake of pandemic SMEs as well as the companies having stakes with SMEs are forced to use new methods & methodology required for conduction of business (Marcysiak & Pleskacz, 2021). Although findings also have some exceptions Bularafa and Adamu (2021) quoted Hamiza (2020) to reflect those restrictions on international travelling & lockdowns produced positive impacts upon performance of SMEs.

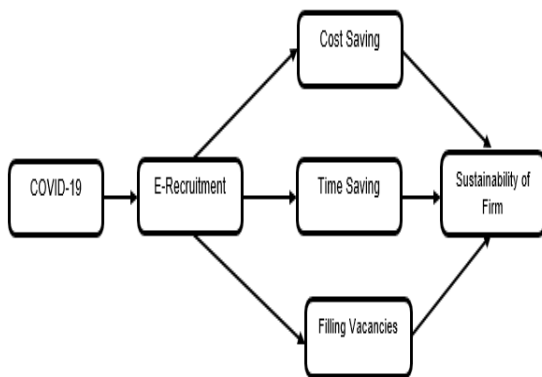
On the other side Ozili and Arun (2022) indicated that elements like lack of internal movement and higher fiscal policy spending produces negative impacts upon SMEs performance. In fact, in India conditions created severe negative impact on SMEs associated with clothing, tobacco, metals, food products, furniture and machinery etc. Hence in order to move towards organizational and economic sustainability SMEs must move towards effective use of online resources (Kumar et al., 2020). Study of indicated that requirements pertaining to Human Resource functions are the second top reason for the digitization of SMEs. Although the most important reason behind digitization is to make employees work from remote locations (Marcysiak & Pleskacz, 2021).

Among various HR functions recruitment is perceived as the source to evaluate company's willing towards attraction of best suited applicants at the time of need. In

fact, e-recruitment is a way to attract multiple candidates in a cost-effective manner so to assure sustainability in the long-term (Abbas et al., 2021).

Although, failure of recruitment may also cause failure of selection as after poor recruitment process that is the next function to the function of recruitment. During pandemic almost all type of organizations prefers e-recruitment practices in order to have ample number of human resources (Abbas et al., 2021). There are several benefits of using e-recruitment although among the one of the most prominent is cost reduction. Through companies may also able to synthesize the application and information in the required way in order to deal effectively with the cost & time related issues (Vashisthaa et al., 2021).

Figure 1: Research Model



2.1 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

H_{1A}: There is a relationship between the outbreaks of COVID-19 on the use of e-recruitment through Facebook.

H_{2A}: There is a relationship between use of e-recruitment through Facebook & cost saving by food related SMEs from Pakistan

H_{3A}: There is a relationship between use of e-recruitment through Facebook & time saving by food related SMEs from Pakistan

H_{4A}: There is a relationship between use of e-recruitment through Facebook & filling vacancies by food related SMEs from Pakistan

H_{5A}: There is a relationship between cost-saving by food related SMEs from Pakistan & sustainability of the firm

H_{6A}: There is a relationship between time-saving by food related SMEs from Pakistan & sustainability of the firm

H_{7A}: There is a relationship between filling vacancies by food related SMEs from Pakistan & sustainability of the firm

H_{8A}: There is a mediation of e-recruitment through Facebook between outbreak of COVID-19 & sustainability of the food related SMEs from Pakistan

H_{9A}: There is a serial mediation of e-recruitment through Facebook & cost-saving between outbreak of COVID-19 & sustainability of the food related SMEs from Pakistan

H_{9A}: There is a serial mediation of e-recruitment through Facebook & time-saving between outbreak of COVID-19 & sustainability of the food related SMEs from Pakistan

H₁₀A: There is a serial mediation of e-recruitment through Facebook & filling vacancies between outbreak of COVID-19 & sustainability of the food related SMEs from Pakistan

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology is used to describe major research ideas, questions and requirements to affirm research needs. Research methodology is also used to clarify steps that are required to take to solve research problem (Al Kilani & Kobziev, 2016).

In fact, research methodology is a systematic process of workflow and has several key components like research strategy, research technique, population, sample, sampling, research instruments and software for analysis (Sileyew, 2019). However, there are two major parts of research methodology, i.e., research design and sampling design (Yin, 2002).

3.1. Research Design:

This study has been supplemented with epistemology as the research philosophy as the purpose of using epistemology is to gain knowledge. In fact, Kovalainen and Eriksson (2015) epistemology is the research philosophy that addresses the question that what is knowledge? Similar was indicated Saunders Lewis Thornhill (2007) that epistemology is the philosophy of knowledge. However, the linkage between research philosophy and method is a much complex process therefore

this study uses the reference of Vveinhardt (2018) and Žukauskas et al. (2018), the study needs to be associated with research paradigm in order to develop effective linkage between research philosophy & method of data collection. Hence in line with Saunders et al. (2015) this study capitalizes upon post-positivism that is best suited stance for qualitative and quantitative studies. Moreover, in consistent with above citations this study also uses deductive approach and quantitative technique.

3.2. Sampling Design:

According to the most drastic impact of COVID-19 produces drastic impact over SMEs, especially on those that are in business of clothing, tobacco, metals, food products, furniture and machinery (Kumar et al., 2020). Therefore, this study collects data from SMEs that are associated with food related products and operating in Mega City Karachi. Major reasons to select Karachi are it is the largest city of Pakistan and most of the youth population of the country also resides in Karachi (Zafar & Mustafa, 2017). Furthermore, we may also find variety and number of SMEs operating in Karachi in comparison to the other cities of the country (Hou et al., 2021).

On the other side preference of food sector SMEs lies with the indications of Aftab et al. (2021), that emphasizes upon focused & in-depth research work on effect of COVID-19 on different forms of SMEs in Pakistan, that also includes food related SMEs. Last but not the least study also uses indication of Sekaran and Bougie (2016) to use group as the unit of

sampling and uses non-probability sampling to collect data through quota sampling. The type and method of sampling was preferred by most of the prior studies including Aftab et al. (2021) and Shoja et al. (2020) etc.

3.3 Research Instrument:

The questionnaire used for this research is based on five points Likert scale and has been developed through using elements of e-recruitment and its benefits used by Aboul-Ela (2014); Kuchеров and Tsybova (2021) and Rathee et al. (2020). Although sustainability of SME has been gauged through the indicators of Rahman and Hosain (2021). Last but not the least use indicators of Ashraf and Mohammad (2020) and Gigauri (2020) in order to gauge the impact of outbreak of COVID-19.

3.4. STATISTICAL TESTING & ANALYSIS

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is a second-generation multi-variate statistical tool. Tool is based upon two different models i.e., inner model to reflect the relationship between independent and dependent latent variables & outer model is used to check association between latent variables and their observed elements. Although there are several

ways to implement SEM i.e., through covariance-based approach, PLS-Based approach and web-based approach.

Though PLS-Based approach is preferred due to its ability to replace covariance-based approach, ability to work on smaller sample that are not distributed normally etc (Wong, 2013). Though SMART-PLS has been incorporated to indicate significant paths that are the part of structural models but the software is also vibrant to indicate other important relationships (Vijayabanu & Arunkumar, 2018).

Figure 2 is used to highlight outer loading that is actually a factor loading for all the variables used in the study. Although elements that have score lower than 0.50 must always be deleted in order to increase overall reliability of the construct. On the other side initial studies on the use of outer loading and SMART-PLS believes that elements having score of 0.5 might be retained in the research model (Afthanorhan, 2013). However, latest work of Trianasari et al. (2022) highlighted that 0.7 is the least acceptable score for the element that is required to be retained in the research mode. Though study may also include elements with outer loadings ranges between 0.6 & 0.7 if there is no impact upon the convergent criteria (Sander & the, 2014). Although according to the figure 2 there no elements have outer loading lesser than 0.766

that assures the criterion of outer loading.

Figure 2: Outer Loading and Confirmatory Factor Analysis

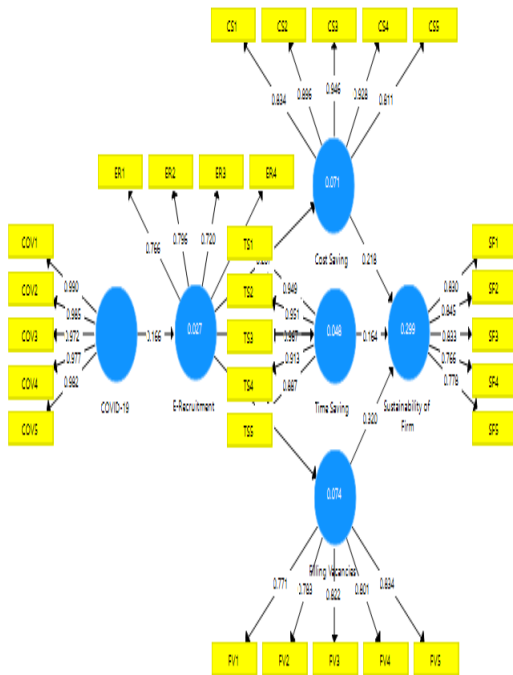


Table 1 is strategized in order to show quality criteria, i.e., predictive accuracy that is actually the measurement of variance that is caused by the change of independent variable over the dependent variable. Wong (2013), indicated that 0.25 is the minimum acceptable value for reflecting predictive accuracy (Quality Criteria) in the research model, while 0.5 and 0.75 are perceived as moderate and substantial values respectively. Though there is no value in table 1 that is lesser than 0.25 that means all the relations that are indulged in the study are effective and falls under the domain of predictive accuracy.

Table 1: R-Square (Predictive Accuracy)

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Cost Saving	0.61	0.59
E-Recruitment	0.627	0.618
Filling Vacancies	0.574	0.572
Sustainability of Firm	0.299	0.294
Time Saving	0.548	0.539

Table 2: Construct Reliability & Convergent Validity

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
COVID-19	0.99	0.994	0.992	0.963
Cost Saving	0.93	0.936	0.947	0.782
E-Recruitment	0.757	0.761	0.845	0.578
Filling Vacancies	0.862	0.865	0.9	0.644
Sustainability of Firm	0.87	0.882	0.905	0.657
Time Saving	0.964	0.977	0.971	0.872

Table 2 is plotted to indicate construct reliability and convergent validity. Therefore, table has been supplemented with reliability as well as validity measures. Previously Cronbach's alpha with values of 0.4 or above as the prime indicator of internal consistency and reliability. Although recent studies have ranked composite reliability as the better tool

in comparison to the Cronbach's alpha. The minimal range for composite reliability is 0.6 (Vijayabanu & Arunkumar, 2018). although higher values are recommended for better results (Yaacob et al., 2021).

On the other side Hair et al (2017) recommended to use cluster of outer loading, composite reliability and average variance extracted to determine convergent validity (Hair et al., 2017). Outer loading has been highlighted through table 1 and composite reliability and AVE are through table 2 with sufficient values to reflect convergent validity as indicated by Yaacob et al (2021) and Vijayabanu and Arunkumar (2018). Although, AVE is the most reliable indicator of convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981 & Sijtsma, 2009) but there is a need of value that is equal to or greater than 0.5 to reflect convergent validity (Yaacob et al., 2021). Therefore, in the light of these citation table 2 is fulfilling all the requirements of construct reliability and convergent validity.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

	Cost Saving	E-Recruitment	Filling Vacancies	Sustainability of Firm	Time Saving
COVID-19					
COVID-19					
Cost Saving	0.205				
E-Recruitment	0.189	0.312			
Filling Vacancies	0.209	0.455	0.337		
Sustainability of Firm	0.241	0.458	0.214	0.518	
Time Saving	0.117	0.469	0.25	0.335	0.381

Table 4: Path Coefficient

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Value
COVID-19 -> E-Recruitment	0.166	0.169	0.052	3.184	0.002
Cost Saving -> Sustainability of E-Recruitment	0.218	0.223	0.067	3.234	0.001
E-Recruitment -> Cost Saving	0.267	0.268	0.058	4.631	0
E-Recruitment -> Filling Vacancies	0.272	0.273	0.065	4.204	0
E-Recruitment -> Time Saving	0.219	0.222	0.055	3.99	0
Filling Vacancies -> Sustainability of Time Saving	0.32	0.32	0.058	5.528	0
Sustainability of Firm	0.164	0.16	0.061	2.705	0.007

Table 3 is placed to indicate discriminant validity through the use of Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio that is one key criteria for assessing discriminant validity along with Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion. Although HTMT has gain attention and preference over the use of Fornell and Larcker (Iqbal et al., 2021).

Therefore, this study also uses HTMT as the reflection of discriminant validity and uses the indication of Hair et al (2019) to indicate that values below 0.85 are good indicator of discriminant validity.

Thus, legitimate to declare that table 3 assures the discriminant validity as it has no values that are higher than 0.85. Therefore, this study also uses HTMT as the reflection of discriminant validity and uses the indication of Hair et al (2019) to indicate that values below 0.85 are good.

Table 5: Specific Indirect Effects

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Value
COVID-19 -> E-Recruitment -> Cost Saving	0.044	0.046	0.019	2.314	0.021
COVID-19 -> E-Recruitment -> Filling Vacancies	0.045	0.047	0.019	2.324	0.021
E-Recruitment -> Cost Saving -> Sustainability of Firm	0.058	0.059	0.022	2.678	0.008
COVID-19 -> E-Recruitment -> Cost Saving -> Sustainability of Firm	0.087	0.088	0.027	3.183	0.002
E-Recruitment -> Filling Vacancies -> Sustainability of Firm	0.01	0.01	0.005	1.823	0.069
COVID-19 -> E-Recruitment -> Filling Vacancies -> Sustainability of Firm	0.014	0.015	0.007	2.052	0.041
E-Recruitment -> Time Saving -> Sustainability of Firm	0.036	0.035	0.016	2.21	0.028
COVID-19 -> E-Recruitment -> Time Saving -> Sustainability of Firm	0.006	0.006	0.004	1.648	0.1
COVID-19 -> E-Recruitment -> Time Saving	0.036	0.037	0.015	2.449	0.015

Table 4 is the part of structural model and used to infer on the bases of statistical results through SMART-PLS (Silaparasetti, Rao & Khan, 2017). The criteria to check impacts are to analyze values from t-statistics or p-values. However, the minimum acceptable value of t-statistics is 1.97 and 0.05 or below for p-value (Wong, 2013). Therefore, in accordance with table 4 it has been concluded that all the relationship are valid, effective and highlighted through the use of inferential statistics as the values of t-statistics are higher than 1.97 and p-values are sufficiently lower than 0.05

Figure 3: Path Co-efficient

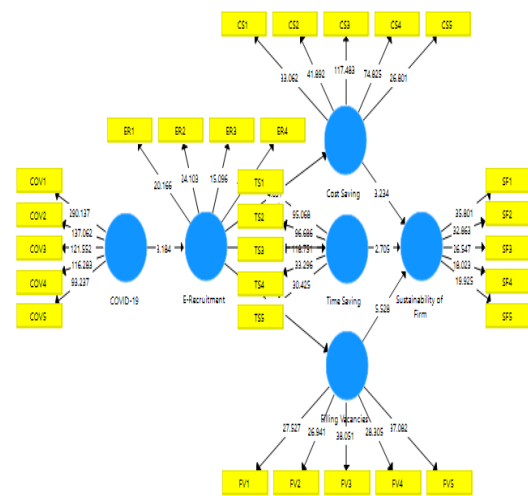


Table 5 is also a part of inferential statistics as well as structural model of SMART-PLS (Silaparasetti, Rao & Khan, 2017). Similarly, it is also based on t-statistics & p-values in order to reflect the impact as mentioned in table 4 the criteria are same i.e., 0.05 or below for p-values and 1.97 or above for t-statistics (Wong, 2013). Although, the findings from table 5 are bit different from table 4 as according the criteria of t-statistics and p-values two of the serial mediations are insignificant. Hence in the light of table 4 & table 5 it is legitimate to declare that among nine hypotheses, only H_{8A} & H_{9A} are rejected.

4 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Initially the findings of the study are consistent with Kubar et al. (2021), as findings

indicated that outbreak of pandemic has been positively associated with e-recruitment.

Moreover, the positive relationship of e-recruitment by SMEs with cost-saving, time saving and filling of vacancies also reflected the consistence of the research with Poorangi *et al* (2011) and Vashisthaa *et al* (2021). Hence it has been proved that use of e-recruitment is massively beneficial for SMEs. Thus, findings also legitimize the use of digitization by SMEs, especially to combat against public crises due to the outbreak of COVID-19 (Guo *et al.*, 2020; Mwita, 2020). Thus study uses three major benefits of e-recruitment, i.e., cost saving (Vashisthaa *et al.*, 2021), time saving & filling vacancies (Nguti & Mose, 2021).

Findings of the study also legitimizes the use of cost saving, time saving & filling vacancies as the potent and effective benefits of e-recruitment, especially through use of Facebook for the SMEs associated with food sector of Pakistan. Therefore, it is also effective to relate the findings of the study with Gajanova *et al* (2020), that highlighted the significance of e-recruitment through Facebook for companies in Asian Pacific Region. Moreover, all the benefits of e-recruitment through using Facebook are also found to be positively associated with the sustainability of SMEs that is major reason behind digitization (Alkhodary, 2021). Hence overall most of the findings including the serial mediation of e-recruitment and cost saving has been found significant through the findings of the study. The significance of the relationship for relationship of e-recruitment with

sustainability has very high importance as cost saving the top most reason and benefit for using e-recruitment (Vashisthaa *et al.*, 2021). However, serial mediation of other benefits i.e., time saving and filling of vacancies with e-recruitment is not creating any impact upon sustainability of SMEs from Pakistan. Although failure of any of the serial mediation does not nullifies or harms the selection of variables as the variables are selected as the major benefits of e-recruitment. In fact, all the benefits are found to be effectively associated with use e-recruitment through Facebook and also with sustainability of the SMEs.

That means e-recruitment through Facebook will provide edge to SMEs through reduction of cost, time and through filling vacancies. Similarly, these three benefits are also predicting the sustainability of SMEs. Thus, legitimate to declare that use of variables is effective and further studies may further substantiate the relationships.

4.1. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND AREA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research fulfills the criterion of Aftab *et al.* (2021) through analyzing impact of COVID-19 on sustainability of SMEs that are associated with food sector. Although further research work might be conducted on the other sector that are reflected through the research of Aftab *et al.* (2021) and Kumar *et al.* (2020). Although study is one of the first comprehensive effort from Pakistan that is reflecting the perceived impact of pandemic,

i.e., COVID-19 on sustainability of the SMEs. In fact, these forms of studies are rear in developing sides of the world. Therefore, indications of this study might be used by SEMDA and other financing and micro-financing institutes in order to support SME sector, especially those SMEs that are associated with food sector in PAKISTAN. Moreover, the findings of the study might also be used by policy makers to provide relief as well as technological and financial support to the SMEs related with food sector of Pakistan.

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