

Free Will Versus Force: The Role of Brand Equity and Strategic Human Resource Management in Employee Motivation

Jan Kleinhans

University of Mannheim

Arnd Vomberg

HEC Paris

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Can firms leverage their brands to motivate employees? With employee motivation at historic lows, traditional tools of strategic human resource management (SHRM) may fall short. The authors distinguish between two routes to employee motivation, explore their interplay, and assess their financial impact. The first route, *force*, encompasses external factors such as those introduced through SHRM, an important component of the social dimension in ESG ratings. The second route, *free will*, encompasses intangible factors related to meaningfulness of work, which is driven, among other things, by brand equity. Analysing YouGov brand equity data, 380,000 Glassdoor reviews, and ESG and financial data for 311 public firms over five years, the authors find that brand equity, a key marketing outcome, boosts employee motivation and drives SHRM engagement. The findings underscore the importance of aligning marketing and HR strategies to foster a motivated workforce and enhance financial performance.

Keywords: marketing–human resource management interface, brand equity, employee motivation

Track: Marketing Strategy & Theory