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Top Management Support, Green Intellectual Capital and Green HRM: A Proposed Framework for Sustainability

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Abstract: Sustainability has become a crucial aspect of organisational strategy, with many organisations implementing sustainable actions to mitigate environmental effects and reinforce social responsibility. However, sustainability adoption in organisations may be challenging due to some factors including the lack of resources, conflicting priorities, and resistance to change. Considering that sustainability is a long-term agenda that requires continuous commitment and investment in human resources, companies should understand the drivers of their sustainability adoption to develop strategies that foster company longevity. This study discussed the resource-based view (RBV) theory that emphasises the strategic resources that could be utilised by an organisation to gain sustainable competitive advantage. A framework was proposed to demonstrate the ability of leveraging organisational key resources such as top management support (TMS), green intellectual capital (IC), and Green Human Resource Management (HRM) in promoting the adoption of sustainable practices in organisations. This research has contributed to the sustainability literature by establishing a unified framework that could be applied to assess the impacts of TMS, GIC, and Green HRM on sustainability and determine the ability of Green HRM to strengthen the relationships between TMS, GIC, and sustainability through mediation. The study results would assist the top management and policymakers in understanding the importance of their support towards sustainable development. The results would also enhance the understanding of the importance of continuous investment in green knowledge creation among employees to reap the benefits from GIC and Green HRM practices. Finally, researchers could adopt the proposed framework in future studies for further empirical explorations of the drivers of sustainability.

Keywords: sustainability; green intellectual capital; green human resource management; top management support.

JEL Classification: Q01; J21; J24; J29; M54.

Introduction

Sustainability denotes the implementation of economically, environmentally, and socially responsible practices that contribute to society's well-being (Sheehy and Farneti 2021). Achieving sustainability in organisations is a complex and major challenge (Dubey *et al.* 2015). This complex and challenging task requires coordination across multiple sectors and stakeholders, including innovative solutions to address the underlying drivers of unsustainable practices (Alharbi 2020; Yong *et al.* 2020). Pursuing long-term sustainability is gaining increasing recognition as an essential aspect of corporate strategy (Fernando *et al.* 2019). Therefore, businesses should identify and understand the factors influencing their sustainability to develop and implement effective sustainability strategies and practices (Salmanzadeh-Meydani *et al.* 2022) due to the global perception of sustainability strategies as the key strategic development (Amrutha and Geetha 2020). Promoting sustainability remains crucial to ensure economic, social, and environmental progress (Amjad *et al.* 2021).

1. Literature Review

1.1. Underpinning Theory

According to the Resource Based View (RBV) theory, the resources of a business comprise tangible and intangible assets that include a semi-permanent attachment to the company. Examples of the tangible and intangible resources are brand identities, efficient procedures, in-house expertise, machinery, trained labour, and trade contracts. These resources are valuable, scarce, and challenging to duplicate. Furthermore, the implementations and consequences of RBV increased the convergence of strategic HRM (Malik *et al.* 2020). The RBV theory was employed in this research, considering that it is a managerial framework utilised to specify the strategic resources required by a company to gain sustainability. Notably, HRM plays a crucial part in companies' competitiveness, evolutionary processes, institutional and societal forces, regeneration (Bombiak and Kluska 2018), and the need for the optimisation of natural resources when they are required (Sehnm *et al.* 2019). It also directs managers' attention to human attributes contributing to a firm's long-term viability (Macke and Genari 2019). With respect to natural resources, HR departments are established with strict criteria (Renwick *et al.* 2015).

The introduction of Green Human Resource Management (HRM) applications involves several advantages, including an increase in worker ecological knowledge that improves a company's sustainability policies (Bombiak and Kluska 2018). People are viewed as organisational resources that could be employed to implement long-term management strategies and objectives (Yong *et al.* 2019). In the pursuit of sustainability, business strategies expand the product value chain using environmentally oriented principles and ecologically solid premises (Sehnm *et al.* 2019). Furthermore, placing worth in human potential, showing respect to the social needs of specific communities, ethnic groups, and regions, using large data systems, and putting balance in the consistent demand of generating profits with environmental awareness are integral to sustainability (Malik *et al.* 2020; Singh 2018). This research applied an RBV viewpoint to examine the ability of HRM greening initiatives to assist in achieving sustainability to identify the link between Green HRM practices, green intellectual capital (IC), and top management support for sustainability.

1.2. Sustainability

Sustainability was described as the capability to retain a certain entity, result, or procedure over time (Jenkins 2009) and perform activities that do not involve excessive resources that the capability is based on (Klarin 2018). Meanwhile, Clough *et al.* (2006) described sustainability as a procedure that assists in developing a vibrant economy and high life quality while showing respect to the importance of sustaining natural resources and protecting the environment" (p. 30). Sustainability is an essential concept that has gained significant attention in recent years due to its importance in addressing global environmental challenges. It denotes the idea that the present and future human societies must live and meet their needs. The Brundtland Report in 1987 developed the "official" definition of sustainability for the first time. According to the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) (1987), sustainability is defined as "meeting the demands of the current generations without risking the capability of the incoming generations to fulfil their demands".

Malik *et al.* (2021) viewed sustainability as a process related to the implementation and development of specific approaches to solving environmental and social problems. This process was founded on three elements also known as the three Ps: profit, the environment, and people (Alhaddi 2015), which show mutual support. On the other hand, sustainability represents the capability of sustaining the three elements of a human system over time (Roca-Puig 2019). Based on these definitions, sustainability emphasises the importance of intergenerational

equity, recognising that today's actions could significantly impact the future. As a result, this general comprehension of sustainability could be integrated into all human activities and business procedures. Khan *et al.* (2021) emphasised that companies should act beyond legal and economic compliance and integrate economic, environmental, and social performance to improve their sustainability.

1.3. Top Management Support

Top management support (TMS) is a critical element for the successful project of any company. The term "top management" denotes the executive managers who are also leaders of the entire company with the highest authority in making business decisions (Rogers *et al.* 2022). Moreover, Lee and Joo (2020) asserted that top management is the most influential group in determining the strategy and direction of the company and projecting its performance and emphasized the impact of top management's supportive attitude toward green project. Kemei *et al.* (2018) described TMS as senior managers' positive attitudes and behaviours towards a project and their visible support throughout and after the implementation of the project. Khrosrowpour and Travers (1991) added that TMS is the readiness of top management to offer the required resources and authority or power for positive results from a project.

According to Alameri (2022), TMS is the primary element leading to a positive result of a project, indicating that top management participation in projects may have positive and negative impacts on project portfolio success. Therefore, the quality of TMS could thoroughly regulate a project's success. A company complies with the practices, endeavours, and instructions of the top management in deciding on the optimum developmental direction of an organisation (Wilms *et al.* 1994). Considering the primary role of TMS (Daily & Huang 2001), TMS becomes the major (Young & Jordan, 2008) and essential (Kannan *et al.* 2014) factor impacting a project success. According to Liu *et al.* (2020), top management directs a company's operations based on its position. Daily and Huang (2001) added that top management could also act as a change guardian to assist an organisation in making a smoother and more complete transition. Yusliza *et al.* (2019) reported that top management supervises the development and design of the policies that will be implemented. It also ensures proper and effective communication throughout a company. Similarly, Nguyen *et al.* (2022) opined that top management is essential for a successful introduction of new management practices; organisations with strong TMS would increase organisational environmental performance.

1.4. Green Intellectual Capital

Currently, intellectual capital has emerged as a factor in the identification of approaches that raise corporate environmental effectiveness (Arsawan *et al.* 2022; Guerrero-Baena *et al.* 2015; Toniai *et al.* 2019; Yong *et al.* 2019; Yusliza *et al.* 2020). Baharum and Pitt (2009) highlighted the purpose of IC, which is to analyse the explicit and implicit intelligence functions in the three components of IC and develop the methods of encouraging value creation within these components. Sudibyo and Sutanto (2020) further reported that IC is critical for businesses to improve their competitiveness. Intangible assets are normally perceived as creating competitive advantages that could successfully lead to the achievement of sustainable corporate goals (Chen, 2008; Yong *et al.* 2019). Moreover, Sidik *et al.* (2019) and Asiaei (2021) suggested that an organisation's intangible resources bank, abilities, expertise, wisdom, reputation, and information capable of boosting a company's skillset are described as an IC.

Yusliza *et al.* (2020) defined IC as a complex concept that supports non-monetary and non-physical resources of businesses built on practical abilities, knowledge, and experience. Chen (2008) stated that GIC could be classified under green human capital (GHC), green structural capital (GSC), and green relational capital (GRC). These three GIC components are interrelated and interact with each other (Kamukama, 2013) to develop knowledge. This knowledge is represented in diverse manners, which include employee knowledge, databases, external and internal relations, procedures, or systems (Bombiak, 2022). In summary, GIC is a crucial concept that enables organisations to manage environmental resources and enhance sustainable development.

1.5. Green Human Resource Management

Green HRM has been more widely recognised as a crucial technique for the implementation of green activities and the achievement of long-term sustainability (Abbas *et al.* 2021; Adubor *et al.* 2022; Malik *et al.* 2020; Yusoff *et al.* 2018; Zaid *et al.* 2018; Farooq *et al.* 2023). To gain a competitive edge and achieve the optimum environmental performance in industries, Green HRM practices have become critical for innovativeness, affecting credibility, customer satisfaction, and trust (Hollebeek & Rather, 2019; Kim *et al.* 2019; Yen *et al.* 2020; Yusliza *et al.* 2021). Ahmad (2015) described Green HRM generally as the promotion of causes of environmental

sustainability. More specifically, it was defined as the utilisation of HRM policies for promoting sustainability in the use of resources in companies. Similarly, Jabbour and Jabbour (2016) argued that Green HRMs are established by placing HRM practices in line with corporate environmental management goals. Malik *et al.* (2020) reported that the Green HRM practices and their correspondence to the environment are aimed towards limiting the waste of natural resources, which was subsequently achieved upon the workers' awareness of environmental concerns and their importance.

In general, green HRM generally denotes a set of HRM actions that clearly take a company's environmental objectives into account (Ren *et al.* 2018; Renwick *et al.* 2013). Green HRM improves the workforce environmental performance and ecological behaviour and represents various aspects aimed at developing a green employee (Farooq *et al.* 2022; Peng *et al.* 2020; Raut *et al.* 2020). This HRM holds a direct responsibility in the development of a green workforce that shows appreciation, understanding, and practices of green initiatives. The HRM also establishes green objectives throughout the HRM procedures of recruitment, employment, training, advancing, compensating, and establishing a company's human capital (Mathapati, 2013). It was added by Bombiak (2019), Soomro *et al.* (2021), and Ghouri *et al.* (2020) that Green HRM is essential for the implementation of sustainable development. Green HRM could be perceived as a proactive organisational practice aimed at ensuring environmental protection and promoting sustainability.

2. Proposition Development

2.1. Top Management Support and Sustainability

The necessity for considerable organisational changes that adopt sustainable practices increases the importance of the top management (Naranjo-Gil *et al.* 2016). The manner through which an organisation directs these coordination issues between its functional departments is based on the actions and decisions of the top management team (Naranjo-Gil 2016). The upper echelons perspective emphasises that the top management of an organisation is regarded as the most influential and decisive member of the company (Hambrick and Mason 1984). Thus, the attitudes and degrees of support by the top management have a considerable impact on the attitudes or participation of organisational members in terms of accepting practices, management activities, and human resource development efforts (Lee *et al.* 2017). Accordingly, Lee and Joo (2020) argued that it is unfeasible to offer a significant level of collaboration for executing management tasks without the active support or commitment of the company's top management. Subsequently, the support and participation of top management in corporate sustainability activities are recognised as essential for effective sustainability integration in businesses (Blackburn 2007; Epstein and Buhovac 2010; Kiesnere and Baumgartner 2019; Tacheva *et al.* 2020). Therefore, as strategic decision-makers, top management teams are the important internal drivers of sustainability implementation (Kiesnere and Baumgartner 2020).

The support of top management for specific organisational activities is essential for overcoming the obstacles to change within and outside a corporation by increasing information sharing and communication between companies (Teo *et al.* 1997). Amoako *et al.*'s (2022) study confirmed a significant positive association between top management support and environmental sustainability. It could also be said that the top management's support level has successfully carried out sustainability initiatives in an organisation. In line with this, the following hypothesis was established:

Proposition 1: Top management support positively affects sustainability.

2.2. Top Management Support and Green Human Resource Management

According to Zahrani (2022), top management serves a crucial role in building proactive attitudes toward environmental measures employed in businesses. According to Sanusi and Johl (2021), top management commitment and support are crucial for the design and execution of policies and strategies in an organisation. Therefore, Green HRM sustainability initiatives require top management's commitment and support, which begins from the executive level and subsequently affects the organisation as a whole. Support and commitment at the executive level highlight sustainability as an organisational priority. Moreover, top management commitment has gained attention in the recent literature as a significant Green HRM predictor. For instance, Yusliza *et al.* (2019) asserted that top management commitment is essential for implementing Green HRM practices to achieve positive environmental performance. Similarly, Haldorai *et al.* (2022) suggested that top management green commitment has significantly and positively impacted Green HRM and environmental performance. Therefore, it can be assumed that top management support would positively impact Green HRM implementation.

Memon *et al.* (2022) explained that when the top management identifies the potential benefits of specific environmental projects, it would be motivated to support environmental sustainability. Caliskan and Esen (2019) suggested that support from top management may be perceived as a success factor for the human aspect of environmental management. Support may take the form of promoting Green HRM practices including green recruitment and selection, training, and development (green abilities), performance management, reward and compensation (green motivation), and workers' involvement and leadership (green opportunities) to gain an organisation's green competitive advantage (Muisyo *et al.* 2021). Following these discussions, it was assumed in this study that the support from top management would improve Green HRM implementation. The following hypothesis was developed:

Proposition 2: Top management support has a positive impact on Green HRM.

2.3. Green Intellectual Capital and Sustainability

Green IC is essential for strengthening sustainable growth prospects and boosting business performance and competitiveness (Chen 2008). Given the importance of organisational assets and resources in accelerating an organisation's productivity and development, the value of a company's intangible assets (*e.g.*, IC) in enhancing performance is significant (Chaudhry and Chaudhry 2022; Martín-de-Castro *et al.* 2011). Yusoff *et al.* (2019) stated that an organisation's sustainable performance is improved by gaining a competitive edge and incorporating GIC into its commercial operations. The GIC assists enterprises in adhering to stringent global environmental processes (Chang 2011; Huang and Kung 2011). According to Chen (2008), for industry to successfully implement a sustainable ecological approach, environmental knowledge is essential to seek the related potentials for process and product development. In the current times, knowledge and comprehension of culture, agents, administrators, and convergent thinkers are crucial to resolving organisational problems (Gharib *et al.* 2022).

IC is believed to be advantageous to workers through the assistance offered in acquiring new knowledge, expertise, and experience (Chen, 2021). According to De Vos and Van der Heijden (2017), the sustainability of the business condition is contingent on the skills and abilities of the company's personnel. Moreover, Geng *et al.* (2017) and NR and Yurniwati (2018) found that the majority of emerging economies have currently prioritised the development of green skills among their workforces. Ullah *et al.* (2021) stated that in the Chinese manufacturing sector, the relationship and impact of GIC on business sustainability were statistically significant, suggesting that organisations should increase employee awareness to place their objectives in line with those of the companies. This action is carried out to achieve sustainability and develop environmental protection training programmes with an emphasis on GIC. Considering these arguments, the following hypothesis was proposed:

Proposition 3: Green intellectual capital positively impacts sustainability.

2.4. Green Intellectual Capital and Green Human Resource Management

Environmental management could be enhanced when individuals are recruited based on green initiatives, green training, and growth and they adhere to green discipline actions (Jyoti 2019; Mandip 2012). While the majority of existing studies highlighted that green HRM practices are crucial factors required to achieve various aspects of GIC (Jirawuttinunt, 2018; Nisar *et al.* 2021; Sudin & Saad, 2018; Yang & Lin, 2009), only a few investigated the reverse effect of GIC on green HRM (Malik *et al.* 2020; Yong *et al.* 2019). For instance, Ma *et al.* (2021) argued that the provision of green training to workers improves their capabilities, conduct, commitments, knowledge, and expertise in environmental management. Their findings also demonstrated that providing green training to employees creates green human capital, which is a component of GIC.

A correlation was observed between environmental awareness and green employee behaviour (Rayner & Morgan, 2018). Huang and Kung (2011) asserted that competitive advantage and sustainable performance could be achieved through structural capital. On the other hand, green relational capital is essential for the development of long-running associations between two parties (Tonial *et al.* 2019). According to Golicic and Smith (2013), organisations are concerned about sustainability due to their desire to express to their stakeholders that they are concerned about environmental issues and their management. As a result, businesses are expressing concern regarding the societal impact of GIC, Green HRM practices, and sustainable performance (Malik *et al.* 2020). Based on Jirawuttinunt's (2018) study that linked Green HRM practices with GIC, it was found that Green HRM actions play a crucial role in boosting pro-environmental psychological capital. On the other hand, the findings by Yong *et al.* (2019) indicated that GIC significantly impacted Green HRM practices. Additionally, enterprises with high levels of green human capital and green relational capital could boost their Green HRM practice adoption. In line with these findings, the following hypothesis was established:

Proposition 4: Green intellectual capital positively impacts Green HRM.

2.5. Green Human Resource Management and Sustainability

The primary objective of Green HRM is to encourage sustainable development through HRM practices (Peerzadah *et al.* 2018). Bhutto and Auranzeb (2016) argued that sustainable environmental performance could be attained by implementing certain Green HRM practices. Furthermore, Cherian and Jacob (2012) stated that Green HRM actions increase competitive advantage and performance in general through improved employee morale, retention of employees, improved public image and recruitment of personnel, higher productivity, and sustainability. According to Mehta and Chugan (2015), while businesses are sustainable due to their operations and culture, employees develop and implement eco-friendly policies and establish a green corporate culture. It was added that without the training for employees and implementation of sustainable strategies, going green would be a challenging initiative (Mehta and Chugan 2015). Meanwhile, Hamadamin and Atan (2019) asserted that human resource practices are the essential elements of sustainable corporate growth and competitive advantage.

According to Russo and Fouts (1997), incorporating environmental considerations into a company's culture may result in environmental capabilities, which rivals would struggle to imitate, subsequently developing a competitive advantage. The literature demonstrated the significant impact of Green HRM as a sustainability driver. For example, Adubor *et al.*'s (2022) study revealed a significant association between the components of Green HRM (green recruitment and selection, green training, and green rewards) and corporate sustainability in the manufacturing industry in Nigeria. It was also suggested that workers who were provided with greening abilities and training carried out the reduction of waste and practised reusing materials, improved an organisation's reputation, drew in and maintained green customers, and made the reduction of negative environmental impacts to gain corporate sustainability. Similarly, Malik *et al.* (2020) found that two components of Green HRM practices (green recruitment and selection and green rewards) positively impacted a company's sustainability. Therefore, the following hypothesis was suggested:

Proposition 5: Green HRM has a positive impact on sustainability.

2.6. Green Human Resource Management as a Mediator

In achieving success within the corporate community and facilitating the shareholders' maximisation of their profits, today's organisations should focus on social and environmental elements besides economic and financial elements (Arayssi *et al.* 2016; Daily *et al.* 2007; Finger and Rosenboim 2022; Xu *et al.* 2019). Currently, business communities have been increasingly aware of going green and implementing a wide range of environmental management approaches. Notably, the successful implementation of these sustainable corporate approaches in a company indicates the importance of solid, sustainable leadership (Iqbal *et al.* 2020a; Iqbal *et al.* 2020b; Metcalf and Benn 2013) and environmental knowledge, which is accessed through GIC (Amores-Salvadó *et al.* 2021), and focused on attracting personnel who can make significant contributions (Yong 2020) through sustainable HRM practices (Mohiuddin 2022; Farooq *et al.* 2022). In addition, Green HRM has been developed into the primary business approach for prominent companies where HR departments are mainly involved in going green at the office (Ahmad, 2015).

Sustainability concern has become one of the priorities among the strategic leaders of the corporate world due to the increased consciousness of the incorporation of "green" into the corporate approach to business (Brockhaus *et al.* 2017; Hambrick, 2007; Politis and Grigoroudis 2022). The concept of sustainable HRM, which includes Green HRM, socially responsible HRM, triple bottom line HRM, and common good HRM (Piwowar-Sulej 2021), is recently taken into account in view of sustainability as a method of gaining a set of skills, motivation, values, and confidence to prevent the harmful environmental impacts through the adoption of justice, development, and welfare (Cohen *et al.* 2012; Ehnert *et al.* 2016). Ahmad (2015) argued that Green HRM is the most crucial factor of sustainability. Corporate sustainability performance is attributed to the management and workers' green practices including Green HRM and dynamic capabilities (Schaltegger and Burritt 2018). Accordingly, the following hypotheses were suggested:

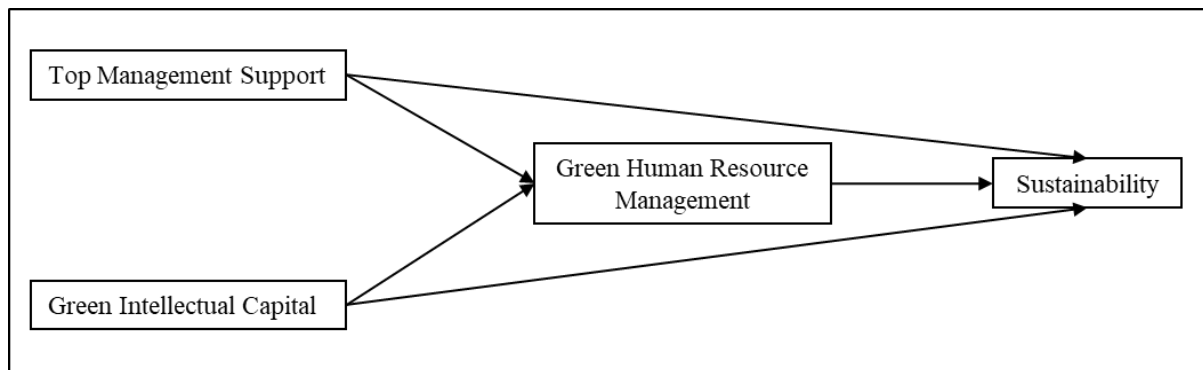
Proposition 6: Green HRM positively mediates the association between top management's support and sustainability.

Proposition 7: Green HRM positively mediates the association between green intellectual capital and sustainability.

3. Proposed Framework

The uniqueness of this study is evident through the assessment of the mediating role of Green HRM in the relationship between TMS, GIC, and sustainability. Figure 1. presents the proposed conceptual framework.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study



Conclusion

This proposed research highlights the important association between TMS, GIC, Green HRM, and sustainability, with Green HRM playing a crucial role as the mediator. The results from the literature review suggest that TMS and investment in GIC could positively impact sustainability efforts by developing and implementing Green HRM practices. The review also demonstrated the importance for managers and policymakers to prioritise sustainability adoption and Green HRM as the key components of their overall strategy. To illustrate, this strategy comprises the investment in training and development programmes ensuring that workers are equipped with the knowledge and expertise crucial for supporting sustainability initiatives and implementing performance metrics to measure the success of these efforts.

Managers and policymakers should prioritise the development of a culture of sustainability within their organisations. This development includes incentivising sustainable behaviour, integrating sustainability into decision-making processes, and encouraging collaboration across departments to ensure that sustainability is incorporated into all aspects of business. Overall, this proposed study contributes a valuable understanding of the significance of TMS, GIC, and Green HRM in driving sustainable practices in organisations. Overall, by considering the findings of this research and implementing the highlighted recommendations, managers and policymakers would be able to develop a more sustainable and environmentally responsible future.

Credit Authorship Contribution Statement

The authors contributed equally to this work.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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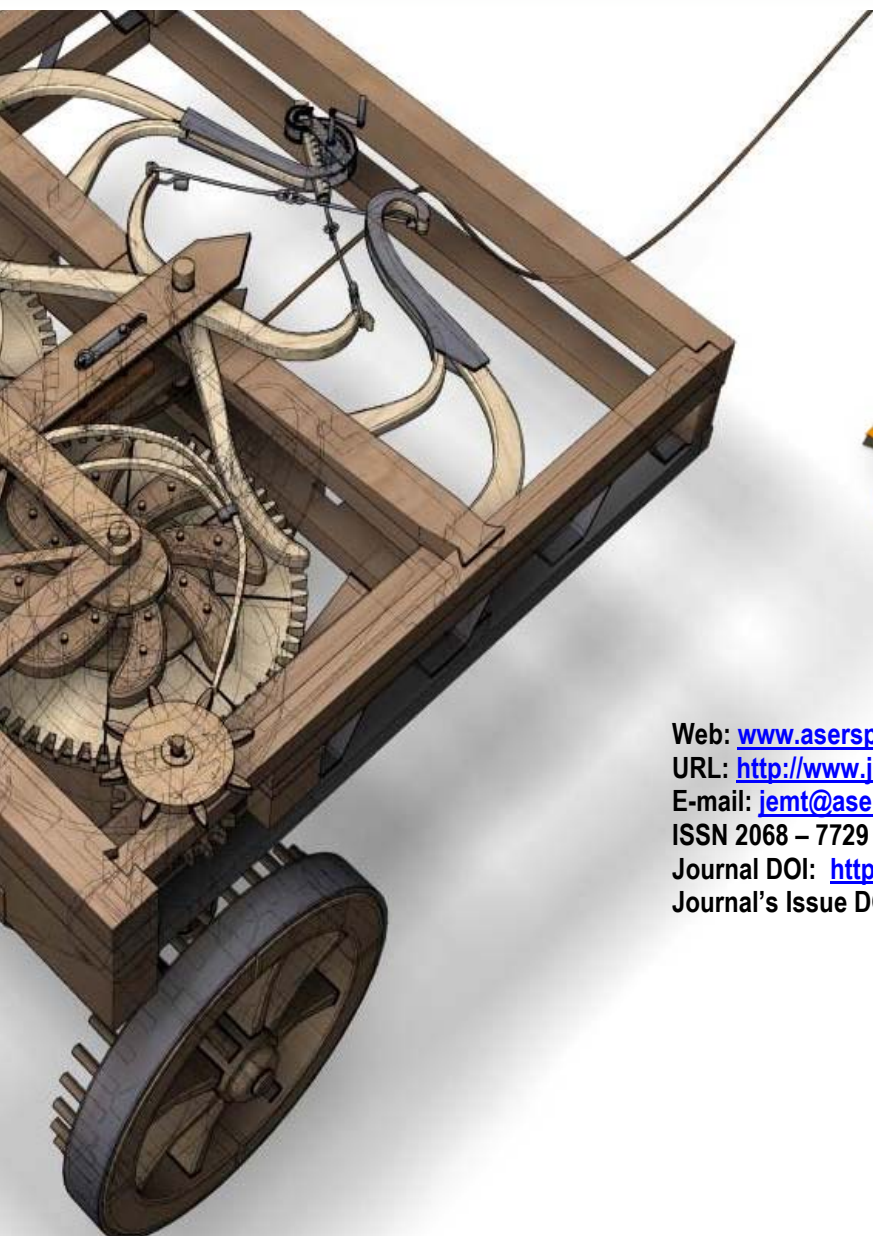
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