

Exploring the antecedents and consequences of Employer branding

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EXPLORING THE ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF EMPLOYER BRANDING

ABSTRACT

Employer branding is defined as the projection of the image of an organization as a great place to work for. The image is communicated to external (potential) and internal (existing) employees to attract and retain the best talent in the organization. The research in employer branding has evolved considerably since its conceptualization by Barrow (1990). The current literature on EB is largely restricted to study its application and resulting advantages with a little consideration on exploring the factors leading to employer branding and the impact of employer branding. Hence, this study would like to add on to the literature of EB by proposing a framework of antecedents and consequences of employer branding. Drawing our argument from the literature on organization behavior, marketing and human resource management, we propose employer brand association, organization culture, employee innovativeness opportunities, positive word of mouth, employer brand awareness, along with potential growth and job advancements as the antecedents of employer branding. An effective employer branding strategy may lead to higher employee commitment, higher employee loyalty, reduction in turnover intentions, lowering of attrition rate and employee work behavior. For the scope of this paper, we intend to examine the impact of employer branding on employee work behavior in form of organization citizenship behavior.

Keywords: Employer branding, antecedents, consequences.

INTRODUCTION

The brand is considered as the most valuable asset of an organization (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). In general people relate to the brand with company's name, logotype, products and services associated with it. The

application of branding ideas and theories to human resource management is termed as ‘Employer Branding’ (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). It is defined as “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing Company” (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). The academic journey of the concept is quite young and has advanced remarkably with the contributions of practitioners and academic scholars. The definitional account of academicians is largely conceptual and theoretical in nature (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens et. al., 2005; Martin, 2009; Wilden et. al., 2010) On the other hand, practitioners are inclined on the function of attracting employees for the employers (Berthon et al. 2005; Bendaraviciene et al. 2013; Lievens and Highhouse 2003; Maxwell and Knox 2009).

The organizations are adopting employer branding as a promising strategic tool to combat the scarcity of talent in current scenario of intense competition for resources and market share. The intellectual and human capital are an important source of competitive advantage (Becker, 1964). The organizations that are having and can attract the best minds can enjoy a distinct advantage over others (Harari, 1998). An organization can gain competitive advantage only with the access of highly competitive workforce to act on all the available employee benefits, infrastructure and technology (Boxall, 1998). The ongoing war of talent is getting worse day by day as organizations are competing to attract the skilled employees in different professions (Mahroum, 2000). In such a scenario, EB can play a functional role in creating a workforce which is tough to replicate (Ambler & Barrow, 1996) and help organizations in creating a sustainable competitive advantage.

The major studies in the existing literature of employer branding elaborate the seminal on the role of employer branding in enhancing employment (Ambler & Barrow, 1996) creating a competitive advantage (Sutherland, Torricelli & Karg, 2002), employee internalization of organization values, employee retention (The Conference Board, 2001), reduced employee acquisition cost, improved employee relations and increased employee retention (Ritson, 2002), talent management (Mandhanya & Shah, 2010), intention to apply (Saini, Rai & Chaudhary, 2014), better organization image, effectiveness in recruitment practices and

increase in job satisfaction (Heilmann , Saarenketo & Liikkanen, 2013), organization attractiveness for an effective and successful execution of employer branding strategy (Leekha Chhabra & Sharma, 2014).

The review of literature revealed only one study reporting eight antecedents of employer branding which in turn affect the firm's performance (Biswas & Suar, 2016). We believe that there are other factors that can also influence employer branding which can further enrich our understanding of antecedents of employer branding. Based on the conceptual and theoretical arguments derived from the literature of organization behavior, marketing and human resource management we propose employer brand association, organization culture, employee innovativeness opportunities, positive word of mouth, employer brand awareness, and potential growth and job advancements can help in creating a strong employer brand.

This study can further broaden our understanding of employer branding which may later be used by practitioners to devise an effective employer branding strategy. So far, the literature has majorly discussed the impact of employer branding on organization's performance. Many researchers have suggested that the overall job performance is a combined function of task performance and contextual work behavior such as organization citizenship behavior and counterproductive work behavior (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002; Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000). The employee work behavior plays a crucial role as they "shape the organizational, social and psychological context that serves as the catalyst for task activities and processes" (Borman, & Motowidlo, 1997, pp 100). We believe that employer branding will have a greater influence on the employee work behavior. For the scope of this paper, we are limiting ourselves to examine the impact of employer branding on organization citizenship behavior as the employee work behavior.

Organ (1988, p.4) defines organization citizenship behavior as an "individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization". We posit that the employees identify with a strong employer brand and gets loyal, attracted, committed and positively affected to perform extra job role as well out of

formal job description. In other words, we can propose that a strong employer brand can lead to organization citizenship behavior.

This paper makes an attempt to contribute to the literature of employer branding by conducting a study on antecedents and consequence of employer branding. A framework is developed illustrating the antecedents of employer branding and its consequence on the organization citizenship behavior. The paper contributes at two levels. Firstly, it extends the body of literature by introducing antecedents of employer branding. Secondly, the study also adds a behavioral consequence of employer branding in form of organization citizenship behavior.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Dell & Ainspan, (2001) posited that employer branding creates an identity of the organization as an employer by projecting its values, culture, policies for attracting, motivating, and retaining the firm's current and potential employees. This broadened the understanding and application of employer branding for both external (potential) and internal (current or existing) employees. Employer branding is not merely a tool for attracting employees in fact it is a targeted, long-term strategy to create an awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm (Sullivan, 2004).

The seminal work by Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) proposed a conceptual framework for employer branding positing two prime assets for the organization as, brand association (the ideas or the thoughts that is sensed in the mind) and the brand loyalty. Berthon et al. (2005) developed an employer attractiveness scale suggesting a need to focus on 'internal branding' that is taking consideration of current or existing employees for employer branding strategies as they are the first customers of the organization's job product. This completely adheres to the conceptualization of employer branding by Lloyd (2002) who had explained employer branding as the collective efforts to communication about an organization, as a desirable place to work for, to the existing and prospective staff.

Minchington (2006) presented the practitioner aspect by proposing 'Employee Value Proposition (EVP) as 'a set of associations and offerings provided by an organization in return for the skills, capabilities and experiences an employee brings to the organization,' Employer value proposition is often referred to as 'Employer Brand Proposition' (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). It is the specific set of associations, values and offerings that positively affect the desired target candidates to choose an employer, thus helping in talent pooling and employee engagement, It is the underlying organization content that is converted into messages and visual expressions by adopting a careful and well-crafted communication strategy to match up the desires of the target talent groups. According to this approach, the employee 'gives' the value by contributing to the organization to 'get' a reciprocating value from the organization. The organization can align EVP with its respective brand promise to attract potential candidates with desired skills and capabilities (Moroko & Uncles, 2005)

The extant literature talks about the merits of employer branding suggesting its positive impact on enhancing employment (Ambler & Barrow, 1996) creating a competitive advantage (Sutherland, Torricelli & Karg, 2002), employee internalization of organization values, employee retention (The Conference Board, 2001), reduced employee acquisition cost, improved employee relations and increased employee retention (Ritson, 2002), talent management (Mandhanya & Shah, 2010), intention to apply (Saini, Rai & Chaudhary, 2014), better organization image, effectiveness in recruitment practices and increase in job satisfaction (Heilmann, Saarenketo & Liikkanen, 2013). The empirical study by Leekha Chhabra & Sharma (2014) based on semi structured interviews, surveys and literature review, reports organization culture, brand name and compensation as the most preferred organization attributes considered by applicants. The study found a strong correlation between strong brand image and likelihood to apply for the job. The study was conducted with a sample from private institutions in India which is its major limitation.

Earlier studies have suggested antecedents and consequences of employer branding, but with limited empirical support. The empirical study by Biswas & Suar, (2016) is a first attempt of its kind by the authors in presenting the antecedents and consequence of EB. The study reported the influence of realistic job

previews, perceived organizational support, and equity in reward administration, perceived organizational prestige, organizational trust, top management leadership, psychological contract obligations and corporate social responsibility on employer branding and consequences of EB on financial and non-financial performance of the organization. We believe that there are other characteristics and job attributes that can also affect employer branding. A large number of studies reports the impact of EB on organizational performance with no consideration of behavioral consequences. The paper will discuss this in detail in following sections.

ANTECEDENTS OF EMPLOYER BRANDING

The thoughts and ideas that are evoked by a brand in the minds of consumers are the brand associations (Aaker, 1991). It can be verbal, sensory or an emotional response associated with a brand (Supphellen, 2000) Brand associations determines the brand image (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). According to Keller (1993), brand image is the blend of the perception about product (objective and tangible characteristics) or non-product (consumers' thinking and inferences about the product) related features and functional/symbolic benefits that beset with brand associations formed in memory of consumer. In the context of employer branding, employer brand image is also characterized by functional and symbolic benefits The functional benefits comprises of objective employment terms such as salary, employee benefits, allowances and more. The symbolic benefits relates to the perception of prestige of a firm and the social acceptance imagined by an applicant, if working at that firm. (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Drawing from the literature on brand association, we define employer brand association as the thoughts and ideas that are evoked in the minds of potential and existing employees, when exposed to an employer brand. The potential prospects will get attracted to apply for an organization on the basis of employer brand associations felt by a candidate due to the projected employer brand image. Thus, we can propose,

Proposition: Employer brand association will positively associate with employer branding.

Culture is an important ingredient for the success of any organization. The organization culture is defined as the system of shared meaning held by the employees that segregates the organization from the other organizations (Schein, 1996). The organization culture is composed of a dominant culture (core values shared by the employees that provides a distinct personality of the organization) and a subculture relating to common day to day employee experiences (Hofmann & Jones, 2005; Jermier, et al., 1991). A strong culture is held intensively and shared widely (Swart & Kinnie, 2003) which further enhances organizational commitment, loyalty, cohesiveness, thereby reducing employee turnover. Organization culture helps an employee to understand the routines and practices of an organization, facilitates communication across department and fosters cooperation among the employees (McShane & Glinow, 2005). The digital age employees prefer compatible work culture to work effectively. It is an important job prerequisite considered by knowledge workers (Simon, 2000) cited in (Sutherland, Torricelli & Karg, 2002).. Some studies refer organization culture as the personality of the organization (Schneider, 1990; Van der Post, & De Coning, 1997). The organization culture plays an important role in shaping the intentions of employees in both aspects, namely, to apply and to remain within an organization. We posit that an employee perceives the personality of organization through its organization culture which will in turn affect his attraction to apply for a job in an organization. Thus, we propose,

Proposition: Organization culture will positively associate with employer branding.

Employee innovativeness is a relatively new job attribute that is being seriously considered by the young generation. Employee innovativeness is defined as the engagement of employee in innovative behavior comprising of generation, promotion and realization of ideas with an objective of developing innovative product and solutions (Kanter 1988; Scott & Bruce 1994). Job related attributes such as autonomy (Shalley, Gilson & Blum, 2000), availability of sufficient resource (West & Hirst, 2003), sufficient time for creative thinking (Amabile et al., 2002), organisation and corporate strategy (Van der Panne et al. 2003) plays a crucial role in motivating an employee to get engaged in innovative behavior. It is no longer that the higher pay is motivating the employees, in fact the candidates are looking for motivational work environment

(Simons, 2000), meaningful work (Herman & Giola, 2000) and opportunities for innovations at their workplace (Ramamoorthy, et al., 2005). Thus, in present context, the employee innovativeness opportunity largely influences the potential candidates to apply for a job and existing employees to stay with the current organization respectively. Hence, we propose,

Proposition: Employee innovativeness opportunities will positively associate with employer branding.

The consumers rely on word of mouth for various product decisions. Many a times information about the organization brand influences the buying decisions when there is limited information about the product itself (Cable et. al., 2000). Similarly, the existing employees are the brand ambassador of the organization and can influence the reputation of organization as employer of choice with their word of mouth (Kennedy, 1977). Sutherland, Torricelli & Karg (2002) reported that current employees are the top most influencers for the employer of choice decisions. Potential employees also refer to word of mouth and firsthand experience shared on different media on internet to gather information about the brand and the work culture. Hence, a careful consideration has to be taken for effective brand communication among internal (existing/present/current) employees. Previous studies have suggested positive word of mouth enhances loyalty among team members and firms (Herman, 1991). The potential candidates consult existing employee friends or the reviews by others posted on online social media platforms to gather information about the prospect organization. The current employees have huge ‘signaling effect’ on potential employees (Rynes, et. al., 1991). The positive word of mouth by existing employees helps the potential employees to ascertain the best suitable organization according to their person-organization fit with the respective brand (Moroko & Uncles, 2005). Hence, we propose,

Proposition: Positive word of mouth of employer brand will positively associate with the employer branding

For a positive word of mouth, the organizations should consider employer brand awareness. Brand awareness is defined as an extent to which a consumer can identify the brand in different context on the basis of distinct brand features (Keller, 1993). It is the degree of brand recall and brand recognition that

shapes the purchase decision making of consumers. Drawing on the similar lines, we propose employer brand awareness as the extent to which an employee can identify the employer brand in different context on the basis of distinct employment characteristics. The employer brand awareness can be done by sharing the employee benefits, schemes and various new initiatives taken by the organization for employee development and welfare. According to Keller (2002) there must be an alignment of brand and its representation. Thus, accurate representation of a brand will inspire existing employees to 'live' the brand and delivering on the brand objectives (Ouchi, 1981) and will attract the potential employees to apply for the job in the organisation. The awareness of employer brand with the internal employees will lead to increase in employee loyalty (Leekha Chhabra & Sharma, 2014) which will further enhance the employee productivity (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The awareness of employer brand with external employees will enhance the attractiveness of organization among the potential employees. Hence, we propose,

Proposition; Employer brand awareness will positively associate with employer branding .

In current context, career growth and opportunity is the most sought out benefit by the employees. People actively look for job in the organizations' that provide ample number of opportunities for learning, growth and development of capabilities (Herman & Giola, 2000). The opportunity of learning, development and recognition is one of the intangible features of employment experience that provides a base to the employer brand (Henry & Jenkins, 1997)The employment experience provides a base to the employer brand and comprises not only of tangible characteristics (salary, rewards etc.) but also include intangible attributes such as the opportunity for learning and skills development. Upon joining an organization employees expect training and development to groom their skills for career growth and advancements The potential growth opportunities and job advancements is an important factor considered specifically by knowledge workers to apply for a job (Lopus & Murray, 2001) cited in (Sutherland, Torricelli & Karg, 2002). Hence, we propose,

Proposition: The potential growth and job advancements opportunities will positively associate with employer branding.

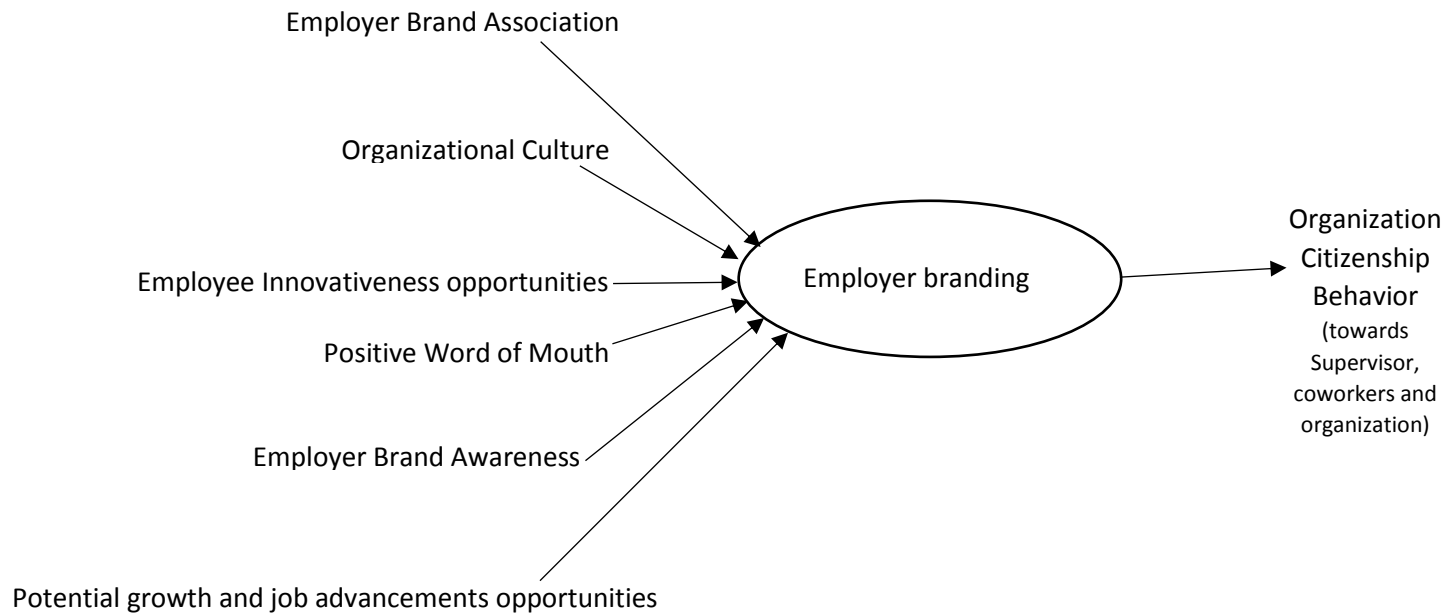


Figure 1. The proposed framework of antecedent and consequences of employer branding

CONSEQUENCES OF EMPLOYER BRANDING

A stronger employer brand can result in attraction of talented candidates, retention of employees and above all an increase in organization financial and non-financial performance (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004 ; Biswas & Suar, 2016). Hatch & Schultz (2004) found a strong relation between alignment of employees with the brand promise leading to customer satisfaction and rise in profit. A consumer develops a feeling of attachment for a brand, which is termed as brand loyalty (Aaker, 1991). A loyal customer of a brand is less likely to switch to any other brand irrespective of any product modifications or any action taken by the competitors. Similarly, a strong employer brand will lead to employer brand loyalty and thus, helping the organization to retain the talented workforce.

In employer branding context, employer brand loyalty refers to the ‘commitment that employees make to their employer’ (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004,p. 8). The projection of a strong employer brand leads to the organizational commitment and organizational identity. The organization commitment is the extent to which an employee identifies with the organization, its values, goals and intend to be with the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991).Similarly, in employer branding scenario, organizational commitment is the attachment feeling of an employee with the organization as represented in its employer brand (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).On the other hand, organization identity is attained by effective communication of organization values to internal and external stakeholders (Aust, 2004). It is a way of controlling the representation of an organization (Christensen & Cheney, 2001).In the context of employer branding, organization identity can be ‘conceived as collective attitude about who the company is as a group.’ (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

The extant literature has alked about the impact of employer branding on organization’s financial and non-financial performance (Biswas & Suar, 2016), employee loyalty and commitment (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) but to the best of our knowledge, no attention has been paid to the employee work behavioral consequences of employer branding The employee work behavior playa a crucial role as they “shape the organizational, social and psychological context that serves as the catalyst for task activities and processes”

(Borman, & Motowidlo, 1997, pp 100). Organization citizenship behavior is defined as the “behavior that contributes “to the maintenance and enhancement of the social and psychological context that supports task performance” (Organ, 1997, p. 91). It refers to the behavior of an employee that is not a part of his employment contract but contributes to the psychological and social aspect of the organization work environment. According to the voluntary work behavior model (Spector and Fox, 2002), workplace situations can affectively influence employees which energizes them to have action tendencies. When an employee is induced with positive affect, she will have a tendency to go for OCB (Dalal, et. al., 2009). An employee is likely to display OCB at three levels, namely, towards supervisor, coworkers and organization (Datar et al, 2009) by lending help, volunteering and more.

An affectively committed employee strongly identifies with the values and objectives of the organization and has strong intent to stay in the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). As an individual comes across an employer brand, she will try to look for the cues with which he can associate with the projected brand. The existing employees will look for the affirmation of brand promises as projected in employer branding practices. This experience can help in development of the employee commitment and organization identification in mind of the employees. The employees with higher feeling of organization identity, high levels of commitment and positive affect will facilitate an employee to perform extra role duties leading to organization citizenship behavior. Hence, we can propose,

Proposition: A strong employer branding will lead to organization citizenship behavior towards supervisor, coworkers and organization.

According to our earlier propositions, employer brand association helps in creation of an employer brand image which attracts potential candidates to apply for the job. The organization culture represents the personality of the organization and this helps potential candidates to identify with the employer brand. Employer brand awareness plays an active role in informing people about the attributes of the brand. The positive word of mouth by employees also plays an active role in shaping the perception of potential

candidates to apply for a job in the organization. The opportunities for employee innovativeness, potential growth and job advancements further enhances the characteristic appeal of an employer brand, which facilitates a candidate to apply for the job. This, all these acts as antecedents to the employer brand. As we have seen in the above proposition, a strong employer brand has an impact on employee citizenship behavior. Organization citizenship behavior has positive impact on organization effectiveness. Thus we can posit that strong employer branding can lead to strengthening of organization citizenship behavior, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness and functioning of an reorganization. This asserts the relevance and the contribution of our study for the benefit of the organization as a whole. Based on all these aforementioned arguments and discussion, we propose,

Proposition: Employer branding will mediate the relationship between (a) employer brand association (b) organization culture (c) employee innovativeness opportunities (d) positive word of mouth (c) employer brand awareness (d) potential growth and job advancements and organization citizenship behavior.

CONCLUSION

Employer branding refers to the projection of an organization as a best place to work for. The paper discusses the underlying theoretical underpinnings of employer branding. A review of literature and analysis suggested limited studies in exploring antecedents and consequence of employer branding. This paper addresses the gap by proposing the influence of (a) employer brand association (b) organization culture (c) employee innovativeness opportunities (d) positive word of mouth (c) employer brand awareness (d) potential growth and job advancements on employer branding, which further impacts organization citizenship behavior. A conceptual note on the role of social recruitment in employer branding suggests an integration of the two for attracting best of the desired talents.

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