DOES COMMUNICATION EFFORTS OF ORGANISATIONS IMPACT THEIR EMPLOYER BRANDS?

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ABSTRACT

In the present business environment, retention of talent is a significant challenge for organisations. Organisations, now have to differentiate themselves from their competitors through employer branding initiatives. Organisations are becoming cognizant towards employer branding as it helps in attracting, motivating and retaining the best talent in the market. Employer branding is a HR-marketing strategy which communicates the goodwill or reputation of the organisation to employees and other stakeholders. It reflects the employment experience of the organisation and provides its employees the 'wow' factor. It is becoming essential for organisations to make their organisation unique and develop it as a 'great place to work' in the minds of its employees. Among the various dimensions of employer branding, communication has emerged as a critical factor influencing employee perceptions and organisational attractiveness. This study examines IT employees' perceptions of communication as a construct of employer branding and analyses the relationship between employees' demographic profiles and their perceptions of diversity. Primary data were collected from 600 employees working in the top 20 IT companies ranked by NASSCOM using a structured questionnaire. Judgement sampling was adopted, and statistical tools such as percentage analysis, t-tests, and ANOVA were employed for data analysis.

KEYWORDS: Employer branding, communication, IT companies, IT employees

1. INTRODUCTION

In the present business environment, retention of talent is a significant challenge for organisations (Tenakwah, 2021). Organisations, now have to differentiate themselves from their competitors through employer branding initiatives. Organisations are becoming cognizant towards employer branding as it helps in attracting, motivating and retaining the best talent in the market. Employer branding is a HR-marketing strategy which communicates the goodwill or reputation of the organisation to employees and other stakeholders. It reflects the employment experience of the organisation and provides its employees the 'wow' factor. It is becoming essential for organisations

to make their organisation unique and develop it as a 'great place to work' in the minds of its employees (Rokade & Singh, 2015).

In order to effectively manage the employer brand, organisations need to manage employee 'touchpoints. The employee touchpoints include recruitment process, orientation, employee communication, shared services like HR, rewards, performance management and employee development. Similarly, organisation's core values and competencies govern the experiences of employees through communication and behaviour of its leaders. Employer brand should reinforce the right culture within the organisation. In order to align the organisational culture with the desired customer brand experience, it is very important that leadership and people process associate with the brand ethos. These employer brand experiences will result in a distinctive brand attitude, add value to the customer experience and differentiate the organisation from its competitors (Mosley, 2007).

Watson & Reissner (2010) explain employer branding as "a set of attributes and qualities-often intangible-that makes an organisation distinctive, promises a particular kind of employment experience and appeals to those who will thrive and perform best in its culture". It is not about an attractive logo, catchy tagline or a cleverly crafted advertisement. It is all about expressing the company's personality and promise of its culture to both potential and existing employees (Aravamudhan, 2009). Based on their study of pharmaceutical industry in Egypt, Wahba and Elmanadily (2015) understand employer branding as a strategy which communicates internally and externally, the unique attributes that establishes the identity of the organisation as an employer and what differentiates it from others with the aim of attracting and retaining potential and current employees.

Researchers have identified many factors which are crucial for a strong employer brand namely reputation, well known product/ service, corporate communication, policies and practices, compensation, challenging work environment, training and development, leadership and Corporate social responsibility. Among these elements, communication is proffered to be at the core of employer branding. Specifically, corporate communications create strategic communication plans and disseminate messages to present and future employees about company values and ethics, which are considered central elements of employer branding (Neill, 2016). Although the importance of corporate communication for employer brand advocacy has been theoretically problematized and qualitatively explored, one of the areas that has not yet been quantitatively applied to employer branding is the potential of internal communication in developing an attractive employer brand (Poloski Vokic et al. 2022).

Internal communication creates and maintains communication systems between employers and

employees (Tkalac Verčič, 2019), and is a prerequisite of various positive outcomes in organizations. Moreover, internal communication has shown to improve corporate reputation and credibility, since employees represent a highly credible source for all external public and has added insight into leadership communication. Organizations therefore invest considerable financial and human resources in developing effective communication systems and achieving suitable communication within the organization (Poloski Vokic et al. 2022).

Internal communication has both a direct and indirect role in internal employer branding. The direct part refers to the employers' communication of employment benefits to existing employees (Chhabra and Sharma, 2014; Hoppe, 2018). As argued by Hoppe (2018), employees should be viewed as a relevant target group for relevant corporate information that may foster a prestigious evaluation of the employer. Based on the qualitative study they conducted, Moroko and Uncles (2008) illustrated that a company with a successful employer brand has the conscious awareness of what is of value to its people and why, carries through on that with action, and effectively supports this with communication. They specify that the accuracy of internal communication and its consistency with external communication have a central importance for the internal employer brand. The indirect role of internal communication, founded on strong corporate values, implies the transformation of employees into "walking embodiments" of the core values and key touchpoints into opportunities for fulfilling the brand promise (Chong, 2007). This makes internal communication an essential part of the "inside out" approach of creating a powerful employer brand, since internal employee experience turns employees into brand advocates. Punjaisri et al. (2009) empirically proved that that employee brand identification, loyalty and commitment may be fortified by internal communication and training, while Dryl (2017) concluded that internal branding is a result of employers' internal communication efforts to develop a workforce that is committed, loyal and identifies with the organization's values and goals.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Communication with employees plays an important role in maintaining the employer brand. Communication may be by way of periodic interaction with employees, announcement of rewards and recognition and fair and consistent management practices (Mallikarjunan, 2007). Employer branding and employee retention can be achieved through effective technology driven work place communication such as employee/HR portals, on-demand knowledge base, decision support applications, and reward statements and on boarding technologies (Levin, 2008).

Akelsen (2010) is of the view that employer branding can be used to attract and retain employees but in order to do so, the concept of place of work should be aligned from both the employer and employee viewpoint and communication, both internal and external should be consistent. Similarly, Kolle (2011) recommends to fully align the internally and externally aimed employer branding efforts, failure to do

so would undermine the credibility of the employer brand. Consistency in communication plays an important role in utilising the full potential of employer branding initiatives. The employer brand is communicated by way of performance appraisals, training and development programs and employee referral programs (Kapoor, 2010). Employee referrals, career website and social media are the major effective methods that IT industry uses to communicate with its employees (Prabhakaran, 2011)

Sharma & Kamalanabhan (2012) aim to capture the perceptions of employees on internal communication of a leading employer brand. Their study identifies the dimensions of communication practices in an Indian Petroleum Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) and findings suggest that internal communication, more importantly, the two-way symmetrical process of communication and training leads to high level of employee identification with the organisation, employer brand loyalty and commitment. Internal communication policies of an organisation should promote frequent, honest, open, two-way communications among superiors and subordinates and employees should be allowed to provide valuable inputs regardless of their education or background to increase their satisfaction and motivation thereby fostering their loyalty and identification with the organisations they work for (Steyn, Steyn & van Rooyen, 2011). Organisations also need to listen and engage in a dialogue with its employees to strengthen their employer brand.

On boarding programs generate a positive employment experience and perfectly communicates the employer brand by reinforcing the organisational culture, values, vision and mission. These programs also enable organisations to set expectations on performance and establish norms for working behaviour (Roy, 2008). Employer brand messages should be consistently communicated to all the employee touchpoints such as orientation, performance, development, reward and recognition. Employer brand should be experienced by employees through everyday behaviours, values, management and leadership competencies (Botha et al,2011). Banerjee (2007) argues that people practices should be periodically conveyed to its employees through internal publications which would ensure return on investment towards employer branding.

Employer brand communication helps the alignment of employment promises and unique selling points and is the driver of retention. Eshoj (2010) uses case study approach to examine Microsoft's communication initiatives relating to employer branding. Microsoft uses textual and visual communication to create an attractive employer brand by arousing interest, creating desire, inducing action and displaying accuracy in its messages. These communication strategies from employer branding displayed through their career website is a good example of employer branding communication. Findings of a study conducted by Hanin et al (2013) in the banking industry of Belgium indicated that when employment offering depicts favourable employment conditions and these communications are perceived as distinct from that of communication of other organisations,

employees are prouder of their employer and are willing to recommend their organisation to others.

Vokić et al (2022) study the moderating relationship of internal communication satisfaction on employer branding using data from 3457 employees from 26 organisations. Analyses reveal that out of the eight internal communication satisfaction dimensions, 'Satisfaction with communication with immediate superior' has an intervening role. Their findings reveal that quality communication has an important role in building a strong employer brand. Špoljarić A and Tkalac Verčič A (2022) test the relationship between internal communication, employee engagement and employer brand using a communication survey on 1805 employees. The results show internal communication and employee engagement as significant predictors of employer brand. Lubecka (2023) argues that employer branding contributes significantly to the improvement of the image of the company only if the employer-employee communication becomes a dialogue. Communication between the two parties must have a foundation of humanistic values which means that both parties treat each other with respect, information shared is neither manipulated nor distorted and employer must act as an active listener.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE:
Specifically, this paper proposes to address the following research objectives:
  i. To analyse the perceptions of IT employees towards diversity as a construct of employer branding.
  ii. To find out the relationship between demographic profile of IT employees and their perceptions towards diversity.

4. SAMPLING DESIGN
In an attempt to answer the above research questions, the present study has been conducted using a structured questionnaire to capture the views of the respondents with regard to the diversity dimension of employer branding. Employees of top 20 IT companies ranked by NASSCOM were selected as sampling population. Judgement sampling was adopted. T test, ANOVA and percentage analysis was employed to obtain the desired results. Data was collected from 600 respondents. Reliability score was measured using Cronback's Alpha which showed a score of 0.87 for the construct communication.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
In order to understand the perceptions of IT employees towards communication, mean and standard deviation were calculated.

Table 1   Mean and SD of Communication of IT employees

Communication	Mean	SD
Communication with employees is important.	4.31	0.68
Frequent, honest, open and two-way communication.	4.18	1.09
Inspiring and motivating top level communication.	3.80	1.22
Clear communication of expectations.	3.91	1.37
Valuing inputs irrespective of education or background.	4.20	1.09
Strong communication network.	4.40	0.56
Facilitating honest feedback.	4.16	0.98
Induction process.	4.21	0.61

Source: Primary data

From the table above showing the mean scores and standard deviation of Communication in IT companies, the mean ranges between 4.40 and 3.80. "Strong communication network" has the highest mean score of 4.40 and "Inspiring and motivating top level communication" has the least mean score of 3.80(SD 1.22). "Communication with employees is important" has a mean score of 4.31 followed by "Induction process" having a mean score of 4.21. This implies that employees are highly satisfied with communication in their organisation and the induction processes helps them to understand the value system of their organisation and are moderately satisfied with top level communication and clear communication of expectations.

IT organisations have a strong internal communication network system in place. Communication takes place through employee engagement programmes, induction programmes, periodic team meetings, town hall meetings, retreats and routine meetings. All internal communication happens through their intranet. Communication in IT organisations is quite informal; there is upward, downward and lateral flow of communication. IT organisations are well known for their induction programmes which is mandatory for all new comers wherein   the organisational vision, mission, objectives, values and expectations are communicated to its employees. The facilities that are offered and the appropriate communication channels are also prescribed in the induction programmes. Yet, in spite of the above, employees feel that their organisations should concentrate on downward communication to make it more inspiring and motivating as expected by its employees. It should be reassuring and instil confidence in employees. The organisational structure does not ensure direct contact between the highest echelons of management and its lowest level of employees. Contributions of employees should be significant enough to the growth of the organisation to warrant recognition or acknowledgement from top management.

Table 2   Frequency distribution of Level of Communication

Level of Communication	Frequency	Percent
Low	121	20.2
Moderate	320	53.3
High	159	26.5
Total	600	100.0

Source: Primary data

The above table reveals the levels of satisfaction of IT employees on Communication. 53.3% of the sample respondents are moderately satisfied with the level of Communication.

To find out the relation between demographic profile of IT employees and their perception towards Communication, t test and ANOVA were calculated.

H0: There is no significant difference between demographic variables and Communication

Table 3: t test for significant differences between demographic variables and Communication

Demographic variable	t value	p value
Gender	2.110	0.035
Marital status	0.688	0.492

Source: Computed data

Since P value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected at 5% level with regard to Communication. Hence there is significant difference between male and female employees with regard to Communication. There is no significant difference between married and single respondents with regard to the dimension of Communication since the P value is greater than 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted with regard to Communication. Marital status does not affect the employees' perception of this factor.

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Table4: ANOVA for significant differences between demographic variables and communication

Demographic variable	F value	P value
Age in years	0.857	0.425
Educational qualification	4.785	0.009
Designation	0.931	0.395
Job type	5.645	0.004
Years of experience in the industry	1.765	0.172
Years of experience in the organisation	2.721	0.067
Monthly income	6.681	<0.001

Source: Computed data

There is no significant difference between age groups with regard to dimension of Communication since P value is greater than 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted with regard to the dimension of Communication. Employees of different age groups feel the same way with regard to the above dimension of employer branding. Employees of IT companies have similar views on communication irrespective of their age. Since P value is less than 0.01, the null hypothesis is rejected at 1% level with regard to the dimension of communication. Hence, there is significant difference between educational qualifications of IT employees with regard to the above-mentioned dimension. There is no significant difference between designations with regard to Communication, since P value is greater than 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted with regard to the above dimension. It is apparent that employees, regardless of their level of employment, expect clear two-way communication in their organisations. Since P value is less than 0.01, the null hypothesis is rejected at 1% level with regard to the employer branding dimension of Communication. Hence, there is a significant difference between job types of IT employees with regard to Communication. There is no significant difference between employees having different years of experience in the field with regard to the dimension of Communication since P value is greater than 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted regarding the above dimension of employer branding. Regardless of the years of experience the employees gain, this dimension is what they give importance to during the entire period of their careers. There is no significant difference between the years of experience the employee has in the organisation with regard to Communication, since P value is greater than 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted with regard to the above stated dimension. The results indicate that notwithstanding the number of years of experience of employees in their current organisation, the above-mentioned factor will always be important.

Since P value is less than 0.01, the null hypothesis is rejected at 1% level with regard to the dimension of Communication. Hence, there is a significant difference between Monthly Income of employees with regard to the stated construct.

6. CONCLUSION

Internal communication is a key element that influences on how employees communicate with each other and externally about the organisation. It is important that the employees champion their organisations as they have a big influence on the perception of external stakeholders. Hence, organisations cannot passively wait for their employees to speak highly of their employers. Instead, communication should be strategically and proactively managed and their informal communication should improve the organisation's identity through internal branding (Raj and Jyothi, 2011). Organisations must provide employees and managers with accurate information, in line with organizational values and goals. Organizations should make an effort to coordinate and cooperate among departments and functions involved in employer branding strategies and initiatives. A misalignment between these functions can quickly lead to undesirable outcomes and unfavourable reputation. Finally, when internal communication is founded on strong corporate values, it can help transform employees into EB ambassadors, and key touch points into opportunities for fulfilling the brand promise.

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