

Assessing the Role of Instrumental Attributes in Employer Branding

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Abstract: Attracting and retaining the most talented employees is crucial for organizational success and survival. Organizations' perceived image as an employer has been identified as one of the main determinants of job seekers' attraction to organizations (Highhouse, Zickar, Thorsteinson, Stierwalt, and Slaughter, 1999). Employer image consists of individuals' perceptions of what is distinctive, central, and enduring about the organization as a place to work (Highhouse, Brooks, and Gregarus, 2009). It has become a challenge for the organizations to create and change their employer image to attract the right employees, a process called employer branding (Edwards, 2010).

Further, the shortage in labour market has made it important for the organizations to stand aside or to be prominent from their competitors in the war for talent and to be seen as attractive employer for prospective applicants. So, the focus in this study is on instrumental image traits and its' influence on young students.

Keywords: Branding, Employer Branding, Instrumental Attributes, Organizational Attractiveness, Intention to Apply

Introduction

Today's successful and esteemed organizations are known for their visionary business practices so that they are considered for their reputations and positions as employers of choice. These companies all share one common characteristic—astrong employment brand. Employment brand is an attitude that prospective candidates and existing employees consider.

As per NASSCOM, the employment generation estimated by IT-Sector in India in 2010-3.7 million, 2011-4.0 million, 2012-4.4 million, 2013- 4.7 million, 2014-5.3 million, 2015, 5.8 million, 2016-6 million (IT and ITeS-January-2017.pdf).It makes the demand for organizations to seek to fill the jobs fast. On the other hand, the country educates 600,000 engineers per annum and reckonings about four million students in its engineering colleges but employability is a critical issue (Gautama Das, *Business Today*, 2013). Different surveys reveal that just one in four engineers in India can be led to a job, and that too after training. This situation pressurise the organizations to create a strategy that could pull together the best applicants.

The transition from the industrial era to the knowledge era has changed the situation and supply and demand for talent is preferred which is biased towards talented employees. To acquire the talent, companies change their employer brand efforts to moderate talent limitations. In this situation, organization brand and its workforce become the most important competitive advantage for the organizations in the new economy. So, employer brand can be a long term solution for an organization to attract, recruit and retain the personnel from the labour market.

The concept of brand image was first used by David Ogilvy in 1955. As per him, a brand image is the picture of a brand that people carry in their heads, and customer is ready to pay more for this brand identity as they prefer and consider this brand as superior. The concept is originally developed in marketing. It makes the organization clear about how they can differentiate themselves from competitors in the market as an employer of existing staff, and as a prospective employer to potential applicants and as a supplier or partner to customers.

The concept of brand to HRM was introduced by Ambler & Barrow in 1966. They consider employer as brand and employees as customers. Employer branding plays an important role in information technology sector where skilled employees are always in demand. Employee is identity of these organizations as these organizations are into software services and solutions, where employee is the product of an organization and the only source of an organization to provide services and solutions to the client. In addition, the employment in this sector has raised enormously from 3.7 million in 2010 to 6 million by 2016.

In addition, these (IT & ITES) organizations build a new one each time as depending on customer and they compete on terms of service they provide to the customer. Employee is the face of these organizations as 'he' (employee) represents the organization like a product in the market. Employee is the prime source of these organizations of employer branding, from all perspectives as a symbol in market, product to client, image in public and a profit entity. So, this human being—an employee—is very crucial for this software solutions and services industry.

Hence, it turns out to be more challenging for the organizations to invite the pool of applicants to select the critical resources for organizational success and to retain this resource for organizational progress.

Employer brand makes the organization in the market as a distinctive entity; it is the process of creation of an image in the thoughts of prospective applicants and once this image is fixed, it creates a continuous flow of applicants to an organization. So, a strong employer brand therefore not only increases considerations, but it is also a smart business investment (Sullivan, 1999).

Conversely, candidates have become 'talentsumers', who are increasingly selective when looking for an employer and choose an organization in much the same way a consumer chooses a product. As a result, a strong brand is vital if an organization is to remain attractive. It gets more acute when skills shortages in key roles such as IT and engineering arenas. As the economy improves and competition for talent increases, employer branding tells and shows job-seekers why they should choose your organization over all the others.

So, building a strong employer brand needs investment and will require serious time and effort if organizations are to get it right but the rewards are more than worthwhile. Attracting and keeping hold of the best people is the key to competitive advantage in the modern business world and without a compelling employer brand this is nigh-on impossible.

Objectives of the Research

- To evaluate the influence of employer image instrumental traits on applicant's organizational attractiveness.
- To evaluate the influence of employer image instrumental traits on applicant's intention to apply.

(Dependant Variable-Intention to apply, organizational attractiveness)

(Independent Variable- instrumental image)

Literature Review

Branding

A brand can be defined as a specific name, symbol, or design or more, usually some combination of these – which is used to distinguish a particular seller's product. Brands are crucial for marketing and business strategy (Doyle). Marketing is about how consumers consider the company's offer. If company's offer is seeming as it is same to the competitors, then consumer will be unresponsive and will go for the economy and most available product. If companies contest through price, hardly does it make reasonable profits. So, marketing should drive to generate an inclination for the companies' brand. If the customer considered a brand better as compared to others, then desires for it and is ready to pay more for his choice so, that this surplus value of the product is known as brand equity.

Brand Image

Brand image can be a perception about the brand by consumers. The target for brand image can be to make sure that consumers keep strong and favourable associations of the brand in their minds. The brand image typically consists of multiple concepts: perception, because the brand is perceived; cognition, because that brand is cognitively evaluated; and finally attitude, because consumers continuously after perceiving and evaluating what they perceive and form attitudes about the brand (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2002, Keller 1993, 2003; Grunig, 1993). Brand image is the pivotal point of the consumer-based approach.

The employer brand establishes the identity of the firm as an employer. It encompasses the firm's values, systems, policies, behaviour towards the objective of attracting, motivating and retaining the organizations current and potential employees.'

Company's Product Brand and Employer Brand

Organizations deal with brands like a product or company brand in the market and employer brand in the labour market. Both the brands are associated and equally important. A strong product brand can enhance the strength of employment brand; the employment brand can be instrumental to

organizational attractiveness for prospective candidates and create perception for intention to apply, or to accept a job offer for organization.

According to CIPD (2008), employer brand is a set of attributes and qualities often intangible, that makes an organization distinctive, promises a particular kind of employment experience and appeal to those people who will thrive and perform to their best in its culture.

Employer brand identifies an organization in the marketplace and makes it unique (Steve Gilliver, 2009). It displays to the existing about the organization as what it is and prospective everyone interested candidates in joining the organization, a clear image of what to expect.

Employer brand is a concept for an employer which makes him differentiated from the competitors. From HR point of view, an organization first makes some value proposition. It is about what the firm provides to the employees as an organization. The prime interest to branding is to attract the prospective candidate, whereas, within the organization, it aims at workforce commitment to the values and organizational goals.

Economic growth has increased the importance of recruitment in the competition for the technically skilled individuals necessary to fill knowledge based jobs (Munk, 1998) and for increasing the utility of selection systems (Boudreau & Rynes, 1985).

According to Dell & Ainspan (2001), organizations have found that effective employer branding leads to competitive advantage which helps employees internalize company values to assist in employee retention. Armstrong (2006) found that the aim of employer branding is to become an employer of choice, a place where people prefer to work. This means developing what Sears (2003) calls a value proposition which communicates what the organization can offer its employees as a great place to work.

Collins and Kanar, in their research paper 'Employer Brand Equity and Recruitment Research' have mentioned that there have been initial evidences that Brand Awareness, Associations (Surface and Complex) regarding the organization, as an employer, are related to intentions to apply, and decisions to apply or not to apply, to the company. The concept is gaining more and more importance as there is a competition for best employees as aggressive as customers.

Organizational Attractiveness

This concept has been broadly discussed in the areas of vocational behaviour (Soutar & Clarke 1983), management (Gatewood *et al.* 1993), applied psychology (Jurgensen 1978; Collins & Stevens 2002), communication (Bergstrom *et al.*, 2002) and marketing (Ambler & Barrow 1996; Gilly & Wolfenbarger 1998; Ambler 2000; Ewing *et al.* 2002). 'Employer attractiveness' is the envisioned benefit that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization. The construct may be thought of as an antecedent of the more general concept of employer brand equity. In other words, the more attractive an employer is perceived to be by potential employees, the stronger is that particular organization's employer brand equity.

Instrumental Attributes

The employer brand is ‘the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company.’ (Ambler and Barrow, 1996). The basic premise that people associate with both instrumental functions and psychological (symbolic) benefits with a brand is well supported in the marketing literature (Katz, 1960; Keller, 1993, 1998; Shavitt, 1990). Instrumental benefits correspond to product-related attributes. These describe the product in terms of its objective, physical, and tangible attributes linked instrumental attributes to people’s basic need to maximize benefits and minimize costs (Katz, 1960). For example, consumers want to buy a car because it provides them with instrumental functions such as transportation, protection, comfort, and safety. Applied to a recruitment context, instrumental attributes describe the job or organization in terms of the objective, concrete, and factual attributes inherent in a job or organization (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003).

Research Methodology

The proposed study would make an attempt to find the impact instrumental attributes on organizational attractiveness.

Research Question

What is the influence of instrumental employer image traits in:

- Organizational attractiveness?
- Intention to apply?

Choice of Companies: For the research study, organizations will be selected from commonly referred companies in surveys like Best Place to Work, Business Today and Employer Branding Survey. These surveys were observed between the year, 2007 to year 2013. Maximum time referred by companies from IT sector are referred in this survey are selected for the study.

From these surveys, the following 25 organizations are into software services & solutions specifically.

Table 1

Sr. No.	Company
1	Accenture
2	Acclaris Business Solution
3	Adea Technologies
4	Aditi Technologies
5	Adobe
6	Aztec Software
7	Brickred Technologies
8	Google
9	HCL
10	Hexaware
11	HSBC

12	IBM
13	iGate
14	Infosys
15	Intuit Technologies
16	MindTree
17	Patni
18	Perot Systems
19	Sapient
20	Satyam
21	Sierra Atlantic Software Services
22	Talentica Software
23	Tavant Technologies
24	TCS
25	Wipro

From these 25 companies, following 14 are having their offices in Pune. All these companies are with CMM level 5.

Table 2

1	Google
2	HCL
3	Hexaware
4	HSBC
5	IBM
6	iGate
7	Infosys
8	MindTree
9	Patni
10	Sapient
11	Satyam
12	TCS
13	Wipro
14	Accenture

These organizations build a new one each time as depending on customer and they compete on the parameter of service they provide to the customer. Employee is the face of these organizations as ‘he’ (employee) represents the organization like a product in the market. Employee is the prime source of these organizations of employer branding from all perspectives as a symbol in market, product to client, image in public and a profit entity. So, this human being—an employee—is very crucial for the software solutions and services industry.

Hence, it turns out to be more challenging for these organizations to invite the pool of applicants to select the critical resources for an organizational success and to retain this resource for organizational progress.

Hypothesis

Instrumental image dimensions describe the organization in terms of pay, benefits, advancement and flexible working hours and opportunities. Job seekers are attracted to these instrumental attributes on the basis of their practical need to maximise benefits. So, these traits make the

applicants to be more attractive and intend to apply to these organizations with this instrumental image. So hypotheses are:

H.1. Instrumental image dimensions are positively related to:

- employer attractiveness and
- intention to apply.

Measures and Scale

Table 3

Construct	Sources
Instrumental Attributes	Lievens,Highhouse,2003
Organizational Attractiveness	
Intention to Apply	

Validity and Reliability

Validity explains how well a test measures what it is supposed to measure. Reliability explains the degree to which an assessment tool produces stable and consistent results.

Cronbach's α measures reliability, or internal consistency. The value of Cronbach's α varies from 0 to 1. The questionnaire is generally regarded as reliable when the coefficient is 0.70. As per this guideline, the objects in Q1 of the questionnaire deals with instrumental values of employer brand whereas Q2 is about the organizational attractiveness and intention to apply. The coefficient of Q1 is 0.890. Q2 is 0.778 which placate the circumstances to be regarded as reliable.

Unit of Analysis

It is individual.

Sampling

Young students from UG and PG are considered for the study. Population of graduates is from engineering third year, fourth year students and who have completed engineering and have some work experience whereas post-graduates are final year MBA students who have completed their MBA and have some work experience. Simple random sampling method is used for the study. Students from Pune University affiliated colleges were aimed for the study. Apart from this, students who visit the job fair were another source for data collection for the study.

So, student sample of 1400 UG and PG students was taken for the study. Mean age was 23 years ($SD = 1.17$). Forty percent students are with work experience of around 2 years. Students, who are more keen towards the IT industry, were asked to fill the questionnaire.

Data Collection

Data is collected from using a standard questionnaire. The sample is mixture of graduates and post-graduates for the study.

Major collection of student data is through job fairs. Job fairs under employment exchange and self-employment guidance centre are held where the crowd of applicants or jobseekers quite in a high number visit for employment. So, with respect to the sample, researchers make use of job fairs organized at the respective college. UG and PG students were randomly assigned and completed a 3-page questionnaire. Students' contribution for the study was voluntary and secret. Apart of these students from randomly selected engineering and management colleges affiliated to Pune University were randomly assigned and completed a 3-page questionnaire. The data for 1400 students is collected through extensive efforts.

Questionnaire: The questionnaire is designed as per the scales and objectives of the research. Respondents were asked to rank their opinions on 1-7 Likert scale ('strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'). The projected time to answer the complete survey was projected around 10 minutes.

Table 4

Instrumental Attributes
Salaries are high in this brand/organization
Employees are frequently promoted/offers opportunities for career advancement
People who work in this brand have a solid job
When you work, it will always be busy
This organization is close to where I live
This brand has a good benefit package/offers opportunities to work abroad
This brand has flexible work hours
Organizational Attractiveness
This brand is attractive for me as a place of employment
For me, this brand would be great place to work
A job at this brand is very appealing to me
I am interested in learning more about this brand
Intention to Apply
I would accept an offer from this brand
I intend to apply for a position at this brand
I would very much like to work for this brand

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Results

Table 5

Characteristics	Example Item	Instrumental			
		Mean	SD	t-value (Organizational Attractiveness)	t-value (Intention to Apply)
(pay)	Salaries are high in this brand/organization	4.68	1.696	9.731	6.878
(advancement)	Employees are frequently promoted/offers opportunities for career advancement	5.01	1.470	2.452	2.723
(job security)	People who work in this brand have a solid job	4.99	1.573	3.743	2.629
(task demands)	When you work, it will always be busy	4.93	1.492	5.155	4.909
(location)	This organization is close to where I live	4.70	1.699	1.120	1.003
(benefits)	This brand has a good benefit package/offers opportunities to work abroad	4.98	1.515	6.858	7.398
(flexible working hours)	This brand has flexible work hours	4.87	1.523	7.438	5.426

The traits were evaluated on Likert, 7 point scale on 1 = strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree (dependent variable: organizational attractiveness, intention to apply)

Table 5 explains the mean, standard deviations, for organizational attractiveness and intention to apply in the sample of students. T-tests specify that four out of the seven traits were evaluated significantly higher for organizational attractiveness as an establishment. T-tests also indicate that three of the traits (pay, flexible working hours and benefits) were considered to be more significant instrumental attributes to organizational attractiveness. For intention to apply as an employer, t-tests indicate that four of the seven traits were evaluated significantly higher. T-test also indicate that three of the traits (benefits, pay, and flexible working hours) were considered to be more significant instrumental attributes to intention to apply.

Table 6: Means, Standard Deviations and co-relations

	Mean	Std. Deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Org Attractiveness
Pay	4.68	1.696	1							
Advancement	5.01	1.470	.575**	1						
Job Security	4.99	1.573	.579**	.535**	1					
Task Demands	4.93	1.492	.479**	.441**	.449**	1				
Location	4.70	1.699	.448**	.422**	.470**	.393**	1			
Benefits	4.98	1.515	.537**	.393**	.507**	.504**	.421**	1		
Flexible Working Hours	4.87	1.523	.440**	.393**	.394**	.419**	.403**	.478**	1	
Org. attractiveness	5.0659	1.16925	.593**	.464**	.505**	.490**	.405**	.543**	.494**	1

Table 6 evaluates the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among the variables. All variables were considerably associated to organizational attractiveness as an employer. Advancement ($r=.46$), job security ($r=.50$), task demands ($r=.49$), location ($r=.40$), and flexible working hours ($r=.49$) and pay (mean $r=.59$), benefits ($r=.54$), were most highly correlated with organizational attractiveness.

Table 7

Model		Coefficients ^a					Correlations			
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.	Zero-order	Partial	Part
		B	Std. Error	Beta						
1	(Constant)	1.748	.101			17.367	.000			
	Pay	.181	.019		.263	9.731	.000	.593	.249	.185
	advancement	.049	.020		.061	2.452	.014	.465	.065	.047
	Jobsecurity	.072	.019		.097	3.743	.000	.505	.098	.071
	Taskdemands	.096	.019		.123	5.155	.000	.490	.135	.098
	Location	.018	.016		.026	1.120	.263	.405	.030	.021
	Benefits	.134	.020		.173	6.858	.000	.543	.178	.130
	Fwh	.132	.018		.172	7.438	.000	.495	.193	.141
a. Dependent Variable: orgattractiveness										

Table 8

Model		Coefficients ^a							
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlations		
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part
1	(Constant)	1.795	.115		15.628	.000			
	Pay	.146	.021	.200	6.878	.000	.525	.179	.141
	Advancement	.062	.023	.073	2.723	.007	.427	.072	.056
	Jobsecurity	.058	.022	.073	2.629	.009	.453	.069	.054
	Taskdemands	.105	.021	.127	4.909	.000	.457	.129	.100
	Location	.018	.018	.025	1.003	.316	.369	.026	.021
	Benefits	.165	.022	.202	7.398	.000	.515	.192	.151
	Fwh	.110	.020	.136	5.426	.000	.443	.142	.111
a. Dependent Variable: intentiontoapply									

To check the hypothesis, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was done. As p value is less than 0.5 so all factors are significantly positively co-related with organizational attractiveness and intention to apply. The instrumental characteristics to organizational attractiveness explained pay ($b = .18$, $p < .01$), benefits ($b = .13$, $p < .01$), flexible working hours ($b = .13$, $p < .01$) were significant predictors. The instrumental characteristics to intention to apply explained pay ($b = .14$, $p < .01$), benefits ($b = .16$, $p < .01$), flexible working hours ($b = .11$, $p < .01$) were important predictors. These results are consistent with the hypothesis.

The relationship between respondent's level for organizational attractiveness and intention to apply with instrumental image attributes is positive. Pay, benefits depicts a strong overall positive association.

Observations & Suggestions

1. The study is an extension for preceding research on instrumental image traits and their influence on organizational attractiveness and intention to apply to organization as an employer.
2. Analysis emphasize that the instrumental traits really add incremental value in the likelihood of a company's attractiveness and intention to apply to the firm.
3. Pay, benefits depicts a strong overall positive association as a place of employment.
4. The output enhances the embryonic field of causes that affect to the aspirant's initial thoughts or image of organizations.
5. Another important factor of the study highlight on a insight that the trait factors make organization stand out from their competitor's.
6. These outcomes are well assumed in the process of early recruitment context.
7. In the initial recruitment phases prospective aspirants create many possible jobs and organizations for considerations but keep limited focus on the specific characteristic of the choices grouped.

Conclusion

This study endorses the instrumental model for assessing the image as an employer. It can be a guide for competitors. Apart from this, it makes the company to stand aside from the competitors

in the same sector. So, organizations can make employee imagery and employment imagery based on this prominent trait factors. Employee imagery can be testimonials and recommendations by employees to make image as a best place to work. Employment imagery can be through the mode of communication about jobs portrayal in promotion, marketing, staffing material, on website or through social media. So, image-oriented publicity can focus on prominent instrumental attributes such as pay, benefits. Hence 'Best Employer' status is something that more and more organizations are struggling to attract the pool of applicants for the best selection process. This organizational attractiveness provides employers competitive advantage as an employer who strives to attract job applicants with appropriate skills and knowledge as per organizational requirements. As appealing aspirants with requisite skills is crucial for organizational success. Organizational attractiveness impact on the perception of applicant's decision for acceptance of job and intention lead him towards an action for making an application. Instrumental attributes can be one of the prominent factors for making candidates an actual application or accepting job offer.

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