Empirical Study of Factors Influencing Employer Branding

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Abstract

Employer Branding is a psychological contract between employer and the employee. When the psychological contract is fulfilled, the employee is more likely to be engaged and loyal; however, if the contract is broken a fall in engagement and productivity can result, with an attendant impact on staff turnover and productivity. Employer Branding is emphasized in today's Knowledge based economy. IT industry has the most significance due to the prevalence of knowledge workers as key resources. Most recent studies look at defining employer branding and emphasizing its importance. This study is an attempt to understand the concept of employer branding as the employees of the IT Industry identify it. It is an empirical study using structured questionnaire and exploratory factor analysis. Employee Loyalty and Employer Image were found to be the most influencing factors of Employer Branding through this study. The researchers enumerate the factors that emerge as influencers of Employer Branding. This knowledge will help companies to consciously build their brand and understand how their prime target, the employees receive it. Employers can harness the advantage of Employer Branding to create a positive feeling of belongingness that will improve productivity and reduce intention to quit.

Keywords: Employer Branding, Employee Loyalty, Talent Management, Knowledge workers, Brand association, Organization Identity

Introduction

Trends associated with talent shortages, globalization and off shoring, not to state the economic downturn, have ensured that talent managers are paying attention on engaging and retaining their current talent pool. (Roy, 2008). To ensure top talent stays within the organization, talent managers must consider creating a positive employment experience as a part of an employer's overall brand. This calls for in-depth study of the employer value proposition and employer brand, which impact the employment experience and, ultimately, the employee's decision to join and remain with an organization.

Employer branding is a psychological contract between employer and the employee. When the psychological contract is fulfilled, the employee is more likely to be engaged and loyal; however, if the contract is broken a fall in engagement and productivity can result, with an attendant impact on staff turnover (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). Employer branding is an important predecessor for employee engagement (Lockwood, 2007). Recently,(Ewing, Pitt, De Bussy, & Berthon, 2002) emphasize the usefulness of employer branding in an increasingly knowledge-based economy where skilled employees are often in short supply. According to the Conference Board report on employer branding (Conference Board, 2001) organizations have found that effective employer branding leads to competitive advantage, helps employees internalize company values and assists in employee retention and many companies are working towards it.

In recent past many Indian IT companies have come up with employer branding accidently. Infosys did it with its 'middle-class turning into millionaires', Wipro, known as a 'take-off point for entrepreneurs' and TCS as a 'training ground for fresher' and HCL as 'Employees First'. Though they did not attempt employer branding as a well-thought plan, employees began to associate these takeaways with the respective companies (Prayag, 2006). The increasing focus on competitive advantage is leading Indian firms to rethink their employer brand and align it to the mission, vision and values of the organization so as to capture the essence of it in a way that engages the current and prospective knowledge workers. These call for a study of the common factors for employer

branding to help the organization in making its employer brand a competitive advantage.

Employer Branding is good for companies, and understanding the factors will help companies to project themselves as a better place to work for and hence secure inimitable, sustainable competitive advantage.

Statement of the Problem

The business world is experiencing a paradigm shift in the HR Role from a cost centre to an investment center. When HR emerges into the role of a strategic partner, focus should be on ensuring competitive advantage. Employer Branding is the umbrella concept that is an indicator of macro factors like culture, organizational wellbeing etc. Employer Branding exists subtly in organizations. This study is an attempt to accentuate the role of Employer Branding in creating a positive employment experience. It could help employers to position themselves from within and outside the organization as preferred employers. Employers focus on attracting talent with their offerings. This study is to identify the crucial factors which will help the employers to constantly create an employer brand.

Literature Review

Employer Branding was first discussed by marketing academics (Martin, Beaumont, Doig, & Pate, 2005) but the HR academics have not given much attention to it. The concept of employer branding has got a huge attraction from practitioners. A number of employer branding practitioner books have been published (Barrow & Mosley, 2005);(Sartain & Schumann, 2006) (Minchington, 2010). Employer branding guides, annual employer branding conferences and awards (CIPD, 2007); (CIPD, 2009) are becoming the norm.

(Ambler & Barrow, 1996) define the employer brand in terms of benefits, calling it "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company." Employer Branding is defined as the sum of a company's efforts to communicate to existing and prospective staff that it is a desirable place to work (Ambler & Barrow, 1996) or, more formally, as the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company (Lloyd, 2002).

Employer branding is a targeted, long-term strategy to create awareness in employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders and manage their perceptions about the firm (Sullivan, 2004). "Employer brand is about capturing the essence of an organization in a way that engages current and prospective talent. It expresses an organization's 'value proposition'—the entirety of its culture, systems, attitudes and employee relationships, providing a new focal point for the company" (Bhutani, Pankajakshan & Mandayam, 2010). Employer branding represents the efforts taken by an organization to promote itself, both within and outside the organization, with the objective of differentiating itself as a preferred employer (Foster, Punjaisri, & Cheng, 2010).

Researchers (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) have proposed a conceptual framework (Figure 1) to develop testable propositions by combining resource-based view with brand equity theory. It proposes that there is a relationship between employer branding and organizational career management. This framework incorporates marketing and human resources concepts. It states that Employer branding creates two principal assets – brand associations and brand loyalty. Employer brand associations are the thoughts and ideas that a brand name evokes in the minds of prospective and current employees. These are positive associations that strengthen the brand. It is the image formed in the minds of employees, picked up from conscious and unconscious cues sent by the employer. Employer brand associations shape the employer image that in turn affects the attractiveness of the organization to potential employees. Employer branding impacts organization culture and organization identity that in turn contribute to employer brand loyalty. The authors also have also mentioned that organizational culture also feeds back to the employer brand. Employer brand loyalty contributes to increasing employee productivity. Employer brand is linked to desirable organizational outcomes of increased productivity and attracting employees.

The authors have suggested the use of employer branding for integrating many different but related constructs that have been discussed in the recruiting, selection, and retention literatures under one umbrella. Employer branding concept can be very valuable in developing an organizing framework for strategic human resource management.

To establish the proposed relationship in this

Figure 1: Employer Branding Framework
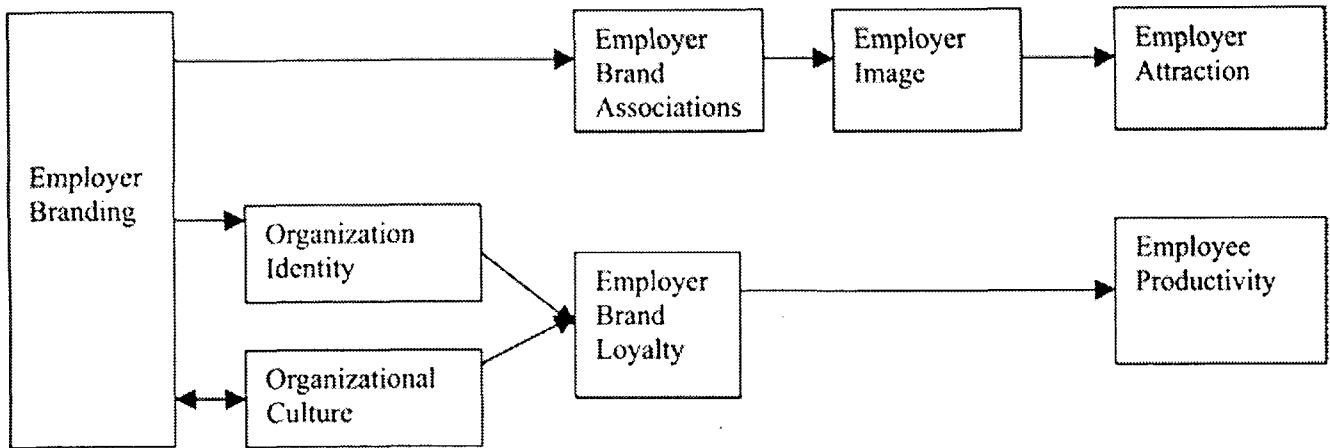
Source: Kristin Backhaus and Surinder Tikoo (2004)

framework for Indian IT companies, understanding the antecedents and consequences of employer branding is indispensable.

Recently, researchers (Foster, Punjaisri, & Cheng, 2010) have thrown light on closer alignment between the employees' values and those of the corporate brand with the help of internal branding and employer branding. They have proposed a framework showing the inter relationship between internal branding, employer branding and corporate branding. While explaining the implications of the two concepts for branding and integrated corporate brand management the authors have discussed the branding alignment. The misalignment between these three areas of branding leads to the possibility for stakeholders to have "increasingly complex identities", such as in situations where prospective employees are also

customers of the firm. The inconsistencies that occur when the corporate brand and employer brand are misaligned inevitably triggers doubts among the general public that can negatively impact upon employee satisfaction, brand credibility and competitiveness.

However, Previous scholars (Moroko & Uncles, Characteristics of successful employer brands, 2008) argued that two main factors may influence the best employer brand are attractiveness and accuracy of the employer as a brand. Attractiveness includes its awareness, differentiation and relevance of an employer brand. Accuracy is the consistency between the employer brand and employment experience, company culture and values. The authors have proposed a typology to assess a firm's employer brand success using human resources metrics of practical

Figure 2: Typology of Employer Brand Success Characteristics with Managerial Implications
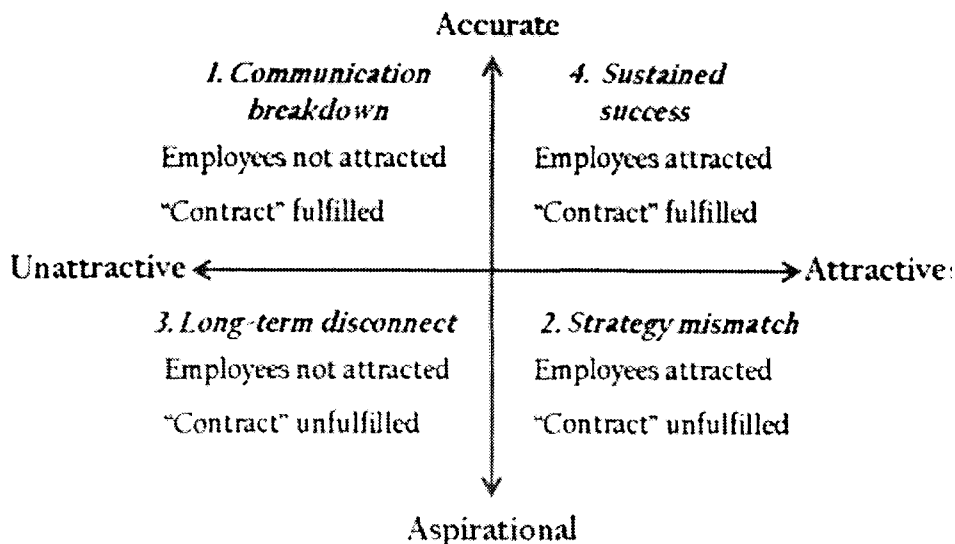
Source: (Moroko & Uncles, Characteristics of successful employer brands, 2008)

In a related study, (Edwards, 2010) describes employer branding as an umbrella program to structure HR policies and practices with psychological point of view. While reviewing the literature the author has figured out that many authors (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) often refer to the employment experience as the "employment offering" which provides a particular experience explicitly to current and potential employees. Employee experience is a mutual understanding of obligations between the employee and the employer towards each other. Employer branding offering of various organizations vary with the make- up of transactional, relational and ideological psychological contract content (Martin & Hetrick, Corporate Reputations, Branding and Managing People: A Strategic Approach to HR, 2006). Organizational image associated with the employment brand depends on the symbolic or instrumental personality characteristics (Lievens, Van Hoye, & Anseel, 2007). Employees' shared perceptions of an organization's central, enduring and distinctive characteristics (Albert & Whetten, 1985) contribute to the organizational image related aspects of the employer brand and employment experience.

In a study, (Society for Human Resource Management, 2008), major reasons have been listed for the use of employer branding for HR. It helps in attaining organizational culture and employee fit to get the positive outcomes for recruiting which in turn will retain talent with corporate values and a team based culture. Indian management researcher and author Jyotsna Bhatnagar (2009) specifies the employer brand as an important differentiator in India for talent management. Yet, research shows that employer branding is an accidental concept in Indian context (Kapoor, 2010). Indian IT companies such as Infosys, TCS and Wipro are few established employer brands but they did not build it intentionally (Bahtnagar, 2009). More Recently (Bhutani, Pankajakshan, & Mandayam, 2010) have defined six factors for effective Indian employer brands. In India, Attract/retain best talent, Quality/ customer service, Recognized icon, Employer of choice, core corporate values are very critical in building a strong value proposition for an employer. Corporate social responsibility can be the best tool for employer brand recognition. Like global context (Turban & Greening, 1996) in the Indian context, CSR has been found to increase the ability to attract and retain employees (Agarwal, 2008). The authors have emphasized on the importance of employer brands in engaging and retaining the employees. "Employees who feel good about the synergy between the business model and

brand values tend to stay longer and be more engaged, leading to higher productivity."(Bhutani, Pankajakshan, & Mandayam, 2010).

More recently, researchers (Kunerth & Mosley, 2011) have demonstrated the effects of an integrated approach towards employer brand management on overall levels of internal engagement, in addition to promoting an employer's external reputation. This empirical study of factors influencing Employer Branding covers the prevailing scenario of employer brand and targeting the IT employees with of the top employer brands in Bangalore.

Objectives

Overall objective of the study is to understand the concept and existence of Employer branding in Indian IT industry. In specific, the objectives are:

1. To establish the construct of Employer Brand for the Indian IT industry; and

2. To understand the factors influencing Employer Brand for IT industry.

Scope

The amount of research on Employer Branding conducted in India is very limited and thus the scope of the research was set to include only IT companies operating in India. This study on crucial factors influencing employer branding in Indian IT industry covers the prevailing scenario of employer brand and targeting the IT employees with maximum five years of experience of the top employer brands in Bangalore. Bangalore is the silicon valley of India with proliferation of IT companies. The employees are from various departments like HR, finance, marketing and comprising engineers working in Indian IT Companies that were top ranking in "Asia's best employer brand awards 09-10 & 10-11", and listed in "IDC Best Employer Survey 2009" with more than two decades of their existence in the industry.

Research Methodology

Research was initially exploratory in nature. As the concept of Employer branding in India is niche and less practiced, researchers made efforts to understand the variables and the constructs that influences Employer branding. This was done from the literatures reviewed from different studies. The factors identified further demonstrated for Indian IT industry with the variables identified by exploratory research. Descriptive research at the later part surveyed the factors that influence Employer Branding with the help of Factor analysis performed with SPSS 16.0.

Sampling Design

To identify crucial factors for employer branding in this study group, a web-based survey was conducted in April 2011 among a group of randomly selected 95 IT employees from Bangalore city with less than or equal to five years of experience in the same company. The employees targeted for the research are from various departments like HR, finance, marketing and comprising engineers working in Indian IT Companies that were top ranking in "Asia's best employer brand awards 09-10 & 10-11", and listed in "IDC Best Employer Survey 2009" with more than two decades of their existence in the industry.

Data Collection

For the purpose of the study, both primary and secondary data were utilized. Primary data was collected from various employees working in the organizations using Questionnaire which was structured and closed ended using Likert Scale. Secondary data was collected from academic journals, internet, newspapers and magazines, company web link and books.

In order to collect primary data, a web-based Employer Branding Survey was conducted. Web based method of survey was selected for the ease of access by IT employees and data entry. The Kwik Survey tool was chosen to host this study because it was cost effective.

The survey entitled "Employer branding Survey" was pilot tested with a group of 15 IT employees. An email was sent to the employees of randomly selected IT companies with the information about the survey and a link to the secure survey website which was hosted by http://www.kwiksurvey.com.Once participants clicked on the link they were able to take the survey online. Survey was kept open for 2 weeks. Results were sent to the researcher via the Kwik Survey tool in aggregate and anonymous form and were downloaded into the SPSS program for analysis.

The major components of the model of conceptual framework of employer branding were considered when choosing questions for the pilot survey. That helped in addressing the face validity of the questionnaire. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested in March 2011 during the pilot study. The data of pilot study was analyzed using SPSS. Cronbach's Alpha score was used to determine if all the items within the instrument measure the similar phenomenon. It should be closer to one for greater internal consistency of the items being measured

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No. of Items
0.893	0.892	27

(George & Mallery, 2006). Table1 shows the Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.892. This shows 89.2 % internal consistency within the items measured to reveal Employer Branding in the instrument used for the study.

The scale means indicated that the item contributions were all fairly correlated except for the few questions. However, even without deletion of these questions, the instrument was internally consistent and suitable for the study. The data collected was analyzed with SPSS 16.0. Data reduction technique of factor analysis was used to extract the major factors influencing Employer Branding. Principal component method of extraction was adopted with Varimax rotation. Factors with eigen value greater than '1' was extracted and those variables with loadings greater than 0.7 in the rotation was identified as the major factors.

Results and Discussion

Exploratory Factor Analysis allows the researcher to test the hypothesis that a relationship between the observed variables and their underlying latent

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No. of Items
0.807	0.809	27

construct(s) exists. The researcher uses knowledge of the theory, empirical research, or both, postulates the relationship pattern a priori and then tests the hypothesis statistically.

Cronbach's Alpha test was conducted for the reliability of the instrument. The resulting score of 0.807 from the instrument used in this study was similar to that of the pilot study and is considered to be within the acceptable range of reliability (Nunnaly, 1978).

Of the 95 employees, 80 (n = 80) took the survey and the overall response rate was 84.2 %. The sample was similar to the sample for pilot study. Of the respondents to this survey, 75 percent were male and 25 percent were female. Number of years of service in the companies varied among respondents with 60.04 percent having experience of less than two years and 39.96 percent with two to five years of experience in the same company. The respondents were of age 20-35 years with equal representation of age groups 62.6%.

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.616
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	734.718
	Df	351
	Sig.	0.000

were between 20 - 30 years age and 37.4% were of 30-35 years of age.

The KMO and Bartlett's statistics assess whether there are patterns of correlations in the data that indicate the adequacy of sample for factor analysis. From the table below the KMO is 0.616 which is greater than 0.5 and Barlett's test is significant [$\chi 2$ (351) =734.718, p<0.001] and therefore the chosen sample is adequate and the factor analysis results can be used for generalization.

Table No. 4 shows all the factors extractable from the analysis along with their eigenvalues, the percent of variance attributable to each factor, and the cumulative variance of the factor and the previous factors. In this study, out of 27 variables, the nine variables account for 68% of the variance in the response and therefore these factors can be considered for further interpretation.

Table 4: Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.762	17.637	17.637	4.762	17.637	17.637	3.440	12.742	12.742
2	3.158	11.698	29.335	3.158	11.698	29.335	2.924	10.829	23.571
3	2.179	8.072	37.407	2.179	8.072	37.407	2.355	8.722	32.293
4	1.958	7.252	44.659	1.958	7.252	44.659	1.899	7.035	39.328
5	1.504	5.569	50.229	1.504	5.569	50.229	1.806	6.688	46.016
6	1.459	5.404	55.633	1.459	5.404	55.633	1.568	5.806	51.821
7	1.255	4.647	60.280	1.255	4.647	60.280	1.540	5.703	57.524
8	1.077	3.988	64.268	1.077	3.988	64.268	1.455	5.388	62.913
9	1.008	3.732	68.000	1.008	3.732	68.000	1.374	5.088	68.000
10	0.928	3.437	71.438						
11	0.884	3.276	74.713						
12	0.792	2.935	77.648						
13	0.730	2.703	80.351						
14	0.685	2.537	82.888						
15	0.604	2.237	85.125						
16	0.568	2.103	87.229						
17	0.545	2.018	89.246						
18	0.456	1.688	90.934						
19	0.440	1.630	92.565						
20	0.391	1.447	94.011						
21	0.324	1.200	95.212						
22	0.296	1.098	96.309						
23	0.259	0.961	97.270						
24	0.224	0.830	98.100						
25	0.209	0.772	98.873						
26	0.168	0.623	99.495						
27	0.136	0.505	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table No. 5 shows the rotated components of the factors. The idea of rotation is to reduce the number of factors on which the variables under investigation have high loadings. This explains the extent of each manifest variable loads onto each of the nine latent variables.

Table 5: Rotated Component Matrix

	Component								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Career development	-.025	.587	.175	.426	-.170	.115	-.002	.180	-.084
Communication	.119	-.108	.121	.273	.006	.093	.744	.032	.027
Compensation & Benefits	-.078	.233	-.024	.104	.162	-.037	-.100	.728	.216
Culture	-.042	.117	.065	.055	.045	.149	.005	.137	.884
Corporate Social Responsibility	.144	.432	.100	-.172	.120	.233	.506	-.282	.066
Employee Research	.393	.302	-.093	.305	-.378	-.149	.345	.229	.101
Innovation	.172	.689	-.185	.197	-.183	.069	.144	-.149	.092
Leadership	.010	-.013	.105	.756	.153	.213	.250	-.019	.000
Mission Vision	.112	.218	.008	.228	-.096	.732	.090	-.129	.081
HR Practice & Policies	.073	.347	-.089	.698	.087	-.061	-.080	.159	.112
Performance Management	.033	.668	-.072	-.061	.237	.205	-.016	.251	.056
Recruitment	.333	.502	-.009	.221	.294	-.223	.050	-.251	.014
Reward n Recognition	-.118	.733	.081	.026	.146	-.091	-.081	.156	.015
Work Environment	.000	.390	-.026	.202	.644	-.098	.063	-.096	.293
Employer Image	.115	.047	.127	.099	.765	.070	-.043	.270	-.051
Employee Value Proposition	.569	.056	.036	.300	.074	.292	-.117	.039	-.047
Employer Attraction	.401	-.021	.226	.288	.184	.175	-.469	.185	.235
Employee Job Satisfaction	.668	-.136	-.126	-.002	.099	-.312	-.066	.005	.383
Employee Recognition	.699	.114	-.056	-.078	.191	.078	.235	.002	.091
Employee Productivity	.432	-.178	.149	.053	.117	.315	-.394	-.192	.307
Employer Brand Association	.184	-.259	-.193	-.076	.342	.553	.038	.202	.218
Employer Image1	.086	-.008	.813	.174	.210	.021	-.001	-.021	.064
Employer Image2	.026	.044	.860	-.084	.042	-.139	.023	.008	.041
Employer Image 3	.377	-.093	.708	-.019	-.256	.157	.077	.089	-.071
Employee Loyalty2	.676	.210	.263	-.113	-.050	.268	-.040	-.058	-.100
Employee Loyalty3	.554	-.013	.201	.111	.066	-.039	.167	.564	-.109
Employee Loyalty4	.709	-.049	.250	.064	-.131	.007	.039	-.019	-.133

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

From the list of variables nine distinct factors emerge. These factors are contributed by variables as indicated below.

Table 6: List of Crucial Factors for Employer Branding

FACTORS	VARIABLE S
FACTOR 1	Employee Loyalty4, Employee Loyalty 2, Employee Recognition , Job Satisfaction
FACTOR 2	Innovation, Rewards and Recognition
FACTOR 3	Employer Image 1, Employer Image 2, Employer Image 3
FACTOR 4	HR Practice and policies, Leadership
FACTOR 5	Work Environment, Employer Image
FACTOR 6	Mission and Vision
FACTOR 7	Communication and Corporate Social Responsibility
FACTOR 8	Compensation and Benefit
FACTOR 9	Culture

The extracted factors seem to be congruent with those identified from literature. The variables in factor one are related to the construct of Organizational Citizenship Behaviour. Employee Loyalty 4 refers to loyalty referring to associated with the company in foreseeable future and employee loyalty 2 refers to loyalty expressed by the employee as a result of past experiences with the company. Employer image 1, 2 3 refers to the image as perceived by family, friends and society about the employer.

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of employer branding and determines the crucial factors for it in Indian IT Industry. Employer branding creates two principal assets – brand associations and brand loyalty. Employer brand associations shape the employer image that in turn affects the attractiveness of the organization to potential employees. Employer branding impacts organization culture and organization identity that in turn contribute to employer brand loyalty. The authors also mentioned that organizational culture feeds back to the employer brand. Employer brand loyalty contributes to increasing employee productivity.(Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Indian IT companies such as Infosys, TCS and Wipro are few established employer brands but they did not build it intentionally (Bahtnagar, 2009). This concept of employer branding is niche and thus an extensive list of important factors for employer branding was prepared. The nine crucial factors for employer branding are determined after the analysis of data collected.

Employer image is essential for employer branding. As suggested by social identity theory, the prospective employees are more likely to choose the employer brand because of the positive self-concept that result from feeling membership with the organization. Work environment of an employer helps in supporting its image and thus a successful employer brand.

Employee loyalty, Employee Recognition and Employee Job Satisfaction determine a factor for employer branding. An employee's commitment to join or remain employed with an organization as a result of the positive associations with the organization helps in creating an employer brand. However, another factor is a combination of leadership and human resources practices and policies. It is about the strategic inclination of human resources management to create a successful employer brand. Innovation and rewards & recognition attract the prospective employees to an

organization. Compensation and benefit, communication systems, culture, corporate social responsibilities and mission and vision of an organization attract the employees.

Companies are using Career websites, employee referrals, recruitment brochures, social media and advertisements in print and electronic media for communicating their employer brands. We have found that the major effective methods being used by companies to communicate their employer brand in Indian IT industry are employee referral, career website and social media.

Limitations

This study is based on employee's perception of Employer Branding, other stakeholders like customers, shareholders, partners and prospective employees are not considered. As the study was conducted among the employees from the specific list of Indian IT companies, drawing a generalization may not be appropriate.

Scope for further research

In the preceding section we provided a list of crucial factors for employer branding in Indian IT Industry. In this section we draw out a research agenda for developing and formalizing employer branding as a valuable practice for human resource management. This study contributes to the limited empirical research on the topic of employer branding. This is the first industry specific study on employer branding in India. This research can be extended to other industries also. The impact of inconsistency between employer brand image and corporate image on job seekers can be studied. The contribution of employer branding in organizational performance can be analyzed. The methods of measurement for employer branding should be developed. Research needs to examine the extent to which employer branding is linked with the other constructs such as employee engagement etc. Employer branding in different economic conditions can be studied.

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