

Empirical illustrations of student's perception of a preferred employer brand

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Abstract

Purpose – To examine the employer brand attributes that attract students to various organisations. This paper studies the perceived importance levels of students in the context of employer brand dimensions.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper is based on a well-administered and structured questionnaire with survey results to test the effectiveness of the employer brand model. The researcher received a convenience sample of 416 filled questionnaires out of the 550 distributed questionnaires. Independent sample and paired sample *t*-tests were run to test the hypotheses.

Findings – Development value emerged as the most potent factor, whereas interest value emerged as the least favoured characteristic of an employer brand. Further analyses revealed no significant differences regarding the perceived levels of importance for dimensions of employer brand in relation to gender. Distinct significance levels are associated with various dimensions of employer brand, so companies should carefully emphasise and facilitate those dimensions. The managers could design their job advertisements to attract skilled employees based on the essential values depicted in this study.

Originality/value – The study contributes valuable suggestions for organisations to formulate an effective employer brand for successful recruitment strategies.

Keywords Employer brand, Employer attractiveness, EmpAt scale, University students, Value propositions

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The problem of unemployment has been steadily rising in India due to the availability of plentiful employees and the continuous efforts of employers to attract highly qualified job applicants. The volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA) environment demands organisations hire agile leaders who can develop an organisational culture for attracting and retaining agile and innovative talent (Lawrence, 2013; Khan, Bharadwaj, Khatoon, & Jamal, 2021). Chambers, Foulon, Handfield-Jones, Hankin, and Michales (1998), in an article “The War for Talent”, explored the increasing demand for the executives with the deflating trend of the professional workforce, shrinking female workforce, stable immigration and stagnant executive career movements. Due to the rise in job mobility, employers continually battle to recruit highly qualified job applicants. It has been previously asserted that employees are attracted to an organisation with a strong employer image, where the organisation's image captivates an applicant's attraction just after a campus interview

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(Turban, Forret, & Hendrickson, 1998). Due to this, organisations could inflate the possibility of attracting prospective applicants' in the initial stages of recruitment. While making a strategic choice, job seekers recognize indications called as attraction factors that are tangible and intangible (Ahmad, 2019). Due to this, it is necessary for organisations to implement an employer branding strategy and be responsible for delivering its promises to achieve maximum retention (Aldousari, Robertson, Yajid, & Ahmed, 2017; Arriscado, Quesado, & Sousa, 2019; Khan *et al.*, 2021).

Employer brand is based on the psychological contract between an employer and employees, consisting of an instrumental-symbolic framework for examining the employee's preferred brand (Khan *et al.*, 2021; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). The instrumental attributes include pay, benefits, bonuses, flexible timings, location, etc. whereas the symbolic attributes include corporate values of loyalty, honesty and fairness. These instrumental and symbolic attributes have been studied as significant predictors of organisation's attractiveness as a preferred employer (Van Hoye, Bas, Cromheecke, & Lievens, 2013; Yameen, Bharadwaj, & Ahmad, 2020; Bharadwaj, 2023).

As a dynamic contract, employee preferences may change from recruitment through various life stages till retirement (Ito, Brotheridge, & McFarland, 2013). For instance, a study by Lievens (2007) delineated that perceived attractiveness in the Belgian army differed between prospective candidates and employees. However, our focus related to employer branding is on potential employees. The research attempts to assess the role of branding in attracting students and analysing how their expectations are set. During the early stages of recruitment, potential applicants give their best shot at finding a top-notch employer and form initial perceptions about an employer as a place to work (Dabirian, Kietzmann, & Diba, 2017). Thus, the study aims to supplement valuable information to the existing literature to understand the differences in the importance levels for various employer brand dimensions and give insights about the most and least preferred attributes among prospective employees.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses development

2.1 Employer brand perception

Since time memorial, a product brand image has been used to differentiate a product from its counterparts. However, organisations are also being differentiated based on their brands, commonly termed as employer brands. Employer brand is an amalgam of "the functional, economic and psychological benefits that are provided by employment and identified with the employing company" (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). According to the internal marketing concept, employees are the organisation's first customers. A level of organisational research and planning is required for an effective employer brand as incorporated by the companies during product planning and development (Kaliprasad, 2006).

The perception of a brand is closely linked with the employers' reputation and is a vital factor in recruitment (Joglekar & Tan, 2022). Employees assign different importance levels to various factors. Even employees' perceptions differ from organisation to organisation due to their unique attributes (Maxwell & Knox, 2009). The authors highlighted the importance of a positively construed external image, where a favourable public perception might help promote a better picture of an organisation, thus enhancing employee attraction and retention levels (Kargas & Tsokos, 2020).

According to Bandura (1994), self-efficacy and outcome expectancy influence an individual's reactions because they have positive perceptions regarding the methods and techniques employed and their success. Job seekers' opinion is also subject to word of mouth as it can create a positive image among employees and customers (File, Judd, & Prince, 1992). The employees generally assimilate information from a credible source, due to which

organisations have started to engage the present employees as brand advocates to spread positive word of mouth (Ahamad, 2019; Chandler & Nemeth, 2020).

2.2 Dimensional approach to employer branding

Prior studies have highlighted the role of employer brand dimensions entailing an employer branding strategy to attract, recruit and retain the employees. For instance, attributes such as career development, financial incentives, corporate social responsibility (CSR) and ethics have been empirically tested to attract skilled employees (Yameen *et al.*, 2020; Bharadwaj, 2023). Previously, employers supplied very little information about employees' growth and development opportunities. Additionally, employees were not even aware of what a company is doing for the betterment of employees and society as a whole, i.e. CSR (Bharadwaj & Yameen, 2020; Mičík & Mičudová, 2018). However, according to the recent literature, the firms have started to engage in CSR activities to attract, recruit and retain prospective and existing employees, synthesising employer branding and CSR (Bharadwaj, Khan, & Yameen, 2021; Carlini, Grace, France, & Lo Iacono, 2019; Tanwar & Kumar, 2019).

Research concerning employer brands has demonstrated the positive influence of transformative brands on employee well-being. For instance, employee's health and wellness programmes as a component of an employer brand have been cited to attract the millennials (Varadharaj, 2019). In addition to this, social recruiting has been identified as an effective tool to leverage an organisation's image as an employer brand (Bharadwaj, 2024). A study by Dodd, Sagers, and Wildy (2009) demarcation of employee generations as Baby Boomers, Gen X and Y identified Gen Y (younger generation) to be attracted towards companies incorporating career and social media websites for the recruitment process.

Considering the instrumental and symbolic framework, employer brand attributes such as development aspects, including training, congenial working environment, career development and social status, have superseded salary as a key element to apply for a job in an organisation (Yameen *et al.*, 2020; Santiago, 2019). Therefore, prior studies clarify that one's preference for attributes concerning employer attractiveness changes at every stage of an employee's career. Instrumental variables play an essential role at the entry level, but the symbolic attributes can be a reason for employees' exit.

Additionally, various researchers provide that candidates' intention to apply may alter based on demographic factors such as age, educational background, gender, etc. (Saini, Rai, & Chaudhary, 2014; Yameen *et al.*, 2020; Bharadwaj, 2023). Almaçık and Almaçık (2012) adopted the validated scale with 25 items given by Berthon, Ewing, and Hah (2005) to study the attributes of employer branding for attracting the right talent. The authors reported that social value outweighed other values, where market value was the least preferred attribute among students. However, demographic factors of gender and academic course have also not affected employees' perceptions regarding employer brand (Arachchige & Robertson, 2011; Yameen *et al.*, 2020). Thus, it can be hypothesised that:

- H1. No significant difference exists in the perceived importance levels regarding the employer brand dimensions between male and female students.

2.3 Students' perceptions of an employer brand

Studies provide that students with no prior working experience perceive the tangible attributes such as pay and compensation as attractive, whereas employees already working prefer intangible attributes such as innovativeness, trust, honesty and prestige (Ahamad, 2019). Arachchige and Robertson (2011), in their study, adopted the modified and revised version of the Australian EmpAt scale given by Berthon *et al.* (2005) to throw light on the preferred brand attributes among Sri Lankan graduates. The results revealed that gaining

experience for a better career, future opportunities and self-esteem were the most preferred attributes, whereas working in an exciting environment where customer-oriented organisations and innovative products were the least preferred attributes.

The “Must Have” or “Necessary Factors” preferred by the students in a study by Mahavir and Srimannarayana (2014) were salary, transparent organisation, friendly and a participative environment. The “High Impact Factors” consisted of the degree of independence, training and development programmes, learning and a good stake in the market. In addition to this, several studies have identified work culture, salary, ethics and CSR as crucial dimensions entailing an attractive employer brand (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019; Bharadwaj, 2023; Kaur, Pingle, & Jaiswal, 2024). Furthermore, in a comparative study between the perceptions of experienced graduates and postgraduates regarding employer attractiveness, it was found that there exist significant differences in the perception regarding the employer brand attributes among them (Arachchige & Robertson, 2013). Thus, we can hypothesise that.

H2. Distinct dimensions of employer attractiveness have different perceived importance levels.

3. Methodology

3.1 Population and sampling procedure

The study used the survey method and approached graduate and postgraduate business and management students from two central universities in Uttar Pradesh. The questionnaires were distributed to students currently looking for jobs or are interested in working in the near future. Hence, surveying these students would give insights into the urgency of various employer brand factors. The study deployed the pilot survey before targeting the entire sample size to check the reliability and correlation among the variables. The researcher, through appropriate results, carried the research further and received the convenience sample of 416 filled questionnaires out of the 550 distributed questionnaires. Using convenience sampling, participants who were easily accessible by the researchers were approached. To remove the possibility of social desirability biases, the respondents were given the assurance that their answers would only be used for academic research. The response rate was 72.7%, which is considered sufficient for social sciences research (Preito & Revilla, 2004).

3.2 Research instruments and study measures

The survey instrument used was a questionnaire divided into two parts: Part A consisted of demographic questions regarding students’ gender, course of study and year of study. Part B consisted of 25 questions adopted from the validated scale of employer attractiveness. To measure the “employer attractiveness”, this study adopted the scale developed and validated by Berthon *et al.* (2005), considered reliable and suitable for generalizing results for students.

The five major heads of the employer attractiveness scale, i.e. Social value, Economic value, Interest value, Development value and Application value consisted of 25 sub-items corresponding to “functional, economic and psychological benefits” given by Ambler and Barrow (1996). The responses were taken on a seven-point Likert scale with anchor 1 = “Not at all” and 7 = “A lot”.

3.3 Analyses and results

The demographic profile of the students is illustrated in Table 1. A total of 416 individuals participated in the survey, where 396 responses were collected in person and 20 from online

Variables		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	223	55.8
	Female	176	44.0
	Prefer not to say	1	0.30
Year age	Final year	164	41.0
	Previous year	143	35.8
	Others	93	23.3
	Below 20 years	216	54.0
	20–30 years	184	46.0
	<i>Total</i>	<i>400</i>	<i>400</i>

Table 1.
Demographic
profile (*n* = 400)

Source(s): Author’s own creation

mode. From the total, 16 questionnaires were eliminated after preliminary analyses and the researcher was left with a total of 400 respondents, where 55.8% were male and 44% were female. The majority of the students was enrolled in the final year (41%) and was aged below 20 years (54%).

The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett’s test of sphericity for measuring sample adequacy examined the appropriateness of the factor analysis. The KMO value was 0.93, and the χ^2 (Chi-Square) approximation test of sphericity was significant at $p < 0.01$, confirming that all variables were suitable for factor analysis (Table 2). The means, standard deviation and intercorrelation among the five variables used to test the hypotheses are depicted in Table 3. Table 3 shows the mean scores under each factor that created five composite variables of social value (SV), interest value (IV), economic value (EV), development value (DV) and application value (AV) under the principal component analysis.

Table 4 shows the factor loadings of items, the standard deviation and the Cronbach’s alpha values. Factor 1, “Social value” assesses to what extent individuals prefer an employer that gives supporting and encouraging colleagues, a better relationship with the manager and colleagues and a fun and happy place of work. Factor 2, “Interest value” assesses to what extent individuals prefer an employer that gives innovative goods and services, superior-

KMO and Bartlett’s test

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		0.93
Bartlett’s test of sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	4904.53
	df	300
	Sig	0.000

Table 2.
Sample sufficient

Source(s): Author’s own creation

Variables	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD	SV	IV	EV	DV	AV
SV	400	27.88	4.78					
IV	400	27.56	4.64	0.582**				
EV	400	28.79	4.45	0.567**	0.541**			
DV	400	29.12	4.08	0.492**	0.588**	0.643**		
AV	400	28.39	4.52	0.489**	0.585**	0.571**	0.638**	

Table 3.
Intercorrelation among
variables

Note(s): **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Source(s): Author’s own creation

Scale items	Mean	SD	Factor loading	Alpha
<i>Factor 1 social value</i>				
Supportive and encouraging colleagues at your workplace	5.44	1.31	0.674	0.827
A good relationship with your superiors	5.60	1.14	0.755	
A good relationship with your colleagues	5.77	1.12	0.807	
A fun working environment	5.35	1.39	0.600	
A happy working environment	5.71	1.23	0.605	
<i>Factor 2 interest value</i>				
Offer you innovative products and services	5.43	1.18	0.718	0.838
Produce high-quality products	5.59	1.20	0.724	
Offer you both values and makes use of your creativity	5.70	1.09	0.635	
Possess novel work practices/forward-thinking – innovative employer	5.38	1.28	0.703	
Offer to work in a conducive working environment	5.45	1.21	0.622	
<i>Factor 3 economic value</i>				
An above average basic salary	5.60	1.17	0.739	0.848
Good promotion opportunities within the organisation	5.83	1.05	0.666	
Inter-departmental experience	5.52	1.21	0.654	
An attractive overall compensation package	5.80	1.06	0.716	
Job security within the organisation	6.03	1.13	0.619	
<i>Factor 4 development value</i>				
A platform for future employment to the employees	5.66	1.06	0.625	0.832
Feeling great about working in it	5.72	1.03	0.631	
Feeling of self-confidence as a result of working in it	5.92	1.06	0.684	
For a career-enhancing experience to the employees	5.92	1.02	0.667	
For recognition/appreciation from management	5.88	1.11	0.674	
<i>Factor 5 application value</i>				
The company has the duty to give back to the society/Humanitarian organisation	5.64	1.19	0.686	0.826
Opportunity to apply what was learned in the tertiary institution	5.41	1.17	0.716	
Opportunity to teach others what was learned	5.66	1.25	0.678	
A feeling of acceptance and belonging	5.77	1.10	0.562	
An organisation should be customer oriented	5.90	1.15	0.679	
Source(s): Author's own creation				

Table 4.
Factor loading and reliability statistics

quality products, use of creativity, forward-thinking and conducive workplace. Factor 3, “Economic value” assesses to what extent individuals prefer an employer that gives a high salary, promotion opportunities, departmental experience, a captivating compensation package and a secured job. Factor 4, “Development value” assesses to what extent individuals prefer an employer that gives future employment, self-confidence, career development, recognition/appreciation and feeling great working in it. Factor 5, “Application value” assesses to what extent individuals prefer an employer that provides an opportunity to use skills learned, learn and teach others, a feeling of belongingness and an organisation that is customer-oriented and humanitarian.

The values of Cronbach's alpha for social value ($\alpha = 0.827$), interest value ($\alpha = 0.838$), economic value ($\alpha = 0.848$), development value ($\alpha = 0.832$) and application value ($\alpha = 0.826$) exhibited satisfactory reliabilities for internal consistency. Furthermore, factor loadings greater than or equal to 0.5 are considered acceptable for further analysis (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2009).

To find the difference in the perceived importance levels for gender regarding the employer's attractiveness in relation to the five values of "social value, interest value, economic value, development value and application value", an independent sample *t*-test was run as shown in Table 5. The analyses indicated no significant differences in the perceived importance level between males and females regarding all five dimensions of the employer's attractiveness and hence, supported our first null hypothesis.

To test our second hypothesis regarding students' perceived levels of importance for various dimensions, a paired sample *t*-test was run. Table 6 depicts the mean, standard deviation and results of paired *t*-tests for each value of the EmpAt scale. Development value scored the highest mean (29.12); hence, it was perceived as the most potent dimension for attracting students, while interest value scored the lowest mean (27.56) and was perceived as the least important dimension to attract college students. Out of the 20 pairs mentioned above, 12 were statistically significant. Therefore, the second hypothesis was partially supported.

4. Discussions

The study aimed to examine students' perceived levels of importance for various dimensions of the employer brand and make comparisons for the same in context to gender. The data were collected through a convenience sample of graduates and postgraduates from two central universities. The perceptions of students were assessed using a multi-item scale of Berthon *et al.* (2005). To determine the suitability of the five major dimensions of the EmpAt scale, "social value, interest value, economic value, development value, and application value," factor analysis was used. Further, the principal component analysis (PCA) was used to analyse the structure and identify the broader factors of the EmpAt scale.

The study revealed a statistically significant difference in students' perceptions regarding various dimensions of employer attractiveness. The results validated development value (mean value = 29.12) as the most potent dimension among students, wherein students ascribe highest importance to career development and skill advancement opportunities. The findings are in line with the previous studies that have cited the importance of training and development opportunities owing to the rapid technological advancements in the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA) environment (Khan *et al.*, 2021; Yameen *et al.*, 2020). The growing interest among prospective employees towards the development value could be attributed to the rising talent gap between skilled and not so skilled employees, where India ranks second with a major talent gap of 64% (Bharadwaj, 2023).

Employer attraction dimension	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. error mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
SV	Male	223	27.95	5.04	0.33	0.35	397	0.725
	Female	176	27.78	4.44	0.33			
IV	Male	223	27.38	4.87	0.32	-0.92	397	0.358
	Female	176	27.81	4.34	0.32			
EV	Male	223	28.75	4.79	0.32	-0.21	397	0.834
	Female	176	28.85	4.00	0.30			
DV	Male	223	29.10	4.19	0.28	-0.11	397	0.912
	Female	176	29.15	3.96	0.29			
AV	Male	223	28.59	4.68	0.31	0.99	397	0.319
	Female	176	28.13	4.32	0.32			

Source(s): Author's own creation

Table 5.
Gender and perceived
importance level of
employer
attractiveness

Employer attraction dimension		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	SV	27.88	400	4.78	1.40	399	0.136
	IV	27.56	400	4.64			
Pair 2	SV	27.88	400	4.78	-4.20	399	0.000
	EV	28.79	400	4.45			
Pair 3	SV	27.88	400	4.78	-5.49	399	0.000
	DV	29.12	400	4.08			
Pair 4	SV	27.88	400	4.78	-2.17	399	0.030
	AV	28.39	400	4.52			
Pair 5	IV	27.56	400	4.64	-1.49	399	0.136
	SV	27.88	400	4.78			
Pair 6	IV	27.56	400	4.64	-5.66	399	0.000
	EV	28.79	400	4.45			
Pair 7	IV	27.56	400	4.64	-7.82	399	0.000
	DV	29.12	400	4.08			
Pair 8	IV	27.56	400	4.64	-3.99	399	0.000
	AV	28.39	400	4.52			
Pair 9	EV	28.79	400	4.45	4.23	399	0.000
	SV	27.88	400	4.78			
Pair 10	EV	28.79	400	4.45	5.66	399	0.000
	IV	27.56	400	4.64			
Pair 11	EV	28.79	400	4.45	-1.80	399	0.071
	DV	29.12	400	4.08			
Pair 12	EV	28.79	400	4.45	1.92	399	0.055
	AV	28.39	400	4.52			
Pair 13	DV	29.12	400	4.08	5.49	399	0.000
	SV	27.88	400	4.78			
Pair 14	DV	29.12	400	4.08	7.82	399	0.000
	IV	27.56	400	4.64			
Pair 15	DV	29.12	400	4.08	1.80	399	0.071
	EV	28.79	400	4.45			
Pair 16	DV	29.12	400	4.08	3.94	399	0.000
	AV	28.39	400	4.52			
Pair 17	AV	28.39	400	4.52	2.17	399	0.030
	SV	27.88	400	4.78			
Pair 18	AV	28.39	400	4.52	3.99	399	0.000
	IV	27.56	400	4.64			
Pair 19	AV	28.39	400	4.52	-1.92	399	0.055
	EV	28.79	400	4.45			
Pair 20	AV	28.39	400	4.52	-3.94	399	0.000
	DV	29.12	400	4.08			

Table 6.
Paired sample *t*-test for perceived level of attractiveness

Source(s): Author's own creation

In contrast, students attribute least importance to the interest value (mean value = 27.56), depicting how economic and social factors such as above-average salary, conducive environment, innovation, application of the job and job content are less important among future job prospects (Santiago, 2019; Binu Raj, 2021). Interestingly, the present study contrasts with the findings of previous studies, which have validated the importance of tangible attributes such as pay and incentives over intangible attributes among students (Ahmad, 2019). The mixed findings could be attributed to the problem with jobs offering a promising salary having no upward mobility, leading to dead-end jobs.

Furthermore, prior studies have also identified the role of interpersonal relationships and culture (social value) owing to the changing work demands; however, the present study has found it to have less importance among job seekers (Binu Raj, 2021). This opens ground for some interesting future comparative study empirically validating the role of pecuniary and non-pecuniary benefits among employees.

Considering this, organisations may design their marketing and HR strategies, aligning with the goals of both present employees and job applicants, after careful analysis of the strongest brand dimensions.

Further analyses revealed no statistically significant differences in the importance level regarding the dimensions of the employer's attractiveness concerning the gender of the students, and the results were similar to Arachchige and Robertson (2011).

4.1 Theoretical implications

The study proposes a few theoretical implications. First the study shed light on the role of employer branding in shaping organisational attractiveness. Organisations use various signals, such as branding efforts and recruitment practices, to convey information about their attributes and characteristics to potential applicants (Lawrence, 2013; Khan *et al.*, 2021). By examining students' perceptions of a preferred employer brand, academicians can assess the effectiveness of different branding strategies and understand how they influence organisational attractiveness.

Second, as the competition for talent is fierce, a strong employer brand can serve as a key differentiator. Organisations with a positive employer brand are perceived as desirable places to work, giving them a competitive edge in attracting and retaining top performers.

Third, employer branding is not just about filling immediate hiring needs; it is also about building a pipeline of talent for future roles. The study implies that a strong employer brand will help organisations cultivate relationships with potential candidates over time, creating a pool of qualified candidates who are interested in future opportunities with the organisation.

4.2 Managerial implications

The practitioners in the fields of human resources, marketing and communication will find the results of this study fruitful while building their strategies following the changing needs of the talent pool. To attract agile and innovative talent, it is necessitated that organisations must differentiate themselves from their competitors. A distinct level of importance is ascribed to various dimensions of employer attractiveness; thus, companies should carefully emphasise and facilitate those crucial dimensions.

Employers can further effectively convey to prospective employees the employer brand benefits embedded in the organisation's work culture. The managers can design their job advertisements to attract skilled employees based on the important values depicted in this study. They should align branding efforts with HR and marketing teams to ensure consistency in messaging and branding across all touchpoints, from job postings to recruitment events.

Aligning with the findings of the current study, it is essential to recognize the importance of non-monetary incentives such as training and development opportunities as a more attractive proposition for prospective talent seeking meaningful and enriching employment experiences. Development value asserts the presence of meaningful work that provides employees with a bundle of marketable skills. These marketable skills could provide an edge to prospective and current employees amidst the *war for talent*. Further, necessary KSAs (knowledge, skills and abilities) could build affiliation and pride among job seekers (Peterson, 2004). This could help companies distinguish themselves as employers of choice, attracting skilled professionals aligned with their values and mission.

Furthermore, a nonsignificant behaviour of job content, economic and social factors does not necessarily imply that these factors should be completely ignored. Prior studies have also revealed these propositions to have a more profound effect on employees (Ahamad, 2019; Binu Raj, 2021). Thus, a careful analysis is needed before designing a robust branding strategy.

Additionally, companies could include the *people-centric values* that the current study determined to be more significant in the employment contract. Organisations should ensure that employment contracts should cover these benefits and focus on their implementation, facilitating an environment of organisational trust and leading to better relations between employees and the employer. By doing so, organisations align their contractual agreements with the key factors that resonate most with prospective employees. This not only enhances the attractiveness of the employment offer but also fosters a workplace culture that prioritizes values deemed important by the talent pool.

4.3 Limitations and future directions

First, the study attempted to incorporate business and management graduates and postgraduates of two central universities. Thus, future research should involve larger and more generalized samples. Furthermore, students enrolled in different courses can also be targeted. Second, the study is cross-sectional; thus, common method biases could be an issue. Therefore, future researchers can adopt a longitudinal approach while designing their research.

Third, the research was not intended to assess the perceptions of current employees but rather to survey prospective employees (students) who will apply for a job in an organisation in the near future. Thus, future research endeavours could explore the role of employer branding initiatives in achieving internal employer branding goals. Future researchers can also focus on conducting a comparative survey of universities within India and outside India among experienced employees, experienced employees and prospective employees. Empirical relationships with external and internal employer branding outcomes such as retention, satisfaction and commitment can also be assessed.

5. Conclusions

By leveraging survey questionnaires and statistical analysis, this study has provided a structured framework for understanding the elements that contribute to a preferred employer brand, particularly in the context of students in the labour market. The findings shed light on the importance of aligning organisational values, salary and incentives, culture and opportunities with the preferences and expectations of prospective employees. Furthermore, the implications extend beyond academia to inform organisational practices in talent acquisition, retention and employer branding strategies. Companies can utilize these findings to assess and enhance the attractiveness of their organizations both internally and externally, thereby facilitating success in acquiring and retaining talent in today's competitive labour market.

Overall, the empirical illustrations presented in this study provide valuable insights and guidance for organizations seeking to strengthen their employer brand and position themselves as employers of choice. By understanding and addressing the preferences and perceptions of prospective employees, organisations can enhance their competitiveness and long-term sustainability in the talent market.

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