

Organization Branding in the Post-COVID-19 World – An Employer and Employee Perspective

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Abstract

Employer branding is a tool to create a positive perception of an organization in the minds of existing and prospective employees. Employer branding not only helps in getting the best talent for an organization, but also reduces the cost of talent acquisition. Employees are not merely passive participants of the recruitment process; they aggressively seek information about the employers using secondary resources like blogs and social media pages of the company and are involved in the co-creation of the recruitment process. The study used a narrative review to identify the factors affecting employer branding. The study then used the multi-criteria decision making (MCDM) technique and TOPSIS to rank these factors, hence identifying the importance of five factors for an employer. The study further performed conjoint analysis to identify the utility of the identified factors for employees. The narrative review of the studies identified salary, job security, training and development, work-life balance, and career progress. The study's results suggested a significant gap between employers' and employees' perspectives, which must be addressed. Salary and job security are the hygiene factors and had a high priority for employees and employers. While career progress is important for employees, it got less preference from employers. The study findings will be useful for managers designing online branding strategies and those at the helm of corporate communication.

Keywords : organization branding, social media, TOPSIS, Delphi method, conjoint analysis, post-COVID-19 world

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Employer branding includes an organization's activities to promote it among employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Dash & Mohapatra, 2016). The employee may include past, current, and future employees. It not only helps in getting the best talent for an organization but also reduces the cost of talent acquisition. Recent advancement in digital channels has made it possible for employers to take a proactive approach to attract and engage with top talent. Communication plays an important role in employer branding and should be carefully designed (Chatterjee & Kundu, 2020; Miles & Mangold, 2004; Radha Kiranmayi & Jyothi, 2017). It is imperative to understand the factors affecting the employer's branding. Despite the existing pieces of literature in this area, there is a lack of research on the analysis of employers' and employees' perspectives on the factors affecting employer branding. Moreover, these perspectives need to be further revisited in the changing context of post-COVID-19. This study aims to fill this gap.

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Literature Review

The employee brand image is driven by the messages employees receive and the mechanisms within employees' psyches that enable them to make sense of those messages (Miles & Mangold, 2004). Employer branding is not only helpful in winning new employees but also in retaining existing employees (Gilani & Cunningham, 2017). Employee branding has five dimensions: Brand-centered human resource management, internal brand communication, brand-specific transformational leadership, brand-oriented support, and external brand prestige (Dhiman & Arora, 2020). Miles and Mangold (2005) explained how employee branding works and how it can be used to create a positive perception of the organization in the minds of stakeholders. Another paper identified and analyzed the typology of employee branding in a service organization using fuzzy c-means clustering to improve the quality of employee brand (Natarajan et al., 2017). In designing effective online communication, it is indispensable to identify the factors affecting the employer's branding. The next paragraph discusses the identified factors and their definition.

The monetary benefits associated with a job are among the key factors of the employer brand (Cable & Judge, 1996; Elving et al., 2013; Sivertzen et al., 2013). The other factor affecting the selection of an employer is job security (Trott, 2013). Job security is the chance that an individual will keep his/her job (McKnight et al., 2009; Mosadeghrad et al., 2011). Training and development (T&D) opportunities available with the employer also create a positive image of the employer in the employee's mind (Natarajan & Babu, 2018). Thus, T&D is also one of the factors affecting employer branding (Love & Singh, 2011; Vijayanthi et al., 2011). The reviewed literature suggests clear evidence of rising organizational stress because of the demanding nature of the jobs (Mosadeghrad et al., 2011). Work-life balance is emerging as one of the important factors in the selection of a job. Employees prefer flexible-timing jobs and have options for working from home (Dabirian et al., 2017; Maurya et al., 2021; Mosadeghrad et al., 2011). Finally, career progress at work is also a significant factor in employer branding (Maben & Uchil, 2019; Saini et al., 2014; Wilden et al., 2010).

The studies also indicated that an organization following sustainable business practices attracts employees and customers (Backhaus, 2016). Some other criteria, such as employee stock ownership plan (ESOP), also play a significant role in the selection of employers. The explicit category of employees only prefers ESOP, and more research is required to understand it. The employer-employee relationship has undergone various changes in the post-COVID world (Shobha & Johnson, 2021).

Digital technologies have been instrumental in the transformation of workplaces (Rajeev, 2021). HR functions such as recruitment have already witnessed digitalization, and the depth of adoption has further increased post-COVID (Kulkarni & Pingle, 2019; Patra et al., 2019). There has been apprehension about job security after the outbreak of the pandemic. Various studies have emphasized the factors affecting an organization's branding (Rather et al., 2018). Considering the magnitude of changes in recent times, there is a need for a study examining the factors affecting the organization's branding, and this study attempts to fill this research gap.

Based on the review of the existing literature and unstructured interview of the focus group containing (FG1) three human resource management professionals and three employees working in software and manufacturing industries, this study finalizes the five key factors contributing to employer branding. All these respondents were from India. These factors are listed in Table 1.

The three research questions this study intends to answer are :

- **RQ1 :** What factors affect the employer's branding on social media?
- **RQ2 :** Which of these factors are considered important by employers?
- **RQ3 :** What is the utility of different factors (job attributes) for an employee?

Table 1. Factors Affecting Employer Branding

Factors	Description	References
Factor 1	Salary	Cable & Judge (1996) ; Elving et al. (2013) ; Sivertzen et al. (2013)
Factor 2	Job Security	McKnight et al. (2009) ; Mosadeghrad et al. (2011)
Factor 3	Training and Development	Love & Singh (2011) ; Vijayanthi et al. (2011)
Factor 4	Work-Life Balance	Dabirian et al. (2017) ; Maurya et al. (2021) ; Mosadeghrad et al. (2011)
Factor 5	Career Progress	Wilden et al. (2010) ; Saini et al. (2014)

Research Objective

The research objectives for the study are as follows:

- **RO1** : To identify the factors affecting the employer's online branding.
- **RO2** : To rank the identified factors from the employer's perspective.
- **RO3** : To determine the importance score for identified factors from an employee's perspective.
- **RO4** : To identify the gap between the two perspectives and suggest recommendations for bridging the same.

Research Methodology

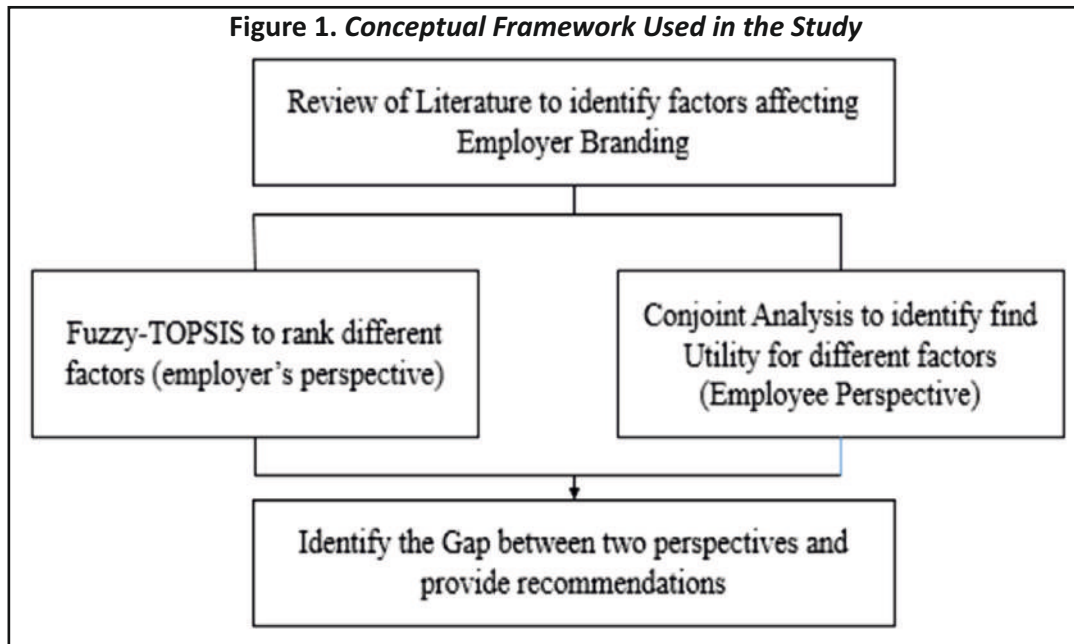
The study performs a narrative review of the existing pieces of literature to identify the factors affecting employer branding. This study then analyses the importance of these factors from an employee's and employer's perspectives from June to November 2021. The study uses the multi-criteria decision making (MCDM) technique Fuzzy – TOPSIS to rank these factors and hence identify the importance of the identified factors for an employer. TOPSIS is an established technique widely used in management and social science research to select alternatives based on multiple criteria.

TOPSIS is grounded on the idea that the highest-ranked factor is one having the shortest distance from the positive ideal solution (PIS) and the lengthiest distance from the negative ideal solution (NIS) (Nădăban et al., 2016). The fuzzy version of the method helps in dealing with ambiguity in decision-making. The factors were evaluated on the basis of three criteria listed in Table 2. The weight of these criteria was calculated using the analytical hierarchy process (AHP). The focus group (FG1) was used to prepare a pairwise comparison matrix. The consistency ratio (CR) for the calculation was found to be 0.08, which is less than 0.1, as suggested by Saaty (Mishra et al., 2018).

The size of the focus group (FG-2) taken for the Fuzzy-TOPSIS study is eight. A too-small sample results in biases, while a group of more than eight is difficult to manage. To develop consensus in the group, the Delphi technique was used. One of the authors (MPM) of the research paper functioned as the moderator for the focus

Table 2. Criteria Used for Evaluation of Factors

Criteria	Description	Category	Weight
<i>AE</i>	Attractiveness to Employee	Benefit	0.39
<i>EI</i>	Ease to Implement	Benefit	0.31
<i>CI</i>	Cost of Implementing	Cost	0.30



group discussion. The sampling method used for the study is non-probabilistic judgemental sampling.

The study further performed conjoint analysis to identify the utility of the identified factors for employees. It is a widely used tool in the pre-product-launch survey for measuring the value consumers place on product or service features. It is frequently used in various industries like retail, healthcare, and insurance to identify consumer preferences (Mishra et al., 2019). Electronic questionnaires were distributed to working professionals and jobseekers on LinkedIn. The sample size for the conjoint analysis was taken as 112. A total of 154 LinkedIn users responded, out of which 42 responses were incomplete. All respondents were from India, out of which 45% were male, and 55% were female.

The five attributes selected for the conjoint analysis are: salary, job security, training & development, work-life balance, and career progress, and the three-level of attributes are poor, average, and good. The total number of possible options was 243, out of which 16 cards were selected based on orthogonal design. Choice-based conjoint was used for the study, and the software used for the study was IBM SPSS 26. To check the reliability of the responses, the Spearman correlation was used. The correlations between observed and estimated preferences were significant as Pearson's R (0.854) and Kendall's tau (0.728). The study further calculated the utility score for each alternative for each level. Finally, the average importance score for each factor was calculated. The findings of the two analyses were compared to identify the gap and hence provide a recommendation for bridging it. The summary of the conceptual framework for the study is depicted in Figure 1.

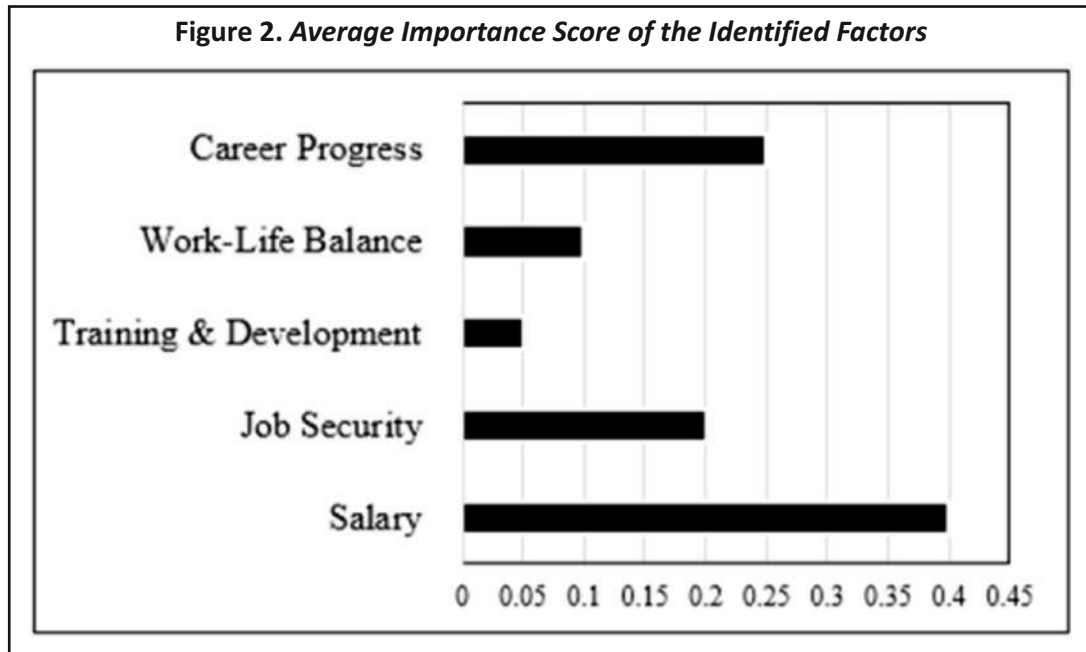
Analysis and Results

The results of the Fuzzy-TOPSIS analysis done to find the employer's perspective are summarized in Table 3. The results suggest that the factor having the least distance from the best solution (PIS) is salary. The factor salary also has the longest distance from the worst solution (NIS). This makes 'salary' the most crucial factor among the identified factors. Career progress is closest to the worst solution (NIS) and has a moderate distance from the best solution (PIS); hence, it is ranked last among the factors.

where,

Table 3. Closeness Coefficients for Alternatives and Rank

		d_i^*	d_i^-	$CC_i = \frac{d_i^-}{d_i^- + d_i^*}$	Rank
Factor 1	Salary	0.12	0.60	0.83	1
Factor 2	Job Security	0.15	0.38	0.72	2
Factor 3	Training & Development	0.35	0.40	0.58	4
Factor 4	Work-Life Balance	0.30	0.52	0.63	3
Factor 5	Career Progress	0.20	0.12	0.38	5

Figure 2. Average Importance Score of the Identified Factors

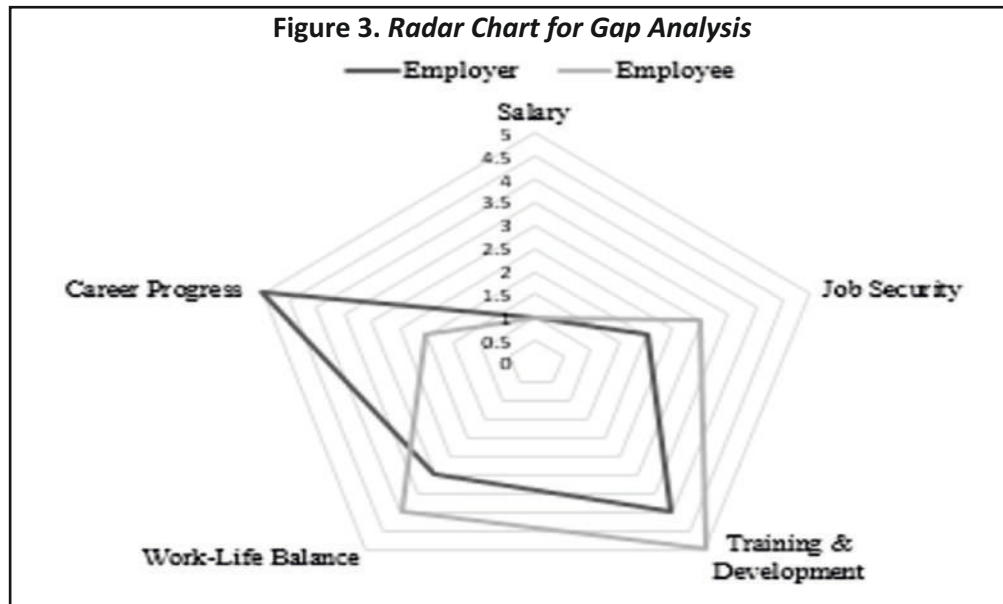
d_i^* : Distance from the best solution.

d_i^- : Distance from the worst solution.

CC_i : Gives Closeness Coefficient.

The conjoint analysis results give the importance score of the five identified factors. The sum of the importance score for the factors is one. The results suggest that salary is one of the most crucial factors, followed by career progress and job security. The least-important factor from an employee perspective is training and development. The results of the conjoint analysis are summarized in Figure 2.

Next, a radar chart is used to compare the employee and employer perspectives and hence identify the gap between the two perspectives. The position in the chart gives the ranking ; hence, the lower it is, the better. As results suggest, salary has been ranked as the most crucial factor by both employees and employers. There is a significant gap between rank given to the factor: career progress by employees and employers. While employees rank it second, employers consider it the least important among the identified factors. The summary of the



comparison is depicted in Figure 3. The study's results can be analyzed through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. The salary is a physiological need, while job security can draw an analogy from safety needs. There is a significant difference in the ranking of career progress from the employee's and employer's perspectives. There should be the integration of employer branding and organizational career management.

Conclusion

Online media is one of the important tools for organizational branding. The social media sites like LinkedIn are emerging as a preferred source of job search by prospective employees. Employees are initiative-taking in their job search and personal branding on these channels. The employer branding on these platforms not only helps attract the best human resource but also reduces the cost of recruitment. Branding on online media has become a point of parity from the point of differentiation.

Moreover, using a digital platform reduces the cost of the hiring process and makes it lean. This study concludes that the major factors affecting the employer's branding are: salary, job security, training & development, work-life balance, and career progress. The study also concludes that there is a gap between employees' and employers' perspectives on organization branding. The organization needs to address these gaps in online communication through social media and other digital channels. The outbreak of COVID-19 has increased the use of digital channels in employer branding. The study's findings will be useful for managers in organization branding in the post-COVID-19 world.

Managerial and Theoretical Implications

This study has two implications. First, it identifies the critical factors so managers can prioritize their branding efforts. Secondly, the gap between employees' and employers' perspectives must be addressed before it is too late. For theory, again, this study has two implications. Firstly, it stresses that organizational branding factors are dynamic and need to be revisited in the changing context. Secondly, the study provides a framework to identify the gap between two important stakeholders in organizational branding.

Limitations of the Study and Future Research Directions

The response to the study was collected through employees present on social media, and the findings can be generalized to a similar population. The study uses judgmental sampling for multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM). We have tried to use the Delphi method to remove the biases in the judgment, but there may be a chance that some bias has crept in due to the small sample size. The response for the study measuring utilities of factors affecting the reputation of an organization was collected on social networks, i.e., LinkedIn. This may result in a bias toward the importance of social media in employer branding. The study can use a larger sample size and apply a probabilistic sampling method to generalize the findings to a larger audience. A future study can include social and environmental responsibility factors in the study design.

Authors' Contribution

Dr. Vinaytosh Mishra conceived the idea and developed qualitative and quantitative designs to undertake the empirical study. Monu Mishra extracted research papers with high reputations, filtered these based on keywords, and generated concepts and codes relevant to the study design. Dr. Vinaytosh Mishra verified the analytical methods and supervised the study. Monu Mishra conducted the focus group discussion. The analysis was done by Dr. Vinaytosh Mishra using SPSS 26.0. Monu Mishra wrote the manuscript in consultation with Dr. Vinaytosh Mishra.

Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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