

Dimensions of Attractiveness in Employer Branding for Employee Retention in Nepalese Hospitality Industry

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ABSTRACT

The topic of employer branding and employee retention is attracting great attention of management researchers and practitioners. Employer branding is one way that increases value of organisations, which integrates two significant organisational fields of branding and human resources, and together they give an adjusted view on the most proficient way to pull in and retain required employees. In this regard, the present study aims at investigating the major dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding for human resource retention in Nepalese hospitality industry. The study employed a cross-sectional descriptive survey design including four out of seven dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding with a sample of 292 respondents from six five-star hotels of Nepal stationed in the capital Valley of Kathmandu. Using Kendall's tau, correlation analysis and Jonckheere-Terpstra test— the descriptive statistics, the study discovered that economic value and interest value dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding for HR retention significantly vary according to hierarchy of the employees in Nepalese hospitality industry.

Keywords: attractiveness dimensions, employer branding, employee retention, economic value, interest value

I. INTRODUCTION AND STUDY OBJECTIVES

Employee commitment, productivity and retention issues are emerging as the most critical workforce management challenges in the global business environment (Caplan & Teece, 1997). Employee skills, employee knowledge and experiences, recruitment and retention of employees has become a major concern for organisations due to increasing levels of

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importance for recognition of the workforce (Arachchige & Alan, 2013). High employee turnover is one of the major problems (Fladetta, Fasone, & Provenzano, 2013) and a continuous challenge for the hospitality industry (Brown, Thomas, & Bosselman, 2015). The hotel industry is a dynamic service sector where optimal human resource management is required to ensure professionalism and efficiency in service delivery (Hanzaree & Mirvahi, 2011). Ogbonna and Lloyd (2002) perceived employee retention as indispensable for the hospitality sector, as it employs more people than any other industry within the private segment, both domestically and globally.

Consumer brand management has been used for decades in order to communicate a distinctive customer experience and make the company externally attractive (Mosley, 2007). In recent times, organisations have realised the value of using these marketing efforts in personnel management and making the employment experience unique by generating and communicating an employment value proposition (Allen, Bryant, & Vandaman, 2010). Past literature well accepts the understanding that employees bring value to companies. Employer branding is one way that increases value of organisations, which integrates two significant organisational fields, branding and human resources, and together they give an adjusted view on the most proficient way to pull in and retain reasonable employees (Backaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Employer branding, as an important retention management technique focuses generally on how to make the employer attractive or the employer of choice, in order to lure the best possible talent to the company (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). Companies that have been managing their employer brand consistently have been able to bring value to their employees thus leading to increased commitment, loyalty and retention (Ambler & Barrow, 1998; Moroko & Uncles, 2008). Supporting the statement, Riston (2002) emphasised on the importance of employer branding in reducing costs of recruitment, enhancing employee relations and retention and in the ability to offer lower salaries, compared to the companies with weaker brands. Likewise, Dell and Alnapan (2001) affirmed that effective employer branding would lead to competitive advantage, assist employees, internalise company esteems, and aid in employee retention.

However, it is extremely challenging to attract and retain a skilled workforce in this industry. Hence, employees have become the primary market for many, especially service companies such as hotels. Yet, the way the employer branding in Nepalese five-star hotels is utilised and what methods and interventions are used is commonly left unattended. Moreover, the link between the employer branding practices and employee retention is yet to be chalked out. Employer branding is a valuable concept for both managers and research scholars. Managers can use employer branding as a shade under which they can channel diverse employee recruitment and retention activities into a planned human asset methodology. Accordingly, employers can control brand capacity to engage their employees in passionate manners to achieve change, remarkable results or increase attraction and retention. Low retention rates in hotel industry has affected the ability to deliver a consistent brand experience, harming business; and the fact that not enough people see the growing industry as somewhere to build their careers (Druce, 2007). It can be an issue worth studying also in the hospitality industry of Nepal, a country with the 7.8 per cent of the GDP contribution (NTB, 2018) and at least 5

per cent of the total foreign currency earnings from the hospitality and tourism sector (MoCTCA, 2019). These issues have entailed formulation of the following research objectives:

- To identify the dimensions of attractiveness most preferred in employer branding for employee retention in Nepalese hospitality industry; and
- To assess the differences existing at dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding for employee retention across management hierarchies

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

With a view to gaining critical grasp of the topic of attractiveness dimensions in employer branding for employee retention in Nepalese hotel industry, past literature has been reviewed at two levels: *Conceptual Review* and *Review of Related Studies*.

2.1 Conceptual review

The theoretical perspective of employer branding has largely been guided by the human capital theory and the resource-based view (RBV) of the firm. According to the theoretical viewpoint, employer-branding concept is the sum of a company's efforts to communicate to existing and prospective staff that the organisation is a desirable place to work (Ewing, Leyland, Nigel, & Pierre, 2002). Potential workers see employers, who have high employer brand value as more alluring than those with lower employer brand esteem (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005).

The theoretical basis for the current study includes Social Exchange Theory (SET). The SET has become an instrumental theory in research regarding relationships at the workplace. The SET is founded on the idea that human behaviour or social interaction is an exchange process involving tangible and intangible costs and rewards (Homans, 1951). Blau (1984) asserted that SET involves a series of social and economic interactions and exchanges that generate obligations to reciprocate, engendering feelings of personal obligations, gratitude and trust. Social exchange hypotheses present social change and stability as a procedure of negotiated exchanges between parties (Emerson, 1978). The use of the SET to workplace relationships depends on the premise that certain predecessors at the workplace generate social exchange connections (Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001).

The social exchange theory assumes that even though the benefits exchanged need not be tangible, the recipients value these benefits exchanged between the parties involved in this mutually interdependent relationship. It implies that employees value the incentives offered by the employer, while the employer, in return, values the reciprocal contributions made by the employee. For the present examination, the social exchange theory gives the premise to demonstrating the way that in situations where an employer or an enterprise offers its employees value, proposition will result in elevated levels of employee loyalty and reliability (Molm, Peterson, & Takahashi, 1999). Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) brought up that employees structure their thoughts and sentiments about the concern and care of their organisation towards them through the approaches, strategies and the core values authorised by various agents of the organisation. This is directly related to the conservation of an organisation's reputation, its future and its idealistic picture, as a result this social exchange among employer and employees, demonstrating it to be a two-way thing (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

2.2 Review of related studies

As indicated by a hypothetical viewpoint, employer branding concept is depicted as the total of an organisations endeavour to communicate to existing and forthcoming staff that the organisation is an alluring place to work (Lloyd, 2002; Ewing, Leyland, Nigel, & Pierre, 2002). Sullivan (2004) characterised employer branding as focused on a long-haul strategy to deal with the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders about a specific firm. The employer-branding idea got the consideration due to the growing challenge among rival companies, which expected ability to contend and achieve growth and sustainability (Mosley, 2007). Employer branding is a moderately new methodology towards recruiting and retaining the most ideal human talent within a recruiting environment that is getting progressively aggressive and it has captured impressive consideration in recent times. Attracting skilled people is equally as important as acquiring the equipment or technological resources that are required to build competitive advantage (Backaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Employer branding is the arrangement of functional, economic and psychological aids provided by employment, and recognised with the employing company (Ambler & Barrow, 1998). The study further probed into the concept by focusing on five dimensions; namely, the interest value, social value, economic value, development value and application value, and opined the way organisational brands convey the advantages of utilising a product or service to potential consumers. Employer brands impart the advantages of employment to potential employees. The interest value assesses the degree of appeal of an employer who is responsible for providing a work situation with innovation and creativeness opportunities. Social value calculates the mark of appeal of an organisation or a company providing a work environment with good and welcoming team spirit and decent respectable relations among co-workers. An economic value estimates the amount of attraction of an employer providing a worthy remuneration and profits. The development value is an attribute that estimates the degree of attractiveness of an employer providing career development and the application value determines the level of attraction of an establishment giving the opportunity to exercise and prepare what is found out.

The term employer branding does not just allude to recruitment strategies that are short term and bound to employment opportunities; employer branding is a long-haul technique, which centres around on the continuous flow of innovative skills in the organisation (Srivastava & Bhattacharjee, 2010; Suikkanen, 2010; Sokro, 2012). Furthermore, Almiack, Almiack, Erat, and Alcin (2014) advocated employer branding as a contemporary approach that is continuously expanding and it could keep up the firms' reputation in attracting and retaining employees. Dell and Ainspan, (2001) found that effective employer branding led to competitive advantage that would help employees internalise company values and assists in retaining employees. Collins (2008) discovered in a conference board report that organisations having effective employer branding leads to competitive advantage, assists employees internalise company values and aids in employee retention.

Employer branding consists of three crucial benefits for the organisation associated with recruiting, retaining and performance (Lievers, Greet, & Frederik, 2007). Organisations with a strong brand image can gain workers at relatively low cost, improve employee relations,

increase employee retention and offer lower pay scales when contrasted with its rivals (Riston, 2002). A solid employer brand will make the organisation an alluring place for a talented work force and will pull in potential employees. A tough employer brand increases organisational commitment levels once workers identify with their organisation's values (Ind, 2007). Davies (2008) showed the role of the employer brand in influencing employee's perceived differentiation, affinity, satisfaction and loyalty. A good and sturdy employer brand urges the workers to put in extra effort, which benefits the organisation. Therefore, a maintained employer brand increases factors such as employee engagement and productivity efficiency (Xia & Liu, 2010). Similarly, as per Tarwar (2017), the dimensions of employer branding elucidate differences in levels of employees' organisational commitment and through it, enterprises can enhance its employee retention levels. In addition, if the organisation is a desirable place to work, employees will enjoy working there which will increase their work performance (Taylor, 2010).

Dabirian, Kietzmann and Hoda (2017) added two more dimensions on employer branding: namely, management value and work life balance value. Management value is the good or bad influence of supervisors at work that determines employee retention. It is more a result of the manager's mentality and their conduct towards their employees that the workers decide to stay in or leave a company, as opposed to due to the organisation itself. Good and bad supervisors influence employees tremendously. An employee's positive and negative experience with the boss also affects his/her social relationships. Work-life balance value is an attribute determining that a proper balance between the employees' work and life allows them to work in harmony with all their identities. It is important to consider that they have a personality outside the work. An appropriate balance between work and social life makes employees work more efficiently and effectively. Armstrong, Riemenschneider, Allen and Reid (2007) defined the quality of work-life as satisfying an employee's needs via the resources, activities and outcomes that arise from involvement in the workplace.

Although there has been much research on work life balance (WLB), still it is an area of concern for any industry, and hospitality industry is not an exception either. Striking a good work-life balance is arguably a factor that helps retain employees in the organisation. Rowley and Purcell (2001) argued that the hospitality industry has higher than average skill shortages, labour turnover and hard-to-fill vacancies. With specific attention to the impact on the work-life balance, Smith and Gardner (2007) suggested that conflict between work and family life is linked to job dissatisfaction and staff turnover. McDonald, Brown, and Bradley (2005) identified flexible working conditions as one of the important dimensions in terms of the factors that influence employer attractiveness. Similarly, Huang, Lawler, and Lai (2007) found that having a work-life balance decreased employees' intentions to leave an organisation. Likewise, Glen (2012) found a strong positive relationship between work life balance, employee retention and career development aspects.

Conversely, Deary (2008) identified the long and unsocial hours, low pay and often-low status of some tourism jobs, especially in the hospitality area hampered the work-life balance and therefore the hospitality sector would neither easily attract new staff nor retain existing staff. Likewise, White, Hill, McGovern, Mills, and Smearton (2003) advocated that diminished quality of work-life leads the employees to dissatisfaction and less commitment so they leave the

organisation. Guest (2002) studied the work-life balance by relating it to attitudes and values of two groups of workers; and reported that those in Generation-X sought greater balance in their work and family life while older workers did not. Similarly, Soinet, Krall, and Kandampully (2012) concluded that the millennial employees are unlikely to remain with the same. Similarly, Sthapit & Shrestha (2018) affirmed that rewards and compensation helped retain entry-level employees, while recognising employer branding as a strong retention measure for those on higher hierarchies. Likewise, the study further stressed that balanced work-life and employer branding would help retain older employees, while evincing career growth as the strongest retention measure, and balanced work-life as the weakest one to retain male hotel employees in Nepal.

In this regard, Nepalese hotel managers can utilise employer branding as a shade under which they can channel diverse employee enrolment and retention activities into an organised human resource strategy. In like manner, hotel employers can control brand capacity to engage their employees in emotional ways to accomplish change, remarkable outcomes or increase attraction and retention. It is, therefore, relevant to examine the practices of employer branding for retaining the employees in Nepalese hospitality industry.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

The design employed for this study is cross-sectional and descriptive in nature. A descriptive survey—a systematic, non-experimental method for gathering information from a sample for describing the attributes of the larger chosen population—best fits in ascertaining and describing characteristics of the studied variables and allows for the use of questionnaires.

Table 1
Sample hotels

SN	Name of the sample hotels	Address
1	Soaltee Crown Plaza	Tahachal
2	Radisson Hotel	Lazimpat
3	The Mall Hotel	Lekhnath Marg
4	Shangri-la Hotel & Resort	Lazimpat
5	Hyatt Regency	Taragon, Boudha
6	Hotel Annapurna	Durbar Marg

Note: Sampled from HAN, 2018

The target population of the study is the five-star hotels in Nepal, which have been in operation for at least 10 years. The official data of the Hotel Association of Nepal have put the total number of 5-star hotels in Nepal at eight (HAN, 2018) of which three are the international chains of hotels in Kathmandu and the rest are just domestic. The study has used a stratified random sampling method to select six five-star hotels stationed in the capital Valley of Kathmandu; they represent 75 per cent of the defined population. Out of the six hotels sampled, three belong to the international chain of hotels and three do not. Table 1 presents the list of sample hotels.

Furthermore, the population of the respondents consists of the front-line employees working at the front office, housekeeping, and service and food production, of the sampled hotels. Prior to determination of the sample size, the information about the number of frontline employees

of the hotels in each of the sampled hotels was obtained from the human resource departments of the respective hotels. The study used a convenience sampling method to determine the required sample size of 278 respondents from the population of 978 front-line employees of the sample hotels, which followed the rule that requires sampling it at 95 per cent confidence level with ± 5 per cent margin of error (Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods, 2008). The study has covered employees from the three management hierarchies: The top-level managers are the departmental heads; mid-level managers the assistant departmental heads and sectional heads within the department, while low-level employees are non-supervisory employees (other than top managers, assistant managers and mid-level managers) of the sampled hotels.

The study used a structured questionnaire to collect required data using a non-disguised approach and validated with content validity by scrutinising it through HRM experts. Finally, after required modifications, the questionnaire was administered on 343 potential respondents within a period of 40 days from 5th November to 15 December, 2019. The study used a self-administered process in two hotels and with the help of assistants in rest four sample hotels by following drop-and-pick method, as this technique is an effective means to reduce potential non-response bias through increased response rate. There was a follow-up to collect the questionnaires on time and offered assistance to the respondents having difficulty in completing the questionnaires. Out of the 343 distributed questionnaires, altogether 301 filled-up ones were collected, and 292 were found to be complete and usable; it has posted a valid response rate of 85.13 per cent, a success rate high enough to go ahead without performing a non-response bias test. The study has used various non-parametric tests as the variables have been measured on an ordinal scale. The study has used descriptive statistics, Kendall's tau correlation and Jockheere-Terpstra test for testing if there exists a significant difference on various dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding across management hierarchies.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Table 2 exhibits the sample characteristics under three strata of respondents. The first stratum is the level of respondents enlisted in top, middle and entry-level jobs of the respondents constituting 15.8, 25.3 and 58.9 per cent, respectively. Similarly, the second stratum is the age groups: those aged above 40 years (12.7 per cent), 30-40 (58.0 per cent) and below 30 years (49.3 per cent). Hence, the respondents are largely young and middle-aged: those below 40 years of age. And, on the gender-based stratum, male constituted nearly two thirds of the respondents, as they accounted for 63.7 per cent as against 36.3 per cent, of the fairer sex.

The Table 3 shows the frequency and percentage of rank for the given dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding for retention in Nepalese hotels. The table is of the evidence that, majority of the respondents accord higher priority to the economic value (37.70 per cent) followed by the development value (25.30 per cent), interest value (19.20 per cent) and work-life balance (17.80 per cent) with the ranks of first, second, third and fourth, respectively.

Table 2

Sample characteristics

Panel A: Management Hierarchies of the sample respondents			
Level	Frequency	Per cent	Cumulative per cent
Top level	46	15.80%	15.80
Middle level	74	25.30%	41.10
Entry level	172	58.90%	100
Total	292	100%	
Panel B: Age groups of the sample respondents			
Age Group	Frequency	Per cent	Cumulative per cent
Above 45 years	37	12.70%	12.70
30-45 years	111	38.00%	50.70
Below 30 years	144	49.30%	100
Total	292	100%	
Panel C: Gender of the sample			
Gender	Frequency	Per cent	Cumulative per cent
Male	186	63.70%	63.70
Female	106	36.30%	100
Total	292	100%	

Note: From the authors' survey, 2019

Table 3

Descriptive statistics for employer branding dimensions

Employer branding dimensions	Rank 1		Rank 2		Rank 3		Rank 4		Median rank	Rank
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%		
Development value	74	25.30%	88	30.10%	64	21.90%	66	22.60%	2	2
Economic value	110	37.30%	66	22.60%	68	23.30%	48	16.40%	2	1
Work Life balance	52	17.80%	38	13.00%	68	23.30%	134	45.90%	3	4
Interest value	56	19.20%	100	34.20%	90	30.80%	46	15.80%	2	3

Note: Calculations from the authors' survey, 2019

The Table 4 exhibits the Kendall's tau correlation for four dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding by management hierarchies. The management hierarchy of the respondents has posted a negative and significant relationship with the economic value dimension of employer branding (-0.182), and a positive and significant relationship with the interest value dimension of employer branding (0.234). It implies that hotel employees at the lower hierarchy have recognised the economic value as an important dimension of attractiveness in employer branding and an important factor for their retention, whereas top-level employees have termed it less important.

Similarly, the top-level employees perceive interest value as the most important dimension of attractiveness in employer branding, and is, therefore, a significant factor for their retention, while it is of less importance for lower level employees in Nepalese hotels. It evinces that the perceived importance levels of the components of dimension of attractiveness in employer branding vary according to management hierarchy of the employees in Nepalese hotels.

Table 4

Kendall's tau correlation analysis

Variables	Development value	Economic value	Work Life balance value	Interest value	Management hierarchy
Development value	1				
Economic value	-.227** (0.001)	1			
Work Life balance value	-.380** (0.001)	-.271** (0.001)	1		
Interest value	-.191** (0.001)	-.336** (0.001)	-.143** (0.004)	1	
Management hierarchy	-0.044 (0.387)	-.182** (0.001)	0.06 (0.252)	.234** (0.001)	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note: Calculations from the authors' survey, 2019

The study also performed a Jonckheere-Terpstra test for robustness check on dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding and retention at Nepalese hotels across the three management hierarchies to identify if the population across these groups differ. Table 5 shows that there is a statistically significant difference across different level of employees' preference for economic value and interest value as dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding and retention with observed J-T statistic of 9542 and 15212, $p = 0.001$ and 0.001 respectively. Further, the table also depicts that there is no mean rank difference on development value and work life balance value as dimensions of attractiveness for employer branding and retention across different hierarchies of management at Nepalese hotels. These findings are in compliance with the results of Kendall's tau correlation coefficients.

Table 5

Jonckheere-Terpstra test

Statistics/Variables	Development value	Economic value	Work Life balance	Interest value
Observed J-T Statistic	11408	9542	12812	15212
Mean J-T Statistic	12022	12022	12022	12022
Std. Deviation of J-T Statistic	709.10	702.86	689.31	703.90
Std. J-T Statistic	-0.87	-3.53	1.15	4.53
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.387	0.001	0.252	0.001

Grouping Variable: Management hierarchy

Note: Calculations from the authors' survey, 2019

Table 6
Post hoc analysis

Dimension	Sample 1-Sample 2	Test statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig.
Economic value	Entry-Middle level	4068	498.438	-4.691	0.000	0.000
	Middle-Entry level	8496	489.475	4.356	0.000	0.000
Interest value	Top-Entry level	5060	364.045	3.033	0.001	0.004

Note: Calculations from the authors' survey, 2019

The post hoc analysis for economic value in Table 6 depicts that the mean rank differences exists across entry - middle level employees of Nepalese hotels (p value=0.000). The Figure 1 depicts the mean rank values for economic value as dimension of attractiveness in employer branding for three different levels of hierarchies. The mean rank is higher for entry-level employees followed by middle level and top-level employees with the mean rank values of 129.65, 150.50 and 183.18. The mean rank values indicate that entry-level employees in the hotel industry consider economic value as the most important factor for among others. Further, Figure 2 shows the box plot diagram of the median rank for three different hierarchies.



Figure 1. Pair-wise comparisons for economic value across management hierarchies

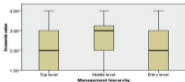


Figure 2. Independent samples Jonckheere Terpstra test for economic value

Similarly, the post hoc analysis for interest value as the dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding and retention in table exhibits that the mean rank differences exists across middle - entry level (0.000) and top - entry level (0.004) employees in Nepalese hotels. The Figure 3 depicts the mean rank values for interest value as dimension of attractiveness in employer branding and retention for three different levels of hierarchies. The mean rank is

higher for middle level employees followed by top and middle level employees with the mean rank values of 117.07, 123.5 and 165.31, respectively. The mean rank values indicate that entry-level employees in the hotel industry considers interest-value as the least important factor, among others. Further, Figure 4 shows the box plot diagram of the median rank for three different hierarchies.



Figure 3. Pairwise comparisons for interest value across management hierarchies

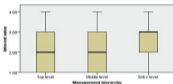


Figure 4. Independent samples Jonckheere Terpstra test for interest value

V. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that distinct components of attractiveness in employer branding i.e. at least in economic and interest value dimension have different levels of perceived importance across different level of management hierarchies in Nepalese hotels. The study specifically concludes that economic value is the major and interest value is of least important dimension of employer attraction for retention for entry-level employees. Whereas for middle and top-level employees in Nepalese hotels, interest value is most preferred dimensions of employer attractiveness for retention, while they identify economic value as the least influential HR retention tactic. The result is consistent with the findings of a previous Nepalese study by Sthapit and Shrestha (2018). Further, the statistically significant relationship existing between economic value and interest value (-0.348^{**}) implies that in case of management hierarchy, the Nepalese hotel employees' preference swings between economic value and interest value as a factor that motivates them to stay with the current employer. The finding has matched with that of Monczka, Zhao and Kay (2009) that was specific about the workforce hierarchies

and noted that interest value and economic value would reduce HR turnover and increase commitment among managers and entry-level employees respectively.

Future scope of the study

Extension for future research could incorporate quantitative research testing the devised conceptual framework, notwithstanding investigating deeper into the seven key subjects distinguished within employer branding to discover which brand characteristics are valued the most by employees. Additionally, other service organisational set-ups could likewise be investigated along these lines to check whether results are comparative between services organisations, and the outcomes would then be able to be summed up over the service sectors.

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