Employer branding and attracting new talents: An explorative study on novel strategies used by organizations in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT: *This study reveals employer branding strategies adopted by Sri Lankan organizations to attract new talents in new incoming generations to the world of work. This research aims to investigate the human resource managers and practitioners for understanding their view of employer branding to identify whether an Employer Branding strategy is proactively making a difference and forecasting the new generation millennial talents looking at this world in line differently. Using qualitative research methodology, Researcher has conducted in-depth, in-person interviews with Human resource managers and practitioners representing diverse industries. The study's findings were derived from the thematic analysis and indicated that most of the participants were adequately aware of what Employer branding is and that they tend to boost employer branding strategies in several ways. The participants also commonly evidence derived from the in-depth interviews, this research concludes the key employer branding strategies from real country HR practitioners, such as; Investing in social listening tools, Candidate relationship management, Company-owned career page, Employee feedback, Reassessing and planning different systems, Diverse inclusion of talents, Shared company core values, EB teams, Employees are the employer branding ambassadors, Deskless workforce engagement and flexible work schedules as brand-boosting strategies*.

Keywords: *employer branding, human resource managers, interview, new generation, qualitative research*

1. INTRODUCTION

Every generation plays an important and significant role in organizations as they are coming from society and bringing new trends into the organizations. Therefore, it is the time the employers to focus the millennial workers as they are future coworkers in organizations. It becomes essential for organizations to understand their, work preferences, needs, and wants, through process and lifestyle to attract the best talents and stand different from competitors (Pandita, 2021). The new generation in the workplace is identified as “influencers” since they have been exposed to the hypercognitive generational attitudes in making comfortable with the internet, social media, and mobile system (Luttrell and McGrath, 2021).

As everyone knows, Covid-19 is a crisis for Generation Z as it comes at a critical time of the generation’s education and entering into the job. Therefore, it is much essential to study them and look at them differently as they are entirely different from their predecessors in light of covid-19. However, millennials and Gen Z may display different characteristics equipped with superpowers enlightened by these global

challenges (Molotay,2020). According to the survey done by Bloomberg in 2019, millennials will be surpassed by Generation Z with the largest workforce influence by 32% of the global population.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: EMPLOYER BRANDING AS A TOOL FOR RETENTION AND ATTRACTION

Ambler and Barrow 1996 first introduced employer branding with an explorative study among UK companies, authors concluded that brand management to the HRM function reinforced the strength and added values to the brand concept that is potentially valuable for organizations. In simple words, employer branding is one of the strategies for attracting the right kind of talent which ensures the psychological, economical, and, functional benefits of the potential employees (Rzemieniak and Wawer, 2021). In a similar vein, Tanwar and Prasad explained in their studies in 2017 organizations use employer branding to target the potential audience they wish to hire.

In the view of Minchington and Thorne 2008, employer branding is identified as envisioned benefits to the employees which provide a platform to create a competitive advantage that gives chance to acquire, nurture and retain talent. Similar to the above discoveries Maurya and Agarwal (2018) established the concept of talent management. As they revealed in their studies, employees tend to seek talent management in achieving talent successive manner.

Academic and business interests in employer brands have reflected one another. While authors have used a variety of terms to discuss the topic, such as "employer attractiveness" (Berthon et al., 2005), "recruitment image" (Gatewood et al., 1993), or "employer brand image" (Rampl and Kenning, 2014), this study uses "employer brand," which is defined as "the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company." (Ambler and Barrow, 1996). This is worthwhile to connect the signaling theory to understand the concept of employer branding along with attracting new talents. Prior researchers have elaborated more on signaling theory and connected its roots and branches with talent management (Connelly et al., 2011and Sandeepani et al., 2022). Moreover, some researchers explained wise its function as employer branding helps an organization to improve employee engagement and employees tend to be more attached to the workplace (Kunerth and Mosley, 2011). At a distance from the above-mentioned studies, some of the advantages of the employer brand such as lower cost for acquiring new employees improved employer relationships, and growth of the organization with brand associations (Ritson, 2002). As it is posited by Terjesen and others in 2007, according to the results of their research that the new talented employees focus on dynamics in work and a forward-looking approach to the job. A notable increase in the literature relating to employer branding has been studied in line with the transformation of the organization towards the proactive behaviors of attractiveness Chuai, 2010). Internal marketing, in the words of Kotler (1994), is "the task of successfully hiring, training and motivating able employees to serve the customer well." Employer branding, and more specifically employer attractiveness, is one area of internal marketing that needs improvement. (Berthon et al., 2005).

According to Harris (2007), internal efforts pay off in the form of recurrent, worthwhile consumer interactions. Employee behavior should support the promises a company

makes to consumers. It is widely acknowledged that an organization's personnel operate as conduits through which internal traits are transmitted to the outside world. Despite the fact that a variety of tactics have been developed for keeping on board current employees and luring in new ones, retention and attraction continue to pose the two major difficulties. Many businesses are developing their employer brands in order to stay visible and present the best possible impression to both existing and potential employees (Moroko and Uncles, 2008). Interestingly and notably companies are getting ready and doing a lot to attract the millennials and Gen Z in a different manner. Therefore, every organization take extra effort on attracting new talents to survive in a competitive environment with multicultural traditions. A broad view of thinking will help these organizations to attract them with their values and keep them satisfied to move towards successive aspirations. Moreover, with the concept of employer branding employer attractiveness emerged (Kashyap and Verma, 2018). In addition to this, digital strategies are also adopted in employer branding campaigns to cover up the new generation with continued participation and testimonials (Subbarao et al., 2022). Consequently, it is essential to do a deep study on exploring the employer branding strategies of Sri Lankan organizations to give a deep sense of knowledge in the field. Therefore, this research intends to explore the different meaningful strategies for employer branding in order to attract the ideal candidate out of the talents coming from millennials and Gen Z and making them career focusers along with organizational career ladder to sustain among the sustainers.

3. METHODOLOGY

This paper explored the strategies of employer branding of Sri Lankan companies, and how to attract new talents. For this study, the judgmental sampling method was used. This sampling technique permits the researcher to intentionally select respondents in the study (Patton, 1990). Hence, typically human resource managers were targeted in this study, the researcher ensured that interviewees are having enough experience in making employer branding strategies. The primary investigation of the research was conducted by the researcher in line with the semi-structured in-depth interviews. The semi-structured in-depth interview is a tool to explore the in-depth experiences of the research participants, and the real meaning they attribute (Rubin and Rubin, 2011). There are 10 interviews have been recorded as strong research evidence for data collection. The interviews were conducted in both Tamil and English languages and the interviews conducted in Tamil were translated into English. With prior permission from the participants, interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed for analysis. Respondents named are coded as R1 and R2.

Prior to the interview, the researcher prepared an interview protocol that consists of open and closed-ended questions. Sample questions we asked from the practitioners include: “How do human resource policy makers make innovative employer branding strategies?”, “What is the impact of effective employer branding strategies on attracting new talents?”, “Do innovative employer branding systems adopted by the organization helps to attract Gen Z?”, “What are sustainable strategies you follow to keep them long-termination?”. Finally, the researcher analyzed transcripts and applied thematical analysis. Certainly, thematic analysis is a flexible systematic approach that identifies, examines, and recounts patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The coded data points were converted to themes and the details of the respondents who were

interviewed were listed in Table 1.

Table:01 Details of the Respondents

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Respondents	Designation	Sector	Region
R1	HR Manager	Banking sector	Northern province
R2	Head of HR	MNC	Western Province
R3	Chief people officer	IT	Eastern province
R4	Chief Hiring officer	Hotel	Northern province
R5	HR Consultant	Consultancy services	Western province
R6	Head recruitment	Travel Agency	Western province
R7	HR business partner	MNC Transport shipping	Western province
R8	Hiring head	Construction	Eastern province
R9	Hiring officer	Insurance	Northern province
R10	Learning and development officer	Apparel	Northern province

The understanding from the Human Resource Managers and practitioners in organizations, this study revealed the tough bond between and attracting new employees as a part of employer attractiveness. As it is stated by a respondent from a respondent who is working as HR Manager in a banking organization, said, "*Our organization recently started to publish its performance, team activities, and special occasions on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Investing in social listening tools helps us to gain deep insight into our potential employees and customers and how they view our organizations. I hope this is the innovative way of attracting new talents as the new generation is considered as tech-savvy".*

Similarly, has been stated by another respondent who is the Head of HR representing the multinational organization "I would say that for attracting new talents it is essential to maintain candidate relationship management. Even though talented candidates could be rejected at interviews due to limited vacancies. We should take necessary action to keep them connected with organizations and we do this in our organizations. We have Facebook groups and the HR department is responsible for operating that group and named as a futurist for the company and our company name".

As he mentioned in his statement it is essential for an organization to keep them positive as they are future potential. A respondent from the IT sector stated here, *I proudly feel about this commencement initiated by our HR team too has own career page for our company. It gives full prolific information about future careers to internal and external employees. Actually, this is a good branding strategy recently introduced by us and gives a platform to attract new unbeatable talents.*

As it is stated by another respondent, it creates employer branding as they facilitate through the career pages for internal and external branding. An informant who has been working as Chief Hiring Officer, in the hotel industry, said, *"Our company uses an employee feedback system when they leave as an exit interview to rate the conditions regarding the company and respond to employee concerns in the future.*

As we believed this system helped us to constantly improve the company conditions and make our workplace the best working place in Sri Lanka".

For example, participant -5 presented his view as "I could say the branding is not a single stand action. It takes time to get it a surefire success. We follow reassess and plan different systems in action. We treat our employer branding strategy as a work in progress. We do the followings plan, measure, implement, assess, reassess, and plan differently. Remember employer branding is a circular process, once we optimized we need to have another in the best way but differently. Because millennials are quickly learning and simply getting bored". In the same view, past researchers ensure the quality of work and work life in employer branding for retaining current employees (Thasika,2021).

It was interesting to note from the persons who are from a travel agency and MNC transport, "None of any quick employer branding wins. I know many examples within the company and competitors. Moreover, branding is not a simple task. A couple of years ago I have suggested my company as an HR to diversify our inclusions of talents. Therefore, employer branding is something that we do to attract new talents that need to manage continuously". "Creating the platform to express the company's core values as it represents the company stands differently may be the best strategy for employer branding. Just pick this from your company history and say how good leadership and company culture are. This helps us to find the cultural fit right talents". Very few participants agreed that they are having a separate team for implementing EB at their organization and understand it's a continuous process.

One more participant said, "We have well-designated EB teams as separate employer branding channels. They work with employer branding like how a marketing professional does product branding differently. They connect everything with brandings and attract talents example, employees' achievements, awards, team success celebrations". Further, thoughts expressed by another Hiring head from the Insurance industry "As I experienced employer branding works through employees. Because existing employees' voice has 3times more credible than our CEO's voice. Therefore, we do maximum through our employees as they are the employer branding ambassadors".

One more respondent nicely pointed out his views "Living in the 21st century and targeting millennials and Gen Z as our big stones of potential is much more difficult. Ensuring deskless workforce engagement and flexible work schedules are very important to keep new generation more comfortable as they have already familied with that".

It is also noteworthy that there are factors stated by human resource managers and their practitioners in Sri Lanka. These statements are validated clearly and considered as key themes as they expressed their real experiences and practices. Table 2 gives detailed inputs from the respondents and linkage to the literature.

Table:02 respondent's Inputs

Themes	Respondent's Inputs (Inductive)
Investing in social listening tools	R1
Candidate relationship management	R2
Company-owned career page	R3
Employee feedback	R4
Reassess and plan different	R5
Diverse inclusion of talents	R6
Shared company core values	R7
EB teams	R8
Employees are the employer branding ambassadors	R9
Deskless workforce engagement and flexible work schedules	R10

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As this study aimed to produce evidence to This study reveals the diverse employer branding strategies which are used by Sri Lankan organizations to attract new talents from the new generation. Evidence derived from the in-depth interviews, this research concludes the key employer branding strategies from real country's HR practitioners, such as; Investing in social listening tools, Candidate relationship management, Company-owned career page, Employee feedback, Reassessing and planning differently system, Diverse inclusion of talents, Shared company core values, EB teams, Employees are the employer branding ambassadors, Deskless workforce engagement and flexible work schedules.

Previous studies in Employer branding revealed the only tangible factors which are contributing to employer branding (Davies, 2008). Tanwar and Prasad (2017) defined EB as "a set of tangible and intangible benefits offered by the organization to attract potential employees and retain existing employees" (P.392). With this stand, this study revealed intangible employer branding strategies as follows; Candidate relationship management and Employees are the employer branding ambassadors. As pointed out by previous studies in employer branding general view (Maxwell and Knox, 2009) this study also suggests that investing in social listening tools would be much more focused on attracting new talents in millennials and Gen Z.

As found in this study Diverse inclusion of talents is worthy in the collection of a diversified workforce, as Elving et al. (2013) also mentioned previously. Employer branding strategies are evaluated by the creation of strategies in recruitment. Further findings of this research also exposed the responsibility of the whole team of the organization such as HR practitioners and marketing practitioners should work as EB teams as a choice of the employer (Lievens et al. (2007).

This study also suggests that Deskless workforce engagement and flexible work schedules will definitely work for a new generation of the potential workforce as they habited with distance learning patterns. Self-learners are another trait associated with Gen Z. They are more analytical, practical in their decision-making, and live pragmatically because they have access to such a wealth of knowledge. They already understand that having a stable job is more important than making a great wage. Compared to the attitudes of other generations for instance millennials already exhibit an increased preference for freelance or flexible-time work, which may come as a surprise. (Francis and Hoefel, 2019).

Furthermore, employer branding goes much deeper than that when it comes to retaining and engaging the new generation. They should be given the freedom to arrange their work around their lives because they are independent, ambitious, creative, and innovative Ivanova et al. (2020).

Organizations must begin focusing on mentoring rather than managing them because as the study revealed employee feedback is one of the tactics that new talents want to work independently. As a result, the HR department of the company must take this into consideration and adjust to meet the requirements of this new employee through employee feedback.

6. IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

The proposed findings of this research would help the researchers rethink how they will design their policies to entice and integrate new generation job seekers into the workplace. This will possibly fill the gap even in the theoretical aspect and literature. Moreover, the study could be lengthy to other industry sectors globally. However, small and middle-scale companies were also left out of our study which should be included in future studies.

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