ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN BUILDING IMAGE OF AN ORGANIZATION AS A GREAT PLACE TO WORK

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ABSTRACT

Employer Branding is known as an approach to communicate to external and internal audiences what makes an organization a great place to work. Marketing of an organization as a great employer occurs via different media sources. Employer branding via social media has recently gained attention, however the use of social media for promoting products and services of an organization is quite known now. Even though social media has been recognized as one of the most promising medium, there is lack of understanding the role of social media in building image of an organization as an employer. The paper studies the scope of use of social media for employer branding purposes. The paper provides a conceptual framework of how social media affects an employer brand and its potential impact on job applicants' intentions to apply in the organization. As managerial implications, the marketers should now also include social media in addition to company brochures, company websites etc for providing information to prospective candidates about the job openings, organization culture, benefits provided etc. Employer branding through social media helps an organization to select employees from a wide range of applicants as a majority of youth is present on social media.

I: INTRODUCTION

In the "war for talent" many companies are trying to sharpen the way they market themselves to the recruits, by applying branding techniques to recruitment. Branding in the field of Human Resource Management has recently received attention. Ambler and Barrow (1996) first discussed branding in the field of people management and termed it "Employer branding". They defined it as the *"package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company"*. Employer branding represents organization's efforts to communicate to both external and internal audiences what makes it different and desirable as an employer. It describes how an organization markets what it has to offer to both the current and potential employees. Organizations today are competing for talented employees the same way they are competing for customers. Marketers have developed ways to attract, communicate effectively and retain customers. Employer branding is about applying similar techniques for recruitment and retention of employees. *"It is a set of attributes and qualities, often intangible that makes an organization distinctive, promises a particular kind of employment experience and appeal to those who will thrive and perform best in its culture"* (Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development; 2009). According to research insight CIPD; 2009 there are three main reasons why employer branding has gained attention in the recent past. Firstly there has been a rise in importance of brand as a social concept. Secondly HR professionals continue to seek for credibility and strategic contribution. Thirdly due to tight labor market conditions where unemployment remains low and skills shortage continues. Employers therefore compete for talented employees via different ways. Organizations that operate in such tight labor market conditions are continuously looking for new ways to attract talented employees. Promoting an

organization as an employer occurs via different media. Traditional branding techniques include company brochures, company websites etc. which have been applied for few years. Traditional branding sources do not seem to be sufficient now as the prospective candidates look for a more personal view from employees about the organization. Social media has become a rage among the young generation though elderly professionals have also started foraying into this field. The growth of social media is not limited to young generation, generation X (35-44 years old) are also now using social media. With more and more people spending a substantial portion of their time on one or the other form of social media, it presents an opportunity to use social media for employer branding purpose. The key feature of social media that differentiates it from traditional media is that the user is now producer and consumer of information. The user can create, edit or disseminate information. Kaplan and Haenlien (2010) have defined social media *as "a group of internet based applications that are based on ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user generated content"*. Social media usually covers social networking sites like Facebook, My Space, content sharing sites like You Tube, Flickr, slide sharing, collaborative projects like wikis. According to Laick and Dean (2011) social media is now becoming prime source to promote job vacancies and recruit potential candidates. Prospective candidates are now using social media to find information about potential employers and to gauge a picture on company's corporate culture and its working practices. The combination of employer branding and social media holds the potential to attract prospective employees and communicate a positive employment image. Although much attention has been devoted to branding the products and services of organizations to attract and retain customers, research on branding an organization as a great place to work is scant. The objective of this paper is to present a conceptual framework of how employer branding can impact job applicants' intentions to apply and how social media is useful in providing more information about an organization and how it can strengthen the relation between employer branding and job applicants intentions to apply. The paper is divided into three sections. The first section talks about employer branding and organizational attractiveness and its impact on job applicants intentions to apply. The second section presents a review of literature on social media, how it is being used in marketing research and the final section presents the research propositions and discussion part.

II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Employer Branding and Recruitment
Many authors have examined the impact of employer branding on recruitment outcomes using customer brand equity perspective (Collins and Stevens; Backhaus and Tikoo; 2004). The term Employer Brand (EB) was conceptualized by Ambler and Barrow (1996). They define EB as *"package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company"*. The benefits offered by an employer brand is similar to benefits offered by a product. The developmental benefits or useful activities are the functional benefits, monetary rewards are the economic benefits and feelings such as sense of belongingness and purpose are the psychological benefits. The authors assessed possible application of branding techniques in people management field. They tried to investigate the importance of employer brand and components of employer brand. Awareness and psychological benefits were identified as the most important components of employer brand. It can be said that in order to become a good employer brand it is important that the job applicants become aware of the organization. If the prospective employees are aware of the organization they would find it more attractive to work for. In addition to awareness psychological benefits like prestige and reputation of the company were also found to be the key components of employer brand.

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) presented a theoretical perspective for understanding employer branding using the concept of consumer brand equity. They define employer branding as the *"process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity, and the employer brand as a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors"*. Customer based brand equity is the effect of brand knowledge on consumer's purchase intentions of the product relative to an unbranded product. Employer brand equity is the effect of brand knowledge on the potential and existing employees. According to them employer branding is a three step process. The firm first develops a value proposition which is nothing but the benefits provided by the organization. In the second step the organization markets its value proposition to the prospective employees and internal marketing is the final step. This stage is about fulfilling the promises made during the recruitment stage.

Han and Collins (2004) in the similar context stated that early recruitment practices improve the quality and quantity of the prospective employees. The authors used the brand equity approach as a framework to examine how a company's mix of recruitment activities influences perceived employer brand equity and how it affects the job applicant's intentions to apply. The authors are of the opinion that brand awareness plays an important role in influencing job decisions.

Collins and Stevens (2002) stated that exposure to early recruitment activities like publicity, sponsorship, word of mouth endorsements, and recruitment advertising was positively related to job seeker's attitude towards the organization. In order to include a particular company in the consideration set, the candidates should be aware that the company as an employer exists. The way marketing communication in form of media advertising, sponsorship, print media, etc are important for influencing brand equity similarly in recruitment context early recruitment communication in form of referrals, advertising in form of brochures, job postings is important.

Gatewood, Gowan and Lautenschlager (1993) examined whether or not the potential job applicants hold a specific recruitment image and what are the dimensions of the recruitment image. The recruitment image is a function of information that is provided in the recruitment messages. Exposure to information is central to individual's perception of image. The results suggest that more exposure to information enhances the image and also has positive correlation with pursuit of employment. It indicates that initial job choice decisions are highly related to the image of the organization. Fombrun and Shanley (1990) cited few advantages a good image can generate for an organization. An organization with a good brand image can benefit from attracting better quality and quantity of job seekers. Turban and Cable (2003) argued that firm reputation would have a positive affect on applicant pool quantity. Positive firm reputation would increase attractiveness of the firm resulting in an increased applicant pool. Turban (2001) investigated factors related to college students' impressions of an organization as an employer. The research suggests that familiarity is positively related to attraction towards the organization. Familiarity can be in terms of increased advertising, when individuals know somebody who works in the organizations, when they have used products of the organization or when the students have read about the organization in the class. Familiarity plays a pivotal role in determining the attraction towards the organization.

Backhaus (2004) examined the corporate descriptions that appear on monster.com (job portal). The authors seek to identify the types of information firms provide about themselves that might allow an applicant to make a reasonable decision about pursuit of employment. It is evident from the results that most organizations fail to differentiate themselves in any material way from their competitors, indicating that in most firms the employer branding strategy has not successfully taken hold.

Lemmink, Schuifjf and Streukens (2003) stated that in order for individuals to form opinions about an organization, they first need to know that company and become familiar with it. They are of the opinion that the information source has an important role to play in formation of an image. Company employment image appeared to be a strong antecedent to intentions to apply. It also appeared that familiarity with the organization positively influences the intentions to apply.

Wilden (2010) used signaling theory to examine the nature and consequences of employer branding. The findings suggest that the companies which make invests more on developing and maintaining employer brand like employee development, participating in career fair, maintaining career websites, advertising in business magazines, offering internships, being active in alumni network creates a perception that employer cares about its coworkers and company is more desirable place to work.

Employer Branding and Social Media
Social media websites such as Facebook, You Tube, Twitter etc have become most important destinations on internet. A key feature of social media is its openness. The end users are consumers and producers at the same time. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define *"social media as a group of internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content"*. Key features of social media include participation, openness, information sharing. Social media provide a virtual network place where people can enjoy expressing their opinions, exchange opinions, share experiences, disseminate and control messages anywhere anytime. Marketers are now able to reach consumers and interact with them using social media. Many corporations and organizations have turned their focus on incorporating social media elements into their marketing and promotion strategies and facilitating two way communications. Social media offers an easy, cost effective way for communication, promote products and services. Personal recommendation is effective in gaining the attention of potential consumers and influencing attitude towards an organization (Park, Rodgers and Stemmie; 2011).

Social media has been used by organizations for promoting products and services. Lately organizations have started branding themselves as great place to work via social media Most of the research conducted on social media has been either on the personal use or for branding company's products and services. However academic research on use of social media for employer branding purposes is very scant and is at its infancy. The potential of employer branding via social media is not fully exploited and needs to be further explored. The objective of this study is firstly to investigate the scope of use of social media for branding an organization as a great place to work and secondly to examine the impact of such branding on job applicants' intentions to apply.

Increased interaction between company and applicants via social media is beneficial for both the parties. The applicants can present themselves to the company prior to the actual application process and obtain useful information about their application, whereas company receives more applications from a wider range of candidates and gets a first impression of the applicants (Brecht, Koroleva and Guenther; 2011).

There are several online mediums such as social networking sites, rating portals, and micro-blogging which are becoming prime portals to promote job vacancies and recruit potential candidates. Job applicants are using these facilities to find information on employers to gauge a picture of the company's corporate culture and working practices. Consequently, the traditional career brochure and company websites are no longer sufficient sources of information to new

applicants who are seeking a more personal review, from employees, about the organization (Laick and Dean; 2010).

Geffen (2010) investigated which of the employer branding concepts are applied by 109 Best Dutch employers. The author defined traditional employer branding tools like advertisements in print, commercials on television, external quality certifications, e-mails, online company presentations at other websites, online company presentations at own websites, sponsorship. The new social media tools include business networking sites, company blogs, employee blogs, search optimization engine of company site or brand, social networking sites, wikis, virtual worlds. The results show that most of the organizations use traditional methods like advertisements in print, external career fairs, and sponsorships. The most applied social media tool was found to be search engine optimization apart from this the other social media tools were barely used. However few of the respondents revealed their plans to use social media tools for branding in the next year. They mentioned SEO, company blogs (11%), Employee blogs (5%), Social networking sites (5%) to be used next year.

Waters & Jones (2011) found that you tube videos are being increasingly used by organizations to educate and inform just as much as they are to entertain. While text based conversations are a significant way to develop an organization's reputation and build its brand, combining words with a visual element significantly enhances the identity. Social media offers individuals the ability to embed an organization's video on blogs and social networking sites and it facilitates the sharing of the video's web address. Social media introduces numerous opportunities for an organization to track where the video is being seen and who is commenting on the video, thereby bringing many potential conversations to the organization's communication staff that enables them to shape the organization's key messages and identity.

Brecht et al., (2011) suggest that companies should carefully choose the Social Networking Sites where they want to be present. This should be done according to the target group that they want to address. If a company is targeting young people (students and graduates), they should consider building up presences in private SNS such as Facebook in the first place as young people are mostly active in private SNS.

Bondarouk, Ruel and Weekout (2012) assessed the moderating role of websites on the relationships between employer branding and organizational attractiveness and explored whether it makes difference if a company use corporate websites and SNS (LinkedIn) for employer branding. The results suggest that there is a direct relation between employer branding and organizational attractiveness. Result also shows that the relationship between employer branding and organizational attractiveness is moderated by exposure through corporate websites, the relationship strengthened. However the difference between corporate websites and SNS was found to be very small. The reason behind relatively less impact of LinkedIn could be because of use of LinkedIn mainly to connect with business relationships and to post recruitment related context. SNS like Facebook might be better designed for the purpose of sharing information and giving an opinion on a product or service. However the effect of social networking sites remains unrevealed.
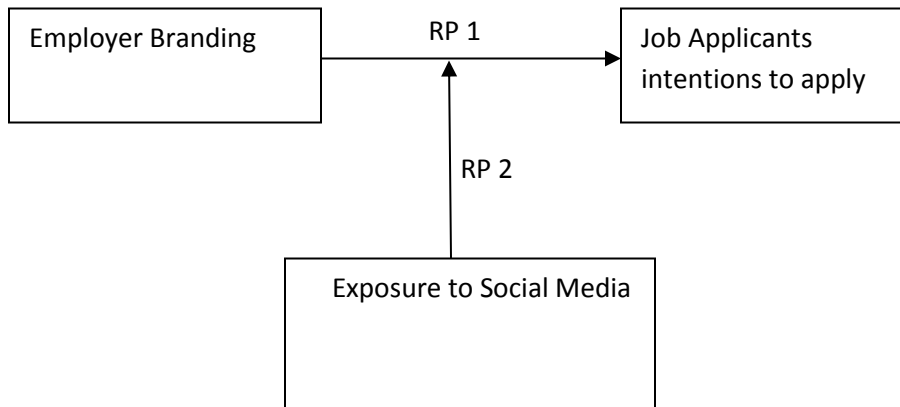
Companies should leverage social media to boost brand, to tweet, to post, and blog job openings and to share what a great a company is. Generation X and Y often called as wired generation have different ways of communicating. Many companies fear employees' bad mouthing employer. But if the organization wants to engage or communicate with gen Y, they must embrace social media by creating their own You Tube channels, have the employees join LinkedIn, to share job

opportunities and also become brand ambassadors. Open communication can have an impact on the perceived image of the organization or their image of being innovative.

III: RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS:
Research proposition 1: There is a direct and positive relation between employer branding and job applicants' intentions to apply.

Research Proposition 2: The relation between employer branding and job applicants' intentions to apply will be moderated by exposure to social media (SNS, You Tube, Wikis, blogs etc) such that in case of exposure to social media the effect of employer branding on job applicants intentions to apply would be stronger.

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┌─────────────────────┐        RP 1       ┌─────────────────────┐
│                     │                   │  Job Applicants     │
│  Employer Branding  │ ─────────────────→│  intentions to apply│
│                     │         ↑         │                     │
└─────────────────────┘         │         └─────────────────────┘
                              RP 2
                                │
                   ┌─────────────────────────┐
                   │  Exposure to Social Media│
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IV: CONCLUSION:
It is evident from the literature that research on employer branding draws parallel from marketing research especially consumer brand equity. The concept of employer branding was first discussed by marketing researchers but has lately been discussed by HR professionals. Research on employer branding is still scant and inconclusive. It is also apparent that research done on social media has been conducted mainly from marketing perspective. Companies have started using social media for promoting their products and services via social media. However research on use of social media for employer branding purpose is silent and unexplored. Despite of not so extensive literature on use of social media for employer branding it is evident that companies have started using social media for employer branding purposes. What is not known is the impact of employer branding via social media on the intentions of job applicants to apply in such organizations. Moreover the credibility issues of employer branding via social media is something which can have important managerial implications. Companies should leverage social media to boost brand, to tweet, to post, and blog job openings and to share what a great a company is. Generation X and Y often called as wired generation have different ways of communicating. Many companies fear employees' bad mouthing employer. But if the organization wants to engage or communicate with gen Y, they must embrace social media by creating their own You Tube channels, have the employees join LinkedIn, to share job opportunities and also become brand ambassadors. Open communication can have an impact on the perceived image of the organization or their image of being innovative.

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