University brand as an employer: demystifying employee attraction and retention

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to unveil the determinants of employer branding (EB) that attracts and retains the employees working in the Indian higher education sector using the factor-analytic approach.

Design/methodology/approach – The study is cross-sectional, and the data were collected from 141 employees working in the higher education sector. Exploratory factor analysis and independent t-test were deployed to analyze the data.

Findings – The results of independent samples t-test explicate that perception of male and female university employees pertaining to EB factors of employee attraction (EA) and employee retention (ER) is congruent. Further, the perception of employees in public and private universities on EB factor is similar for ER and non-similar for EA.

Originality/value – The present research is an effort to unveil the employee attraction and retention factors that play a vital role in showcasing an employer as a great place to work in the Indian higher education sector.

Keywords India, Employer branding, Employee retention, Employee attraction

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

As more and more organizations face intense competition in their sectors, the more they are involved in showcasing themselves as a distinct entity from their counterparts. With this, companies have started to realize the need to invest in human capital for a sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Grant, 1991). Attracting and retaining the right people on board emphasizes the primacy of unique resources that cannot be easily substituted by others. Due to this, organizations have started to focus more on the issue of recruitment and retention and have led HR and marketing scholars to investigate the issue. One such

strategy, *employer branding* (EB) has become a vital tool to attract, acquire, and retain talent (Ambler and Barrow, 1996; Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004).

Branding, a common lexicon in the marketing literature, is a powered mechanism that influences and manages how people perceive your brand. The strategy of branding that was confined to developing a product brand has now stretched its wings to the field of HRM. Research on EB has gained momentum due to the problem faced by organizations to attract and retain skilled and competent taskforce (Chambers *et al.*, 1998).

Globalization, a continual war for talent, and deregularization featuring the traits of market disruption (CIPD, 2007; Chhabra and Sharma, 2014), have led organizations to design a cohesive approach to identify, implement, and monitor an effective EB strategy. The Global Leader on Employer Branding, Universum characterized employers as fatalist that invests a considerable amount of time and efforts on EB strategy and views their employees as competitive enablers (Maheshwari *et al.*, 2017). Although past researchers have identified the dimensions of EB and have explored their relationship with employee work-related attitudes and behaviors, other studies have also examined how preferences for EB attributes differ from entry to exit among employees (Ito, Brotheridge and McFarland, 2013). Irrespective of the given criticality of EB, there are very few studies to trace that addresses the question of unveiling the EB dimensions that attract and retain the employees during their employment cycle (Lievens, 2007; Sokro, 2012) especially in the education sector (Bendaraviciene, 2015).

The ability to attract and retain top talent is rapidly becoming a key issue for human resource management at universities (Van den Brink, Fruytier and Thunnissen, 2013, p. 180). With globalization and a disruptive business landscape, it has become crucial to understand that attracting and retaining the right academic talent on board (Gilliot, Overlaet and Verdin, 2002; Marginson, 2011; Baruch, 2013) enables an employer to face substantial competition. Researchers in the past have recognized that the strategy of EB in the academic context is an under-researched but highly important topic (Brosi and Welpe, 2015; Hamidizadeh and Mohammadnezhad Fadardi, 2019). With a common standpoint that amidst global intensified competition, corporates are the major sufferers, it is discernible that academic sector is mostly unrecognized and that EB strategies are not comprehensively deployed in the academic sector (Fiedler and Welpe, 2008; Ringelhan *et al.*, 2013; Brosi and Welpe, 2015). Past studies have evidenced that university with a strong employer brand is distinguished as a desirable place to work against its counterparts where signaling unique set of attributes engender an employer brand attractive (Chawla and Lenka, 2015; Matongolo, Kasekende and Mafabi, 2018; Hamidizadeh and Mohammadnezhad Fadardi, 2019). Correspondingly, EB may account for a better fitting reaction to competition in guiding universities to determine how they can attract and retain the top talent (Brosi and Welpe, 2015) in the Indian context.

With rapid expansion, the education system in India is plagued by the limited supply of qualified faculty (Sen, 2012; Sharma, 2013). The low proportion of students pursuing doctoral education (less than 0.5% of the total students enrollment) and low inputs for research activities amplify the existing inadequate supply of quality independent researchers (AISHE, 2019; Ravi, Gupta and Nagaraj, 2019). With faculty shortage, a dramatic rise in enrollment has further widened the mismatch between demand and supply for faculty resources in the academic market. According to the All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE) reports, the gross enrollment has nearly increased from 24.30% in 2014-2015 to 26.3% in 2018-2019. With adequate supply, the composition of qualified academic staff is also crucial for quality education, institutional reputation, and competitive position in the academic community (Lorange, 2006; Sen, 2012). This has necessitated

leaders and officials to continuously delve into devising strategies for hiring and retaining the competent faculty and enriching their human capital (Baruch, 2013).

According to Deloitte (2016), universities have started to recognize the importance to hire and retain a diverse and talent-rich workforce. The university boards are identifying the right strategies that drive motivation and desired behavior among academics. Pursuing the above issue, the researchers aim to assist the academic institutions and practitioners in devising and reinforcing an effective HR strategy that communicates unique EB attributes in the academic labor market. Consequently, the present study responds to the research call of (Ahmad, Khan and Haque, 2019) and aims to unveil EB dimensions that attract and retain the employees working in the Indian higher education sector using the factor-analytic approach.

Literature review
Employer branding
Defined as a bundle of instrumental and symbolic attributes (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003), EB is "a strategy of internal and external communication of the unique attributes that establish the identity of the firm as an employer and what differentiates it from others, with the aim of attracting and retaining potential and current employees" (Wahba and Elmanadily, 2015). It pictures the inside and outside of the firm and provides a clear view of what makes it distinguishable and desirable as an employer (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). EB is a tool that builds an organizations' image (Maheshwari *et al.*, 2017), wherein employees perceive it as a better place to work. A positive image is an outcome of a satisfactory environment where providing employee value propositions (EVPs) helps an organization to earn loyalty and commitment from its employees (Aldousari *et al.*, 2017). The EVPs are the unique employment offerings that are based on the premise that value-in-exchange will be tied to the value-in-use (Lusch, Vargo and O'Brien, 2007). The term EVPs has emerged from the marketing technique of brand positioning, i.e. brand key that adds value to the product/ service brand; in a similar line, EVPs add value to the employer brand (Mascarenhas, 2019). As these values are the drivers of motivation, organizations have started to craft a well-documented framework of these value propositions to attract, motivate, and retain the talent (Gursoy, Chi and Karadag, 2013).

EB rests on an implicit contract (Wallace *et al.*, 2014; Butt, Lodhi and Shahzad, 2020) that promises to provide a unique employment experience to its employees in terms of material and non-material benefits (Ambler and Barrow, 1996). It is based on the social exchange theory (Hoppe, 2018) that insists on fulfilling the aspirations and promises of the employees as employees reciprocate in the form of retention, performance, and a higher level of commitment (Blau, 1964; Sheehan *et al.*, 2019). In social exchange theory, negotiations between an employer and the employees are emanated with the expectation that actions on the part of the employers will lead in a return as human relationships in a company are built through a preconceived cost-benefit analysis (Rousseau, 1990).

Although companies with a distinct promise can become an employer brand, not all can become an *employer of choice* (EOC). Employer brands that are capable enough to attract and retain the employees are successful in becoming an EOC (Bellou *et al.*, 2015). EB helps an employee to position an organization as an EOC where companies adopt *give and get back philosophy*, thereby helping an applicant to choose the right company to work with (Branham, 2000). The value propositions of an organization that includes HR policies and practices are evaluated and recognized by the prospective and current employees that pictures an organization as an EOC (Chalimourda and Konstantopoulos, 2020). These policies could be economic or non-economic. Bellou *et al.* (2015) elucidated that

operationalizing the definition of EOC around the economic framework is not related to satisfaction, but the embodiment of non-economic attributes like organizational culture, self-development, and relationship can create satisfied employees.

Studies all over the world have documented that EB is a multi-dimensional concept (Bellou *et al.*, 2015). EB has been conceived as an amalgam of five values proposed by (Berthon, Ewing and Hah, 2005) as social, economic, development, application, and interest value. Dabirian *et al.* (2017) further added management value and work-life balance to the Berthon five values framework using the technique of crowdsourced EB. Kucherov and Zavyalova (2012) categorized EB into four broad groups of psychological, economic, functional, and organizational attributes. Mohamad *et al.* (2018) associated it with the Alderfer ERG theory of existence, relatedness, and growth needs. Tüzüner and Yüksel (2009) connoted that employees have expectations regarding the firmographics and varied attractive components of the company that influences the employer brand, where the firmographics include company age and location while the attractive components are market success, work-life balance, career management, congenial working environment, eco-friendly policies, overall compensation package, telecommuting, and firms' reputation. In context to higher education institutions (Bendaraviciene, 2015), identified teamwork, job satisfaction, work-life balance, and supervisor relationship to be mostly manifested in the higher education industry. Similarly, a study reported that when higher education institutions adopt reward and people-oriented strategies, they succeed in retaining employees for a longer duration (Matongolo, Kasekende and Mafabi, 2018).

Employee attraction and retention

In a disruptive environment, where organizations are witnessing technological innovation, globalization, demographic changes, and data analytics, no one has complete control over their business (Rana *et al.*, 2019). With the advantage to have quick and easy access to the tangible resources like assets and other technology, intangible resources in the form of human capital are somewhat difficult to earn (Butt, Lodhi and Shahzad, 2020). Attracting qualified employees is an important part of organizations' success (Turnea, 2018) where employees' perceptions of distinct attributes, benefits, and values engender an employer brand attractive (Wallace *et al.*, 2014; Ronda, Valor and Abril, 2018). Past results have unveiled conflation among attributes of career opportunities, work-life benefits, corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Kumari and Saini, 2018), employer reputation, acceptance and belongingness (Sharma and Prasad, 2018), organizational culture, and ethics (Saini, Rai and Chaudhary, 2014) among others in conceptualizing employer brand attractiveness.

Furthermore, retaining skilled employees is equivalently crucial as attracting the right candidate (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Kashyap and Rangnekar, 2016). Researches elucidate adopting best practices, such as employee recognition, career path (Butt, Lodhi and Shahzad, 2020), training and development (Tanwar and Prasad, 2016a), stimulating working environment (Gilliot, Overlaet and Verdin, 2002), job security (Sharma, Singh and Rana, 2018), and perceived organizational support (Arasanmi and Krishna, 2019) to enhance employee retention. Moreover, employees are likely to stay in an organization when benefits offered to them are equal to or probably more than the efforts put in by them (Lo, 2015). In addition to this, employees nowadays have become more opportunistic and less loyal, and thus are not interested in having a traditional career within one company (De Vos and Meganck, 2008, p. 46). This has necessitated the organizations to devise an effective EB strategy that provides a positive employment experience to their employees (Mascarenhas, 2019). Research suggests that a supportive work environment, informal work culture, fair and ethical leadership, and positive reputation are some of the factors responsible for attracting prospective and retaining

current employees (Jain and Bhatt, 2014; Arasanmi and Krishna, 2019; Deepa and Baral, 2019). LaPLante (2004) also observed that job seekers willingly forgo financial benefits and choose to work for an organization that enjoys a positive reputation in terms of its socially responsible and ethical behavior. Thus, companies have become more receptive to the normative power and moral values (Tlaiss, Martin and Hofaidhllaoui, 2017) and are placing high importance to providing a conducive working environment to employees (Sharma and Prasad, 2018).

The present research has traced few studies that have identified the EB practices for attraction and retention of employees. Gregorka et al. (2020) illustrated that organizations should categorize EB attributes in terms of attraction and retention factors. The attributes of image and offer should be incorporated to attract employees and attributes of career development, performance evaluation, and employee's feedback should be considered to retain employees. Sokro (2012) established a framework to reason why individuals decide to work and stay with their organizations. The dimensions identified to attract employees were career development, compensation and benefits, and CSR, whereas job security, company's image, and fairness were identified to encompass the retention strategy (Sokro, 2012). Arriscado et al. (2019) asserted that to attract and retain the younger generation; there is a need to imbue a human-centered workplace where employees can freely communicate, collaborate, and connect with each other. Gilliot et al. (2002) stated that universities miss out opportunities to attract and retain potential academicians due to rigid academic career structures. Similarly, Sengupta et al. (2015) identified external EB values (pride, image, work culture, job structure and reference values) and internal EB values (esteem, engagement, comfort, justice and career potential values) for attracting and retaining employees in the Indian organizations.

Literature highlights that academicians have revisited EB strategy to implicate precise appreciation in sectors like Information Technology (Deepa and Baral, 2019), Telecom (Bhasin, Mushtaq and Gupta, 2019), Banking (Maheshwari et al., 2017), Tourism and Hospitality (Chalimourda and Konstantopoulos, 2020) or in understanding perceptions of students searching for jobs (Chhabra and Sharma, 2014). Thus, models used by corporate settings can be employed to conceive an idea of EB fitting an academic context (Hamidizadeh and Mohammadnezhad Fadardi, 2019).

Employer branding and demographic variables
The role of demographics in EB literature has been very limited. Prior studies support the argument that organizations should consider demographic variables while formulating and designing an EB strategy with a bundle of unique EVPs (Sengupta et al., 2015; Kumari and Saini, 2018). Literature reports that candidates' intention to apply may alter according to demographic characteristics of labor market such as age, gender, education, and work experience (Cable and Judge, 1996; Saini et al., 2014). Montgomery and Ramus (2011) also underlined that individuals' expectations of organizational attributes might influence their employment choice. The researchers have reported differences in perceived importance levels for EB and have found significant (Alnıaçık and Alnıaçık, 2012; Kumari and Saini, 2018) as well as insignificant (Arachchige and Robertson, 2011; Ahmad, Khan and Haque, 2019) differences in terms of demographic variables.

Past findings implicate that employees have similar attribute preferences that attract and retain them irrespective of gender (Sengupta et al., 2015; Chandler, 2019). Bussin and Mouton (2019) connoted that the demographic variable of gender did not affect the perception people had of branding attributes and their relative attractiveness. Similarly, Ahmad et al. (2019) reported insignificant differences in gender concerning employee attraction and retention factors. Contrary to the above findings, Tüzüner and Yüksel (2009) and Tanwar and Prasad (2016b) examined the effect of gender in context to EB dimensions

and reported significant results. Similarly, Davies *et al.* (2018) discussed that gender differences particularly marked for EB attributes among full-time public employees. Sengupta *et al.* (2015) indicated that private and public sector employees have similar preferences for EB attributes. Ahmad *et al.* (2019) research also revealed insignificant differences in organization type concerning employee attraction and significant differences concerning employee retention factor. The authors further opined that private sector employers should communicate EB attributes that particularly focus on employee retention to leverage organizational brand success.

In line with the above arguments and mixed findings, the research will address the following questions:

RQ1. What are the EB factors that attract and retain the employees working in the private and public higher education institutes in India?

RQ2. Is there any significant difference as to why employees decide to work for and stay with their employers in context to demographic variables?

Based on *RQ2*, the following hypotheses have been framed:

H1. There exists no significant difference as to why employees decide to work for an employer in terms of gender.

H2. There exists no significant difference as to why employees decide to stay with an employer in terms of gender.

H3. There exists no significant difference as to why employees decide to work for an employer in terms of organization type.

H4. There exists no significant difference as to why employees decide to stay with an employer in terms of organization type.

Methodology
Sample and research procedures
The present research has adopted the items from a study of Sokro (2012) that have been validated in a study conducted by (Ahmad *et al.*, 2019). The statements were reframed, keeping in view the sample of the study. All the items were measured on a seven point-type Likert scale. The first section of the questionnaire included questions relating to the demographics and the second section included eight questions for measuring employee attraction and six items for measuring employee retention pertaining to EB. For the present research, data were collected from employees working in the private and public universities in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India. The questionnaire link was sent to the respondents on their respective emails after which the data were entered into the SPSS software. The researchers managed to collect data from a total of 141 employees. According to Hair *et al.* (2009), the minimum acceptable sample size is five responses per item with a more acceptable ratio of 10:1. A pilot study was conducted to check the reliability of the items and the value of Cronbach's alpha met the acceptable value (Table 1).

Exploratory factor analysis
To address the first research objective, the researchers conducted principal component analysis coupled with varimax rotation. According to Bryant and Yarnold (1995) for EFA, "one's sample should be at least five times the number of variables. The subjects-to-

Variables	Subgroups	Frequency	(%)
Organization type	Private sector	60	42.6
	Public sector	81	57.4
Gender	Female	50	35.5
	Male	91	64.5
Age	Less than 25 years	29	20.6
	25–39 years	81	57.4
	40–54 years	27	19.1
	55 years and above	4	2.8
Designation	Professor	14	9
	Associate Professor	42	29
	Assistant Professor	85	60.2
Nature of employment	Permanent	69	48.9
	Adhoc/Contractual	41	29
	Guest Faculty	31	21.9
Organizational tenure	Less than 5 years	84	59.6
	5–10 years	20	14.2
	More than 10 years	37	26.2

Table 1.
Demographic profile
$n = 141$

variables ratio should be five or greater. Furthermore, every analysis should be based on a minimum of 100 observations regardless of the subjects-to-variables ratio". Thus, the sample size was sufficient.

EFA results revealed that all the items achieved factor loadings above the floor criteria of 0.5 (Guadagnoli and Velicer, 1988). According to Hair *et al.* (2009), in a sample of 150 or greater, factor loadings of 0.45 and above are considered practically significant; hence, all the items were retained. The results of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) for sampling adequacy revealed KMO = 0.94 and KMO = 0.90 for EA and ER respectively that were considered great for the present study (Hutcheson and Sofroniou, 1999). The Bartlett's test of sphericity was also found to be significant for EA and ER, depicting that some relationship exists among proposed variables. Further, all the eight items of EA and all the six items of ER factor explained cumulative variance of 71% and 70%, respectively.

Reliability and validity

The items were checked for internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability of all the items under EA = 0.94 and ER = 0.91 met the acceptable value of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978). The present study used average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) to test the validity of the measurement scale. The analysis depicted that the values for AVE and CR were greater than the acceptable range of 0.5 (EA = 0.60 and ER = 0.57) and 0.7 (EA = 0.93 and ER = 0.89) respectively, thus ensuring the validity of the measurement items (refer to Table 2).

Hypotheses testing

The proposed hypotheses were tested using independent samples *t*-test. *H1* and *H2* checked for the significant difference as to why employees decide to work for and stay with an organization in terms of gender. The results of independent samples *t*-test revealed that the significance value was more than 0.05, and hence there exists no significant difference among higher education sector employees concerning employee attraction and retention in terms of gender (Table 3).

Items	Mean	SD	Loadings	CA	AVE	CR
EA1	5.38	1.57	0.786			
EA2	5.44	1.61	0.787			
EA3	5.28	1.64	0.787			
EA4	5.19	1.72	0.764	0.94	0.6	0.93
EA5	5.32	1.61	0.713			
EA6	5.31	1.54	0.716			
EA7	5.69	1.54	0.943			
EA8	5.53	1.64	0.669			
ER1	5.2	1.79	0.802			
ER2	5.09	1.82	0.863			
ER3	5.59	1.51	0.687			
ER4	5.26	1.65	0.695	0.91	0.57	0.89
ER5	5.08	1.68	0.751			
ER6	4.85	1.91	0.686			
Overall KMO			0.94			
% of variance			72%			

Notes: SD – Standard deviation, EA – Employee attraction, ER – Employee retention, CA – Cronbach's alpha, AVE – Average variance extracted, CR – Composite reliability

Table 2.
Factor analysis

Factors	Gender	N	Mean	Levene's test		Sig. (p-value)	Hypotheses result
				F value	Sig.		
EA	Female	50	5.39	0.403	0.527	0.958	Not rejected
	Male	91	5.41				
ER	Female	50	5.09	1.369	0.244	0.669	Not rejected
	Male	91	5.21				

Table 3.
Gender (t-test)

H3 and *H4* checked for the significant difference as to why employees decide to work for and stay with an organization in terms of their organization type. The results of independent samples *t*-test reported that the significance value was more than 0.05 for ER, and hence there exists no significant difference among employees working in public and private universities in context to EB determinants that retains them. In contrast to this, the study reported significant differences in terms of employee attraction determinates among public and private sector employees where public sector employees were more positive regarding the factor of employee attraction (Table 4).

Factors	Org. type	N	Mean	Levene's test		Sig. (p-value)	Hypotheses result
				F value	Sig.		
EA	Public	81	5.61	5.175	0.025	0.040	Rejected
	Private	60	5.12				
ER	Public	81	5.33	3.782	0.054	0.132	Not rejected
	Private	60	4.95				

Table 4.
Organization type
(t-test)

Discussion and implications

With disruption affecting the business models and their operations, it also affects the workforce and their skills (Sharma *et al.*, 2018). The disruption is furthered due to digitalization, technological advancements, global development, and interdependency on data analytics (Chhabra and Sharma, 2014). This has necessitated the employers to devise strategies that attract and retain the pool of talented employees (Marginson, 2011). As earlier stated, the present employers have started to invest in showcasing them as a *great place to work* via EB (Matongolo *et al.*, 2018; Hamidizadeh and Mohammadnezhad Fadardi, 2019). It is required that employers should understand the nuance of unique attributes of CSR, career advancement, and quality of work-life, among others while implementing an effective EB strategy (Kumari and Saini, 2018; Carlini *et al.*, 2019). Previously stated, attracting and retaining the right academic talent on board could enable academic employers in becoming an EOC (Bellou *et al.*, 2015). The outcome of the present research illustrates that academic employers should imbue an effective EB strategy that communicates their unique identities internally and externally and differentiates them as a preferred employer (Wahba and Elmanadily, 2015; Maheshwari *et al.*, 2017).

The present research has attempted to explore the facets of EB that helps in attracting and retaining a talented workforce. The results of EFA reported two major factors of "employee attraction and employee retention" in context to EB. The scale of Sokro (2012) was validated in the present research, where the researcher identified eight items and six items of employee attraction and retention, respectively. The validity statistics of the two-factor model delineates that the scale is appropriate to be used in further research for addressing the issue of employee attraction and retention in the present disruptive market. The present study highlights that EB traits of CSR, ethics, and career development are most effective in attracting the academic talent where employer image, recognition, growth opportunities, and job security are highly effective in retaining the current employees. The findings align with the former studies where similar attributes were reported for attracting (LaPLante, 2004; Saini, Rai and Chaudhary, 2014; Kumari and Saini, 2018) and retaining the skilled employees (Mohamad *et al.*, 2018; Sharma *et al.*, 2018; Butt, Lodhi and Shahzad, 2020).

Further, the study assessed the differences pertaining to EB factors for attraction and retention of employees working in the higher education institutes of India. The results of *t*-test assert that no significant difference exists between male and female employees for both employee attraction and retention factors. The findings are in line with the previous studies, where authors reported non-significant differences for EB factors in terms of gender (Ahmad *et al.*, 2019; Bussin and Mouton, 2019; Chandler, 2019). The insignificant results could adhere to the volatile job market (Sengupta *et al.*, 2015), due to which male and female employees have similar value preferences while searching for new jobs. Similarly, no significant difference exists between private and public employees for retention factor but was reported significant for employee attraction. The findings are in line with the former study, where authors reported non-significant differences for EB factors in terms of organization type (Sengupta *et al.*, 2015). But results also contradict with the former finding where authors reported non-significant differences for attraction factor between private and public banking employees (Ahmad *et al.*, 2019). Our study puts forward the argument that university employees have different perceptions for public and private employers and that employees find private universities to be less lucrative and attractive than public ones. Prior research has indicated that private universities face a complex challenge in attracting the desired candidates (Aithal and Kumar, 2016). With unfair workload, private sector employees might feel detached with their workplace and consider themselves merely as

tools (Raina and Khatri, 2015). As the study indicated significant differences for EB (attraction factor) for organization type, future research is needed to identify why public and private employees differ.

Implications

The present research is an effort to unveil the employee attraction and retention factors that play a vital role in showcasing an employer as a *great place to work* (Dabirian *et al.*, 2017). The study is based on the sample from employees currently working in higher education institutes in India. The results of factor analysis connote that higher education institutes should focus on the unique attributes to attract, recruit, and retain a highly agile and competitive workforce. With the given competitive environment, it becomes equally important for employers to stand out as a distinct entity in the labor market (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Hoppe, 2018). Due to this, a sustainable approach should be entailed (Saini *et al.*, 2014), where an EB strategy should not only be confined to attracting employees but should also invest in providing a unique employment experience during ones' employment cycle (Ambler and Barrow, 1996; Mascarenhas, 2019).

The results of independent samples *t*-test explicate that perception of male and female university employees on EB factors of EA and ER is congruent. This implies that male and female employees have similar workplace expectations. Further, the perception of employees in public and private universities on EB factor is similar for ER and non-similar for EA, where the mean value for the public sector is greater than the private sector employees. Where the perception of employees relating to private and public universities is consonant for retention factors, these two groups differ in terms of the benefits that attract them. The finding warrants that private universities should emphasize more on employee attraction determinants to attract the right talent on board. Gilliot *et al.* (2002) pointed out that lack of career path and ladders could be responsible for the unattractiveness of academic institutions. A report by Deloitte presented that public universities are generally government-funded and invest in research activities where only a handful of private universities in India succeed in attracting government funding for research (Deloitte, 2017). Previously discussed, employees in India desire to find an organization that serves as a means of career development with advanced skill sets (Sharma and Prasad, 2018; Butt *et al.*, 2020); thus, public universities succeed in grabbing the initial attraction of job seekers due to available research inputs (Deloitte, 2017). Therefore, to be at the forefront in attracting talents, private universities need to communicate succinct signals that portray the distinctive features of an EB strategy (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). The management should aim at strengthening the employer brand and consider factors such as career development, rewards and opportunities, CSR and ethics, quality services and impactful core values to attract skilled employees.

The universities can use social media and other communication platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn and various blogs to manage and promote their brand effectively. According to Employer Branding International, "Social media has truly risen into a prominent place in the Employer Branding toolbox" where the use of social media has significantly grown as a communication channel, from 14% in 2009 to 76% as, claimed by respondents today (David, 2014). However, universities should be mindful that signals communicated are internally and externally consistent as it may be detrimental to EB efforts (Moroko and Uncles, 2008). It is necessitated to consistently monitor the alignment of brand messages communicated with the employment experience so that well-balanced messages are conveyed (Katoen and Macioschek, 2007, p. 89; Backhaus, 2016). Realistic job previews, whether positive or

negative signals accurate and honest EB messages (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004) and infuses positive perceptions among employees.

Further, in a world saturated with communication, the individual messages are often drowned out. This demands a need to adopt an integrated approach to communication that strengthens universities' core brand values (Katoen and Macioschek, 2007, p. 25; Sharma and Kamalanabhan, 2014). Considering the synergy effect, universities should demonstrate their core values in its entirety and promote their clear and unique identity in the academic labor market (Wahba and Elmanadily, 2015; Bois, 2016). Overall, the present study will benefit the academicians, practitioners, and employers in understanding the criticality of an effective EB strategy in the current scenario.

Limitations and future work

Although the study has tried to make significant contributions to further the EB debate, it suffers from a few limitations. The study has employed a small sample size that might limit the generalizability of the present research results. The study is cross-sectional, due to which common method variance could be an issue. Future studies can also extend the present research work to understand the applicability of EB scale in different sectors. Further, the validated scale can be used to test the empirical relationships with external and internal EB outcomes like retention and intent to join.

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