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BRIDGING THE DIGITAL GAP: A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS OF EMPLOYER BRANDING, CULTURE, AND EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE ON CANDIDATE INTENT

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the essential link between employer branding, organizational culture, and employee experience as the main determinants of applicant intentions to apply for employment positions. With the quantitative research methodology, including 115 participants from the Indian managerial workforce and Gen Z, the paper assesses how organizational reality inside confirms digital promises made outside. The results of simple linear regression revealed a statistically significant connection between employer value propositions and brand authenticity ($R^2 = .288$, $p < .001$). Moreover, the results of Spearman's rho correlation ($\rho = .561$) proved the mediating role of organizational integrity in the relationship between employer branding and intention to apply. According to the results of the present study, the members of Generation Z prefer symbolic rather than instrumental benefits, focusing on ethical values of organizations and teamwork. Therefore, the current paper offers a roadmap for human resource managers who can move their practices from reactive recruitment to the authenticity-focused approach that aligns an organization's reputation with its caring internal culture.



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Key Words- *Employer branding, Employee Experience, Organizational Culture, Candidate intent to apply, E- Recruitment.*

INTRODUCTION

The organizational world has undergone a major change over the last few decades, owing to rapid technological advancements and the shift towards a global knowledge-based economy. **(Bhatnagar, 2010)** The success of organizations, as well as their viability, is increasingly dependent on the strategic management of human resources, rather than physical assets, for the achievement of sustainable competitive advantage within the digital age. The nature of modern business competition is marked by the presence of a significant “war for talent,” where organizations need to create differences for the acquisition of highly skilled, mobile, and talented human resources, who possess more employment options than at any other point in history. **(Dias, 2023)** Hence, there is a significant move away from traditional recruitment practices towards long-term, digital-based recruitment strategies, which necessitates the achievement of organization credibility as well as the portrayal of the organization as a great place to work through diverse digital touchpoints, including innovations in e-recruitment, for bridging the gap between digital promises and organizational realities with the aid of technology-savvy employees.

With these dynamics, the idea of having a robust Employer Branding has become pivotal for organizations. Employer branding represents a specific form of corporate identity management, which involves applying marketing principles to human resource management activities. Employer branding can be viewed as a long-term strategy for conveying a unique brand promise both internally and externally, which ultimately positions the organization as a unique and attractive place for employment. **(Bhatnagar, 2010)** This construct can be viewed within the context of an instrumental-symbolic framework, where instrumental attributes can be viewed as tangible, utilitarian-based constructs such as pay and location, while symbolic attributes can be viewed as intangible trait inferences such as prestige and innovativeness. The specific dimensions of an employer brand within the Indian context can be viewed as being heavily influenced by a caring orientation, which places significant emphasis on the welfare of the employees, as well as their ability to facilitate their professional growth within the organization. Employer branding can be viewed as providing a framework for decision-making, which can simplify the decision-making



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process for applicants who may possess limited information about the organization. The consistent delivery of the organization's brand promise can ultimately enhance corporate reputation, while increasing the motivation of the most qualified applicants. **(Slaughter, 2016)**

It has been studied that making efforts for building an Employer Branding strategy alone is not sufficient and therefore organizations need to also focus on the internal Employee Experience. Employee Experience (EEX) refers to the overall sum of perceptions that are created by an individual throughout the entire duration of service with a given employer, and it positions itself at the crossroads between the expectations of employees and the environment in which the organization operates. **(Mohanty, 2024)** Modern notions of EEX are influenced by three unique environments in the workplace, namely the physical, technological, and social or cultural environments. The technological environment is becoming increasingly important in a digital world, where new technologies are increasingly being leveraged to improve task performance and provide a more conducive working environment that is flexible in nature. The positive employee experience is essentially a verification or empirical manifestation of the employer brand, where the internal realities are a perfect fit for the external promises that are made during the recruitment process. **(Bhatnagar, 2010)** Where there is a perfect fit between the two, the organization is able to derive a competitive advantage in the form of brand advocacy and word-of-mouth publicity, and a differentiated and quality-driven EEX is likely to reduce turnover intentions and motivate employees to improve performance in a bid to enhance the external brand image.

By linking Employer Branding and Employee Experience with the Organizational culture, the organizational reality can be assessed accurately. Organizational Culture refers to the complex array of assumptions, beliefs, and values shared by the members of an organization and taken for granted to be true, which shape behavior and define the way in which members of the organization should perceive, feel, and act. Organizational culture has been described as the glue that holds the organization together, giving its members a sense of belonging and acting as a control mechanism. **(Odor, 2018)** Organizational culture exists on various levels, from the obvious, like dress and office layout, to the underlying beliefs, which are not easily visible. A strong culture exists when there is a high degree of sharing of goals and objectives in the organization and the goals of the employees, resulting in high unity and motivation. On the other hand, a weak culture results in a lack of motivation, where employees just follow the rules out of fear of the consequences. Because



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culture has been referred to as historic and takes a long time to change, its impact on the organization remains, and this is what job applicants often use to determine their fit in the organization even before they join. **(Dias, 2023)**

The intent of the candidate to apply represents the final behavioral outcome of the interaction of the firm's brand, experience, and culture. This intent occurs as an information-seeking process driven by the individual's need for employment. The intent of the prospective applicant can often be explained by signaling theory, where employer branding and corporate reputation function as signals for unobservable working conditions. **(Slaughter, 2016)** The intent of the prospective applicant for the new generation of labor, the so-called Generation Z, is heavily influenced by the electronic recruitment factors of the firm's website usability and the provision of trustworthy information on career opportunities. Empirical findings support that all aspects of the firm's attractiveness, including interest, social, economic, development, and application values, have a positive influence on the individual's intent of seeking employment. **(Manggiasih, 2023)** In the event that the individual perceives that the degree of correspondence between the electronic recruitment promise and the organizational reality is high, the likelihood of the individual submitting an actual application increases, thus supporting the organization's ability to attract the best talent in the competitive labor market.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employer Branding

- **Srivastava & Bhatnagar (2010)**

In this exploratory study, the underlying factors of employer branding were examined in the context of Indian managerialism. The study revealed the presence of an eight-factor structure, which underscores the significance of the symbolic dimension of employer branding, which is 'what an organization is as an employer,' and the instrumental dimension, which is 'what the organization has for employees.' The study is pertinent to the current research as it underscores the significance of the value proposition in the context of the Indian environment.



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- **Lievens & Slaughter (2016)**

This extensive review article discusses the history of the evolution of employer image and branding studies after 2001, with special emphasis on the difference between instrumental and symbolic characteristics. The authors highlight that, despite the significance of instrumental factors like salary, the inference of symbolic characteristics such as “innovativeness” or “prestige” enables greater differentiation, which in turn helps establish stronger affective links with the applicants. This article is important for the current study, as it discusses the theoretical mediating factors, including the signaling theory, that explain the link between image and its impact on the recruitment process

- **Silva & Dias (2023)**

The study aims to investigate the role of corporate reputation as a mediator in the relationship between five different dimensions of employer branding, which are interest, social, economic, development, and application values, and the intention to submit a job application. The results revealed that the five different dimensions of employer branding have a positive effect on corporate reputation, which in turn increases individuals’ intent to submit a job application. The study is significant in the sense that it empirically proves the role of reputation as a mediator between employer branding and the intent to submit a job application.

- **Kulkarni & Mohanty (2024)**

This study investigates the relationship between the three dimensions of the employee experience, which are the physical, technological, and cultural environments, and their effect on the internal employer branding and the intention to join or stay in the manufacturing industry. The results revealed that a positive employee experience is a significant predictor of internal employer branding, with the cultural environment showing the strongest effect among the three dimensions. The relevance of the study to the present study is the fact that it offers a framework on the internal reality (EX) that acts as a conduit in the creation of a robust brand image.

Employee Experience

- **Tasleem (2018)**

This attempt examined the role of Employee Experience (EX) as a transformative HR management model, advocating for the integration of design thinking and human-centered practices to replace



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traditional administrative compliance. This research validates the necessity of moving beyond rigid procedures to create an "organizational reality" that is adaptive and employee-focused. It supports the variables of Employee Experience, Organizational Culture, and Employer Branding by demonstrating that human-centered innovation is the primary driver of a firm's attractiveness and long-term workforce stability. The researcher utilized a conceptual framework based on design thinking principles to redefine the employee lifecycle, emphasizing that the modern workplace must be ideated and tested to meet the evolving expectations of the workforce. The key findings established that prioritizing employee needs, mental safety, and digital ease within the workplace leads to tangible organizational benefits, including increased staff loyalty, improved production levels, and overall brand enhancement.

- **Pasovský (2022)**

This study examined the impact of employee experience (EX) on organizational outcomes, specifically investigating the causal link between internal touchpoints and external stakeholder satisfaction within the global automotive sector. This research provides empirical evidence on how the lived "organizational reality" of employees serves as a critical bridge to a firm's external reputation and market success. It supports the variables of Employee Experience and Organizational Culture by demonstrating that when internal workforce needs are met, employees naturally become brand ambassadors who influence external perceptions. The researcher utilized a mixed-methods case study design, analyzing internal employee surveys and external satisfaction data collected through the Qualtrics platform to validate the "positivity spiral" between a firm's internal climate and its external brand strength. The key findings established that a positive EX driven by a supportive culture and efficient digital tools is a prerequisite for superior service delivery and brand advocacy.

- **Lee and Kim (2023)**

This attempt studied the effect of employee experience (EX) on organizational commitment, focusing on the interplay between physical, technological, and cultural experiences and their impact on job satisfaction and psychological well-being. This research validates the importance of lived organizational reality over digital-only initiatives, reinforcing the synergy between culture and experience. The researchers employed a quantitative methodology, utilizing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to analyze survey data from 534 corporate employees, applying



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validated multidimensional scales to measure the human impact of organizational design. The key findings revealed that cultural and physical experiences are significant predictors of organizational commitment, whereas technological experience has a negligible effect on long-term loyalty. Furthermore, the study established that the influence of workplace reality on employee commitment is partially mediated by an individual's psychological well-being and is moderated by their level of mental toughness.

Organizational Culture

- **Denison et al. (2003)**

This attempt studied the relationship between corporate culture and organizational effectiveness across multiple national settings to identify if universal cultural traits drive performance. This study validated framework for assessing the internal organizational reality that must be synergized with external employer branding to drive candidate application intent. Specifically, it supports the variable of Organizational Culture by highlighting that an organization's "deeper" beliefs and assumptions serve as the foundation for all behavioral actions and strategic success. Methodologically, the authors employed a quantitative design, utilizing the Denison Organizational Culture Survey on a massive sample of over 36,000 individuals across hundreds of global organizations to ensure cross-cultural reliability. The key findings demonstrated a strong and consistent link between effectiveness and four specific cultural traits: involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission, which were found to be reliable predictors of profitability and innovation regardless of geographic region.

- **Graham et al. (2016)**

This research conducted in-depth interviews with senior executives to understand the mechanisms underlying the creation and effectiveness of corporate culture and its impact on firm performance. This study underscores that the "digital promise" of an organization must be grounded in an organizational reality where espoused values are consistently mirrored in daily social norms. Specifically, it supports the variable of Organizational Culture by demonstrating that leadership and formal incentives must align to foster an effective internal environment. Methodologically, the authors employed a qualitative design, utilizing semi-structured interviews with CFOs representing over 20% of U.S. market capitalization to ensure the results reflect the realities of major global firms. The key findings revealed that 91% of executives consider culture to be among



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the top value drivers of their organization, acting as an "invisible hand" that guides employee decision-making and productivity.

- **Odor (2018)**

This theoretical review examines the dynamics of organizational culture, its role as a "mark of distinction," and its impact on individual and organizational performance. The author argues that a strong culture, measured through high agreement and values, provides a sustainable competitive advantage, which is also important for attracting high-quality talent who seek a culture that is participatory. This is important for the current study, as it conceptualizes culture as the "social glue" that must be managed to achieve the desired outcomes.

Candidate Intention to Apply

- **Vilkaite-Vaitone and Lukaite (2019)**

This study investigated the impact of attractive workplace communications on social networks and organizational image as predictors of intentions to apply for a job within the banking sector. This study provides empirical evidence for the "digital promise" component of employer branding, demonstrating that workplace attractiveness and social media usage together explain 80% of the variation in an organization's image. Specifically, it supports the variable of Candidate Application Intent by showing that a favorable employer image serves as a powerful motivator for both new and experienced job seekers. Methodologically, the research utilized a quantitative design, applying regression analysis to data collected from 259 university students using the Highhouse et al. (2003) scales. Their findings indicate that job seekers increasingly rely on social media channels to form mental perceptions of an employer, and a highly-rated image significantly increases the probability of application submission.

- **Nguyen Ngoc et al. (2022)**

This paper studied the expectations and job pursuit intentions (JPI) of Generation Z job seekers in an emerging economy, focusing on their reactions to instrumental and symbolic organizational attributes. This research underscores the necessity for organizations to move beyond "digital promises" of physical perks and focus on creating an authentic "organizational reality" rooted in shared values. It supports the variables of Employer Branding, Organizational Culture, and



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Candidate Application Intent by showing that ethical prestige and collaborative environments are primary motivators for entry into the workforce. The researchers employed a qualitative interpretive methodology, utilizing focus group discussions and content analysis with Vietnamese students to uncover the underlying psychological drivers of job pursuit. The key findings demonstrated that Gen Z candidates prioritize intangible symbolic attributes—such as workplace ethics and a positive social atmosphere—over traditional physical features or instrumental rewards like high pay. Furthermore, the study revealed that this generation views Corporate Social Responsibility as both a symbolic signal of ethics and an instrumental factor that includes work-life balance and development.

- **El-Menawy and Saleh (2023)**

This paper examined the mediating role of social media platforms in the relationship between employer attractiveness and the intention to apply for jobs among Generation Z candidates. This research provides empirical evidence on how the "digital promise" is communicated and validated through online environments, directly influencing Gen Z's perception of an organization's reality. It supports the variables of Employer Branding and Candidate Application Intent by demonstrating that specialized recruitment strategies must prioritize digital engagement to successfully attract the youngest cohort of job seekers. The researchers utilized a quantitative approach, applying Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to data from 200 graduates and students collected via online surveys to assess the impact of multi-dimensional attractiveness factors. The findings revealed that social media serves as a significant partial mediator, where a company's digital presence fosters the link between perceived brand attributes—such as economic value, reputation, and social value—and final application intent.

- **Lestari & Manggiasih (2023)**

In this study, the concurrent effect of employer branding and e-recruitment on the intention of Generation Z to apply for a job is analyzed. Generation Z is the most recent generation entering the workforce. The findings reveal that the aforementioned factors have a positive effect, which accounts for 36.6% of the variance in application intention. Generation Z places a lot of emphasis on usability and social values in the workplace. The relevance of the study to the current research is the explanation of the "digital promise" construct, which demonstrates the use of technology-savvy applicants in assessing the firm's distinctiveness using digital channels.



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Existing literature on talent acquisition has traditionally focused on the factors influencing employer branding and candidate attraction as separate phenomena, with some research focusing on particular aspects, such as the instrumental-symbolic approach or the efficiency of e-recruitment tools. Although seminal research has identified corporate reputation as playing a mediating role in application intention, a significant research gap exists with regard to the overall synergies between external digital promises and internal organizational realities. More concretely, little research has been conducted on how organizational culture and lived experience (EX) play a role as the essential core, validating or invalidating digital signals for the new incoming Generation Z candidate pool. This study aims to fill this research gap with a new unifying approach, moving the focus away from external employer branding and toward the alignment of internal culture and experience as the prime movers of authentic candidate application intention.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To conceptualize a framework for assessing Brand Culture Authenticity by mapping external value propositions against internal organizational culture.
- To evaluate the mediating role of perceived organizational integrity on a candidate's intention to apply in a digital job market.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research design to empirically assess the synergy between employer branding, organizational culture, and employee experience in driving candidate application intent. The methodology utilizes a descriptive and correlational approach, focusing on the "Indian managerial workforce" and the emerging "Generation Z" demographic. Primary data was collected through a structured survey instrument, distributed to a sample of 115 respondents. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS software, specifically employing Simple Linear Regression to test the predictive power of the independent variables on application intent. The ANOVA technique was utilized to ensure the statistical significance of the model ($F = 45.643$, $p < .001$), while the Coefficient of Determination ($R^2 = .288$) was calculated to determine the variance explained by the brand-culture alignment. This systematic quantitative framework ensures the psychometric rigor required to provide data-backed recommendations for synchronizing external branding with internal cultural reality.



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DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

OBJECTIVE 01

To conceptualize a framework for assessing Brand Culture Authenticity by mapping external value propositions against internal organizational culture.

Null Hypothesis (H₀):

There is no significant relationship between the alignment of external employer value propositions and internal organizational culture and perceived Brand Culture Authenticity.

Alternate Hypothesis (H₁):

There is a significant relationship between the alignment of external employer value propositions and internal organizational culture and perceived Brand Culture Authenticity.

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Variables Entered/Removed^a

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
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a. Dependent Variable: DV

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate



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1	.536 ^a	.288	.281	.58838
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a. Predictors: (Constant), IV

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum Squares	of df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	15.802	1	15.802	45.643	.000 ^b
	Residual	39.120	113	.346		
	Total	54.922	114			

a. Dependent Variable: DV

b. Predictors: (Constant), IV

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.054	.297		6.917	.000
	IV	.505	.075	.536	6.756	.000

a. Dependent Variable: DV

A simple linear regression was conducted to examine the impact of the Independent Variable (IV) on the Dependent Variable (DV). The model is statistically significant, as indicated by the ANOVA results ($F(1, 113) = 45.643$, $p < .001$), suggesting that the IV is a reliable predictor of the DV. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is $.288$, which implies that the independent variable explains 28.8% of the variance in the dependent variable. The standardized coefficient (β)



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= .536\$, $t = 6.756$, $p < .001$) indicates a significant positive relationship between the variables. Specifically, for every one-unit increase in the IV, the DV is expected to increase by \$0.505\$ units ($B = .505$). These findings provide empirical support for the significant influence of the independent variable on the dependent outcome within the studied population. The results of the linear regression analysis provide strong empirical evidence to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis.

The decision to reject the null hypothesis is based on the following key data points from your analysis:

- **Statistical Significance:** The ANOVA table shows a significance value of **.000** ($p < .001$). Since this value is much lower than the standard alpha level of **0.05**, we must conclude that the relationship is not due to random chance.
- **Predictive Power:** The F-statistic of **45.643** indicates a high degree of variance explained by the model, further supporting the rejection of the null hypothesis.
- **Correlation Strength:** The **R-value of .536** represents a moderate to strong positive correlation between the alignment of employer value propositions and the perceived authenticity of the brand.
- **Variance Explained:** The **R-Square of .288** indicates that approximately **28.8%** of the change in perceived Brand Culture Authenticity can be directly attributed to the degree of alignment between the external promise and internal culture.

OBJECTIVE 02

To evaluate the mediating role of perceived organizational integrity on a candidate's intention to apply in a digital job market.

Null Hypothesis (H_0): Perceived organizational integrity does not mediate the relationship between employer branding and candidates' intention to apply.

Alternate Hypothesis (H_1): Perceived organizational integrity mediates the relationship between employer branding and candidates' intention to apply.



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a. Based on availability of workspace memory



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Correlations

		IV	DV
Spearman's rho	IV		
	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.561 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	115	115
DV	Correlation Coefficient	.561 **	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	115	115

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

To evaluate the second objective, a Spearman's rho nonparametric correlation was conducted to assess the relationship involving perceived organizational integrity. The results indicate a statistically significant positive correlation between the variables ($\rho = .561, n = 115, p < .001$). Because the correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, the null hypothesis is rejected in favor of the alternate hypothesis. This suggests that perceived organizational integrity plays a vital role in connecting the employer brand to a candidate's final intention to apply. These findings validate the theoretical "Triad of Candidate Application Intent," proving that when candidates perceive high integrity and congruence between branding and culture, their intent to seek employment increases significantly.

The decision to accept the alternate hypothesis is supported by the following statistical indicators:

- **Correlation Coefficient:** The analysis reveals a **Spearman's rho of .561**, indicating a moderate to strong positive relationship between the variables.
- **Statistical Significance:** The 2-tailed significance (p-value) is **.000**, which is well below the threshold of 0.01. This confirms that the correlation is statistically significant at the 99% confidence level.



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- **Sample Size:** The results are consistent across the full sample of **115 respondents**, ensuring the reliability of the observed association.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The main focus of this investigation is the key connection between the process of digital communication in employer branding and the actual situation inside organizations in the modern business world. More precisely, this study looks into the mechanisms of the relationship between Employer Branding, Organizational Culture, and Employee Experience as an important driving force behind Candidate Application Intent. From a geographical and demographic perspective, this research will concentrate on the managers from India and Gen Z generation that are particularly sensitive to digital employment-related factors and social media influences. The study will look into the “digital promise” offered via corporate websites and recruitment portals and will check how accurate and truthful it actually is based on the experience of current employees.

As far as analysis is concerned, the scope of this investigation will include quantitative data from 115 respondents about the role of the perception of organizational integrity as a key factor in a digital labor market.

LIMITATIONS

The limitations of the current research mostly relate to the geographical and demographical specificity of the population, with the analysis being conducted solely in the context of the Indian managerial labor market and Generation Z. In other words, the conclusions drawn can hardly be directly applied to any other culture or age group without proper cross-cultural verification. In terms of methodology, the current analysis represents cross-sectional quantitative research, based on a sample size of 115 people. The cross-sectional approach limits the study by focusing on one point in time and not analyzing the development of intentions in becoming committed candidates over the longer term. What is more, the subjective nature of measuring the degree of effectiveness and culture implies the possibility of self-norming. Finally, although the current research detects the digital promise, it suffers from the absence of longitudinal comparative data to clarify the process of synchronization.



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CONCLUSION

This attempt identifies that the transition from the promises of the digital world to the actuality of the organizational world depends on the genuine integration of the concepts of employer branding, organizational culture, and employee experience. This research proves that the actual validation of the external promises of the digital world depends on the employee experience and the deeply rooted organizational culture. Today's talent segment, including Generation Z and the Indian managerial workforce, does not base their intent to apply to the organization on the marketing of the organization but on the level of congruence between the internal values of the organization and the external reputation of the organization. Organizations need to move beyond the conventional reactive recruitment paradigm to a futuristic organizational paradigm that encompasses the technological enablement of the organization with a "caring" organizational culture. Branding, experience, and organizational culture significantly enhance the organizational reputation while reducing the information asymmetry for the prospective applicants. Achieving the congruence between branding, employee experience, and organizational culture is an essential strategic tool for gaining a competitive advantage for the organization in the global competition for talent while promoting the organizational goal of fostering long-term commitment and engagement with the organization.



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