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## Exploring the role of human resource management practices in the nexus of internal and external employer branding

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**Abstract:** In today's competitive market, firms have hurdles in attracting and retaining a qualified workforce. Therefore, EB strategy serves as a means of communicating workplace features and how the firm differentiates itself as an employer from other businesses to acquire a competitive advantage. As a result, there is a need to investigate the phenomenon of internal and external employer branding, as well as how HRM practices influence it. Themes regarding internal and external employer branding were discovered using an exploratory method through NVivo-11 software. This study adds to the discussion about the use of HRM techniques to help a company for becoming a 'brand', particularly in industries where both the product and the brand have a high symbolic value, such as the telecommunications industry. According to the findings of this study, organisations should carefully construct their HRM strategies so that they may become a brand that will help them recruit and retain exceptional people.

**Keywords:** employer branding; HRM practices; telecommunication sector; internal and external employer branding.

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## 1 Introduction

Generally speaking, a technology-driven economy and changing business environment are becoming challenges for organisations because they are demanding recruitment and maintenance of executive talent (Bharadwaj et al., 2021). The success and survival of organisations depend on the quality of the workforce who are willing to avail the mentioned challenges. But, another major challenge for today's organisations is to attract and retain the talented workforce that is rare in the current competitive environment (Manpower Group, 2014). Thus, the organisations need to create appropriate and adequate plans and exert efforts to get the best available pool of potential candidates and to develop and retain the existing employees (Barbaros, 2020). In this regard, employer branding is an organisational tool to attract and retain talent through making as an 'employer of choice' in the market (Kemp and Spielmann, 2021; Figurska and Matuska, 2013).

Academic research on the topic of employer branding is very limited to a few articles in the marketing literature, despite its growing popularity as a research topic. Berthon et al. (2005) also emphasised the growing importance of employer branding in an increasingly knowledge-based economy where knowledge workers are in short supply

(Elegbe, 2018; Urbancová and Hudáková, 2017). As a result, a massive talent war has erupted, that has given rise to the concept of employer branding (Elegbe, 2018).

Regardless of the increased recognition of the employer branding concept, most of the research is only restricted to marketing literature. Several researchers agreed on the same point of inadequate research and identified a gap (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Kashive et al., 2020). Furthermore, it is evident from the literature successful hiring, training and motivating employees is necessary to serve their customers well (Verčič, 2021). Thereby, staff actions must deliver the promises just like a brand makes for its customers. It is widely accepted that internal characteristics or practices are shifted to the external environment through their employees. Furthermore, currently, the telecommunication sector of Pakistan is focused on HRM practices that enhance employer branding to attract and retain employees (Ashraf et al., 2011; Khan and Naseem, 2015; Majid et al., 2016). Literature has also demonstrated the HRM practices, namely recruitment of talented employees, development of positive work attitudes, employee empowerment, compensation system, work-life balance, working environment and training and development for developing internal and external employer branding (Tanwa and Prasad, 2016; Verčič, 2021), in which the exploration of recruitment of talented employee, development of positive work attitudes, employee empowerment and compensation system is still in its infancy. Therefore, the basic purpose of this research is to explore the role of HRM practices for internal and external employer branding in the telecommunications sector of Pakistan.

### *1.1 Problem statement*

Money is no longer a top priority in today's talent-driven market. Instead, a company's reputation – its employer brand – is what matters to existing and potential employees (Urbancová and Hudáková, 2017). Finding personnel may be simple for firms; but, finding top talent is a much more difficult task (Xiu, 2021). These highly skilled potential employees are often aware of their worth to firms and they seek out the greatest options available while looking for reputable employment. As a result, employers must develop and understand how to effectively build an employer brand that will appeal to new prospects while also increasing their image among current employees (Lulla, 2019). Furthermore, in an era of rapid technological advancements, the human resources department is where a company's success or failure is determined (Moser et al., 2017). Therefore, this research is aimed to explore the role of human resource practices for making an organisation brand through targeting internal and external factors.

### *1.2 Research objective and question*

The main objective of this study is to explore which human resource practices can play the most important role in representing an organisation as an employer brand for attracting and retaining top talent?

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 HRM and employer branding

Typically, a brand can take the “form of words, signs, symbols, or designs which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (Martin et al., 2005). Now employees, too, can reinforce, strengthen and even create a brand image for their products and organisations (Martin et al., 2005). According to Figurska and Matuska (2013), branding carried away from marketing to the human resource area. Martin et al. (2005) believes that interest in employer brand concept as an HR topic is more than just a fashion because of three main trends:

- a the development of the services based economies
- b the importance of global and corporate branding
- c lastly, the growing importance of intellectual capital and intangible assets as sources of strategic competitive advantage.

Cover of *HR Magazine* in October 2006; suggested advice to business owners and managers, i.e., “Make sure employees support your brand” which highlighted the importance of the topic of employer branding in this ultra-competitive and dynamic era.

Employer branding consists of three steps (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). Firstly, an organisation alludes to the ‘value proposition’ applying the information regarding the qualities of existing employees, organisational culture, impressions of service or product quality and image of current employment which describes who they are, their expectations and future offerings (Verčič, 2021). Secondly, the value proposition of the employer brand should give a realistic image of organisational culture and the company (Kashive et al., 2020). If an employer’s image is not clear to employees, expectations will not be achieved and might be employees will leave the company (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). Thirdly, post-development about the value proposition, the company applies to attract the potential employees. As the ramification of the employer branding process, this concept is categorised as; internal employer branding and external employer branding. Internal employer branding is referred to as the EB process that focuses on the retention of existing employees as a target goal (Theurer et al., 2016). Recently, employers are increasingly becoming aware that their existing employees can be played a central role in building the brand image of an employer (Berthon et al., 2005). Thus, internal branding concentrates on existing employees who are already working in the organisation (Foster et al., 2010). So, internal employer branding is defined as employees who can send the brand promise of their organisations to potential employees or customers, develop a positive working environment which is the part of overall organisational culture as well as communicate authentic information of organisational culture to possible recruits and maintained culture values for other existing employees (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). And external employer branding is defined as developing a strong positive company image to increase employer attractiveness in the job market (Kemp and Spielmann, 2021; Stuss and Herdan, 2017). Moreover, it is related to communicating the advantages of joining a certain company to the external market. These advantages can be organisational culture, types of employees, leadership and

career development opportunities that a company offers (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Bharadwaj et al., 2021).

## *2.2 HRM practices for external employer branding*

### *2.2.1 Recruitment of talented employees*

The knowledge and talent of employees made external employer branding of an organisation. Organisational members (insourced or outsourced) are the voice of branding an employer (Gilani, 2011; Xiu, 2021). The recruitment of rightly skilled employees in an organisation improves competitive advantage by using their talent for manufacturing innovative products as well as introducing good services for customers which in return positively generate reputation and image of the company (Glaister, 2014). Moreover, the conceptual models of several scholars posit that the recruitment of talented employees influences the external brand image and reputation of an employer and creates an impact on all stakeholders (Verčič, 2021). Similarly, the study of Boudreau (2010) also claims that corporate goals can be accomplished by enhancing employer brand through hiring and maintaining talent. Therefore, the discussion leads to the following proposition:

P1 Recruitment of talented employees helps in the external employer branding of an organisation.

### *2.2.2 Development of positive work attitudes*

Employees are the key players in building employer branding. Their positive workplace attitudes and interactions with customers improve the external brand image of the company (Xiu, 2021). The positive attitudes of employees towards customers and organisation is developed through having good knowledge of the employer brand and the study of Balmer and Soenen (1999) also claims that good internal communication strategies that spread success stories of an organisation develop appropriate workplace attitudes and enhance employer brand for all stakeholders. Furthermore, when an organisation channelised and nurtured the talent of employees is positive, it can contribute to employees' performance and customer dealing, consequently, help in positive external employer branding of an organisation (Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2006). It is noticed that capable and talented staff is vital in developing employer branding of any organisation (Ahmed and Hemman, 2011; Ahmad et al., 2020). Employees' personal knowledge, working attitudes and organisational knowledge can be improved through other employees within the organisation that impacts employer brand image (Sadq et al., 2020). As a result, all employees by their services in the external and internal environment of the company assist in fulfilling the brand promises of all stakeholders (Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2006). Thus, the following proposition can be drawn:

P2 Positive employee attitudes at the workplace can build a good external employer image.

### 2.3 *HRM practices for internal employer branding*

#### 2.3.1 *Working environment*

The working environment is an essential aspect of employer branding because it changes the employee's perception of an organisation as an 'employee's first choice' (Corporate Leadership Council, 1999; Barrow and Mosley, 2011). Brands such as Reuters, Vodafone and Microsoft put extensive efforts into shaping working environments that reflect the core organisational values (Barrow and Mosley, 2011; Ahmad et al., 2020). As indicated by Aiken et al. (2000), the working environment can impact the employees' attitudes towards the organisation. Further, the addition of Chapman et al. (2005) study also demonstrates that the working environment is the main factor of job retention between employees. Concerning the dimension of employer branding, the report of the Corporate Leadership Council (1999) reveals that the working environment is one of the important elements contributing to internal employer branding (Ahmad et al., 2020). So, the following statement is generated.

P3 Working environment helps in internal employer branding.

#### 2.3.2 *Work-life balance*

HRM literature mentioned work-life balance as an important issue to be a consideration in recent years. Recently, organisations have started including WLB strategies in employer branding. The strategies of work-life balance encourage an employee in having integration and coordination of non-work and work perspective of lives (Felstead et al., 2002). Literature has recommended that WLB strategies can enhance the employer branding of an organisation that will lead to promoting employee retention culture (Hudson, 2005; Barrow and Mosley, 2011). It would be very difficult for an organisation to make an employer brand without including WLB as an important component (Barrow and Mosley, 2011; Monteiro et al., 2020). In terms of elements influencing employer attractiveness, WLB is a major determinant along with prestige and salary (Verčič, 2021). WLB introduces flexible working hours as an attracting factor for creating value propositions, developing retention behaviour and internal employer branding (Hillebrandt and Ivens, 2013). Subsequently, we can make the following proposition:

P4 Work-life balance helps in internal employer branding.

#### 2.3.3 *Training and development*

Training and development have gained much consideration in the context of developing current employees (Lievens et al., 2000). Development has received much attention for employer branding because it consists of personal development and good opportunities for training inside the organisation (Berthon et al., 2005). Nowadays, flexible work arrangements and development opportunities at the workplace have potential benefits that employees considered before and after joining any employer (McLeod, 2007; AlKahtani et al., 2021). Moreover, a company's contribution towards career development is more valued by experienced employees while taking signals of employer branding (Wilden et al., 2010). Further, companies have made huge investments in training and development activities for developing them as strong employer brands (Kucherov and Zavyalova, 2012). Thus, this discussion posited a proposition as follows:

- P5 Training and development activities can promote employer branding within the organisation.

#### *2.3.4 Employee empowerment*

Employee empowerment is a famous HR practice to achieve competitive advantage and talent retention. Empowerment is referred to as giving full authority and power to others within the organisation (Kivinda, 2021). It is about what requires to be performed rather than doing which are told to employees, therefore achieved desired objectives and goals (Kivinda, 2021). In addition, empowered organisations focused on team building, problem-solving, acting as enablers and facilitators (AlKahtani et al., 2021). So, the significance of employee empowerment enhances employee retention and the effectiveness of the organisation (Murray and Holmes, 2021). As a consequence, a strong internal employer brand is build up. Thus, the following proposition can be drawn:

- P6 Employee empowerment builds up internal employer branding.

#### *2.3.5 Compensation system*

Compensation is crucial for the attraction and retention of employees. Compensation management aims to promote the business goals by attracting, stimulating and retaining competent employees (Petera, 2011; Shieh, 2008). The compensation system (e.g., financial and non-financial rewards) of an organisation increased the motivation of employees to stay in the organisation and accomplished organisational objectives (Lee and Bruvold, 2003; Gardner et al., 2004; Kuvaas, 2006). The study of Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) also indicated that organisational advantages such as salary and rewards can improve internal employer branding (Kargas and Tsokos, 2020). Therefore, the proposition is proposed as:

- P7 Compensation system helps to promote internal employer branding.

### *2.4 Theoretical framework*

According to signalling theory (Connelly et al., 2011), all activities of an organisation are perceived as signals spreads by the organisation. In the process of job-seeking, potential employees evaluate the organisational signals as a characteristic of an employer, to bond asymmetries in the information (such as employer has much information than a potential employee). This information can be used by the potential employees to make their opinions regarding whether they would like to do a job in a particular organisation or not (Celani and Singh, 2011; Kargas and Tsokos, 2020). Further, the theory of social identity also demonstrates that the self-concept of a person is dependent on their membership with various social organisations (Lievens et al., 2007). An employee's self-concept is influenced by the reputation and image of the employer (Kargas and Tsokos, 2020). Employees formed self-concept after comparing with less favourable competitors and consequently, high-quality employees retained and attracted by the firm that can improve competitive advantage (App et al., 2012; Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). Thus, these two theories highlight the significance of the notion of 'employer branding'. Employer branding includes the activities that encourage the internal process of branding which has an impact on brand commitment and brand perception (Johnson et al., 2014; Gilani,



2011; Martin et al., 2011). In other words, employer branding is the gradually designing and implementing the process of the good reputation of the organisation with the help of key elements, through delivering the signals to stakeholders by the imagery, communication and behaviour using the identity of corporate (Riel, 2001; Ahmad et al., 2020).

### **3 Research methodology**

#### *3.1 Research approach*

The research context and the study questions guided the appropriate research paradigm and approach for the study (Hair, 2010). The qualitative research and inductive methodological stance are applied in this study to explore the HRM practices for internal and external employer branding studied in the telecommunication sector of Pakistan. This is supposed to be a suitable method for getting an in-depth understanding of this context (Cresswell, 2003).

#### *3.2 Population and sampling*

As the research was exploratory, a judgmental method of sampling was adopted to select 22 employees from the telecom sector because of constraints of availability, cost and time which is an acceptable method for qualitative research (Cresswell, 2013). The respondents were selected based on these criteria: they must be managerial employees and having more than two years of experience in telecommunication settings. It was found that a sample of 22 respondents (cases) was suitable to get meaningful and adequate findings in qualitative research which is in line with past studies (Chhabra and Sharma, 2014; Tanwar and Prasad, 2016).

#### *3.3 Interview question design*

To fulfil the assumptions of qualitative study, this research has used a semi-structured interview method to collect the response from employees, regarding HRM practices and employer branding. It is an appropriate method for generating a deep understanding of the topic (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). In addition, this method has minimised the problems of self-made validity questionnaire that was linked with the use of closed-ended questionnaires to know phenomena that is unique to participants (Jarvenpaa and Todd, 1996). The protocols of interview comprising open-ended questions were developed after reviewing the literature on HRM practices and employer branding (Randstadt, 2013; Tanwar and Prasad, 2016; Kucherov and Zavyalova, 2012; App et al., 2012) and its usage in telecommunication settings (Zahoor et al., 2015; Keino, et al., 2017; Khalid and Tariq, 2015). Interview questions were included under the supervision of telecommunication professionals that have not participated in the study and duly adjusted after taking the expert's opinion (Turner, 2010; Ahmad et al., 2020).

### 3.4 Data analysis techniques

In the present research, the answers of the respondents were recorded on audio devices and stored as a repository that was converted into transcriptions. The steps of qualitative analysis as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed. Firstly, the interviews were transcribed, secondly, the coding scheme was introduced to determine the relevant text about the exploration of HRM practices that are helpful for internal and external employer branding in the telecommunication sector. Based on the codes, key themes were introduced and they were re-identified to confirm coherency and named lately in themes of the same ideas. For this purpose, NVivo-11 software was used. The remaining results were described in the form of themes and interrelationships with comparative strength as presented in matrix coding findings (Table 1) and displayed visually in the conceptual model (Figure 1).

## 4 Data analysis and result discussion

### 4.1 Demographic information

The demographic profile of the respondents is given below which explains that most of the employees were experienced and had a higher level of education with a variety of age groups including both genders in the sample (Table 1).

**Table 1** Demographic information

<i>Variable</i>		<i>No. of employees</i>
Gender	Male	12
	Female	10
Age	25–30 years	3
	30–35 years	4
	35 years and above	15
Education	Postgraduated	18
	Graduated	4
Experience	Less than 5 years	6
	5 years and above	16

### 4.2 Thematic analysis

The views of the interviewees highlighted the key HRM practices for internal and external employer branding from the current employees' perspectives. The thematic analysis was performed on the responses gathered from 22 employees of various telecommunication companies.

#### 4.2.1 *Employees' perception about the concept of employer branding*

It is quite obvious that the majority of telecommunication companies are using employer branding. Most of the employees have a clear understanding of the employer branding concept. Employee A said that:

“Our reputation is good that’s why our company is considered first for getting telecommunication services. It is because of our growing performance and organisational culture that is communicated in the market and our competitors are competing with us in our services day by day.”

#### 4.2.2 *Employer branding strategies in the market*

During the interview, employees have reported few employer branding strategies (e.g., corporate social responsibility and variety of experiences on the job, etc.) used in the telecommunication sector of Pakistan. The main purpose of these strategies is to establish a lasting relationship between the employee and the client to make a profit. Employee B revealed his views as:

“My company is more socially involved inside the society and my top management communicated that appropriate usage of money is essential. Thus, giving back money to society is part of this organisation. For example, a donation to hospitals and street child education.”

One of the HR managers of the company said:

“Interacting with different types of personalities and cultures forced me to deal with them strategically which gives me a variety of experiences and challenges in my job. According to my opinion, it is important for staying in this role and it eliminates boredom from the job.”

The marketing manager indicated that:

“Retention of employees and positive word of mouth create employers’ existence that is helpful for recruitment of talented employees.”

#### 4.2.3 *Recruitment of talented employees*

Talented employees are the heart of the telecommunication industry of Pakistan (see Table 3). The HR officers describe that the company is working on hiring and maintaining competent employees.

#### 4.2.4 *Employee's attitudes for marking good employer brand image*

Attitudes of employees are classified as the main factor for external employer branding. Employees shared their opinions as:

“Positive employee attitudes are translated into customer satisfaction and enhance the reputation of the company which has a link with the external employer branding via positive word of mouth and good experiences of market.”

#### 4.2.5 *Working environment for retaining behaviour*

The working environment is essential for engaging existing employees. As Employee D said:

“Business culture is important to me as compared to remuneration for staying in this company.”

On asking, what they like in the working environment. An employee replied:

“I love working here. I made many good friends and we work in a team to achieve excellent results. My colleagues are very friendly to me.”

Another employee mentioned:

“Our company gives a secure environment. I can work night shifts here. The company provides pick and drop service from office to home. I feel energetic at work and my team is very helpful and understanding.”

#### *4.2.6 Work-life balance forcing an employee to be committed*

Telecommunication companies of Pakistan are considering WL balance as a crucial element for internal employer branding. According to one marketing executive:

“Sindh and Punjab offices have an elegant gym. Many fun events such as new year’s celebrations, hikes, family outputs are started to develop a balance among personal and work life that leads to improving internal employer branding.”

#### *4.2.7 Training and development for internal employer branding*

Many training programs have been started in the telecommunication companies for increasing the talent of existing employees. An Employee H said:

“My job performance is enhanced since I have attended the regular training programs offered by the company. I am planning to stay in this organisation for a longer period for learning new things and through it, the internal good image of the employer is spreading, we love to work in a team.”

An Employee E said:

“Since I joined this company, my work efficiency has improved. Training programs that are offered here are mandatory for all employees; in this way, we build professional networking with other employees within a company and show affection to the organisation.”

The answers revealed that most employees were motivated by the T&D programs. Only a few of them found it boring.

#### *4.2.8 Compensation system affecting the decision of employees to stay in the organisation*

The top management of telecommunication companies in Pakistan understands that employee commitment is dependent on a good salary package because employees would make more efforts to achieve outstanding organisational results. Employee F reported:

“When you are working in a prestigious organisation, an employee has a high expectation for meeting the cost of living. To show the strong organisational commitment for me competitive compensation system is necessary that does not only provide a financial package but rather it should include non-financial benefits for becoming an employer brand.”

#### 4.2.9 Employee empowerment increase internal employer branding

Employee empowerment authorised employees to make righteous decisions for solving customer complaints or unusual service requests. The answer is given by the customer service support officer:

“My company provides the equilibrium of responsibility and freedom therefore I can solve the customer complaint immediately. If I cannot solve the problem, it can transfer to the managers.”

#### List of HRM practices for employer branding

The majority of telecommunication employees have written these HRM practices in their companies such as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2** List of HRM practices for employer branding

<i>Sr.</i>	<i>HRM practices</i>	<i>No. of employees</i>
1	Recruitment of talented employees	16
2	Employee's attitudes	20
3	Working environment	17
4	Work-life balance	19
5	Training and development	15
6	Compensation system	21
7	Employee empowerment	14
8	Insurance coverage	10
9	Foreign work projects	12
10	Job characteristics	13
11	Transformational leadership	14
12	Constructive feedback	11

#### 4.2.10 Obstacles in implementing the employer brand strategies

The approval of senior management is required for the implementation of employer branding strategy. Interviewees replied:

“Most executives are not interested in such problems that need action in my company. I have more than two years' experience, company has the same complaints regarding employer branding that need internal investigation but it is not resolved.”

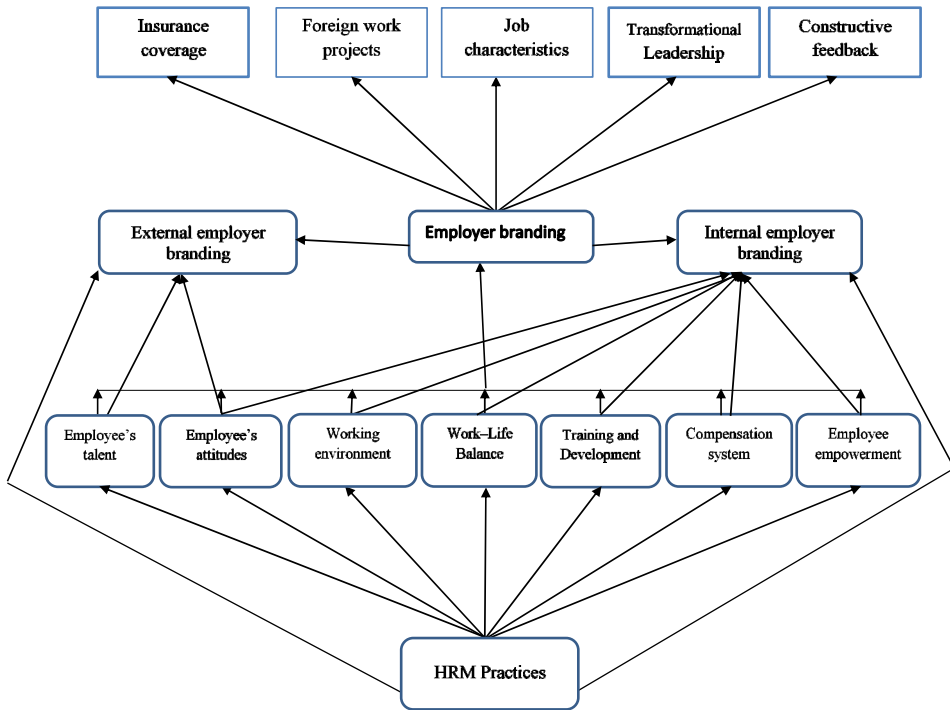
Likewise, the HRM department is the major obstacle in executing strategies of employer branding. Several interviews have shown it.

The company has doubtful recruitment practices and policies due to which we are not getting the right candidates and it is also not helping positively in employer branding.

Moreover, the outputs of the analysis strongly suggested that employer branding can be improved through HRM practices in the telecom settings of Pakistan (Figure 1).

**Table 3** Matrix coding query for HR practices of internal and external employer branding

Sr.	Respondents	HRM practices for external employer branding			HRM practices for internal employer branding			
		Recruitment of talent	Employee's attitudes	Working environment	Work-Life Balance	Training and development	Compensation system	Employee empowerment
1	EMP A	2	5	3	4	1	3	2
2	EMP B	3	6	2	3	2	4	2
3	EMP C	4	5	3	4	2	5	3
4	EMP D	3	5	4	4	2	6	2
5	EMP E	2	4	4	4	1	3	2
6	EMP F	3	3	4	3	1	4	3
7	EMP G	2	2	3	3	1	5	3
8	EMP H	3	4	3	3	1	2	3
9	EMP I	3	3	3	3	2	3	2
10	EMP J	2	3	2	4	1	4	2
11	EMP K	3	3	2	3	1	5	3
12	EMP L	2	2	2	3	1	6	3
13	EMP M	2	4	3	3	2	3	2
14	EMP N	3	4	2	4	2	4	2
15	EMP O	3	2	3	4	1	3	2
16	EMP P	2	2	3	3	1	2	3
17	EMP Q	1	3	2	3	2	5	3
18	EMP R	2	2	2	2	1	4	3
19	EMP S	3	3	2	3	2	3	2
20	EMP T	2	4	2	2	1	5	3
21	EMP U	3	3	3	4	1	6	2
22	EMP V	2	4	4	3	1	4	2

**Figure 1** Conceptual framework (see online version for colours)

## 5 Discussion

The current exploratory research sheds light on the HRM practices and their application in facilitation for external and internal employer branding. The overall opinions of employees revealed that HRM practices play a significant role in employer branding in telecommunication settings (Gilani and Jamshed, 2016; Monteiro et al., 2020). Moreover, as per the call of many studies (Martin, et al., 2005; Biswas and Suar, 2016; Tanwar and Prasad, 2016; App et al., 2012). The present research uncovered a deeper understanding of the underlying process of usage of HRM practices as a tool for internal and external employer branding in telecommunication settings via existing employees. The findings of the thematic analysis proved that working environment, work-life balance, training and development, compensation system and employee empowerment aided in the building of internal employer branding. The responses received from employees are similar to the findings of Tanwar and Prasad (2016), Alshuaibi and Shamsudin (2016) and Aurand et al. (2005) indicated that HRM enhanced internal employer branding. The majority of the employees said the usefulness of the compensation system, work-life balance and working environment are important ingredients for increasing length in their organisations (Peters, 2011; Hillebrandt and Ivens, 2013; Barrow and Mosley, 2011). Congruently, the views of participants showed that employees' talent and employee's attitudes helped in the promotion of employer brand externally. This result is consistent with the studies that reported the role of HRM for gaining competitive advantage and

external employer branding (Bharadwaj et al., 2021; Parmar, 2014; Gregorka 2017; Wahba and Elmanadily, 2015). Most of the employees highlighted that employees' attitudes enhance employer attractiveness (Xiu, 2021). It has been also argued by Sadq et al. (2020) that employees' attitudes impact the employer brand image (Barbaros, 2020). In addition, this study extended the findings of Gilani and Jamshed (2016) that employees' attitudes are helpful for the external recruitment process of potential employees but it can also be applied for achieving committed employees. As it is explained in the research of Zhao et al. (2018), that the attitudes of existing employees influence customers, co-workers, or all stakeholders. In line with this disposition, the results of this study support the notion by qualitative insights of managerial level employees who said that using HRM practices for employer branding in the telecommunication sector is one of the emerging mechanisms. Therefore, it proved the conceptualisation of Zahoor et al. (2015) who deemed HRM as an effective tool of employer branding in a telecom setting of Pakistan.

Likewise, additional themes are identified from employees' perspective that other HRM practices such as insurance coverage, foreign work projects, job characteristics (including task variety, identity and significance), transformational leadership style and constructive feedback promoted employer brand image of an organisation and these results were same with the studies (Sengupta et al., 2015; Sahu et al., 2018; Cascio and Graham, 2016). In other words, consistent with the job characteristic model (Hackman and Oldham, 1976) and transformational leadership style (Bass, 1990) can also increase a firm's creditability which shaped the employees and external community behaviour towards the firm (Barbaros, 2020). Moreover, in this study, respondents also indicated a mix of views about employer branding strategies and obstacles on the implementation stage of those strategies. One possible cause of this failure is; poor HRM department collaboration with the marketing department within the company. The telecommunication sector of Pakistan applies HRM policies for internal working rather than fostering brand values and marketing strategies focus on spreading message externally rather than internally projection of policies. Consequently, the lack of an adequate coordinated model among the two departments resulted in poor employer branding strategies implementation (Aurang et al., 2005; Ahmad et al., 2020).

### *5.1 Theoretical implications*

The current research attempted to search the HRM practices for promoting internal and external employer branding, from the perceptive of current employees in telecommunication settings. Theoretically, it is a unique inquiry that combines the theoretical views of management (Gilani and Jamshed, 2016; Tanwar and Prasad, 2016; Biswas and Suar, 2016) and theories of social identity and signalling (Connelly et al., 2011; Monteiro et al., 2020); thereby, adding on the literature of employer branding and human resources management with deeming the usage of HRM practices for internal and external employer branding in telecommunication settings.

### *5.2 Practical implications*

In practical orientations, incorporating a healthy working environment, good work-life balance, training and development opportunities, competitive compensation system,



employee empowerment, use of existing employees' talents and positive workplace attitudes can aid a company to develop a positive employer image. HR and marketing managers of the telecom sector should develop a stronger employer brand by focusing on HRM practices through it they would be able to retain and attract a talented workforce. Furthermore, corporate social responsibility can be used as a promotional tool by employees to spread the word-of-mouth message among all stakeholders.

### *5.3 Limitations and future research directions*

Apart from few theoretical and practical implications of this research, some limitations are discussed here as it is detained for qualitative outputs to gather data from a small number of managerial employees of telecommunication companies that puts restrained the generalisability of these results to other geographical areas or other sectors. Therefore, it is suggested that future scholars should perform quantitative inquiry for validation of this study and include multiple sectors to increase the generalisability. The blueprints of this research follow that future qualitative researches can be done on a larger sample to have solid findings that can prove the results generally. Furthermore, other sectors of the economy may have different HRM practices as compared to the telecommunication sector. In this regard, it is advisable to do future studies simultaneously in various organisations to get good insights into the phenomenon. The recent qualitative study obtained information from employees regarding how HRM practices are helping in their organisation for internal and external employer branding. Future studies can be performed on; how obstacles can be minimised in the stage of employer branding implementation and what are the other HRM practices or strategies for enhancement of employer branding and their benefits and drawbacks to an organisation.

## **6 Conclusions**

The goal of this study was to gain a better knowledge of the underlying process of using HRM practices as a tool for internal and external employer branding in telecommunications settings through existing employees. Hence, through thematic analysis, this research offers insight into HRM practices and how they might be applied to facilitate external and internal employer branding. It is confirmed from this exploratory study that HRM practices act as a meaningful promotional tool for employer branding. Furthermore, it is revealed that compensation system, work-life balance, working environment and employees' positive attitudes are beneficial for the current and potential employees. In a nutshell, the participants of the current research recommended that corporate social responsibility enhance employer branding in the telecom context. Telecommunication organisations are facing critical problems in building and implementation of employer branding strategies that should be resolved by building a positive employer brand image.

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