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Research Article

Employer Branding Practices and Employee Retention: Role of Person-Organization Fit as a Mediator

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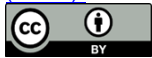**Correspondence**
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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between employer branding and employee retention, with a particular emphasis on the mediation role of person-organization fit in the healthcare sector of Pakistan. The aim is to substantiate the research findings by employing social identity theory as a foundational framework to unfold the existing theoretical gaps. A survey approach was implemented, which involved the administration of structured questionnaires to 468 nurses in the hospitals of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. The results indicate that employee retention is positively impacted by employer branding, with person-organization fit functioning as a mediating factor in this relationship. Organizations that implement effective employer branding strategies are more likely to retain their employees, as evidenced by the existence of person-organization fit. According to author's knowledge there is a relatively small body of research that examines the proposed relationship within the Pakistani healthcare sector, with the person-organization fit serving as a mediator. The research will be instrumental in the development of strategies to enhance staff retention in the healthcare sector, which will be beneficial for healthcare practitioners.

KEYWORDS

Employer branding; Person-organization fit; Employee retention; Social identity theory; Healthcare sector

1 | INTRODUCTION

Employee turnover remains a subject of interest in the field of organization since it affects the various facets of organizational performance. Reduced staff retention leads to high costs of hiring new employees, orienting and training them, and pervasively lost productivity costs estimates at between 50% to 200% of their annual salary (Cascio, 2020). It is, therefore, important to identify ways of minimizing such cost constraints through effective staff retention practices. Long-term employment enhances efficiency and effectiveness in an organization by leveraging the competency of staff with vast working experience. This has, thereby, resulted in enhanced efforts made by organizations in retaining employees and discouraging them from turnover (Khan et al., 2021). Various strategies are being employed by organizations to promote their organization and make them the choice of employment (Bharadwaj & Yameen, 2021). One of them is an employer branding strategy that has become one of the successful HR practices to retain talented employees (Bharadwaj et al., 2022). Branding increases organization's image as an employer, therefore important for gaining competitive advantage, by rewarding and retaining employees, as well as increasing the overall levels of their engagement (Renaud et al., 2016; Yousf & Khurshid, 2024). Some recent and similar studies have focused on the aspect of employer branding (EB) as one of the critical success factors for an organization and may act as a driver for employee engagement and reducing turnover rates (Bharadwaj et al., 2022; Brown-Nelson, 2024; Chiu et al., 2020).

While, previous research has investigated employer branding (EB) and employee retention (ER), nonetheless, literature lacks ample research on how person-organization fit affects this link (Kashyap & Verma, 2018; Mouton & Bussin, 2019). Person-organization fit (POF) in this context is a measure of how well the values, objectives, and personality of a person match the characteristics of an organization (Chowdhury & Kang, 2022; Kasekende et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2022). Employees who possesses similar personal values as of their organizations are likely to develop positive perceptions about workplace than those with dissimilar personal values (Presbitero et al., 2016). Several other studies have also indicated that a strong level of employee-organizational value fit may leads to lower levels of employee burnout (Kilroy et al., 2017), improved job satisfaction (Kaur & Kang, 2021) and higher staff retention (Naz et al., 2020). High POF corresponds with high staff retention. It might seem as though an employee is losing a piece of themselves when their identity is strongly linked to the company's reputation and image (Naz et al., 2020). In light of the available literature, this study contributes significantly to the employee retention research domain by addressing several gaps in the existing research. Firstly, the study explores the relationship between EB and ER, an area with limited empirical evidence, Pakistani context in particular. Understanding how EB affects ER in Pakistan, where the job market and organizational dynamics differ from western context of studies, and could provide useful insights for both academia and industry practitioners. Secondly, this study is also valuable in the sense that it introduces and examines POF as a mediator, offering a fresh perspective on how EB can influence employee retention through POF within the organizations. Finally, the study responds to calls for further investigation into the effects of Social Identity Theory (SIT) as an underpinning theory on the proposed framework (Bharadwaj et al., 2022). According to SIT, EB is likely to have an impact on employees' identification, which is characterized as a feeling of belonging for an organization because socially conscious businesses are better able to preserve positive relationships and fit with their workforce (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).Thus SIT helps us understand how POF can serve as a strong mechanism in retaining employees, particularly in the healthcare sector, which is characterized by high turnover rates.

Building on this premise, the study seeks to answer the following research questions to accomplish study objectives.

- Does employer branding is related to employee retention
- Does person-organization fit mediates the relationship between employer branding and employee retention

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Impact of Employer Branding on Employee Retention

Due to the difficulty in recruiting and retaining highly competent personnel, EB has garnered significant attention in a disruptive economy. According to a study conducted by Capgemini, the disparity between highly qualified and less skilled employees is not only substantial, but also expanding (Banga, 2022). Likewise, another report showing that the United States had the greatest skill disparity at 70%, while India is in second place at 64% (Rios et al., 2020). In response, organizations can cultivate a pool of dedicated and competent employees by implementing an effective EB strategy. This is because employees tend to judge employers based on how effectively they brand themselves (Reis et al., 2021) and are likely to remain loyal to organizations that reciprocate their loyalty through long-term appreciation and acknowledgement (Bharadwaj & Yameen, 2021). This is because employees tend to judge employers based on how effectively they brand themselves (Reis et al., 2021) and are likely to remain loyal to organizations that reciprocate their loyalty through long-term appreciation and acknowledgement (Bharadwaj & Yameen, 2021). In the domain of human resource management (HRM), EB has been adopted from the marketing discipline (Deepa & Baral, 2022; Theurer et al., 2022). There are two dimensions to EB: the first dimension serves as an incentive for incumbents to remain with the organization in the long term, while the second dimension serves as an attraction factor for prospective employees (Theurer et al., 2022). Consequently, both prospective and present employees have a vested interest in EB (Ahmed et al., 2022). EB as defined by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) is a three-step procedure. To start with, an organization creates its 'value proposition' through the use of information that pertains culture of the organization, quality of the organization's product or service, and image of the current employees. This information qualifies the organization to understand what it wants, what it anticipates to achieve and its capacity to deliver those expectations. Second, the expected value proposition that is created should differ from that of rivals and competitors. This is also named as the external marketing of the employer brand (Tanwar & Prasad, 2016). The third step in the process is internal marketing which is aimed at ensuring that the brand promise is delivered to the applicants. The purpose of internal marketing is to maintain a workforce that would embraces the organization's vision with its true spirit (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Prior studies have stressed on the need to adopt EB strategies to retain focus and goodwill of the employees while serving the organization (Chandrasekaran, 2020; Kumar et al., 2021). Following studies have supported and elaborated the effects of EB initiatives on employees retention (Alzaid & Dukhaykh, 2023; Chopra et al., 2024), employer brand image (Özcan & Elçi, 2020) and employee engagement (Yousf & Khurshid, 2024). For example, research conducted by Özcan and Elçi (2020) provides empirical evidence affirming that the EB-ER relates significantly with each other. Organizations with strong EB may experience an upward trend in their employee retention rates since the employer image influences the employees' perception of the organization and determines their level of job satisfaction. Similarly, Tanwar and Prasad (2016) pointed out that the EB plays a crucial role in case of employee attraction and retention as well. It discovered that a favorable EB, creates an appealing image about workplaces, significantly boosts employees' intent to stay with their current organization. Based on the assumptions, the study hypothesizes that

H1: Employer branding is positively related with employee retention

2.2 | Mediating Role of Person-Organization Fit

Many practitioners are becoming interested in POF, as it is a critical aspect of employment and is consequently associated with job attitudes, organizational retention, selection criteria and outcomes (Naz et al., 2020). This concept is based on the premise that aligning employees' values with those of their employer can improve organizational success and individual productivity (Ma et al., 2022). Strategically aligning individuals who have similar tendencies with the company's culture positively contributes to an organization's competitiveness and decreases turnover (Komariyah et al., 2021). While POF is vital throughout the employment lifecycle, it is particularly crucial during the recruiting phase, as it provides the basis for subsequent employment outcomes (Qin et al., 2020). Considerations of fit during the recruiting process, for instance, is the most important predictor of organizational attractiveness. A job seeker's decision to continue with the hiring process or accept an offer to work for the company may ultimately be influenced by these impressions (Ghielen et al., 2021). Therefore, organizations can leverage their enhanced attractiveness to job applicants by broadening their talent pools (Paluch & Shum, 2022). Furthermore, careful POF assessment during recruitment can mitigate the risk of costly outcomes associated with misfit including negative work attitudes and counter work productive work behaviors that may likely arise if the unsuitable individual might join the organization, (Chi et al., 2020; Englert et al., 2023).

In such circumstances, the effective employer branding initiatives can contribute to the establishment of POF with the current and perspective employees (Lary & Omar, 2021). Boon et al. (2011), revealed that positive reputation, sound human resource management policies and positive culture, including learning and development, proactive recruitment and communication with the employee leads to higher POF among the employees. The study by Boon (2023) also reported a direct relationship between EB, POF and employee engagement. The study found that the POF partially mediates the association between corporate branding and employee engagement. It is somehow found consistent with the social identity theory (SIT), which argues that people use social categories to characterize and classify both themselves and other people (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). These social categories can help people recognize their place in the environment and help establish order in it. Hence, the EB enables organizational members evaluate their personhood with the organization. It improves person-organization fit when they feel that they share similar values and when their values align with those of the organization that they are seeking to join. Based on the literature reviewed, the study hypothesizes that

H2: Person-organization fit positively mediates the relationship between employer branding and employee retention
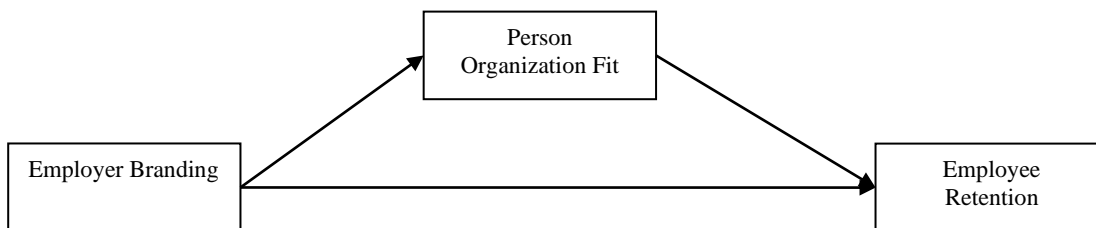

Figure 1: Research Framework

3 | METHODS

3.1 | Research Design

This study uses a quantitative research design, employing a deductive approach and a cross-sectional framework to achieve study objectives. This quantitative approach is suitable for examining proposed connections among employee retention (ER), employer branding (EB), and person-organization fit (POF). The study's empirical confirmation of theoretical constructs like Social Identity Theory (SIT) and the proposed conceptual perspective is made possible via adopting deductive approach, which guarantees that the research builds upon preexisting ideas and literature. In order to capture the current dynamics between the variables within the designated context, a cross-sectional design makes it easier to gather data at a single moment in time. In a real-world context, like the healthcare industry, where nurse turnover rates are a major problem, this method works especially well for understanding the linkages and mediating effects.

3.2 | Population and Sampling

This study has been conducted on the nurses employed in the healthcare sector. According to the Ministry of Finance, Government of Pakistan, the cumulative count of registered nurses in Pakistan for the period spanning from 2021 to 2022 amounts to 121,245 personnel (MOF-Pakistan (2022). Nevertheless, this data is consolidated on a national scale and lacks precise information regarding the allocation of nurse staff among specific hospitals or cities, such as Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Therefore, the exact count of nurses in these cities is presently unknown. In light of the limited availability of comprehensive data regarding the allocation of nursing personnel in particular areas, this study utilizes a statistical framework to determine the sample size, The lack of specific local data can thus be compensated by following a statistical approach which guarantees an adequate sample size and power. Hair et al. (2019) called for the use of observation to variable ratio technique to determine a viable sample size. According to them a 20:1 observation to variable ratio is adequate to perform inferences and estimations. This implies that for every variable used in the study, at least twenty participants should be sampled for the study to yield meaningful results. Because of the multifaceted nature of the healthcare system and factors influencing turnover rates in this industry, it was necessary to obtain a large sample size. This study, therefore follows the guidelines through first identifying the number of variables to be measured and then estimating the required sample size for those variables.

3.3 | Data Collection

In order to achieve a high response rate due to the possibility of some participants dropping out before completing the questions, oversampling was used with the aim of having a robust final sample. A total of 468 questionnaires have been administered to the nurses working in different hospitals of Islamabad and Rawalpindi. With regards to the distribution, an effort was made to secure a wide spectrum of participants from different departments and shifts in order to encompass as many aspects of nursing as possible. Of the 468 questionnaires administered, the total number 282 were filled and returned thus giving the study a response rate of 60%. This response rate is in concordance with other studies carried out in the healthcare sector whereby research participants are subjected to heavy workload remain busy in most cases thus less time to participate in such research studies.

3.4 | Measurement Scales

The questionnaire was developed from previously validated research instruments to ensure its robustness and relevance. Respondents would be given a close-ended questionnaire, "and the response scale for all items ranged from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree" on a 5-point Likert scale." Maintaining the privacy of employee identities during questionnaire participation is an ethical imperative to uphold confidentiality. Employer branding (EB): was measured using 13 items Likert scale developed by Tanwar and Prasad (2016). Sample items are "my organization has a fair attitude towards employees." Person-organization fit (POF): Four items developed by (Valentine et al., 2002) were used to assess employees' alignment with the organization's values and culture. Sample item is "I feel that my personal values are a good fit with this organization." Employee Retention (ER): was measured using 13 items Likert scale developed by (Elsafty & Oraby, 2022). Sample item is "I want to stay with the company for a long time."

3.5 | Data Analysis

The partial least squares method of structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to analyze the data. The study initially verified the measuring constructs and subsequently assessed the hypothesized model using the two-step method of (Hair et al., 2014). Initially, the measurement model underwent assessment The measurement model employed to gauge and establish the connection between the latent constructs and their observable indicators. The model's internal consistency, reliability, and convergent validity were assessed using composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) (Mehboob & Haque, 2024a, 2024b). Table 1 illustrates that all reflective constructs had a CR of 0.7 or higher (Hair et al., 2019). This suggests that the measurement model exhibits a high level of reliability. Additionally, the validity of reflective constructs was assessed using convergent (AVE) and discriminant (Fornell-Larcker) validity criteria (Hair et al., 2019). The AVE values and outer loadings of each item in relation to its construct were greater than the benchmark values of 0.50, after the items EB_8, EB_11, and EB_13 were excluded for insufficient factor loadings (see Table 1). Consequently, this suggests that the measurement model has demonstrated reliability and convergent validity. The discriminant validity of the construct was evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which stipulates that the square root of the AVE for the particular construct must be greater than the correlations between the construct and other variables in the model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The discriminant-validity of the measurement model was confirmed by the fact that the square root of AVE (bold emphasis) was greater than the other square roots, as demonstrated in Table 2.

4 | RESULTS

Table1
Reliability, Convergent Validity and Outer Loadings of Reflective Constructs

"Reflective Constructs	Items	Loadings	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
Employer Branding	EB_1	0.806	0.921	0.906	0.541
	EB_2	0.778			
	EB_3	0.805			
	EB_4	0.756			
	EB_5	0.664			
	EB_6	0.718			
	EB_7	0.746			
	EB_9	0.654			
	EB_10	0.746			
	EB_12	0.664			
Person-Organization Fit	POF_1	0.857	0.906	0.863	0.707
	POF_2	0.869			
	POF_3	0.861			
	POF_4	0.774			
Employee Retention	ER_1	0.787	0.877	0.813	0.641
	ER_2	0.755			
	ER_3	0.853			
	ER_4	0.803"			

EB = Employer Branding; ER = Employee Retention; POF = Person-organization fit

Table 2
Fornell-Larcker Criterion: Discriminant Validity of Reflective Constructs

REFLECTIVE CONSTRUCTS	EB_C	ER_C	POF_C
EB_C	0.736		
ER_C	0.360	0.800	
POF_C	0.383	0.590	0.841

EB = Employer Branding; ER = Employee Retention; POF = Person-organization fit

Table 3 presents the mean and zero-order correlations for the suggested constructs. Most of the statistics support the primary assumptions, as anticipated and predicted. We are certain that the directionality of our hypothesis is reasonable in light of these observations.

Table 3

Mean and Inter-Correlation of Latent Constructs

S#	Construct	Mean	1	2
1	Employer Branding	3.59		
2	Person-Organization Fit	3.51	0.363	
3	Employee retention	3.4.3	0.499	0.334

The hypothesized associations were tested for relevance and significance in the model during the second stage of PLS-SEM. Table 4 shows a substantive link between EB and ER ($\beta = 0.364$, $p < 0.001$). These findings corroborate the H1 hypothesis. For mediation analysis, the study has adopted transmittal approach to mediation conceived by (Rungtusanatham et al., 2014), this technique enables us to not only analyze the direct path between EB and ER, but also intervening process that explains how POF mediates this relationship. The mediation results indicated that the effect of EB on ER was significantly mediated by POF (EB -> POF -> ER: $\beta = 0.203$, $p < 0.001$). Hence, validating our second hypothesis H2.

Table 4

Structural Path Analysis: Hypotheses Results

Relationship	Hypotheses	β	t	sig	sig@0.05	Decision
"Direct Paths (Model 1) Without mediator EB->ER Mediating Paths (Model 2) including direct effect paths after mediation" Direct Effect	H1	0.364	7.846	0.000	Significant	Supported
(EB-> ER) Indirect Effect		0.157	2.848	0.013	Significant	
(EB -> POF -> ER)	H2	0.203	4.770	0.000	Significant	Supported

EB = Employer Branding; ER = Employee Retention; POF = Person-organization fit

5 | DISCUSSION

The theoretical model examined in this study establishes a connection between EB and ER. Employees who believe their companies have a great brand are therefore more likely to remain with them for a longer period of time. According to the study's findings, ER is strongly predicted by EB. The results are consistent with earlier research suggesting that EB has a positive impact on ER (Alzaid, Dukhaykh, 2023; Bhardwaj et al., 2022; Raj 2020). The study also found POF as a mediator in the relationship EB and ER. These impressions of EB may indicate to employees that organizations genuinely value them, which ultimately serves as a mechanism to create a lasting connection between employees and an organization, hence increasing staff retention (Hadi & Ahmed, 2018). This found in congruence with the past studies indicating POF as key contributor in inducing staff retention (Azeem et al., 2021; Bharadwaj & Yameen, 2021; Tanwar & Prasad, 2016). Top talents are discerning regarding their employers and make decisions based on the value provided by the employer (Maczuga, 2021). EB facilitates the retention of skilled personnel whose competencies enhance organizational value. Consequently, the implementation of EB is no longer an option but a requirement (Reis et al. 2021). Therefore, the findings confirm the importance of aligning EB strategies with the POF perspective to employee retention.

The degree of congruence between employers and employees has been explained by the person-organization fit perspective in conjunction with employer brand research (Christiaans, 2012). If these two aligns, the individual will be more drawn to the organization (Ergun & Tatar, 2018). Potential employees assess the company brand and make comparisons with their own personalities and ideals. Employers who have a strong employer brand are able to draw in candidates with the qualities that best meet their needs. EB in this vein serves as a tactic for sharing the organization's mission with its employees, enabling staff members to make sure they mesh well with the

organization's values (Parmar, 2014; Sharma & Tanwar, 2023; Srivastava & Bhatnagar, 2010). The finding thus support the earlier studies on the POF, prospective employees match an organization's brand with their own values, needs, and ideas (Bhatnagar & Srivastava, 2008; Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). The findings are also found consistent with the SIT, which argues that the way employees perceive the subjective value of being part of a group has a considerable impact on their judgment, assessments, and intentions to remain or leave the group. Therefore, having a unique and socially responsible image sets an organization apart from others and strengthens employees' sense of belonging and connection (Maignan & Ferrell, 2001). Employees with a strong sense of self are eager to keep their memberships, and as a result, they exhibit positive behaviors like being driven to remain connected to the existing organization (Van Dick & Monzani, 2017).

6 | MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The study has significant implications for the managerial community and practice. The initial implication pertains to the utilization of EB as a potent instrument for talent retention. Investing in EB generates a reputation that attracts exceptional employees and fosters a sense of belongingness among current employees. Managers should also recognize the value of EB in enhancing relationships with employees, as it is implemented with a specific strategic intent to obtain a competitive advantage. Moreover, the result indicates that the POF is the sole mediator in the relationship between the EB and ER. This suggests that the EB, while essential for enhanced outcomes, do not necessarily result in the establishment of ER unless potential employees establish a strong POF. Potential employees with meticulously developed career goals actively seek organizations that align with their cultural and social preferences prior to initiating contact for employment opportunities. As a result, organizations must prioritize the alignment of employee values with organizational values, norms, and objectives to foster strategic, sustainable, and positive employee behaviors at work.

7 | LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Although the study makes a theoretical contribution, it is important to consider certain limitations and cautions. First, our ability to draw causal conclusions from the tested model is limited by the cross-sectional research approach. Despite the fact that our model was created utilizing theoretical and empirical literature, and the results we obtained confirmed the expected causality. Experiments and longitudinal study designs should be employed in future studies to test the proposed connection and firmly validate this pattern of relationships. Additionally, it will aid in reducing the impact of potential common method variance (CMV) within the dataset. Furthermore, the study is limited by its research context and the specific target population. The study aims to investigate the relationship between EB and its influence on IWB; however, these limitations constrain the generalizability of our findings to other work environments. Further research is required across various institutional and organizational contexts to provide robust theoretical and empirical validation for the proposed framework. Research designs utilizing cross-cultural and cross-institutional comparative approaches can facilitate this endeavor.

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