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## EMPLOYER BRANDING : AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract

*This paper discusses employer branding from an Islamic perspective. Islam is a way of life and so do the employer and employee relationship, which strengthens employer branding in an organization. The definition, importance and process related to employer branding are discussed in the context of human resource management, such as job satisfaction and work environment. In addition to that, related human resource management practices such as recruitment and selection were discussed in an Islamic context. Related concepts such as employee value proposition (EVP), ethics and Islamic values were discussed with reference from Al-Quran and Hadith. The paper concludes with a few suggestions and recommendations on instilling Islamic values for effective employer branding.*

*Keywords: Employer branding, Islam, human resource management*

### Abstrak

*Studi ini membahas tentang employer branding dilihat dari perspektif Islam. Islam merupakan sebuah cara hidup yang juga mengatur pola hubungan majikan dan karyawan, yang memperkuat brand branding dalam sebuah organisasi. Definisi, kepentingan, serta proses yang berkaitan dengan employer branding dibahas dalam konteks pengelolaan sumber daya manusia, seperti kepuasan kerja dan lingkungan kerja. Selain itu, praktik pengelolaan sumber daya manusia yang terkait seperti perekrutan karyawan dan seleksi juga dibahas dalam studi ini. Studi ini juga membahas mengenai konsep terkait nilai proposisi karyawan (EVP), etika dan nilai-nilai Islam berdasar referensi dari Al-Quran dan Hadis. Studi ini memberikan saran dan rekomendasi untuk menanamkan nilai-nilai Islam untuk pencitraan merek kerja yang efektif.*

*Kata kunci: Employer branding Islam, manajemen sumber daya manusia*

**T**he concept of employer branding, a combination of marketing and human resource management, emerged and gained ground during the 90s. Although various scholarly discussions can be identified on the practice of employer branding, none provide the Islamic stance on the same.

As such, this paper attempts to portray the Islamic perspective on employer branding. The paper is arranged by firstly defining the term 'employer branding', followed by its importance. The process of employer branding is presented for a clear understanding in the succeeding section. In order

Table 1. Some definitions of employer brand as identified through a review of literature

Author and year	Points
Ambler and Barrow (1996: p. 187)	“The package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company.”
Ewing et al., (2002: p.12)	“Building an image in the minds of the potential labour market, that the company above all others, is a great place to work.”
Lloyd (2002) as cited in Berthon et al., (2001: p.152)	“The sum of a company’s efforts to communicate to existing and prospective staff that it is a desirable place to work.”
Backhaus and Tikoo (2004: p.502)	“Process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity... concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors.”
Knox and Freeman (2006: p.697)	“Image associated with an organisation, uniquely in its role as an employer.”
Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2009: p.534)	“An organisation’s image as seen through the eyes of its actual and potential employees.”

to provide systematic, in-depth understanding, the research questions have been developed according to the theoretical framework. The paper concludes with few suggestions and recommendations on instilling Islamic values for effective employer branding.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Definition of Employer Branding

Employer branding originated through the application of marketing principles to the field of personnel recruitment (Maurer et al., 1992). Ambler and Barrow (1996) are the first authors to coin the term “employer brand.”

One of the specific types of corporate identities is employer branding, in that it creates both an inside and outside image of the organization in two forms – first, as a desirable employer (Ambler and Barrow, 1996; Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004) and second, as a conducive workplace (Bergeron, 2001). The various definitions of employer brand as identified through literature are summarized in Table 1. (Srivastava and Bhatnagar, 2010)

To sum up, from the stated definitions, it is understood that an employer brand is about owning an identity, image, and distinctiveness as an employer in order to appeal to prospective employees

and to inspire, involve and maintain its current employees.

### **Importance of employer branding**

Employer brand, according to the summary by Fernon (2008), is:

“Its ability to deliver organisational success by attracting and retaining the right people, providing an environment in which employees live the brand, improving organisational performance in key business areas of recruitment, retention, engagement and the bottom line and differentiating employers from each other, creating competitive advantage.” (p. 50)

It is considered an advantage for individuals, as well as the organization (Bergeron, 2001). It provides a clear framework for management to simplify and focus priorities. It also raises productivity and improves staffing, retention, and pledge (Keefe, 2007; Ambler and Barrow, 1996; Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004).

From the employees' point of view, being an employee of an organization enhances their self-esteem and strengthens their organizational identification that has a strong employer brand (Lievens et al., 2007). Continuous delivery of the brand promise leads to trust and loyalty ensuring a steady supply of prospective employees (Holliday, 1997) Further, it can maintain high commitment and high performance among employees. By promoting the organization's credibility with employees, organizational effectiveness will increase (Burack et al., 1994). It attracts the right candidates with the value fit, and at the same time, gives potential

employees a guarantee of the work experience they expect (Bhatnagar and Srivastava, 2008).

Employer branding communicates the unique employment suggestion of the organization to the potential hires, current employees, and society as a whole. It does so by creating an image of a distinct and desirable employer, both inside and outside the organization (Ambler and Barrow, 1996; Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Balmer and Greyser, 2002), and of a good place for employment (Bergeron, 2001). It requires an employer to recognize what is unique about them compared to their competitors and to promote it to the aimed population. The result is assurance that prospective employees have a clear idea of the employment value proposition offered by the employer (Bergeron, 2001a). This helps distinguish organizations from their competitors by creating a unique image of the whole employment relationship and workers' life-cycle management, which the organization offers to its prospective and current employees. This will continue, even when the organization does not hold a competitive position regarding location or wages (Ployhart, 2006).

### **Process of employer branding**

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) identify three aspects of the employer branding process, as follows:

- i. First, an organisation develops a clear, consistent and honest “value proposition” based on research for their existing and prospective staff (Heger, 2007). It must include the organization's culture, the management style,

current employees' qualities, the image of current employment, and impressions of products or service quality manager (Sullivan, 2002). Also, the organization should understand the expectations and specific attributes it has which are found attractive by the applicants (Lawler, 2005).

- ii. It is also important to find out what the competitors are offering to the same pool of applicants. The employer value proposition (EVP) should be built around this common theme, which is different from that of the competitors. Then, the organization should use it to attract prospective employees.
- iii. The EVP must state the brand promise made to the recruits (Lawler, 2005) to increase their likelihood of remaining in the organization. The EVP must reflect the business strategy of the organization, so that the employer brand acts as a strainer for only those who have the inspiration, skills, knowledge, proficiencies and personality to perform the required job (ibid).

Given the argument that employer branding could play its role in modern organizations, following are the questions that can be derived from the above discussion:

Research Question 1: What is the philosophy and characteristics of Islamic employer branding?

Research Question 2: What are the principles of ethics in employer branding?

Research Question 3: What constitutes Islamic employer branding strategy?

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Employer branding from an Islamic perspective

Based on the discussions of Islamic Scholars as well as in the opinion of the author of this research, Muslims in particular, as well as people in general, are encouraged and required to spend their lives in a manner prescribed by Allah and His messenger. In one of the Quranic verses, Allah SWT says:

“O you, who believe! Enter perfectly in Islam (by obeying all the rules and regulations of the Islamic religion) and follow not the footsteps of Shaitan (Satan). Verily, He is to you a plain enemy” (Al-Quran 2:208).

The above verse necessitates that, in order to acquire and establish Islam completely, one has to follow essential details of religious and social conduct, which entails the practice of employer branding. The most fundamental and important concept in Islam is that of Tawhid or Oneness [1] (Alhabshi, 1987; Haneef, 1997), which requires a Muslim to know it in depth in order to live and persist successfully in this world and the hereafter. The concept and principle of Tawhid means to believe that Allah SWT is the only owner and creator of the universe and the human being. Furthermore, the human being is the representative of Allah to manage this world and its resources in a just way as prescribed in the Shariah (Abusulayman, 1998; Badawi, 2002). To elaborate further, according to Abusulayman (1998), the concept of Tawhid is both vertical and horizontal. The vertical relationship pictures the connection between humanity and its creator, while the

horizontal relationship portrays the inter-human relationship based on Allah's law (Abusulayman, 1998; Arham, 2010). As such, through this concept of Tawhid, the responsibility of man to be the vicegerent on earth is derived, and entails the practice of justice and fairness in all aspects of life. Extending this principle of Tawhid to employer branding, the author argues that justice must be presented to the applicants to attract them to work for an organization. The employer should entail strong values and culture to retain talented employees. Although most employees frequently think on their salary, however, their welfare and career development should be taken into consideration as a promise from an employer to an employee.

### **The principle of ethics**

The execution of the Islamic ethics was the first message of Allah conveyed to His Messenger, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). A Hadith clearly conveys a message on the significance of akhlaqul karimah in Islam, as narrated by Bukhari, whereby: "I (Muhammad) have only been sent to complete good manners (Makarim Al- Akhlaq)" (Note 1). Ahmad (2006) has added that Muslims, who wish to be granted the pleasure of Allah, may attain this by applying the fundamental values of ethics.

As such, Islamic Work Ethics (IWE), which are concerned with Islamic values, belief and practices, has its roots based in Al-Qur'an and Sunnah (Arslan, 2005), and differentiates what is right from what is wrong (Beekun, 1997). It inspires assurance in the workplace, strengthens social business responsibilities (Ali, 2005) and has a work-orientation as an advantage in

human life (Rizk, 2008). These are also applied in any business applications and behaviours that every Muslim should observe and engage in as the servants of God (Beekun and Badawi, 2004) through hard work, commitment, dedication, work creativity, avoidance of being excessively attached to wealth, accumulation of wealth, cooperation, and competitiveness at the work place (Yousef, 2001). It is noted that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) encouraged Muslims to work as much as to one's ability (Ali, 2005; Rafiki and Wahab, 2014).

Many studies conducted by authors such as Al Habtoor (2001), Yousef (2001), Ali (2005), and Ali and Al-Owaihian (2008) have summarized that the IWE facilitate higher performance and spread prosperity and societal welfare. They also propose the usage of the IWE in management, economic activities and business operations. A well-known researcher, Ali (1988) created the measurement scales of Islamic Work Ethics (IWE), where a test was taken among 150 Arab students in major universities in the United States. Researchers have been using this scale in the context of organizational and management (Yousef, 2001; Rahman et al., 2006; Ali and Al-Kazemi, 2007; Khalil and Abu-Saad, 2009; Kumar and Rose, 2010). They conducted the studies in countries, such as the United Arab Emirates, Malaysia and Kuwait and concluded that IWE showed strong relationship with organizational change, commitment, and work satisfaction. However, other studies have reported contradictory results, as in the case of Uygur (2009) wherein his in-depth interviews of 32 business people in Turkish SMEs establishes that the IWE is not a significant factor affecting their attitudes.

However, as far as the modern organizational environment is concerned, employees are treated as per their position and power, whereas Islam teaches to treat employees as equal, regardless of what task they are assigned. Man, as a vicegerent (khalifa) on earth, should be self-sufficient for livelihood. Moreover, the concept of work should be understood from the Islamic perspective, which says that one should excel and become successful in life by following the ethics of Islam. While conducting recruitment and selection, employers should be fair and make decisions in an unbiased manner. Favouritism, which is sometimes practiced in modern society, is not a part of Islamic culture. Work conducted in an ethical manner as prescribed in Islam undeniably results in the pleasure of Allah – the sole aim for which any Muslim should strive (Khan, Farooq, & Hussain, 2010).

### **Islamic practices in organization**

Islam, being a universal and comprehensive religion, allows for its implementation regardless of the changes in time as well as the comprehensiveness of the religion of Islam relates to the complete and perfect teachings (syumul) as is stated in Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-An'am (6:38). Rivai et al. (2012) mentioned that Islam is based on three pillars of Tawheed, Shariah and Akhlaq. Ahmad (2006) in summary clarify each of these three pillars; Tawheed is a basic belief of Muslims that means the foundation of the Unity of Allah; Shariah can be described as Muslims' guideline based on Al-Qur'an and Hadith; and, Akhlaq refers to the practice of virtue, morality and manners. A Muslim worker is required to have Tawheed as a total faith to Allah as the Only Sustainer and

the acceptance of His divine assistance that provides Muslims with security.

Islam, as a way of life, integrates religious practices with business activities and regards any social activity as personal worship when undertaken with the intent of attaining Allah's pleasure. Hence, combining socio-economic practices such as business activities with good intention is termed "Ibadah." All the practices as have been cited in Al-Qur'an and Hadith encompass various shariah rules, muamalat and ethical values (akhlaq Islamiyyah), examples of such in today's time can be Islamic finance, Halal certification, Islamic motivation in work, Islamic education, Islamic business training, Islamic networking (jemaah), payment of zakat, honesty, good intention (niyyah), dedication, commitment, tenacity and hard work.

Islamic practices are categorized into actions of fardhu a'in (individual's compulsory obligation) and kifayah (individual's optional obligation). Fardhu 'ain refers to practices that are compulsory to Muslims. A Muslim who ignores them is sinful and therefore, can be punished. These practices include the Islamic pillars of belief in One Creator –God and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the messenger of God. The five Islamic pillars to which every Muslim must adhere are praying five times a day, fasting during the month of Ramadhan, paying zakat, and performing Hajj to Mecca (if able). In addition, there are other acts of obeying Allah by doing everything that He orders and preventing everything He forbids. Meanwhile, fardhu kifayah refers to that the situation that other Muslims are not required to do so if any Muslim has done the practices. An example would be attending Islamic

business training to learn financial or marketing strategies, where Muslims are not obliged to learn such knowledge (although in other perspectives, every Muslim has the responsibility to gain knowledge).

### **Islamic values related to work**

In the context of employer branding, as is measured through work environment, job satisfaction and organizational commitment, numerous social and moral values encouraged to be practiced in Islam during social interaction can be implemented for a better employee-employer relationship, as well as increased employer branding. Latifi (1997) identified the following work-related characteristics as prescribed in Islam:

- i. Equality before god;
- ii. Individual responsibility and teamwork with others;
- iii. Employees' respect and honour should be prominent;
- iv. Principle of equity is to be followed;
- v. Fatalism but also a recognition of personal choice; and
- vi. Deliberation at all levels of decision-making.

In the context of employer branding, the relationship between employer and employee is strong and engaged. In the hadith, the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said: "Your brothers are your servants whom Allah has made your subordinate, he should give them to eat for what he himself eats and wear for what he himself wears and do not put on them burden of any labor which may exhaust them. Provide them with assistance if you give them such task" (Sahih Bukari, Volume 1). This Hadith clarifies the nature of the relationship that should exist between an employer and his/her employees.

- i. The employer should respect, forgive and appreciate his/her employees and consider them as brothers rather than his/her followers (Ali Mohamed, 2007).
- ii. The previous Hadith demonstrates the basic principle that determines the minimum wages of workforces inside organizations. It requires the employers to be very generous to their employees in giving wages, which should be high enough to meet the needs and requirements of their lives.
- iii. An employee should not be given too heavy or tough a duty that would exceed his capacity, or is likely to cause him great suffering in doing it; and working for long hours is forbidden, as that might affect his health (Mohammad & Quoquab, 2014). The Prophet (SAW) said, "Allah (SWT) has no mercy on him who is not merciful to (His) men" (Shih Bukhari, Volume 9). Moreover, an employee that is given a hard task should be assisted by more employees and capital to reduce his burden.

In order to plan human resources to reflect Islamic culture, the manipulation of human resource management practices, which are common in the modern business world, must be avoided. The will of Allah and teachings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) need to be followed by managers in order to be successful in both worlds – here and hereafter. Hence, in a basic human resource process in an organization, the following points must be considered:

### **Recruitment in Islam**

There are various instances in which organizations advertise a job vacancy



that conveys a preference for people belonging to specific groups, race, or gender. In most cases, the non-preferred ones are also capable of performing the same task with equal or better competence. Sometimes, advertisements clearly convey qualifications that suit a particular candidate and possibly the one that the HR manager is interested in. Such blatant favouritism affects the effectiveness of a company, since deserving candidates are not given a chance (Ali, 2010). The Islamic way of life does not permit undue favouritism in recruitment, since it violates the ethical principles of justice (Al-'Adl ), fulfilment of contract with the employer to look after the interest of the organization (Ifa Al-'Aqd ), and the rights of others in dealings (Huquq Al-'Ibad ). This principle of Al-'Adl can be derived from numerous verses in the Quran, as has been quoted by Ahmad and Sadeq (2001). "Allah commands justice, the doing of good to kith and kin. He forbids all shameful deeds, injustice, and rebellion; He instructs you, that you may receive admonition" (16:90).

### **Selection in Islam**

When organizations lack any custom selection process and depend upon unstructured questions for conducting interviews, the chances of being biased are relatively higher, as the procedure involves subjectivity. That is why many countries have introduced laws to administer the selection process. The United States Civil Rights Act requires that any test used must be validated in the selection process or in promotion decisions if its use will have a contrary impact on women and minorities. But such rules and laws may not necessarily entail implementing fair

treatment and ethical behaviour. Such kind of favouritism is not permitted in the Islamic system since Islam always promotes unbiased, rational behaviour that is strictly based on affirming the good and forbidding the bad (Sadeq, 2006; Bilal Khan et al., 2010)

### **CONCLUSION**

Organizations must pay attention to talent recruitment as a follow-up routine to ensure employee development rather than only during filling vacancies. The organization must strive to attract, recruit and retain the best talent. On this matter, following are recommendations to organizations:

- Focus on the organization's publicity: improve employer advertising through excellent team recruitment, an excellent message, improving employer brand.
- Think of recruitment as a marketing function and the candidate as a customer (because integrating human resources and marketing allows the organization to excel at attracting talent and customers); additionally, attract candidates through good communication and good sponsorship activity, keeping the promises made during the recruitment process in line with Islamic teachings.
- Focus on advertising: use brochures and official sites, presenting in it development programs, the career evolution, training, evaluation based on sustainable development, ethics, not discrimination, equal opportunities, mentoring and coaching programs, so that to attract the best candidates and retain the best employees;

- Partnerships with universities and former trainees, government agencies, media, TV, recruitment agencies, and professional trade unions should be made in order to attract the best candidates.
- Activities to know the organization better should be held: every time a candidate and an employer have “touch-points,” each “touch-point” leaves an impression and is an opportunity to have a positive impact, thus a perception is formed (and can be maintained or changed) [van Leeuwen B et al., 2009].

In usual practice during the incorporation and induction processes, new employees hear about the company’s history, meet with numerous senior leaders and other employees, and are set up with a mentor. Employees who make the tour of the organization during the integration period are made clearly aware that the organization’s culture is one that values people. During this time, more executives from different departments explain and clarify the organization’s vision, mission, and uniqueness.

Strong employer brands manage the whole employment lifecycle consistently and in a structured way, leaving a compelling image. In the final stage, the organization must find out why people leave the organization

and what causes the same to improve communication. Every organization fights for personnel with talent and the required skills and knowledge. That is why the organizations must create an employer brand program. However, this would not serve the purpose lonely, rather but the emphasis should be placed on how the organizational performance improvement is delivered by being “core talent centred.” There seems to be a war for talent because acquiring and retaining talented personnel is often imperfectly imitated, and an original and effective employer branding programme is rarely found.

Islam teaches compatibility and peaceful co-existence between humans while instilling a sense of understanding of what is right and what is not. As the values and ethics embedded in a human being are reflected through his behaviour, it makes it incumbent upon the organizational decision makers to develop an employer brand that reflects the ethical, social and moral values approved and promoted by Islam. Islam shows the path—not of just possessing Islamic values but to prove these in day-to-day life. In order to develop a workplace environment of sincerity and trust, individuals should practice their religion at the workplace. This will, in turn, produce a healthy and positive “mutual gain” environment for the employee as well as the employer.

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### **Further reading**

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