

# Employer Branding: How Perception of Social Media Use and Prior Work Experience Impacts Employer Attractiveness for Prospective Employees

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## Abstract

*The current study aims to extend Sivertzen et al. (2013)'s proposed model to garner insights pertaining to employer branding, social media use, work experience and intention to apply for prospective applicants within the Pakistani context and, creating a more cohesive view of employer branding for academics and practitioners. Questionnaire data were collected from 220 MBA students of varying levels of professional experience from Pakistani universities about their perceptions of potential employers and their intention to apply. Data analysis carried through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) revealed that employer attractiveness dimensions such as "Economic Value" and "Development Value" were significantly linked to a company's "Corporate Reputation" which in turn was linked to "Intention to Apply"; additionally, Social media Use was identified as a moderator for the relationship between Corporate Reputation and Intention to Apply. These results highlight the impact perceived functional social and psychological benefits have on the interaction between individuals and organizations and, the influence of social media during the recruitment process. From a managerial standpoint, the results underscore the importance of understanding the needs of the workforce and, curating an effective corporate reputation for recruitment purposes.*

**Keywords:** Employer branding; employer attractiveness; corporate reputation; social media, work experience, intention to apply.

**JEL Classification:** M1, M3, M5

## 1. Introduction

A sustained competitive advantage is paramount in any organization's economic profitability and survival in an increasingly dynamic competitive environment. In light of rapid technological and economic developments, the role of Human Resources as a key

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contributor to organizational success has become more apparent. The ability to effectively access and manage human capital as an important resource is crucial for a sustained competitive advantage (Delery & Roumpi, 2017). Agostini et al. (2017) elaborate on the concept of human capital as the amalgamation of employee capabilities that an organization has access to address its business objectives. As the contest for attracting and retaining talented individuals with the required capabilities continues to escalate (Berthon et al., 2005), employers have become more aware of the importance of employer brands as a means of being seen as an 'employer of choice' by employees and prospective recruits.

As Bellou et al. (2015) highlight, job seekers tend to behave similarly to consumers i.e., they are constantly searching for brands that meet their preferences. Employer brands and reputations are reflective of the value and support organizations are able to provide to current and potential employees. The more proficient an organization is in meeting the value expectations of employees, the greater is the willingness of the workforce to reciprocate in the form of engagement and organizational performance (Arasanmi & Krishna, 2019). As such, the importance of branding and organizational corporate reputation as employers has gained salience in the labor market, with organizations realizing that establishing unique employer brands is a strategic requisite for a continued competitive advantage by means of managing and retaining a competent workforce. However, the subjective nature of these constructs makes them context-sensitive, hence, understanding the applicability of employer attractiveness dimensions presented by Berthon et al. (2005) across various cultures and contexts and their subsequent correlation to "corporate reputation and" an applicant's intention to join has major academic and practical scope.

Social media has become one of the key recruitment channels for organizations. By providing the means of sharing content and information, social media platforms have transformed the way people collaborate and communicate (Derks & Bakker, 2012). The wide span of visibility that social media affords organizations to establish their brand image for current and future employees makes it a key strategic human resource management tool (Kashive et al., 2020). Organizations can use this visibility to exhibit their unique employer value proposition as a way of establishing their attractiveness as an organization.

While Berthon et al. (2005) employer attractiveness (EmpAt) scale has served as the foundation for literature relating to employer branding and employer attractiveness, studies by Sivertzen et al. (2013), Kissel and Büttgen (2015); Babikova and Bucek (2019) and Tanwar and Kumar (2019) have found that the application of the scale varies across cultures. In recognition of this, the current study looks to add to the literature by studying it in a different context and invoking more generalized insights. Furthermore, prior research on employer branding has been limited by studying homogeneous groups like university students (Berthon et al., 2005; Sivertzen et al., 2013; Kissel & Büttgen, 2015; Babikova & Bucek, 2019).

While studies like Hadi et al. (2016), Hadi and Ahmed (2018), Roy (2008 et al.,) and Tanwar and Kumar (2019) have studied employer branding in contexts similar to that of Pakistan in different forms, the scope still exists to study the phenomenon in more detail. With Pakistan poised as a growing economy (Iravani, 2011), the war for talent is inevitable and companies will need an extensive understanding of what employees in Pakistan expect from their employers or potentially lose out on accessing a rapidly shrinking pool of high-quality talent.

By introducing prior work experience as a variable, the study aims to make additions to the literature by studying groups that are more heterogeneous. In fact, literature on the topic has actively promoted the study of factors such as gender and work experience to gain more generalizable insights. To bridge this research gap, the present research attempts to expand upon prior studies carried out by Sivertzen et al. (2013) and Babikova and Bucek (2019) and study their purposed model within the Pakistani context. The objectives of this study are as follows: 1) put forth a cohesive view of employer branding that addresses the persistent split between academics and practitioners (Theurer et al., 2018); 2) add to existing literature that has studied employer branding in contexts similar to that of Pakistan (Hadi et al., 2016; Hadi & Ahmed, 2018; Tanwar & Kumar, 2019) and; 3) identify the impact social media and work experience have on the relationship between corporate reputation and intention to apply.

Table 1  
*Literature Table*

<b>Author (Year)</b>	<b>Research Objective</b>	<b>Study Type</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Gap and Limitations</b>
Arasanmi and Krishna (2019)	“Analyze the correlation between the organizational support attribute of employer branding and employer retention.”	Quantitative analysis	“Cross sectional design, online survey. 134 research participants recruited from a local government council in New Zealand.”	“Perceived organizational support (POS) as a branding strategy influences employee retention. Organizational support significantly impacts organizational commitment (OC) as a predictor of employee retention. Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between organizational support and employee retention.”	Focused on a single aspect of employer branding. Studies only address attraction of new talent and does not address retention.

*Table to be continued*

Kashive et al. (2020)	“Studying the impact social platforms like Glassdoor have on the ability of an organization to establish an attractive employer brand.”	Thematic analysis	“Analysis of 1,243 reviews from online crowdsourced employer branding platform Glassdoor for top-rated employers across FMCG, pharma, IT, retail sectors. SAS visual analytical was used to carry out text and sentimental analysis.”	“Ten themes of employer value propositions generated, in line with Berthon (2005) employer branding dimensions (interest, development, social and economic value). Additional themes identified include management, work life and branding value.”	The study only confirms that social media platforms can be used as a channel to promote employer brands but does not present any insights about how employer value propositions can be generated
Hadi and Ahmed (2018)	“Exploring how employer branding dimensions interact with employee retention.”	Quantitative analysis	“Sample for questionnaire included 204 teachers and administrative staff members from branded institutes in Islamabad Pakistan. Analysis carried out through multiple regression analysis.”	“Out of the dimensions of employer brands, only development value was found to influence employee retention.”	Narrow sample consisting of employees from a limited number of institutes Lack of generalizability due to homogeneous sample of candidates Focused only on retention and not on attracting new talent.
Dabirian et al. (2019)	“Identification of factors that impact the desirability of IT firms amongst IT professionals as a means to attract and retain a talented workforce.”	Thematic analysis	“Analysis of 15,000 Glassdoor reviews for the top ten best rated and bottom three rated firms. Content of reviews analyzed by the artificial intelligence engine Watson as means to identify relevant brand propositions.”	“Extension of previous academic understanding on the effects various employer brand propositions have on shaping an organization's brand image in the mind of current and former employees.”	Limited focus on attracting talent in the future Focused narrowly on the IT sector leading to reduced generalizability

*Table to be continued*

Ahmad et al. (2019)	“Analyzing how organization type and gender influence the attraction of new employees and the retention of current human resources.”	Quantitative analysis	“Personally, administered questionnaires to a sample of 100 banking professionals from private and public banks in India. Analysis carried out via an exploratory factor analysis, followed by Independent sample t-Test.”	“Results showed no significant influence of gender on either employee attraction or employee retention. There was also no discernable impact of organization type on employee attraction, but, a significant influence was seen to exist on employee retention.”	Limited sample size and narrow industry focus Limited focus on the constituents of employer branding
Babikova and Bucek (2019)	“Replication of Sivertzen et al. (2013)'s model used to investigate constituents of employer branding strategies, and verification of the adequacy of existing view of relevant elements as well as the influence of social media.”	Quantitative analysis	“Electronic questionnaire administered to 337 computer science and 290 economic students from universities in Czech Republic. Analysis carried out using structural equation modeling.”	“Multiple elements of employer attractiveness were found to have a correlation with corporation reputation which was further found to be correlated to intention to apply. Outcomes were found to vary between industries highlighting the importance of relative elements.”	Potential further relative elements such as work experience and other heterogeneous groups of respondents to further improve the generalizability of the replicated model that has been extended in the study
Tanwar and Kumar (2019)	“Exploration of the correlation between constituents of employer brand and employer of choice (EOC). Additional analysis of the influence of person-organization fit in mediating the relation between dimensions of employer brand and EOC status, and how social media moderates the link between EOC status and the person organization fit.”	Quantitative analysis	“The sample included 386 second year MBA students from the top ranked business schools in India's National Capital region actively searching for jobs. Analysis was carried out through structural equation modeling on data collected via a questionnaire.”	“The person-organization fit was found to have a significant mediating role showing that to become EOC, there is a need for person-organization fit to link with employer brand dimensions. The moderation analysis further highlighted how important social media is to become a EOC regardless of organization fit.”	Limited generalizability to the homogeneous nature of the sample potential for incorporation of work experience as a variable and existing employee as part of the sample

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 *Intention to Apply*

An increasing shortage of talent across various markets globally has necessitated organizations to develop a greater understanding of the importance of the many aspects that impact applicants' intentions to apply for available job vacancies (Gomes & Neves, 2011). A job prospect's intention to apply is defined as the desire for applying, visiting a company's website, participating in activities beyond the early recruitment stages such as second interviews, or providing any other indication of intending to enter or remain part of the pool of applicants without a concrete decision about a job choice (Chapman et al., 2005). Gomes and Neves (2019) further expand on this, proposing that the intention of an applicant to apply for an available job vacancy can serve as a proximal and rational determinant of actually applying. The theoretical foundations for the construct can be found in the "theory of reasoned action" and "theory of planned behavior" (Adams & de Kock, 2015; Gomes & Neves, 2019). Fishbein and Ajzen (1975)'s "theory of reasoned action" has been presented in recruitment literature as a sequence of rational cognitive processes, such that the application decisions come as a direct consequence of job application intentions which in turn stem from an applicant's evaluations about the job and the company overall (Gomes & Neves, 2019; Van Hooft et al., 2006). Gomes and Neves (2019) link this to their proposed behavioral perspective; stating that the key to understanding any behavior (such as application decisions), is to develop in-depth assessment on the attitudes, beliefs and resulting intentions (intention to apply) as the determinants of said behavior. The "theory of planned behavior", extends this view, stating that the behaviors of individuals stem from logical, rational evaluation of the available information and the intentions formed as a result. It differentiates from the theory of reasoned action by considering that behavior may not always be voluntary, making the perceived control individuals have over their behaviors an important consideration (Ajzen, 1991, 2020). Adams and de Kock (2015) frame this theory within the context of recruitment literature as a multidimensional framework that describes attitude-behavior relationships that influence applicants in their decisions of engaging in and completing the application process.

### 2.2 *Employer Branding and Intention to Apply*

The rapidly growing demand for competent and qualified employees reflects today's dynamic, knowledge-driven business environment. The importance of human resources to the modern organization has its roots in the 'resource-based view' theory. This view presents the idea that the performance of organizations differs based on how an organization leverages unique, inimitable resources to establish a distinct advantage; these resources include both physical capital as well as intangible assets such as brand names and organizational capabilities (Barney, 1991; Lockett et al., 2009).

According to Jiang and Iles (2011), employer brands aid organizations vying for talent by enhancing engagement, recruitment and retention in a way that creates positive perceptions of the value the organization has as an employer amongst employees, both prospective and current. Broadly speaking, the intersection of human resource management with the principles of branding and marketing is the basis of employer branding (Almıaçık & Almıaçık, 2012; Babikova & Bucek, 2019; Theurer et al., 2018). The origins of employer branding can be traced back to Ambler and Barrow (1996)'s definition for the term as being "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company". Alternatively, it has also been defined as an organization's identity as an employer incorporating its values, policies and activities as a way of differentiating itself to attract, motivate and, retain current and potential employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Dell & Conference Board, 2001).

Employer branding lacks a unified interpretation of the dimensions and application of the concept amongst academics and practitioners (Theurer et al., 2018). Biswas and Suar (2014) shine a light on how the perspectives on employer branding vary. While most academics remain firmly in realm of concept and results focusing on the employer image and reputational aspect (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Cable & Turban, 2001; Wilden et al., 2010), practitioners prefer to study the attributes that make organizations more attractive and how brand image can be used to enhance this attraction for the recruitment and retention of talent (Berthon et al., 2005; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Sivertzen et al., 2013). Findings from both perspectives provide empirical evidence that employer brands help improve the awareness, knowledge and, familiarity of applicants for an organization and simultaneously serve as a signal for its value proposition as an employer to attract employees based on their functional and symbolic needs from their place of work.

Employer attractiveness can be defined as "the benefits potential applicants' envision receiving as a result of being a part of any organization and is deeply intertwined with the employer brand concept" (Berthon et al., 2005). Organizational attractiveness is based on the belief systems and experiences of applicants and current employees and their influence on the interpretations and associations of an employer's brand attributes (Saini et al., 2013). As noted by Reis et al. (2017), a jobseeker's positive beliefs about an organization influence the attraction they feel and their readiness to pursue a position in said organization. Hence it is clear that the relevance of employer attractiveness is based on its influence on job application decisions (Gomes & Neves, 2011); employee retention (Helm, 2013) and; applicant willingness to seek out more information about employers and incorporate it into any forthcoming choices (Cable & Turban, 2001). This in turn highlights the importance of understanding the attributes that applicants find most important so that effective branding initiatives can be implemented (Reis et al., 2017).

The operationalization of employer attractiveness is carried out through the combined attributes that potential applicants consider when making application decisions; something that is impacted by interpretations of employer attributes and the degree of familiarity with employer brand image (Edwards, 2010). In what has been termed elemental perspective by Lievens and Slaughter (2016), the associations formed about an employer's attributes require extensive cognitive processing and are reflective of the perceived image of the company. The categorization of these attributes has been subject to plethora of approaches but the most well-known and longstanding of these has been the alignment of attributes being either functional, symbolic or experiential (Keller, 1993). This is further solidified by Ambler and Barrow's original definition of employer branding as amalgamation of economic, social and functional benefits that an employer can offer.

One framework that has been introduced to the literature is the integration of instrumental (compensation, work conditions, advancement opportunities) and symbolic (culture, innovation, prestige) attributes (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Srivastava and Bhatnagar (2010) identified eight attributes that encompass organizational offerings (international exposure, career advancement, developmental support) and descriptors (flexibility, fairness, credibility, ethical, and positive imagery). The attributes have also been classified as either hard or soft in other research; hard attributes cover formalized, objective, enforceable terms while soft factors are less observable, subjective and, lack a clear definition. In general, literature has found that symbolic, intangible attributes and benefits have had more influence on how an employer is perceived and thus how attractive they are in the eyes of prospective talent (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016).

Amongst the various frameworks proposed to capture the real picture of employer attractiveness, Berthon et al. (2005)'s employer attractiveness scale (EmpAt) has been most frequently used in prior literature (Alniaçık & Alniaçık, 2012; Arachchige & Robertson, 2013; Babikova & Bucek, 2019; Sivertzen et al., 2013;). Using Ambler and Barrow (1996)'s original study as a foundation, the scale comprises 5 attributes including: "interest value", "social value", "economic value", "application value" and, "development value".

Contrary to employer attractiveness, a brand equity-based approach that has been adopted by most practitioners; corporate reputation aligns with the alternate perspective heralded by academics on employer branding as being value neutral and used to create a distinct identity of the organization in terms of various brand attributes (Backhaus, 2016; Biswas & Suar, 2014; Theurer et al., 2018). In fact, some literature has chosen to use the term corporate reputation interchangeably with employer brand (Cable & Turban, 2003; Mosley, 2014; Tkalac Verčič, 2018), indicating how closely the two concepts are intertwined with one another. Corporate reputation can be defined as the attitudes of stakeholders towards an organization, based on the image projected as a result of organizational attributes (Highhouse et al., 2009; Wartick, 2002). Additionally, it is the collection of characteristics established on the

foundations of past social engagements and future prospects serving an indispensable intangible asset that mitigates information asymmetry for stakeholders. (Dowling & Moran, 2012; Schnietz & Epstein, 2005; Weigelt & Camerer, 1988). Cable and Turban (2003) apply the concept of corporate reputation to the employment and recruitment context; drawing on the principles of signaling theory to state that the more positive an organization's reputation, the higher the applicants' willingness to be part of the organization and the amount of prestige they expect from membership in the organization.

The perceptions about an organization's reputation and its subsequent attractiveness to prospective applicants have been empirically linked to corporate reputation (Collins, 2007; Collins & Han, 2004). This further extends to the social identity theory; because of the prevalence of information asymmetry between applicants and organizations, reputation may serve as an important tool to reinforce the personal value systems and self-image for prospective employees and lead to positive evaluations for the organization (Story et al., 2016). The congruence of an applicant's personal values with those perceived about an organization communicated through its reputation also has a significant positive impact on how attractive an organization is based on their perceived fit to the company and subsequently leads to an increase in the willingness of applicants to join any organization (Xie et al., 2015).

### **2.3 *Employer Attractiveness and "Corporate Reputation"***

Literature shows that while the correlation between employer attractiveness and corporate reputation is clear, the interaction between these constructs is sensitive across various national, generational and industry-specific contexts, leading to inconsistent statistical evidence. While some like Sivertzen et al. (2013), Tkalac-Verčič (2018) and, Babikova and Bucek (2019) report that change in context may require modification to the original employer attractiveness scale; others like Liu (2018) and Hadi and Ahmed (2018) did not find the need to modify the original scale.

In light of this varying evidence, it is important to define the different constituents of employer attractiveness for this study. Berthon et al. (2005) defined each dimension as follows: interest value refers to "employee perceptions about creativity and excitement in the work environment and novelty of the work practices and, how the employer is able to leverage the ingenuity and resourcefulness of its workforce to become more innovative"; social value refers to "employee perceptions about the ability of an employer to provide a fun, happy environment which actively nurtures strong social connections and interpersonal relationships and encourages an agreeable team atmosphere"; economic value refers to "employee perceptions that the combination of monetary (salary, compensation packages) and non-monetary (job security, promotion prospects) provided by the employer are not only above average but also align with the expectations and needs of the applicants"; development value refers to "employee perceptions about aspects such as recognition, self-efficacy,

career-enhancement and a foundation for future employment opportunities that they expect an employer will be able to provide”; application value refers to “employee perceptions about the opportunities made available by an employer for application of personal knowledge to add value to the organization and provide guidance to others in customer-oriented and altruistic environs” (Berthon et al., 2005). Literature such as Sivertzen et al. (2013), Babikova and Bucek (2019) Liu (2018) and, Hadi and Ahmed (2018) and, Tanwar and Kumar (2019) have presented conflicting evidence regarding corporate reputation’s relationship with the dimensions of employer attractiveness. This presents an opportunity to study these relations in a different context leading to the following hypotheses being proposed.

*H1: Applicants’ interest value is positively related to employer corporate reputation.*

*H2: Applicants’ social value is positively related to employer corporate reputation.*

*H3: Applicants’ economic value is positively related to employer corporate reputation.*

*H4: Applicants’ development value is positively related to employer corporate reputation.*

*H5: Applicants’ application value is positively related to employer corporate reputation.*

There exists a myriad of evidence suggesting the reputation of a firm has a major role in governing application intentions, emerging as a source that generates applicants’ preliminary awareness of a firm as an employer (Cable & Turban, 2001). It is hence understandable that jobseekers consider corporate reputation as an accurate reflection of a company characteristics and attributes that subsequently influence their application intentions (Cable & Turban, 2003; Edwards, 2010). Walter et al. (2013), Zhu et al. (2014) and Liu (2018) all demonstrate that positive opinions about companies contribute to employers’ ability to create a psychological contract with applicants, subsequently impacting their intentions. Based on the literature, there seems to be a general agreement that corporate reputation and intention to apply are positively linked. However, there is still value in studying the relationship in a different context such as Pakistan to add further credence to existing evidence. As such, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

*H6: Employer corporate reputation has a positive relation with an applicants’ intention to apply.*

## **2.4 Social media Use**

Organizations have long realized the importance of online channels as a means of recruitment (Cappelli, 2001). One such channel that has slowly been gaining popularity in this regard is social media; digital platforms that enable widespread connectivity, generation and

distribution of content and, a means of engagement and communication (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). To attract prospective employees and foster application intentions, organizations can leverage the social media to carefully curate and effectively communicate their corporate identity and stay connected to potential applicants (Smith & Kidder, 2010). Literature provides evidence of social media's critical role in influencing the job pursuit intentions at a particular organization (Franca & Pahor, 2012; Wei et al., 2016). Recent studies reveal that employers use social media as a crucial means of communicating information about vacancies and engaging with potential candidates (Caers & Castelyns, 2010). Further analysis of the literature shows social media has also taken up an influential role of the corporate reputation management for organizations to engage with potential applicants in a bid to improve the attitudes and associations they hold through a variety of content (Dijkmans et al., 2015; Walker et al., 2011). According to Jones et al. (2009), social media provides a mechanism to effectively monitor, control and engage with various stakeholders with the ultimate goal of acquiring the positive position in the mind of prospective employees. In light of this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H7: Applicants' perception of an employer's use of social media is positively related to the employer's corporate reputation.*

The increased use of social media has opened up a multitude of channels where applicants can get information about potential employers (Dreher, 2014). Literature provides empirical evidence that the active social media use for job advertisements influences applicant intention to apply by enhancing corporate reputation (Chu et al., 2013), that the means and channels that companies use to communicate their corporate reputation, through corporate social responsibility activities (Story et al., 2016); recruitment advertisements (Baum & Kabst, 2014); use of social media (Kissel & Büttgen, 2015); word of mouth (Hoppe, 2019) and; career websites (Williamson et al., 2010) have a strong correlation in enhancing corporate reputation's impact on the intentions of high quality talent to apply. Dutta (2014) and Tanwar and Kumar (2019) provide quantifiable evidence that the mix of social media use will influence how person-organization fit is communicated through corporate reputation and, how applicants interact with the company's image and form their intentions to apply as a result. This shows that there is further value in studying social media's ability to enhance the relationship between "corporate reputation" and "intention to apply" leading to the proposal of the following hypothesis:

*H8: Applicants' perception of employer's use of social media moderates the relationship between "corporate reputation and" intention to apply.*

## 2.5 *Work Experience*

One factor that is significantly underrepresented in employer branding and recruitment literature is prior work experience. As Yockey (2019) notes, recruitment literature encompasses a wide variety of recruitment activities and a number of different contexts such as from different cultures, generations and industries to ensure that the best talent can be recruited (Rampl, 2014). A glaring limitation of this literature is the fact that it mostly studies largely homogeneous groups (Berthon et al., 2005; Klimkiewicz & Oltra, 2017; Sivertzen et al., 2013; Tanwar & Kumar, 2019), mostly final year university students. In light of this, there have been attempts to expand the research how employer branding and its influence on recruitment outcomes may vary across more heterogeneous groups, based on gender (Alniaçık & Alniaçık, 2012); educational background (Babikova & Bucek, 2019), generation (Reis & Braga, 2016) and, national cultures (Alniaçık et al., 2014). In a similar vein, there have been numerous calls for the incorporation of work experience into the literature as well (Breaugh, 2013; Fisher et al., 2017).

The incorporation of work experience as a factor in employer branding is backed theoretically by Aaker (1996)'s observation: in the marketing context, consumers who are relatively inexperienced have difficulty in comparing and contrasting products at a cognitive level. Such consumers are hence more likely to be dependent on their perceptions of the brand to guide them in the evaluation process (Keller, 1993). Similarly, in the recruitment context, job seekers with limited work experience may find it more difficult than experienced workers to evaluate the attributes of an employer and hence may lean on the organization's corporate reputation to make career decisions. Walker et al. (2008) and Swider et al. (2015) found that work experience has a limited influence on the relationship between employer brand and application intention. Meanwhile Arachchige and Robertson (2013) found that perceptions about employers based on the value communicated via corporate reputation differed significantly between experienced MBAs and those with little to no experience. Other studies, like Yockey (2019), found that there was no impact of work experience on the interpretation of an organization's recruitment advertisements or the attraction applicants may feel for it. The inconsistent nature of these findings highlights the gap in the literature that this study aims to address by proposing the following hypothesis:

*H9: Prior work experience moderates the relationship between perceived "corporate reputation and" intention to apply.*

## 2.6 Theoretical Framework

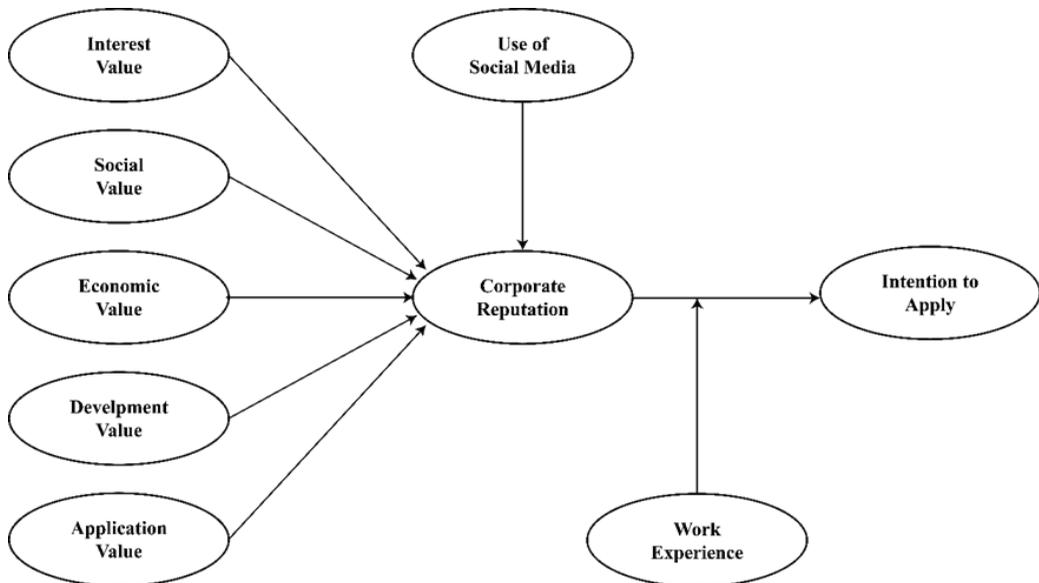


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

An empirical research design based on a quantitative approach was used for the current study which allowed for a structured and numerical presentation of the data collected (Goertzen, 2017). In line with recommendations from past literature the present study made use of the survey method using an online questionnaire as a data collection instrument to allow access to an expansive population size in cost effective and time saving manner without being hindered by geographical constraints, while also offering a degree of control based on the sampling techniques used to select potential respondents truly representative of the overall population (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Babikova & Bucek, 2019; Zikmund et al., 2012).

The analysis made use of Structural Equation Modeling as has been the norm in the existing literature by (Alnıaçık & Alnıaçık, 2012; Babikova & Bucek, 2019; Klimkiewicz & Oltra, 2017; Sivertzen et al., 2013; Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). This process included an initial Exploratory Factor Analysis, followed by a further Confirmatory Factor Analysis to confirm if the factor loadings line up with those proposed by the measurement scales taken from literature as a means to ensure their fit and validity. A common latent factor test was carried out to account for potential common method bias and to ensure the proper model fit. Finally, a

path analysis was conducted based on t-tests and betas of the regression paths of the proposed model, allowing for conclusions to be drawn about the hypotheses of this study.

### **3.2 *Population and Sample Size***

The proposed population for the study was chosen in line with Azhar et al. (2010)'s approach of studying business students from universities in Pakistan for studying employment and recruitment trends. The universities were selected based on a combination of non-probability sampling techniques such as purposive sampling similar to those used by Ahmad (2012), Azhar et al. (2010) and, Ismail (2016) with the primary criteria being that the population studied includes only MBA students currently enrolled in the business schools of Pakistani universities that are recognized by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. The reason for the choice of MBAs for the purpose is twofold; students, especially those pursuing post graduate studies, are active job seekers who are best suited for this research (Sivertzen et al., 2013); additionally, MBA students are more likely to have more varying levels of work experience in terms of the time they have spent in the labor market (Arachchige & Robertson, 2013), allowing the research to study a more heterogeneous sample than has been the case in past literature. Following the approach provided by Israel (1992) that was based on formula found by Cochran (1977) it was determined that a sample of 210 respondents would be used for the purpose of this study on the basis of purposive sampling as has been seen in past literature e.g. Shah and Soomro (2017).

### **3.3 *Measures***

In line with Sivertzen et al. (2013), respondents were initially asked for demographic data to serve as control variables and whether or not they are currently enrolled in an MBA program and if so at which institution. Respondents then rated items pertaining to different dimensions of Berthon et al. (2005)'s employer attractiveness 7-point Likert scale. Moving further they were asked to select from a list of five companies (Unilever, Nestle, Engro, Coca Cola, Telenor) that they feel they are most familiar with. The companies were selected based on purposive sampling with the following criteria: companies operating in Pakistan that are rated at least 4 stars out of 5, a company size of 5,000 employees or more and had at least 100 reviews. Glassdoor was used as it is seen as an accurate reflection of employee experiences at companies and a clear source of corporate reputation via word of mouth that influences the intentions of job seekers (Brooke, 2017). Based on the chosen companies, respondents rated items on 5-point Likert scales for corporate reputation (Turban et al., 1998), the use of social media by (Collins & Stevens, 2002) and, the intention to apply (Highhouse et al., 2009). To extend the original research, work experience in number of years was added as a moderator variable. The choice of retaining work experience as a continuous variable was made to mitigate to a loss of information and a failure to consider the sensitivity that may stem from the lack of a proper cutoff point (Bagozzi et al., 1992; Baumgartner & Weijters, 2019).

Table 2  
*Measurement Scales*

Variable	Source	Items
Employer Attractiveness	Berthon et al. (2005)	25
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interest Value</li> <li>• Social Value</li> <li>• Economic Value</li> <li>• Application Value</li> <li>• Development Value</li> </ul>		
Corporate Reputation	Turban et al. (1998)	4
Social Media Use	Collins and Stevens (2002)	4
Intention to Apply	High house et al. (2003)	4
Work Experience (Number of years)		1

## 4. Results and Data Analysis

### 4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Of the 220 responses collected via the online questionnaire, representation of male respondents was slightly higher (57.2%) than women (42.8%), most likely due to men being more prone to pursuing corporate positions than women. The 22-25 age group was the most highly represented in the sample (44.5%), followed closely by the 26-35 age group (40.2%). Understandably most of the respondents (cumulatively 59.8%) had either no real experience or had been in the corporate world for no more than 2 years. However, those with moderate and high years of work experience also made for a sizable proportion of the population (40.2%), providing fairly even representation of both experienced and inexperienced individuals which is an important factor in light of the current research.

The highest representation of MBA students came from Lahore School of Economics (20%), Lahore University of Management Sciences (12%) and National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences (14%); three institutes that were most easily accessible. In total, students from MBA programs from 14 institutes across various cities of Pakistan were selected, ensuring that the data would capture insights that would be fairly representative of the overall population of MBA students in Pakistan. Of the 5 companies provided to the respondents to select which they felt they were most familiar with, Coca Cola and Nestle were selected most frequently (25% and 23% respectively) due to near universal awareness these brands have created for themselves, followed closely by Unilever and Engro (20% and 19% respectively) and trailed significantly by Telenor (11%).

#### 4.2 *Exploratory Factor Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis*

To ensure that the correlations shown in the component correlation matrix were not due to high inter-item correlations and to identify distinct components for further analysis, EFA was carried out with the component matrix undergoing the Promax rotation as suggested by Finch (2006). The pattern matrix generated showed eight distinct components based on the factor loadings exceeding 0.5 which has been deemed to be acceptable in literature (Hair et al., 2009). Based on the results, it is clear that the items measuring each of the latent variables as part of the theoretical framework effectively load on to each unique factor and as such a Confirmatory Factor Analysis can be carried without having to drop any items from the chosen measurement scales.

Table 3  
*Component Correlation Matrix*

Component	1 (AV)	2 (SV)	3 (IV)	4 (DV)	5 (EV)	6 (SM)	7 (IA)	8 (CRep)
1 (AV)	1.000							
2 (SV)	.273	1.000						
3 (IV)	.371	.392	1.000					
4 (DV)	.527	.400	.349	1.000				
5 (EV)	.108	.352	.288	.178	1.000			
6 (SM)	.120	.132	.130	.129	.031	1.000		
7 (IA)	.158	.196	.072	.265	.164	.525	1.000	
8 (CRep)	.187	.204	.129	.239	.126	.515	.565	1.000

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Promax with Kaiser Normalization.

Prior to CFA, a common latent factor was introduced to account for common method bias that could influence the model fit as suggested by Podsakoff et al. (2003) and Gaskin (2021). The model fit indices of the model showed a strong fit showing it be sufficient for further analysis. It also showed that CLF did explain a significant amount of shared variance

in the initial measurement model as seen by the difference in Chi-square value of model and the degrees of freedom the unconstrained between an unconstrained and constrained common latent factor (Chi-sq=979.0 df=601 constrained to Chi-sq=725.2 df=530 unconstrained). Leaving the CLF unconstrained also had an impact on factor loadings of Social Value due to two highly correlated items; SV4 (A fun working environment) and SV5 (A happy working environment). Due to the high correlation between the two, SV5 was dropped leading to far more improved model fit and improved factor loadings for Social Value.

Table 4

*CLF Adjusted Model Fit*

<b>CMIN/df</b>	<b>SRMR</b>	<b>TLI</b>	<b>NFI</b>	<b>CFI</b>	<b>RMSEA</b>	<b>PCLOSE</b>
1.368	0.0453	0.957	0.878	0.963	0.041	0.981

Table 5

*Pattern Matrix*

		<b>Pattern Matrix<sup>a</sup></b>							
		Component							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<b>IV1</b>				.932					
<b>IV2</b>				.868					
<b>IV3</b>				.820					
<b>IV4</b>				.860					
<b>IV5</b>				.732					
<b>SV1</b>		.843							
<b>SV2</b>		.893							
<b>SV3</b>		.858							
<b>SV4</b>		.867							
<b>SV5</b>		.775							
<b>EV1</b>						.854			
<b>EV2</b>						.865			
<b>EV3</b>						.887			
<b>EV4</b>						.800			
<b>EV5</b>						.762			
<b>DV1</b>					.872				
<b>DV2</b>					.849				
<b>DV3</b>					.839				
<b>DV4</b>					.890				
<b>DV5</b>					.748				

*Table to be continued*

AV1	.854											
AV2	.907											
AV3	.827											
AV4	.884											
AV5	.800											
CRep1											.792	
CRep2											.844	
CRep3											.593	
CRep4											.823	
SM1						.744						
SM2						.883						
SM3						.908						
SM4						.880						
IA1										.791		
IA2										.835		
IA3										.765		
IA4										.830		

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.  
 Rotation Method: Promax with Kaiser Normalization.<sup>a</sup>  
 a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

### 4.3 Reliability and Validity

The reliability and validity of the data were tested using the estimates of standardized regression weights and the correlations of the latent variables in the CLF Adjusted. In line with Hair et al. (2009), results were shown to have sufficient divergent validity as the AVE for each construct exceeded 0.5; it was further seen that the Maximum Shared Variance (MSV) did exceed its AVE and the square root of AVE of each construct exceeded inter-construct correlations, that the constructs are statistically distinct and discriminant validity is present in the model. The reliability of the results was also confirmed as each construct had a Composite Reliability above 0.7 meaning that the constructs measured what they were intended to do so.

Table 6  
*Discriminant and Convergent Validity*

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	IV	IA	SM	CRep	AV	DV	EV	SV
IV	0.906	0.658	0.189	0.908	0.811							
IA	0.873	0.633	0.549	0.880	0.080	0.796						
SM	0.895	0.680	0.450	0.895	0.124	0.671	0.824					
CRep	0.833	0.556	0.549	0.838	0.131	0.741	0.642	0.746				
AV	0.889	0.616	0.323	0.897	0.435	0.151	0.207	0.215	0.785			
DV	0.904	0.655	0.323	0.909	0.402	0.314	0.203	0.328	0.568	0.809		
EV	0.900	0.643	0.177	0.910	0.327	0.175	0.044	0.149	0.103	0.204	0.802	
SV	0.891	0.671	0.282	0.897	0.392	0.272	0.111	0.232	0.418	0.531	0.421	0.819

#### 4.4 Path Analysis

The path analysis was carried out in two parts; a primary model initially free of the proposed moderating influence of social media use and work experience in years, before introducing the influence of these proposed interactions and taking the impact they have into account to establish the final causal model. Upon an initial run of the model, it was found that model generated mixed results regarding the model fit indices; SRMR=0.0281, CFI=0.933, NFI=0.923 were all seen to be well within their acceptable ranges for a good model fit, TLI=0.660, RMSEA=0.137, PCLOSE=0.000 and CMIN/df=5.135 showed a more pessimistic view of the model fit. This did indicate that the model was flawed as the discrepancy might have arisen from reasons such as limited sizes and high factor loadings (Lai & Green, 2016).

To account for the discrepancy in fit, Markland and Ingledew (1997)'s suggestion of inspecting modification indices was followed to make changes like paths between social value and intention to apply, between social media use and intention to apply, and between application value and intention to apply. All three changes can be said to have support in prior literature; application value and social value dimensions of employer attractiveness have become more inherently linked with the symbolic benefits a company can offer in a way that often supersedes reputational aspects (Arachchige & Robertson, 2013; Babikova & Bucek, 2019; Hadi & Ahmed, 2018) and the increasing importance of social media content for employers in interacting with potential recruits and their subsequent willingness to apply (Caers & Castelyns, 2010; Kissel & Büttgen, 2015; Walker et al., 2011). The changes resulted in a significantly improved model fit to move forward with.

Table 7  
*Path Analysis Model Fit*

CMIN/df	SRMR	TLI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA	PCLOSE
2.882	0.0207	0.845	0.974	0.981	0.093	0.030

This was followed by the introduction of the two moderation interaction effects proposed in the theoretical framework by standardizing the relevant observed variables generated after the imputation of the CLF adjusted measurement model, followed by the creation of two new observed variables, both of which are product of the moderating variable and the independent variable in the proposed moderating interaction. For the social media use-corporate reputation relation the variable name was set to be SM\_x\_CRep, while for the work experience-corporate reputation interaction the new variable was named WorkExp\_X\_CRep. The resulting variables were used as observed exogenous variables that were co-variated to the other observed variables by creating paths between work experience and intention to apply, social media interaction effect and intention to apply and, work experience interaction effect and intention to apply.

The results of the path analysis were indicative of the finalized Structural Equation Model and were used to interpret and test out the proposed hypothesis. It was found that of the five proposed dimensions of employer attractiveness only two: economic value and development value, showed statistically significant links to corporate reputation as originally proposed. Additional insights from the analysis of the modified model included the confirmation of a statistically significant direct relation between social value and application value and, the intention to apply. Furthermore, the proposed relations between social media use and “corporate reputation and between corporate reputation and intention to apply were confirmed as was the moderating effect of social media use on the relation between corporate reputation and intention to apply. Finally, work experience was found to not have any sort of moderating effect and in fact had no significant impact on any of the constructs in the model as a whole.

Table 8  
Standardized Regression Weights Direct Effects

Parameter			Estimate	P
CRep	<---	IV	-.069	.308
CRep	<---	SV	.088	.095
CRep	<---	EV	.086	.099
CRep	<---	DV	.205	.010
CRep	<---	SM	.659	.010
CRep	<---	AV	-.060	.267
CRep	<---	Company	-.097	.023
IA	<---	CRep	.537	.010
IA	<---	SM	.345	.010
IA	<---	SV	.174	.010
IA	<---	AV	-.138	.010
IA	<---	Work_Experience	-.004	.935
IA	<---	WorkExp_x_CRep	-.002	.916
IA	<---	SM x CRep	-.062	.086

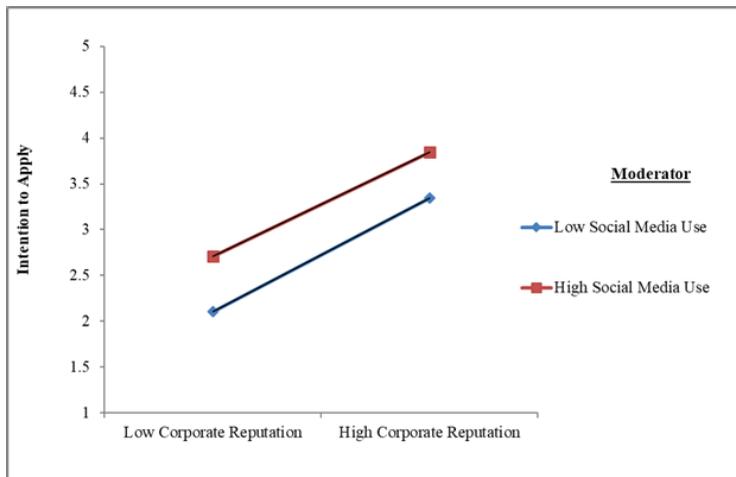


Figure 2: Moderation Interaction Effect

The standardized regression weights presented in Table 8 are evidence of the statistical significance of the proposed hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 stated that “Applicants’ perceptions of interest value are positively related to employer corporate reputation” and based on the standardized regression weights ( $\beta = -0.069$ ,  $p = 0.308$ ) it was rejected. Hypothesis 2 stated that “Applicants’ perceptions of social value are positively related to employer corporate reputation” and based on the standardized regression weights ( $\beta = 0.088$ ,  $p = 0.095$ ) it was accepted. Hypothesis 3 stated that “Applicants’ perceptions of economic value are positively related to employer corporate reputation” and based on the standardized regression weights ( $\beta = 0.079$ ,  $p = 0.099$ ) it was accepted. Hypothesis 4 stated that “Applicants’ perceptions of development value are positively related to employer corporate reputation” and based on the standardized regression weights ( $\beta = 0.205$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ) it was accepted. Hypothesis 5 stated that “Applicants’ perceptions of application value are positively related to employer corporate reputation” and based on the standardized regression weights ( $\beta = -0.060$ ,  $p = 0.267$ ) it was rejected. Hypothesis 6 stated that “Employer corporate reputation has a positive relation with an applicant’s intention to apply” and based on the standardized regression weights ( $\beta = 0.537$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ) it was accepted. Hypothesis 7 stated that “Applicants’ perceptions of employer’s use of social media is positively related to perceived corporate reputation” and based on the standardized regression weights ( $\beta = 0.659$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ) it was accepted. The hypotheses pertaining to the moderation effect were also studied; Hypothesis 8 “Applicants’ perception of employer’s use of social media moderates the relationship between perceived corporate reputation and intention to apply” ( $\beta = -0.062$ ,  $p = 0.086$ ) was accepted while Hypothesis 9 “Prior work experience moderates the relationship between perceived corporate reputation and intention to apply” ( $\beta = -0.002$ ,  $p = 0.916$ ) was rejected.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Theoretical Implications

One major theoretical implication of this current study is the validation of the EmpAt scale. The scale has seen to be sensitive across different cultures and geographical locations as seen in Sivertzen et al. (2013), Babikova & Bucek (2019), Hadi and Ahmed (2018) and, Liu (2018). It is hence imperative to carry out confirmatory factor analysis to establish the dimensions that best represent a context when studying employer branding. The direct relation between dimensions of social and application value to intention to apply also provides an insight to the functional and psychological benefits considered most important in the current context. The study was also able to add credence to growing research about the use of non-traditional media such as social media platforms as a means to generate interest amongst prospective applicants. The moderation effect on display in this research also adds to the theoretical importance of the type of content organizations choose to use on their social media platform and raises the question if social media use by an organization can actually damage their already established reputation. This differs from Sivertzen et al. (2013)’s original study

who was unable to identify such a moderating effect. The study also attempted to address the discourse on the potential impact of work experience on employer branding and found no evidence to suggest that work experience has any major effect.

## 5.2 *Practical Implications*

There are a number of key takeaways for managers and decision makers that this study puts forward. One major takeaway is that managers and organizations in Pakistan as whole need to develop an awareness of how they are perceived by the general public. Managers must become aware of what applicants find attractive so that they may effectively curate their corporate reputation in a way that it serves as signal to high quality talent. Social media use in particular plays an important role in the ability of a company to leverage its corporate reputation as means to attract talent. Results of this study shows that the use of social media by employers seems to be actively hindering the organizations' ability to leverage its established corporate reputation to attract top-tier talent. Managers hence should make it a priority to identify where the potential dissonance stems from and deal with it accordingly. This directly links to the next takeaway that if managers are able to identify and remove the cause of dissonance, they can actively leverage the power of social media to improve their "corporate reputation" and hence enhance their ability to attract talent. Managers must also become aware of what their potential employees find most attractive in an employer and use that knowledge to cultivate a corporate reputation that signals to talent that the company is the best fit for them. In doing so, the companies will also be able to save costs in the long run by having to spend less time in sorting out relevant high-quality talent.

## 5.3 *Limitations and Future Direction*

This study was limited primarily due to its cross-sectional design, meaning it only captured a minor snapshot of the overall picture. To rectify this, a longitudinal study is proposed to track changes in employer attractiveness dimensions over the course of a set timespan. The study was also limited due to the use of self-administered online questionnaires which may mean that the data is not of as high a quality as it could have been. The use of work experience in number of years alone may have also limited the ability of the study to gather meaningful data in regards to that particular hypothesis. It is hence suggested that in future studies a more robust scale that considers aspects such as job satisfaction and relations with past employers may serve similar research better. The study was restricted in its efforts to continue and extend Sivertzen et al. (2013)'s original study and hence there may be scope to study this topic with a different set of scales that are more in line with the context future research may be conducted in. One suggested change in scale is the one used for the measurement of social media use. The scale from the original study was a modified form of a scale usually used for general marketing purposes. A scale specifically designed to capture social media use could provide a better fit in the future. As the study was able to confirm a

hypothesis that was rejected in the original study it shows that there is scope for it to be replicated in even more contexts. The use of only MBA students in sample led to a highly homogenous sample which the study tried to counteract by using work experience as a moderator. A better approach may be to conduct multi-group analysis from not only MBAs but professionals from other fields and associated to other types of firms than the one used in the current study as well to get a clearer and more holistic view of employer branding.

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