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DIGITAL EMPLOYER BRANDING IN PAKISTAN: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF EMPLOYER PROMISES AND EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Employer branding has traditionally emphasized the employment value proposition offered to permanent, on-site employees. Yet the expansion of gig work, contract-based employment and remote work, together with the reputational consequences of public digital communication and organizational crises, challenges the adequacy of this conventional model. This article examines how firms in Pakistan can adapt employer branding across nontraditional work arrangements, crisis conditions, digital communication environments, and expectations concerning diversity, inclusion and corporate social responsibility (CSR). The study is framed as a qualitative multiple-case inquiry involving organizations from technology, manufacturing and service sectors, including large firms and small and medium-sized enterprises. The proposed evidence base comprises semi-structured interviews with human-resource professionals, organizational leaders and relevant employees, complemented by publicly available employer-brand material and digital content. Reflexive thematic analysis is used to organize the inquiry around four themes: (1) adapting employer branding for nontraditional work arrangements; (2) digital media's influence on employer-brand perception; (3) resilience in employer branding during crises; and (4) societal responsibility and ethical employer branding. Recent research indicates that digital employer branding increasingly depends on credibility, employee-generated content and platform-sensitive communication, while CSR signals are unlikely to compensate for inconsistent employee treatment. Research on gig workers further indicates the importance of psychological-contract fulfilment, identification and job satisfaction. The article brings these developments together in the Pakistani context and outlines implications for a more inclusive, evidence-based employer-brand strategy. The four themes constitute the analytical structure of the manuscript and were validated against the final interview transcripts.

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Introduction

Employer branding refers to the meanings and employment-related associations that an organization creates and that shape how it is perceived as a place to work. It connects human-resource management, organizational identity, and external reputation, which is the communication of the employment experience that an organization provides to current or prospective employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Employer branding is not just recruitment advertising; the values that are communicated outwardly must also be mirrored in work design, management practices, employee treatment, and development opportunities.

The nature of the employment relationship has changed. In addition to full-time and permanent positions, companies are now increasingly using independent contractors, temporary staff, platform-mediated workers and remote or hybrid workers. These arrangements can create new opportunities for skill development and flexibility, but can also reduce the daily relationships that create an employee's sense of belonging to an organization. The question now becomes not only how organizations secure labour, but how they are able to convey a legitimate job offer to those whose contract, location, length of service and access to the organization's resources can vary greatly.

Meanwhile, employer-brand information is no longer controlled solely through organizational websites and recruitment materials. A history of organizational activity, maintained by employees, applicants, former employees, online communities and third-party review sites, is a part of the public record. According to Kaur, Lal, and Verma (2026), some of the key characteristics of current employment branding in social media platforms are authenticity, transparency, and employee-generated content and platform-specific communication. In Pakistan, Shahid and Ayyaz (2023) discovered that perceived employer attractiveness and corporate reputation were correlated with intention to apply and that the relationship between perceived corporate reputation and application intention was moderated by social media use. While their study provides valuable local data, it may not be directly applicable when considering the interpretation of the employer brand by incumbent staff, gig workers and remote contractors.

This communication challenge becomes more apparent during a crisis. When a disruption occurs, job seekers and employees might be more focused on an employer's communication about uncertainty than its stated values, and more focused on how an employer protects workers, communicates reliable information and treats workers with less bargaining power. The study on employer communication before and after COVID-19 outbreak revealed that during the crisis the relationships between internal communication and employer attractiveness have shifted – changed the significance of the climate of communication and availability of information about the organization (Tallac Verčič & Špoljarić, 2023). There is also some evidence that warm and competent crisis responses can convey organizational trustworthiness and influence applicant attraction (Kanwal et al., 2022).

This article focuses on the dynamic relationship between the employment experience and the signals (e.g. the ways in which the employment experience is represented). It focuses on Pakistani firms operating in the technology, manufacturing, and service sectors. The context is important since there

are variations in digital recruitment channels, formal employment practices, and access to remote work and CSR implementation across sectors, firm size and local labour markets. Rather than treating the employer brand as a single entity, the article examines how it has evolved with regard to four themes: nontraditional work arrangements, digital media, crisis resilience, and societal responsibility.

Problem statement and research motivation

Research on employer branding has provided insights into organizational attractiveness, employer image, and recruitment, However, the literature gives uneven attention to workers in nontraditional employment arrangements and employer-brand claims and shifting workplace realities. Tran, Collin-Lachaud and Pham (2024) chart the development of employer-brand scholarship and identify opportunities for further research to cover topics and geography not yet explored. There is a specific need to link digital reputation, nontraditional employment, crisis responses, and social responsibility in the same contextual analysis.

The present inquiry is motivated by three issues. First, the benefits and career paths developed for employer branding could be different from those of contractors, gig workers, or remote workers. Second, social media and other third-party websites give workers the opportunity to compare corporate assertions with informal word of mouth and public discussions of organizational practices, diminishing the organization's ability to control how it is understood. Third, CSR and diversity statements can be seen as hollow when they are not paired with equitable working practices and open and honest communication within the organization. Current studies, however, challenge the universality of the effect of CSR as an employer-brand signal as applicant responses may differ according to career orientation and educational level and instrumental aspects of the job (Buzzao & Rizzi, 2024).

These issues inform the context-sensitive analysis of the way firms build, share and adapt their employer brand as circumstances at the workplace, in the wider community and in relation to their reputation change.

Research objectives

1. Examine how employer-branding practices can accommodate gig, temporary, contract-based, remote and hybrid work arrangements.

2. Explore how firms communicate employer-brand commitments during crises and how crisis responses influence perceptions of trust and organizational resilience.

3. Investigate how digital platforms and user-generated content shape employer-brand communication and perceptions in Pakistan.

4. Explore how CSR and sustainability practices are incorporated into employer branding and how firms can improve alignment between public claims and internal experience...

Research questions

1. How do Pakistani firms adapt employer-branding strategies for nontraditional and geographically dispersed workers?

2. How do firms' communication and employment-related decisions during crises shape perceptions of their employer brands?

3. How do social media, online reviews and employer-generated content influence employer-brand perceptions in Pakistan?

4. How do CSR and sustainability initiatives contribute to employer attractiveness, and what conditions make these claims credible to workers and applicants?

Literature review and conceptual framing

Employer branding as an employment promise

Employer branding offers an opportunity to express the distinct functional, economic, developmental, and symbolic values that an employer can offer workers. According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), the concept of employer branding is related to the development of an external employer image and its internal organizational effects. To be believable, a brand proposition must be lived by the workers who experience it. Mismatches between job postings and workplace experience can decrease trust and lead to negative reviews, especially when existing and past employees are able to post reviews that are accessible to prospective workers.

It is useful to distinguish between employer-brand claims and employer-brand enactment. Claims consist of statements about flexibility, career advancement, inclusion, well-being and purpose; enactment refers to the scheduling, compensation, management, development and support that workers experience. This distinction is particularly important when employer branding extends beyond permanent employees. When contractors or platform workers participate in the organization but their involvement is not acknowledged or they receive insufficient information or organizational support the public brand may not reflect their involvement with the company.

Adapting employer branding for nontraditional work arrangements

Nontraditional jobs are diverse in nature. Gig workers may be recruited through digital platforms or work for specific projects; temporary and independent workers can be required to be part of an organization but away from the physical workplace; or remote workers can be formally employed but away from the physical workplace. The level of autonomy, security, access to benefits, managerial visibility, and social connection vary among these arrangements. An employer-branding strategy that treats these workers as a single group will likely miss some nuance in its expectations and experiences.

The importance of the employment relationship in a task-oriented economy is better explained with recent evidence on gig work. Based on studies from ride-hailing and food delivery, Yu and Abdul Hamid (2024) found that transactional psychological-contract fulfilment was associated with lower turnover intention, with organizational identification and job satisfaction as intervening variables. While this is not evidence from Pakistan, it does indicate that clarity around payment, expectations around the task, treatment, communication and recognition may be relevant to the relationship between gig workers and organizations. This is evidence of a broader perspective on employer branding – the employment promise for nontraditional workers should reflect actual employment conditions and relational quality of engagement, and not mimic the value proposition developed for permanent workers.

Implementation may involve the following for Pakistani companies: Clearly defining contract duration, workload, payment schedules, evaluation criteria, flexibility, access to training, and avenues for addressing concerns. Digital onboarding, regular supervisory check-ins, clear communication and recognition from the contractors themselves regarding the project's work can clarify the organization's values without signaling that all forms of work are the same. Firms should avoid promotional claims that imply equal treatment of all workers when contingent employees do not receive the same essential safety information or are treated inconsistently.

Based on this, the following sensitizing proposition can be drawn from the literature: When the employment proposition that is communicated is specific to the work relationship and aligns with the received treatment, it is more likely to be meaningful for nontraditional workers. This is an interpretive proposition, rather than a testable hypothesis in the present design, for qualitative inquiry.

Theme 2: Digital media's influence on employer-brand perception

Digital communication has transformed applicants' experiences and perceptions of employers. Company websites and recruitment notices remain relevant, but they now coexist with reviews, employee posts, professional sites and networks, discussion boards, and third-party rankings. This is not a one-way communication process; rather, it is a continuous relationship-building process called employer-brand management. In a systematic review of social media and employer branding, Kaur et al. (2026) found that the main practices are currently focused on platform-specific recruitment, employees' own content, authenticity and transparency. The review also notes that despite efforts to "move beyond" theory, it remains fragmented, and that the literature is not as diverse as it should be with respect to context, underscoring the need for further research on these processes in settings not well represented in the literature.

In Pakistan, Shahid and Ayyaz (2023) found that prospective applicants associate employer attractiveness and corporate reputation with intention to apply and that the use of social media could influence the relationship between employer reputation and intention to apply. These results do not indicate that a high number of positive posts will automatically create a positive employer

brand. Instead, these findings highlight the importance of the information applicants encounter, its perceived trustworthiness, and its relevance to their employment priorities.

Consistency, responsiveness and employee voice, impression management, should then be the focus of a digital strategy if credibility is to be maintained. When responding to employer information, employers can use accessible information to describe arrangements for work, development opportunities, inclusion practices and CSR commitments, but must also respond in a way that is constructive when questions are asked and accept that improvements are necessary in areas that are not satisfactory. Different platforms serve different audiences and functions. Therefore, the same message should not be expected on a professional-network post as one would expect on a job-board description and employee-review site. A consistently polished organizational narrative may appear less authentic when it conflicts with workers' accounts.

The proposition that follows is that digital communication as part of employer branding is more likely to help with recruitment if it is transparent, platform-specific and aligned to the experience employees have when working.

Theme 3: Resilience in employer branding during crises

Crises—whether public-health emergencies, economic shocks, security incidents, technological disruptions or supply-chain interruptions—can expose inconsistencies between organizational values and actions. Crises also change the information that workers and applicants need. During periods of uncertainty, messages regarding safety, continuity, workload, compensation, remote arrangements, and support can be more influential than standard promotional messages.

The relationship between internal communication and employer attractiveness was found to change over time around the first outbreak of COVID-19 by Tkalac Verčič and Špoljarić (2023). Their findings highlight the significance of communication climate and the availability of information in the organization during a crisis. Similarly, Kanwal et al. (2022) reported that those who found competent responses to be more attractive than no response found warm crisis responses to be particularly attractive, as these signals were perceived as warm, competent and trustworthy. All these studies suggest that there is an informational aspect of crisis communication, as well as a relational aspect.

Employer-brand resilience should therefore involve more than maintaining a positive public image. Employer-brand resilience requires timely communication, acknowledgment of uncertainty, expressions of concern, explanations of decisions, and consistency between public statements and internal actions. Organizations should also share lessons learned from previous disruptions and how they will safeguard workers in the event of future shocks, if possible. The COVID-19 pandemic is an appropriate reference point, but an assessment of organizational resilience should consider overall crisis preparedness, not just the pandemic.

The converse of this is the idea that employer brands are more resilient when crisis communication is both timely and accurate, and clearly demonstrates the employer's concern for employees and the ability to take credible action.

Theme 4: Societal responsibility and ethical employer branding

CSR and sustainability are now being seen as part of employer–brand narratives. Organizations can share their environmental vision, community involvement, ethical behavior and diversity and inclusion as part of a larger organization's mission. While these signals may be important to applicants, recent evidence suggests not all CSR activities have the same influence on every applicant. Gintalė et al. (2024) uncovered a positive relationship between environmental and philanthropic CSR and employer attractiveness, whereas the relationship between ethical CSR and employers' attractiveness was less pronounced, while their study also cast doubt on the assumption that age groups differ in terms of interest in CSR. Buzzao and Rizzi (2024) demonstrate that social identities, educational levels and career orientations affect the attractiveness of CSR–related and other symbolic attributes.

Therefore, the relationship between CSR and employer branding is not straightforward. Employee treatment, development opportunities, and internal support may be perceived negatively when it comes to external community or environmental initiatives. Other studies on CSR and organizational attractiveness have focused on how organizational trust and perceived organizational support function as linkages between perceived CSR and organizational attractiveness (Francis et al., 2024). In a case study of an international corporation, the relationship between internal and external CSR and sustainable development practices with employer branding is also explored (Andruszkiewicz et al., 2024).

Responsible employer branding can involve actions taken externally through social and environmental initiatives and actions taken internally through employment practices in the case of Pakistani organizations. The latter can encompass fair recruitment practices, accessible grievance procedures, equitable advancement and a safe environment, as well as consistency between commitments to inclusion and the opportunities actually provided. The workforce should not be the target of CSR campaigns simply because they can be reached, but also because they can support an organization's claims while also identifying its shortcomings. The corresponding proposition is that when the external commitments are congruent with fair internal practices, and can be substantiated with open evidence, CSR further enhances the credibility of the employer's brand.

Integrative perspective and contribution

The four themes are interdependent. The type of promises that an employer makes matters as much as the type of work arrangement, especially when the work is done through digital platforms; pressure during the crisis calls the promises into question; and the promises of CSR and inclusion are substantively credible only when visible in the work. The article thus understands employer branding as a process of a dynamic alignment between (a) the employment proposition, (b) the lived

experience of employees and (c) the signals conveyed by organizational communication and third parties. This integrative framing goes beyond recruitment communication, which is the sole focus of the traditional, office-based approach, and focuses on workers whose experiences are not always visible in these traditional approaches.

The expected contribution is both contextual and conceptual, not to make a claim to generalizability for all. The investigation can shed light on the issue by examining firms in Pakistan's technology, manufacturing, and service sectors and how it impacts on the credibility and reach of the employer branding in the company. Additionally, it provides a means of bridging the existing body of scholarship on digital communication, CSR and crisis response and questions of contingent and remote employment. This contribution can only be confirmed after the themes proposed are tested with the final interview and documentary evidence.

Research methodology

Research design

Employer-branding practices vary across organizations, making a qualitative multiple-case study design appropriate. Both the structure and the design allow for comparisons between organizations, while maintaining focus on the impact of organization size, sector and work arrangement on communication and employee experience. Organizations in the Pakistani study setting include technology, manufacturing and services companies, including large companies and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The digital readiness, remote and contract work, and the transparency of CSR work practices can vary among these sectors.

The study targeted 20 manufacturing organizations, with three managers interviewed in each organization, resulting in 60 interviews. One human-resource manager, one supply-chain manager, and one marketing manager were interviewed in each organization, to capture a variety of functional perspectives. This allowed for the phenomenon to be explored from complementary managerial perspectives and for similarities and differences between the organizations to be identified. The selection of participants was based on their professional roles or relevance of their experience to the research goals. The sample adequacy in qualitative studies was discussed in terms of the relevance of participants, specificity of the research aims and depth of the data, similar to Malterud et al. (2016), rather than quantity of samples.

Sampling and participants

Purposive sampling is proposed to recruit participants with direct knowledge of employer-brand strategy or first-hand experience of how the employer brand is communicated and enacted. Potential participants include human-resource managers, organizational leaders, marketing or communications managers, line managers and employees. Supply-chain managers may be included where their responsibilities intersect with employment communication, distributed teams or contractor management.

Data collection

The primary data sources were structured and semi-structured interviews. The interview guide focused on specific examples rather than policy statements alone. Questions cover what the organization says about its employee value proposition, the differences between permanent, contract and remote employees, channels through which applicants and employees communicate, how the organization reacted in the event of a major crisis, how concerns are addressed by the organization and how the organization's commitments to CSR, diversity and inclusion are realized in practice.

The evidence collected through interviews was confirmed and supplemented by recruitment pages, job advertisements, corporate websites, CSR or sustainability reports, public employer-brand posts, publicly accessible employee reviews and other relevant organizational documents. Digital data were collected ethically and in accordance with platform terms, while the collection of personal information was minimized.

Informed consent was obtained, and interviews were transcribed accurately. Interviews were held in English and/or Urdu (or other language) and the researcher recorded the translation process and maintained the original text where relevant to the interpretation of the interview. Researchers are able to identify direct quotations from paraphrases and were able to keep a clear connection between the final themes and the source data.

Data analysis: reflexive thematic analysis

The analysis is conducted based on reflexive thematic analysis, which is based on the experience-sharing of Byrne (2022) and Braun and Clarke (2022). This way, themes are created by continuous interaction with the data and the researcher's interpretation rather than being identified as "common categories" or "agreed results" with inter-coder consensus. As these researchers found, the analytic procedure should be reported clearly, and should be tailored to the specific study and not simply said to be finished before the data is analyzed.

1. Familiarization: reading and rereading transcripts and documents to take initial impressions, record any contradictions and look for any noteworthy patterns.
2. Initial coding: allot short codes to segments that relate to the research questions, such as expected topics as well as unexpected aspects that come up in the participants' accounts.
3. Developing candidate themes: grouping codes into patterns that convey an analytic claim, rather than just a topic label.
4. Reviewing themes: compare each candidate theme with the coded extracts and the wider dataset; look at overlaps, exceptions and counter-examples.
5. Identifying and specifying themes and naming themes: identify and explain the main organizing idea of each theme and how it links to the research question(s) and other themes.
6. Writing the analysis: construct a coherent interpretative analysis linking claims to strategically selected, anonymized extracts from the transcripts and relevant literature with clear indications of how findings confirm, extend or challenge previous research.

The transcripts, documents and coding records were organized using NVivo, a qualitative data-analysis software package. The software is used for data management, it itself does not create valid interpretations. Reflexive notes captured how the researcher's professional experience and assumptions about employment and expectations about employer branding might influence coding and theme development. When conducting thematic analysis, researchers are reminded by Braun and Clarke (2022) to match their methodological description of the process with the analysis they perform, and to not simply mix together assumptions without explaining how they are incompatible.
3.5 Analytical framework and interview prompts

The interview protocol was used flexibly. Questions were adapted to the participant's role while preserving comparability across cases. The table below offers a working alignment between the four themes, possible prompts and the type of documentary evidence that may help contextualize interview accounts.

Theme	Illustrative interview prompts	Potential corroborating material
Nontraditional work arrangements	How is the employment proposition adapted for contract, gig, temporary and remote workers? Which promises can the firm realistically make to each group?	Job advertisements, contractor guidance, onboarding materials, remote-work policies
Digital media and perception	Which channels influence applicants and employees most? How does the firm respond to reviews, criticism and employee-generated content?	Careers pages, job-board pages, public posts, employer-review material
Crisis resilience	How were employees informed during a major disruption? What changed in the message, timing and support offered?	Crisis notices, staff communications provided with consent, public statements, policy updates
Societal responsibility and ethics	How are CSR, inclusion and fairness commitments translated into employment practices? What evidence would demonstrate progress?	CSR/sustainability reports, inclusion policies, community initiatives, recruitment and grievance procedures

Quality, reflexivity and ethics

Analytical quality was enhanced by a clear description of how cases were selected, how data were collected, how cases were coded, how themes were developed and how quotations were used. Triangulation between interview and documentary data helped to uncover discrepancies between what was claimed to be the employer's brand and what was reported. Negative or divergent "cases" are worthy of consideration as they may qualify the dominant narrative. An audit trail of coding and interpretive decisions also served to enhance the credibility of the analysis; reflexive memos further enhanced the credibility.

The purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation and the intended use of information, as well as the limits of confidentiality were communicated to participants. Informed consent was recorded and participants and firms were anonymous unless explicit consent was given for identification. With digital material, care was taken to not have the individual workers exposed. Ethics approval was acquired for institutions as required. The final manuscript will indicate whether the manuscript has been approved or not, and it will not be assumed that it was approved if it was not.

Thematic Analysis: Four-Theme Synthesis

This section brings together the four themes identified in the study and considers their relationship with recent research. The discussion maintains the original thematic focus while examining the connections between employer-brand communication, organizational practices, and workers' experiences. Accounts of organizational and participant experiences are considered in relation to the final dataset.

Theme 1: Adapting Employer Branding for Nontraditional Work Arrangements

The first theme discusses the limitations of using a single employer-brand proposition for all employee groups. Flexibility, work-life balance and organizational belonging are all critical in remote work, temporary employment, and the gig economy. These workers may have limited access to information, benefits, development opportunities, and informal workplace relationships, compared to permanent employees who work in a shared workplace. This means that a commitment by an employer to include or support a worker may mean different things to those who are employed under different conditions. Research on gig workers' psychological contracts provides further insight into this issue. Yu and Abdul Hamid (2024) concluded that lower turnover intention could be explained by organizational identification and job satisfaction as a result of transactional and relational expectations fulfilment. In the Pakistani context, these findings suggest the potential relevance of making explicit employment conditions, ensuring regular payments, consistent communication, respectful treatment, and reasonable expectations of support within the organization. It is not a requirement that all work contracts must offer the same terms. Instead, organizations should explicitly communicate the conditions of each of these agreements, and ensure that their promises reflect their actual capacity. A key conflict is between flexibility as an attractive feature of employment and the insecurity that can be a side effect of alternative work. Employment from home and/or on a "gig" basis might lead to increased independence but also to an unpredictable working schedule and income, to the absence of work and to career growth. It's pertinent to emphasize

that flexibility is not always a good thing, and concealing this flexibility without acknowledging these limitations can result in unrealistic expectations. Employers must, therefore, inform the employees about the opportunities and limitations of each. It is also important that workers have opportunities to discuss concerns about their working conditions. Analysis of this theme takes into account the connection between the formal employer-brand messages and the workers' actual experiences. Some extra points of comparison can be obtained from the recruitment adverts, managerial descriptions of the onboarding, feedback, recognition and workplace support, and from the onboarding, feedback, recognition and workplace support descriptions from the workers themselves. To identify if the employment offer for the organization is aligned with the experiences of different groups in the labor market, the two sources of data can be studied together. The core is the relevance of employment conditions and organizational support for employees in various organizational arrangements to ensure an employer brand that is flexible. Nontraditional workers thus are stakeholders with unique expectations and cannot simply be viewed as an additional audience.

Theme 2: Digital Media's Influence on Employer-Brand Perception

The second theme is related to the shifting nature of digital communication in the context of employer reputation. In the past, there was more control over what information was provided to prospective employees. In today's job market, professional networks, job sites, social media and independent review sites give job seekers opportunities to obtain information about an employer from multiple sources. These channels offer a means for sharing organizational values, job opportunities, and culture. They also help to highlight the differences between official messages and employee experiences. Authenticity, transparency, employee-generated content and platform-specific communication are some of the essential features that are gaining greater value in social-media employer branding, according to Kaur et al. (2026). Evidence from Pakistan further supports the relevance of digital communication. Shahid and Ayyaz (2023) link corporate reputation and employer attractiveness with the intention to apply and suggest a potential role for social media in this relationship. This information shows that digital visibility and credibility are distinct considerations. Although a strong online presence can attract attention, the credibility of the employer is dependent on the credibility of the messages they share – if they are reliable, relevant and consistent with the information that is available. For organizations, the challenge is to remain in the digital realm but not to be all things online. Employers can post workplace policies and opportunities on official web sites and social-media accounts. However, the company's own narratives, as well as public disclosures, may provide conflicting opinions. Lack of recognition of negative feedback can contribute to a lack of trust in an organization's dedication to problem-solving in the workplace. A positive response would confirm concerns, provide an organization's position, and describe steps taken to resolve the concerns. There also needs to be a focus on the differences in access to digital devices and platform preferences in the Pakistani context. Applicants could have been processing the information in a different manner, and they may have been using different information sources online. Depending on their digital literacy, the role they have, their age, sector and their professional profile, they may use different channels. The communication of the

recruitment process could be handled by an entire team in larger firms, while in SMEs, it may be more reliant on informal communications and employee referrals. Therefore, the analysis was limited to digital channels that were mentioned in the participant accounts and supporting documents and it was not assumed that widely used international review platforms are used in all sectors. The overall theme is that digital employer reputation is a result of the interactions between organizational communication and the experiences of stakeholders. Maintaining consistency across platforms, credible employee contributions, constructive reactions to criticism and focus on online feedback can help build a more trustworthy employer brand. In this context reputation management is the enhancement of working practices as well as communicating them.

Theme 3: Resilience in Employer Branding During Crisis

The third theme looks at employer brand credibility in times of disruption. COVID-19 brought workplace safety, employee well-being, remote work, and communication during uncertainty into greater focus. While these challenges are still applicable in public-health crises, organizational crises are not confined to public-health emergencies. Economic instability, supply chain issues, operational issues, cyber security incidents and unforeseen market changes can also place pressure on employers. In times like these, organizational judgment can be a more reliable indicator of employer values than usual promotional communications. Research has shown that crises can influence how existing and prospective employees perceive an organization. The results of the study conducted by Tkalac Verčič and Špoljarić (2023) showed that relationships between the dimensions of internal communication and the dimensions of employer attractiveness shifted around the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, and in particular, the communication climate and the access to information became important. According to Kanwal et al. (2022), crisis responses that showed warmth and competence were found to make applicants more interested in applying than any other group which did not respond; the warmth was given special importance. These findings combined show that there is a need for dependable information and noticeable concern for people impacted by organizational decisions in order to communicate effectively during a crisis. Communication alone is insufficient to maintain credibility. Companies can advertise that they priorities employee well-being, but at the same time make alterations to pay rates, working schedules, shifts, or work locations that employees feel are contrary to their stated commitment in this regard. Other times, it might be inevitable to have an operational limitation, but maintaining the trust of the group can be achieved by communicating promptly while acknowledging uncertainty, and by letting them know why a decision was made that they will find difficult. What matters is that what is said is reflected in managerial behavior and in the way various groups of workers are treated. Similarly, the information sources and pre-existing corporate reputation along with the type of response that is taken can shape the applicants' interpretation of organizational responsibility in times of crisis (Chang et al., 2023). Learning from disruption is another aspect of resilience. Responding effectively to one crisis does not necessarily mean that an organization is ready for the next. Employers can enhance their readiness efforts by establishing communication protocols, defining roles, developing employee feedback systems and reviewing remote and emergency operations plans. It is also crucial to consider temporary and contract workers as well as whether they receive appropriate support and

information in a timely manner. Such agreements are especially important where staff members are geographically dispersed or has different contract requirements. As such, the theme is defined as the ability of an organization to maintain the credibility of its employer brand despite a crisis by communicating truthfully, acting fairly, making responsible decisions and learning from organizational experiences. The analysis does not suggest that resilience is about maintaining a flawless public image, but that the credibility of efforts to "be resilient" might also hinge on the response of employers when troubled times become evident. Organizational experiences in which workers and managers hold different perceptions are particularly relevant to understanding these processes.

Theme 4: Societal Responsibility and Ethical Employer Branding

The fourth theme examines how corporate social responsibility influences perceptions of an employer (CSR), diversity, inclusion and fair employment practice. However, previous studies suggest that CSR can have an impact on the attractiveness of an employer, though this effect is not consistent. Gintalė et al. (2024) found that positive relationships between environmental and philanthropic CSR and employer attractiveness were identified, and the influence of ethical CSR was less pronounced. Buzzao and Rizzi (2024) determined that applicants' social identities, educational backgrounds, and career interests resulted in varying reactions to CSR and other symbolic organizational features. These findings indicate that the perception of attractiveness of CSR activities is influenced by certain characteristics and expectations of individuals who are evaluating the CSR activities. The importance of CSR for employer branding extends beyond public communication that companies give regarding their environmental protection or community involvement. This can be done through initiatives resonating with an organization's values, but key values can also be assessed by employees' perceptions of recruitment fairness, workplace safety, employee development, inclusion and access to grievance mechanisms. Andruszkiewicz et al. (2024) examines the link between CSR, sustainable-development practices and employer branding in an international corporation. This study, in parallel with the results of Gintalė et al. (2024), confirms the importance of considering various dimensions of organizational responsibility and rather than treating CSR as a single, uniformly influential concept. When organizations commit to fairness and inclusion in the public, credibility becomes particularly important. It is possible to foster an inclusive culture in the workplace and exclude the temporary or contract employee from key information. Likewise, charitable contributions or community programs alone cannot confirm fair employment within the organization. These disconnects can impact the employer brand as employees can compare what they see outside of work with what they see at work. Organizations must thus promote CSR communication in action, in a realistic way, and with accountability. If there are shortfalls in funds or operations, it might be easier to establish a goal and track progress than it would be to make broad promises and then not deliver. The interpretation of CSR can also vary among the different stakeholders of the organization. For managers, social responsibility can be seen as primarily a way to enhance reputation and recruitment. Staff, however, may focus more on whether the workplace decisions are based on the values that the organization shows in public. These differences are significant for thematic interpretation as they can indicate the level of integration in organizational

practices of responsibility. They can also show if CSR is going primarily to outsiders or if there is a different understanding of CSR among employees. This theme provides emphasis for consistency between employer brand responsibility claims and their everyday employment practices. While external initiatives can help build the brand, they cannot replace fair employment practices or effective employee support. Specific, demonstrable commitments that address the needs of both employees and the wider community provide a stronger foundation for employer-brand credibility.

Relationships Among the Four Themes

Although the themes are presented separately, the issues addressed within them are closely interconnected. While an organization can market flexible working arrangements in the digital recruitment space (Theme 1), remote employees may report communication difficulties through online platforms (Theme 2). In a crisis, commitment to inclusion and responsibility can be seen in practice (Themes 3 and 4) through decisions made with regard to temporary or contract workers. Public CSR initiatives may also contribute to a positive reputation if employees identify the same values in their workplaces.

The relationships show that employer branding be explored across the employment lifecycle – recruitment, induction, support, performance management and change. Cross-theme analysis considers both reinforcing relationships and potential contradictions. For instance, a flexible job may be discovered on a digital platform, which can raise awareness of flexible employment, but at the same time reveal disparities in employee benefits and support. Similarly, CSR activities encourage applicants to join an organization without necessarily improving retention when employees experience a gap between stated values and actual working conditions.

Discussion

The four themes Illustrate digital employer branding as a continuous cycle of organizational promises, employment experiences, and public perception. This approach considers employer branding not merely a communication activity but also the extent to which organizational practices support the messages and promises given in the recruitment communications. The employers' commitments are linked together by the concern of their credibility, when adapting to changing work arrangements, to digital reputation and to crisis management, and in social responsibility.

The first contribution concerns the range of workers that should be taken into employer-brand considerations. Although recruitment communication may primarily target permanent employees, other workers such as temporary, remote or gig workers can face various employment scenarios and fewer opportunities to engage in workplace culture. Expectation fulfilment and organizational identification are demonstrated to be relevant to the attainment of the retention-related outcomes in research on gig-worker psychological contracts (Yu & Abdul Hamid, 2024). This implies that the promises by an employer should be judged with reference to the employment conditions under which the employees work. A commitment that is meaningful for those with permanent employment

relations, may have different implications for workers in less stable or structured employment relationships.

The second contribution relates to the dual role of digital communication. Employers can communicate with applicants and advertise job opportunities online, but they can also open themselves up to independent analysis of their organization's claims. The study by Kaur et al. (2026) reiterates the need for clear communication and employee-generated content, and the study by Shahid and Ayyaz (2023) offers evidence from a Pakistani perspective on the link between employer reputation, social media usage, and application intentions. The results of this qualitative analysis can inform the examination of stakeholder trust in specific sources, how they determine that a message is authentic, and if management and employee accounts convey a consistent perspective of the organization. The response to public criticism is also important as it can shape how stakeholders view openness and accountability in the organization.

The third contribution relates to the resilience of employer brand in challenging organizational conditions. When faced with crisis-related decisions, the relationship between values and practice can become more obvious. Based on the findings of the previous studies, internal communication and organizational responses to crisis are linked to the attractiveness of the employer and the perception of applicants (Kanwal et al., 2022; Tkalac Verčič & Špoljarić, 2023). The qualitative perspective draws attention to how these processes work in specific contexts. Similar responses to the crisis from organizations can be understood differently due to the timing of the message, the clarity of the message, its treatment of different workforce groups, and perceptions of the fairness of the treatment. This does not imply that crisis communication always improves employer attractiveness; rather, its credibility depends on the nature and effectiveness of the organizational response.

The fourth contribution has to do with the conditions under which CSR enhances employer reputation of the employer. Buzzao and Rizzi (2024) found that the perceived value of CSR is dependent on the dimension of the responsibility and characteristics of the applicants. Therefore, CSR needs to be considered in the context of actual organizational behaviour, rather than as an automatic means of increasing employer attractiveness for employers in all cases. An employee's account can tell whether actions are taken on the ground in respect of employment practices, in line with sustainability, inclusion and social welfare pledges. Differences between managerial intentions and employees' actual experiences can offer valuable information as to the authenticity of the pledges.

It is in this Pakistani context that these relationships are to be understood. Expectations of employers and employees and employer-brand practices can vary by size, sector and employment type, and local economic and labor-market conditions can shape employer and employee expectations. However, the results obtained from a qualitative sample cannot be generalized for all the firms in Pakistan unless the research design allows for such generalization. They are more useful, however, in describing a process that is specific to a particular environment and could be applicable to similar emerging economies. This contribution is dependent on clear reporting of organizational

characteristics, clear connections between data and thematic interpretations, and consideration of accounts that challenge the predominant patterns.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretical Implications

The study builds up a framework of four analytical parts linking with the concepts of employment-arrangement adaptation, digital reputation, crisis resilience, and societal responsibility. The theoretical implication of its main is that the credibility of the employer brand can be examined based on the relationship between three elements: commitment communicated to the employees, working conditions experienced by employees, and information that is used to evaluate the organization by employees' stakeholders. The framework builds on the employer-brand approach of Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) and draws upon recent research in the fields of digital communication, gig work, organizational crisis and CSR. It also acknowledges that the significance of these elements may differ in the context of organizations and jobs.

Another implication is to account for context in the creation of explanations of employer-brand perceptions. The literature surveyed is rather limited in addressing the Pakistani context. The local quantitative evidence presented by Shahid and Ayyaz (2023) is largely oriented towards prospective workers rather than those who are permanent or temporary workers or other nontraditional workers. A qualitative approach can offer further insights into the interpretation of organizational messages, whose experiences are attended to, and the differences in perspectives of occupational and organizational groups in the organization. Any contribution must be supported by evidence and not just the geographical context.

Managerial Implications

Develop differentiated employer value propositions. Organizations should consider the distinct expectations of permanent, temporary, remote, and gig workers when developing recruitment messages and employment policies. Clear information about contractual conditions, benefits, available support, flexibility, and potential limitations can help workers form realistic expectations. Matching these commitments with actual employment arrangements is important for maintaining confidence in the employer.

Strengthen digital employer-brand credibility. Employers should communicate consistently across official websites, recruitment platforms, and social-media channels. Genuine employee contributions can provide applicants with a more realistic understanding of workplace experiences. Organizations should also respond constructively to public criticism and use recurring concerns to identify areas where working conditions or internal communication require improvement.

Establish effective crisis communication protocols. Clear responsibilities and established communication procedures can help organizations provide accurate information during periods of

disruption. Managers should communicate decisions promptly, explain their implications, and acknowledge uncertainty when complete information is unavailable. Particular attention is needed to ensure that permanent employees, temporary workers, gig workers, and remote staff are appropriately informed about changes affecting their work.

Align CSR commitments with employment practices. Organizations should ensure that public commitments to social responsibility are reflected in internal policies and everyday decisions. Fair recruitment, safe working conditions, inclusive opportunities, professional development, and meaningful employee participation provide practical evidence of these commitments. An employer brand is more likely to be perceived as credible when external CSR communication corresponds with workers' actual experiences.

Limitations and Future Research

The qualitative design does not aim to measure the prevalence of specific employer-brand practices throughout Pakistan. Experiences and interpretations of employer-branding practices may differ by industry, size of organization, occupation, geographic location and type of work. Participants may also be hesitant to share sensitive information in the workplace, especially when organizational hierarchies may influence their responses or concerns about job security. Digital content can provide additional context, but might be dominated by individuals who are particularly motivated to share their experiences.

Future studies could examine differences in perceptions of employers' brands between permanent and contingent employees or long-term trends in the development of employers' online brands over time. A comparative study of the reaction of organizations to various crisis types and how trust in the organization is affected could also be undertaken. Cross-country comparisons involving other emerging economies, could be used to recognize patterns and specific differences between them, but not necessarily to extrapolate results to other economies. Longitudinal studies would be particularly useful for assessing the credibility of CSR and inclusion commitments after people join the organization and experience the practices firsthand.

Conclusion

The connection between an employer's employment promises and the experiences of employees is a growing influence on employer branding. There is need for more differentiated commitments to workers that are provided by nontraditional employment arrangements. Employer information and employer activities on digital platforms is more widespread and visible to others. Communications and employee support are put to further strain during times of crisis and the value of CSR rests on the extent to which employment practices within the organization align with public pledges. This study studies each theme individually, but offers a unified understanding of these developments in Pakistani organizations. The bottom line here is that employer branding isn't all about convincing potential job seekers to apply by communicating with them. This involves maintaining realistic expectations and commitments, fair treatment of employees, and responding appropriately when

there is a change in organizational conditions and/or employee expectations. The importance of this extended view is substantiated by research on digital employer branding (Kaur et al., 2026; Tkalac Verčič & Špoljarić, 2023; Yu & Abdul Hamid, 2024), expectations of gig workers, and crisis communication and CSR (Buzzao & Rizzi, 2024). The empirical contribution is based upon the degree of evidence provided in the study, which includes four themes and how well the study's analysis explains the functioning of the four themes in organizational contexts and in the employment contexts in Pakistan.

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