



How Employer Branding Affects Employer Attractiveness in the Vietnamese Service Industry?

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ABSTRACT

The quality of human resource relies on whether firms can identify and attract talented employees while other firms also compete aggressively to obtain such workforce. Although prior research focuses on how to conduct employer branding and how it is important to attract potential staff, they have not fully addressed how employer branding affects employer attractiveness. This paper aims at filling this gap in the context of the service industry which significantly emphasizes the role of employees in creating service quality. Our sample includes 358 respondents who have ever searched for information about or considered applying to a specific service company. Using the structural equation modelling, we find that employer branding has a positive effect on corporate reputation which, in turn, increases employer attractiveness. Our findings imply that service firms should recognize the importance of employer branding and improve their employer branding practices. Employer branding is not only good for their reputation but also their attractiveness towards job applicants. If firms fail to have enough resources to invest in all employer branding dimensions, they may set investment priorities based on their resources and capabilities. Moreover, applicants should collect enough information about firms before applying for jobs. Considering employer branding dimensions across potential employers help applicants choose appropriate destinations for their applications.

Keywords: Employer Branding, Employer Reputation, Employer Attractiveness, Service Industry, Vietnam

JEL Classifications: M12, M31

1. INTRODUCTION

In the modern economy, where technology and innovation have become critical drivers of business development, one of the foremost priorities for firms is having a high-quality workforce. The quality of human resource relies on whether firms can identify and attract talented employees while other firms also compete aggressively to obtain such workforce (Leekha Chhabra and Sharma, 2014). Over the last 20 years, employer branding has been recognized as a powerful tool to attract high-potential employees in the war for talent. Therefore, employer branding draws much attention from both academics and practitioners (Elving et al., 2013; Kucherov et al., 2022). Many prior studies mainly focus on definitions and contents of employer branding (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Berthon et al., 2005; Knox and Freeman, 2006; Kucherov and Zamulin, 2016; Lee et al., 2018; Maxwell

and Knox, 2009) and its effects on corporate characteristics and firm performance (Aldousari et al., 2017; Edwards, 2009; Tumasjan et al., 2020; Xia and Yang, 2010). However, there has been little research on how employer branding affects employer attractiveness. Kucherov et al. (2022); Leekha Chhabra and Sharma (2014) pay attention to this topic but their studies have not fully addressed the mechanism through which dimensions of employer branding influence employer attractiveness.

Service industry is a promising context to examine the effect of employer branding on employer attractiveness due to its specific characteristics. First, the intangibility of service makes firms face difficulties in quality control. Second, the inseparability of service delivery and consumption requires employees to provide customers with service in real time (Pleger Bebko, 2000). These characteristics indicate that service quality considerably depends

on the interaction between employees and customers. Several previous studies show that talented employees have better interactions with customers and thus enhance customer experience and satisfaction (Chuang and Liao, 2010; Islam et al., 2020; Jo et al., 2020; Prentice et al., 2020).

Vietnam is a transition economy with a fast-growing service industry. According to the overall strategy to develop the service industry of Vietnam over the period 2021-2030 and vision 2025 attached to Decision 531/QĐ-TTg, the Vietnamese government aims to improve the service industry's efficiency and competitiveness so that it is as competitive as those of ASEAN developed economies and complied with international standards and practices. In 2025, the Vietnamese service industry accounts for 51.08% of GDP and has a growth rate of 8.62% which is higher than the economic growth rate of 8.02%. However, trained workforce only constitutes about 30% of the country's total workforce. This drives service firms to concentrate on employer branding which is necessary to improve their human resources.

Based on the above-mentioned motivations, this paper investigates how employer branding influences employer attractiveness in the Vietnamese service industry. We use the 25-item scale suggested by Berthon et al. (2005) to measure dimensions of employer branding. We argue that these dimensions affect employer attractiveness through shaping employer reputation. Our sample includes 358 respondents who have ever searched for information about or considered applying to a specific service company. Using the structural equation modelling, we find that employer branding helps service firms improve their reputation and thus make them more attractive to potential employees. Our paper contributes to the literature of employer branding by showing that employer branding dimensions affect employer attractiveness through employer reputation. These findings imply that service firms should be aware of and invest more in employer branding so that they may improve their reputation and attract talented employees.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Employer Branding

A brand is initially defined as a set of consumers' perceptions about a product (Veloutsou, 2007). It reflects how a product is positioned in consumers' mind. Firms develop a brand as a crucial means to connect consumers with a specific product and thus drives consumers to purchase it (Aldousari et al., 2017). Employer brand is an extension of product brand. This new concept emerges in the 1990s when organizations start paying more attention to attraction of potential employees. Ambler and Barrow (1996) are pioneers in coining the term "employer brand" after they conduct a pilot qualitative study with a sample of 27 top managers in the UK. From the interest perspective, they define employer brand as a set of functional, economic and psychological benefits supplied by a job and identified with an employer. Although a firm is aware of its employer brand or not, its employer brand is still present.

From the 1990s, firms are more likely to depend on intellectual assets more than on physical assets. This increases the demand for skilled labor force. In the meantime, the supply of high-quality

staff is limited (Kucherov et al., 2022; Moroko and Uncles, 2008). Therefore, recruiting talented employees becomes critical to firms' survival and development. When firms are concerned about their employer brand in human resource management, they tend to divert many resources into employer branding in order to make them more attractive to potential employees (Backhaus, 2004; Kucherov et al., 2022).

Employer branding is the application of marketing strategies, tools and techniques to create and develop a good brand for a firm so that it becomes appealing to potential employees. According to Sullivan (2004), employer branding does not focus only on potential staff but also other stakeholders. It is defined as "a targeted, long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm". In the recruitment process, this marketing-based approach differentiates a firm from its competitors in the labor market by creating unique and desirable characteristics. Employer branding helps firms attract highly appropriate and qualified candidates; therefore, they have more opportunities to improve the quality of their human resources. Following the benefit perspective, Berthon et al. (2005) propose five groups of information that may be used for employer branding. These five factors include interest value, social value, economic value, development value and application value. Then, Maxwell and Knox (2009) suggest another set of employer branding contents namely employment, organizational success, construed external image and product/service characteristics. Later studies also provide a wide range of approaches to reflect employer branding but the Berthon's dimensions are still used commonly.

2.2. Theoretical Foundations

The extant literature shows that employer branding may be effectively explained by four theories including resource-based view, psychological contract theory, signaling theory and social identity theory. According to the resource-based view, a firm's competitive advantage is shaped by its internal resources rather than factors in the external business environment. Possessing unique and valuable resources is the key for a firm to move ahead of their rivals (Barney, 1991). Beside common resources such as physical and financial assets, human capital is also recognized as a critical source of competitive advantage. Hence, firms focus on employer branding to increase their human capital and thus enhance their performance.

Psychological contract theory posits that an employer and an employee have implicit expectations and beliefs towards each other. They are beyond formal rights and obligations stipulated in an employment contract but they also determine the relationship between employers and employees (Hendry and Jenkins, 1997). Employer branding help employees understand employers' expectations and vice versa. Consequently, firms can recruit appropriate employees and strengthen the psychological contract.

In a similar manner an adverse selection in which potential employees tend to consider all firms as low quality employers. Therefore, firms need to use employer branding as a signal to reduce the information asymmetry (Spence, 1973). Specific

actions, attributes or information from employer branding strategies helps candidates evaluate employers more effectively and thus firms can recruit highly qualified employees.

Social identity theory states that people derive their personal identity when they are engaged with a group or an organization (Tajfel and Turner, 2004). Potential employees tend to have positive identification with an employer when they are more aware of the employer image. Employer branding helps a firm increase potential employees' positive identification and thus motivates them to seek membership with it. Candidates apply for jobs in a firm since they expect to experience what the membership promises (Siem et al., 2026).

2.3. Hypothesis Development

The theoretical foundation shows that employer branding is used to create positive perceptions of potential employees towards employers. These positive perceptions motivate potential employees to work for them and thus they are more likely to recruit highly qualified and appropriate staff. The perception of potential employees towards employers may be defined as employer reputation (Tkalac Verčić and Sinčić Ćorić, 2018). Good reputation is one of the most valuable assets that mitigates stakeholder uncertainty about firms' future prospects and enhance their competitive advantages (Vidaver-Cohen, 2007). Therefore, we hypothesize that dimensions have positive effects on employer reputation.

H₁: Employer branding dimensions have positive effects on employer reputation.

Good reputation is a valuable corporate resource, a strong binding for the psychological contract, a positive signal and an enhancement of applicants' identifications with an employer. Therefore, an employer with a good reputation becomes more appealing to potential employees. Prior research also finds that customers have higher loyalty and job applicants are more willing to work for firms with good reputation (Fombrun, 2005; Tkalac Verčić and Sinčić Ćorić, 2018). Furthermore, Buil et al. (2025); Xie et al. (2015) find a positive impact of employer reputation on organizational attractiveness.

H₂: Employer branding has a positive effect on employer attractiveness.

Figure 1 shows the proposed research model based on the above-mentioned hypotheses.

3. METHODS

3.1. Data Collection

Our study has two stages of data collection. First, we conduct a pilot survey of 30 students with the questionnaire draft in order to verify and improve the questionnaire design. After receiving their feedbacks, we modify the sequence of questions and some statements to make the questionnaire more understandable and readable. The final questionnaire includes three main parts including the introduction, the demographic information and items reflecting the constructs.

The main survey is conducted online through Google forms. The questionnaire is delivered to potential employees who have ever searched for information about or considered applying to a specific service company. After the survey period, we obtain 358 valid responses. Since respondents are required to answer all questions which are compulsory before they submission, there is no questionnaire with missing data.

3.2. Measurement of Variables

In line with many prior studies (Kashyap and Verma, 2018; Maurya and Agarwal, 2018; Tkalac Verčić and Sinčić Ćorić, 2018), we use the five dimensions suggested by Berthon et al. (2005) to measure employer branding. These five dimensions consist of interest value, social value, economic value, development value and application value. Each dimension has five items. Since our study survey students, we modify the items to capture responses from potential employees instead of existing staff. Following Buil et al. (2025), we adapt four-item scales adapted from Ehrhart et al. (2012) and Highhouse et al. (2003) to measure employer reputation and employer attractiveness respectively. All items are answered on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree.

3.3. Data Analysis

In order to analyze our data, we utilize Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). According to Hair et al. (2017), PLS-SEM is appropriate for complicated models with several latent variables and small samples. We evaluate the reliability and validity of the constructs by common indices including Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). In addition, we assess the discriminant validity by the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Demographics

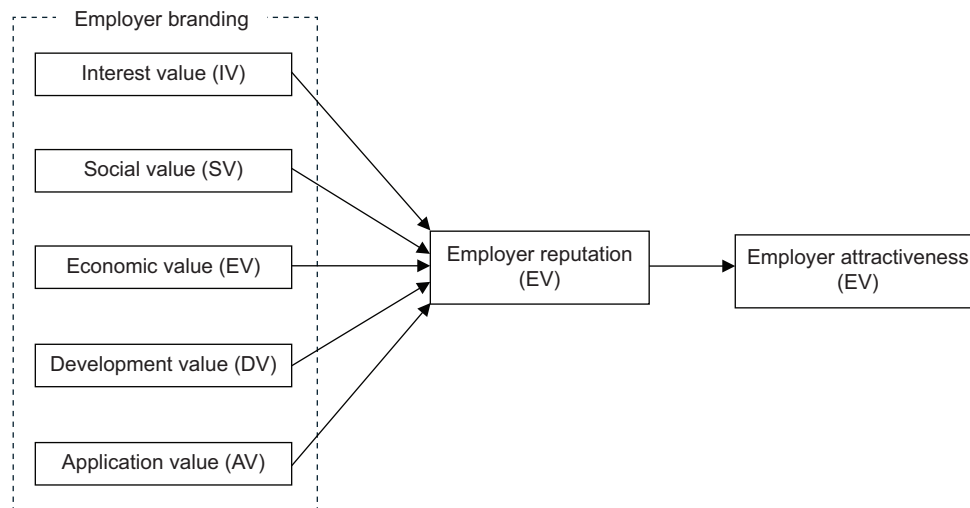
Table 1 shows demographic information of the sample, namely respondents' occupation, age, education and working experience.

Table 1: Demographic information

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage
Occupation		
Third-fourth year students	194	54.2
Recent graduates (under 2 years)	54	15.1
Staff (under 5 years of experience)	51	14.2
Others	59	16.5
Age		
18–22	236	65.9
23–25	80	22.3
26–30	33	9.2
Over 30	9	2.5
Education		
Undergraduate	303	84.6
Postgraduate	29	8.1
Other	26	7.3
Working experience		
Under 1 year	156	43.6
1–3 years	70	19.6
3–5 years	23	6.4
None	84	23.5
Over 5 years	25	7.0

Variables	Items	Sources
Interest value (IV)		
IV1	The company produces innovative products and services	Berthon et al. (2005)
IV2	The company has novel work practices/forward-thinking	
IV3	The company makes use of employees' creativity	
IV4	The company produces high-quality products and services	
IV5	The company has an exciting working environment	
Social value (SV)		
SV1	Employees have a good relationship with their colleagues	Berthon et al. (2005)
SV2	Employees have a good relationship with their superiors	
SV3	Colleagues are supportive and encouraging	
SV4	The company has a fun working environment	
SV5	The company has a happy working environment	
Economic value (EV)		
EV1	The company has an attractive overall compensation package	Berthon et al. (2005)
EV2	The company has an above average basic salary	
EV3	Job security is guaranteed in the company	
EV4	The company provides good promotion opportunities	
EV5	The company provides hands-on inter-departmental experience	
Development value (DV)		
DV1	Employees feel more self-confident as a result of working for the company	Berthon et al. (2005)
DV2	Employees feel good about themselves as a result of working for the company	
DV3	Employees gain career-enhancing experience	
DV4	Working for the company is a springboard for future employment	
DV5	Employees receive recognition/appreciation from management	
Application value (AV)		
AV1	Employees have opportunities to teach others what they have learned	Berthon et al. (2005)
AV2	Employees have opportunities to apply what was learned at tertiary institutions	
AV3	The company is customer-orientated	
AV4	The company is humanitarian organization that gives back to society	
AV5	The company provides the feelings of acceptance and belonging	
Employer reputation (ER)		
ER1	The company has a reputation as being an excellent employer	Ehrhart et al. (2012)
ER2	The company has a positive organizational image	
ER3	The company is recognized for its good reputation	
ER4	The company has a reputation for being a good company	
Employer attractiveness (EA)		
EA1	For me, this company would be a good place to work	Highhouse et al. (2003)
EA2	This company is attractive for me as a place for employment	
EA3	I am interested in learning more about this company	
EA4	A job at this company is very appealing to me	

Figure 1: Proposed research model



Third-fourth year students have the largest group with 54.2% of responses. Recent graduates (under 2 years) and staff (under 5 years of experience) constitute 15.1% and 14.2% respectively.

This occupation distribution is consistent with the distribution of others. Respondents from 18 to 22 years old account for 65.9% of the sample, followed by the 23–25 group (22.3%) and the

26–30 group (22.3%). Over 30 respondents only have 2.5%. Most participants are undergraduates (84.6%). Those who have working experience of under 1 year and 1–3 years contribute 43.6% and 19.6% of the sample respectively.

4.2. Measurement Models

4.2.1. Construct reliability and validity

Table 2 presents Cronbach’s alpha, composite reliability (rho_a), composite reliability (rho_c) and average variance extracted (AVE) to consider the construct reliability and validity. We find that all loadings, alphas and composite reliability indices (rho_a and rho_c) are greater than the acceptable value of 0.7. According to Hair et al. (2017), the constructs meet the requirements of internal consistency and reliability. In addition, we realize that our constructs have satisfactory levels of convergent validity since their AVE indices are larger than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 2: Cronbach’s alpha, composite reliability (rho_a), composite reliability (rho_c) and average variance extracted (AVE)

Variables	Loadings	Alpha	Rho_a	Rho_c	AVE
IV		0.925	0.929	0.944	0.770
IV1	0.848				
IV2	0.877				
IV3	0.883				
IV4	0.862				
IV5	0.915				
SV		0.896	0.898	0.924	0.708
SV1	0.817				
SV2	0.867				
SV3	0.851				
SV4	0.776				
SV5	0.892				
EV		0.864	0.876	0.902	0.650
EV1	0.868				
EV2	0.803				
EV3	0.746				
EV4	0.721				
EV5	0.881				
DV		0.900	0.905	0.926	0.716
DV1	0.890				
DV2	0.817				
DV3	0.856				
DV4	0.778				
DV5	0.886				
AV		0.866	0.878	0.903	0.651
AV1	0.794				
AV2	0.804				
AV3	0.735				
AV4	0.834				
AV5	0.862				
ER		0.864	0.865	0.908	0.711
ER1	0.839				
ER2	0.851				
ER3	0.796				
ER4	0.885				
EA		0.851	0.853	0.900	0.692
EA1	0.851				
EA2	0.834				
EA3	0.802				
EA4	0.839				

EV: Economic value, DV: Development value, AV: Application value, ER: Employer reputation, EA: Employer attractiveness, IV: Interest value

4.2.2. Discriminant validity

The Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio are commonly used to investigate the discriminant validity. Table 3 indicates that the former is satisfied since the square root of AVE for each construct is consistently greater than its correlations with the remaining constructs across all columns. Besides, Table 4 shows that the HTMT values meet the requirement of discriminant validity since they are smaller than the critical value of 0.85 (Hair et al., 2017).

4.2.3. Structural model

Figure 2 reports path coefficients to examine the connections between different constructs described in the research model. Table 5 shows that all of the employer branding dimensions are positively related to employer reputation at the significant level of 1%. The five employer branding dimensions can explain 57.6% of the variance in employer reputation. This finding supports Hypothesis 1. Moreover, employer reputation also has a positive relationship with employer attractiveness at 1% of significance. Employer reputation can explain 49.6% of the variance in employer attractiveness. This is supporting evidence for Hypothesis 2.

Table 6 presents the mediation test to consider the indirect effects of five employer branding dimensions on employer attractiveness through employer reputation. We find that all indirect effects are positive and statistically significant at 1%.

5. DISCUSSION

This paper contributes valuable insights into employer branding, specially in the context of service industry where the interactions between employees and customers critically determine service quality and customer satisfaction. Our findings are consistent with theoretical foundations such as resource-based view, psychological contract theory, signalling theory and social identity theory.

Table 3: Fornell-Larcker criterion

Variables	IV	SV	EV	DV	AV	ER	EA
IV	0.877						
SV	0.260	0.842					
EV	0.226	0.282	0.806				
DV	0.375	0.336	0.246	0.846			
AV	0.291	0.081	0.068	0.316	0.807		
ER	0.548	0.480	0.457	0.523	0.378	0.844	
EA	0.533	0.296	0.270	0.462	0.405	0.704	0.832

EV: Economic value, DV: Development value, AV: Application value, ER: Employer reputation, EA: Employer attractiveness, IV: Interest value

Table 4: Heterotrait-monotrait ratio

Variables	IV	SV	EV	DV	AV	ER
SV	0.286					
EV	0.252	0.324				
DV	0.406	0.371	0.279			
AV	0.320	0.118	0.099	0.359		
ER	0.610	0.544	0.526	0.589	0.430	
EA	0.598	0.337	0.314	0.524	0.466	0.818

EV: Economic value, DV: Development value, AV: Application value, ER: Employer reputation, EA: Employer attractiveness, IV: Interest value

Figure 2: Structural equation model

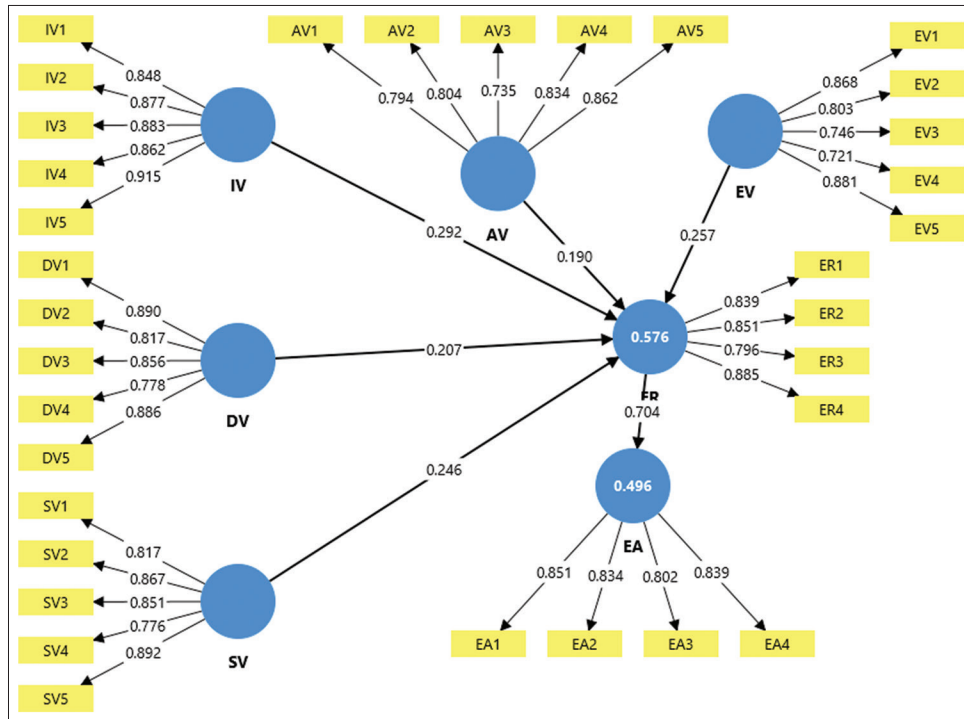


Table 5: Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P-values
IV->ER	0.292	0.289	0.036	8.081	0.000
SV->ER	0.246	0.246	0.035	6.992	0.000
EV->ER	0.257	0.258	0.043	6.050	0.000
DV->ER	0.207	0.209	0.049	4.211	0.000
AV->ER	0.190	0.194	0.036	5.314	0.000
ER->EA	0.704	0.706	0.018	39.293	0.000

EV: Economic value, DV: Development value, AV: Application value, ER: Employer reputation, EA: Employer attractiveness, IV: Interest value

Table 6: Mediation testing

Hypothesis	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P-values
EV -> ER -> EA	0.181	0.182	0.031	5.941	0.000
IV -> ER -> EA	0.206	0.204	0.027	7.678	0.000
SV -> ER -> EA	0.174	0.174	0.025	6.886	0.000
AV -> ER -> EA	0.134	0.137	0.025	5.340	0.000
DV -> ER -> EA	0.146	0.148	0.035	4.183	0.000

EV: Economic value, DV: Development value, AV: Application value, ER: Employer reputation, EA: Employer attractiveness, IV: Interest value

First, we document that employer branding dimensions including interest value, social value, economic value, development value and application value have positive effects on employer reputation. Positive reputation is recognized commonly as a key foundation for organizational success since it enhance stakeholders’ trust in an organization (Vidaver-Cohen, 2007). This makes customers are more loyal to firms’ products and services despite high prices and makes investors more willing to provide firms with capital. As a result, good reputation leads to better firm performance (Rindova et al., 2005).

Second, our study shows a positive impact of employer reputation on employer attractiveness. This finding supports prior empirical studies conducted by Buil et al. (2025); Xie et al. (2015). Positive reputation helps firms reduce information asymmetry with

potential employees. It also strengthens the psychological contract between firms and job applicants. When talented employees are effective in providing high quality service, firms with better reputation become more competitive in the skilled labor market (Fombrun, 2005; Tkalac Verčić and Sinčić Ćorić, 2018). In other words, good reputation makes firms become more attractive to potential employees and thus they are more likely to select appropriate staff.

6. CONCLUSION

Although prior research focuses on how to conduct employer branding and how it is important to attract potential staff, they have not fully addressed how employer branding affects employer attractiveness. This paper aims at filling this gap in the context

of the service industry which significantly emphasizes the role of employees in creating service quality. Employer branding is measure by five dimensions proposed by Berthon et al. (2005). With a sample of 358 respondents, we find that employer branding has a positive effect on corporate reputation which, in turn, increases employer attractiveness.

Our findings imply that service firms should recognize the importance of employer branding and improve their employer branding practices. Employer branding is not only good for their reputation but also their attractiveness towards job applicants. If firms fail to have enough resources to invest in all employer branding dimensions, they may set investment priorities based on their resources and capabilities. Moreover, applicants should collect enough information about firms before applying for jobs. Considering employer branding dimensions across potential employers help applicants choose appropriate destinations for their applications.

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