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EMPLOYER BRANDING, SYMBOLIC IMAGE AND ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION: THE DYNAMICS OF BANKING SECTOR OF PAKISTAN

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Organizational Image, Symbolic Image, Employer Branding, Organizational Identification, Banking Employees.

ABSTRACT

The inclinations among workforces are diverse owing to the modifications in the current era's working environment. Thus, it's significant to indicate the elements that employees pursue by performing efficiently under the umbrella of that organization's image and branding. This study intends to find out the relationship between Organizational Image (OI), Employer Branding (EB), and its effect on the current employees of the Banking Sector of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan's attitudinal outcome i.e., Organizational Identification (OID). Besides, this research adopts the idea of organizational level image in terms of Symbolic image with employer branding by transforming it into a banking background, in an endeavor to advance the attitudinal outcome regarding current employee management. A quantitative study approach was administered. Questionnaires were distributed among the current employees of the banking sector and 232 respondents gave feedback on this research. Whereas, the result interprets a significant association between the various variables; organizational image (symbolic) and employer branding. Theoretical and managerial implication of the study depicts that employees' attitudinal outcome in terms of organizational identification is the product of their employer's image and branding. Accordingly, an image audit based on symbolic features will offer organizations a more comprehensive understanding of the components of their employer image, as well as how it differs from those of other firms in the same industry.

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, many executives and managers rely on the role played by talented employees for the successful accomplishment of organizational outcomes. However, they are facing obstacles in identifying and finding suitable employees. Although, organizations could

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overcome the problems pertaining to financial resources by borrowing or mortgage, while physical resources by outsourcing. However, the shortage of Human Resource cannot be overcome due to the non-imitative nature of Human Resource (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, pp. 100-110). Employers with differentiation and greater employee engagement could result in optimal revenue (Ritson, 2002), returns on investment (Barrow & Mosley, 2011), and competitive advantage (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The numerous organizational outcomes could be the product of employer image and branding, but organizational identification is one of the significant organizational outcomes. Thus, a greater understanding of organizational image as an employer can implement the employer branding concept to enhance the current employee's performance that will result in organizational identification.

According to Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994) the image of the organization being an employer comprises of an individual's view regarding what is unique, dominant, and persistent, about a firm as an employer. Earlier studies (like Oikarinen, 2022; Schwaiger, Zehrer, & Spiess, 2022) have magnificently promulgated the symbolic-instrumental framework for reviewing organizational-image in different populations, backing the idea that organizational-images comprise of both instrumental features and symbolic attributes. However, we are intended to investigate the symbolic aspect of organizational image only because a symbolic image is more reliable and valuable than an instrumental image of the current employees as indicated in the studies of (Hendriana, Christoper, Zain, & Pricilia, 2023; Näppä, Ek Styvén, & Foster, 2023).

Similarly, employer branding signifies an employer's determination to stimulate both inside and outside the organization, a clear outlook for differentiation and desirable place for work. Besides, currently this concept has gained fame among practicing management (Samoliuk, Bilan, Mishchuk, & Mishchuk, 2022). Ambler and Barrow (1996) first ever used the word "Employer Brand" in their study. Since then the term employer branding has received much more popularity in human resource literature. Similar to product branding, where the customers feel devotion, loyalty, and satisfaction, employer branding also have their outcomes like recognition in firm and attitudinal outcomes.

Employer branding stands as a phenomenon measured as a foundation of competitive gain by firms in attempting the present employment state for at least more than twenty years (Council, 1999a). Thus, firms endeavor to retain 'employer preferences and this view of employer preference is the idea regarding employer branding. The application of a marketing

brand on an organization for the attention and retention of talented pool is known as employer branding (Biswas & Suar, 2016).

Although the organizational image has been revealed to influence on the organizational attractiveness views as an employer of students (Huang, 2022), actual candidates (Klysing, Renström, Gustafsson-Sendén, & Lindqvist, 2022), current employees (Kalinska-Kula & Staniec, 2021), and potential candidates and their companions (Yu, Dineen, Allen, & Klotz, 2022) their influence on the fascination (being an employer) of current employees along with their attitudinal outcomes (e.g., Organizational identification) have not been so far explored. Furthermore, previous studies have usually treated job seekers; whereas, considerable research has studied the aspects pouring employer branding for intended candidates. While, up to the author's search, no prevailing study was found for the current employee's view of the organizational image and employer branding determents influencing them. Lastly, no study has been revealed to investigate the indirect effect of organizational image on organizational identification via mediating role of employer branding of the current employees (Azam & Qureshi, 2021).

The current study identifies these gaps by investigating insights into organizational image and employer branding and their organization's attitudinal outcome among the current employees of the banking sector of Pakistan. Hence, for the conceptualization of the key elements of the organizational image as an employer, symbolic aspect is adopted for this study. A symbolic image has more value for the current employees than instrumental image (Näppä et al., 2023). From a theoretical perspective, this research aims to provide an increased understanding of the aspects persuading employer branding. In expressions of practical implementations, knowledge of the factors of employer branding offers employers valuable facts about its attitudinal outcomes.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Symbolic image and organizational identification

According to Dutton et al. (1994) the image of the organization being an employer comprises of an individual's view regarding what is unique, dominant, and persistent, about a firm as an employer while, the instrumental-symbolic framework represents the organizational image as an employer. We are interested only in organization's symbolic image, because the symbolic image is more significant and associated with the current employees compare to instrumental image (Näppä et al., 2023).

To study the aspects of an organizational image as an employer, symbolic image is to be considered. Lievens and Highhouse (2003) were the first ones to combine both consumer and social psychology (Katz, 1960; Keller, 1993) to know the images of the numerous firms as an employer. Social psychology states that humans have both symbolic and instrumental functions (Katz, 1960; Shavitt, 1990). Subjective and intangible factors, such as the degree of employer innovativeness, culture, and eminence, are represented through symbolic traits (Reis & Braga, 2016). Rai (2020), investigated characteristics related to both employer image and organizational identity using an instrumental symbolic framework. This suggests that employer branding is influenced not only by the real features of the job but also by the symbolic significance. People's need to maintain their self-identity, improve their self-image, or express themselves is linked to symbolic qualities (J. L. Aaker, 1997; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Symbolic traits have been found in studies to be more important than instrumental attributes in distinguishing an employer from its competitors (Koch-Rogge & Westermann, 2021; Schwaiger et al., 2022). Kollitz, Ruhle, and Wilhelmy (2022) claim that when instrumental distinctions between brands are restricted, the symbolic functions of a brand become more important. In terms of subjective and intangible traits, these symbolic attributes describe the job or organization.

Gardner and Levy (1955) segmented the image of the brand into product symbolic meanings and product functional attributes. Keller (1993) shows the brand image as product and non-product associated perceptions. Lievens and Highhouse (2003) copied upon J. Aaker (1991) works to grow scales for measuring innovativeness, competence, sincerity, and prestige. Many authors have used social identity theory for symbolic image study (Brouer, Badawy, & Stefanone, 2021). Ashforth and Mael (1989), presented the social identity theory. Diversity, impressiveness and antagonism point a group with others reference to social identification.

Organizational identification is defined as an apparent oneness with an organization and the knowledge of the organization's success and failure as one's own (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Organizational identification mentions the employee's internalization of perceived organizational norms, values and characteristics (Dutton et al., 1994). Thus, organizational identification is the pledge between an individual and an organization (Drzensky, Egold, & van Dick, 2012). Organizational identification brings into line individual interests and behaviors with interests and behaviors that use the organization (Dutton et al., 1994).

Identification can mark different efforts. In the business setting, possible efforts are, for example, one's organization, one's team, or one's profession or occupational group (Van

Dick, Wagner, Stellmacher, & Christ, 2004). Exceedingly identified employees are particularly process-oriented (Van Knippenberg, Martin, & Tyler, 2006), since exceedingly identified employees are involved in organizational success (Dutton et al., 1994).

Organizational identification comprises of both the cognitive and affective elements in defining the association between the organization and the individual. Edwards (2005) has given a valuable organizational identification definition in his explanation of a psychological bond between the individual and the organization whereby the individual feels a profound, self-defining affective and cognitive bond with the organization as a social entity. This nexus between the individual and the collective is the source of organizational identification. Likewise Ashforth and Mael (1989) have labelled the phenomenon, organizational identification is the creation of oneness within an organization.

The construct of organizational identification is not a new one, and as early as in 1939 a publication from the American Statistical Association Hanna (1939) used the exact phrase 'organizational identification' in the setting of favoring dispersed organization of the Federal Statistical Service, because it was maintained, quality statistical analyses required identification with the group who used the analysis. The result would be that organizational identification of statistics at an agency level would be upheld (Moksness, 2014). Long (1949) has enquired and emphasized that current analysis expected organizational identification should combine primary organization loyalty in a large synthesis. Further ground work was done in 1950s by Foote (1951) who pronounced of human beings' tendencies to recognize with group members, and by March and Simon (1958) who planned a thorough model of organizational identification and formalized the construct. Though, in 1980 the construct looks to have gained some impetus and became handier through the influential work of Albert and Whetten (1985). A few years later, Ashforth and Mael (1989) unified social identity theory into the understanding of organizational identification and later developed a widely used measure of organizational identification (Mael & Ashforth, 1992).

On the basis of social identity theory, the self-concept is encompassed of personal identity, encompassing characteristic features such as abilities and interests, and a social identity encircling striking group classifications (J. C. Turner & Oakes, 1986). The theory preserves that an individual defines a class according to the ideal characteristics attributed to or preoccupied from the members (B. S. Turner, 1985). Social identification, then, is the insight of belongingness to a group classification. The individuals observe him or herself as an actual or representative member of the group (I am a man; I m a fan of the local football team),

(Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Through social identification, he or she observes him or herself as expressively entangled with the chance of the group, as sharing a common purpose and feeling its success and failures (Tolman, 1943). Identification permits the individual to vicariously partake in accomplishments beyond his or her powers Katz and Kahn (1978) and can reduce personally damaging activities meaningful in so far as they support the larger self (Staw, 1984).

Rai (2020) has said that instrumental and symbolic characteristics that applicants notice as being related to an organization as a place to work map well into the influences that are postulated to be connected to an organizational identification. Properties of employer branding have been proven and results of the study exposed that symbolic attributes of a brand are the best forecasters of the organizational identification while instrumental frameworks do not have any contribution to identification (Peng, Lee, & Lu, 2020; Schwaiger et al., 2022). It means that the current employee's affiliations with banking sector in terms of symbolic image will effect positively and significantly. Hence, it can be assumed that;

Hypothesis 1: *A banking employee's symbolic image will be positively associated with bank identification.*

Symbolic Image and Employer Branding

Nowadays companies are allotting a resource that has been labeled as "The employer branding". The customary characteristic links made by personnel (actual) or (potential) with the business name, (Davies, 2008). A brand is an assembly of perceptions in customer's mind (Kapoor, 2010). A bundle of functional, economic, and psychological welfare delivered by service, and recognized by the employing firm refers to employer branding (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). The author views that employer branding has both positioning and personality just like a customary brand. The summation of a firm's struggles to interconnect to current and potential workforce that the situation supports for place to work is known as employer branding (Lloyd, 2002). It is the set of principles based on marketing activities, particularly in branding used in human resources for both potential and current employees (Edwards, 2010).

The efforts to promote inside and outside a clear crystal picture of a distinctive firm and required workplace as a business is known as employer branding (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Cable & Turban, 2001). It is a beset, extensive plan to cope with the attentiveness and insights of employees, possible employees, and connected shareholders with respect to a specific organization (Sullivan, 1999). The literature based on branding is more existed whereas on the study of employer branding is covering the phases of progress (Backhaus &

Tikoo, 2004; Council, 1999b). First ever, Ambler and Barrow (1996) used the word "Employer Brand" in their study. Since then the term employer branding has received much more popularity in human resource literature. The EB idea is grounded off the principle that a business can be viewed by way of a brand, (Ambler & Barrow, 1996) Similar to product branding, where the customers feel devotion, loyalty, and satisfaction, Employer branding also has its outcomes.

Incorporation for employer branding regarding human resource practices is hitherto at the beginning stage. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), supported this notion by introducing the theoretical foundations that hints to assimilate additional the human resource and marketing strategies. Likewise, the role of Edwards (2010), and Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) now expressions of HR and structural performance theories add adhesive to the employer branding. Finally, the introduction of representative and instrumental frameworks (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003) and the growth of attraction as an employer scale Berthon, Ewing, and Hah (2005) became widespread to attract experts of human resources.

Subsequently, the concept of the psychological contract and its effect on the employee organizational relationship offers a foundation for employer branding. In the old-style concept of the psychological contract between workers and employers, workers assured loyalty to the firm in exchange for job security (Hendry & Jenkins, 1997). Nevertheless, the current drift toward downsizing, outsourcing, and flexibility on the part of the employer has executed a new form of psychological contract, in which employers provide workers with marketable skills through training and development in exchange for effort and flexibility (Baruch, 2004). In the face of negative perceptions of this new employment reality, firms use employer branding to publicize the welfares they still suggest, including training, career opportunities, personal growth and development. Broadly, firms have been supposed to fail in bringing some of these offerings (Hendry & Jenkins, 1997; Newell & Dopson, 1996). Hence, employer branding drives can be intended to change perceptions of the firm.

In the study of Koch-Rogge and Westermann (2021), both instrumental and symbolic attributes predict current employees' attraction to organizations i.e., employer branding. Another study that supports the links between symbolic image and employer branding conclusively by stating that the instrumental-symbolic framework is positively associated with employer branding (Msiska, 2021). Therefore, it can be stated that;

Hypothesis 2: *Bank employees' symbolic image will be positively associated with employer branding.*

Employer Branding and Organizational Identification

Several studies pinpoint the impacts of employer branding on organizational outcomes of current workforce. Though, only a rare studies center on employer branding antecedents and consequences essentially under considerations for current employees. These studies express that positive attitude of the current employee's towards employer branding delivers organizational commitment, low intentions to leave, workforce productivity, and satisfaction (Cascio, 2014; Davies, 2008; Sehgal & Malati, 2013). Similarly, employer branding positively associated with organizational productivity and outcomes (Robertson & Khatibi, 2013).

The findings of Salameh, Aman-Ullah, Mehmood, and Abdul-Majid (2022) revealed that employer branding had a significantly positive relationship with organizational identification and employee retention. Subsequently, the dire image elements that are responsible for the employer branding significantly affected organizational identification (Ta'Amnha, Bwaliez, & Samawi, 2021). Properties of employer branding have been proved and the results of the study exposed that attribute of an employer brand is the best forecaster of the organizational identification (Bharadwaj, Khan, & Yameen, 2022). Thus, banking employees' symbolic image will be positively associated with employer branding. Similarly, employer branding will also be positively associated with bank identification. Therefore, it can be proposed that;

Hypothesis 3: *Employer branding will be positively associated with employee bank identification.*

Mediating role of employer branding and bank employee's identification: indirect effects

The theoretical model under study shows the proposed hypotheses. The favorable views of an employer's distinctive and persistent features contribute to workforce organizational identification (Ahearne, Bhattacharya, & Gruen, 2005). Thus, it can be argued that while a bank having an effective employer branding program, these distinctive organizational features contributes to promising employee perceptions. Similarly, internal branding reasonably affects the apparent organization-person fit of the retailing employees (Matanda & Ndubisi, 2013). Mael and Ashforth (1992) suggest that organizational image was meaningfully interrelated to the organizational identification that is the crucial component of employer branding. Meta-analytical research approves that highly identified employees demonstrate positive and more helping behavior (Riketta, 2005; Riketta & Van Dick, 2005). On the contrary, Schlager, Bodderas, Maas, and Cachelin (2011) state that the supposed employer branding affects employee's contentment and identification with the company and

the stream from reputation value to identification with company today is pointedly positive. Likewise, the result of employer branding on identification is substantial (Sarrica, Michelon, Bobbio, & Ligorio, 2014).

A strong corporate brand positively contributes to the employer brand dimensions, and employer branding fully mediates the relationship between the corporate brand and intention to apply (Banerjee, Saini, & Kalyanaram, 2020). According to the Sobel test, the indirect influence of symbolic characteristics on organizational identification through the mediation of employer branding is central. Eventually, it can be decided that employer branding facilitates the influence of symbolic attributes with organizational identification (Sarrica et al., 2014). The study of Maurya, Agarwal, and Srivastava (2021) mentioned that a significant and positive correlation between employer branding attraction value and perceived organizational talent management exists. Moreover, employer branding attraction value was found to be a mediating construct between the relationship of work–life balance and organizational talent management. Similarly, employee-based brand equity mediates the relationship between the employer's symbolic image and firm performance, while the work environment acts as a moderating variable (WISKER, TAN, ABIDI, & TRAN, 2021). It means that the bank employee's symbolic image will be fully and significantly mediate with organizational identification via employer branding. Therefore, it can be stated that;

Hypotheses 4: *Symbolic image indirectly affects employees' bank identification through employer branding.*

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

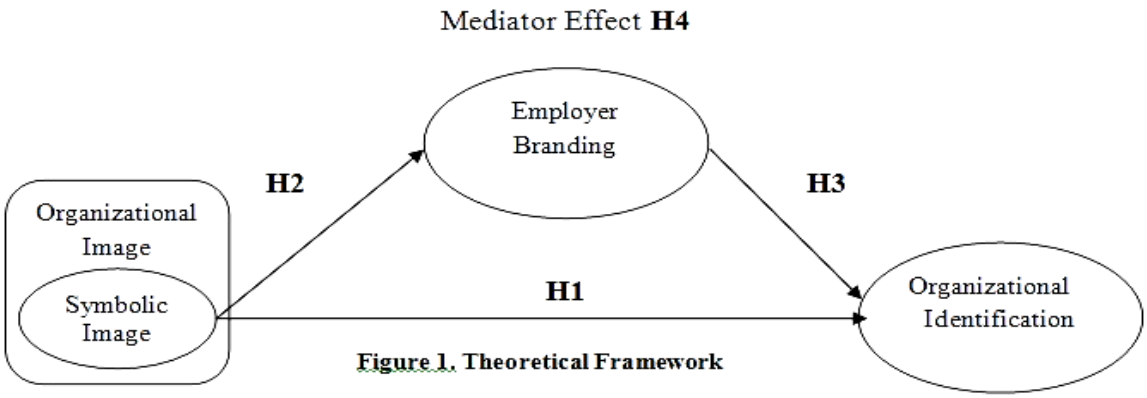

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

METHODOLOGY

Participants and procedure

The survey method was used for data collection with an adapted version of the questionnaire containing controlled and multiple items for each of the three variables of the study. The top

five employers in terms of market share were the major focus of the questionnaire that was distributed and delivered to 410 bank employees in Peshawar, KP. Similarly, 233 of them were returned (56.82 percent response rate), and 15 questionnaires were then eliminated because they were either not completed or filled carelessly. This method resulted in 218 valid surveys in response to our google questionnaire (a response rate of 53.17 %), which were used in the data analysis. Because there was not enough time to reach out to the employees in the current study, convenience sampling was used. The information was gathered in 25 days, from November 26 to December 20, 2022.

A panel data was collected so that to tackle with same source biases. Thus, both Branch Managers (supervisors) and employees other than Managers i.e., (subordinates) currently working in the banking sector were surveyed. The uniqueness of this study is that the employer branding data was collected from the Branch Managers (supervisors) as well as their subordinates, moreover attitudinal outcome i.e., regarding subordinates' bank identification was collected from their supervisors (Branch Managers) possess by their subordinates. Similarly, data regarding an organizational image in terms of symbolic attributes were gathered from the subordinates.

Operational Measurement, Reliability and Validity

After the evaluation of the reliability and validity of the instrument, all the values are in the range of the threshold level. All of the items on the measures used in the study were based on existing scales in the employer branding and management literature and were measured on seven-point Likert scales. The content validity of the scales utilized is enhanced as a result of this. "Strongly disagree" and "strongly agree" were used to anchor the items.

Employer branding

The employer branding scale was adopted from the (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003) scale used in their study on employer branding in the Belgian banking sector. They operationalized it as organizational attractiveness scale. To create a composite employer branding scale, the 04 items used for these scales were added. Like, "a job at this bank is very appealing to me". The Cronbach α= 0.81 for employer branding.

Symbolic image

As we intended in symbolic image of the organizational image that's why we are taking symbolic image only. The symbolic image scale was based on four-item version of (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003) scale adapted from (J. Aaker, 1991). This scale was chosen because it was developed with employees from a variety of jobs and because of its generic nature,

which allows it to be used in a variety of industries, including banking sector. Like, "this bank is prestigious to me". After initial exploratory factor analysis and scale reliability evaluations the symbolic image scale was Cronbach α= 0.76.

Organizational identification

The organizational identification scale was based on Edwards and Peccei (2007) organizational identification scale. Like, "this subordinate's membership of the bank is important to him/her". The bank identification scale Cronbach α = 0.79 was kept.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 and 2 describe the descriptive statistics of the study.

Table 1: Respondent's Profile

Respondents	Male	Female	Mean	SD
Supervisor Age			40.6009	7.9272
Supervisor Gender	100%	0%		
Supervisor Education			16.1009	0.8845
Supervisor total Experience			14.7936	7.6597
Supervisor Current Experience			2.9189	3.2247
Experience as supervisor			2.9189	3.2247
Time with Subordinate			1.6766	1.6881
Subordinate Age			32.8394	7.6938
Subordinate Gender	94.04%	5.96%		
Subordinate Education			15.7798	1.2095
Subordinate Experience			7.4589	7.0012
Subordinate Current Experience			1.6771	1.6876

N=218

Table 1 shows the descriptive results of the controlled variables. Average mean of the supervisors (Branch Managers) age was 40.6009 with a standard deviation of 7.92717 as compared to subordinates (other than branch managers) average age mean of 32. 8394 and standard deviation 7.9385. Similarly, there were no female supervisors which means that 100% supervisors were male. While in the case of subordinate's gender representation 94.04% were male subordinates and the rest were 5.96% female respondents. However, the mean for supervisor's qualification was 16.1009 and subordinates mean score was 15.7798. It means that there was only slight difference in qualifications of both the groups. In case of total experience there was a huge difference between the two groups i.e supervisors mean experience was 14.7936 and subordinates experience mean was only 7.4589. Furthermore, the supervisor's means of experience in the current branch and mean of experience as a supervisor are also represented in the table 1.

Table 2: Results of Partial Correlation Coefficient Values of all the Study Construct

	1	2	3	4
Subordinate Symbolic Image	1			
Subordinate Employer Branding	0.659	1		
Subordinate Organizational Identification	0.298	0.253	1	
Supervisor Employer Branding	0.327	0.673	0.481	1

P >0.05 level of significance

Table 2 shows the outcomes of partial correlation analysis. It indicates clearly from the results that a high partial correlation between subordinate symbolic image and employer branding of the subordinates exists (r = .659, P < 0.05). Similarly, subordinate organizational identification partially correlates with subordinate symbolic image and subordinate's employer branding (r = .298 &, r = .253 at P < 0.05). Hence it has been proven that these variables partially correlate with each other.

While table 2 also shows that subordinate symbolic image and supervisor's employer branding partially correlate with each other (r = .327, P < 0.05). Similarly, subordinate organizational identification also partially correlates with subordinate symbolic image and supervisor's employer branding (r = .673 &, r = .481 at P < 0.05). Thus both the supervisors and subordinates employer branding is correlated with symbolic image and bank identification.

Testing Hypotheses

Hierarchal regression analysis was used to verify the given hypotheses (see table 3). The findings supported hypothesis 1, and model 2 offered the findings about the impact of symbolic images identification. The study hypothesis 1 is validated by the coefficient of regression in model 2 that indicates symbolic image is a positively and significant predictor of organizational identification (β = 0.278**). Results of the direct impact of symbolic image on employer branding are shown in Model 3. Employer branding is positively and strongly predicted by the symbolic image effect (β = 0.4127**). Thus, hypothesis 2 is accepted. Similar results for the relationship between employer branding and organizational identification are provided by model 3. The organizational identification is significantly and positively predicted by employer branding (β = 0.127**), hence hypothesis 3 is likewise validated.

Table 3: Multiple Hierarchical Regression Results

	Organizational Identification		
	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**
Supervisor Age	0.01	-0.005	-0.006
Supervisor Gender	-0.026	0.014	0.029
Supervisor Education	0.128	0.17	0.137

Supervisor total Experience	0.004	0.023	0.031
Experience as supervisor	0.069*	0.049	0.017
Subordinate Age	-0.023	0.016	0.027
Subordinate Gender	0.46	-0.016	-0.019
Subordinate Education	0.046	0.459	0.372
Subordinate Experience	0.026	0.088	0.073
Subordinate Current Experience	0.025	0.025	0.025
Symbolic Image		0.278**	0.127**
Employer Branding			0.412**
R^2	0.062	0.146	0.207
ΔR^2	0.062	0.084	0.123

*Note: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01*

Mediation results

Regarding the indirect (mediation) results, this study found that employer branding significantly mediates the relationship between symbolic image and organizational identification (SI → EB→ OID = 0.420, t-value = 4.228, LLCI = 0.2245, ULCI = 0.6162 and p-value = 0.0000), confirming that H4 is statistically significant and accepted.

Table 4: Mediation Result

H	Path	Beta	LLCI	ULCI	T Statistic	P-Value
H4	SI→EB→OID	0.420	0.2245	0.6162	4.228	0.0000

SI, Symbolic Image: EB, Employer Branding: OID, Organizational Identification

DISCUSSION

It is significant to indicate the elements that employees pursue by performing efficiently under the umbrella of that organization's image and branding. However, this study was intended to assess the organizational outcome of the current employees working in the banking sector in terms of their identification. Thus, organizational image concerning symbolic image and its impact on employer branding to the bank, as well as the effects of employer branding to the bank on their subsequent identification with the bank, were the main relationships investigated in the study, which focused on the banking sector of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Schwaiger et al. (2022) have said that symbolic characteristics that applicants notice as being related to an organization as a place to work map well into the influences that are postulated to be connected to an organizational identification. Properties of employer branding have been proved and the results of the study exposed that the symbolic attributes of a brand are the best forecasters of the organizational identification

(Bharadwaj & Yameen, 2021). It means that a banking employee's symbolic image is positively associated with organizational identification.

Symbolic image features are linked with employer branding among students (Oh & Myeong, 2021), job seekers (Sharma & Tanwar, 2023), and current employees (Oh & Myeong, 2021). It shows that banking employees' symbolic image is positively associated with employer branding. Similarly, employer branding positively associated with organizational productivity and outcomes (Chopra, Sahoo, & Patel, 2023). Hence, employer branding of the banking sector has bank identification of banking sector employees in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Properties of employer branding have been proven and the results of the study exposed that symbolic attributes of a brand are the best forecasters of the organizational identification while instrumental frameworks do not have any contribution to identification (Schwaiger et al., 2022). From the above it is noted that the employer branding is fully mediated with symbolic image of the banking sector employees in Pakistan.

In the relationship between organizational image and employee bank identification, the mediating function of employer branding to the bank was also investigated. The study's finding shows that a thorough organizational image process is critical for bank current employee connections, as it has a beneficial impact on employer branding. Organizational image (symbolic image fully mediate) with employee bank identification via employer branding. Subordinate's bank identification is positively and significantly influenced by employer branding.

Theoretical Implications

The theory being proposed for this study is social identity theory (SIT). According to social identity theory, the current members will differentiate against the out-group in order to improve their self-image (Tajfel, 1979). It means that the employees of banking sector would feel productive if there is employer branding in the particular banks. Thus, the employee's attitudinal outcome in terms of organizational identification is the product of their employer's image and branding. As the symbolic image is fully mediated with the organizational identification via employer branding, it indicates that the employees do prefer symbolic images (Prestige, sincerity & competency etc). Showing that if there is bank's image besides branding and identification then employees will work even with low pay.

Managerial Implications and Future Research

In view of the managerial implications, the banking management (Pakistani and SAARC countries) should keep eye on the employee's views of employer image and branding

regarding their attitudinal outcome i.e. organizational identification. An image audit based on symbolic features will offer organizations with a more comprehensive understanding of the components of their employer image, as well as how it differs from those of other companies in the same industry. The presence of employer branding not only will retain the current employees but also will enhance their affiliations with the bank, which ultimately result in the productive outputs. The management should focus on practices of employer image and branding to cope with HR challenges efficiently and effectively. Banking industry with greater understanding of organizational image as an employer can implement the employer branding concept to enhance the current employee's performance that will result in organizational outcomes.

Generally, we recommend that further studies should be conducted by using the same theoretical model in other industries other than banking sector. Similarly, it is significant to apprehend the employer branding principles for current employees. On the other hand, in view of the future research, as this study has a limitation of single attitudinal outcome i.e., organizational identification we further recommend for other attitudinal outcomes like, cooperative work behavior, organizational citizenship behavior etc.

The limitations of the study are; as this study was conducted in a specific area of Pakistan based on generalization of results. Similarly, no specification of banks on the bases of conventional or Islamic practices was considered, as the Pakistani banking sector is practicing both the approaches. Owing to the above-mentioned limitations this study was conducted.

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