How Employment Brand Impacts Employees, Following A Multinational Acquistion? An Empirical Analysis

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***Abstract*: Present study explores employment brand in the context of a multinational acquisition, particularly the implications for employees who are currently working. Using a sample of three hundred from acquired telecom organization's employees. Study examines identification predictors with the acquiring organization, discretionary effort and intention to leave. Author emphases on predictors related to employment brand, particularly perceptions related to the unique employment experiences provision, perceived prestige, organizational identity strength, and perceptions of whether the acquiring organization acts with its corporate social responsibility claims. Findings suggest that perceptions of corporate social responsibility identity claims, perceived organizational prestige and organizational identity strength are positively related to organizational identification and discretionary effort and negatively related to intention to leave. Surprisingly, unique employment experience is positively related to organizational identification and negatively related to intention to leave but unrelated to discretionary effort. The elements of employment brand have varying effect on the outcomes under consideration.**

Key words: Merger, Acquisition, Organizational identity, Organizational prestige, Identity strength.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the field of human resources, employment brands have received a considerable attention, with the claims that organization may win the war for talent and lead to an engaged workforce by successfully managing their employment brand. In major organizational turmoil, different aspects of what is offered by an organization's employer brand may well change. The present study investigates implications of a changing employment brand in the context of a multinational acquisition in the telecom sector. The employer brand is defined as "the package of, psychological, economic and functional rewards provided by employment" by Ambler and Barrow (1996, p. 187) and "what makes a firm different and desirable as an employer" (Lievens, 2007, p. 51), and it is emphasized that each organization has a unique and different employer brand. When two organizations join together through merger or acquisition, the post merger experience may be quite different from that experience before the merger or acquisition, which may affect employee attitudes. It is stressed that the nature of an organization's employment's brands will determine the extent to which current employees intend to leave (Ambler & Barrow, 1996) and whether they identify with the organization (Edwards, 2010). Often in acquisitions, a major consideration of management involves ensuring the smooth integration of separate workforces. Failure to ensure integration is associated with negative outcomes like higher staff turnover and poor post merger organization performance.

In spite of increased employment brand practitioners attention still little empirical research exists on the topic and "empirical studies exploring its assumptions and effects are scarce", with only a few researchers discussing the concept (e.g., Cable & Turban, 2003; Lievens, 2007). Weber and Fried (2011) pointed to a number discrepancies in the study of HR in post acquisition periods, including that few HR researchers have focused on importance of employees' reactions, and still fewer have empirically tested this human behavior dynamic. No research exists at present that determines the impact of changes in employment brands in case of acquisition; the current study fills the gap. In the case of major acquisition, there exist two unique employment brands that two workforces from both the organizations experience prior to an acquisition and changes in employment brand will be experienced by both the groups. Thus, present study examines reactions of employees in the acquired workforce.

The researcher in the present study uses approach which involves four key aspects that employment branding research considers as vital to an organization's brand. These four brand elements are: employee perceptions of the uniqueness of employment experiences; perceptions of the organization's corporate identity strength; perceptions of organizational prestige; and perceptions of corporate CSR identity claims. In branding research each of these aspects are supposed to be important elements of an organization's employment brand. Hence, the researcher examines the role played by these elements in effecting three employee outcomes connected to employee adjustment following organizational turmoil;

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organizational identification, intention to quit and discretionary effort.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Organizational Turmoil and Changing Brands

A pivotal question that needs to be unpacked in the employer brand literature is what takes place when an organization undergoes major organizational turmoil. This organizational turmoil may lead to change in employment brand linked with a certain employer in a merger or acquisition. The literature on employer branding suggests that a specific employment brand is related with every organization. Both current and potential employees recognize this brand (Ambler and Barrow 1996). In order to have a successful employer brand the employer need to differentiate it from other sources of employer (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). By implication, different aspects of employer band should be relatively lasting for employment experience to the organization. Further, in a major acquisition, when two organizations combine, it is considered that there will be a change in the employment brand for both the groups, especially, the acquired group.

The researchers exploring the implications of changing employment brands are still in a dilemma in spite of increasing growth in the literature on the topic. A lot of work is still needed to find out what exactly formats employment brand. This is because of fairly broad definitions presented by researchers and "umbrella concept" (Edwards, 2010), that covers a range of different ideas and activities which were first considered to be separate people management activities. The researchers of employer brand will have to consider a set of different factors when indulging into research of implications of any change. The current research considers four factors which are assumed as key elements in the employer brand research.

2.2 Organizational Identity Strength and Outcomes (Organizational Identification, Discretionary Effort, Intention to Quit

Albert and Whetten (1985) considered organizational identity as an idea of the organization's central, enduring, and distinctive characteristics by the workforce. Ashforth and Mael (1996) and Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994) suggested that the individual-organization relationship is deeply effected by the nature and the strength of organizational identity. It is suggested that strong relationships are formed with the organization where organization has distinct, strong and enduring identity. Some definitions of employer brands include specifically organization's identity in them (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Dell & Ainspan, 2001; Martin, et al., 2011). Organization's identity strength will have important implications for the extent to which current employees relate and identify themselves with the organization. Cole and Bruch (2006) define organizational identity strength as the degree to which members perceive that the organization's identity is unique (p. 587). Strong relationships of organizational identity strength have been found with employee outcomes, such as identification, commitment and turnover intentions (Cole & Bruch, 2006). They suggested that more organizational identity strength will lead to more identification and less turnover intentions.

Ravassi and Phillips (2011) emphasized that there will be sustaining influence of initial perceptions of the organizational identity overtime. The relationship between strength of organization's identity and discretionary effort, organizational identification, and turnover intentions may also be formed by changes in the strength of the identity over the years. On the basis of this argument we can forecast a similar developing element in an organization formed by major acquisition (He & Baruch, 2009; Kovoor-Misra, 2009). It is therefore emphasized that the employee responses are likely to be effected by the initial perceptions of organizational identity, the degree to which employee expect change in the strength of organizational identity across the turmoil of restructuring followed by major acquisition. The author emphasizes that these aspects of strength of organizational identity will affect the extent to which employees identify with the acquiring firm, the degree to which they talk about of staying in the organization, and the degree to which they exert discretionary effort.

Hypotheses 1a–c: Perceived organizational identity strength will be positively related to (a) identification and (b) discretionary effort, and negatively related to (c) intentions to quit.

2.3 Perceptions of Corporate CSR Identity Claims and Outcomes (Organizational Identification, Discretionary Effort, Intention to Quit.

Barrow and Mosley, (2005) argued that a key aspect of an organization's potential employer brand should include features associated with its projected corporate identity, including its projected corporate values. In an acquisition context, the employee-organization relationship and employee responses will be influenced by the employee perceptions of how true is the organization to its espoused corporate identity. In the present scenario, the dominant organization made corporate social responsibility identity claims, which are considered as projected identity claims (Elstak, 2007). There are two main reasons of why the author expected that perceptions associated to whether organization's corporate CSR claims will influence employee's responses to the acquisition (like identification). First, it is evident that to highly socially responsible organizations, more employees will respond positively with higher commitment (Ellemers, et al., 2011; Peterson, 2004) and low intention to leave (Riordan, et al., 1997) because of higher moral value (Dutton, et al., 1994). Second, many researchers have made important contribution on organizational authenticity (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Harter, 2002; Walumbwa, et al., 2010) that claimed that employees respond positively to those employer to whom they perceive to act with authenticity. Recently, Harquail,

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(2007); Martin et al., (2011) suggested that importance of authenticity is associated to organization's identity in relation with employer branding.

Therefore, the author argues that in acquisition context, more an acquiring organization follow its identity claims in the initial period of acquisition, the more employees will respond positively over the next coming year. The employees will feel pride to be attached with the organization as they discover that organization being true and honest to itself. Increase in identification, discretionary effort and decrease in intention to leave will be the result of these positive responses. Also, the author argues that changes in perceptions of the degree to which the organization act according to its CSR claims are related to changes in these three organization outcomes.

Hypotheses 2a–c: Employees' perceptions that the acquiring organization acts in accordance with its CSR identity claims will be positively related (a) identification and (b) discretionary effort, and negatively related to (c) intentions to quit.

2.4 Unique Employment Experience and Outcomes (Organizational Identification, Discretionary Effort, Intention to Quit.

The main aspect of an organization's employment brand is the unique combination of elements of their employment experience. Ambler and Barrow (1996, p. 167) suggested that these elements of employment experience as "the package of, psychological, economic and functional rewards provided by employment" or as the researcher like Edwards (2010, p. 7) referred unique employment experience as "the total of tangible and intangible reward features that a specific firm offers to its employees". However, these experiences of the organization should be unique and should be perceived by the employees as desirable. In case of acquisition, the acquired employees may perceive the offerings by the new employer as desirable. The new set of offerings of potentially unique experience will make the previous employer go disappear. It is necessarily true that employee's initial perceptions will have an impact on employee attitudes and behavior over time. The changes in perceptions of an employee will lead to changes in his attitude.

Hypotheses 3a–c: Perceived unique employment offering "package" experienced will be positively related to (a) identification and (b) discretionary effort, and negatively related to (c) intentions to quit.

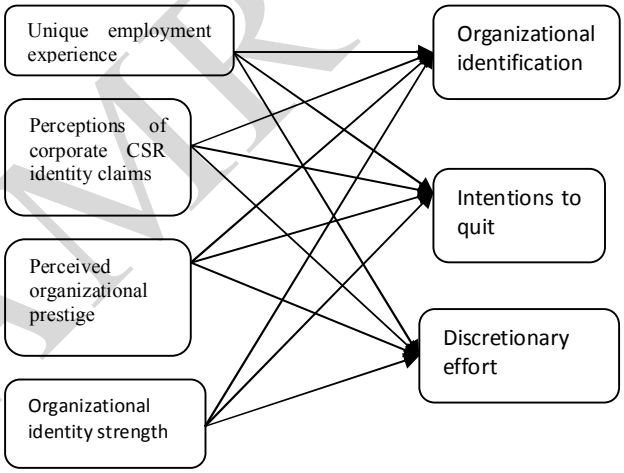
2.5 Perceived Organizational Prestige and Outcomes (Organizational Identification, Discretionary Effort, Intention to Quit.

Previous researches have pointed out that organization's prestige is a major component of its employer brand (Cable & Turban, 2003; Turban, Forret, & Hendrickson, 1998).

Specifically, perceptions of employee of how reputed their organization is will surely influence employee identification, discretionary effort and withdrawal intentions (Fuller, et al., 2006; Mignonac, Herrbach, & Guerrero, 2006; Van Knippenberg, et al., 2002; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Social identity theory explains links like these, as being related to prestigious organization will make the employees to be proud of their organization (Cialdini et al., 1976).

In the context of acquisition, the initial perceptions about the organization's prestige formed prior to acquisition and at the time of acquisition have lasting but varying effect on employee identification, discretionary effort, and intention to leave. These perceptions of reputation may change well over the years after the acquisition as employees gather more information about the acquisition partners. These changes appear in the employees' responses such as identification, discretionary effort and intentions to quit.

Hypotheses 4a–c: Perceptions of organizational prestige will be positively related to (a) identification and (b) discretionary effort, and negatively related to (c) intentions to quit.



III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Context for the Study

PTCL started its operations from Posts & Telegraph Department in 1947 and established itself as Pakistan Telephone & Telegraph Department in 1962; PTCL has been a key player in telecommunication in Pakistan since then. In spite of having developed a network of enormous size, PTCL polices and workings have continuously been criticized by the civil society and other smaller operators of Pakistan. Under Pakistan Telecommunication Corporation Act 199, Pakistan Telecommunication Corporation (PTC) took control of operations and functions from Pakistan Telephone and Telegraph Department. This corresponded with the Government's competitive policy, encouraging private sector participation and resulting in award of licenses for cellular, card-operated pay-phones, paging and, lately, data communication services. In 2005, Government of Pakistan decided to sell 26%

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of the company shares to some private company. Etisalat, a company which is based in Abu Dhabi was able to get the shares. All the stakeholders discouraged the privatization of the corporation by the Government. Countrywide confrontation started by the PTCL worker. They disrupted phone lines of institution along with public sector organizations. Military had to take over the management of all the exchanges in the country.

They arrested many workers and put them behind bars. There is basis to believe that the perceptions of employees in the immediately after the acquisition as a sustained affect on their attitudes and intentions. Clark, et al., (2010) pointed to the strategies of the acquiring organization that it adopts immediately after the acquisition, named as "transactional identity". In this case, the confrontation between Government and employees ended with a 30% increase in the salaries of workers. Etisalat got management control with 26% shares of PTCL in 2005. The Performance of PTCL under the control Etisalat declined which caused in the decline of its wealth. Profit after tax increased from approximately 18 billion to more than 27 billion rupees, which is the rate corresponding to 11% annually for four years before privatization.

The author is interested in determining the influence of change in employer brands on employees in this acquisition. For this purpose longitudinal study was required. PTCL has three business zones, North zone includes Federal Administered Area and K.P.K., Central zones includes Punjab and South zone includes Baluchistan and Sindh. Presently, PTCL has four categories of employees (1) Regular employees, (2) New Compensation Pay Group (NCPG), (3) New Terms and Conditions (NTC), and (4) Employees on Daily Wages (Not actually employees of PTCL).

IV. SAMPLE AND PROCEDURE

Data for the present study was collected from managerial and non-managerial employees of a telecom organization PTCL in Pakistan. The researcher employed non-probability sampling method (purposive sampling) was employed to surveys at the acquired organization in a multinational acquisition (11 years later). About 32,000 employees were laid off through VSS or Golden Hand Shake scheme offered in the start of 2008 and about 7,000 employees were laid off in late 2012 by the acquiring organization who was not over 58 years of age. Large numbers of the employees voluntarily decided to leave and benefit from this scheme. Otherwise, they had to be compensated according to New Compensation Pay Group (NCPG). In total, 300 questionnaires were sent to participants of the acquired organization who were working at the time of acquisition and are still in service, 205 valid questionnaires were received back with 68.3% response rate. A number of phone calls and email exchanges were conducted the with HR staff at PTCL before the initial survey distribution in order to inform them about the context of the study and the questionnaire design. Some personal visits were made by the researcher to improve the response rate. Data collection process was completed in about three months.

V. MEASURES

Likert scales (with 1–5, strongly disagree to strongly agree scales) were used to measure the main constructs. The internal consistency estimate (Cronbach's Alpha) for overall questionnaire was 0.72.

VI. OUTCOME MEASURES

Organizational Identification: The five-item Mael and Ashforth (1995) Organizational Identification scale was used to assess participants' identification with the merged entity. The internal consistency estimate (Cronbach's Alpha) for organizational identification was 0.90.

Intention to Quit: Four-item intent to quit scale was used (Price & Mueller, 1986). The internal consistency estimate (Cronbach's Alpha) for intention to quit was 0.70.

Discretionary Effort: A three-item discretionary effort measure was used based on items included in Moorman and Blakely's (1995) OCB scale. The internal consistency estimate (Cronbach's Alpha) for discretionary effort was 0.85.

VII. INDEPENDENT VARIABLES MEASURES

Unique Employment Experience Elements: 7-item from unique employment scale Edwards and Edwards, (2013) were used, measuring the degree to which employees felt that they received a range of unique employment experiences in employment. The internal consistency estimate (Cronbach's Alpha) for unique employment effort was 0.82.

Perceptions of Corporate CSR Identity Claims: A six-item perception of CSR identity claims scale Edwards and Edwards, (2013) was used to measure the degree to which respondents felt that the acquiring organization acted in accordance with its espoused identity claims. The internal consistency estimate (Cronbach's Alpha) for perceptions of corporate CSR identity claims was 0.90.

Perceived organizational Prestige: An eight-item perceived organizational prestige scale Mael and Ashforth, (1992) was used to judge the prestige of the acquiring organization on a 5-point scale. The internal consistency estimate (Cronbach's Alpha) for perceived organizational prestige was 0.70.

Acquirer Identity Strength: A three-item scale was used to assess employee perceptions of the acquiring organization's identity strength (Cole & Bruch, 2006). The internal consistency estimate (Cronbach's Alpha) for acquirer identity strength was 0.79.

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VIII. DEMOGRAPHICS

The researcher used some demographic in the analysis, which were: *gender (0=male,1=female)*, which was included because "vertical gender inequality" has been seen to be and issue in international mergers (Tienari, et al., 2005); *job tenure (1=0-5 & 5=20-25)*, which was included because job tenure has been found to be correlated with organizational identification (Riketta, 2005); *managerial status(=0)*, which was introduced because non-managerial (=1) employees may have more insight conceptualizations than managers of their organization (Corley & Gioia, 2004). Furthermore, *experience job continuity (1=once, 2=twice, 3=thrice 4=more)* was measured for job-related changes; a three items measure was used because it was used by (Van Dick, et al., 2006) in their study. *Age (1=21-25 & 8=55-60)* and *education (1=SSC, 2=HSSC, 3=Graduation, 4=Masters)* were also included in the research as age and education affect the turnover intentions.

IX. RESULTS

Data for the present study was collected from 71.7% males and 28.3% females whose average age was between 35 to 40 years. Majority (72.2%) of the sample had master degree, 21% graduation degree, and only 6.8% higher secondary certificate. On average, the employees of the acquired organization had been employed for 10 to15 years. The sample, on average had been experiencing job continuity at least once in his / her job tenure.

Table-1 reports the means, standard deviations, and correlations between the research variables. To calculate the relationship between variables, Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was used. The correlation analysis shows the strength and direction of a linear relationship among variables.

The results suggested that organization identity strength was (a) moderately positively related to identification ($r = .602^{**}$, $p < .001$) and (b) discretionary effort ($r = .532^{**}$, $p < .001$), and(c) weakly negatively related to intention to quit ($r = -.161^{*}$, $p < .05$). Hence, the findings supported Hypotheses 1a-c. The results suggested that employees' perceptions that the merged organization acts in accordance with its CSR identity claims was weakly positively related (a) identification ($r = .427^{**}$, $p < .001$) and (b) discretionary effort ($r = .412^{**}$, $p < .001$), and weakly negatively related to (c) intent to quit ($r = -.333^{**}$, $p < .001$). Hence, the findings supported Hypotheses 2a–c. The results indicated that Perceived unique employment offering "package" experienced was weakly positively related (a) identification ($r = .382^{**}$, $p < .001$), and (b) unrelated to discretionary effort, and weakly negatively related to (c) intent to quit ($r = -.324^{**}$, $p < .001$). Hence, Hypotheses 3a and 3c were supported but 3b was not supported. The results indicated that perceptions of organizational prestige was weakly positively related to (a) identification ($r = .315^{**}$, $p < .001$) and (b) discretionary effort($r = .353^{**}$, $p < .001$), and weakly negatively related to (c) intentions to quit ($r = -.260^{**}$, $p < .001$). Hence, findings supported Hypotheses 4a–c.

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Table-1

	Mean	SD	Gender	Age	Educa_ tion	Job Tenure	Rank	Exp. job Continuity	UX	OI	CR	IL	DE	IS	OP
Gender	0.29	0.465	-												
Age	3.57	1.213	-0	-											
Education	3.65	0.604	-0.1	-.179*	-										
Job Tenure	2.6	1.051	-.195*	..671**	-..196**	-									
Rank	0.41	0.494	-.266**	.351**	-.437**	.283**	-								
Exp. Job Continuity	1.77	0.981	-0.1	.472**	-0	.567**	-0	-							
UX	3.22	0.7389	-.218**	-0	.269**	0.1	-0.1	-0	-						
OI	3.76	0.8334	-.262**	0.01	.222**	0.04	-.165*	0.05	.382**	-					
CR	3.53	0.8166	-0.1	.143*	.451**	.193**	-0.1	0.08	.594**	.602**	-				
IL	2.99	0.7763	0.1	-.167*	-.143*	-0.14	-.188**	-0.1	-.324**	0.03	-.333**	-			
DE	3.86	0.8331	.209**	.225**	0.08	0.02	-.139*	.217**	0.05	.424**	.412**	-0	-		
IS	3.6	0.7771	-0.1	0.09	.215**	0.04	-0	0.06	.523**	.427**	.518**	-.161*	.532**	-	
OP	3.53	0.6975	-0.1	0.13	0.13	.188**	0	.168*	.512**	.315**	.457**	-.260**	.353**	.637**	-

*p < .05, **p < .001 (2-

X. DISCUSSION

In context of organization, the aspects of employment brand are surely to change. The purpose of the article is to trace out the influence of such a change. Generally, the finding of the study show that the perceptions about the aspects of the employment brand that were formed immediately after the acquisition influenced employee attitude and behavior concerned with discretionary effort, identification, and intention to quit even after Eleven years. The findings of the study support the notion that the organizational employment brand will have important outcomes and will affect the employee-organization (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010).

The findings of the study have shown that the prediction patterns of three outcomes vary in accordance to the different aspects of employment brand. The most significant element of the brand is whether the organization acts according to its organization's identity claims. This argument is reinforced by Amber & Barrow, (1996), who claimed that organization's corporate CSR identity is an essential element of the employment brand. The initial perceptions of CSR identity of an organization after the merger were positively linked to subsequent organization's identification and discretionary effort, whereas changes in the perceptions were positively linked to changes in discretionary effort, identification and negatively linked to change in intention to quit. Conversely, organization's identity was the least consistent brand element that has influence on attitudes of interest. The changes in strength of organizational identity were positively affecting changes in employees' organizational identification. It is note worthy that it may be possible that strength of the identity is not much essential than the identity nature, that is, the influence that changes in identification of employees (which is built on cross sectional association confirmed by (Cole and Brush, 2006).

The other two elements of employment brand were found to be significant in some of the cases and not in other cases. Particularly, the perceptions of the uniqueness of employment offerings and of the organization's prestige have clear influences on intention to quit. If the employees' initial perceptions of these aspects are stronger then they are less likely to intend to leave eleven years later, increase in these two elements of the employment brands was related to decrease in intention to leave in the following years. Further, increases in unique employment offering was predictor of increase in organizational identification and stronger initial perceptions of the organizational prestige predicted that employees are more strongly to identify with the firm eleven years later. Generally, these results are conforming to the suggestions given by Ambler and Barrow (1996) and Edward (2010) in regard to uniqueness of employment experience. Furthermore, these findings are conforming to suggestions given by Cable and Turban (2003) and Fuller, et al., (2006) about the importance of organizational prestige. It is interesting to note that these aspects had no influence on discretionary effort of the employee. Different elements of employment brand have shown varied pattern of association which support our argument of taking separate elements related to employment brand and determining the influence of brand and overtime changes in the perceptions.

The study design and analyses used by the author has enabled him to prove whether these hypothesized links hold across the acquired organization. Further, it is clear from our findings that different elements of changes in employment brand of an organization have different about the uniqueness of their employment experience given by employment. The mangers should carefully take into consideration the extent to which these unique experiences are about to vary in the context of acquisition. Further, the acquired workforce will be sensitive about whether the acquiring firm acts in accordance with its CSR identity claims. Therefore, present study reveals that how essential it is that when acquiring firm makes CSR claims, such claims must be followed during the restructuring and integration.

The acquired workforce in particular will be interested in knowing whether these CSR claims are being met or not. Importantly, in case of acquisition and post-merger integration, careful consideration should be given to manage the employment brand campaign, because any one change may led to different responses in the acquired workforce.

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