**Call for Papers for a Special Issue of Human Resource Management**

**Employer Branding and Talent Acquisition**

**Guest Editors:**

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**Background, Objectives, and Subject Coverage of the Special Issue**

In today’s globally and virtually connected modern economy, a firm’s success depends a great deal on its reputation and image with stakeholders both within and outside the organization. Correspondingly, managing an employer brand is crucial for attracting, developing, and retaining a workforce that yields firm competitive advantage (Barney, 1986; Cable & Turban, 2001; Theurer, Tumasjan, Welpe & Lievens, 2016; Yu & Cable, 2012). Research to date has largely focused on employer branding within the context of talent attraction (Collins & Kanar, 2013; Lievens, 2007; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Given the broad potential implications for talent management, this narrow focus leaves us with an incomplete picture of how employer branding fits into the overall human resource management system and strategy within the firm. Hence, although widely acknowledged as a key concern for organizational leadership, knowledge remains sparse for how employer branding can be leveraged to achieve myriad organizational goals.

The rapidly changing economic, technological, and socio-political global landscape also calls into question the generalizability and precision of our current employer branding knowledge. For instance, employer control over their brand has become much more challenging, with informal insider information on workplaces becoming commonplace via social media platforms (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). Hence, current information and tools through which leaders and HR professionals effectively design and manage their employer brands may be obsolete in the current business climate. Given this background, our special issue will address economic, technological, and sociological challenges wherein we foresee the most potential to address current knowledge limitations in the branding space. We now expand on these challenges.

First, to fully realize the potential of empirical research on employer branding, there needs to be a more expansive approach by considering a wider range of stakeholders who are impacted by employer branding. As employer brands permeate the consciousness of stakeholders both within and outside organizations, research should consider the impact of employer brands on **current employees**, in terms of how they experience being part of an organization or even how they might potentially leverage organizational branding success for personal gain (Dineen & Allen, 2016; Edlinger, 2015; Edwards, 2010; Edwards & Edwards, 2013). Furthermore, as organizations are situated within networks comprising other organizations and institutional regulatory bodies, employer branding can also have a significant impact on **firm-level strategy and behavior**, such that it also impacts human resource management at the organizational level. For instance, efforts to develop employer images associated with openness and creativity can also influence the adoption of equal opportunity and diversity targeted at HR practices that are geared toward increasing minority representation in managerial positions.

Moreover, much of our current understanding of employer brands and images has developed in light of traditional or standard employment relationships characterized by full-time, permanent, and relatively stable employment (Ashford, George, & Blatt, 2007). The proliferation of **nonstandard work arrangements** such as independent contracting, temporary employees, virtual officing, and gig work are challenging what it means to be a member or employee of an organization. Thus, we know little about how employer branding will influence workers under such arrangements, or whether new employer branding approaches are needed to manage how these workers think about and evaluate the organization (Cappelli & Keller, 2013). Furthermore, employer branding may also have implications for organizations’ ability to navigate, or even survive, crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, we aspire to foster multi-level research considering a variety of stakeholders and employment perspectives.

The second challenge to understanding employer branding derives from the digital world of work and how it has revolutionized the way that employer information is communicated, encountered, and interpreted. We have typically assumed that information about employers and their opportunities emanates either from *formal* information sources controlled by the organization (e.g., company websites, job ads, career talks and fairs) or from *informal* sources like personal friends, family, or career advisors (Saks, 2006). With social media, potential talent and current employees now consume and react to employer information in varied ways. For one, the presence of user generated content on these platforms means that job seekers can now freely access information about employers prior to and during the recruitment and selection process (Cable & Yu, 2006; Leonardi & Vaast, 2017; McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). Similarly, employer brands are now subject to higher levels of scrutiny given the greater amount of transparency brought about by insider and online third-party job information.

The rise of social media platforms like Glassdoor, Great Place to Work, Indeed, and Vault has made word-of-mouth information considerably more accessible to potential applicants. Similarly, third-party rankings such as the ‘Best Places to Work’ (BPTW) have also grown in prominence. These sources increasingly influence employer brands as potential talent interprets them as key signals to gain insight into prospective employers and their workplaces (Dineen & Allen, 2016; Wayne & Casper, 2012). Moreover, the proliferation of ranking competition types implies a more complex relationship between ranking success and branding outcomes. For example, being ranked as one of *Fortune’s* “World’s Most Admired Companies” likely impacts an organization’s branding initiatives differently than ranking as one of Wellness Pet Food’s“America’s Most Pet-Friendly Companies.” Thus, we also aspire to encourage innovative work capturing the variety of ways employer brands are communicated, managed, virally spread, and potentially manipulated in this age of unprecedented information proliferation and availability.

The third and final challenge we aim to address focuses on the central role that organizations play in society and the impact that employment and organizational membership can have on individual well-being (Kelly et al., 2008). In short, we need to develop a better understanding of how employer brands, through their impact on talent acquisition and fostering positive employment relationships, contribute to larger societal challenges (George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi, & Tihany, 2016). For instance, increasing **organizational diversity**, **targeted recruitment**, and **minority hiring** represent pertinent areas where employer branding can significantly impact advancements in workforce goals of fairness, diversity, and the advancement of marginalized individuals (Avery & McKay, 2006; Volpone, Thomas, Sinisterra, & Johnson, 2013).

Corporate social responsibility constitutes another under-researched area that is directly relevant to employer branding. As organizations are becoming more accountable for their impact on the environment and communities, employer branding can be an important tool for effective engagement between firms, their employees, and the general public (Bansal & Kistruck, 2006; Jones, Willness, & Madey, 2014). Furthermore, corporate *irresponsibility* and negative employer brands are also garnering increased media attention, and thus deserve greater concomitant research attention, both in terms of how they affect key stakeholders as well as what organizations can do to rectify them. This leads us to aspire to foster research at the intersection of business and societal goals.

Finally, we also hope to stimulate more employer branding research that takes advantage of recent methodological and data collection advances to lead us beyond traditional lab experiments and survey based self-reports in our scientific inquiry. For instance, the incorporation of big data techniques like text mining and natural language processing (Kobayashi, Mol, Berkers, Kismihók & Den Hartog, 2018), physiological measures like eye-tracking or skin conductance (Christopoulos, Uy, & Yap, 2019; Ganster, Crain, & Brossoit, 2018; Meißner & Oll, 2019), and video-based approaches (Christianson, 2018) all hold tremendous potential to contribute to capturing rich and contextual data on individual and organizational behavior associated with employer brands. Overall, our special issue aims to not only contribute to the advancement of employer branding knowledge along economic, technological, and socio-political lines, but also encourage utilization of cutting-edge methodological approaches as scholars engage in employer branding research.

**Potential Theoretical Advancement and Practical Significance**

Achieving the various goals set forth in the previous section will lead to the following advancements in theoretical understanding of employer branding. First, a **broader and more holistic understanding** of the impact of employer branding on a variety of stakeholders, potentially expanding the list of affected parties and outcomes that typically characterize current branding process models. Second, **deeper knowledge** of how various channels and methods of communication in our current information-age impact the development, communication, experience, and interpretation of employer brands. Third, advancing the **application of theoretical understandings** of employer branding to contexts like diversity, fairness, sustainability, and well-being that represent **grand challenges** for the management sciences. Lastly, our call for novel methods in design and data collection will challenge scholars to expand their current thinking about pre and post hire outcomes, which in turn will **enrich the contextual realism and theoretical precision** of current models explaining employer branding and its effects.

Given significant general awareness of and keen interest in the importance of employer branding among practitioners, policy makers, and scholars, we believe that the research and ideas generated by this issue will provide concrete avenues for continued development of closer bonds between scientists and practitioners (Banks et al., 2016). Specifically, addressing the aforementioned advancements in employer branding research would benefit employer branding practice in the following ways. First, having a broader understanding of the various stakeholders and nonstandard employment arrangements involved in the branding process would provide practitioners with a better **understanding of complexities and nuances** involved in the strategic management of employer brands. Second, organizational leaders and HR professionals would be better **equipped to leverage the potential afforded by the latest technologies** in social media and other communication platforms to effectively monitor and manage their employer brand. Third, practitioners and policy makers would also have deeper knowledge of how to **utilize their status and reputation as employers to impact metrics beyond the usual financial indicators of organizational success**. Diversity in organizational leadership, equal opportunity minority involvement, and environmental impact, for instance, could be additional meaningful goals that employer branding can help to accomplish.

**Scope: Key Themes and Research Questions for Submissions**

Submissions should seek to answer to the following research questions organized around four key themes.

***Stakeholders***

* Who are the different stakeholders of employer branding (e.g., potential talent vs. current employees, customers, business partners, or others)?
* How does employer branding occur in the process of talent acquisition (i.e. recruitment and selection)? How is this process influenced and changed by the gig economy and non-traditional employment relationships (e.g., independent contractors, part-time/temporary employees, etc.) (Ashford, George, & Blatt, 2007; Cappelli & Keller, 2013)?
* How does employer branding influence **current organizational members**? What are its implications for various talent management activities like employee **onboarding** and **socialization**?
* How do third-party employer rankings (e.g. Best Places to Work) influence employer brands? How is success in these rankings related to employer branding outcomes (Dineen & Allen, 2016; Wayne & Casper, 2012)? How does potential talent interpret these rankings as signals to gain insight into prospective employers and their workplaces?
* How can employer branding be part of **strategic human resource management** and competitive advantage? How does employer branding fit into the overall human resource management system and strategy within the firm? Why should organizations invest in employer branding? What different forms can such investment take? What key resources do organizations require to develop their employer brands?

***Technology***

* How do technological advancements in media and communication affect employer branding practice and experience? How has the **digital revolution** changed the practice of employer branding?
* How does employer branding take place on **social media and networking** platforms? How does user experience of employer brands on these platforms differ from that of more tradition recruitment sources involving face-to-face interactions with recruitment professionals and company websites (Cable & Yu, 2006; Leonardi & Vaast, 2017; McFarland & Ployhart, 2015)?
* How does use of **artificial intelligence** during recruitment and selection impact (i) organizations that employ these technologies and (ii) potential candidates and applicants who interact with and experience these technologies?

***Socio-political Issues***

* How do companies’ employer branding practices relate to **organizational diversity** and **minority hiring** issues?
* How is employer branding linked to **corporate social responsibility** (Bansal & Kistruck, 2006; Jones, Willness, & Madey, 2014)?
* How does employer branding influence **societal and employee well-being**?
* How do employer branding practices and experiences differ across physical, geographical, and social (e.g. culture, social class, vocation groups etc.) boundaries? How do **multinational organizations** manage employer brands globally and locally?
* How do organizations use employer branding as a form of **organizational impression management**? How are employer brands affected by **business ethics violations or scandals**? How do organizations use employer brands to manage responses to threats to their reputation and image?
* How can employer branding influence an organization’s ability to navigate, or even survive, crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic?

***Methodological advancements***

* How can **big data approaches** be employed to study employer brands and branding efforts (e.g., text mining, natural language processing) (Kobayashi, Mol, Berkers, Kismihók & Den Hartog, 2018).
* How can **physiological measures** (e.g., skin conductance, eye tracking, other biological markers) be used to investigate individual responses to employer branding (Christopoulos, Uy, & Yap, 2019; Ganster, Crain, & Brossoit, 2018; Meißner & Oll, 2019)?
* How can new technologies like **virtual reality, gamification, and artificial intelligence** be used to investigate the practice of employer branding as well as the psychological and behavioral experience of employer brands Bigné, Linares, & Torrecilla, 2016; Meißner, Pfeiffer, Pfeiffer, Oppewal, 2017)?

**Submission Deadline:** 31st March 2021

**Submission Process:**

Authors can submit their paper between March 1st - 31st 2021 to HRM for review. Details on the manuscript submission process will be made available closer to the submission period. Papers should be prepared and submitted according to the journal’s guidelines: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/1099050x/homepage/forauthors.html>.

All papers will be subject to the same double-blind peer review process as regular issues of HRM. If you have questions about a potential submission, please contact: Kang Yang Trevor Yu at: [akyyu@ntu.edu.sg](file:///C:\Users\akyyu\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\CEQG1FM9\akyyu@ntu.edu.sg).

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