

Impact of Employer Branding on Employee Retention of Executive-Level Employees in a Selected Apparel Company in Western Province: The Mediating Role of Perceived Organizational Support and the Moderating Effect of Career Development Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

Employee retention has become a strategic priority in Sri Lanka's apparel industry due to increasing competition, evolving workforce expectations, and the rising global demand for skilled executives. Despite extensive investment in employer branding, organizations continue to face challenges in retaining executive-level employees. This study looks at how employer branding affects employee retention while evaluating the moderating effect of career development opportunities (CDO) and the mediating role of perceived organizational support (POS). This study used a quantitative research design, guided by Social Exchange Theory, and gathered information from 169 executive-level employees of a chosen Western Province clothing company. The results showed that employee retention is significantly improved by employer branding. While CDO considerably increases the impact of employer branding on retention, POS only partially mediates this relationship. The study highlights how crucial it is to combine effective employer branding campaigns with encouraging HR procedures and planned developmental pathways. Future research directions and suggestions for organizational practice are discussed.

Keywords: employer branding, employee retention, perceived organizational support, career development opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the impact of employer branding on employee retention while assessing the mediating function of perceived organizational support (POS) and the moderating effect of career development opportunities (CDO). This study collected data from 169 executive-level employees of a selected Western Province clothing company using a quantitative research design that was informed by Social Exchange Theory. The findings demonstrated that employer branding greatly increases employee retention. POS only partially mediates this relationship, but CDO significantly boosts the effect of employer branding on retention. The study emphasizes how important it is to combine successful employer branding initiatives with supportive HR practices and strategic developmental pathways. Suggestions for organizational practice and future research directions are explored.

Employer branding, according to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), is the value proposition that a company provides to its workers. Strong employer branding not only draws in young talent, especially Gen Z, but also lowers stress, burnout, and turnover, according to recent research (Hendriana et al., 2023). These observations are extremely pertinent to Sri Lanka's garment industry, where younger executives are increasingly drawn to companies that provide fulfilling work, independence, and a positive workplace culture.

In Sri Lanka's garment industry, employee retention has grown to be a significant problem, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Limited career advancement, poor organizational support perceptions, and

discrepancies between employer brand promises and real experiences have all contributed to an increase in executive workers' intentions to leave (Perera, 2022; D.A.S. Udayanga, 2021). Additionally, research from around the world indicates that businesses with strong employer brands draw almost twice as many applicants and have lower turnover than those with weaker brands (LinkedIn, 2021).

Retention is even more important at the executive level because these workers oversee global buyer relationships, drive strategic decision-making, guarantee adherence to international standards, and spearhead innovation. Significant organizational disruption, knowledge loss, hiring expenses, and reputational risks result from their departure (Fernando & Wijesundara, 2021).

In this dynamic, perceived organizational support, or POS, is crucial. According to Eisenberger et al. (2020), POS refers to workers' perceptions that the company appreciates their contributions and is concerned about their welfare. According to research from South Asia, POS mediates the connection between employer branding and retention and fortifies the psychological contract (Kumara & Jayawardane, 2021). Recognition, participation in decision-making, and opportunities for growth are examples of supportive practices that increase executive loyalty and reduce turnover.

Additionally, career development opportunities moderate retention outcomes. Gen Z and executive-level employees place strong emphasis on continuous learning and career progression. Deloitte (2022) reports that over 60% of Gen Z professionals in Asia consider career development a major factor in retention decisions. However, Sri Lankan apparel firms often lack structured succession planning and leadership development pathways, contributing to increased attrition (Gunaardethm, 2023).

These industry-wide difficulties are exemplified by the Western Province's chosen apparel company. The company saw an 18% increase in executive turnover between 2023 and 2024 despite offering competitive salaries. This increase was mostly caused by inadequate career development opportunities, weak organizational support systems, and discrepancies between employer branding messaging and real employee experiences. This circumstance emphasizes the strategic significance of comprehending the ways in which career development opportunities, perceived organizational support, and employer branding interact to affect executive retention.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee Retention

Employee retention refers to an organization's ability to keep valuable employees over the long term, emphasizing the employer's efforts to retain skilled staff essential for achieving business objectives (Rappaport et al., 2003, as cited in Chopra et al., 2024). Socioeconomic pressures like inflation, currency depreciation, political unrest, and increased migration exacerbate retention issues in Sri Lanka's apparel industry, as many professionals are looking for stable, higher-paying opportunities abroad (Gunawardina, 2023). In this setting, executive turnover leads to significant expenditures for hiring, screening, and training, as well as the loss of leadership potential and tacit knowledge and the disruption of buyer relationships (Dessler, 2020).

According to recent empirical research, executive turnover in Sri Lankan apparel companies is rising voluntarily. According to Perera and Perera (2022), a large number of executives departed after 2020 as a result of poor organizational support, little opportunity for career advancement, and discontent with employer branding initiatives. This suggests that retention goes beyond pay and is impacted by a variety of factors, including opportunities for professional growth, organizational culture, fairness, and recognition (Allen et al., 2010). Higher employee engagement is linked to better retention and fewer intentions to leave, according to research conducted in Sri Lanka's manufacturing and clothing sectors (Jayasinghe & Perera, 2022).

According to Kossivi et al. (2016), retention should be viewed as a long-term strategic investment that improves organizational knowledge, fortifies employee-employer relationships, and boosts innovation capabilities. Evidence from around the world also demonstrates that, especially in dynamic industries, successful retention strategies boost organizational performance, crisis resilience, and competitiveness (Hom et al., 2021; Deery & Jago, 2015). Strategies that have been shown to be successful in lowering attrition and

enhancing employee wellbeing include leadership development, succession planning, mentoring, and flexible work schedules (Memon et al., 2016).

Employer Branding

The employer branding has become an organizational strategic tool to attract, engage and retain high quality of talent in the ever competitive labor market (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). It can be defined as the image of the organization as an employer and the set of tangible and intangible qualities reported to the current and potential employees (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2021).

The powerful employer brand boosts the talent attraction and encourages more employee engagement and loyalty. Empirical studies have continuously shown that employer branding has a positive corpus on job satisfaction and organizational commitment as well as turnover intentions (Sivertzen et al., 2021). Competitive advantage Organizations enjoying great employer brand advantage are able to attract candidates who fit their value systems and develop coherent and cooperative working environments.

The purpose of good employer branding is that it helps instill a sense of purpose with the employees, also at the same time diminishes conflict and enhances the overall harmony in the organization. The change in employee expectations, specifically to be healthy, to have mental support, and to be empathetic with the organization has found employer branding to be the focus of long-term retention efforts. Since a good employer brand is pegged on whether an organization can deliver on the promises, employee perception is critical in assessing the reality and performance of the brand (Tanwar and Prasad, 2017). According to the employees, Tanwar and Prasad (2017) were able to name five central dimensions of employer branding namely Training and Development, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Work-Life Balance, Healthy Work Atmosphere and Compensation and Benefits, which collectively form the main components of the employer brand strength building.

Perceived Organizational Support (POS)

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) is a general perception of workers that the organization appreciates their contribution to its success and is interested in their welfare (Eisenberger et al., 2020). Basing on the Social Exchange Theory, POS functions on the principle of reciprocity, according to which, in case employees feel that their organization cares about them, employees are likely to pay back their loyalty, commitment, better performance, and lower turnover intentions (Blau, 1964; Kurtessis et al., 2017). This mutual dependence underscores the fact that organizational investment in employee welfare promotes desirable employee results including job satisfaction, engagement and discretionary effort (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). In the Sri Lankan apparel sector, POS is a matter that is essential when it comes to the retention of executives.

In the face of intense competitiveness in the sector, global compliance requirements, and the growing freedom of labor mobility, it is now difficult to retain talented executives. It has been found that the greater the POS, the more commitment and decreased desire to migrate or find other job opportunities among employees (Kumara and Jayawardane, 2021). On the same note, POS is identified to mediate the connection between employee loyalty and employer branding, which means a good employer brand is not enough without the genuinely supportive mechanisms (Fernando and Wijesundara, 2021).

These findings are supplemented by broader POS studies in the human resource management area, where the researchers found that effective POS can increase engagement, motivation, and affective commitment and decrease withdrawal behaviors (Eisenberger et al., 2020; Kurtessis et al., 2017). When applying to the apparel industry of Sri Lanka, POS is the key to transforming the employer branding efforts into concrete retention effects.. Empowering POS will allow companies to link reputational strategies to actual supporting systems and will allow reducing turnover, increasing engagement, and remaining competitive within a strategically important and labor-intensive business.

Career Development Opportunities (CDO)

Opportunities in career development, including training, mentoring, promotions, and challenging assignments, help in achieving the professional growth of the employees and creating the vision of the organization as a

longterm partner. The executives experience poor career advancement and unclear promotion policies as well as insufficient leadership development programs, resulting in increased turnover rates in the Sri Lankan apparel sector (Gunawardena, 2023; Perera and Perera, 2022).

In comparison, Millennials and Gen Z youths do not need any standard incentives, i.e., a salary or job position, as much as they value skill improvement and the ability to upgrade (Chaudhary et al., 2022). Career development is also one of the factors that increase the effectiveness of employer branding in employee retention as it ties organizational promises to real experiences, fosters trust, and increases commitment (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2021; Jayasinghe and Perera, 2022). Tactically, career development as part of the HR practices will aid in the establishment of internal leadership pipelines, sustainability, and competitiveness in knowledge-driven industries such as apparel (Collings et al., 2019).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Employer branding is a strategic tool that improves the attractiveness of an organization and makes it unique in the competitive labor markets (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). Employer brands provide strong organizational identification, commitment and loyalty among employees (Theurer et al., 2018) particularly in Sri Lankan apparel industry where the turnover rate is high.

The Social Exchange Theory elucidates that employees pay in kind through their loyalty and retention to positive organizational treatment (Blau, 1964), whereas the mediation is done by Perceived Organizational Support (POS) as they become affectively committed, achieves job satisfaction, and intention to stay (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Career Development Opportunities (CDO) is a moderator, which enhances the positive influence of employer branding and POS when employees believe that they have sufficient growth and promotion opportunities (Weng and Hu, 2009). In general, employer branding, POS, and CDO and their interaction offer a complete theoretical framework of the executive retention in the Sri Lankan apparel industry.

Conceptual Framework and Methodology

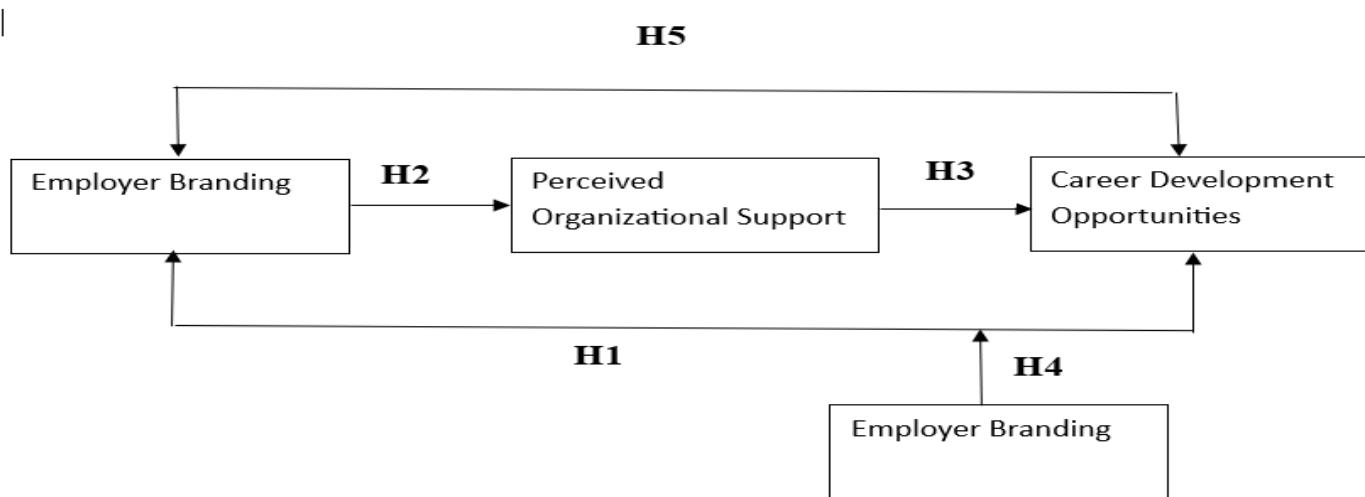


Figure 1:Conceptual framework

Hypotheses Development

H1: There is a positive relationship between employer branding and talent retention of executive-level employees.

H2: Employer branding has a positive impact on perceived organizational support.

H3: Perceived organizational support has a significant positive impact on employee retention.

H4: Career development opportunities significantly moderate the relationship between employer branding and talent retention, such that the relationship is stronger when career development opportunities are high.

H5: Perceived organizational support significantly mediates the relationship between employer branding and talent retention.

Research Design

The study adopts a quantitative, positivist research design to empirically examine the relationships between employer branding, perceived organizational support, career development opportunities, and talent retention. A cross-sectional survey was conducted. The target population of the study is 300 employees and the sample size is 169. data was analyzed using the software SPSS 27.

Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

The study focused on executive-level employees of ABC Apparel Company in the Western Province of Sri Lanka, as this group represents strategically important talent essential for sustaining competitiveness in the apparel sector. The total population consisted of 300 executive employees. To ensure adequate representation across departments, a simple random sampling technique was adopted. Guided by Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table, a sample of 169 executives was identified as sufficient to represent the population. The questionnaires were then distributed proportionately among executive employees across various departments of the company to ensure balanced representation.

Measures

- Employer Branding:** Measured using a 23 item scale adapted from Tanwar and Prasad (2017).
- Perceived Organizational Support:** Measured using the 8 item scale by Eisenberger et al. (2020).
- Career Development Opportunities:** Measured using 6 item scale by Sturges et al. (2002).
- Employee Retention:** Measured using the 8 item scale by Kyndt et al. (2009).

All items were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess internal consistency.

Variable	No. of items	Cronbach alpha
Employer Branding	23	0.968
Employee Retention	11	0.884
Perceived Organizational Support (Mediator)	08	0.866
Career Development Opportunities (Moderator)	06	0.951

Validity Statistics

Variable	KMO Coefficient	Bartlett's Test [Chi Square]	Bartlett's Test Sig.
Employer Branding	0.827	1449.710	0.000
Employee Retention	0.953	1449.000	0.000
Perceived Organizational Support (Mediator)	0.917	566.838	0.000

Career Development Opportunities (Moderator)	0.895	404.314	0.000
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Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis showed strong positive relationships between the main variables studied which were statistically significant. Employee Retention was also strongly positively correlated with Employer Branding ($r = 0.717, p < 0.01$), which means that the higher the employer image that the employee sees as attractive and credible is, the more the probability of staying in the company is high. Perceived Organizational Support also had a strong positive correlation with Employer Branding ($r = 0.730, p < 0.01$) and it can be inferred that the feeling of organizational care and value are stronger in employees who regard their organization as a supportive employer. Likewise, the relationship between Perceived Organizational Support and Employee Retention showed significant positive correlation ($r = 0.642, p < 0.01$), and this substantiates the fact that, employees who feel valued, supported, and appreciated are more likely to stay in the organization. In general, the results of the correlation indicate that there are strong and consistent relationships between Employer Branding, Perceived Organizational Support, and Employee Retention.

Regression Analysis

Regression analysis further validated the predictive strength among the variables. Employer Branding significantly predicted Employee Retention with $R = 0.717$ and $R^2 = 0.514$, indicating that 51.4% of the variance in retention is explained by employer branding ($\beta = 0.717, p < 0.001$). Employer Branding also significantly predicted Perceived Organizational Support, producing $R = 0.730$ and $R^2 = 0.533$, meaning 53.3% of the variance in POS is explained by employer branding ($\beta = 0.713, p < 0.001$). Similarly, Perceived Organizational Support significantly predicted Employee Retention, with $R = 0.642$ and $R^2 = 0.412$ ($\beta = 0.642, p < 0.001$), demonstrating that organizational support is a meaningful determinant of retention outcomes. These results confirm that Employer Branding is a strong direct predictor of both retention and perceived support, while Perceived Organizational Support serves as an essential additional predictor of retention.

Mediation Analysis

Path	B	Standard Error	t value	P value
a	0.713	0.053	13.278	0.000

Equation 1: Sobel Z test

$$a = 0.713 \quad a^2 = 0.508369$$

$$S_a = 0.053 \quad S_a^2 = 0.002809$$

$$b = 0.271 \quad b^2 = 0.073441$$

$$S_b = 0.082 \quad S_b^2 = 0.006724$$

$$Z\text{-value} = \frac{a * b}{\sqrt{b^2 * S_a^2 + a^2 * S_b^2}}$$

$$= \frac{0.713 * 0.271}{\sqrt{0.073441 * 0.002809 + 0.508369 * 0.006724}}$$

= 3.209

If the Z value is greater than 1.96, the mediating variable is significantly mediating between the independent variable and dependent variable. According to the Sobel Z test, Z value is come as 3.209. Therefore, this result shows that relationship between Employer Branding and employee Retention is significantly mediated by Perceived Organizational Support.

Moderation Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.719 ^a	.517	.511	.699	.517	88.677	2	166	0.000
2	.743 ^b	.552	.544	.675	.035	13.021	1	165	0.000

CDO significantly moderated the relationship between employer branding and employee retention ($p < .05$). At high levels of CDO, the effect of employer branding on retention was stronger.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study examined the relationships between Employer Branding (EB), Perceived Organizational Support (POS), Career Development Opportunities (CDO), and Employee Retention (ER) among executive-level employees in a selected apparel company. The results indicate that:

- Employer Branding and Employee Retention:** EB has a significant positive effect on ER. A strong, positive employer brand fosters employee pride, commitment, and organizational loyalty, reducing turnover intentions.
- Employer Branding and Perceived Organizational Support:** EB positively influences POS, with employees perceiving a reputable and supportive organization as valuing their contributions. Regression analysis showed EB explains 53.3% of the variance in POS, supporting the social exchange perspective.
- Perceived Organizational Support and Employee Retention:** POS significantly enhances ER. Employees who feel valued and supported reciprocate through increased commitment and retention.
- Mediating Role of POS:** POS partially mediates the EB and ER relationship. Sobel test results ($Z = 3.209$) confirmed the mediation, suggesting EB strengthens retention primarily by fostering perceived organizational support.
- Moderating Role of Career Development Opportunities:** CDO significantly moderates the EB and ER relationship. The positive effect of EB on retention is amplified when employees perceive opportunities for growth, training, and internal mobility.

Overall, the findings highlight that employer branding not only attracts talent but also strengthens internal support mechanisms and, when combined with career development opportunities, maximizes employee retention.

Practical Implications

The results have some important implications on human resource strategy and organization management. To

begin with, the demonstrated mediating presence of POS implies that the management team ought to not regard the presence of a strong Employer Brand as an end unto itself, but as one of the key instruments of fostering the feeling of organizational concern and worth among the executive personnel. In an attempt to increase retention, organizations are to operationalize their Employer Brand through practices that visibly show support and appreciation since this is the direct impetus to retention. Second, the moderating aspect of CDO provides an operational strategy: it is not enough to have a strong Employer Brand. Its beneficial impact is an initiator of retention when it is combined with the physically perceived prospects of growth, training, and internal mobility. The HR must, therefore, plan to integrate EB communication with sound CDO schemes to optimize the investment in their workforce and successfully reduce executive turnover.

Limitations

This study has a number of methodological and contextual limitations even in the light of the strong statistical findings. This was mainly limited to executive level employees of one, selected Aperol Company in the Western Province. It is the nature of this sample and this geographic location that restricts the generalization of the results in an effort to apply the findings to the employees in other hierarchical positions and other sectors or regions. Moreover, the use of cross-sectional survey represents the design that implies that all variables were observed at the moment. Although statistical mediation has been developed, such a design does not allow the unambiguous determination of causality and the long-term time impact of Employer Branding on retention; the relationships between the variables could not be determined but only guessed in the long term. Lastly, self-reported data also brings about the issue of the common method bias which could have exaggerated the observed correlation between the constructs slightly.

Researcher recommendations.

Resting on the limitations identified and the compelling findings, there are several directions that should be followed by the future research attempts to understand this topic more. To begin with, the researchers are advised to repeat this research with bigger and more diverse sample that involves non-executive employees and organizations in

different industries to examine the effect of POS mediation and CDO moderation effects on the overall population. Secondly, it is highly suggested that a longitudinal research design is taken. This would enable the researcher to trace the changes in the Employer Branding and Perceived Organizational Support over time and examine their following effect on the real retention rates, which would support the evidence on causality. Thirdly, other variables of interest could be studied in the future research. As an example, exploration of alternative mediators such as job satisfaction or organizational commitment, or exploration of new moderators such as leadership style or organizational culture would help to enrich the theoretical model and give a more holistic view of the drivers of employee retention.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, this study managed to shed a lot of light on a multi-dimensional process by which a powerful Employer Brand can help in Employee Retention among the executive population. The main contribution that the study will make is that the Perceived Organizational Support is the psychological linkage needed between them because it is known that the best role of EB is to create the sense of being appreciated and nurtured. The discovery that Career Development Opportunities is a potent modifier, which changes a positive EB-ER relationship to an exceptionally good one, is equally important. This study does not only validate the current theory but also provides practical, strategic advice to the practitioners who want to minimize the executive turnover by strategically aligning branding, support and growth opportunities.

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