

Digital Employer Branding: Theoretical Evolution, Mechanism Reconstruction, and Research Paradigm

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Abstract. Digital technologies have significantly changed how organizations build, communicate, and manage employer brands. While existing research has examined the use of digital technologies in recruitment and employer branding communication, a comprehensive understanding of how digitalization reshapes employer branding remains limited. This review synthesizes the existing literature to examine how digitalization transforms employer branding from three perspectives: brand formation, communication, and influence mechanisms. The review shows that digitalization shifts employer branding from an organization-controlled activity to a dynamic process involving multiple stakeholders, digital platforms, and employee-generated content. It also highlights the increasing importance of platform governance, algorithmic mediation, and digital trust in shaping employer brand outcomes. Based on these findings, the review identifies key research gaps and suggests future directions for theory development and methodological innovation. By integrating current evidence, this review provides a systematic understanding of how digitalization is changing employer branding and offers a foundation for future research on digital employer branding.

Keywords: Employer Branding, Digitalization, Employee Value Proposition (EVP), Literature Review.

1. Introduction

The digital era has fundamentally reshaped labor market dynamics. Population aging, the widespread adoption of flexible work arrangements, and the rapid expansion of the gig economy have transformed the employment landscape, intensifying the global competition for highly skilled talent. As organizations increasingly compete to attract and retain human capital, employer branding has been widely recognized as a strategic resource for securing high-quality employees [1]. At the same time, shifting workforce expectations—particularly among Generation Z, who place greater emphasis on work flexibility, meaningful work, and value congruence—have challenged the effectiveness of traditional employer branding strategies characterized by one-way communication and standardized employee value propositions [2]. The growing influence of social media and third-party digital platforms has further diminished organizations' ability to unilaterally shape their employer image, rendering conventional EVP-centered approaches increasingly insufficient to meet the expectations of both employers and prospective employees [3]. Consequently, organizations are compelled to rethink their employer branding strategies, with digital employer branding emerging as one of the few sustainable long-term solutions to talent shortages [4].

Against this backdrop, the growing penetration of digital technologies into organizational and human resource management practices has substantially reshaped the focus of employer branding research. On the one hand, the scope of the literature has expanded beyond traditional employer brand communication to encompass a broader range of digitally enabled HRM topics, including digital recruitment experiences, employee digital engagement, online organizational reputation, and AI-assisted recruitment [1]. On the other hand, theoretical explanations have evolved beyond the dominant signaling perspective to incorporate diverse theoretical lenses, such as Stakeholder Theory, Brand Co-creation Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Platform Ecosystem Theory, to explain how employer brands are constructed, communicated, and co-created in digital environments [5], [6]. These developments suggest that digitalization represents more than the introduction of new recruitment technologies; rather, it has fundamentally transformed employer branding from an

organization-centered branding activity into a dynamic digital ecosystem characterized by continuous interactions among multiple stakeholders.

The existing literature indicates that employer branding research has undergone a profound theoretical shift driven by digitalization—from organizational control to multi-stakeholder participation, from brand communication to brand interaction, and from information management to digital experience [7]. While traditional employer branding primarily emphasized how organizations design and communicate employee value propositions, contemporary research increasingly views employer brands as continuously constructed and reshaped through interactions among organizations, employees, job seekers, and digital platforms [8]. Digitalization has therefore not only broadened the scope of employer branding research but also redefined its theoretical foundations and analytical framework, providing a new research paradigm for understanding how organizations develop and sustain competitive employer brands in the digital era.

2. Theoretical Foundations and Research Progress in Employer Branding

2.1. Conceptualizing Employer Branding

Employer branding has been conceptualized from multiple theoretical perspectives, reflecting its multidisciplinary origins in marketing, human resource management, and organizational behavior. Ambler and Barrow proposed one of the earliest and most influential definitions, conceptualizing employer branding as the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by an organization in exchange for employees' contributions [11]. Functional benefits refer to opportunities for professional growth and meaningful work, economic benefits encompass salary and financial rewards, and psychological benefits capture employees' sense of belonging, purpose, and identification with the organization. These employment-related benefits are communicated and reinforced through employer branding activities, such as recruitment campaigns and corporate communication initiatives [12].

Early studies primarily adopted an external market perspective, defining employer branding as the process through which organizations establish themselves as desirable employers in the labor market. For example, Ewing et al described employer branding as creating an image of the organization as the best place to work [9], whereas Backhaus emphasized the development of a distinctive and attractive employer image [10]. Similar to consumer branding, which seeks to cultivate enduring relationships between brands and consumers through consistent value delivery, employer branding aims to foster long-term emotional and psychological connections between organizations and employees.

Beyond the external perspective, scholars have increasingly emphasized the internal dimension of employer branding. Rather than viewing employer branding solely as a recruitment tool, this perspective conceptualizes it as the articulation of a distinctive employment experience that reflects an organization's promises to its employees, including a supportive work environment, job security, career development opportunities, competitive compensation, and positive workplace relationships. Consistent with this distinction, Lievens and Slaughter argued that external employer branding corresponds to employer image—outsiders' mental representations of an organization as an employer—whereas internal employer branding reflects organizational identity, namely employees' shared perceptions of employer-related organizational attributes [5].

As employer branding research has evolved, scholars have examined the construct from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. From a marketing perspective, employer branding is regarded as a strategic approach for attracting and retaining talented employees by communicating the unique value of working for an organization [13]. Building on the instrumental-symbolic framework, Lievens and Slaughter argued that employer brands consist of both instrumental attributes, such as compensation, career advancement, and job security, and symbolic attributes, including organizational personality, prestige, and perceived corporate values [5]. The combination of these tangible and intangible attributes enhances employees' organizational identification, commitment, and sense of belonging [1].

From a human resource management perspective, employer branding centers on the creation and management of a distinctive employment experience. Edwards argued that effective employer branding depends on clearly defining, managing, and communicating both the tangible and intangible benefits associated with employment. Empirical research has subsequently identified a broad range of employer brand attributes, including equitable and transparent HR practices, organizational performance, employee well-being, work–life balance, meaningful work, corporate social responsibility, and career development opportunities [1], [14].

Employer branding has also been conceptualized as a dynamic organizational process. Backhaus and Tikoo proposed that employer branding comprises three interrelated components: the development of an employer value proposition (EVP), external employer branding aimed at attracting prospective employees, and internal employer branding designed to strengthen employee commitment and retention [10]. From a branding perspective, the employer brand itself functions as an organizational identifier, such as a name or logo, whereas stakeholders' perceptions are embedded in broader employer brand knowledge, which encompasses employer familiarity, employer image, and employer reputation.

At the center of employer branding lies the Employee Value Proposition (EVP), which represents the core exchange relationship between organizations and employees. The EVP specifies the bundle of tangible and intangible rewards employees receive in return for their contributions, including compensation, career development opportunities, organizational support, fair performance management, and other employment benefits [15]. A compelling EVP differentiates organizations from competitors in the labor market [4], enhances employer attractiveness, and improves organizations' ability to attract passive candidates. Recent studies further suggest that a strong EVP is reinforced through supportive organizational cultures, high employee engagement, employee-centered HR practices, and inclusive workplace environments [16]. Consequently, employer branding has evolved into an overarching concept that encompasses virtually all organizational attributes, practices, and behaviors that shape stakeholders' perceptions of an organization as an employer [17].

2.2. The Classical Theories of Employer Branding

Table 1. The Classical Theories of Employer Branding

Theory	Application	Core Logic	Example
Signaling Theory	Applicant attraction	Job seekers infer organizational attributes from recruitment signals under information asymmetry.	Well-being policies signal a supportive employer [16], [18], [19].
Brand Equity Theory	Employer brand value	A strong employer brand creates intangible value that enhances organizational attractiveness.	Well-known employers attract more applicants [19], [20].
Instrumental–Symbolic Framework	Employer evaluation	Applicants evaluate employers based on both functional and symbolic attributes.	Salary (instrumental) and prestige (symbolic) jointly influence attraction [21].
Social Identity Theory	Organizational attraction	Individuals prefer employers that enhance their social identity and self-concept.	Applicants are attracted to prestigious organizations [18], [19].
Person–Organization Fit Theory	Recruitment and selection	Higher value congruence between applicants and organizations increases attraction and commitment.	Innovative individuals prefer innovative firms [22].
Resource-Based View	Strategic HRM	Employer branding is a strategic resource that creates sustainable competitive advantage.	Strong employer brands improve talent retention [19], [23].
Psychological Contract Theory	Employee relationship Employee Value Proposition	Employer branding shapes expectations; unmet promises lead to contract breach.	Misleading recruitment messages increase turnover [24].
HRM System Strength Theory	HR Policies Process / Strength)	The "strength" of the HRM system determines whether employees can develop a unified and clear understanding of the organization's intentions, thereby forming consistent psychological contracts and organizational behaviors.	Build a highly aligned employer brand consensus [25].

From a Table 1 theoretical perspective, employer branding research has evolved from an information transmission perspective toward a value creation perspective. Early studies primarily adopted signaling theory to explain how organizations communicate employer-related information to the external labor market. Subsequently, brand management theory and person–organization (P–O)

fit theory further explained how employer branding enhances organizational attractiveness. As employer branding gradually expanded into the field of employee management, social identity theory and psychological contract theory began to explain internal employer branding. More recently, the resource-based view (RBV) has further conceptualized employer branding as an important source of sustainable competitive advantage. Although these theoretical perspectives emphasize different aspects of employer branding, they collectively reflect a theoretical evolution from viewing employer branding as a recruitment tool to recognizing it as a strategic organizational resource.

However, most of these theoretical perspectives were developed in the context of traditional recruitment environments and share the common assumption that organizations possess primary control over the design, communication, and management of employer brand information. The emergence of digital platforms, social media, and artificial intelligence has gradually challenged this assumption. Employer branding is no longer shaped solely by organizations but is continuously constructed through the interactions among employees, job seekers, digital platforms, and algorithms. Consequently, recent studies have increasingly incorporated new theoretical perspectives, including stakeholder theory, brand co-creation theory, platform ecosystem theory, and digital trust, to explain the new characteristics of employer branding formation, communication, and value creation in digital contexts. This theoretical evolution also provides the foundation for the subsequent analysis of how digitalization reshapes the mechanisms of employer branding in the present review.

2.3. Research Progress in Employer Branding

In recent years, employer branding research has not only expanded its research scope but has also undergone significant developments in its core content, theoretical paradigms, and research contexts. Overall, the literature has evolved from an external recruitment orientation to talent management across the employee lifecycle, from static employer brand attributes to a dynamic employee value proposition, from organization-centered communication to multi-stakeholder co-construction, and from traditional recruitment contexts to digital ecosystems. This evolution indicates that employer branding has gradually developed from a recruitment tool into an important strategic approach for organizations to acquire and sustain talent-based competitive advantage.

2.3.1. From an External Recruitment Orientation to Talent Management Across the Employee Lifecycle

Early employer branding research primarily regarded employer branding as a recruitment tool for enhancing organizational attractiveness. It focused on the effects of employer branding on external outcomes, such as organizational attractiveness, application intentions, job acceptance intentions, and recruitment quality, emphasizing that organizations attract potential applicants by developing a differentiated employer image, with the primary objective of reducing recruitment costs and improving talent acquisition efficiency [26].

As research has progressed, an increasing number of scholars have argued that employer branding not only influences prospective employees but also has profound effects on current employees' organizational identification, work engagement, organizational commitment, brand citizenship behavior, and employee retention. Accordingly, the research focus has gradually expanded from the external labor market to employees within organizations, leading to a dual-path framework that integrates external and internal employer branding [10]. The concept of employee-based brand equity has further integrated the perspectives of both prospective and current employees. With the advancement of digital technologies, employer branding has gradually evolved from a recruitment management tool into a talent management strategy spanning the entire employee lifecycle [2], [27], [28].

2.3.2. From Attribute Lists to a Dynamic Employee Value Proposition System

Early studies primarily adopted an attribute perspective, focusing on which employer attributes enhance organizational attractiveness. Research typically examined specific dimensions, such as compensation and benefits, career development, job security, job characteristics, work–life balance,

corporate social responsibility, and organizational reputation, with the implicit assumption that organizational attractiveness arises from the combination and configuration of these employer attributes. However, focusing solely on employer attributes is insufficient to explain why different organizations are able to develop employer brands with sustainable competitive advantages.

In recent years, research has increasingly adopted the employee value proposition (EVP) as a more integrated concept. Rather than representing a simple list of employee benefits, EVP refers to the overall value package and differentiated positioning that an organization offers to its employees [5], [29]. However, the theoretical boundaries of EVP remain unclear. Some studies regard EVP as a core component of employer branding, whereas others use EVP interchangeably with employer attributes, employer image, organizational attractiveness, or even employer branding itself, resulting in substantial differences in conceptual definitions, measurement dimensions, and theoretical levels across studies [3], [5], [15]. This conceptual inconsistency not only reduces the comparability of existing studies but also constrains the further accumulation of employer branding theory. Kilson further pointed out that the coexistence of different EVP models and measurement instruments makes it difficult for the existing literature to establish a unified theoretical framework [30].

Digitalization is further changing the logic underlying the development of EVP. Traditional studies generally regard EVP as a value proposition designed and communicated by organizations in a top-down manner. In contrast, an increasing number of studies in the digital era suggest that EVP is no longer determined entirely by organizations but is continuously adjusted and reconstructed through employee feedback, digital platform reviews, social media interactions, and real-time data analytics [29], [31]. Accordingly, EVP research is undergoing a theoretical shift from organization-designed to data-driven and stakeholder co-created, with the research focus gradually expanding from the content of the value proposition itself to the process of value formation and its dynamic evolution.

2.3.3. From Organization-led Communication to Multi-stakeholder Co-construction

In the traditional model, organizations are the primary producers and communicators of employer brand information. However, in digital environments, employer branding has gradually evolved into a reputation system co-constructed by multiple stakeholders [18], [19]. These stakeholders include human resource departments, managers and recruiters, current employees, former employees, job seekers, social media users, recruitment platforms, employee review platforms, news media, the general public, and other stakeholders.

Accordingly, employer branding has gradually evolved from an organization-controlled branding activity into a dynamic process jointly constructed by multiple stakeholders. At the same time, authenticity [22], [31], consistency [2], [25], and employees' authentic experiences have gradually become central topics in employer branding research [18], [19]. The research focus has also shifted from how to develop an ideal employer brand image to how to maintain an authentic, credible, and consistently delivered employer identity that is recognized by stakeholders [19].

2.3.4. From Traditional Recruitment Contexts to Digital Ecosystems

Artificial intelligence (AI) has not only changed the production and communication of employer branding information [32], but has also changed the ways in which candidates interact with organizations. As a result, recruitment technologies have become an important component of the employer branding experience. In recent years, employer branding research has increasingly focused on the effects of digital recruitment and artificial intelligence on candidate experience and organizational evaluations. Unlike traditional research, which primarily examined recruitment advertisements and organizational communication, artificial intelligence is reshaping the entire process of interaction between candidates and organizations. Generative artificial intelligence, recruitment chatbots, algorithmic screening, and AI interviews not only improve recruitment efficiency but also serve as important sources of information through which candidates evaluate organizational fairness, transparency, and employee care [32]. Drawing on signaling theory and procedural justice theory, an increasing number of studies argue that AI recruitment systems themselves have become a new employer brand signal, and that their transparency, explainability,

fairness, and the degree of human–AI collaboration may influence candidates' organizational attractiveness, organizational trust, and evaluations of employer branding [2], [33]. Meanwhile, sustainability-related issues, including corporate social responsibility (CSR), environmental, social, and governance (ESG) [7], [14], and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), have gradually become important components of employer branding in the digital era [34].

Although existing research has extensively examined digital recruitment tools, social media communication, and artificial intelligence applications, the literature remains relatively fragmented and still lacks systematic theoretical integration and empirical validation. On the one hand, different theoretical perspectives explain different phenomena, such as employer brand authenticity, algorithmic fairness, candidate experience, personalized employer branding communication, and digital platform governance, but have not yet formed a unified theoretical framework [7], [33], [35]. On the other hand, research on how artificial intelligence, algorithmic fairness, digital trust, and platform governance jointly reshape the mechanisms of employer branding is still at an early stage [36]. This suggests that digitalization not only expands the application contexts of employer branding but also drives its research paradigm from traditional brand management toward the study of digital ecosystems.

3. How Digitalization Changes Employer Branding

Employer branding was originally developed within the context of traditional recruitment, where the underlying assumption was that organizations possessed primary control over employer brand communication and that job seekers primarily obtained organizational information through formal channels, such as recruitment advertisements, corporate websites, and campus recruitment [10]. However, with the development of social media, digital platforms, artificial intelligence, and big data technologies, the information structure between organizations and job seekers has fundamentally changed. Information communication has shifted from one-way dissemination to multidirectional interaction, employer branding has evolved from organization-led communication to multi-stakeholder co-creation, and job seekers have transformed from information recipients into brand evaluators and content creators. Consequently, digitalization has reshaped the formation mechanism, communication mechanism, and influence mechanism of employer branding.

3.1. Employer Branding Formation Mechanism

Traditional employer branding theories generally assume that organizations are the primary architects of employer brands, possessing control over the design, communication, and management of employer brand information, while job seekers mainly act as information recipients who form overall perceptions of organizations based on the information provided by employers. Accordingly, traditional employer branding research is built upon an implicit assumption that organizations are able to maintain relatively stable control over the employer branding formation process. However, the development of digital technologies has challenged this assumption. Internet platforms, social media, online recruitment websites, and employee review platforms have transformed the information structure between organizations and job seekers, making organizations no longer the sole source of employer brand information. Job seekers can obtain organizational information through professional platforms such as LinkedIn, Glassdoor, and Indeed, as well as social media platforms. They further develop more comprehensive perceptions of organizations by combining employee reviews, shared recruitment experiences, and third-party media reports. Consequently, an increasing number of studies have begun to question whether organizations are still able to fully control the formation of employer branding. Lievens and Slaughter argued that digitalization has changed the information relationship between organizations and potential employees, making organizations no longer the only source of employer brand information [5]. Theurer et al further suggested, in their systematic literature review, that employees, former employees, job seekers, and third-party digital platforms have become important participants in employer branding [6]. Accordingly, employer branding

formation has gradually evolved from an organization-led branding activity into a dynamic process jointly constructed by multiple stakeholders [18], [19].

In recent years, a growing body of research has examined the influence of diversified information sources on the formation of employer branding. Unlike traditional studies, which emphasize organizational communication, existing research suggests that employees' shared work experiences, online reviews, and social media interactions are generally perceived as more authentic and credible than official organizational communication and therefore exert a stronger influence on organizational attractiveness among job seekers [6], [37]. Digital platforms have lowered the barriers to information production and dissemination, enabling employees to shift from being recipients of employer branding communication to becoming important producers of employer brand meaning. At the same time, job seekers have evolved from passive information recipients into active information seekers, evaluators, and disseminators [22].

These developments have driven employer branding research from brand management toward brand co-creation. Brand co-creation theory argues that brand value is not created solely by organizations but is jointly constructed through continuous interactions among organizations, employees, consumers, and other stakeholders [38]. In digital contexts, employees share their work experiences through social media, job seekers express their recruitment experiences on online review platforms, and the public participates in discussions of organizational events through digital media, collectively shaping employer branding [19]. Consequently, an increasing number of studies conceptualize employer branding as a dynamic process of social construction rather than a branding activity that can be fully controlled by organizations [26].

Taken together, the existing literature suggests that traditional employer branding primarily emphasizes how organizations design and communicate EVP, whereas digital employer branding focuses on how employer brands are continuously formed, revised, and reproduced through ongoing interactions among organizations, employees, job seekers, and digital platforms [19]. Accordingly, employer branding research is gradually shifting from an organization-centered paradigm toward a stakeholder co-creation paradigm, and from static brand management to dynamic brand formation [39].

3.2. Employer Branding Communication Mechanism

Traditional employer branding research generally assumes that employer branding communication is built upon organization-led information dissemination, whereby organizations communicate EVP to potential applicants through formal channels, such as recruitment advertisements, corporate websites, and campus recruitment, with the aim of building a favorable organizational image through consistent brand communication [10]. Under this model, organizations control both the production and dissemination of employer brand information, and communication is largely understood as a one-way process through which organizations transmit brand information to the labor market to reduce information asymmetry and enhance organizational attractiveness [40].

With the rapid development of social media, online recruitment platforms, and employee review websites, organizations are no longer the sole communicators of employer branding [5], [6]. Digital platforms enable employees, former employees, job seekers, and other stakeholders to continuously generate and disseminate organizational information, transforming employer branding communication from an organization-controlled process into an open and interactive exchange [2]. Compared with official organizational communication, employees' work experiences, recruitment reviews, and online word-of-mouth are generally perceived as more credible and have become important sources of information for job seekers [22]. Consequently, digitalization has diversified communication actors while reducing organizations' exclusive control over employer branding communication.

Accordingly, communication is increasingly understood as a process of continuous interaction rather than one-time information transmission. Job seekers actively search, evaluate, share, and comment on organizational information, while organizations continuously respond to employee

reviews, public discussions, and candidate feedback on digital platforms to maintain their employer brand [19]. As a result, employer branding communication has gradually shifted beyond recruitment marketing toward the development and maintenance of long-term brand relationships.

Meanwhile, digital platforms have become more than communication channels; they also shape communication outcomes through algorithmic recommendation, content ranking, and interaction mechanisms. AI-powered recommendations, targeted advertising, and algorithmic matching increasingly influence how organizational information reaches job seekers, making employer branding communication progressively platform-mediated [32], [33]. Consequently, communication effectiveness depends not only on organizational messages but also on platform governance and algorithmic mechanisms [39]. This has led recent research to pay greater attention to platform governance, algorithmic transparency, and digital communication ethics as important components of employer branding communication [32], [39].

Overall, communication actors have expanded from organizations to multiple stakeholders, communication has evolved from one-way dissemination to continuous interaction, communication channels have shifted from organization-controlled media to platform-enabled ecosystems, and communication outcomes have gradually moved from brand exposure toward relationship building [41]. Accordingly, employer branding communication has evolved from traditional brand communication to interactive communication supported by digital platforms, where employer brand value increasingly depends on organizations' ability to build authentic, credible, and participatory brand perceptions within an open digital ecosystem.

3.3. Employer Branding Influence Mechanism

Traditional employer branding research primarily draws upon signaling theory to explain how employer branding influences potential applicants. Because recruitment is characterized by information asymmetry, job seekers rely on organizational signals—such as EVP, organizational reputation, compensation and benefits, and recruitment advertising—to infer organizational characteristics and reduce decision uncertainty, thereby influencing organizational attractiveness and application intentions [10], [40], [42]. Accordingly, early studies generally assumed that employer branding depends on organizations' ability to communicate positive and consistent brand signals.

However, digitalization has made signaling theory alone insufficient to explain employer branding in digital contexts. Increased information transparency enables job seekers to compare official organizational communication with employee reviews, online word-of-mouth, and third-party media reports [2], [5], [6], [32]. Consequently, the mechanism of employer branding has gradually shifted from signal transmission to signal verification. Although official communication continues to shape initial perceptions, organizational attractiveness also increasingly depends on the consistency of information across different sources [16], [30] and on whether the promised employee value proposition is supported by employees' actual work experiences [24].

Against this background, authenticity has become a central theme in recent employer branding research and an important characteristic of the employee value proposition. Compared with brand visibility or communication frequency, job seekers increasingly evaluate whether organizational communication reflects employees' actual experiences [26], [31]. Employees' social media posts, online reviews, and digital word-of-mouth all contribute to judgments of employer authenticity [22], [29]. When organizational claims are consistently validated through employee behavior and organizational practices, job seekers are more likely to trust the organization and perceive it as attractive [43].

At the same time, candidate experience has emerged as another important mechanism explaining employer branding outcomes. Rather than focusing solely on what organizations communicate, recent studies emphasize candidates' experiences throughout the recruitment process. Positive candidate experiences enhance perceptions of organizational fairness, professionalism, and credibility, thereby increasing organizational attractiveness and application intentions. With the growing adoption of AI-enabled recruitment, algorithmic transparency, procedural fairness, and privacy protection have

become increasingly important determinants of candidate experience [35]. Employer branding therefore depends not only on what organizations communicate but also on how they interact with candidates and whether recruitment processes provide fair, transparent, and respectful experiences [32], [35].

In addition, value congruence between organizations and job seekers has become an increasingly important condition shaping employer branding effectiveness [18]. As CSR, ESG, and DEI receive growing attention, job seekers increasingly evaluate whether organizational values are reflected in actual practices. Digital platforms amplify both the communication and public scrutiny of organizational values. When organizational values are consistently supported by organizational actions, they are more likely to foster organizational identification [44]. Conversely, discrepancies between organizational communication and actual practices may be perceived as green-washing or diversity washing, thereby weakening employer branding [45].

Existing research suggests that traditional employer branding primarily emphasizes the effects of positive organizational signals, whereas recent studies increasingly focus on authenticity, trust, candidate experience, and value congruence as key psychological mechanisms through which employer branding influences job seekers [2], [31], [39]. Accordingly, employer branding increasingly depends on organizations' ability to establish a trustworthy employer image through authentic interactions and consistent organizational practices. This indicates that the focus of employer branding has gradually shifted from brand communication to brand trust building, providing a new perspective for understanding the boundary conditions of employer branding in digital contexts.

Overall, digitalization has not changed the fundamental objective of employer branding—to enhance organizational attractiveness and attract talent—but it has fundamentally changed how this objective is achieved. Traditional employer branding primarily focuses on what organizations communicate, whereas digital employer branding places greater emphasis on how organizations communicate, who participates in the communication process, how candidates experience that communication, and how organizations respond to it. Accordingly, employer branding research has gradually shifted from a brand communication paradigm to a brand interaction paradigm, from an organization-centered perspective to a candidate-centered perspective, and from static brand management to dynamic brand co-creation. This suggests that digitalization is not merely a new communication technology but a transformative force that has fundamentally reshaped the formation, communication, and influence mechanisms of employer branding.

4. Discussion and Future Research Agenda

4.1. Digitalization Requires a Paradigm Shift in Employer Branding

The preceding review shows that the impact of digitalization on employer branding extends beyond the adoption of new communication channels and recruitment technologies. Rather, digitalization has reshaped the formation, communication, and influence mechanisms of employer branding, indicating a gradual shift in the focus of employer branding research. The central question is no longer how organizations communicate employer brands, but how employer brands are created, communicated, and sustained within digital ecosystems.

Existing research continues to explain employer branding primarily through signaling theory, brand equity theory, and social identity theory. While these perspectives remain useful for explaining employer branding outcomes, they provide limited insight into how digital platforms, employee-generated content, algorithmic recommendation, and platform governance jointly shape employer branding [31], [46]. Digitalization should therefore not be understood merely as the introduction of new communication channels or recruitment tools into traditional employer branding, but rather as a driving force behind a fundamental shift in its theoretical foundations.

Future employer branding research should move beyond the traditional organization-centered perspective by integrating stakeholder co-creation, platform governance, algorithmic mediation, and digital trust into a unified analytical framework. Such a framework would better explain how

employer brands are continuously created, communicated, and evaluated through interactions among organizations, employees, job seekers, digital platforms, and artificial intelligence [3], [35].

4.2. Implications for Theory and Future Research

Future research should further examine how multiple stakeholders jointly shape employer branding. Existing studies increasingly recognize the roles of employees, job seekers, and digital platforms in employer branding [2], yet these actors are often examined separately. Future research should investigate how organizations, employees, digital platforms, and artificial intelligence interact to co-create employer brands, as well as how different stakeholders contribute to employer branding across different stages of the employment lifecycle.

Future research should also pay greater attention to platform-mediated employer branding. Existing studies mainly examine social media communication, whereas the role of platform algorithms in shaping the visibility, credibility, and dissemination of employer brand information remains underexplored. As algorithmic recommendation, personalized communication, and generative AI become increasingly embedded in recruitment, future research should examine how platform governance and algorithmic mechanisms influence employer branding communication rather than treating digital platforms simply as communication channels [47].

Another important direction is the integration of theoretical perspectives. Authenticity, digital trust, candidate experience, and stakeholder participation have become increasingly important in explaining employer branding in digital environments [35], [46]. Future research should integrate signaling theory, brand co-creation theory, and digital trust to explain how employer branding influences organizational attractiveness, applicant behavior, and employee outcomes under digital conditions.

Finally, greater attention should be given to the boundary conditions of employer branding in digital ecosystems. Future studies should examine how platform ecosystems, institutional environments, national culture, algorithmic transparency, and artificial intelligence influence employer branding effectiveness [31], [47]. These contextual factors are likely to become increasingly important as employer branding continues to evolve alongside digital technologies.

4.3. Implications for Research Methodology

The preceding review demonstrates that digitalization has not only reshaped the formation, communication, influence mechanisms, and boundary conditions of employer branding, but has also transformed employer branding into a dynamic process characterized by continuous interactions among multiple stakeholders within digital ecosystems. However, existing research still relies primarily on traditional research designs, including cross-sectional surveys, scenario-based experiments, and structural equation modeling, with a focus on examining static relationships among variables. These approaches are less capable of explaining how employer brands are continuously formed, communicated, and evolve across digital platforms [8]. As the research focus shifts from relatively stable organizational attributes to dynamic evolutionary processes, future employer branding research should pay greater attention to temporal dynamics, interaction mechanisms, and cross-platform contexts, thereby moving from explaining relationships among variables to explaining underlying processes [7], [47]. Accordingly, future studies may combine longitudinal research designs, social media text analysis, and multi-source data to track the dynamic evolution of employer branding through interactions among different stakeholders [31], [47]. It should be emphasized that methodological innovation is not simply the adoption of more advanced analytical tools, but should serve the development of new theoretical questions in digital employer branding by explaining how employer brands are continuously formed, communicated, and evolve within digital ecosystems, thereby promoting the coordinated development of theory and methodology in this field.

4.4. Implications for Management Practice

The preceding review demonstrates that digitalization has not only changed how employer branding is communicated, but has also reshaped the logic of employer brand formation and value creation. Within digital platform environments, employee reviews, social media content, and platform algorithms continuously participate in the construction of employer brands, making it increasingly difficult for organizations to shape and control employer brand images through one-way communication [48]. Accordingly, the focus of employer branding management should gradually shift from brand communication to brand governance [7]. Organizations should place greater emphasis on ensuring consistency between EVP and employees' actual work experiences [31]. By continuously improving employee experience and actively responding to online feedback, organizations can enhance the authenticity and credibility of their employer brands [2]. At the same time, organizations should proactively adapt to platform rules and algorithmic environments, strengthen two-way interactions with employees and job seekers, and establish transparent and trustworthy digital communication mechanisms [32]. In the future, the competitive advantage of employer branding will increasingly depend on organizations' ability to coordinate relationships among the organization, employees, digital platforms, and digital technologies, rather than on one-way control of employer brand information, thereby enabling continuous value co-creation within digital ecosystems [41].

4.5. Conclusion

This review systematically synthesizes the development of employer branding research in the context of digitalization and summarizes the major impacts of digital technologies on employer branding from the perspectives of brand formation, communication, and influence mechanisms. Existing research indicates that digitalization has not merely changed the communication tools and recruitment practices of employer branding, but has gradually transformed employer branding from an organization-led brand management activity into a dynamic process of multi-stakeholder co-construction within digital ecosystems [34]. This transformation has not only expanded the research boundaries of employer branding but has also raised new challenges for existing theories, research designs, and management practices.

Building on this review, we further propose that future employer branding research should move beyond the traditional organization-centered perspective and develop a more systematic theoretical framework for digital employer branding by focusing on stakeholder co-creation, platform governance, algorithmic mediation, and digital trust. At the same time, future research should strengthen the application of dynamic research designs and multi-source data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how employer brands are formed and evolve within digital ecosystems. Overall, this review not only integrates the existing literature on digital employer branding but also provides directions for future theory development, research design, and management practice, with the aim of advancing employer branding research in response to the evolving challenges and opportunities brought about by digital technologies.

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