Identifying and ranking employer brand improvement strategies in post-COVID-19 tourism and hospitality

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Abstract
This study aims to identified and ranked employer brand strategies in post-COVID-19 tourism and hospitality, considering the significance of employer branding as one of the most important elements for attracting and retaining key employees. In this study, we initially develop a model by systematically reviewing the literature. And in the subsequent quantitative analysis, the strategies identified are tested through a questionnaire survey and ranked by a panel of industry experts and analyzed data using the R-SWARA method. Results show that the most important employer brand strategies in post-COVID-19 tourism and hospitality were "paying increased attention to social responsibility," "developing reliable and sustainable internal/external relationships" and "assessing the effect of brand re-building measures on the social image of the organization". The analysis of the studies conducted dealing with post-COVID-19 employer branding demonstrates that none of these investigations proposed a comprehensive framework of strategies for employer brand promotion. Exploring the literature also revealed that, despite the significance of employer brand in times of economic crisis, this topic has been ignored by researchers although it points to an obvious gap in the literature on employer brand in tourism and hospitality.

Keywords
Employer brand, tourism and hospitality, post-COVID-19, R-SWARA analysis

Introduction
The coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has left a significant negative impact on tourism and hospitality (Mao et al., 2020) in terms of financial and job losses (Sönmez et al., 2020) worldwide over the past months (Rutynskyi and Kushniruk, 2020). Following the crisis, many tourism and hospitality businesses have either closed down or seen a sharp decrease in their activities, because of their response to the crisis or other business-related reasons (e.g. a reduction in travels and tourism activities) (Baum et al., 2020).

The crisis, which has disturbed most organizational processes and has engendered confused and, at times, ambiguous response, is a serious challenge to human resource (HR) management in organizations (Abelt, 2020). Meanwhile, re-establishing tourism and hospitality businesses and transitioning to the “next normal”...
status under COVID-19 conditions demand a timely access to key employees and talented individuals. Of course, this situation could increase employee turnover and force various organizations to devise innovative and effective to attract and retain employees and talent. One of the most effective attraction and retention strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic is posited as “employer branding” (Randstad, 2020a; Ranosa, 2020).

Employer branding was first proposed in the 1990s and was introduced to HR management through the principles of marketing, especially relational marketing (Jain, 2013). Subsequently, it has been regarded as an effective instrument to attracting and retaining talent in tourism and hospitality (Gehrels and Altan, 2015; Gehrels and Looij, 2011; Reis and Braga, 2016). Meanwhile, theorists and organizational managers have engaged with the idea (Jain, 2020; Reis and Braga, 2016); yet, during the COVID-19 pandemic, employer branding has gained more prominence, and promoting an employer brand may represent an effective tool that could help attract and retain talent while maintaining and improving the organization’s social positioning. The notion, more specifically, is viewed as a topic of interest to both theorists and practitioners (Grajeda, 2020).

The reason for this is that, during previous crises, it could be seen that ignoring employer branding during and in the first months after a crisis could negatively affect the re-establishment of an organization in the long-run (Denys, 2020a). The transformations taking place in the competitive post-COVID-19 environment may even disorient the best employer brands and undermine all of their points of strength (Randstad, 2020b). As such, how to promote an employer brand through the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, during which the perceptions, thinking modes, and behaviors of both current and potential employees may have significantly changed, represents a serious challenge for managers and scholars (Denys, 2020a). Some argue that how an organization responds during the very first post-COVID-19 months will most probably impact on current and potential employees’ perceptions of employer brands for years to come (Zojceska, 2020).

Yet, despite the importance of employer branding in post-COVID-19 tourism and hospitality and suitable opportunities to promote and distinguish an organization’s employer brand from that of others, there is currently no consistent package of strategies and measures that could be utilized in order to promote employer brands under post-COVID-19 conditions (Maurer, 2020). The literature shows that the topic has been partially addressed and some factors affecting post-COVID-19 employer branding have been explored; already published investigations, for instance, have focused on removing the negative impacts of the crisis on employees (Rivera, 2020), the role of internal and external relationships (Maurer, 2020; Zojceska, 2020), collaboration with organizations and institutions concerned with community health (Heinz, 2020), consideration of the organization’s social responsibility (Heinz, 2020; Martic, 2020), among other concerns. However, despite these narratives, there is no comprehensive framework that has identified the dimensions affecting employer branding in post-COVID-19 tourism and hospitality, and there is presently a gap in the literature. Tourism and hospitality managers will need to identify the elements that leave an impact on employer branding in their attempts to formulate and implement their employer brand management and development plans (Gehrels, 2019). The present study seeks to identify possible employer branding strategies in post-COVID-19 tourism and hospitality to address this research gap.

**Employer branding and COVID-19**

Employer brand stems from the application of the assumptions and principles of marketing management (Dawn and Biswas, 2010), especially relational marketing in the field of human resource management (Jain, 2013). Ambler and Barrow proposed the concept in 1996; they recognized employer brand as a package of “functional, economic and psychological benefits” provided through employment and are developed by the employer (Ambler and Barrow, 1996: 8). As such, an employer brand can be regarded as a comprehensive and distinct set of tangible and intangible benefits of employment offered by a company, and it can have a lasting impact on the target group of people to be recruited and employed in the company (Fischer and Kieler, 2015).

Employer brand is also regarded as part of organizational assets that helps to distinguish a company’s atmosphere and environment and the benefits they provide, in contrast to its competitors (Bakhwas and Tikoo, 2004). Employer brand is also viewed as the image that an employer has in HR markets in the minds of potential employees (Chunping and Li Xi, 2011) and as a long-term strategy defined by an organization to constitute its identity in the market as a “most desired employer” (Malati and Tiwari, 2013). In the tourism and hospitality industry, employer brand has been used as a strategy to highlight the distinction of an organization (as an employer) from competitors in the HR market (Gehrels, 2019).

Since its introduction, employer brand has been used as a “strategy to position a company attractively
and make it a top-of-mind company for applicants” (Gehrels et al., 2016: 163) and as a highly effective strategy to attract and retaining talents In the tourism and hospitality industry (Gehrels and Altan, 2015; Gehrels and Looij, 2011; Reis and Braga, 2016), On the one hand, the success or failure of tourism and hospitality businesses depends heavily on the way talent and other employees view employers in the industry (Jain, 2020), and on the other hand, labor markets in recent years have been influenced by the Social media and managerial practices have become highly competitive venues, challenging tourism and hospitality businesses in attracting talented and talented employees (Gehrels et al., 2016). Scholars also believe that employer brand management should be considered as a strategic concept in the management philosophy of tourism and hospitality businesses (Gehrels and Looij, 2011; Jain, 2020).

Although it will have even more significance in the post-COVID-19 future (Grajeda, 2020). The reason for this is that during this period of time, employees’ needs and motivations have undergone changes, and under such circumstances HR managers must try to strike a new balance between needs and motivations before and after the crisis (Sneader and Singhal, 2020). This issue may even transform the assumptions behind employer brand, because returning to normalcy requires new models that view humanity as their central concern (Sneader and Singhal, 2020).

Scholars have highlighted various reasons to account for the importance of employer branding, as well as its management and promotion, during the post-COVID-19 period. These can be divided into three categories.

- The post-COVID-19 employer brand and its management have to encompass issues beyond talent attraction: many researchers contend that the functioning and scope of employer brand and its management during post-COVID-19 times must not be limited exclusively to the attraction of talent and key employees (Sundberg, 2020). Besides absorbing key employees and trying to retain current ones, organizations must strive to increase employees’ sense of engagement and organizational commitment; this issue, however, may be one of the most serious challenges that HR management will encounter in the post-COVID-19 future (Denys, 2020a);

- The harms that the employer brand undergoes in the short-term can leave long-term impacts on the organization: researchers emphasize that consistency and coherence are important issues in post-COVID-19 management, and if employer brand management and promotion are ignored within this period of time, the organization will have to deal with many long-term challenges (Randstad, 2020b); that is, if the organization fails to consider the employer brand in the short-term and misses the opportunity to distinguish its employer brand in post-COVID-19 months, it will incur many costs in the long-term to re-create its employer brand image (Denys, 2020a);

- The assumptions that underpin employer brand management will be transformed in the post-COVID-19 competitive environment: the post-COVID-19 period represents a time during which labor markets and expectations about organizations will undergo basic changes, and this problem could lead to an inconsistency between the assumptions of employer brand management and the requirements of the new period. Therefore, during the post-COVID-19 period, employer brand managers must revisit their assumptions considering the impacts and pressures imposed by the pandemic; they must re-structure their employer brands according to the current conditions and demands (Randstad, 2020b).

Furthermore, attending to employer brand in the post-COVID-19 tourism and hospitality industry would be overriding concerns. Because the industry encounters such serious problems as temporary employment, poor levels of job skills, low wage levels (Baum and Szivas, 2008), harsh working conditions, unconventional working hours (Sampson and Akyeampong, 2014), that have led to negative publicity among potential job applicants (Barron, 2008). Although rebuilding businesses in the post-COVID-19 future demands the involvement of talented and competent employees, the tourism and hospitality industry, due to low levels of pay and a large proportion of hours worked exceeding usual business hours (Brien, 2004; Richardson, 2009), has a negative image in job markets (Boella and Goss-Turner, 2005) and has always faced a shortage of capable and skilled job applicants (Lin et al., 2018). This problem has posed a serious challenge to the industry (Nickson, 2007), although employer branding can assist it in dealing with the challenges in finding talent (Gehrels, 2019) and it helps retain the talent tourism and hospitality businesses want to keep hold of (Beavan, 2020).

Research Methodology

This study conducted an applied research which consisted of qualitative and quantitative steps. In the qualitative step, to identify the strategies for promoting employer brand in post-COVID-19 tourism and hospitality and to construct a functioning model, the study drew on the systematic review method. In the
quantitative part, to weight the strategies and rank them, the R-SWARA method was used. The population included practitioners from Iranian tourism and hospitality. Because this study relied on experts’ opinions to rank employer brand improvement strategies in post-COVID-19 tourism and hospitality, it was highly important to select experts who had specific knowledge and expertise in this field. As such, to identify and select the experts in tourism, there inclusion criteria were considered: (a) work experience in the industry and (b) familiarity with foundational concepts in employer brand management.

To select the sample, the purposive sampling method was used, given the inclusion criteria specified. The data required for the quantitative study were gathered through questionnaires. In this process, the strategies identified in the qualitative part were arranged into a questionnaire and copies of it were submitted to the participants. As a result, out of the 12 questionnaires (equal to the sample size), 10 one were sufficiently completed, which showed a response rate of 83.3%.

**Systematic literature review**

A systematic literature review is a comprehensive and organized process to collect, assess and extract all pieces of evidence, while re-producing scientific findings with the purpose of answering a research question (Yannascoli et al., 2013). This method can reduce bias in research (Gupta et al., 2018) and usually involves three stages. In the first step (research planning), the significance and importance of the research are justified and the research proposal and the principles governing it are defined. In the second step (conducting the research), the study is introduced, the content needed is identified, and the required data are collected, extracted and analyzed. In the third step (organizing and presenting the research report), test results and findings are published (Tranfield et al., 2003).

**The R-SWARA weighting method**

In most multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) models, weighting the criteria represents one of the most important stages in the solution process. The SWARA method is one of the most recently proposed ones, which was introduced by Kersuliene et al. (2010). The most noteworthy advantages of this method, compared to similar ones, are its ability to evaluate the precision of experts’ opinions about the criteria weighted in the process, its ease of use, and its functionality without numerous calculations (Kersuliene et al., 2010). R-SWARA, as an extended version of SWARA, involves a combination of rough theory and the SWARA method. The stages of this synthetic method are explained below (Zavadskas et al., 2018).

**Step 1:** Define the set of important criteria in the decision-making process.

**Step 2:** Make a team of specialists including k experts to evaluate the importance of the criteria. Primarily, it is necessary to rank the criteria based on their degree of importance (from the most important to the least). Next, $S_j$ is determined as the second criterion and represents the degree of importance of the criterion $C_1$ with respect to other criteria ($C_1 - n$).

**Step 3:** Convert each expert’s responses to the rough matrix $(C_j)$. Each individual expert response $K_{ij}$, $K_{j2}, …, K_{jn}$ should be converted into a rough matrix (like an equation)

$$\text{Apr} (G_q) = \{ Y \in U \mid R(Y) \leq G_q \}$$

$$\text{Apr}(G_q) = \{ Y \in U \mid R(Y) \geq G_q \}$$

$$\text{Bnd}(G_q) = \{ Y \in U \mid R(Y) \neq G_q \}$$

$$\text{Bnd}(G_q) = \{ Y \in U \mid R(Y) > G_q \}$$

$$\text{Lim}(G_q) = \frac{1}{M_U} \sum_{Y \in \text{Apr}(G_q)} R(Y)$$

$$\text{Lim}(G_q) = \frac{1}{M_U} \sum_{Y \in \text{Apr}(G_q)} R(Y)$$

$$\text{RN}(G_q) = \left[ \text{Lim}(G_q), \text{Lim}(G_q) \right]$$

$$\text{RN}(G_q) = \left[ C^L_j, U^L_j \right]$$

**Step 4:** Normalize the matrix $\text{RN}(G_q)$ to reach the matrix $\text{RN}(S_j)$ through the following equation

$$\text{RN}(S_j) = \left[ S^L_j, S^U_j \right]$$

The elements of the matrix $\text{RN}(S_j)$ are computed via

$$\text{RN}(S_j) = \left[ C^L_j, C^U_j \right]$$

Because $j = 1$, the first element of the matrix $\text{RN}(S_j)$ is $[S^L_1, S^U_1] = [1.00, 1.00]$. For the rest of the elements $j > 1$ and they are calculated through
This study utilized the 8-stage model proposed by Okoli and Schabram (2015); this model was used because it was more recent than other existing ones (Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2015). Given the guidelines for a systematic literature review, primarily some (remote) meetings were held in which the participants took part and determined the publications dealing with post-COVID-19 employer branding, particularly in the area of tourism and hospitality. The importance and exploration of employer brand and ways to improve it in the post-COVID-19 future were the topics profoundly discussed, while the purposes of this research were also clearly communicated to the participants. In the next step, through consensus of researchers a mixed research design was selected as the framework of this study to identify the strategies and the principles governing the whole process.

Next the problem was stated and the theoretical literature was searched for keywords (“post-COVID-19 employer brand”, “post-COVID-19 employer brand management”, “employer brand in tourism and hospitality”) on the Scopus database, as one of the leading electronic reservoirs for finding published research in social sciences (Norris and Oppenheim, 2007)... After the references needed were collected, they were evaluated and screened. Figure 1 illustrates the process of identifying, searching, evaluating, and selecting the publications needed for this research.

After the relevant resources were selected, the data were extracted, condescend and analyzed, and were then categorized and combined in line with the purposes of this study. This categorization included 16 strategies for employer branding in post-COVID-19 tourism and hospitality, as listed in Table 1.

In the next step, the strategies identified and extracted were integrated and categorized. As Table 2 shows, the strategies detected at this stage were divided into five groups. In the last stage, too, the results of the present study were assessed and examined and the findings were reported as a final report (the preset research).

Quantitative findings

In this process, the post-COVID-19 employer brand strategies were weighted through R-SWARA. In the Quantitative section, the participants were asked to rank the strategies identified in their questionnaires and divide the strategies into “Strategy” and “Sub-Strategy” categories. The questionnaires were then collected and the data they contained were analyzed. Table 3 shows the ranks of the “functional strategies” as a sample of the ratings made by the experts.

In Table 3, \( C_1 \) is the “financial dimension”, \( C_2 \) is the “strategic dimension”, and \( C_3 \) is the “technical dimension.” Through equations (2)–(7), a rough matrix \( C_j \) group is found

\[
C_j = \{1, 1, 3, 2, 1, 2, 3, 2, 3, 3, 1\}
\]

\[
\text{Lim}(2) = \frac{1}{7} (1 + 1 + 2 + 1 + 2 + 2 + 1) = 1.428
\]

\[
\text{Lim}(2) = \frac{1}{8} (2 + 2 + 3 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 3 + 3) = 2.500
\]
\[
\lim(3) = \frac{1}{10} (1 + 1 + 3 + 2 + 1 + 2 + 3 + 2 + 3 + 1) = 1.900, \quad \lim(3) = 3
\]

\[
\lim(1) = 1, \quad \lim(1) = \frac{1}{10} (1 + 1 + 3 + 2 + 1 + 2 + 3 + 2 + 3 + 1) = 1.900
\]

In step 4, it was necessary to normalize the matrix based on the equations mentioned above. The worst dimension would show the greatest value; in this analysis, this dimension was “evaluating the impacts of the crisis on employees and trying to cancel out negative impacts” \( (C_2) \). The first element of \( RN(S_1) \) was one and the rest of the elements of this matrix were divided by the greatest value \( (C_1) \) to be computed.

\[
C_1^L = \frac{C_1 + C_2 + C_3 + C_4 + C_5 + C_6 + C_7 + C_8 + C_9}{n} = 1.398
\]

\[
C_1^U = \frac{C_1 + C_2 + C_3 + C_4 + C_5 + C_6 + C_7 + C_8 + C_9}{n} = 2.410
\]

The complete \( C_j \) matrix was created through the previous calculations:

\[
RN(S_1) = \begin{bmatrix} C_1^L & C_2^L \\ C_1^U & C_2^U \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} 1.39 \ 2.41 \\ 2.83 \ 1.94 \end{bmatrix} = [0.49, 1.24]
\]

\[
RN(S_2) = \begin{bmatrix} C_1^L & C_2^L \\ C_1^U & C_2^U \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} 1.94 \ 2.83 \\ 2.83 \ 1.94 \end{bmatrix} = [0.68, 1.45]
\]

Through the same procedure, to calculate the matrix, the other elements were computed.
Table 1. Post-COVID-19 employer branding strategies.

| Row | Post-COVID-19 employer branding strategies                                                                 | References                                                                 |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | Evaluating the negative impacts of organizational measures on the employer brand in times of crisis       | Webber, 2020; Maurer, 2020                                                 |
| 2   | Considering the changing expectations of current/potential employees from their employer in the post-COVID-19 future | Denys, 2020a; Glassdoor Team, 2020; Connaughton, 2020                      |
| 3   | Fostering an appropriate organizational culture                                                           | HR Asia, 2020; Talent Works International, 2020                           |
| 4   | Training effective leaders for crises                                                                     | Heinz, 2020; Zojceska, 2020                                               |
| 5   | Considering employees’ safety and health in the workplace                                                | Connaughton, 2020; Baker, 2020                                             |
| 6   | Telecommuting                                                                                            | Talent Works International, 2020; Baker, 2020; Morse, 2020                 |
| 7   | Harmonizing the benefits offered to employees with the new conditions                                     | Martic, 2020; Curlewis, 2020; Morse, 2020; Curtis, 2020                   |
| 8   | Evaluating the impacts of the crisis on employees and trying to cancel out negative impacts               | Rivera, 2020; Zojceska, 2020                                               |
| 9   | Paying attention to employee training                                                                     | Estrada, 2020                                                              |
| 10  | Developing reliable and sustainable internal/external relationships                                      | Zojceska, 2020; Maurer, 2020; Baker, 2020; Connaughton, 2020; Morse, 2020; Martic, 2020; Estrada, 2020; Talent Works International, 2020 |
| 11  | Using employee-centered advertisement                                                                     | Sharma, 2020; Martic, 2020; Heinz, 2020; Talent Works International, 2020 |
| 12  | Establishing online communication networks                                                                 | Heinz, 2020; Curlewis, 2020; Morse, 2020; Martic, 2020                    |
| 13  | Using communication technologies for recruitment                                                          | Smart dreamers, 2020; Curlewis, 2020; HR Asia, 2020                       |
| 14  | Producing value for the society through participation with organizations/institutions concerned with public health | Heinz, 2020                                                                |
| 15  | Assessing the effect of brand re-building measures on the social image of the organization               | Martic, 2020                                                              |
| 16  | Paying increased attention to social responsibility                                                       | Martic, 2020; Heinz, 2020                                                  |

Table 2. The research model.

| Post-COVID-19 employer brand development strategies | Organizational strategies | Occupational strategies | Functional strategies | Communicational strategies | Social strategies |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|------------------|
|                                                   | Evaluating the negative impacts of organizational measures on the employer brand in times of crisis | Considering the changing expectations of current/potential employees from their employer in the post-COVID-19 future | Fostering an appropriate organizational culture | Developing a functional leadership style | Producing value for the society through participation with organizations/institutions concerned with public health |
|                                                   |                           |                         | Considering employees’ safety and health in the workplace | Telecommuting | Assessing the effect of brand re-building measures on the social image of the organization |
|                                                   |                           |                         | Harmonizing the benefits offered to employees with the new conditions |                           | Paying increased attention to social responsibility |
|                                                   |                           |                         | Evaluating the impacts of the crisis on employees and trying to cancel out negative impacts |                           |                           |
|                                                   |                           |                         | Paying attention to employee training |                           |                           |

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In step 5, all of the elements of the previous matrix, except the first one which had a constant value, were added to “1” and the following matrix was created

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{RN}(K_5) &= [1.00, 1.00] \\
\text{RN}(K_1) &= [1.49, 2.24] \\
\text{RN}(K_2) &= [1.68, 2.45]
\end{align*}
\]

In step 6, the elements of the matrix were calculated through equation (14)

\[
\begin{align*}
q^{L}_1 &= \frac{q^{L-1}_1}{k^L} = \frac{q^{L}_1}{k^L} = \frac{1}{2.24} = 0.445 \\
q^{U}_1 &= \frac{q^{U-1}_1}{k^U} = \frac{q^{U}_1}{k^U} = \frac{1}{1.49} = 0.669 \\
q^{L}_2 &= \frac{q^{L-1}_2}{k^L} = \frac{q^{L}_2}{k^L} = \frac{0.44}{2.45} = 0.181 \\
q^{U}_2 &= \frac{q^{U-1}_2}{k^U} = \frac{q^{U}_2}{k^U} = \frac{0.66}{1.68} = 0.397
\end{align*}
\]

In accordance with the procedures mentioned in step 6, the complete \(\text{RN}(Q_i)\) matrix would be

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{RN}_1 \times \text{RN}_2 = & \left[ \min \left( R_1 \times R_2, R_1 \times R_3, R_1 \times R_4, R_1 \times R_5, R_1 \times R_6, R_1 \times R_7, R_1 \times R_8, R_1 \times R_9, R_1 \times R_{10} \right), \right. \\
& \left. \max \left( R_1 \times R_2, R_1 \times R_3, R_1 \times R_4, R_1 \times R_5, R_1 \times R_6, R_1 \times R_7, R_1 \times R_8, R_1 \times R_9, R_1 \times R_{10} \right) \right]
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{RN}_1 \times \text{RN}_2 = & \left[ \min(0.160 \times 0.061, 0.160 \times 0.281, 0.392 \times 0.061, 0.392 \times 0.281), \right. \\
& \left. \max(0.160 \times 0.061, 0.160 \times 0.281, 0.392 \times 0.061, 0.392 \times 0.281) \right] = [0.010, 0.110]
\end{align*}
\]

Table 4 shows the ranks experts assigned to the (main) strategies. Table 5, too, lists the experts’ rankings in relation to “Sub-Strategy.”

To calculate the final weights, Zhu and colleagues’ (2015) equation for multiplying rough numbers was utilized; the calculations for the first strategy in this study were as follows

Next, to rank the strategies, primarily the means of the upper-bound and lower-bound of the final rough weights of each strategy were computed, and next the strategies were ranked in terms of their weights; ultimately, the R-SWARA method steps were applied to each of the strategies (see Table 6).

Discussion and conclusion

This study was conducted to identify and rank employer branding strategies in post-COVID-19 tourism...
and hospitality, given the importance of employer brand in the tourism and hospitality industry (Gehrels and Looij, 2011) as a highly effective means that can help to attract and employ talented individuals in the industry in question (Horner, 2017). Tourism-related businesses will need to attract and retain talent in the post-COVID-19 future to revitalize their processes and re-establish their activities (Peacock, 2020). The findings revealed that improving the employer brand in the post-COVID-19 tourism and hospitality industry could be divided into five main strategies and 16 sub-strategies.

The results also suggest that the participants in the study found “paying attention to social responsibility” the most significant factor in improving post-COVID-19 employer brands. Social responsibility represents one of the major employer brand elements (Benraiss-Noailles and Viot, 2020; Lindholm, 2018) and it will be particularly important in the post-COVID-19 era (Heinz, 2020). The reasons for this are that organizations need to be aware of effects of offering assistance to citizens, clients, employees and their host societies in their attempts to move back to normal conditions for improving their employer brands (Martic, 2020).

Besides considering social issues, social responsibility could also affect the internal operations inside organizations. For instance, many hotels and tourism-related businesses have reduced their physical capacity for serving guests/clients and as a consequence have lost a proportion of their organizational revenues. In the meantime, however, they have prioritized (or might have been forced to prioritize) citizens’ safety and health over profit, which is a decision reflecting social responsibility. Studies also suggest that paying attention to social responsibility and considering issues beyond personal profit in tourism and hospitality could increase employees’ stay at a given company by 27% (Heinz, 2020).

The second post-COVID-19 tourism and hospitality strategy, was “developing reliable and sustainable internal/external relationships”. Active, constant and reliable relations in the post-COVID-19 future could serve as a factor affecting the development of employer brands (Connaughton, 2020), and in this era, warm, informal, intimate, friendly and empathic relationships must replace impersonal, cold, and formal ones (Zojceska, 2020). For instance, communicating messages in relation to organizational activities and measures contributing to employees’ health and welfare and how they are supported during the pandemic could leave considerable impacts on both internal and external audiences (Maurer, 2020). Such communications must also share precise and reliable information in association with organizational positions and jobs with both internal and external audiences (Morse, 2020).

The third strategy was identified as “Assessing the effect of brand re-building measures on the social image of the organization”. This factor suggests that in the post-COVID-19 world, in which there is more social sensitivity toward organizational measures, an organization must evaluate all of its actions in terms of its employer brand and the impacts it has on the organizational social image. Through this process, the organization will be able to appraise the compatibility of messages, measures, contents, and all tools/practices it uses to enhance its employer brand with the new conditions occurring in the society (Martic, 2020).

“Fostering an appropriate organizational culture” was the fourth post-COVID-19 employer brand promotion strategy. Organizational culture is normally regarded as an impactful factor in employer brand development (Dabirian et al., 2019; Karjaluoto and Paakkonen, 2019). The coronavirus pandemic makes organizational culture even more important, while scholars underscore that establishing organizational culture could increase commitment, develop empathy (caring for others), and a sense of value in employees, and that it could serve as an effective instrument contributing to employer brand promotion in the post-COVID-19 future (HR Asia, 2020).

The analysis also revealed that “establishing online communication networks” was the fifth factor affecting post-COVID-19 employer brand development in the tourism and hospitality industry. The studies exploring employer brand have demonstrated that activity on social networks could be viewed as one of the elements affecting employer brand development (Kashive et al., 2020; Siivertsen et al., 2013). Investigations show that post-COVID-19 job-seekers are likely to prefer to work in organizations that have an outstanding presence on social networks and media in times of crisis, and try to alleviate employees’ and other people’s stress and social isolation (Heinz, 2020). “Developing a functional leadership style”, which was the sixth strategy, was also identified in other investigations as one of the effective factors influencing the employer brand (Dabirian et al., 2019; Mau, 2019). Studies also suggest that post-COVID-19 organizational leadership could be one of

### Table 4. The main strategies as ranked by the experts.

| Crit/Ex | E1 | E2 | E3 | E4 | E5 | E6 | E7 | E8 | E9 | E10 |
|---------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| C1      | 4  | 5  | 4  | 5  | 3  | 1  | 1  | 3  | 3  | 1  |
| C2      | 3  | 1  | 2  | 3  | 5  | 2  | 5  | 5  | 1  | 3  |
| C3      | 2  | 3  | 3  | 4  | 4  | 3  | 4  | 4  | 2  | 2  |
| C4      | 5  | 4  | 1  | 2  | 1  | 5  | 2  | 2  | 4  | 4  |
| C5      | 1  | 2  | 5  | 1  | 2  | 4  | 3  | 1  | 5  | 5  |

Such communications must also share precise and reliable information in association with organizational positions and jobs with both internal and external audiences (Morse, 2020).
the most elements having a strong impact on a company’s (employer’s) image (Heinz, 2020).

The seventh factor was “producing value for the society through participation with organizations/institutions concerned with public health”. Creating value could be realized as efforts to prevent the spread of diseases, develop suitable products/services, and provide effective services; such value could play a remarkable role in distinguishing an organization from others as a favorable employer (Heinz, 2020).

“Using communication technologies for recruitment”, as another post-COVID-19 employer branding strategy in tourism and hospitality was the eighth factor. Studies conducted show that job applicants in the post-COVID-19 prefer recruitment procedures that make it possible to have a better interaction with employers through communication technologies, while observing social distancing conventions (HR Asia, 2020). Considering this issue, scholars emphasize that using social media, digital technologies, digital content, emails, text messages, and video-conferencing are not only techniques to increase the effectiveness of the recruitment process, but also they serve as vital facets of effective management of post-COVID-19 employer branding (SmartDreamers, 2020).

The results also clarified that “considering employees’ safety and health in the workplace” was the ninth factor in improving post-COVID-19 employer branding in tourism and hospitality. The findings of a global investigation into the factors affecting post-COVID-19 employer brand management have demonstrated that considering employees’ safety and health is an indicator taken seriously by many employees and has a major impact on evaluating the employer brand (Connaughton, 2020). “Evaluating the negative impacts of organizational measures on the employer brand in times of crisis” was the 10th factor recognized in this study; as the coronavirus pandemic broke out Reduced activity led to a forceful closure of businesses in some tourism and hospitality organizations (Nicola et al., 2020), which have tried to reduce costs by dismissing employees, granting forced leaves of absence, and reducing salaries and fringe benefits (Baker, 2020). A negative evaluation of the impacts of such measures on the employer brand (Maurer, 2020) and searching for ways of re-creating one’s image as an employer are among the most important actions that managers must take to salvage their employer brands in the post-COVID-19 future. (Webber, 2020).

“Using employee-centered advertisement” was another strategy, which ranked 11th in the participants’ evaluations. Other related studies showed that in the post-COVID-19 fluctuating world, in which people are re-visiting their personal/professional values, employees can serve as trustworthy messengers who support an employer brand (Martic, 2020). Scholars, therefore, advise managers to make it possible for employees to adopt more prominent roles when formulating and promulgating their post-COVID-19 employer brand advertisements. In fact, employees’ actions in terms of introducing the organization and its brand could be even more effective than the official statements of the organization itself (Sharma, 2020).

“Considering the changing expectations of current/potential employees from their employer in the Post-COVID-19 future” was the 12th strategy for improving employer brand. As it seems, employees’ changing expectations and needs in the post-COVID-19 era will transform the components and indicators of employer branding. For instance, investigations suggest that in the first post-COVID-19 months, work security and good work atmosphere could be more valuable than salary and wage (Denys, 2020a). Studies also explain that the most important expectations that could affect employer...

| Main strategies          | Crit/Ex | E1   | E2   | E3   | E4   | E5   | E6   | E7   | E8   | E9   | E10  |
|-------------------------|---------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Organizational strategies | C1      | 1    | 2    | 4    | 4    | 3    | 1    | 2    | 3    | 2    | 4    |
|                         | C2      | 4    | 1    | 3    | 3    | 4    | 4    | 1    | 4    | 1    | 3    |
|                         | C3      | 3    | 3    | 2    | 2    | 1    | 2    | 3    | 2    | 3    | 1    |
|                         | C4      | 2    | 4    | 1    | 1    | 2    | 3    | 4    | 1    | 4    | 2    |
| Occupational strategies  | C1      | 1    | 1    | 1    | 1    | 1    | 1    | 1    | 1    | 1    | 2    |
|                         | C2      | 2    | 2    | 2    | 2    | 2    | 2    | 2    | 1    | 2    | 2    |
| Combinational strategies | C1      | 2    | 2    | 1    | 2    | 3    | 1    | 2    | 1    | 2    | 2    |
|                         | C2      | 4    | 3    | 3    | 4    | 4    | 3    | 3    | 3    | 3    | 4    |
|                         | C3      | 3    | 4    | 2    | 3    | 1    | 4    | 1    | 4    | 1    | 1    |
|                         | C4      | 1    | 1    | 4    | 1    | 2    | 2    | 4    | 2    | 4    | 3    |
| Social strategies        | C1      | 1    | 3    | 2    | 3    | 2    | 2    | 3    | 2    | 2    | 1    |
|                         | C2      | 2    | 2    | 3    | 2    | 1    | 1    | 2    | 3    | 1    | 3    |
|                         | C3      | 3    | 1    | 1    | 1    | 3    | 3    | 1    | 1    | 3    | 2    |
branding in the post-COVID-19 future are health and offering help/support to employees (Connaughton, 2020).

As a result, understanding employees’ needs and making efforts to respond to their expectations could be a major step in managing and enhancing employer brands in post-COVID-19 days (Denys, 2020a). Identifying and investigating job-seekers and potential employees are two major stages in developing an employer brand. Yet, working in the uncertain and unpredictable post-COVID-19 future has given a peculiar significance to employer brand, and scholars contend receiving feedback from the group of employees through organized surveys could help to reveal new dimensions in terms of employer brand important and attractiveness to managers. Providing new insights could considerably reduce errors in relation to employer branding (Glassdoor Team, 2020). “Telecommuting”, as the 13th factor ranked in this study, was also emphasized in other investigations as an effective procedure that could sustain operations while helping to protect employees’ safety and health in the post-COVID-19 (Baker, 2020; Boston Consulting Group, 2020). The studies published also have demonstrated that using post-COVID-19 telecommuting procedures could leave an impact on improving an organization’s employer brand by alleviating employee stress, increasing life-work balance, increasing job flexibility, and creating an appropriate organizational culture (Talent Works International, 2020). Therefore, telecommuting could serve as an effective strategy for improving employer brand in post-

| Table 6. The final weights of the strategies. |
|---|
| **Dimension** | **Weight** | **Strategy** | **Indicator weight** | **Final weight** | **Mean** | **Rank** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Organizational strategies | 0.160 0.392 | 1 Evaluating the negative impacts of organizational measures on the employer brand in times of crisis | 0.061 0.281 0.010 0.110 0.060 | 10 |
| | | 2 Considering the changing expectations of current/potential employees from their employer in the post-COVID-19 future | 0.022 0.178 0.004 0.070 0.037 | 12 |
| | | 3 Fostering an appropriate organizational culture | 0.415 0.630 0.066 0.247 0.157 | 4 |
| | | 4 Developing a functional leadership style | 0.161 0.429 0.026 0.168 0.097 | 6 |
| | | 5 Considering employees’ safety and health in the workplace | 0.656 0.677 0.016 0.108 0.062 | 9 |
| Occupational strategies | 0.025 0.160 | 6 Telecommuting | 0.313 0.355 0.008 0.057 0.032 | 13 |
| | | 7 Harmonizing the benefits offered to employees with the new conditions | 0.216 0.411 0.002 0.038 0.020 | 15 |
| | | 8 Evaluating the impacts of the crisis on employees and trying to cancel out negative impacts | 0.088 0.244 0.001 0.023 0.012 | 16 |
| | | 9 Paying attention to employee training | 0.484 0.614 0.005 0.057 0.031 | 14 |
| | | 10 Developing reliable and sustainable internal/external relationships | 0.697 1.167 0.044 0.293 0.168 | 2 |
| Functional strategies | 0.010 0.093 | 11 Using employee-centered advertisement | 0.080 0.300 0.005 0.075 0.040 | 11 |
| | | 12 Establishing online communication networks | 0.346 0.813 0.022 0.204 0.113 | 5 |
| | | 13 Using communication technologies for recruitment | 0.172 0.561 0.011 0.141 0.076 | 8 |
| Communicational strategies | 0.063 0.251 | 14 Producing value for the society through participation with organizations/ institutions concerned with public health | 0.082 0.237 0.033 0.144 0.089 | 7 |
| | | 15 Assessing the effect of brand re-building measures on the social image of the organization | 0.204 0.396 0.082 0.242 0.162 | 3 |
| Social strategies | 0.405 0.610 | 16 Paying increased attention to social responsibility | 0.502 0.637 0.203 0.389 0.296 | 1 |
COVID-19 tourism and hospitality in terms of some administrative activities and processes such as completing clients’/guests’ forms via online platforms.

The 14th post-COVID-19 employer brand strategy in tourism and hospitality was “paying attention to employee training.” In fact, enjoying training opportunities and development serves as one of the major factors contributing to employer brand promotion (Adler and Ghiselli, 2015; Aslam, 2015). In the post-COVID-19 era, too, this item is identified as a good option; the findings of other studies also highlight that an organization’s consideration of education, knowledge transfer, and essential skills (e.g. resilience and problem-solving) in the post-COVID-19 era can have a positive impact on improving the employer brand and on the decisions of job-seekers in relation to working for the organization in question (Estrada, 2020).

“Harmonizing the benefits offered to employees with the new conditions” was the 15th strategy identified in this study. Exploring organizations’ behaviors within this period suggests that many of them have sought to enhance their employer brand image to find better ways of developing benefits offered to employees and make such benefits compatible with the new conditions. In doing so, organizations are sharing their successful experiences and sending inspiring and encouraging messages to their target communities. Such employers base their employees’ benefits gained through post-COVID-19 activities on job security and stability, safety, health and welfare (Martić, 2020).

“Evaluating the impacts of the crisis on employees and trying to cancel out negative impacts” ranked 16th as a post-COVID-19 employer brand. The crisis emerging from the outspread of the coronavirus have left negative emotional, economic and social effects on employees. In the meantime, organizations should inspect the personal, occupational and organizational effects on their employees. For instance, the crisis could increase stress, psychological distress, ambiguities in roles, and workload. Employees, as a result of this crisis, may experience many economic difficulties and low job security (Zhu et al., 2020). Managers dealing with employer brand must examine such effects rigorously and make necessary measures to reduce the harms arising from them (Rivera, 2020).

The analysis of the studies conducted dealing with post-COVID-19 employer branding demonstrates that researchers have investigated this topic and the various factors/strategies involved in post-COVID-19 employer branding in tourism and hospitality. These include training (Estrada, 2020), consideration of employees’ safety and health (Connaughton, 2020), telecommuting (Talent Works International, 2020), the importance of communication (Maurer, 2020; Morse, 2020; Zojceska, 2020), using advertisements (Martić, 2020; Sharma, 2020), and other issues. However, none of these investigations proposed a comprehensive framework of strategies for employer brand promotion, which represents one of the points of strength of the present study compared to the ones published in the literature. Exploring the extant literature on employer brand in tourism and hospitality also revealed that, despite the significance of employer brand in times of economic crisis, this topic has been ignored by researchers although it points to an obvious gap in the literature on employer brand in tourism and hospitality. This study could help to overcome some of these shortcomings. The participation of activists and experts in the tourism industry, as well as employing R-SWARA, could further highlight the specific features of the present study.

The findings of this research provide practical guidelines to organizational managers, especially employer brand managers, decision-makers and planners in the realm of tourism and hospitality. Managers active in these areas are advised to use the strategies identified when making plans to improve employer brand in their organizations in the post-COVID-19 future. Managers could also employ the strategies by considering the priorities made by the experts in this study. Other researchers could utilize the model proposed here to evaluate the attitudes of employees and job-seekers in the tourism and hospitality industry. Future surveys can focus on identifying the factors affecting post-COVID-19 employer brand development from the perspective of employees and job-seekers in tourism and hospitality.

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