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What's New against Goblin Mode?
Employer Brand Practices in Turkey during the Post-pandemic Period

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ABSTRACT

A strong employer brand is crucial for maintaining employee motivation, engagement, and high satisfaction. Improving employee experiences and expectations is vital for maintaining and enhancing brand strength. The pandemic has changed the dynamics of business life as it has affected different areas of life. Remote working and hybrid working models that came with the pandemic have changed the expectations of employees from companies and required organizations to review their employer branding practices. In the post-pandemic period, employees can enter goblin mode when companies do not meet their expectations or their motivation decreases. An employee in goblin mode may need even more inspiration to adopt social and business practices. This study defines the concept of goblin mode, which can be an essential obstacle to being a solid employer brand with a corporate communication perspective. Then the employer branding practices of companies in Turkey during and after the pandemic will be analyzed. The study shows that most companies in Turkey focus instead on human resources that consist of the existing employer branding themes and are similar to and repetitive of each other than employer branding practices. The study reveals the need for unique employer branding practices in attracting skilled workforce for companies in Turkey.

Keywords: *employer branding, Turkey, corporate communication*

Introduction

Companies compete in human resources for corporate sustainability and success with their products and services. However, a qualified workforce is the primary determinant of companies' sustainability. For this reason, companies seek to create an employer brand that accurately describes their corporate identity and culture with a positive image and reputation for their current and potential employees. Thus, the need for employer branding practices has increased for companies to attract, distinguish and prefer qualified human resources.

Employer branding is one of the most critical ways for companies to express themselves to their employees. Companies can convey their corporate culture, identity, worldview, and working philosophy through employer branding practices. Thus, companies can establish a bond with current and potential employees. Furthermore, companies with a positive image can gain a high corporate reputation and employee loyalty through a long-term strategy. This situation facilitates achieving the projected efficiency and success through healthy internal communications.

Today, although most companies know that they will be affected by their employer brands and reputations, either positively or negatively, only a minority of them monitor and measure employer brand reputation. A strong employer brand is crucial for motivating current employees, increasing their loyalty to the company, and attracting potential employees. Especially due to the determining transformations in business life, the importance of employer brand practices has increased. At this point, the pandemic has transformed the dynamics of business life and caused radical changes in many aspects of life. With the pandemic, new working conditions, such as telecommuting, and hybrid working models have also changed employees' expectations and needs; failures in meeting employees' expectations in this period led to decreased motivation. In this study, the concepts of employer branding, a branch of corporate communication practice, and goblin mode, which can be a major obstacle to being a convincing employer brand, will be defined. The study also intends to examine the employer branding practices of companies in the BIST30 index and Great Place to Work 2020-2021-2023 reports in Turkey during and after the pandemic, through qualitative descriptive analyses, as well as through a mapping of the practices of companies, with categorical themes.

Corporate Communication Concept and Scope

Communication is the lifeblood of organizations and companies that will ensure their survival, facilitate the management of operational processes, and raise their reputation and legitimacy before the target audience. Corporate communication covers the organization's customer, target audience and stakeholders-oriented activities. According to Van Riel and Fombrun (2007), corporate communication includes marketing, public relations, investor relations, and employee communication in a "multi-tactical and strategic" manner. Based on

these definitions, corporate communication is a discipline that manages an organization's communication with its internal and external stakeholders. In addition, this discipline focuses on and promotes corporate identity, culture, brand image, reputation, products, and services, through practical communication efforts with target audiences.

Management and internal communication within the corporate communication perspective constitute the core of employer branding studies. In this respect, Van Riel and Fombrun (2007) summarize the objectives of management communication as follows:

- "Develop a shared vision of the company within the organization.
- Establish and maintain trust in the organization's leadership.
- Initiate and manage the change process.
- Strengthen the identification of employees with the organization." (Van Riel and Fombrun, 2007: 15).

Employer Branding as a Branch of Corporate Communication Practices

In addition to external target audiences and stakeholders, companies also seek to influence and manage the perception of a positive image and reputation by current and potential employees. Backwards, employer branding was considered "an implementation of branding activities in human resources management." Amber and Barrow introduced the concept to the literature. They defined employer brand as "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided through employment that is identified with the employing company." However, it surfaced that employer branding required comprehensive and long-term studies. For this reason, Sullivan (2004) defined employer branding as "a targeted, long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders regarding a particular firm." Corporate communication has an indispensable role in the process of managing long-term awareness, perception, and reputation.

Figure 1. *The Relationship between Employee Quality and Product/Service Quality*
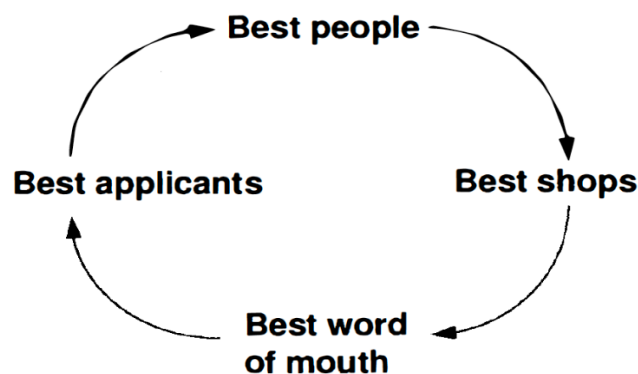
Source: Ambler, Barrow, 1996.

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As seen in Figure 1, according to Ambler and Barrow's employer branding approach, the recruitment of the best-qualified employees within the company will positively impact the sales and performance of the organization. Furthermore, with the spread of this situation by word of mouth, the organization will achieve even better results in providing goods and services.

On the other hand, there is no homogenous theoretical background in employer branding. It is possible to mention that various theories or approaches support and merely add to one another; and that the most commonly adopted theories in approaching employer branding are the brand value theory and the related sub-theories. The brand equity theory explains the instrumental and intangible relationship between the brand, the branding process, and employees' company image (Theurer et al., 2018: 160-161). Employees' level of acquaintance with a brand, how they evaluate it, and their perceptions and experiences about it, determine brand equity (Cable & Turban, 2001: 120). In an employer-based brand equity theory, potential employees prefer organizations with powerful brand identities to organizations with weaker or negative images (Kashive and Khanna, 2017: 213).

In employer branding practices, companies should meet employees' psychological expectations and their economic or functional needs alone. Three other vital components of employer branding practices are corporate culture, identity, and reputation (Kashive and Khanna, 2017: 213). These components determine employees' company preferences, work efficiency, and perceptions.

Relationship between Corporate Communication and Employer Branding

It is a general opinion that employer branding is a human resource (HR) department practice (Cable and Turban, 2001: 115-163) and implementing "marketing techniques" to employer and employee relations to the letter (Theurer et al., 2018: 193-194) would be problematic. As Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) remark in the conceptual framework of employer branding in Figure 1, although employer image and attractiveness are essential components in building an employer brand, the primary variable in employee efficiency and productivity is to ensure employee loyalty and commitment. Therefore, adherence to the employer brand is directly related to companies' effective corporate identity and culture-building activities. To reflect a positive image for the target groups of organizations, to transform the existing positive image into a corporate reputation, and to build and protect it, corporate identity should be effectively managed and transformed into a competitive factor (Karaosmanoglu and Melewar, 2006: 196).

Figure 2. *Employer Branding Framework*
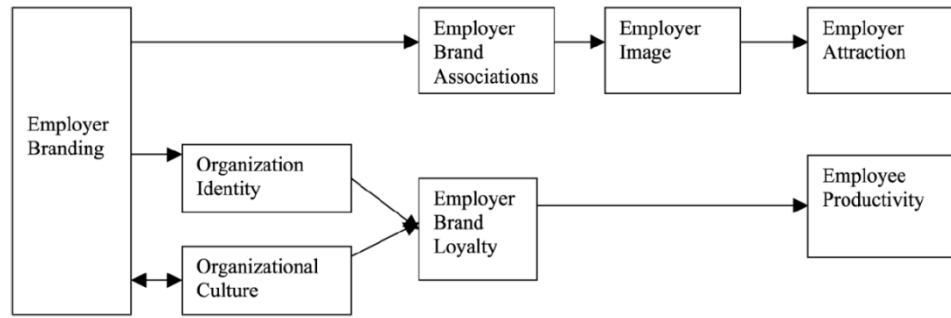
Source: Backhaus, Tikoo, 2004.

Corporate identity, on the other hand, includes corporate culture as an umbrella concept and can be defined as who and what the company is, how the company sees itself, and the information and promotion activities they carry out for the target audience, stakeholders, and employees (Okay and Bıçakçı, 2005). Therefore, corporate identity is one of the three essential components of corporate communication. Corporate communication bridges an effective corporate identity design and the organization's corporate image and reputation (Balmer and Edmund, 1999: 174). In other words, corporate communication is necessary to transform corporate identity into a corporate image to create a powerful employer brand.

Corporate communication is all internal and external communication processes to create and maintain organizations' and companies' positive image and reputation before their stakeholders and target audiences (Cornelissen, 2020). This perspective turns corporate communication into a holistic concept that is responsible for all communication activities for employees, who are internal stakeholders, as well as communication with external stakeholders. In other words, corporate communication plays the role of an orchestra conductor in all company communication processes (Van Riel, 1997: 288). Corporate communication is not only an external stakeholder-oriented means; it also motivates employees to achieve the company's corporate strategies and goals, work together with synergy, and emphasize achieving corporate goals. Van Riel and Fombrun (2007) list the roles of corporate communication from a holistic perspective as follows;

- "To flesh out the profile of the 'company behind the brand' (corporate branding).
- To develop initiatives that minimize discrepancies between the companies.
- Desired identity and brand features.
- To indicate who should perform which tasks in the field of communication.
- Formulating and executing effective procedures to facilitate decision-making about matters concerning communication.
- To mobilize internal and external support behind corporate objectives." (Van Riel and Fombrun, 2007: 23).

One of the critical parts of corporate communication activities is internal communication. As part of in-house communication, employee communication, and employee motivation are the priorities. Organizational structure, size, hierarchy, and institutions' decision-making processes determine employee communication (Krone et al., 1987). In managing employee relations as an in-house communication practice, mutual understanding, understanding of the corporate environment, motivation, and a rise in productivity are aimed. In realizing these objectives, which will directly affect organizations' sustainability, strategies, and goals, it is necessary to cooperate with corporate communication departments instead of the human resources department alone (Van Riel and Fombrun, 2007: 188).

Employer branding practices should be approached from the perspective of communication discipline, instead of being perceived only as a human resources practice. Employer branding is a concept that includes employee relations, corporate perception, and reputation. For this reason, communication is crucial for managing the employer's brand image accurately and effectively for current and potential employees. Furthermore, the right communication strategy can touch employees' hearts and minds in employer branding activities. Therefore, employer branding should aim to function standardized, ensuring interaction and harmony between human resources and communication departments (Öksüz, 2012: 23).

Communication professionals should play an essential role in determining employer branding strategies. Implementing corporate communication discipline to employer branding activities is extremely important in providing proper communication, brand image, and reputation management for employees. In addition, employer branding makes employees believe the company is "a great place to work." Thus, it will increase the satisfaction of existing employees and influence the preferences of a newly qualified labor force (Ewing et al., 2002: 12).

As part of employer branding, corporate communication and marketing techniques are used to attract existing and potential employees (Backhaus, 2016: 193). In this regard, increasing expectations and needs of employees, increasing competition, and difficulties in recruiting a qualified workforce require branding and communication visions to be more comprehensive and unique.

The sustainability of the employer brand is another crucial point for employees. The employer brand reflects the corporate identity and aims to help employees experience the company's values, policies, and corporate behaviors, this means meeting their expectations and increasing their motivation and passion (Backhaus, 2016: 193-194). The sustainability of the employer brand allows employees and potential employees to be constantly informed about the company, cognize of the company, and create an attractive basis (Verčič and Ćorić, 2018: 446). On the other hand, an employer's brand image that is not kept up to date by the existing situations and conditions may lead to decreased employee motivation and productivity.

The Risk of Goblin Mode against Employer Branding after the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic (WHO, 2020), which affected the whole world at the beginning of 2020, and the mandatory quarantine processes that followed (BBC, 2023), caused the rules of business life to be rewritten as it affected every aspect of life. As a result of the pandemic, many companies have compulsorily adopted the telecommuting method. Working from home has profoundly affected many sectors of business life. While e-commerce, digitalization, and the entertainment sector have proliferated, online meetings have become indispensable for business life (Marketing Turkey, 2021a).

Working from home has entered the lives of millions of employees with its positive and negative features. Referred to as 'blessings' by some, the factors that came along with working from home were deemed negative by others, over time, and because of unfavorable experiences. Therefore, drawing sharp boundaries when assessing telecommuting is impossible, and personal relativity is at the forefront. Working from home can be deemed as an opportunity to work independently of space, mobility, working hours restrictions (Prasad et al., 2020: 386-387), that "saves time, increases work efficiency and creativity, and allows employees to spend more time at home" (Tuna and Türkmendağ, 2020: 3246). On the other hand, working from home has many negative aspects. Working from home hinders the construction of a corporate culture for companies. It causes a decrement in interaction, resulting in social isolation of employees, and hinders their ability to balance their work and private life (Popovici and Popovici, 2020: 470).

Furthermore, being a digitally accessible workforce increases the risk of pressure on employees to complete even the tasks that could be inconvenient to conduct, for instance, in case they are sick (Popovici and Popovici, 2020: 471). Furthermore, working from home also leads to lack of social interaction and physical inactivity, which might bring physical and psychological problems (Marketing Turkey, 2021b). In addition, increased workload, and endless shifts, combined with anxiety of unemployment risk, cause increased pressure on employees (Marketing Türkiye, 2021c).

In addition to all these difficulties encountered in the new normal, the method has created a new employee lifestyle. The compulsory time spent at home, which emerged at the pandemic's beginning, has created a home-bound lifestyle (Lund et al., 2021: 6-16). As a result, the individual spent more time with their immediate circle at home without experiencing a sense of loss (Phillips, 2020).

This lifestyle, which results from the compulsory living and working conditions during the pandemic, is now called goblin mode. The word goblin mode, which Oxford University Press chose as the word of the year 2022 after of a public questionnaire of 300 thousand people, is defined as a slang term as "a type of behavior which is unapologetically self-indulgent, lazy, slovenly, or greedy, typically in a way that rejects social norms or expectations" (Oxford University Press, 2022). Wong explains the concept of goblin mode as "The term embraces the comforts of depravity and a direct departure from the 'cottage-core' influence of early pandemic days" (Wong, 2022). "Goblin mode is similar to the moment

when you wake up at 2 am and shuffle into the kitchen wearing nothing but a long t-shirt to make a weird snack, like melted cheese on saltines." (Wong, 2022)

Beyond a simple definition, goblin mode has gained a more profound cultural meaning in the period when the effects of the pandemic have subsided. So indeed, goblin mode offers people an instinctive way of living without considering existing traditional social roles and norms (Callahan, 2023). On the other hand, Zimmer defines goblin mode as a zeitgeist concept representing the spirit of the time and considers it a coping mechanism during the pandemic. This situation shows that people see the existing social norms and rules differently, are eager to abandon them, and accept new models (Zimmer, 2023). Goblin mode also reflects that people do not want to leave this lifestyle that emerged during the pandemic and do not want to return to the moral norms of the pre-pandemic world (Schuessler, 2022).

Goblin Mode to Silent Resignation

On the other hand, goblin mode has the potential to affect business life and working styles. Due to the "new normal" of the pandemic, remote or hybrid working, burnout, and boredom can put employees in goblin mode. The intense working conditions of employees even cause them to be put into a forced goblin mode by employers (Microsoft, 2023). When an employee enters goblin mode, it carries a severe risk of problems for organizations and companies. An employee in goblin mode, who is not interested in the rules and norms of business life, and in which feelings of burnout, boredom, or apathy prevail, may experience low productivity, motivation, and organizational loyalty problems. This situation may become a kind of "silent resignation" later. During the pandemic, rapidly changing working conditions, the inability to balance work and personal life, high-performance systems, and increasing work intensity has raised the number of silent resignations cases (Hamouche et al., 2023). The concept of quiet resignation was first used by a software engineer named Zaid Khan on Tiktok and spread quickly (Önder, 2023).

Silent resignation can be explained as an act in which employees only regard whether their business processes are in order but work with low motivation, minimum effort, and a sense of responsibility.

Yıldız and Özmenekşe (2022) define the concept of silent resignation as "not doing anything in addition to the specified responsibilities, avoiding responsibility, working only as much as necessary, seeking rights passively, giving up; more basically, the employee asks themself the questions "for what?", "what am I doing?" and "Is it worth it?" and finds answers that oppose the benefits of the work organization they are affiliated with, and take action" (Yıldız and Özmenekşe, 2022: 16).

Silent resignation causes many inconveniences in business life. During the pandemic period, employees voluntarily reduced their working hours. Faberman, Mueller, and Şahin (2022) note a decrease in working hours of two times more than the current labor force participation rate and that this situation continued

throughout the pandemic (Faberman et al., 2022). Likewise, Lee, Park, and Shin (2023) mention that the decrease in working hours continued in 2022. The situation is considered a silent resignation related factor (Lee et al., 2023). The fact that employees seek a balance between their work and personal lives shows that this situation may continue to affect their working life. At this point, employer branding practices are vital for companies not to lose their employees in a "silent" way and to protect employee welfare, motivation, and loyalty. Due to increasing competition in every field, effective employer branding practices are the only way to persuade and attract a qualified labor force and ensure they prefer their companies.

Methodology

This study aims to analyze the employer brand practices of Turkish companies that increase employee welfare, comfort, motivation, and productivity throughout and after the pandemic through a descriptive qualitative analysis method. The employer branding practices of companies in the BIST30 index and Great Place to Work 2020-2021-2022 reports in Turkey during and after the pandemic will be examined through a qualitative descriptive analysis method. First, the study maps the companies with categorical themes, and then categorizes the qualitative findings with a more thematic analysis method.

Qualitative descriptive research design is a valid and acceptable method that allows for a categorical inquiry in a less interpretive way (Lambert and Lambert, 2012: 255). Although qualitative descriptive studies can contain the characteristics of other qualitative research methods, the findings will not be pre-dependent on a theoretical view. They will not develop a theory from the data acquired. Furthermore, qualitative descriptive studies ensure data saturation for analysis by collecting cases considered rich in information to analyze the sample (Lambert and Lambert, 2012).

The thematic analysis method will be used to systematically identify and organize the patterns of meaning in the data obtained in the study and to identify and make sense of the commonalities in the findings (Braun and Clarke, 2012: 57). Thematic analysis, which is a flexible, accessible, and unusual method, enables the researcher's analytical observations, identification, and interpretation of meaning patterns in the data through codes and themes in a systematic way, without being limited by theoretical boundaries/ commitments (Clarke et al., 2015: 222-223).

Data Collection Methods and Techniques

In this study, to systematically analyze the employer branding practices of the most valuable companies in Turkey during and after the pandemic period, companies in the Borsa Istanbul 30 (BIST30) index were identified and scanned. BIST30 Index, with 2.3 million investors and a total market capitalization of TL

2.8 trillion, lists Turkey's most valuable 30 companies (Borsa İstanbul, 2023a). This study uses March 2023 BIST 30 Index data as a base (Borsa Istanbul, 2023b). Furthermore, the study analyzes the employer practices of companies with 1000 thousand or more employees in the 2020-2021-2022 lists of Great Place to Work Turkey, where the best employers in Turkey and around the globe compete. Great Place to Work aims to measure employee experience and offer an insight into the corporate culture and trust levels of employees, motivation, pride in their work, and the pleasure of working together in a standardized way (Great Place to Work, 2023).

Table 1. *Data Collection Method*

Companies in the Data Scope	Number of Employees	Platform	Keywords
Companies in BIST 30 index and Great Place to Work lists in 2020-2021-2022.	Companies with 1000 or more employees	Google Search Results and Google News	company name+employer branding applications, company name+working life, company name+career

In the study, as shown in Table 1, the matching status of the companies in the BIST30 index and the 2020-2021 and 2022 Great Place to Work Turkey list is revealed, and then the practices of the companies on the lists are scanned. Data were obtained from the companies' corporate websites on the list, and keywords were determined through Google search. Finally, the findings were categorized into employer brand themes by identifying commonalities. Thus, a systematic analysis and mapping of the employer branding practices of the most valuable companies in Turkey were carried out.

Research Findings

In this study, 57 companies were screened in the BIST 30 Index and the 2020-2021- 2022 Best Employer Lists, as indicated in Tables 2 and 3; of these companies, 27 were in the best employer lists, and 30 were included in the BIST 30. Of these 27 companies, 11 have formerly been listed in the top employers twice or more. However, when comparing the BIST 30 index with the Great to Work Best Employer lists, no matching company was identified except for "Turkcell." This situation has led to the lack of a positive relationship between Turkey's most valuable companies in Borsa Istanbul and the best employers on the list. For this reason, the study examined all employer practices of BIST 30 Index companies and companies in the "Best Employer" lists of 500 and above in 2020, 2021, and 2022.

Table 2. *Companies in the BIST 30 Index*

INDEX	SHARE CODE	COMPANY NAME	CORPORATE WEBSITE
BIST 30	AKBNK.E	AKBANK	https://www.akbank.com/
BIST 30	AKSEN.E	AKSA ENERJI	https://www.aksagroup.com.tr/
BIST 30	ALARK.E	ALARKO HOLDING	https://www.alarko.com.tr/
BIST 30	ARCLK.E	ARCELIK	https://www.arcelik.com.tr/
BIST 30	ASELS.E	ASELSAN	https://www.aselsan.com.tr/
BIST 30	BIMAS.E	BIM MAGAZALAR	https://www.bim.com.tr/
BIST 30	EKGYO.E	EMLAK KONUT GMYO	https://www.emlakkonut.com.tr/
BIST 30	ENKAI.E	ENKA INSAAT	https://www.enka.com.tr/
BIST 30	EREGL.E	EREGLI DEMIR CELIK	https://www.erdemir.com.tr/
BIST 30	FROTO.E	FORD OTOSAN	https://www.fordotosan.com.tr/
BIST 30	GARAN.E	GARANTI BANKASI	https://www.garantibbva.com.tr/
BIST 30	GUBRF.E	GUBRE FABRIK.	https://www.gubre.com.tr/
BIST 30	HEKTS.E	HEKTAS	https://www.hektas.com.tr/
BIST 30	ISCTR.E	IS BANKASI (C)	https://www.isbank.com.tr/
BIST 30	KCHOL.E	KOC HOLDING	https://www.koc.com.tr/
BIST 30	KOZAA.E	KOZA MADENCILIK	https://www.kozamaden.com.tr/
BIST 30	KOZAL.E	KOZA ALTIN	https://www.kozaaltin.com.tr/
BIST 30	KRDMD.E	KARDEMIR (D)	https://www.kardemir.com/
BIST 30	ODAS.E	ODAS ELEKTRIK	https://www.odas.com.tr/
BIST 30	PETKM.E	PETKIM	https://www.petkim.com.tr/
BIST 30	PGSUS.E	PEGASUS	https://www.flypgs.com/
BIST 30	SAHOL.E	SABANCI HOLDING	https://www.sabanci.com/
BIST 30	SASA.E	SASA POLYESTER	https://www.sasa.com.tr/
BIST 30	SISE.E	SISE CAM	https://www.sisecam.com.tr/
BIST 30	TAVHL.E	TAV HAVALIMANLARI	https://www.tavhavalimanlari.com.tr/
BIST 30	TCELL.E	TURKCELL	https://www.turkcell.com.tr/
BIST 30	THYAO.E	TURK HAVA YOLLARI	https://www.turkishairlines.com/
BIST 30	TOASO.E	TOFAS OTO. FAB.	https://www.tofas.com.tr/
BIST 30	TUPRS.E	TUPRAS	https://www.tupras.com.tr/
BIST 30	YKBNK.E	YAPI VE KREDI BANK.	https://www.yapikredi.com.tr/

Source: BIST30 Index Company 2023.

**Table 3.** *Great Place to Work Best Employers Turkey Lists*

Number of Employees	Great Place to Work Turkey 2022	Great Place to Work Turkey 2021	Great Place to Work Turkey 2020
500-999	Magna Exteriors & Magna Mirrors, Astrazeneca Türkiye, Bhm Otelcilik A.S., Sahibinden.com, Tavuk Dünyası, Sefine Shipyard, Nuh Çimento, Entek Insaat, Aydem Yenilenebilir Enerji, Saat ve Saat A.S., Albayrak Medya, Yatağan Termik Enerji, Birgi Mefar Grup	Magna Exteriors & Magna Mirrors, DHL Worldwide Express Taşımacılık ve Ticaret A.S, Sahibinden.com, Aydem Yenilenebilir Enerji Gediz Elektrik Perakende, Kone	Sahibinden.com, Esbaş, Glaxo Smith Kline Türkiye,
1000-4999	Hilton, Vodafone Holding A.S., DHL Worldwide Express Taşımacılık ve Ticaret A.S., Allianz Türkiye, Pronet Güvenlik Hizmetlerı A.S., Tb Sewtech Turkey Otomotiv Sanayi ve Ticaret Ltd., Otokar Otomotiv ve Savunma Sanayi A.S., Erişim Müşteri Hizmetleri A.S., İzmir Ekonomi Üniversitesi, Medical Park Hastanesi, Türk Henkel Kimya Sanayi ve Ticaret A.S., Huawei Telekomünikasyon Dış Ticaret Ltd.	Hilton, Albaraka Türk Katılım Bankası A.S., Penti Anadolu Sigorta, Yatagan Termik Enerji Üretim A.S	DHL Express, Tavuk Dünyası, Assan Alüminyum, Esan, Hilton, Albara Türk, Penti
5000+	Turkcell Global Bilgi Assistt, Kuveyt Turk Katılım Bankası, Teleperformance Turkey	Kuveyt Turk Katılım Bankası A.S. Teleperformance Turkey Assistt	Kuveyt Türk, Global Bilgi Assist

Source: Great Place to Work 2020, 2021, 2022 Turkey Reports.

This study analyzes the employer branding practices of 57 companies. First, the companies' repetitive/unique same and similar practices were categorized as main themes. Then sub-themes were identified to analyze the detailed breakdown of the main themes. As shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3, 14 main themes were obtained from the analysis of 57 companies. The main themes of within these 57 companies, with the numbers indicating how many are serving in that field, are Recruitment (13), Social Responsibility (12), HR Practices (10), Education-Development (9), Socializing-Entertainment (9), Career (8), Diversity-Equality-Inclusivity (8), Work Style (6), Employee Experience (5), Employee Well-Being (5), Flexible Rights (4), Communication-Interaction (2), Workplace Democracy (1), Ethics (1). In terms of the findings, it is seen that companies focus on facilitating recruitment processes, social responsibility practices, vocational training that support the development of employees, career plan support, and practices that aim to ensure diversity and equality within the company.

It should be noted that, very few companies engaged in practices intending to improve internal communication and interaction, internal democracy practices that can be decisive in decision-making processes and employee motivation, and business ethics dimensions. However, as shown in Figure 3, the main theme distribution rates among the 57 companies specifying employer branding activities analyzed were insufficient. In other words, most 57 companies analyzed in the study did not carry out employer branding activities.

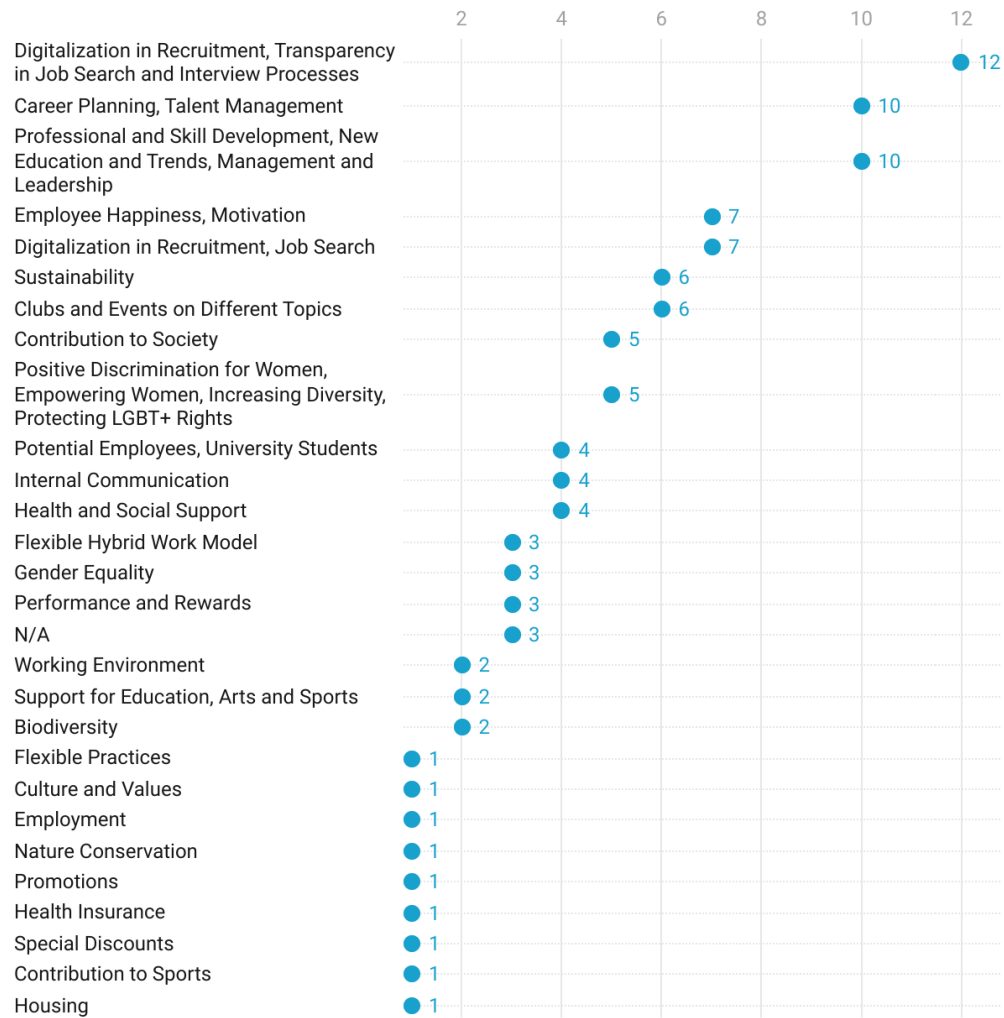**Figure 2.** *Main Themes in Employer Branding Practices (EBP)*
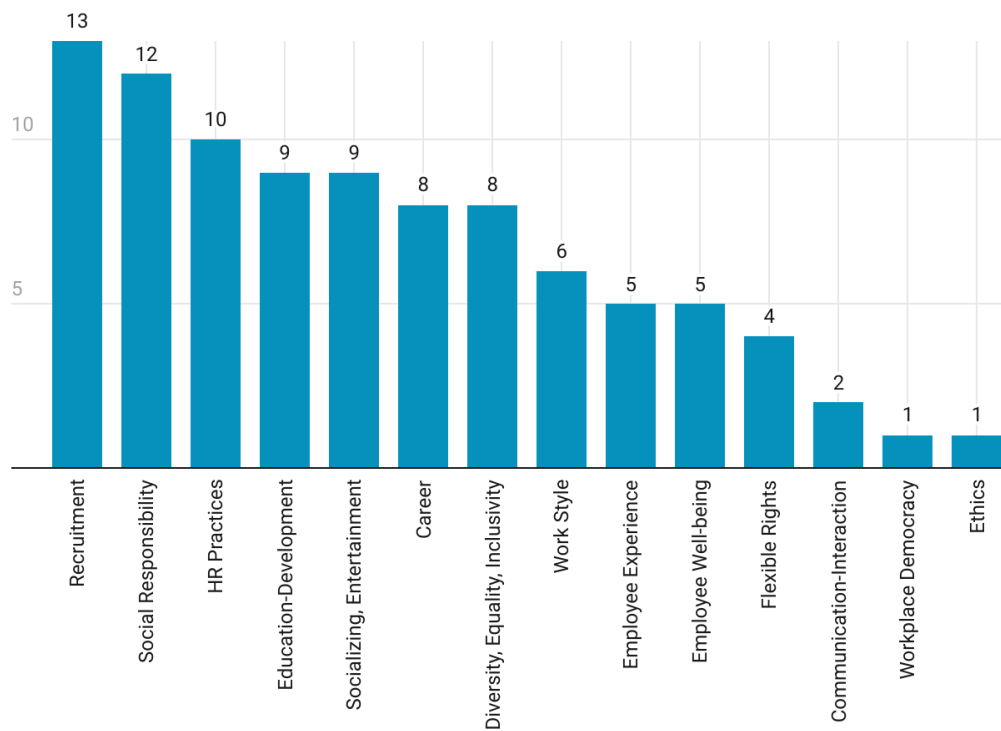
Source: BIST 30 Index and "Great Place to Work" Companies

Figure 3. *Main Themes Distributions in Employer Branding Practices (EBP)*
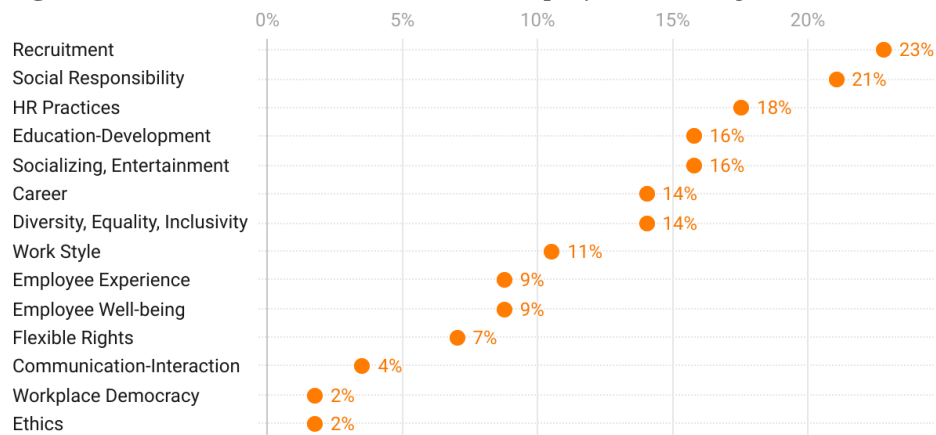
Source: BIST 30 Index and "Great Place to Work" Companies.

Figure 4. *Sub-themes in Employer Branding Practices (EBP)*

Source: BIST 30 Index and "Great Place to Work" Companies.

As shown in Figure 4 above, the employer branding practices carried out through the main themes in the study were conducted with similar sub-themes. In other words, the lack of diversity hinders the companies' ability to compete through sub-themes. These sub-themes include online job application forms that facilitate recruitment processes, transparent job process explanations, talent and career planning programs, vocational training, and social events. Again, sub-themes such as equal opportunity for employees, supporting women in business life, providing positive discrimination, and protecting and supporting LGBT+ rights come to the forefront with activities that increase the motivation of employees. On the other hand, there are limited practices in the sub-themes of internal communication on health matters, supporting sports activities, the flexibility of personal rights, and gender equality.

Discussion and Conclusion

Today, companies compete to acquire qualified labor and talent, as they do in every other area, to survive. Employees' competence, quality, motivation, and loyalty are vital elements that determine companies' sustainability. For this reason, companies' ability to attract, motivate and increase the loyalty of their employees and potential employees depends on effective employer branding practices. The radical change in the dynamics of business life, especially with the pandemic, has become even more critical in motivating and "persuading employees to work and for the job."

This study examined companies' post-pandemic employer branding practices in Turkey by the descriptive qualitative analysis method. In the study, companies in the BIST30 index in Turkey and companies included in the Great Place to Work 2020-2021-2023 reports were analyzed within the scope of the research. When the study findings are evaluated, it is determined that most companies in the BIST 3O Index, including Turkey's most valuable companies, do not carry out employer branding practices. For the companies included in the best employer brand lists, serious deficiencies were identified regarding introducing and promoting employer brand practices. Despite being in the "best employers" list, it was seen that many companies do not communicate this issue or include it on their corporate websites. Again, Google searches on the identified keywords showed limited news coverage of employer branding practices.

When the main theme findings and sub-themes obtained in the study are evaluated, it is seen that, in employer branding practices, human resources activities are more prominent compared to the corporate communication approach. However, employer branding practices must be conducted under a cooperation of corporate communication and human resources departments to achieve results. Companies frequently prefer recruitment processes, vocational training, and career and talent programs. Limited activities have been carried out on increasing diversity and equality opportunities, improving workplace democracy, employee environment, welfare, and flexible working opportunities, which will win hearts and attract employees with radical policy changes. This study shows that companies prefer a "conservative" approach in practical terms.

Another point from the study's findings is the need for more original diversity. It can be mentioned when the study's principal themes, sub-themes, and individual practices were analyzed that, the rules were similar to each other. This situation reduces the distinguishability and competitiveness of companies in the eyes of employees through employer branding practices.

Today, we are in a period where the cliché questions "Why should we hire you?" or "Why do you want to work here?" have lost sense. Companies must now effectively and clearly express the answer to the employees' question, "Why should I work for you" through their policies and practices. In other words, companies must convince employees why they should work with them. Otherwise, especially after the pandemic, silent resignation of employees will become inevitable, and because a qualified workforce will not be available,

company productivity will decrease. In this respect, sharing a few suggestions for companies implementing effective employer branding would be appropriate.

- Companies should interpret current employee expectations correctly and change their corporate culture, policies, and actions accordingly.
- Employer branding should not only be considered an area of human resources, but its corporate communication dimension should also be emphasized.
- Brand awareness, promotion, and widespread impact are essential in employer branding activities. With this regard, corporate communication is of great importance.
- In employer branding practices, original and bold activities are needed to ensure employee welfare, working environment, diversity, and equality.
- After the pandemic, changes should be made by expectations in flexible rights and flexible working styles such as working from home and hybrid.
- A work culture focusing on business and widespread impact regarding "control and performance" of employees should be built, adopting a symmetrical communication method.
- Internal democracy, symmetrical and horizontal communication, and transparent feedback practices will be critical concepts of the new working life.

Further Research

This study intends to holistically analyze employer branding practices in Turkey and outline the current situation. Therefore, the scope of the study was limited to the current practices. However, a study focusing on employer and employee perspectives and including field findings will yield more comprehensive results. Another study can be conducted on employee expectations in Turkey after the pandemic and employer branding practices.

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