

## OPINION

# The problem with EMPLOYER BRANDING

TAASEEN MOHAMMED ISLAM

In business, a company's reputation is the most valuable and volatile commodity that can exist. Employer branding, a function at the intersection of HR and Branding, ensures that the employee experience is marketed in a bid to stay competitive in an increasingly tense job market. While candidates have had to step up and differentiate themselves from the sea of job seekers, companies have also started to up their game to remain lucrative. Gen Z graduates no longer subscribe to the philosophy of remaining loyal to an employer, and are often looking to change careers for better opportunities.

Unfortunately, a fat paycheck no longer cuts it, and employers are now offering transportation facilities, catered lunches, swanky offices, and insurance to compensation packages. In tandem, workplaces have also transformed drastically from dreary beige and plaster cubicles to places resembling airport lounges with game rooms and decked-out pantries, as well as frequent engagement activities to distract us from the gruelling reality of capitalism. Companies will do all this with the good intention of boosting morale and well-being, but also curate a very specific and fun image online, which may be quite misrepresentative of the reality of working there.

What may start as harmless LinkedIn posts welcoming new joiners into the company can very quickly evolve into a dedicated "Life at X" company. This has interns, marketing, and HR scrambling to make content on potlucks, volunteer activities, and special occasions and churn them out

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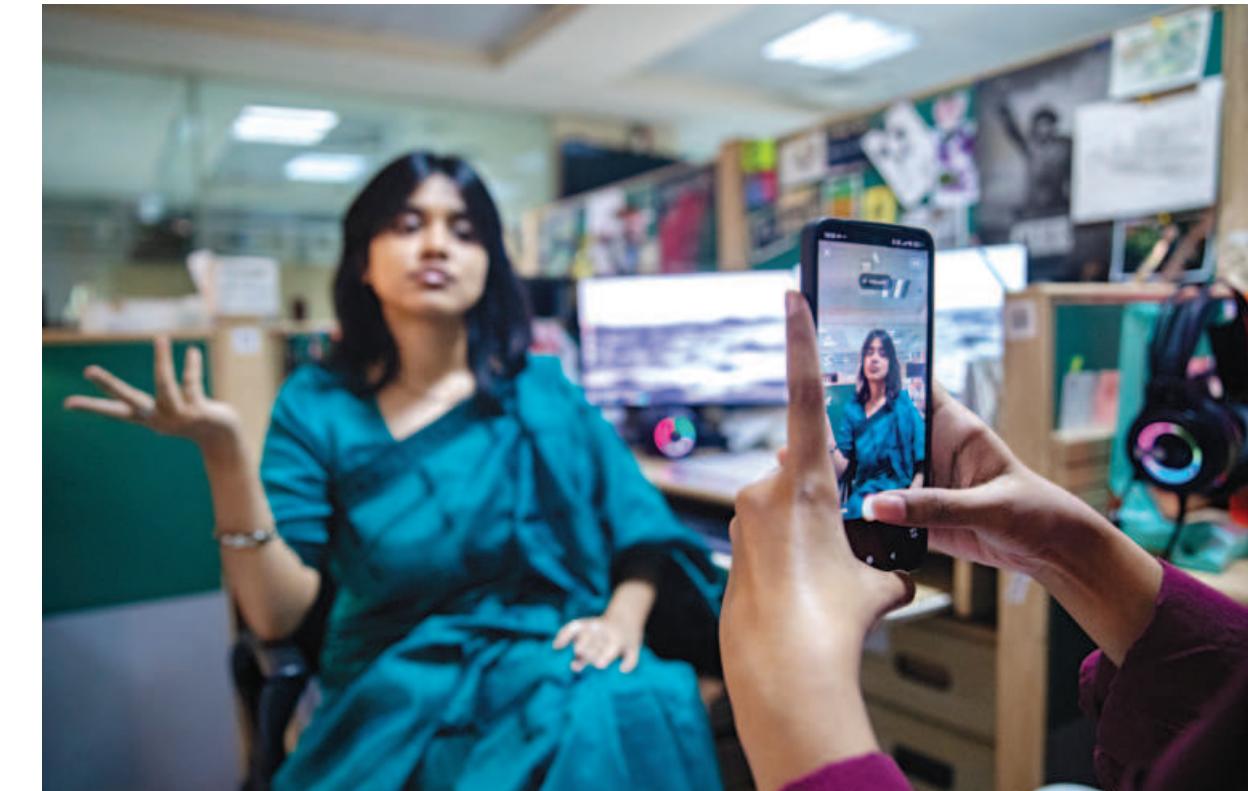


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like clockwork. This is a very effective strategy that gains both traction and goodwill at minimal marketing costs. Many times, employees go the extra mile and become AI-powered, em dash- and emoji-laden pseudo-thought leaders on empathy at the workplace and are all about that "#empowerment" lifestyle – annoying but tolerable.

But the problem starts when the frequency of employer branding starts to gaslight upper management into thinking people are not working. When managers see people having a bit of fun at the office, a whole lot of cognitive dissonance and mental gymnastics start to happen, and suddenly, your performance is questioned because other people around you are having fun. Even though deliverables are handed over on time and expectations are met, there is somehow an air of distrust, and passive aggressive hinting that mission-critical low-hanging fruit are being left on the table because someone is playing foosball.

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special moments. Outsiders see employees being rewarded appliances as performance recognition, organising table tennis tournaments and even the annual company retreat, forming skewed expectations about the work culture. This can attract both top talent and the wrong crowd that's not serious about their career goals, leading to a cycle of unmet expectations across the board and eventually an increase in turnover rates. More importantly, employer branding efforts are often disconnected from the business and its main mission and drivers.

Does this mean that employer branding should not exist? Of course not, but an aggressive employer branding strategy shouldn't be an alternative to employee advocacy and development. Talent pipelines are important, but employee retention is even more so, and it can often be dismaying when corporations invest so heavily in magnifying the work experience rather than addressing core issues tied to the business.

Taaseen Islam has fallen prey to shady employer branding practices before, learn more at [taaseen.2001@gmail.com](mailto:taaseen.2001@gmail.com)



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