


Recommendations for Internal Communication to Strengthen the Employer Brand: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract: The increasingly intense competition in organisations means that they have to develop strategies to differentiate themselves. One of these strategies consists of using internal communication to improve the company's attractiveness to outside talent and increase its attractiveness to its existing employees. However, this relationship still needs to be studied in the existing literature. This review aims to find and understand the main recommendations to be used in internal communication to improve employer branding. Nine open access scientific articles published between 2013 and 2023 on Scopus and Web of Science, written in English, met the inclusion criteria. Internal communication has been proven to play a crucial role in employer branding. The review presents a series of guidelines that can be incorporated into internal communication to strengthen the employer brand. These relate to communication qualities, knowing how to listen to and respect employees, maintaining responsiveness, providing feedback and the flow of company-related information, and choosing the appropriate communication channels. This study contributes to the ongoing scientific community by summarising and exploring the literature from the past decade. Its findings enhance our understanding of this field of study and strongly advocate for future research.

Keywords: employer brand; internal communication; employer attractiveness; systematic literature review



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1. Introduction

In today's competitive organisational environment, attracting and retaining talent has become a considerable challenge for companies (Tenakwah 2021). Given this, organisations must differentiate themselves from the rest as a positive and successful workplace (Sivertzen et al. 2013), positioning themselves as an ideal employer for highly qualified and talented individuals, both internally and externally. The significance of employee retention cannot be overstated, considering the valuable contributions that human assets make to organisational goals (Arasanmi and Krishna 2019). Moreover, the initial job selection often depends on the employer's reputation. The candidates' perception of an organisation's image, shaped by the information available, significantly influences their decision to apply for a position (Silva and Dias 2022). Organisations actively seek strategies for effective employer branding to retain their workforce (Vokić et al. 2022), manage employee satisfaction and loyalty, turnover intentions, and overall employer attractiveness (Saini et al. 2022). The brand concept is widely recognised and comprehended concerning customers and has recently been extended to employer branding concerning employers (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). Scholars have recognised numerous factors that are essential for a positive

assessment of an employer, such as continuous training and progress (Itam et al. 2020), internal and external communication efforts (Verčič 2021), internal branding (Saleem and Iglesias 2016) and employer responsiveness (Itam et al. 2020).

Employer branding encompasses several antecedents, such as the value proposition for the employee, the company's social responsibility, the organisation's culture, and employer branding initiatives (Saini et al. 2022). According to Biswas and Suar (2014), to effectively implement employer branding, it is crucial to prioritise a comprehensive internal approach. This includes having strong support from top management who provide visionary leadership in creating an empowering work environment for employees. It also involves actively engaging the business process team and implementing incentive systems. Additionally, the author affirms that uniting H.R. functions with corporate communications and marketing efforts across different departments ensures synergy throughout the strategy. Thus, the company's internal communication is often emphasised as a fundamental aspect of employer branding. Verčič (2021) and Vokić et al. (2022) demonstrate that employees who are pleased with their company's internal communication are more inclined to consider their employers more attractive. Given the growing recognition of the significance of internal communication, it is crucial to explore its impacts and outcomes on employees (Meng and Berger 2019).

A limited number of studies link employer branding to internal communication (Verčič 2021). Therefore, this research aims to uncover effective strategies that can be employed in the company's internal communication to achieve a higher employer brand. These recommendations will help leaders adjust their internal communication so that their company becomes more attractive to the outside eyes and enhances the appeal to current employees. Moreover, this study provides valuable insights into the field of study by summarising and exploring the relevant literature from the last decade. This improved understanding can help guide future research in this area, making it a significant contribution to scientific efforts.

2. Area Descriptions

2.1. Internal Communication

Internal communication plays a critical role in establishing and sustaining effective communication channels between employers and employees, serving as an essential foundation for achieving various favourable results within organisations (Vokić et al. 2022). Marques (2010) and Ruck and Welch (2012) emphasise the importance of several attributes for effective communication. These include timely delivery of information, content accuracy, and credibility, source eligibility, responsibility in sharing information, conciseness in expression, professionalism in tone, and sincerity in intention. Moreover, according to researchers (Zaremba 2006; Marques 2010; Ruck and Welch 2012; Verčič et al. 2021; Deepa and Baral 2021), suitable and appropriate internal communication requires specific characteristics:

- Clear: Fostering a positive organisational environment requires transparent communication, clear information management, and explicit task outlines (Lange 2022). Moreover, Zaremba (2006) stresses the importance of using methods that facilitate the clear reception of messages. Face-to-face interactions offer immediate feedback and incorporate non-verbal clues that increase the likelihood of messages being understood accurately.
- Open and Equal: It is crucial that internal communication is carried out honestly and openly. When employees are well-informed about the happenings in the organisation, it enhances their understanding of colleagues' and superiors' behaviour. This, in turn, fosters a greater perception of organisational support among employees (Verčič et al. 2021). Encouraging employees to express their opinions can benefit their sense of control, leading to greater satisfaction and decreased stress levels. In addition, allowing individuals to express their viewpoints and worries can contribute to more favourable attitudes among them (Morrison 2011). Team meetings play a crucial role

in fostering an environment of fairness and equality, enabling the team to identify and address any issues impacting the organisation. Facilitating equal communication among all team members is essential for creating a positive work climate, ultimately enhancing overall productivity (Alakotila 2017).

- Unrestricted: Due to technological advances, workers can now work without being limited by geographical or time constraints (Deepa and Baral 2021). This allows for remote working opportunities that offer flexibility regarding location and working hours. Companies must keep up with this progress and maintain a high level of internal communication quality, even if employees are only sometimes on site.
- Bidirectional and Horizontal: Engaging in two-way communication with others can enhance the evaluation of communication quality. This is because when there is a back-and-forth exchange, individuals can inquire and voice concerns, thereby reducing ambiguity (Sun et al. 2021). In turn, horizontal communication encompasses various forms of interaction with colleagues, including their accessibility and receptiveness to constructive feedback from peers (Čorić et al. 2020).
- Informal: Informal communication encompasses various forms of non-formalised information exchange, such as “satisfaction with the frequency of informal gatherings, satisfaction with the number of decisions based on informal communication, the amount of gossip in the organisation, as well as usefulness and accuracy of information communicated informally” (Čorić et al. 2020, p. 366). Informal communication helps employees feel more comfortable, trusting, and open to expressing their opinions, making it a more relaxed and honest approach. In this way, the informality of communication makes employees more friendly with their peers, facilitating the exchange of ideas and problem solving. This, combined with bidirectionality, facilitates the flow of communication and avoids misunderstandings so that employees can voice their concerns and get a response.
- Constant and Coherent: Communication must be coherent and consistent throughout the process, from recruitment to hiring and employment (Deepa and Baral 2021). In this way, employees will have greater reliability, as the information is constantly being passed on and updated. In addition, the coherence of information helps to improve employee performance, as the information is conveyed logically, congruently, and appropriately.
- Innovative: Internal communications should strive to capture the attention and engage employees by incorporating enjoyment, surprise, and curiosity (Malik et al. 2018). By infusing these exciting elements into communication efforts, companies can ensure that their employees are aware of the organisation’s vision, mission, and values and foster a sense of excitement and enthusiasm among them. This approach promotes employee involvement and reinforces the organisation’s fundamental values.

Internal communication is crucial in ensuring employees are aware and informed about the organisation’s goals and vision. It also empowers them to engage in decision-making procedures and peer-to-peer feedback (Kovaitė et al. 2020). This practice encompasses a variety of formal and informal communication activities that aim to disseminate information to different groups within the organisation (Kalla 2005). Effective internal communication is essential to drive and advance the company, helping employees and employers achieve organisational goals and positively improving employees’ brand-based quality (Li 2022). This activity can take place in various directions, whether it is horizontal (between peers), downward (from superiors to subordinates), or upward (from subordinates to superiors) (Verčič et al. 2021). In the past, information was passed down from the top, with only managers giving feedback and being able to express an opinion on employee performance (Lemon 2019). Internal communication is evolving, with a tendency for employees’ opinions to be more valued and for bottom-up communication to be adopted. The degree to which employees engage in upward communication by sharing suggestions, ideas, problem information or concerns can greatly impact an organisation’s effectiveness (Morrison 2011). Thus, communication has become more horizontal, with information

shared between peers without hierarchical deference (Korzynski 2015). Nowadays, employees demand above-average transparency and authenticity from their organisation, especially their leaders (Men 2021). For instance, effective leadership communication, as offering positive feedback and aligning individual goals with the organisation's higher purpose, can satisfy employees' intrinsic needs for self-reliance, skills, and connections, thus increasing their motivation in the workplace (Ryan and Deci 2000; Mayfield and Mayfield 2018).

Traditional communication channels, such as face-to-face interactions, team meetings, and orientation sessions, have evolved to incorporate technology, particularly with the widespread adoption of videoconferencing due to remote work (Gordon-Isasi et al. 2020). Print media, including newsletters, magazines, and posters, are considered non-technological channels for communication (Deepa and Baral 2021). According to Špoljarić and Verčič (2021), face-to-face communication is the most effective form of interaction as it allows for in-depth discussions and personalised attention. On the opposite end are written materials, such as documents, statements, and posters, which lack personal engagement. Videoconferencing, telephones, instant messages, and emails fall between these extremes. Internal communication is set apart because every organisation member is involved in these communicative efforts (Verčič et al. 2021). Effective communication should be conducted professionally, considering the nature of its content. While specific messages may not be suitable for email correspondence, they may not require direct face-to-face interaction (Ruck and Welch 2012). It has been recognised that organisations are investing more resources in creating well-defined hierarchical structures to enhance the efficiency of their internal communication processes (Li 2022). The sender and channel's effectiveness, clarity, credibility, and consistency of the information play a crucial role in how well employees understand and internalise the brand. Employees should be considered an essential audience for corporate information, as they play a vital role in evaluating the employer (Hoppe 2018). Employees' perception of an organisation significantly impacts their attitudes and behaviours, ultimately influencing the company's overall performance (Malik et al. 2018).

Internal communication must be accurate and consistent with external messaging to ensure a cohesive internal employer brand (Moroko and Uncles 2008). This guarantees consistency across all levels of communication within the organisation. When an organisation effectively aligns its internal and external communication, it fosters employee collaboration, resulting in a positive work environment that leads to continued company attraction and cultivates optimistic attitudes (Deepa and Baral 2021). Additionally, internal communication is crucial for creating a compelling employer brand from within the organisation by shaping positive employee experiences that transform them into advocates for the brand (Vokić et al. 2022). These experiences significantly impact how employees perceive their roles and responsibilities within the company and shape their identity as dedicated ambassadors representing their organisation.

As an instance of the aforementioned points, IKEA promotes a collaborative approach to internal communication, fostering strong relationships with internal stakeholders. The company values each employee as an independent and responsible individual, aligning the interests of the company and its employees. Middle managers play a crucial role in ensuring organisational efficiency, problem solving, and achieving objectives. "Through meaningful communication strategies, IKEA aims to support individuals by meeting their real needs and contributing to human development. These factors contribute significantly to the success of employer branding, mainly through the effective implementation of internal communication strategies" (Pérez-Pérez et al. 2022, p. 14).

2.2. Employer Branding

Many brands are beginning to recognise the significance of hiring employees whose beliefs and values align with the organisations. As a result, an "employer brand" is emerging, which assists in creating a positive perception among employees regarding the company's desirability as an employer (Foster et al. 2010). According to Ambler and

Barrow (1996), employer brand (E.B.) is defined as “the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company” (p. 187). There is some ambiguity regarding the connection between employer branding and employer attractiveness, with some overlap in theory and research (Hendriks 2016; Verčič et al. 2021). The concept of branding can be used to increase the appeal (attractiveness) of an organisation as perceived by its employees, using the range of benefits they associate with a particular company as a competitive advantage (Špoljarić and Verčič 2021). This study defines employer brand based on how attractive employees perceive an organisation.

According to Fernandes et al. (2023), employer branding entails reaching both external and internal audiences—while it seeks to appeal to potential candidates, it also extends its influence on current employees. The main objective is twofold: attracting new talents to bolster the company’s competitive edge while ensuring that existing employees fully grasp, appreciate, and align their actions with the organisation’s values and goals (Fernandes et al. 2023). It also aims to establish a reputation as the best workplace through marketing practices typically used to motivate and attract talent (Pérez-Pérez et al. 2022). The company can maintain and encourage employee loyalty by communicating and showing its positive aspects internally and externally (Ahmad et al. 2019). This approach involves adopting various marketing tools and techniques to create a strong connection with employees beyond job satisfaction or remuneration.

Internal communication plays a crucial role in enhancing and promoting internal employer branding within an organisation, consisting of a progressive process consisting of three significant steps (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). Firstly, it is crucial to establish an idea of the benefits that employees will gain from being part of the organisation. Subsequently, this value proposition should be effectively promoted externally to attract potential employees. Lastly, internal efforts must be made to embed and integrate this brand promise within the organisational culture (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). This integration between employer branding and internal communication ensures that employees actively embody and practice the values of the organisation’s brand (Verčič 2021). Internal communication can be achieved through both direct and indirect means. Internal communication involves effectively communicating the various employment benefits available to current employees, which helps foster loyalty and commitment toward the organisation (Hoppe 2018). A thriving company’s internal communication strategy hinges on comprehending employees’ motivations and values, directing purposeful actions in line with these values, and effectively sharing this alignment inside and outside the organisation. Consistent communication is essential to bolster the company’s employer brand within its internal environment (Vokić et al. 2022). Internal communication’s indirect impact on employer branding involves turning employees into living representations of the company’s fundamental values (Chong 2007). Put differently, organisations embrace an ‘inside-out’ approach when prioritising internal communication, fostering a conducive workplace, and nurturing employee contentment.

3. Methods and Techniques

3.1. Review Purpose and Scope

This study highlights the potential for organisations to enhance their employer branding through effective internal communication. The aim is to provide recommendations that companies can incorporate into their internal communications strategy to attract and retain top talent. By leveraging these tools, companies can improve their image and strengthen their position as attractive employers. The literature review focused on the relationship between employer branding and internal communication, revealing key actions organisations can take to enhance their brand reputation.

3.2. Search Strategy

On 21 July 2023, Web of Science and Scopus were searched for scientific articles written in English. The search was for “employer brand*” AND “internal communication” OR “intern communication”. This search yielded 1896 results that could be relevant. Duplicated articles and those without the intended topics in their title, abstract, and keywords were removed. All in all, nine articles were considered suitable for this review.

The following inclusion criteria were used to choose candidate articles: (a) they must have been published between 2013 and 2023; (b) they must be written in English; (c) they must be articles; (d) they must include topics such as employer branding and internal communication in their title, abstract and keywords. The 2013–2023 timeframe was selected since the investigation into these subjects has intensified during the last ten years. Duplicate publications and non-compliance with the inclusion criteria were also considered exclusion criteria. Of the 1896 articles, 131 were duplicates, resulting in 1765. Of those mentioned above, 1212 could not be accessed as they were not open access, resulting in 553 possible articles for the systematic literature review. Then, all the articles that did not include “employer branding” and “internal communication” or “intern communication” in the title, abstract, and keywords were removed (347 articles). Most of these articles featured one or other of the topics mentioned, relating it to other topics of no interest to this research. Therefore, an approach was taken to choose only those that directly addressed the research topic.

Figure 1 shows that the model provides a comprehensive overview of the criteria utilised during the review process. The PRISMA Flow Model is highly regarded for its thoroughness and usefulness across different fields of study, enhancing the reliability and clarity of literature reviews (Liberati et al. 2009). Moreover, implementing this model is a practical approach to ensuring high standards and transparency in assessing academic literature.

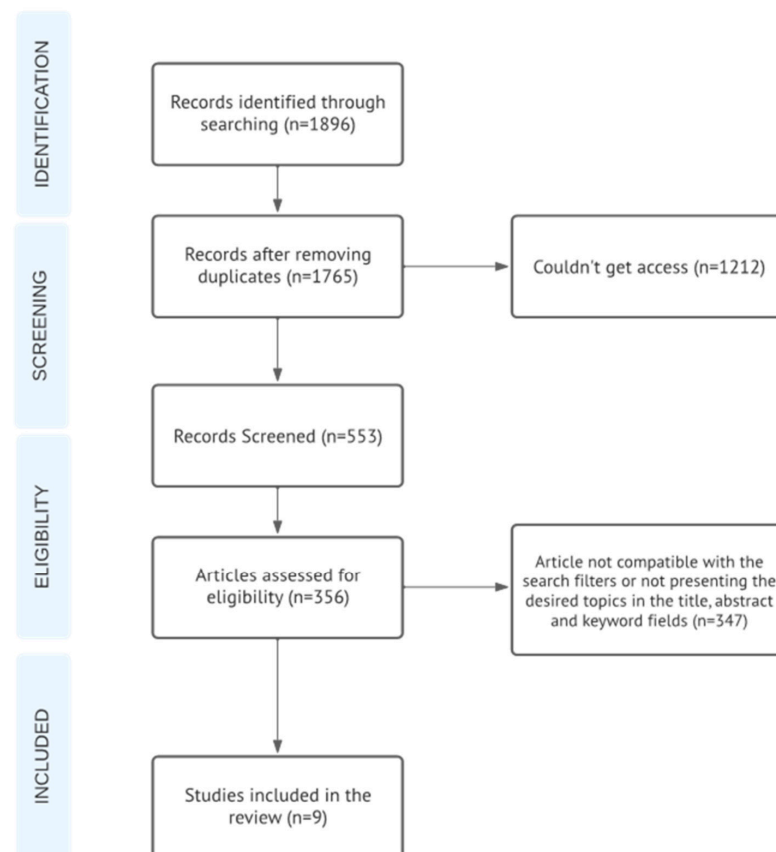


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Model adapted from Moher et al. (2009).

4. Results

The papers underwent analysis, highlighting the recommended actions employers should consider to enhance their employer brand. Valuable guidelines for improving the employer brand started to surface, and examples of these recommendations are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Communication-Related Guidelines.

Suggested Guidelines	Number of Related Papers	Transcriptions
Communication Quality	Effectiveness	3 <p>“The present pandemic has accelerated the need for effective integrated communication regarding revised policies and practices. . .” (Deepa and Baral 2021, p. 122)</p> <p>“... effective internal communication procedures will lead to engaged employees with higher regard for their employees.” (Špoljarić and Verčič 2021, p. 142)</p> <p>“Organisations should make sure all their internal communication procedures are effective.” (Verčič et al. 2021, p. 19)</p>
	Clarity	2 <p>“Clear and two-way communication that highlights mutual obligations helps both sides better understand expectations.” (Verčič et al. 2021, p. 19)</p> <p>“Clear two-way communication, as well as effective internal communication procedures, will lead to engaged employees with higher regard for their employers.” (Špoljarić and Verčič 2021, p. 142)</p>
	Openness	2 <p>“If there is sufficient open communication, it will lead to a higher perception of organisational support (...), leading to engaged employees and employees who find their employers more attractive.” (Verčič et al. 2021, p. 19)</p> <p>“An open and equal communication climate should be encouraged among employees, as well as constant feedback from the management.” (Špoljarić and Verčič 2021, p. 142)</p>
	Bidirectionality	2 <p>“Clear and two-way communication that highlights mutual obligations helps both sides better understand expectations.” (Verčič et al. 2021, p. 19)</p> <p>“Clear two-way communication (...) will lead to engaged employees with higher regard for their employers.” (Špoljarić and Verčič 2021, p. 142)</p>
	Informality	2 <p>“Organisations should also give a higher level of significance to informal communication since it can allow information sharing among employees. . .” (Špoljarić and Verčič 2021, p. 142)</p> <p>“... informal communication and the quality of communication media were significant predictors of overall employer attractiveness. . .” (Verčič and Špoljarić 2023, p. 7)</p>
	Constancy	1 <p>“The study results suggest that fragmented communication within the organisation may lead to loss of trust among employees. This is especially true in providing realistic job previews during internal hiring, where the loss of trust may lead to reduced employee attraction within the organisation.” (Deepa and Baral 2021, p. 122)</p>
	Coherency	1 <p>“(...) employee attraction must be seen more as a continuum of applicant attraction so that the signalling remains coherent to what was communicated at the stage of recruitment. (...) when communication is coherent and consistent throughout. . .” (Deepa and Baral 2021, p. 121)</p>
	Equality	1 <p>“An open and equal communication climate should be encouraged among employees, as well as constant feedback from the management.” (Špoljarić and Verčič 2021, p. 142)</p>
	Innovation	1 <p>“... possible solutions to improve the employer brand image internally. For that, internal communications should not be boring; rather, the elements of fun, surprise and intrigue should be used to excite the employees and make them aware of the company’s vision, mission, values. . .” (Malik et al. 2018, p. 382)</p>

Table 1. Cont.

Suggested Guidelines	Number of Related Papers	Transcriptions
Unrestricted	1	"The present pandemic situation has accelerated the need for effective integrated communication in terms of revised policies and practices, where employees are not bound by constraints of being in a physical office space. Employees are also free of temporal constraints (...). These two changes have major implications for integrated employer branding and employee attraction communication." (Deepa and Baral 2021, p. 122)
Peer-to-Peer Communication	1	"Horizontal communication stood out in our survey as the one dimension of I.C.S. that was crucial to internal employer attractiveness both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic." (Verčič and Špoljarić 2023, p. 5)

The literature review findings yielded eight ($n = 8$) communication-related recommendations, as displayed in Tables 1 and 2. Through an analysis of the selected publications, patterns related to communication emerged. The content of these articles was carefully examined and analysed in terms of their objectives, context, research methods employed, and resulting outcomes.

Table 2. Internal communication outcomes.

Suggested Guidelines	Number of Related Papers	Transcriptions
Listening to the Needs, Supporting and Acknowledging Employees	6	"Employers who managed to create a reassuring and understanding, or even helpful, communication climate under these circumstances were perceived as more attractive because the employees felt supported." (Verčič and Špoljarić 2023, p. 8)
		"To increase satisfaction with communication climate, individual organisation and its employees' needs should be considered since this aspect of internal communication describes the employees' ability to connect to organisation and understand its goals." (Špoljarić and Verčič 2021, p. 140)
		"Improving employee engagement adds to a higher level of perceived organisational support, which adds to employer brands. Effective corporate communications should focus on improving all of these, and through that, additionally help foster good internal communication." (Verčič 2021, p. 5)
		"If there is sufficient open communication, it will lead to a higher perception of organisational support and psychological contracts (...) and this will lead to engaged employees and employees who find their employers more attractive." (Verčič et al. 2021, p. 19)
		"Employees satisfied with communication are likely to show a higher level of engagement and see their employers as attractive. Positive experiences with internal communication can promote attitudinal responses, resulting in positive outcomes." (Verčič et al. 2021, p. 18)
		"Employees that are satisfied with internal communication feel that their organisation cares more for them and perceive that their employer has fulfilled implicit promises during recruitment/selection and onboarding period. Those feelings, in turn, lead to higher engagement and better perception of employer attractiveness." (Verčič et al. 2021, p. 18)
		"Good internal communication might lead to a better understanding of the rules and customs in an organisation, a sense of consistency and lack of bias on the employer's end (procedural justice), a feeling that employees have been treated with dignity and respect and that they receive relevant information (interactional justice)." (Verčič et al. 2021, p. 18)
		"If you want to create a good Employer Branding through social networks, you have to make publications that value employees and recognise them publicly." (Fernandes et al. 2023, p. 12)
		"Managers conceive of internal communication as co-creation: there is a perfect alignment between the interests of the company and the people because IKEA is an entity that accompanies and helps and that knows how to communicate transcendent or prosocial motives by conveying that the usefulness or benefit of their actions satisfy the real needs of people and contribute to human development." (Pérez-Pérez et al. 2022, p. 14)

Table 2. Cont.

Suggested Guidelines	Number of Related Papers	Transcriptions
Selecting the Appropriate Internal Communication Channels	5	<p>“...keeping an employee attracted and thereby enabling him/her to stay with the organisation requires the choice of both mass and interactive communication channels.” (Deepa and Baral 2021, p. 123)</p> <p>“Interactive communication channels enabling two-way communication are employee specific, that help in providing continuous feedback and development initiatives.” (Deepa and Baral 2021, p. 123)</p> <p>“It hugely depends on managers’ awareness to use digital platforms effectively to attract, engage and retain their employees.” (Deepa and Baral 2021, p. 123)</p> <p>“To develop an attractive employer brand through internal communication, rich internal communication channels should be used more.” (Špoljarić and Verčič 2021, p. 142)</p> <p>“Therefore, organisations should consider developing meaningful informal communication channels that allow their employee’s undisturbed communication flow and fulfil their informational needs.” (Špoljarić and Verčič 2021, p. 142)</p> <p>“Thus, in order to stand out and make known the organisational environment of the company, they must use social networks and publish publications that show what it is like to work there.” (Fernandes et al. 2023, p. 12)</p> <p>“(.) the quality of communication media were significant predictors of overall employer attractiveness...” (Verčič and Špoljarić 2023, p. 7)</p> <p>“(.) integrated communication as a process where H.R. communication in the form of policies should be consistent with the organisational practices since both involve a combination of mass and interactive communication channels.” (Deepa and Baral 2021, p. 122)</p>
Preserving Management Responsiveness	3	<p>“Satisfaction with feedback and satisfaction with communication climate are significant predictors of all EmpAt dimensions.” (Špoljarić and Verčič 2021, p. 137)</p> <p>“...the two most relevant I.C.S. dimensions for favourable employer attractiveness proved ... ‘satisfaction with feedback’...” (Vokić et al. 2022, p. 28)</p> <p>“...satisfaction with feedback ... were significant predictors of overall employer attractiveness...” (Verčič and Špoljarić 2023, p. 7)</p>
Sharing Company-related Information with Employees	2	<p>“In our study, information about the organisation significantly contributed to employer attractiveness during the COVID-19 pandemic. (...) In fact, well-informed employees are more likely to become positive ambassadors for their employers...” (Verčič and Špoljarić 2023, p. 7)</p> <p>“If you want to create a good Employer Branding through social networks, you have to use publications that show the workplace, that portray the organisational environment, make the organisation’s values visible...” (Fernandes et al. 2023, p. 12)</p>
Building an Appropriate Communication Climate	1	<p>“...satisfaction with communication climate are significant predictors of all EmpAt dimensions.” (Špoljarić and Verčič 2021, p. 137)</p>
Empowering Employees	1	<p>“Middle managers have high degrees of efficiency, are effective at resolving problems that arise, and achieve objectives, as well as increase the attractiveness of or satisfaction with the organisation.” (Pérez-Pérez et al. 2022, p. 14)</p>

The first recommendation, presented in Table 1, concerns (1) Communication Quality, which according to several authors (Verčič et al. 2021; Špoljarić and Verčič 2021; Deepa and Baral 2021) should be effective, clear, open, and bidirectional, while also being informal, coherent, constant, innovative, and unrestricted (Verčič and Špoljarić 2023; Deepa and Baral 2021; Špoljarić and Verčič 2021; Malik et al. 2018). Moreover, it is crucial to have horizontal communication (peer-to-peer) as this increases the perception of support between employees (Verčič and Špoljarić 2023).

The remaining recommendations were coded into (2) Listening to the Needs, Supporting and Acknowledging Employees, (3) Selecting the Appropriate Internal Communication Channels, (4) Preserving Management Responsiveness, (5) Sharing Company-Related Information with Employees, (6) Building an Appropriate Communication Climate, and (7) Empowering Employees, as can be seen on Table 2.

Analysing the nine articles published between 2013 and 2023 written in English revealed a set of valid recommendations for improving the employer brand through

internal communication. These recommendations can improve internal and external image and reputation, attracting external talent and retaining existing talent.

These guidelines emphasise various topics, such as the importance of communication quality ($n = 10$), prioritising employee needs and input ($n = 9$), selecting appropriate channels for disseminating company information ($n = 8$), and demonstrating responsiveness through constant feedback ($n = 3$). Additionally, transparent company-related information sharing ($n = 2$), building an appropriate communication climate ($n = 1$), and empowering employees ($n = 1$) are each crucial in strengthening the employer brand.

Based on the systematic literature review and the results obtained, a new model for Internal Communication-Related Recommendations to Achieve an Enhanced Employer Brand is proposed, as seen in Figure 2. This combines the attributes of internal communication (Table 1) with the recommendations identified (Table 2) to improve employer branding in an organisational context.



Figure 2. Model for Internal Communication-related Recommendations to Achieve an Enhanced Employer Brand.

5. Discussion

According to the study by Pérez-Pérez et al. (2022), internal communication is the key to making employees feel valued in the business community, bringing about the perfect harmony between the company's interests and their own. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the significance of organisational information. Well-informed employees not only feel secure and engaged but also tend to share positive experiences with the organisation, serving as valuable advocates (Verčič and Špoljarić 2023). Creating a transparent communication environment helps reinforce the perception that the company values its employees and increases its attractiveness to potential talent. Furthermore, an atmosphere of openness and equality must be encouraged, along with regular feedback from management (Špoljarić and Verčič 2021).

Additionally, internal communication must be constant, coherent, and equal (Deepa and Baral 2021; Špoljarić and Verčič 2021). As a result, employers will be constantly receiving transparent information about the company and will be able to collaborate proactively. Additionally, they will feel active and valued community members, reinforcing the perception of high organisational support and job satisfaction (Verčič et al. 2021).

Effective and clear communication about both parties' commitments should be encouraged to enhance a better employee–employer relationship. This will ultimately result in better employee engagement and employer awareness (Verčič et al. 2021; Špoljarić and Verčič 2021). Moreover, internal communication should also be appealing, creative, and

innovative to draw employees' interest and capture them more effectively, using "elements of fun, surprise and intrigue" (Malik et al. 2018, p. 382). Moreover, according to Deepa and Baral (2021), internal communication should not be restricted by spatial or temporal factors, as it is no longer necessary to remain in an office to receive or communicate information physically.

Developing a compelling and appealing employer brand is closely tied to how organisations handle internal communication and aid their employees. Current studies (Verčič 2021; Fernandes et al. 2023; Verčič and Špoljarić 2023) emphasise the significance of fostering a positive and inclusive communication atmosphere, particularly during difficult situations. However, enhancing satisfaction with the communication climate requires a tailored approach considering the organisation's and its employees' unique needs. Internal communication involves more than just sharing information; it also encompasses the ability of employees to connect with the organisation and comprehend its goals (Špoljarić and Verčič 2021). Therefore, communicating the company's values and standards and a favourable working environment is essential for attracting new talent and retaining existing employees (Fernandes et al. 2023).

Moreover, public recognition of employees also contributes to an increased employer brand, as employees feel valued and potential talents realise how they would be treated if they worked for the company. Posts highlighting employees' achievements and contributions can positively reinforce the employer's image (Fernandes et al. 2023). Employers who succeed in establishing an environment that promotes reassurance and empathy are regarded as more attractive since employees feel well-supported (Verčič and Špoljarić 2023). According to Verčič et al. (2021), for employees to nurture trust and attraction toward the company, it is essential to maintain honest, regular, and coherent internal communication. This, combined with mutual, equal, and honest communication practices, helps to understand and manage the expectations of both sides—employees and employer—while fostering the perception of high organisational support. Moreover, this will also contribute to clarifying organisational values, practices, and policies, ensuring that employees are informed about them, and creating a better organisational climate (Deepa and Baral 2021). Thus, employers create a sense of impartiality and coherence since the information is passed through transparently.

Furthermore, building an attractive employer brand involves utilising various communication channels, including traditional mass media and interactive tools, as emphasised by Deepa and Baral (2021). Implementing a two-way approach promotes continuous feedback and personalised development initiatives for the workforce. Managers must understand how to effectively utilise these tools to attract, engage, and retain employees, as pointed out by Deepa and Baral (2021). This involves establishing informal channels facilitating direct communication and fulfilling employees' information requirements. Social media also plays a significant role in cultivating an appealing employer brand. Thoughtful posts showcasing the company's work environment can show the organisational culture and draw in well-qualified candidates, as Fernandes et al. (2023) observed. Good internal communication will empower employees as they will have greater autonomy and effectiveness if they are informed about situations occurring in the company (Pérez-Pérez et al. 2022). Successful internal communication seeds the perception of dignity and respect on the employer's part, increasing the company's attractiveness. These activities will lead to positive attitudes and behaviours that benefit the company.

6. Conclusions

The main goal of this review was to understand which recommendations related to internal communication improve the employer brand. To this end, nine articles published from 2013 to 2023 in English, open access, retrieved from the Scopus and Web of Science platforms, were analysed.

This analysis resulted in 7 recommendations, of which (1) Communication Quality is divided into 11 sub-recommendations. The latter, combined with the appropriate com-

munication channel selection, has proved essential in increasing brand employers. When communication is constant, coherent, reciprocal, and well-placed, everything is smoother, and employees are more content with their work. In addition, listening to and respecting employees and giving constant feedback is also crucial; this way, they feel more supported and valued. Satisfied employees perceive that their organisation values them and fulfils promises made during the recruitment and onboarding process, leading to increased engagement and a positive perception of the employer's attractiveness (Verčič et al. 2021). Sharing information related to the organisation while creating an appropriate and respectful working environment is also a factor that influences the employer's brand. This will lead to greater autonomy and effectiveness, as the employee is given more power and information to perform their job successfully (Pérez-Pérez et al. 2022). Building an attractive employer brand requires a diversified approach to internal communication, which includes using a variety of channels, focusing on two-way communication, exploring digital platforms, and making the most of informal channels. The strategic use of social media and the quality of communication methods play crucial roles in this process (Špoljarić and Verčič 2021; Deepa and Baral 2021; Fernandes et al. 2023).

This study contributes significantly to the ongoing scientific effort by summarising and exploring the literature from the last decade. Doing so improves our understanding of this field and encourages future study. Given the limited number of studies on employer branding and internal communication, this review highlights the need for more academic research. Through this research, academics are encouraged to delve deeper into the subject, exploring the complexities of the impact of internal communication on employer branding.

This research also had practical implications for organisations. Organisations must prioritise their internal communication quality to ensure constant, coherent, reciprocal, and well-positioned communication. These factors are crucial in streamlining operations and increasing employee satisfaction. Promoting a respectful working environment and sharing relevant information about the organisation are essential practices. This empowers employees with the knowledge they need to excel in their roles and promotes autonomy and effectiveness.

Moreover, managers must actively listen to employees, respect their input and provide constant feedback to create a supportive atmosphere in the organisation. Implementing social media as part of internal communication efforts can strategically improve the employer's brand. Overall, effective communication methods within the organisation play a significant role in promoting employee engagement and the perceived attractiveness of the employer.

A limitation of this review is that because there are few studies linking the concepts of brand employer and internal communication, only nine articles were gathered that meet the scope of this review. Moreover, the analysed studies encompass various organisational contexts and industries, which may restrict the applicability of the results. The impact of internal communication on employer branding is a complex process influenced by various internal and external factors. Influential issues like organisational size, sector, and culture can greatly affect the influence of internal communication on employer branding. However, there needs to be more research available that fully captures this complexity.

Internal communication and employer branding holds potential for further exploration and development. Researchers can explore various avenues to enhance our understanding and contribute to improving employer branding strategies in organisations. Qualitative research methods like in-depth interviews and case studies are recommended as they provide a deeper insight into employees' experiences and perceptions within internal communication. Future research could also explore the relationship between internal communication and employer branding across different industries, identifying sector-specific best practices and understanding underlying differences.

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