

## Doing “Reputation” in the Indian Context: An Employee Perspective

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Corporate reputation has been studied as an aggregate of stakeholder perceptions with some emphasis on distinguishing among the perceptions of different stakeholder groups. This study focuses on the perceptions of employees, a critical group of stakeholders, within the Indian context and examines factors that inform an understanding of reputation from an employee perspective and shares the consequences of the same. Building on existing research conducted in developed countries, the study reveals similarities and dissimilarities with existing reputation conceptualizations. Results reveal three new factors, namely stakeholder connect, customer centricity, and company ethos, which are critical to an understanding of reputation from the perspective of Indian employees. Based on factors and attributes emerging from employee perceptions, the study proposes the Loyalty, Engagement, Emotional Connect, and Commitment model, which highlights the consequences of a good reputation in the Indian context.

*Keywords: corporate reputation, emerging markets, employees, India, perceptions*

Corporate reputation (CR) is defined by the perceptions of a wide array of stakeholders such as shareholders and investors, customers and consumers, employees, and members of the community. In other words, reputation is

A collective representation of a firm’s past actions and results that describes a firm’s ability to deliver valued outcomes to multiple stakeholders. It gauges a firm’s relative standing both internally and externally with its stakeholders, in both its competitive and institutional environments. (Fombrun & van Riel, 1997, p. 10)

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Date submitted: 2022-06-25

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Scholars have suggested models that define reputation for developing strategy and building stakeholder community with concepts such as "integrated marketing communications" (Kitchen & Schultz, 1999), "corporate identity management" (van Riel & Balmer, 1997), "reputation management" (Fombrun, 1996), "stakeholder communications" (Christensen & Cheney, 1994), and "excellent public relations" (Grunig & Grunig, 1998). CR has also been viewed as providing a competitive advantage and value with consequences, such as consistent and superior market performance.

Numerous studies have probed this strategic relationship and researched the antecedents and consequences of CR (Walker, 2010) and asserted that companies with a good reputation are linked to sound financial performance (Roberts & Dowling, 2002) and higher satisfaction for stakeholders such as customers (Walsh & Beatty, 2007) and employees (Chun & Davies, 2010), among others. The findings of these studies though have been subject to dispute in the CR literature (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). Considering the fact that CR accords a competitive advantage to a company, further research on the antecedents and consequences is important (Ali, Lynch, Melewar, & Jin, 2015). Of primary importance are the following three points in this research domain: The country of study, the type of stakeholder group assessing the reputation, and the research methods adopted for the study (Ali et al., 2015).

A majority of extant studies on CR have been conducted in developed countries such as the United Kingdom (e.g., Chung, Schneeweis, & Eneroth, 1999), the United States (e.g., Fombrun, Gardberg, & Sever, 2000), Germany (e.g., Helm, 2005), and the Netherlands (e.g., Groenland, 2002). In the literature, the issues examined by scholars emphasize the level of income, industrialization, development of the economy (e.g., Terblanche, 2014), and differing culture (Groenland, 2002). These factors have contributed significantly to developing perceptions of reputation in differing geographies as Asia and the West (Wang & Shen, 2000). In the past decade, scholarly attention to reputation perceptions in emerging markets has been on the rise (Vancheswar, Batra, & Gera, 2015) in non-Western cultures (e.g., Walsh & Wiedmann, 2004) and with individual stakeholder groups such as customers, employees, and others (Fombrun, Ponzi, & Newburry, 2015).

Thus, it is first important to examine the applicability of (validated) frameworks/models from the Western contexts to emerging markets (Amabile & Khaire, 2008) for "the market realities in emerging markets such as India impose unique challenges for organizations striving to present their intent" (Vancheswar et al., 2015, p. 262). With the opening of Indian markets to foreign direct investments, CR becomes decisive in ascertaining trust and goodwill. This article contributes to the existing scholarship by investigating perceptions of employees on reputation drivers in the Indian context and examining the consequences therein, which lead to supportive behavior.

A second argument underpinning our research is the need to focus on the employee perspective. CR research has conventionally focused heavily on customer perception (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). Employees and their role in CR have, however, gained more currency in recent times (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001) predicated on the argument that employees are the "conduit through which reputation is managed" (Cravens & Oliver, 2006, p. 297). Researchers posit that employees can drive organizational reputation (Shamma & Hassan, 2009), build public trust (Melewar, 2008), increase commitment and enhance performance (Bauman & Skitka, 2012), and have power and internal legitimacy to influence the company (Lee, Park, & Lee, 2013). An organization with a good CR secures supportive behavior from employees by helping them meet their goals, identifying with the organization, and creating a sense of ownership and responsibility. While there is general agreement on the

benefits of positive employee perceptions of the company, the same has not been extensively examined (Cravens & Oliver, 2006). Our study fills the two aforementioned gaps by empirically testing factors that define reputation from the employee perspective in emerging markets, with specific reference to India.

Guided by the aforementioned considerations, this study examines drivers of reputation and outcomes from an employee perspective.

The article is structured as follows: We begin by unpacking the key factors in CR and their attributes and follow this up with an understanding of stakeholder (employee) perceptions, the methodology, and findings. We then propose the benefits of a positive reputation from the employee perspective, delineate similarities and differences with extant scholarship, and propose managerial and theoretical implications.

### **Literature Review**

CR has prominently featured in management research since the 1990s, with researchers considering its overall appeal, fame, and esteem as signals of its key characteristics (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). It has also been viewed as a valuable intangible asset that may contribute to providing a competitive advantage to different stakeholder groups (Schwaiger & Raitchel, 2014) and superior financial performance (Roberts & Dowling, 2002). Kartalia (2000) has viewed reputation from the perspective of a winning organizational strategy. Strategic management theory postulates that a favorable and positive CR can provide a competitive advantage (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001) independent of other issues that affect corporate performance and provide corporate success (Fombrun, 1996).

Differing viewpoints on CR have resulted in a plethora of models and criteria to measure the construct (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001), varying considerably in their sampling frames, items, and length (Ponzi, Fombrun, & Gardberg, 2011) and field application. Most of these scales measure performance instead of attitude toward a company (Fombrun et al., 2000; Ponzi et al., 2011). Some of the dimensions in these instruments lack cross-cultural validity, which would allow for international comparability (Feldman, Bahamonde, & Bellido, 2014).

The first measurement instrument proposed was the Reputation Quotient (RQ) constructed from 20 attributes (Fombrun et al., 2000). Four of these 20 variables were selected to compose the RepTrak® Pulse measure in 2005. The reliability and validity of this measure of reputation were demonstrated by Ponzi and colleagues (2011) and since then has been extensively used. The scale conceptualized CR as "a collective construct that describes the aggregate perceptions of multiple stakeholders about a company's performance" (Fombrun et al., 2000, p. 242) and measured items drawn from previous research (Fombrun et al., 2000) on multiple stakeholder groups. The same was validated by research (Fombrun et al., 2015) and measured four core areas—trust, esteem, admiration, and good feeling (Chan, Sathasevam, Noor, Khiruddin, & Hasan, 2018). The scale was developed in the Western context, and this article explores the relevance/applicability of the proposed dimensions in the Indian context.

### ***Contextual Understandings of CR***

As a socially constructed concept (Rindova & Martins, 2012), CR is based on the types of goals and objectives pursued by a company (Soleimani, Schneper, & Newburry, 2014) within a particular geography or economy. A similar orientation in identification and understanding reputation perceptions from an

employee perspective is required in emerging economies with increasing competition and entry of multinational firms.

Though the focus on reputation has increased, there is little consensus on understanding the concept across markets and economies. For instance, Zyglidopoulos and Reid (2006) asserted that differences in "ethical reasoning" and decision making between developed and developing economies create varied stakeholder perceptions (Zhang & Schwaiger, 2009). Market realities and country-specific issues of governance, regulatory frameworks, and transparency in emerging markets are found to affect perceptions of CR as different stakeholder groups base their assessment of reputation on outcomes based on their relationships with firms (Carter & Deephouse, 1999). In other words, the significance of CR can be understood by comprehending the antecedents and consequences of the same, which are complex, context-specific, and stakeholder-dependent (Ali et al., 2015).

Studies on perceptual differences between employees in developed and emerging economies have emphasized that the objectives of managing reputation in developed (Western) countries are intangible, whereas in many emerging economies in the Asia region, tangible aspects are more important. For instance, Lines (2004) suggested that Asian employees favor transparency (53%), the ability to innovate (47%), and adaptability to change (46%). He further postulated that employees in Asian countries are unable to move beyond the immediate business benefits, which clearly signaled their focus on customers and shareholders. In sharp contrast, European and North American employees preferred internal communication (66%) and treatment of employees (52%; Lines, 2004) to be critical variables in managing and building a positive reputation.

### ***Stakeholder (Employee) Perceptions***

Although the classic understanding of reputation as an aggregate of perceptions of all stakeholders is firmly established in management scholarship, scholars have challenged this view, arguing that an organization can have multiple reputations, contingent on perceptions of different stakeholder groups (Ang & Wight, 2009). Walker (2010) argued that it is difficult to expect all stakeholder groups to conform to aggregate perceptions or to expect individual groups to overlook their perceptions and maintain conformity to the collective, summary analysis of overall reputation.

Indeed, different stakeholders may have differing views of the same firm's reputation because they use their own needs, economic, social, and personal backgrounds (Fombrun, 1996), and individual relationships with the firm (Dowling, 2001) to arrive at an assessment of the firm's reputation. Owing to this variation in the experience of people, a firm can have multiple reputations, which may vary across stakeholder groups, with each group using different evaluation criteria (Fombrun, 1996).

Within existing scholarship on CR, employees have been found to be the most significant group of stakeholders as reputation is internally founded in "the sensemaking experiences of employees" (van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, p. 57), which drives positive perceptions of an organization (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). Pragmatically as well, understanding employee perception and engagement (Martin, 2009) facilitates reputation management by creating a good fit between company image and stakeholder (a.k.a. employee)

values. This "fit," leads to "high levels of confidence, trust and support among stakeholders" (Dowling, 2001, p. 23). Additionally, companies stand to gain from a positive reputational perception of employees. Good and qualified workers are attracted to reputable companies, which creates "mutually beneficial relationships between the organization and its employees" (Men & Bowen, 2017, p. 12) and has a positive cascading effect on the existing reputation of the company.

### ***The Indian Context***

As an emerging economy, India has, over the last couple of decades, begun focusing on reputation management. Expectations of tangible returns have governed operational strategies in terms of attracting foreign investments and multinational corporations. The key driver to success, in the Indian context, has been the attempt to beat market competition through the procurement of resources and the creation of unique products, which may be difficult to replicate in other markets. While Indian companies have realized the importance of reputation, the conceptualization of what constitutes reputation from the employee perspective or its consequences still need to be investigated. Multiple corporate scandals, scams, and loss of investor faith have made firms shift focus to the intangibles in managing reputation, which could be built by managing credibility (Zyglidopoulos & Reid, 2006).

Research confirms this shift. However, there are no comparative data that would help justify reasons for the differences in factors of reputation across societies. In the absence of these data, we argue that while the core purpose of stakeholder connect is societal, it is also instrumental in terms of the tangible aspects (Witzel, 2010). There is, therefore, a need to measure and understand the attitudes and perceptions of practitioners (read employees), who are important stakeholders. This can be done with respect to the core attributes that could contribute to CR building in emerging market contexts such as India because practitioners base their reputation evaluations on the differing set of outcomes stemming from their relationship with the organization (Carter & Deephouse, 1999).

With this background, this article examines employee perceptions of reputation in the Indian context by addressing the gaps between theory and empirical investigations and builds on the RepTrak™ model to do so. It therefore assesses the need to either restructure or replicate the model (Walsh & Wiedmann, 2004) in a culturally diverse setting.

As such, we ask the following research questions:

*RQ1: From an employee perspective, what are the defining factors of reputation in emerging economies, with a specific focus on India?*

*RQ2: In what ways do these compare with existing understandings of reputation in developed countries?*

*RQ3: What are the consequences of a good reputation for employees in the Indian context?*

### Research Methodology

We followed a two-step process as used by Harrison Poll for the Reputation Quotient and other studies that develop a new scale or purify an existing one for measuring CR (Balan & Burlea, 2017; Walsh & Beatty, 2007).

#### *Questionnaire Development and Design*

In step one, a sample of 140 executive management students was administered an open-ended questionnaire to identify the top five attributes of a company with a good reputation. These students were participants of an executive management program at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, India, and had work experience ranging from two to 10 years, making them suitable as respondents (Walsh & Beatty, 2007). The resulting attributes were analyzed, and the most frequently recurring ones were grouped into factors.

The second step of data collection employed these factors. The CR scale of Fombrun and colleagues (2000) was designed for use across constituencies and company types (Groenland, 2002; Walsh & Wiedmann, 2004), but our focus was on Indian employees. However, given its wide acceptance, and in line with Walsh and Beatty (2007), we chose to use the RepTrak™ items in our study. Our modified scale included the seven RepTrak™ factors (products and services, innovation, workplace, governance, citizenship, leadership, and performance) and three new factors (stakeholder connect, customer centricity, and company ethos) developed from qualitative responses in our first questionnaire (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Factors and Attributes for CR Derived From Questionnaire 1.**

Sr. No.	Factor	Attributes
1	Products and services	Offers good quality/reliable products and services
		Offers a variety of products and services
		Offers user-friendly products and services
		Offers pocket-friendly products and services
2.	Creativity and innovation	Promotes innovation
		Displays creative ideas
		Adapts to emerging trends
		Is unique
3.	Workplace culture	Has a good working environment
		Compensates employees well
		Has a well-defined hierarchy
		Has an employee-friendly work culture
		Provides sufficient information
4.	Governance	Pursues ends ethically
		Has a strong value system
		Is transparent and trustworthy

5.	Citizenship	Is a socially responsible company
		Engages in sustainable and citizenship activities
		Contributes to nation's development
6.	Leadership	Has a clear long-term vision
		Has opportunities for learning
		Has a visionary leader
7.	Performance	Is financially sound
		Has a good track record of financial performance
		Shows good prospects for future growth
8.	Stakeholder connect	Builds emotional connect with customers
		Is fair in its dealings with stakeholders
		Aims to prevent disadvantages to stakeholders and society
		Does not violate social, moral, or legal codes of behavior
9.	Customer centricity	Has strong customer engagement
		Takes customer feedback and works on reviews
		Communicates clearly and often
10.	Company ethos	Is constantly evolving
		Is convincing
		Knows the market very well
		Is consistent in its approach
		Appears genuine

In the second step, a structured questionnaire with 40 statements based on attributes identified in the first step was administered to middle-management employees. The level of agreement on the significance of a particular attribute for company reputation was measured on a 5-point Likert scale with the intervals, "strongly agree" (5), "agree" (4), "neutral" (3), "disagree" (2), and "strongly disagree" (1). The purpose of this questionnaire was to measure the factors and test the constructs that had emerged from the first stage of analysis.

### ***Pilot Study***

The reliability of the structured questionnaire was checked through a pilot survey administered to a small sample of 30 middle-level employees from Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) India 500 companies from the authors' networks between November and December 2017. This study did not report any remarkable deviations. The Cronbach's alpha values for the items of each construct were greater than 0.7, demonstrating the questionnaire's reliability and suitability for the final survey (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Following the pilot study, three research methodology experts were consulted, and suggested changes were incorporated into the questionnaire.

### ***Administration of Instrument***

Following the pilot, the final questionnaire was sent to two mid-level employees from each of the BSE India 500 companies, leading to a sample size of 1,000. Questionnaires were administered both personally to companies located in the state of Gujarat, by a field research associate, and through e-mail to companies outside Gujarat (Smith, 1997) between January and March 2018. Four hundred responses were received, leading to a 40% response rate. Respondents were promised a copy of the published article in return for their participation. Table 2 shows the demographic profile of these respondents.

***Table 2. Demographic Profile of Respondents.***

Average total work experience	7.3 years
Average age	30 years
Average annual salary	INR 1,615,080 (USD 19,595.60)
International exposure in work and education	24.2%
Women students	22.14%
Industries represented	22

### **Data Analysis**

Exploratory factor analysis was employed to uncover the factors underlying the responses to the second questionnaire.

#### ***Exploratory Factor Analysis***

Eight factors were extracted using the principal component analysis (PCA) with Varimax Rotation to arrive at the most significant factor solution. Six iterations of factor analysis were performed till a clear, interpretable, and meaningful factor solution was arrived at. The two major criteria for factor extraction were the following: (a) Kaiser's criterion for identifying factors with an eigenvalue greater than 1 (Kaiser, 1960) and (b) a minimum loading value of 0.50 for any factor to be included in the final structure of constructs (Hair et al., 2010).

Factor structures for the study were identified on the basis of the significance and clarity of the factor loadings and the interpretability and meaningfulness of the factors within the theoretical framework. This resulted in some factors being excluded as they did not fit well with other items in the structure and in the change of name of some factors due to the grouping of factors thrown up by the analysis. The final model comprised eight factors with 27 attributes in all, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis: Constructs and Their Reliability and Validity Indicators.**

		Factor									SCR	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9			
<b>Factor 1. Products and Services (Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math> = .63)</b>											0.671	0.739	0.632
1	Offers a variety of products and services	.09	.32	.01	-.08	.13	-.02	<b>.71</b>	.17	.01			
2	Offers pocket-friendly products and services	.15	-.11	.14	.11	.25	.31	<b>.61</b>	.05	-.18			
<b>Factor 2. Creativity and Innovation (Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math> = .71)</b>											0.661	0.736	0.708
1	Displays creative ideas	.14	.09	.06	.17	.23	<b>.64</b>	.23	-.03	.35			
2	Is constantly evolving	.17	.41	.11	.07	.04	<b>.60</b>	-.09	.11	.21			
3	Knows the market very well	.22	.14	.12	-.09	.18	<b>.47</b>	-.10	.39	.24			
4	Is unique	.13	.24	.07	.16	-.03	<b>.58</b>	.20	.33	-.18			
<b>Factor 3. Workplace Culture (Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math> = .83)</b>											0.760	0.830	0.825
1	Compensates employees well	<b>.66</b>	.12	.12	.10	.20	.01	.16	-.06	.15			
2	Shows good prospects for future growth	<b>.63</b>	.02	.17	.12	.11	.14	.15	.11	.16			
3	Has a good working environment	<b>.53</b>	.23	.25	.50	.09	.12	-.03	-.05	.17			
4	Has an employee-friendly work culture	<b>.69</b>	.27	.13	.19	.05	.20	.07	.11	.10			
5	Provides sufficient information	<b>.59</b>	.25	.13	.17	.19	.25	.07	.28	-.02			
<b>Factor 4. Citizenship (Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math> = .82)</b>											0.736	0.649	0.817
1	Promotes innovation	.31	<b>.58</b>	-.10	.06	.04	.07	.02	.09	.27			
2	Drives positive societal change	.01	<b>.63</b>	.32	.19	.20	.25	.22	-.10	.02			
3	Pursues ends ethically	.22	<b>.53</b>	.26	.16	.07	.12	.02	.01	.34			
4	Has a strong value system	.24	<b>.54</b>	.27	.21	.25	.20	-.11	.16	.13			
5	Contributes to the nation's development	.13	<b>.57</b>	.25	.09	.20	.25	.08	.25	-.11			
<b>Factor 5. Financial Performance (Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math> = .76)</b>											0.731	1.149	0.764
1	Is financially sound	-.04	.19	-.04	.27	.04	.15	.08	<b>.76</b>	.03			
2	Has a good track record of financial performance	.23	.02	.11	.10	.08	.06	.26	<b>.76</b>	.03			
<b>Factor 6. Stakeholder Connect (Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math> = .72)</b>											0.683	0.786	0.724
1	Builds emotional connect with customers	.02	.10	<b>.66</b>	.11	-.04	.25	.15	.13	.18			

2	Is fair in its dealings with stakeholders	.37	.14	<b>.47</b>	.10	.25	.04	-.07	-.06	.28			
3	Aims to prevent disadvantage to stakeholders and society	.27	.08	<b>.64</b>	.23	.08	-.05	.13	.03	.05			
4	Does not violate social, moral, or legal codes of behavior	.22	.30	<b>.59</b>	.17	.26	.02	-.04	.07	.24			
<b>Factor 7. Customer Centricity (Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math> = .68)</b>											0.681	0.710	0.677
1	Has strong customer engagement	.19	.05	.25	.19	<b>.54</b>	.15	-.10	.13	.21			
2	Offers user-friendly products and services	.14	.19	.04	.15	<b>.69</b>	.01	.30	.19	-.03			
3	Communicates clearly and often	.13	.13	.08	.15	<b>.70</b>	.15	.13	-.06	.22			
<b>Factor 8. Company Ethos (Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math> = .75)</b>											0.652	0.702	0.752
1	Adapts to emerging trends	.26	.24	.18	<b>.56</b>	.10	.08	.05	.13	.27			
2	Is consistent in its approach	.14	-.02	.19	<b>.71</b>	.26	.04	.05	.26	.08			

Note. AVE, average variance extracted; SCR, scale composite reliability.

Extraction method: PCA; rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization.

Table 3 shows scale composite reliability (SCR), average variance extracted (AVE), and Cronbach's alpha reliability for each factor. The SCR values were found to be greater than 0.6 for all the factors. AVE for the eight factors was greater than 0.5, which is acceptable for discriminant validity. Cronbach's alpha for each factor was greater than 0.6. This indicates the convergent validity of the factors (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). To determine discriminant validity, an inter-factor correlation matrix was derived and modified. As Table 4 shows, the squares of correlation coefficients between any two factors were not greater than the individual AVEs of the two factors, suggesting that each factor had internal (extracted) variance greater than the variance shared between the factors and had adequate discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

**Table 4. Discriminant Validity.**

Factor	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Workplace culture	0.91							
2 Citizenship	0.67	0.81						
3 Stakeholder connect	0.59	0.57	0.89					
4 Company ethos	0.60	0.54	0.54	0.84				
5 Customer centricity	0.51	0.50	0.49	0.50	0.84			
6 Creativity and innovation	0.53	0.63	0.43	0.47	0.43	0.86		
7 Products and services	0.39	0.37	0.28	0.34	0.35	0.37	0.86	
8 Financial performance	0.34	0.36	0.23	0.41	0.26	0.40	0.36	1.01

Thus, it can be inferred that the constructs of the model presented in the article possess both convergent and discriminant validity (Singh, Nandan, & Chawla, 2015).

### Findings

This section includes two key findings that build on the existing RepTrak™ model and merit further investigation in developing economies and emerging markets. First, there was limited support for two factors, governance and leadership, which featured in the Western models of reputation. Governance was excluded for there were no significant attributes that could be grouped to form this factor. Under leadership, only one attribute, "long term vision" emerged as significant and hence, it was dropped from the list of factors. The factor name "performance" was changed to "financial performance" as the constituent attributes were more descriptive of financial than overall firm performance. The factor name "customer orientation" was changed to "customer centricity" to better suit the underlying attributes.

Second, the study found three additional factors—stakeholder connect, customer centricity, and company ethos—critical in determining reputation from the employee perspective. With these two findings, our model comprised eight factors of CR: Workplace culture, citizenship, stakeholder connect, company ethos, customer centricity, creativity and innovation, products and services, and financial performance. Notably, even when there are similarities, our results indicate variations in the attributes associated with these drivers (Table 5).

**Table 5. Similarities\* and Dissimilarities in Attributes Between the Proposed Model and RepTrak™.**

	<b>Proposed Model</b>	<b>RepTrak™</b>
<b>Factor 1. Products and Services</b>		
1	Offers a variety of products and services	High quality
2	Offers pocket-friendly products and services	Value for money
3		Stands behind its products
4		Customer needs
<b>Factor 2. Creativity and Innovation</b>		
1	<i>*Displays creative ideas</i>	Innovative
2	<i>*Is constantly evolving</i>	First to market
3	Knows the market very well	Adapts quickly
4	<i>*Is unique</i>	
<b>Factor 3. Workplace Culture</b>		
1	<i>*Compensates employees well</i>	Rewards fairly
2	<i>*Shows good prospects for future growth</i>	Concern for employees
3	Has a good working environment	Equal opportunities
4	Has an employee-friendly work culture	
5	Provides sufficient information	
<b>Factor 4. Citizenship</b>		
1	Promotes innovation	Environmentally responsible
2	<i>*Drives positive societal change</i>	Supports good causes
3	Pursues ends ethically	Positive influence on society
4	Has a strong value system	
5	Contributes to the nation's development	
<b>Factor 5. Financial Performance</b>		
1	<i>*Is financially sound</i>	Profitable
2	<i>*Has a good track record of financial performance</i>	Better results
3		Future growth
<b>Factor 6. Stakeholder Connect</b>		
1	Builds emotional connect with customers	
2	Is fair in its dealings with stakeholders	
3	Aims to prevent disadvantage to stakeholders and society	
4	Does not violate social, moral, or legal codes of behavior	
<b>Factor 7. Customer Centricity</b>		
1	Has strong customer engagement	
2	Offers user-friendly products and services	
3	Communicates clearly and often	

<b>Factor 8. Company Ethos</b>	
1	Adapts to emerging trends
2	Is consistent in its approach
<b>Factor 9. Governance</b>	
1	Open and transparent
2	Ethical
3	Fair
<b>Factor 10. Leadership</b>	

Note. \*indicates similarities between the two models.

### ***Factor Dissimilarity***

Of the new factors, stakeholder connect was identified as building emotional connect, fairness in dealing with stakeholders, preventing disadvantage to stakeholders and society, and being ethical in social, moral, and legal codes of behavior. While the only stakeholder group mentioned under RepTrak™ was customers, our study demonstrated the respondents' sensitivity toward all stakeholder groups.

The results suggest that the bias toward building stakeholder connect in understanding reputation rests on the perception of a dyadic and reciprocal relationship with stakeholders "in terms of harms and benefits as well as rights and duties" (Freeman, 1997, p. 69). This implies that organizations in developing countries are cognizant of and dependent on stakeholders.

Another factor unique to the study was company ethos, which is related to company personality. The personification of a company facilitates the linking and understanding of the target concept with another notion or concept with which there is more or greater familiarity (Morgan, 1983). Similar to the personification metaphor approach for CR suggested by Aaker (1997), company ethos was construed as including factors related to the personality of the company such as sincerity and competence. Sincerity emphasizes honesty, genuineness, and good cheer (Aaker, 1997). Competency, with emphasis on reliability, responsibility, dependability, and conscientiousness (Aaker, 1997), has been considered important from the corporate- and product-branding perspective. Enterprise in literature would define a company as innovative and exciting. There were some surprises though, in the detailing of attributes under these factors. The attributes in the study for company ethos emerged as adapting to emerging trends (sincerity in business) and being competent (responsible and conscientious).

On the link between company ethos and reputation, there have been differences of opinion. Though several authors (Dowling, 2001; Roberts & Dowling, 2002) have discussed trust and confidence in the future acts of the organization as part of CR, the link, to date, has not been empirically established (Walsh, Beatty, & Shiu, 2009). However, we can agree on the criticality of the relationship between ethos and company reputation from the managerial perspective as it directly impacts the top line of a company and makes it more appealing to customers.

This study emphasizes the relevance of organizational culture and reputation. Sincerity and consistency build relationships in developing markets when trust in organizations, financial performance, and communication is low. Awareness of the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of expressing business culture may encourage positive customer behavior.

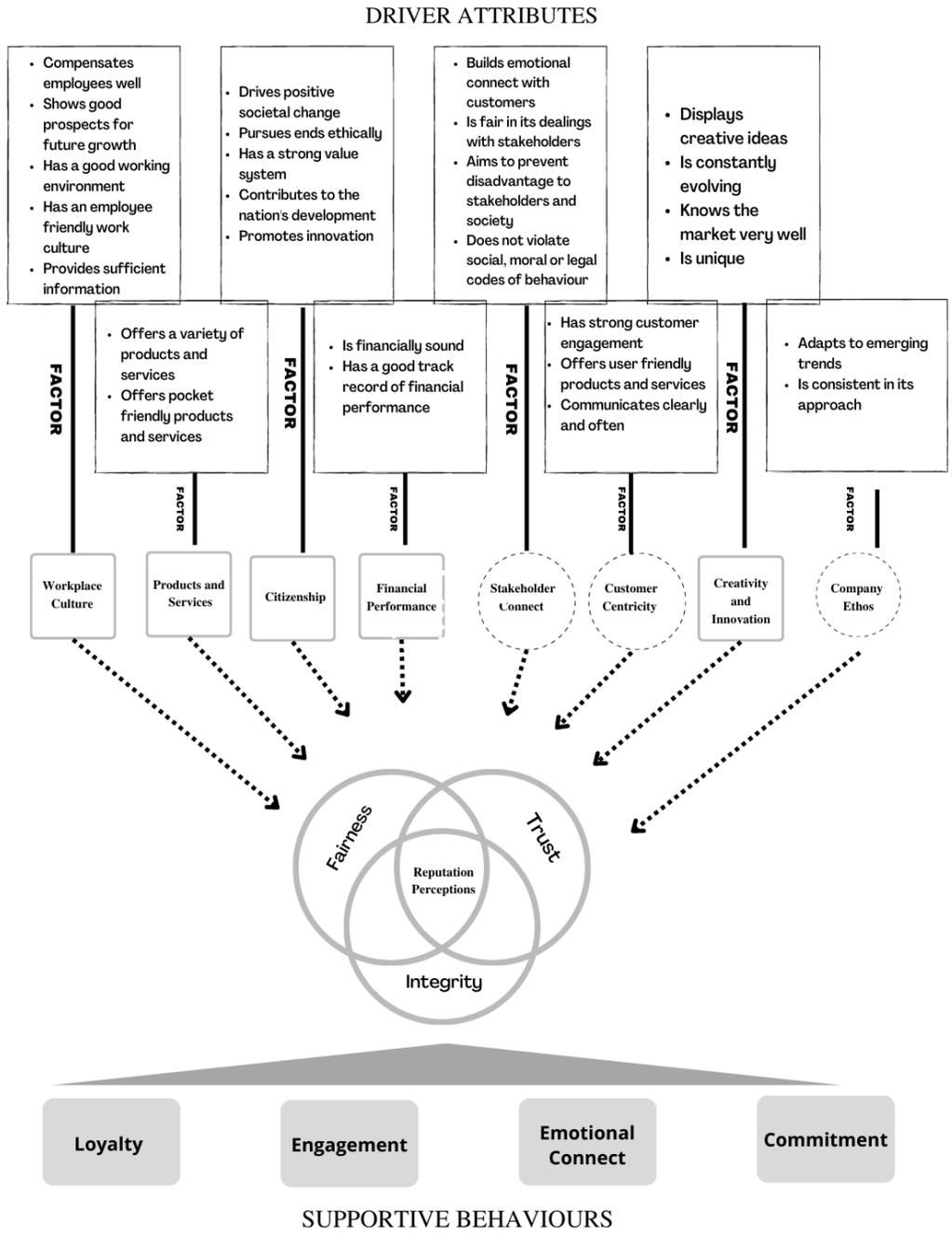
Customer centricity, which demonstrates engagement with customers, was also unique to the model. Based on attendant attributes, the study defines customer centricity in terms of product offering (customer centric), customer engagement, and communication. With increasing competition, organizations are compelled to understand target buyers, continuously create superior value for them, and convert them to loyalists through products, interactions, and corporate activities (Walsh & Beatty, 2007).

Governance was excluded for lack of significant loadings on its underlying attributes. Under leadership, only "long-term vision" emerged as significant and hence was dropped. The absence of governance and leadership from the employee perspective demonstrates a comparatively lower importance of these factors for employees. One possible explanation could be the lack of involvement of mid-level employees in issues related to governance and leadership. As these pertain mostly to senior leadership, this absence is not surprising and suggests that despite globalization, a one-size-fits-all understanding of reputation cannot be attempted.

We examined how positive employee reputation perception leads to supporting conduct. We propose the Loyalty, Engagement, Emotional Connect, and Commitment (LEEC) model, which suggests that positive perceptions lead to supportive behaviors such as loyalty, engagement, emotional connect, and commitment. Vancheswar and colleagues (2015) found that in India, ethics and values are viewed as intrinsically crucial for developing CR, which is why ethical values and principles are emphasized.

As this was an exploratory study, with little work done in the Indian context, we decided to first examine the eight dimensions/attributes of CR from the perspective of employees.

We employed qualitative content analysis to analyze the data obtained from open-ended survey questions. The approach involved a systematic and in-depth examination of the responses to identify patterns, themes, and relationships (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The analysis was conducted inductively, allowing for the emergence of themes and categories from the data itself (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The data were transcribed and reviewed by the researchers to gain a general understanding of the content, after which the data were coded by highlighting and labeling the key concepts and ideas (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), which were then grouped into categories and subcategories based on the similarities and differences in the responses (Mayring, 2014). This systematic process led to four outcomes/supportive behaviors: Loyalty, engagement, emotional connect, and commitment (Figure 1). Scholarship is divided on understanding of these outcomes as attitudes or behaviors. The article affirms the second stream of scholarship (Sheng, 2019), which defines these outcomes as behaviors.



**Figure 1. LEEC—Supportive behaviors of employees.**

Organizations' efforts to maximize support to varied audiences, enhance organizational culture, and strengthen community ties inspire loyalty. Drawing on knowledge and adapting to evolving trends to provide effective services to diverse constituencies engages personnel. Increasing stakeholder value by satisfying intrinsic requirements naturally generates an emotional connect with employees, who feel dedicated to recognizing organizational adherence to understanding and responsibly managing consumer demands and furthering organization goals.

We present below (Table 6) the attributes that lead to supportive behaviors of employees or are the consequences of employee perceptions of positive reputation.

**Table 6. Attributes Leading to Supportive Behaviors.**

<b>Supportive Behavior</b>	<b>Attributes</b>
Loyalty	<i>Is fair in its dealings with stakeholders</i> <i>Aims to prevent disadvantage to stakeholders and society</i> <i>Has a strong value system</i> <i>Contributes to nation's development</i> <i>Has an employee-friendly employee culture</i> <i>Shows good prospects for future growth</i> <i>Drives positive societal change</i>
Engagement	<i>Has strong customer engagement</i> <i>Is constantly evolving</i> <i>Knows the market very well</i> <i>Provides sufficient information</i> <i>Has a good working environment</i> <i>Adapts to emerging trends</i>
Emotional connect	<i>Builds emotional connect with customers</i> <i>Has an employee-friendly work culture</i> <i>Compensates employees well</i>
Commitment	<i>Does not violate social, moral, or legal codes of behavior</i> <i>Communicates clearly and often</i> <i>Is consistent in approach</i> <i>Is unique</i> <i>Is financially sound</i> <i>Has a good track record of financial performance</i> <i>Displays creative ideas</i> <i>Promotes innovation</i> <i>Offers a variety of products and services</i> <i>Offers pocket-friendly products and services</i>

First, our results confirm that positive perceptions of CR can generate supportive employee behaviors in the form of higher LEEC. The link between individual self-perception and social categorizations or group memberships perceived to be self-enhancing is also validated by the social identity theory (e.g., Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Positive reputations together with clear company values, fair treatment of employees, vision, and

future growth prospects may further strengthen employee loyalty. Loyalty thus is an affirmation of company vision and values through behavioral dispositions such as non-attrition, positive word of mouth, and adherence to organizational policies and procedures.

Second, engagement is a long-term commitment that is reflective of psychological empowerment and job engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008) or employee engagement which stems from close association with other employees, emotional connect, job satisfaction, work relationships, organizational communication, and other similar aspects (Stairs, Galpin, Page, & Linley, 2006). A promise of the future, knowledge and awareness of the market, a conducive work environment, and the ability to adapt and adopt help build an emotional connect with the organization, which engages employees and psychologically binds them. Engagement can be viewed as a connect with the organization that underscores a desire to be part of its processes.

Third, employees with a higher commitment would have a positive morale, improved or enhanced job satisfaction and productivity, and lower turnover (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982), which leads to affect based trust and builds on emotional connect. Sociological literature emphasizes the importance of trust comprising cognition-based and affect-based trust. While the former is based on logic and thinking, the second focuses on the emotional bonds between and among individuals. An emotional connect with all stakeholders and a happy work environment with good compensation forms the base for building relationships through affect-based trust. The emotional connect is a bridge that unites the employee to the organization with feelings. This may be a result of the organizational personification or organizational disposition.

Fourth, commitment is an unspoken and unwritten identification with the organization that spells out the belief and trust in the goals of the organization and emphasizes a willingness to remain a member of the organization (Mowday et al., 1982). The strength of the commitment is visible in the relationship between the individual and the organization (Mowday et al., 1982) and the process by which employees/individuals link themselves to the organization. Consistency in approach, the promise of being different, and good financial performance linked to uniqueness in product offering provide comfort and are reflected in committed behavior. Commitment can be understood as a (un)spoken decision or cognition that binds an individual to an organization.

LEEC validates the psychological contract between the employees and the organization resulting in loyalty, emotional connect, affective commitment, engagement of employees, and their resultant positive behavior and performance (Men, 2012). As organizations and employees are inextricably linked, perceptions of good organizational reputation and supportive behavior from employees can help organizations secure a competitive advantage, enhance profitability, and impact CR positively (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001).

### **Conclusion**

CR is the differentiator that provides the company with a competitive advantage (Odriozola, Martín, & Luna, 2015). The understanding of the concept varies with stakeholder groups and country of origin (Ali et al., 2015). Building on existing research, the present study underscores the need to understand and measure CR with a specific stakeholder group in a differing cultural context (India;

Fombrun et al., 2015). Employees are a critical group of stakeholders, and their perceptions have been underplayed in the reputation literature (Kaler, 2009). The study covers this gap in the literature by investigating the factors linked to employee perceptions of CR in India. The same, it is postulated, can be extrapolated to other emerging economies.

The role of employees in managing CR is critical for they have internal legitimacy (Lee et al., 2013), and facilitate reputation building (Shamma & Hassan, 2009). Capturing the perceptions of this key stakeholder group (Gill, 2015) facilitates an understanding of how employees relate to the organization. This thus, leads to personal fulfilment, identification with the organization, creation of a sense of responsibility and confidence in interaction with external stakeholders, and development of a positive approach, all of which help the organization meet its objective (Almeida & Coelho, 2018) It, therefore, becomes important to study drivers/attributes that create positive reputation perceptions and lead to supportive behaviors/outcomes.

The responses of corporate employees in India reveal their considerations of reputation as different from their contemporaries in developed countries. Five of the factors in the present study are similar (i.e., workplace culture, citizenship, creativity and innovation, products and services, and financial performance) and three are dissimilar (stakeholder connect, customer centricity, and company ethos) to RepTrak™. Two factors (leadership and governance), featuring in RepTrak™ do not emerge as critical from the employee perspective. Notably, even when there are similarities, our results indicate variations in the attributes associated with these drivers.

The dissimilarities between the existing and proposed models of reputation, as evidenced in the study, stem both from the country of operations and the type of stakeholders. In a developing economy, employee relationships with other stakeholders are dynamic as stakeholder expectations of organizations continue to change over time (Hanson & Stuart, 2001). This makes it imperative for organizations and their representatives to emphasize stakeholder connects. Another possible explanation is that stakeholders may compare global and Indian employee organizational services. Engagement improves organizational perceptions (Gardberg, 2001).

Elaborating on the causes for the dissimilarities in the context of a developing business environment, we assert that for creation of a positive climate care, compassion, and concern for customers are essential. Focus on the customers would require sharing organizational information and creating an emotional bond between the organization and the customer by catering to their interests (Brown, Mowen, Donovan, & Licata, 2002) and developing trusting relationships (Waddock, 2003), which have been suggested as prerequisites to a good reputation.

In this study, sincerity and competency (Aaker, 1997) were critical factors in defining company ethos. Reputation has been found to be synonymous with competence, effectiveness, and trustworthiness (Wong & Boh, 2010). Research acknowledges that reputed organizations often use their employees to inculcate and promote public trust (Melewar, 2008). These drivers create positive perceptions that lead to consequences/supportive behaviors such as loyalty, engagement, emotional

connect, and commitment, which can provide the organization with a competitive edge and also act as a safeguard against risks and crises.

Studies assert that organizations can improve their competitiveness through individual loyalties of employees (Othman, Mansor, & Kari, 2014). One of the key drivers of success within organizations is employee empowerment or employee engagement, which motivates employees to be committed to organizational goals (Falola, Oludayo, Igbino, Salau, & Borishade, 2018). Employees with awareness of CR of the company would be emotionally connected to the organization for there would be a desire to be associated with a company with a good reputation (Olmedo-Cifuentes & Martínez-León, 2014).

Overall, this article has put forward a model that enables the measurement of CR for a particular stakeholder group (employees) in a specific cultural context (India), thus attempting to address the gaps in the existing literature.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

This research contributes to the existing literature on CR by proposing three new factors of reputation in the Indian context—stakeholder connect, customer centricity, and company ethos—indicating the difference in reputation perceptions of stakeholders across countries. Furthermore, it contributes to the field by introducing the LEEC model as supportive behaviors/consequences of positive reputation in emerging markets.

For the field of employee engagement, the study helps in securing an in-depth understanding of the factors that contribute to employee perceptions of organizational reputation and how they can impact attrition and retention by enhancing a sense of integrity, fairness, and trust. Likewise, the study provides inputs to the senior leadership team for inculcating and strengthening a culture that addresses the key concerns of the employees.

Additionally, this article contributes to business practitioners in the following ways. First, the study underscores the importance of factors of reputation for creating positive employee perceptions that will impact the overall performance of the company. Second, the importance accorded to CR and its implementation can be used as a key differentiator, creating an advantage in the hiring process. Third, building relationships with a group of key stakeholders, in other words, employees, can facilitate both, the reputation enhancement and legitimation processes. Last, focusing on sincerity in business and consistency toward values in all communications with employees can help highlight the company ethos.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

This study is not without limitations. The study relied on a sample of 400 employees from BSE 500 Indian companies and was based on employee perceptions only and did not include employer perspectives on CR. Furthermore, the validity of these findings is yet to be examined across industries and countries.

Despite these limitations, this study offers promising avenues for future research. Future research may employ a comparative analysis of stakeholders (e.g., employees and consumers or employees and investors) to understand different perceptions and convergent similarities. As this was an exploratory study, it used a qualitative assessment of attributes. Quantitative methodologies can be used to study the impact of the eight proposed factors on the four outcomes, namely, loyalty, engagement, emotional connect, and commitment.

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