

Is your employer branding strategy effective? The role of employee predisposition in achieving employer attractiveness

Effective
employer
branding
strategy

1

Antonia Z. Hein

*Professorship Communication, Behaviour and the Sustainable Society,
Centre of Expertise Energy, EnTranCe, Hanze University of Applied Sciences,
Groningen, The Netherlands and
Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen,
Groningen, The Netherlands*

Wim J.L. Elving

*Professorship Communication, Behaviour and the Sustainable Society,
Centre of Expertise Energy, EnTranCe, Hanze University of Applied Sciences,
Groningen, The Netherlands*

Sierdjan Koster

*Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen,
Groningen, The Netherlands, and*

Arjen Edzes

*Professorship Regional Labour Market, Hanze University of Applied Sciences,
Groningen, The Netherlands and
Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen,
Groningen, The Netherlands*

Received 3 July 2022
Revised 24 February 2023
28 June 2023
22 November 2023
Accepted 27 November 2023

Abstract

Purpose – Employer branding (EB) has become a powerful tool for organizations to attract employees. Recruitment communication ideally reveals the image that companies want to portray to potential employees to attract talents with the right skills and competences for the organization. This study explores the impact of EB on employer attractiveness by testing how pre-existing employee preferences interact with EB and how this interaction affects employer attractiveness.

Design/methodology/approach – A quasi-experiment among 289 final-year students was used to test the relationships between EB, perceived employer image, person-organization (P-O) fit and employer attractiveness, and the potential moderating variables of pre-existing preferences, in this case operationalized as locational preferences. Students are randomly assigned to four vacancies: one with and one without EB cues in two different locations: Groningen and Amsterdam. The authors used standard scales for attractiveness, perceptions of an employer and person-organization fit. The authors test the relationships using a regression analysis.

© Antonia Z. Hein, Wim J.L. Elving, Sierdjan Koster and Arjen Edzes. Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

This paper is part of the project “Talent in the Region”, a collaboration between University of Groningen and Hanze University of Applied Sciences, funded by National Programme Groningen, the Netherlands. The authors wish to thank all participants for their involvement in this research and colleagues as well as attendees at conferences for comments on earlier drafts of this manuscript.



Findings – Results suggest that if respondents have previous predispositions, then their preference can be enhanced using an EB-targeted strategy. Based on these results, the authors can conclude that EB and related practices can be successful avenues for organizations in the war for talent, particularly if they reaffirm previous preferences of potential employees.

Originality/value – The research is original in the way it provides empirical evidence on the relationship between EB and attractiveness, particularly when previous employee preferences exist. This is of value to employers using EB as a tool to influence employer attractiveness.

Keywords Employer branding, Employer attractiveness, Employer image, Location, Preference

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Attracting and retaining desirable employees is one of the biggest challenges for organizations nowadays (Tumasjan *et al.*, 2020). Many organizations engage in employer branding (EB) activities to differentiate themselves as an employer of choice (Slavkovic *et al.*, 2018; Bharadwaj and Yameen, 2020). The focus in EB lies on the process of building an identifiable and unique identity (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004) and an attractive image and reputation as an employer (Sivertzen *et al.*, 2013).

EB has gained recent interest among practitioners and researchers alike as it helps potential employees in understanding their future employers (Verčič and Čorić, 2018). As a key that can improve the compatibility between potential employees and a particular employer (Schneider, 2001), EB acts as a catalyst in increasing employees' long-term commitment to the firm (Biswas and Bhatnagar, 2013) and organizational attractiveness (Ambler and Barrow, 1996).

Recent research on EB is mostly focused on internal and external communication effects on employee engagement and satisfaction (Chhabra and Sharma, 2014; Davies *et al.*, 2018), as well as on individual employee perceptions of the employer brand (Berthon *et al.*, 2005; Elving *et al.*, 2013). There is relatively scarce evidence on why and when EB is effective in talent management (Lewis and Heckman, 2006; Thunnissen, 2016) to explore whether certain EB practices yield better attractiveness than others (Kwon and Jang, 2021). At the same time to better understand the role of EB for organizations, more research is needed on uncovering interaction effects in the relationship between the organization and its employees (Verčič *et al.*, 2023). Some employee preferences of organizational characteristics such as size, location, industry can be easily observed by potential employees compared to others such as work climate, culture and career development (Collins and Stevens, 2002). Therefore, studying differing pre-existent preferences toward EB attributes can shed more light into the relationship between EB and employer attractiveness (Ito *et al.*, 2013). To address this, the study will explore whether *EB contributes to employer attractiveness and how this relationship is moderated by prior preferences*.

To this end, the contribution of this study is two-fold: first, it extends the literature on EB by examining how pre-existent preferences toward certain EB attributes affect employer attractiveness. In this respect, the study illustrates that the pre-existent preferences interact with EB. Second, it enriches previous work on EB by exploring whether a tailored effect of EB in combination with a pre-existent preference would work differently than an EB approach used regardless of previous preferences.

2. Theoretical background

EB is associated with firm attractiveness in two principal ways. Firstly, the use of an EB strategy is associated with on average higher perceived firm attractiveness. Secondly, by EB, job seekers are better informed of the norms and values of the organization, which also leads to higher employer attractiveness but only for those who share the norms and values

broadcasted. In the remainder, the first part of this section provides an overview of the different approaches to EB and how the understanding of the concept has developed over the years. The second part aims at examining the concept of employer attractiveness. The final part explores the relationship between EB and employer attractiveness by looking into the direct and indirect effects related to them.

2.1 Employer branding

[Ambler and Barrow \(1996, p. 187\)](#) are among the earliest academics to define the concept as: “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company”. It is a “concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitor” ([Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004, p. 502](#)). Throughout the years the term has been mostly associated with the development of an image and an identity as an employer, which present two different perspectives of development of the concept: a static and a more dynamic perspective. Part of the literature focuses on crafting the organization’s unique employer image to be perceived positively by potential employees ([Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004](#); [Sivertzen et al., 2013](#)). EB helps to improve organizational performance within recruitment, retention and engagement ([Chhabra and Sharma, 2014](#)) as it increases affinity with an employer because of a positive effect on the employer brand associations and therefore on perception of the employer brand ([Rampl, 2014](#)). The term “employer branding” has gradually gained recognition as a critical contribution to strengthen organizations because potential hires are increasingly drawn to a favorable employer image ([Collins and Han, 2004](#)). EB highlights the unique aspects of the firm’s employment benefits that differentiate it from those of its competitors both for current and future employees. Drawing on internal marketing literature, EB includes differentiating yourselves as an employer for current employees, next to potential employees ([Kunerth and Mosley, 2011](#); [Kolesnicov, 2018](#)). [Backhaus and Tikoo \(2004\)](#) describe EB as a process, in which after developing value proposition to employees, it is followed by externally and internally marketing this value proposition to (potential) employees. The way current employees evaluate their employer plays an important role in advocating an external employer brand ([Itam et al., 2020](#)), as it portrays the real picture of working for an organization. Current employees are the best EB ambassadors of an employer brand. With this shift, EB must now account not only for the way the organization is perceived, but how this organization behaves and continues to behave over the long-term internally too, which necessitates looking at EB with a more dynamic lens.

The dynamic perspective to EB expands the domain to include a broader range of strategic human resource management (HRM), internal marketing and social responsibility aspects ([Aggerholm et al., 2011](#)), as well as corporate communication ([Kolesnicov, 2018](#)). The focus here lies on the process of building an identifiable identity ([Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004](#)) and image taking a more long-term approach to relationship management with employees after recruitment too ([Gilani and Cunningham, 2017](#); [Tumasjan et al., 2020](#)). This process resonates within the core values and the culture of an organization, recognizing that an authentic employer image can only exist if it is well-orchestrated with the employer identity ([Jain and Bhatt, 2015](#); [Lievens and Slaughter, 2016](#)). Because of the reciprocal interactions between the organization, society and employees, the organizational culture will likely change over time. EB then needs to constantly be nurtured and nudged and reevaluated to fit the current situation. Within this view, EB provides a structured and purposeful communication on core values and culture by creating, conveying and reinforcing the organization’s attractive aspects as an employer ([Collins and Kanar, 2013](#)). Therefore, it becomes more effective for organizations to align own values with those of prospective employees through communication. Talented prospective employees

interested in obtaining a position in an organization interact with the organization in other ways as well, for example, by using its products or services, or through the company website. Therefore, the image of the organization should be orchestrated in all organizational communication (Cornelissen, 2008; Christensen *et al.*, 2009). Integrated communications through various communication channels consistent with organizational practices aid in employee attraction (Deepa and Baral, 2022). EB in job vacancies is one important aspect in this communication as it creates the foundation for the match between an organization and potential talents (Backhaus, 2004). Specifically, corporate descriptions in job vacancies are a purposeful approach to creating an impression of the organization as an employer (Cober *et al.*, 2000; Oltarzhevskiy, 2019). The effectiveness of the match lies in the underlying assumption of the person-environment fit (P-E) referred to as “the degree of similarity or fit between a person and the work environment” (Schneider, 2001, p. 142). Organization’s communication becomes crucial in signaling key associations of the organization as an employer and unique organizational characteristics (corporate identity). Corporate identity refers to the organization’s unique characteristics, which are rooted in organizational culture and expressed through behavior of its members (Balmer and Greyser, 2006). The signals coming from the organization must be consistent with its identity. EB should provide sufficient information about essential matters as mission, values, development (Backhaus, 2004).

2.2 Employer attractiveness

Numerous studies have examined the concept of employer attractiveness. On the one hand, evidence suggests a holistic view when assessing employer attractiveness, which focuses on general feelings and attitudes toward the organization (Gardner *et al.*, 2011). In most studies that adopt this holistic perspective, company employer image associations equal overall organizational attractiveness (Highhouse *et al.*, 2003; Collins and Kanar, 2013). In this view, organizational attractiveness is defined as “an attitude or expressed general positive affect toward viewing the organization as a desirable entity with which to initiate some relationship” (Aiman-Smith *et al.*, 2001, p. 221). On the other hand, in a systematic summary of previous literature, Lievens and Slaughter (2016, p. 409) suggest that “an organization’s employer image is only one of the possible images that individuals might hold of an organization”. From this perspective, different stakeholders hold different images of the same organization. Employer image refers to the potential employees’ image of the organization as a desirable place to work (Ehrhart and Ziegert, 2005). In turn, employer image perceptions have influence on the employees’ attraction to organizations as a place to work (Turban and Keon, 1993). Berthon *et al.* (2005) identify the five dimensions of perceiving an employer as social, development, application, interest and economic value. These are a set of value propositions perceived by potential employees. In contrast to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), looking at an organization’s offering to employees, Berthon *et al.* (2005) put the employee’s perception of these offerings central as a stronger predictor of job pursuit (Ronda *et al.*, 2018) and differentiate the five types of employee value as opposed to the two types of benefits, functional and symbolic, classified by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004). The more attractive the benefits, the greater the employer attractiveness of an organization.

2.3 Direct and indirect effects of EB on employer attractiveness

There is a distinction in direct and indirect effects of EB on employer attractiveness. Considering the direct effects, more intense EB activities lead to increased employer attractiveness in terms of benefits expected by employees (Kalinska-Kula and Staniec, 2021). EB increases affinity by employees with an employer because of the positive effect on the

brand associations (Tanwar and Prasad, 2016; Ewing *et al.*, 2019). Building a picture in the mind of potential employees relates closely to the corporate image the organization is aiming to portray in the minds of the employees as a stakeholder (Cornelissen *et al.*, 2012). Organizations that have worked on their EB are distinguished as recognizable and desirable places to work in (Silva and Dias, 2022) and have a positively built image, thus acting positively on the perception of candidates with job and organizational characteristics (Gilani and Cunningham, 2017).

Based on literature on EB, employer attractiveness can be influenced indirectly in three ways: through perceived employer image, through person-organization (P-O) fit and through pre-existent employee preferences. The section below looks at these three effects.

2.3.1 Through perceived employer image. Building an employer brand is a long-term process resonating within the core values and culture of an organization rather than only short-term recruitment communication on the associations and benefits of being an employer. In a study on perceived employer image and EB, Lievens and Slaughter (2016) argue that substantive organizational investments in information on core organizational values disseminated by organizational sources as job advertisements influence organizational attraction and job pursuit intentions because of an indirect effect via perceived employer image. EB information provided in vacancies by the organization during recruitment will indirectly affect employer attractiveness via individual employee perceptions of employer image (Elving *et al.*, 2013).

2.3.2 Through person-organization (P-O) fit. Employer attractiveness is also related to how particular characteristics of the job and the organization are perceived (Ehrhart and Ziegert, 2005). Organizations with committed employees tend to select employees based on P-O fit as well as person-job (P-J) fit. There is a trade-off between P-O fit and P-J fit also on employees' side (Lauver and Kristof-Brown, 2001). Sekiguchi (2007) argues that P-O fit is more important than P-J fit. Core values become central to searching for the P-O fit rather than the P-J fit for a job. Core values are rooted in organizational culture and identity. A supportive working environment, ethical standards, salary, career prospects and location, compensation, culture and development possibilities contribute to the P-O fit directly and in turn contribute to the attractiveness of an organization as an employer (Turban *et al.*, 1998; Elving *et al.*, 2013). In particular, the P-O fit is evident in jobs relying on complex tasks requiring competencies gained through higher education and "21st century skills" (Fruyt *et al.*, 2015). The higher the P-O fit, the greater meaningfulness and psychological safety for employees leading to higher levels of employee engagement, which leads to higher commitment and greater employer attractiveness (Biswas and Bhatnagar, 2013). As EB in vacancies provides a source of information on employer benefits and organizational values, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1.* The use of EB in recruitment communication as a source of information on organizational values is positively related to employee's perception of employer image.
- H2.* The use of EB in recruitment communication as a source of information on employer benefits is positively related to employee's perception of P-O fit.
- H3.* The use of EB in recruitment communication is positively related to employer attractiveness.
- H4a.* The use of EB in recruitment communication is positively related to employer attractiveness because of a change in employer image.
- H4b.* The use of EB in recruitment communication is positively related to employer attractiveness because of a change in P-O fit.

2.3.3 *The role of pre-existent employee preferences.* People differ and employees have different preferences concerning the attributes that are communicated by the employer. Several theories and studies have demonstrated the role of pre-existent preferences toward EB attributes (Ito *et al.*, 2013; Jain and Bhatt, 2015). Organizational characteristics such as size, location, industry can be easily observed by potential employees. However, other more intangible characteristics such as work climate, culture, career development are difficult to observe prior to a job application (Collins and Stevens, 2002). Moreover, transfer policies, leave structure, location, flexible working conditions and work-life balance can be perceived significantly differently across gender or age (Jain and Bhatt, 2015). This makes the effect of EB likely to be dependent on the preferences of the recipient. Especially, easily observed characteristics are difficult to change in the short-run and can form a predisposition toward an employer even before employees are exposed to EB in vacancy descriptions. EB effectiveness, thus, depends on when and how specific EB efforts are being targeted at employees. In other words, these pre-existent preferences can influence the strength of the relationship between EB and employer attractiveness.

Among the long-term easily-observed organizational characteristics, the effect of industry image on employer attractiveness has already been studied (Wallace *et al.*, 2014). Limited attention has been spent on the location or destination image as an EB attribute in influencing employer attractiveness. Having its origins in tourism, location branding or destination branding focuses on evoking perceptions about a place to either identify or differentiate that place as a potential destination (Kemp *et al.*, 2012). Nadeau and Olafsen, 2015 are among the few who show that destination image and country employer attractiveness indirectly affect migration decisions. Bruschi *et al.* (2018) conclude that companies in more rural regions should focus on social components and security of employment to ensure that potential employees are attracted to them. A preference for a certain location because of a certain image held by potential employees will influence the perception of EB cues and therefore also the strength of the relationship between EB and employer attractiveness. The following hypothesis is defined:

H5. The strength of the direct relationship between EB in recruitment communication and employer attractiveness depends on the preference for location of potential employees.

See Figure 1 for the conceptual model.

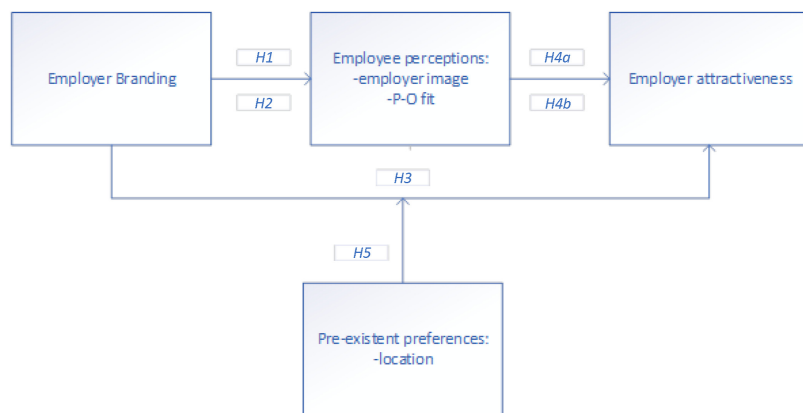


Figure 1.
Conceptual model

Source(s): Figure by authors

3. Method

The aim of the study is to explore how EB contributes to employer attractiveness and how this relationship is moderated by prior preferences. A quasi-experimental design was chosen to study the relationships as it allows for the manipulation of EB and location in a controlled setting, in which participants were randomly assigned to one of four versions of the same vacancy. Consequently, these groups were asked about their perceptions of the job opening and their general preferences. The following section will provide an insight into the design, sampling, instrument and data analysis.

3.1 Experimental design

To test elements of EB and location, we created four variants of the same vacancy in a quasi-experiment. We used a 2×2 between-subject-design for this study. One factor was EB cues (absent vs. present), the other was location (Groningen vs. Amsterdam). Location was included as an assumption to check if pre-existent preference of location interacts with EB. Groningen and Amsterdam differ in perception as a working region. Amsterdam is the capital of the Netherlands and a popular work region, whereas Groningen is in the North of the Netherlands. From previous studies we know that Amsterdam is particularly appealing to recent graduates from Groningen (Venhorst *et al.*, 2010; Koster and Cnossen, 2022). Moreover, the participants were recruited in Groningen. They have previous connection to Groningen. This is a condition to be able to test whether having predisposition influences their preference for a place. The job advertised was a management trainee position for which no specific educational field was required. We choose a virtual organization, so that the effect of the actual message could be measured, without associations with an existing corporate brand. Table 1 summarizes the experimental design.

In all four versions of the text, the job was advertised with reference to the content of the job requirements and the trainee profile. In the version including elements of EB, information on the core values and organizational norms was added. For this, we drew on the 25 characteristics of perceived employer image (Berthon *et al.*, 2005). All other aspects were identical. In line with EB theory, the EB vacancy showed the organization's identity and personality through providing information about the organizational culture, core values and vision (Gilani and Cunningham, 2017). Examples from the texts include: “*employees are our main asset*”, “*open and honest atmosphere is the norm*”, “*attention to each other*”, “*work in department where you feel mostly at home*”, “*a lot of attention for your development*”. While some development and interaction with colleagues are present in most vacancies, the focus of the EB-cues lies on values which create an open atmosphere, best fit with opportunities and full support to reach these.

The vacancy without EB cues focused on formal requirements without much information on the identity or personality of the organization. The focus was on formal characteristics, pre-established training and development by the organization and the vacancy did not clearly show a distinct personality of the organization.

		Location	
		Amsterdam	Groningen
Branding	Non-Employer Branding	1	3
	Branding	2	4

Source(s): Table by authors

Table 1.
Experimental design

With regards to location, the texts were the same, except for the location of the job. There was no additional information on the locations, so it alluded only to the pre-existing image and preferences that students had (we do not say for example that Amsterdam is a vibrant city).

Table 2 presents the modifications scheme of the vacancies. To supplement Table 2, the sample vacancies used are shown for verification purposes in Figure 2. Pilot manipulation checks of the vacancies were conducted with ten students and branding experts before carrying out the study to see if the EB cue was perceived as intended.

Both conditions	
Our organization, trainee profile, terms of employment and application procedure	
EB condition	Non-EB condition
<i>Core values and organizational characteristics</i>	<i>Core values and organizational characteristics</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employees are our main asset - We offer a pleasant working environment - Open and honest atmosphere is the norm - Attention to each other - You will be guided by the organization. Together with a senior manager you draw up a personal plan - You develop new skills and you learn from your colleagues - Within the department where you feel mostly at home - You can count on the best guidance with a lot of attention for your development - You can continue to grow after two years in a suitable position within the organization - A perfect match can be made between you and your function - Your type of degree program is less relevant, it is more important that you fit within the organization - Work-life balance - Based on the needs of the employee - If you complete this step successfully and there is a click between you and the organization, you will be offered a contract 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Our products are our main asset - Without them we would no longer exist or be successful - We offer a competitive environment - You will always be in contact with your colleagues - You can think of participating in an operational division, leading a project, writing a policy plan for a department or researching the feasibility of new products - Where the organization thinks that suits you best - The organization determines this based on your abilities - Select the best 25% of our trainees, to certify . . . - There are career opportunities available to you - Your type of degree program is not relevant - As mentioned before, the function requires full commitment - For this function you work 40 h a week - After this it will be decided whether you will be admitted to the traineeship

Table 2.
Modification scheme
vacancies

Source(s): Table by authors

Students were randomly distributed among the vacancies. They were asked to reflect on the vacancies using information cues on core values and organizational characteristics. Example questions include: “*I learn about the organization’s vision*”, “*read or obtain information about the organization’s identity*”, “*The organization pays attention to work-life balance*”. In addition, in the open-ended questions, all respondents (100%) agreed that the EB version portrays an organization that clearly shows its identity. Regarding predisposition, we asked a question: “*In which city is the organization located?*”. Again, all respondents (100%) identified the location correctly. Given the pilot manipulation test, we are confident that the quasi-experimental design can capture the difference between the EB and non-EB version of the vacancy. A suggestion of experts was to make both vacancies equal in length. As a result of the pilot manipulation checks both job offers were made the same in design and presentation.

Vacancy with Employer Branding Groningen

Traineeship with international player in FMCG

Education: HBO/University

Industry: Fast Moving Consumer Goods

Our Organization

We are a big player in the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) market. Our products are used daily by millions of customers worldwide, both food and non-food. With a turnover of € 5.8 billion and 150,000 employees, we belong to the top of the FMCG-industry. A rich history is underlying this. Since 1903, an A-brand portfolio has been built, where responding to consumer needs and top quality are the priority. Our organization carries 15 brands that reflect the corporate vision: enriching people's daily lives with high-quality products. Although we are operating worldwide, our headquarters are located in Groningen, the Northern Netherlands. Our employees are our main asset, without them we would no longer exist or be successful. We offer a pleasant working environment. Open and honest atmosphere is the norm. With attention to each other, we focus on the customer and society.

The function

As a trainee you will be prepared for a top position; full commitment is indispensable. You will work in a team with employees from different backgrounds, experience, and age. You will be guided by the organization. Together with a senior manager you draw up a personal plan. In the first year you explore the organization by carrying out six projects. You develop new skills and you learn from your colleagues. In the second year you carry out one project within the department where you feel mostly at home. You can count on the best guidance with a lot of attention for your development. You can continue to grow after two years in a suitable position within the organization. A perfect match can be made between you and your function within the organization. You will, of course, continue to develop personally.

Trainee Profile

An ambitious traineeship requires ambitious candidates. Your type of degree programme is less relevant, it is more important that you fit within the organization. This requires the following:

- A completed higher education (University/HBO)
- A strong personality
- Ambition to go beyond limits
- To be able to think outside of the box
- The will to collaborate with people from different organizational layers, nationalities and functions
- Able to demonstrate managerial skills and/or international experience

Vacancy without Employer Branding Groningen

Traineeship with international player in FMCG

Education: HBO/University

Industry: Fast Moving Consumer Goods

Our organization

We are a big player in the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) market. Products are used daily by millions of customers worldwide, both food and non-food. With a turnover of € 5.8 billion and 150,000 employees, we belong to the top of the FMCG-industry. A rich history is underlying this. Since 1903, an A-brand portfolio has been built, where responding to consumer needs and top quality are the priority. Our organization carries 15 brands that reflect the corporate vision: enriching people's daily lives with high-quality products. Although we are operating worldwide, our headquarters are located in Groningen, the Northern Netherlands. Our products are our main asset, without them we would no longer exist or be successful. We offer a competitive environment in which focus on the customer is our priority.

The function

As a trainee you will be prepared for a top position; full commitment is indispensable. You will work in a team with employees from different backgrounds, experience, and age. In the first year you explore the organization by carrying out six projects. You can think of fully participating in an operational division, leading a project, writing a policy plan for a department or researching the feasibility of new products. You will always be in contact with your colleagues and other trainees of your class. In the second year you carry out one large project within the department where the organization thinks that suits you best. The organization determines this based on your abilities. We will only select the best 25% of our trainees, to certify that only the best work for us. When you are done with this and the organization remains satisfied, there are various career opportunities available to you.

Trainee Profile

An ambitious traineeship requires ambitious candidates. Your type of degree programme is not relevant. This requires the following:

- A completed higher education (University/HBO)
- A strong personality
 - Ambition to go beyond limits
- To be able to think outside of the box
- The will to collaborate with people from different organizational layers, nationalities and functions
- Able to demonstrate managerial skills and/or international experience

Source(s): Figure by authors

Terms of employment

Working within the FMCG means working in a dynamic world. No 9-5 mentality. You will receive an excellent package of employment conditions. A top salary and excellent secondary employment conditions are part of this. You can count on a car, a company laptop and smartphone. A collective insurance and good pension provisions are arranged. Because not everyone has the same needs, the fringe benefits are tailored especially to your needs. A good work-life balance is of great importance. Location and flexible working hours based on the needs of the employee. Location: Groningen

Application procedure

Are you enthusiastic after reading this vacancy and are you considering applying for it? Then please send your CV with a motivation letter explaining the reason why we must invite you. Based on your CV and motivation letter, you may or may not be invited for a further exploratory interview. After selection, an assessment and an interview with managers from different divisions will follow. If you complete this step successfully and there is a click between you and the organization, you will be offered a contract.

If you have any questions, please contact us at helpdesk@fmcg-select.eu or on telephone: [REDACTED]

For any questions about the application procedure, please contact traineeship@fmcg-select.eu or call [REDACTED]

You can send your CV with motivation to recruitment@fmcg-select.eu.

Terms of employment

Working within the FMCG means working in a dynamic world. No 9-5 mentality. You will receive an excellent package of employment conditions. A top salary and excellent secondary employment conditions are part of this. You can count on a car, a company laptop and smartphone. A collective insurance and good pension provisions are arranged. As mentioned before, the function requires full commitment. For this function you work 40 hours a week. Location: Groningen

Application procedure

Are you enthusiastic after reading this vacancy and are you considering applying for it? Then please send your CV with a motivation and the reason why we must invite you. Based on your CV and motivation, you may or may not be invited for a further exploratory interview. After selection, an assessment and an interview with managers from different divisions will follow. After this it will be decided whether you will be admitted to the traineeship.

If you have any questions, please contact us at helpdesk@fmcg-select.eu or on telephone: [REDACTED]

For any questions about the application procedure, please contact traineeship@fmcg-select.eu or on call [REDACTED]

You can send your CV with motivation to recruitment@fmcg-select.eu.

Figure 2.
Sample vacancy with
EB-cues and without
EB-cues

3.2 Sampling strategy

The sample of participants was drawn from final-year students at two universities in the city of Groningen in the Netherlands. Final-year students are a relevant group since they enter the labor market shortly (Megehee, 2009). Also, since they enter the labor market without any strings attached or previous job experiences to rely on, they are likely to be responsive to the image portrayed by a firm. Finally, they are mobile (Venhorst et al., 2010), which makes them prone to respond to locational cues.

Students in a selection of programs – who are the most likely respondents to the vacancies – were approached by their program coordinators from May 10th to July 10th, 2021. 27 students (20.9%) come from technical sciences (for example, Energy for Society, Renewable Energy, ICT etc.), 22 students (17.1%) from business (for example, Business Administration, International Business etc.) and 80 (62.0%) come from social sciences (for example, International Communication, Psychology etc.). Although the target group fits well with the study, the restrictions to the sampling strategy possibly introduce bias in the respondents (those interested in career matters may be more inclined to participate). We try to accommodate for this by following up on non-respondents from the programs from which we had very few respondents. Table 3 presents the demographic characteristics of the sample. The four groups do not differ greatly on key demographic variables, however, the group that got the EB version of the vacancy in Groningen is slightly older (mean = 27.07, s.d. = 7.8) than the other groups. The group that got the non-EB version of the vacancy in Groningen is represented by slightly more female participants (72.2%) than male (27.8%) in comparison to other groups. Furthermore, in terms of study programs, the group that got the non-EB version of the vacancy in Groningen has the most students in social sciences (72.2%). As these differences might affect the results, we control for these demographic factors in the analysis. Next to these variables, our sample did not differ between experimental conditions.

We accounted for common method bias by using different scale types in the survey design and by performing Harman’s one-factor test for common method bias in SPSS (Podsakoff et al., 2003). This gave us a value of total variance explained smaller than 0.6, confirming that there is no common method bias.

After agreeing to participate in the study, the respondents went through 4 steps: first, students were requested to give their consent, as well as to provide their demographic and general information. Second, they were asked about their ideas regarding future jobs. Third, they were directed to the experiment. In the experiment, students were randomly assigned the branded or the non-branded version of a vacancy in Amsterdam or Groningen. Finally, after reading one version of the vacancy, the participants completed the survey questions about that vacancy.

In total, 289 respondents filled in the survey. After cleaning the data with incomplete responses, incorrect or no answer to the control question, we ultimately had 129 credible

	Groningen with EB	Groningen without EB	Amsterdam with EB	Amsterdam without EB
Age	M = 27.07, (s.d. = 7.78) (N = 30)	M = 24.92, (s.d. = 6.45) (N = 36)	M = 25.32, (s.d. = 3.64) (N = 28)	M = 25.17, (s.d. = 3.74) (N = 35)
Gender	Male: 40.0% Female: 60.0%	Male: 27.8% Female: 72.2%	Male: 35.7% Female: 64.3%	Male: 31.4% Female: 57.1% Binary: 11.4%
Education	Technical: 20.0% (N = 6) Social: 56.7% (N = 17) Economic: 23.3% (N = 7)	Technical: 13.9% (N = 5) Social: 72.2% (N = 26) Economic: 11.1% (N = 4)	Technical: 17.9% (N = 5) Social: 60.7% (N = 17) Economic: 2.4% (N = 6)	Technical: 17.1% (N = 6) Social: 68.6% (N = 24) Economic: 14.3% (N = 5)
Dutch/ International	Dutch: 40.0% International: 60.0%	Dutch: 52.8% International: 47.2%	Dutch: 42.8% International: 57.1%	Dutch: 54.3% International: 45.7%

Table 3.
Demographic
characteristics of the
sample

Source(s): Table by authors

respondents. The average age of the participants was 26 years old (SD = 6,2). The sample consisted of 82 (63.6%) female, 43 (33.3%) male and 4 (3.1%) third gender participants.

We checked the minimum sample requirement to test our hypotheses by using [Faul et al. \(2009\)](#)'s G*Power tool (version 3.1.9.7). The analysis indicated that a sample size of 120 is adequate to detect a medium effect size ([Cohen, 1988](#)) for linear regression ($\alpha = 0.05$, power = 0.93, predictors = 8). As a result, the acquired sample size of 129 is sufficient to test the hypotheses.

3.3 Instrument

In measuring the main concepts, we rely on generally used and accepted measurements.

Employer attractiveness was measured with the scale developed by [Highhouse et al. \(2003\)](#) to measure intentions of job acceptance (Cronbach alpha = 0.86). Example items were: “I would accept a job offer from this company.”, “I would make this company one of my first choices.”, “If this company invited me for a job interview, I would go” For each of the items respondents were asked to assess to what extent they agree or disagree with the statement on a 7-point ordinal Likert scale from 1 = completely disagree to 7 = completely agree. The intention to pursue a job captures the level of employer attractiveness for employees ([Young et al., 1993](#)). This intention is dependent on the employee perceptions of the organization.

Perceived employer image was measured with a selection of the 25 items measurement as developed by [Berthon et al. \(2005\)](#), with a reliability score for Cronbach alpha = 0.88. Respondents were asked to indicate to what degree they agree that the items are applicable for the organization in the vacancy on a 7-point ordinal Likert scale (1 = completely inapplicable – 7 = completely applicable). Examples of items were: “a fun working environment”, “a springboard for future development”, “having a good relationship with your colleagues”. Although there are other validated indices as the one by [Hinkin \(1995\)](#), [Berthon et al.'s \(2005\)](#) operationalization is the most used one.

We adapted the scale based on the feedback from experts to fit the Dutch context. Some of the statements were the same in Dutch language. For example, in Dutch the word “happy”, “fun” and “exciting” work environment would mean almost the same. We also balanced against the need for scale brevity to maximize response rates ([Robinson, 2018](#)). Consistent with our research purposes, 17 items were used. We conducted factor analysis to measure the scale's consistency and to identify underlying dimensions in our data. The items were analyzed for all conditions by using factor analysis with varimax rotation. The factors reproduced four of the original five dimensions, which overlap with 4 of the 5 identified by [Berthon et al. \(2005\)](#). Therefore, in the empirical analyses, we use [Berthon et al.'s \(2005\)](#) measure as the main model.

Perceived P-O fit estimate was developed using the work-value items by [Cable and Edwards \(2004\)](#), with a reliability score for Cronbach alpha = 0.81 Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agree that the sample items are true for the organization in the vacancy on a 7-point ordinal Likert scale (1 = completely disagree – 7 = completely agree). Example items include: “Making the world a better place”, “Developing close ties with co-workers”, “Obtaining status”, “Doing a variety of things”. It contains nine elements, however, after carrying out a pre-test in our conditions with the vacancies, security and authority were excluded from the scale because they were difficult to measure with the vacancies.

Location For location, we recorded Amsterdam and Groningen. They are mutually exclusive as it is hard to commute between both places. Thus, the variable we used was a dummy variable indicating the city (0 = Amsterdam, 1 = Groningen).

3.4 Data analysis

To test our hypotheses 1, 2 3 and 5 we used stepwise regression analysis.

Dependent and independent variables: As introduced in our conceptual model, the dependent variables were employer attractiveness, perceived employer image and perceived P-O fit, whereas the independent variable was EB.

Control variables: To rule out possible biases, we controlled for age, gender, country and region of origin and current study program.

We tested our three models to isolate the contribution of different terms. We first included our control variables in model 1. In the second model the main effect of the independent variable EB was added to the regression model, followed by the inclusion of the moderators in model 3. To test our hypotheses 4 with mediators, we utilized Model 4 of the Process procedure by Hayes (2017) to apply a bootstrap method to estimate indirect relationships between EB and employer attractiveness with perceived employer image and perceived P-O fit as mediators. Compared to Baron and Kenny (1986)'s method, Hayes (2017)'s procedure is more powerful and less limiting. Hayes (2017)'s approach for identifying mediation effects does not rely on the direct relationship between the predictor and outcome variable for testing the mediation effects. This model tests everything in one command and therefore we have all of the results in one table.

4. Results

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics of the main variables.

Regression results for models with employer attractiveness, perceived employer image and perceived P-O fit are summarized in Table 5. The overall effect of the control variables was not significant.

4.1 Direct effects

Given its focus on company values, it has been assumed that employers adopting EB strategy are perceived better by prospective employees. We test this general expectation for three dimensions: perceived employer image, P-O-fit and employer attractiveness. For this we adopt the same model three times, each time with a different dependent variable (see Table 5). From the analyses, we find no indications that there is a positive relationship between the use of EB in the vacancy text and the attractiveness of the firms (Hypotheses 1–3).

Variable	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Employer attractiveness	4.65 (1.32)	–								
2. Perceived employer image	4.81 (0.77)	0.44**	–							
3. Perceived P-O fit	4.66 (0.50)	0.37**	0.78**	–						
4. Employer branding	0.45 (0.50)	0.05	0.07	0.21*	–					
5. Location	0.51 (0.50)	0.01	0.01	–0.06	0.03	–				
6. Origin (international_Dutch)	0.49 (0.50)	0.20*	0.24**	0.16	0.05	0.32**	–			
7. Age	25.57 (5.7)	–0.08	0.01	0.04	0.10	0.06	0.15	–		
8. Gender	1.40 (0.56)	–0.14	–0.21*	–0.15	–0.30	–0.12	–0.28**	0.05	–	
9. Field of study	2.56 (0.60)	–0.07	–0.12	–0.06	–0.06	–0.05	0.10	0.24**	0.06	–

Note(s): * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Source(s): Table by authors

Table 4. Descriptive statistics

Variables	Model 1 Perceived Employer image β (SE)	Model 1 P-O fit β (SE)	Model 1 Employer attractiveness β (SE)	Model 2 Perceived employer image β (SE)	Model 2 Perceived P-O fit β (SE)	Model 2 Employer attractiveness β (SE)	Model 3 Employer attractiveness β (SE)	Model 3 Employer attractiveness β (SE)
<i>Control variables</i>								
Origin	0.14	0.08	0.16	0.16	0.08	0.16	0.17	-0.16
Age	-0.00	0.04	-0.10	0.00	0.04	-0.11	-0.12	-0.10
Gender	-0.14	-0.09	-0.02	-0.14	-0.10	-0.02	-0.01	0.01
Field of study	0.09	0.12	0.17	0.07	0.11	0.18	0.19	0.14
<i>Independent variables</i>								
EB			-0.07	-0.07	-0.06	0.08	0.07	0.33*
<i>Moderators</i>								
Match Location_EB							0.05	0.07
Intl. Vac.								0.05
Amsterdam non-EB								-
Intl. Vac.								-
Amsterdam EB								-0.11
Intl. Vac Groningen								-0.34*
non-EB								-0.36*
Intl. Vac Groningen								-
EB								-
Dutch Vac.								-0.11
Amsterdam non-EB								-0.34*
Dutch Vac.								-0.36*
Amsterdam EB								0.15
Dutch Vac.								0.09
Groningen EB								0.09
R-square	0.07	0.04	0.08	0.08	0.05	0.09	0.09	0.15

Note(s): $N = 129$; $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$; β is standardized beta coefficient. SE is standard error

Source(s): Table by authors

Table 5.
Results of regression analysis

4.2 Indirect effects

Although there is a clear belief in the effectiveness of EB in vacancy texts, in our set-up we find significant effect on the perceived attractiveness of firms only in the model with moderators. One reason for this could be that EB is particularly potent if it appeals to some pre-existing preferences that the prospective employees have. If you are not interested in sustainability, appealing to this in an EB strategy is likely not going to be effective. To test whether cues in the text appeal to certain target groups, one of the conditions we introduced was location of the company, which we used to carry out the analysis further and explore how it interacts with origin. This helped us to see how location of the company in combination with EB in the vacancies played a role in improving employer attractiveness for certain target groups.

As shown in Table 5, while the moderator of match of location and EB is insignificant, the model fit increases substantially (R-square = 0.15) with a positive and significant coefficients for EB (0.33*, $p < 0.05$) and the moderators “Dutch Vac. Amsterdam EB” (−0.34*, $p < 0.05$) and “Dutch Vac. Groningen EB” (−0.36*, $p < 0.05$). Hypothesis 5 is not supported. However, this suggests that if respondents have a previous predisposition to a certain location because of their origin, this influences employer attractiveness in combination with EB. These outcomes suggest that the moderator of location and origin has a significant effect on the relationship between EB and employer attractiveness. In particular, international students respond more positively to EB than Dutch students, regardless of the location. In other words, EB is likely to be more effective if it appeals to existing preferences of the target groups. Preferences because of a certain origin affect the relationship between EB and employer attractiveness.

EB can also have an indirect relationship to the attractiveness of employers through employees’ perceptions of the organization on employer image and P-O fit (Hypothesis 4a and 4b). As reported in Table 6, the results show that the two indirect relationships are not different from zero. Hence, our hypotheses 4a and 4b are not supported.

Table 6. Direct and Indirect effects of EB on employer attractiveness through perceived employer image and P-O fit

		Effect (SE)	LLCI	ULCI
<i>Dependent variable</i>	<i>Independent variable</i>			
Employer attractiveness	EB	0.62 (0.11)	0.39	0.84
<i>Dependent variable</i>	<i>Mediator</i>			
Employer attractiveness	Perceived employer image	0.00 (0.01)	−0.02	0.03
Employer attractiveness	Perceived P-O fit	−0.05 (0.09)	−0.26	0.13

Note(s): $N = 129$. For indirect effects, SEs and 95% confidence intervals were calculated through a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 bootstrap samples. SE = standard error; LLCI = lower limit confidence interval; ULCI = upper limit confidence interval. Used model: Model 4

Source(s): Table by authors

5. Discussion and conclusions

This study aimed at finding out to what extent EB contributes to employer attractiveness and how this relationship is moderated by prior preference of potential employees. The results indicate that understanding EB requires a deeper scrutiny. If respondents prefer an EB cue, they are more susceptible for an EB-targeted strategy using that cue. The fundamental conceptual contributions are twofold: first the study addresses the void in the literature on EB by identifying the moderating role of employee predisposition on perceived employer image, perceived P-O fit and employer attractiveness. In comparison to literature supporting the notion that EB enhances organizational attractiveness (Tanwar and Prasad, 2016; Kalinska-

Kula and Staniec, 2021), this study suggests that using specific EB practices which fit the specific target groups support perceived employer attractiveness. Therefore, the study fits within the stream in literature taking a more dynamic perspective on EB to include a broader range of disciplines when looking at the concept (Aggerholm *et al.*, 2011; Kolesnicov, 2018) rather than a static view on the main relationships. Second, the study enriches the literature on employee preferences of organizational characteristics (Collins and Stevens, 2002; Ito *et al.*, 2013) by illustrating that EB leads to better perceptions of employer attractiveness because it influences employees' subjective estimates of the quality of the relationship they have with their employers (Lievens and Slaughter, 2016). The results support the assumption that perceived employer image as well as P-O fit and employer attractiveness depend on EB. However, this is the case only when a previous predisposition toward the company exists of the different target groups. When EB works, it depends on the fit with the context and the target group. In this respect, this study supports the body of literature which addresses the notion of employee's fit with the environment (Kristof-Brown *et al.*, 2002; Schneider, 2001).

Next to its theoretical contributions, this research provides three practical managerial implications on how to utilize EB for employers and HR practitioners alike. The practical intent is to provide communication managers with a guide on how to compose the EB message with care, incorporating relevant information for job seekers. First, the results highlight the importance of analyzing potential employee preferences. Neglecting expectations of potential employees, especially toward easily-observed characteristics because of their origin, may result in lower employer attractiveness.

Second, in crafting EB strategies, practitioners and managers should consider targeted EB information as it can promote attitudinal responses which then result in positive outcomes for both perceived image and P-O fit as well as overall employer attractiveness. By including EB strategies in their job advertisements, organizations can become more attractive to potential employees. However, investments in EB should be targeted and well-defined beforehand by the organizations. A branded identity has more chance of being effective when it corresponds with wishes of the potential employees. This would enhance the previous preference of potential employees. Third, a more targeted approach toward certain job seekers could be more effective for managers. In line with this implication, Fischer *et al.* (2021) find that job seekers who come from the North of the Netherlands have the biggest chance to come back to the region. Companies can either target their information toward potential employees who already decided to stay in the region or nudge them to come to the region.

The present study has a few limitations. First, the composition of the target group limits the generalization of the results to students. For example, regarding job information, the needs of senior job seekers may differ from those of starters on the labor market. Second, no support is found for the hypotheses, especially concerning the main relationships between concepts. The limited number of respondents besides efforts to increase participation of non-respondents could be the reason for this, as well as the fact that this is a first experiment in a controlled setting. An additional experiment and longitudinal designs with existing companies would be beneficial to enhance the findings when it comes to perceptions. As our study is a quasi-experiment, future studies could further validate our findings through true experimental design with a bigger sample. Because one of the locations in the vacancies is Groningen and that students come from Groningen too, they may be more inclined to choose Groningen as a location for their first job for practical reasons. To increase the reliability and for comparison reasons, it is worth repeating the experiment with a larger group from the other location, Amsterdam. In our design, we can only make assumptions about the actual location. Future studies could measure how the preferred location interacts with the manipulated location. Third, a non-existent, virtual organization was used, which means that respondents had no previous experience with the organization or an impression of the image of the organization. This had the benefit that it

could be manipulated with characteristics that fit EB characteristics only. Finally, data came from the same participants in a single measurement point in time. Future studies should aim to separate the data collection of different parts of the model over time or collect data from various sources.

Notwithstanding its theoretical contributions and practical relevance, there are several avenues for future research following the study. The application of this research to a real organization could be of considerable value to study the influence of EB on a specific brand. Furthermore, considering that the only manipulation focused on was the vacancy text, it must be noted that employer attractiveness can only partially be explained by location and utilization of EB in vacancies. Studying how EB cues can be applied to other organizational communication rather than only vacancies is yet another useful focus for future research. Another avenue for future research is repeating the experiment for further empirical exploration of the relationships, detailing which dimensions of EB exactly influence employer attractiveness, as well as carrying out an interview study, so that students' reflections could be gathered on why they are not influenced by EB in the job vacancies. A final and important general implication of the more dynamic perspective toward EB is the multidisciplinary approach which needs to be taken when studying EB further. Given the various working fields from which it can be approached, different disciplines, such as HR, corporate communication, brand management should cooperate in future research on EB to further explore its effectiveness.

References

- Aggerholm, K.H., Andersen, E.S. and Thomsen, C. (2011), "Conceptualising employer branding in sustainable organisations", *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 105-123, doi: [10.1108/13563281111141642](https://doi.org/10.1108/13563281111141642).
- Aiman-Smith, L., Bauer, T. and Cable, D. (2001), "Are you attracted? Do you intend to pursue? A recruiting policy-capturing study", *Journal of Business and Psychology*, Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 219-237, doi: [10.1023/a:1011157116322](https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1011157116322).
- Ambler, T. and Barrow, S. (1996), "The employer brand", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 4 No. 3, pp. 185-206, doi: [10.1057/bm.1996.42](https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.1996.42).
- Backhaus, K. (2004), "An exploration of corporate recruitment descriptions on monster.com", *Journal of Business Communication*, Vol. 41 No. 2, pp. 115-136, doi: [10.1177/0021943603259585](https://doi.org/10.1177/0021943603259585).
- Backhaus, K. and Tikoo, S. (2004), "Conceptualizing and researching employer branding", *Career Development International*, Vol. 9 No. 5, pp. 501-517, doi: [10.1108/13620430410550754](https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430410550754).
- Balmer, J.M.T. and Greyser, S.A. (2006), "Integrating corporate identity, corporate branding, corporate communications, corporate image and corporate reputation", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 40 Nos 7/8, pp. 730-741, doi: [10.1108/03090560610669964](https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560610669964).
- Baron, R.M. and Kenny, D.A. (1986), "The moderator–mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 51 No. 6, pp. 1173-1182, doi: [10.1037/0022-3514.51.6.1173](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.51.6.1173).
- Berthon, P., Ewing, M. and Hah, L.L. (2005), "Captivating company: dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding", *International Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 24 No. 2, pp. 151-172, doi: [10.1080/02650487.2005.11072912](https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2005.11072912).
- Bharadwaj, S. and Yameen, M. (2020), "Analyzing the mediating effect of organizational identification on the relationship between CSR employer branding and employee retention", *Management Research Review*, Vol. 44 No. 5, pp. 718-737, doi: [10.1108/mrr-05-2020-0298](https://doi.org/10.1108/mrr-05-2020-0298).
- Biswas, S. and Bhatnagar, J. (2013), "Mediator analysis of employee engagement: role of perceived organizational support, P-O fit, organizational commitment and job satisfaction", *Vikalpa*, Vol. 38 No. 1, pp. 27-40, doi: [10.1177/0256090920130103](https://doi.org/10.1177/0256090920130103).

-
- Brusch, I., Bruschi, M. and Kozłowski, T. (2018), "Factors influencing employer branding: investigations of student perceptions outside metropolitan regions", *International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences*, Vol. 10 No. 3, doi: [10.1108/ijqss-09-2017-0085](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijqss-09-2017-0085).
- Cable, D.M. and Edwards, J.R. (2004), "Complementary and supplementary fit: a theoretical and empirical integration", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 5, pp. 822-834, doi: [10.1037/0021-9010.89.5.822](https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.89.5.822).
- Chhabra, L.N. and Sharma, S. (2014), "Employer branding: strategy for improving employer attractiveness", *International Journal of Organisational Analysis*, Vol. 22 No. 1, pp. 48-60, doi: [10.1108/ijoa-09-2011-0513](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijoa-09-2011-0513).
- Christensen, L.T., Firat, F.A. and Cornelissen, J. (2009), "New tensions and challenges in integrated communications", *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 207-219, doi: [10.1108/13563280910953870](https://doi.org/10.1108/13563280910953870).
- Cober, R.T., Brown, D.J., Blumenthal, A.J., Doverspike, D. and Levy, P. (2000), "The quest for the qualified job surfer: it's time the public sector catches the wave", *Public Personnel Management*, Vol. 29 No. 4, pp. 479-494.
- Cohen, J. (1988), *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale, NJ.
- Collins, C.J. and Han, J. (2004), "Exploring applicant pool quantity and quality: the effects of early recruitment practice strategies, corporate advertising, and firm reputation", *Personnel Psychology*, Vol. 57 No. 3, pp. 685-717, doi: [10.1111/j.1744-6570.2004.00004.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2004.00004.x).
- Collins, C.J. and Kanar, A.M. (2013), "Employer brand equity and recruitment research", in Cable, D.M. and Yu, K.Y.T. (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Recruitment*, Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford, pp. 284-297.
- Collins, C.J. and Stevens, C.K. (2002), "The relationship between early recruitment-related activities and the application decisions of new labor-market entrants: a brand equity approach to recruitment", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 87 No. 6, pp. 1121-1133, doi: [10.1037/0021-9010.87.6.1121](https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.87.6.1121).
- Cornelissen, J. (2008), *Corporate Communication: A Guide to Theory and Practice*, 2nd ed., Sage Publications, London, UK.
- Cornelissen, J.P., Christensen, L.T. and Kinuthia, K. (2012), "Corporate brands and identity: developing stronger theory and the call for shifting debate", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 46 Nos 7/8, pp. 1093-1102, doi: [10.1108/03090561211230214](https://doi.org/10.1108/03090561211230214).
- Davies, G., Mete, M. and Whelan, S. (2018), "When employer brand image aids employee satisfaction and engagement", *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance*, Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 64-80, doi: [10.1108/joep-03-2017-0028](https://doi.org/10.1108/joep-03-2017-0028).
- Deepa, R. and Baral, R. (2022), "Is my employee still attracted to me? Understanding the impact of integrated communication and choice of communication channels on employee attraction", *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, Vol. 27 No. 1, pp. 110-126, doi: [10.1108/ccij-09-2020-0136](https://doi.org/10.1108/ccij-09-2020-0136).
- Ehrhart, K.H. and Ziegert, J.C. (2005), "Why are individuals attracted to organizations?", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 31 No. 6, pp. 901-919, doi: [10.1177/0149206305279759](https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206305279759).
- Elving, W.J.L., Westhoff, J.J.C., Meeusen, K. and Schoonderbeek, J. (2013), "The war for talent? The relevance of employer branding in job advertisements for becoming an employer of choice", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 20 No. 5, pp. 355-373, doi: [10.1057/bm.2012.21](https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2012.21).
- Ewing, M., Men, L.R. and O'Neil, J. (2019), "Using social media to engage employees: insights from internal communication managers", *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, Vol. 13 No. 2, pp. 110-132, doi: [10.1080/1553118x.2019.1575830](https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118x.2019.1575830).
- Faul, F., Erdfelder, E., Buchner, A. and Lang, A.G. (2009), "Statistical power analyses using G* Power 3.1: tests for correlation and regression analyses", *Behavior Research Methods*, Vol. 41 No. 4, pp. 1149-1160, doi: [10.3758/brm.41.4.1149](https://doi.org/10.3758/brm.41.4.1149).

- Fischer, T.J., Wever, J. and Alsem, K.J. (2021), "Studenten en werkgelegenheid in Groningen: motivaties bij het zoeken van werk en werklocatie", [Students and job opportunities in Groningen: Motivations for looking for a job and location], *Hanzehogeschool Groningen, Markting Publicaties*, Vol. 23, pp. 1-44.
- Fruyt, De.F., Wille, B. and John, O.P. (2015), "Employability in the 21st century: complex (interactive) problem solving and other essential skills", *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 8 No. 2, pp. 276-281, doi: [10.1017/iop.2015.33](https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2015.33).
- Gardner, T.M., Erhardt, N.L. and Martin-Rios, C. (2011), "Rebranding employment branding: establishing a new research agenda to explore the attributes, antecedents, and consequences of workers' employment brand knowledge", *Research in Personnel and Human Resource Management*, Vol. 30, pp. 253-304.
- Gilani, H. and Cunningham, L. (2017), "Employer branding and its influence on employee retention: a literature review", *The Marketing Review*, Vol. 17 No. 2, pp. 239-256, doi: [10.1362/146934717x14909733966209](https://doi.org/10.1362/146934717x14909733966209).
- Hayes, A. (2017;2022), *Introduction to Mediation, Moderation, and Conditional Process Analysis*, Guilford, NY, USA.
- Highhouse, S., Lievens, F. and Sinar, E.F. (2003), "Measuring attraction to organisations", *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, Vol. 63 No. 6, pp. 986-1001, doi: [10.1177/0013164403258403](https://doi.org/10.1177/0013164403258403).
- Hinkin, T.R. (1995), "A review of scale development practices in the study of organizations", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 21 No. 5, pp. 967-988, doi: [10.1177/014920639502100509](https://doi.org/10.1177/014920639502100509).
- Itam, U., Misra, S. and Anjum, H. (2020), "HRD indicators and branding practices: a viewpoint on the employer brand building process", *European Journal of Training and Development*, Vol. 44 Nos 6/7, pp. 675-694, doi: [10.1108/ejtd-05-2019-0072](https://doi.org/10.1108/ejtd-05-2019-0072).
- Ito, J.K., Brotheridge, C.M. and McFarland, K. (2013), "Examining how preferences for employer branding attributes differ from entry to exit and how they relate to commitment, satisfaction, and retention", *Career Development International*, Vol. 18 No. 7, pp. 732-752, doi: [10.1108/cdi-05-2013-0067](https://doi.org/10.1108/cdi-05-2013-0067).
- Jain, N. and Bhatt, P. (2015), "Employment preferences of job applicants: unfolding employer branding determinants", *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 34 No. 6, pp. 634-652, doi: [10.1108/jmd-09-2013-0106](https://doi.org/10.1108/jmd-09-2013-0106).
- Kalinska-Kula, M. and Staniec, I. (2021), "Employer branding and organizational attractiveness: current employees' perspective", *European Research Studies Journal*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 583-603, doi: [10.35808/ersj/1982](https://doi.org/10.35808/ersj/1982).
- KempChilders, E.C.Y. and Williams, K.H. (2012), "Place branding: creating self-brand connections and brand advocacy", *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, Vol. 21 No. 7, pp. 508-515, doi: [10.1108/10610421211276259](https://doi.org/10.1108/10610421211276259).
- Kolesnicov, I. (2018), *Winning the war for talent. A study on employer branding from a corporate communication perspective*, PhD thesis, Aarhus University.
- Koster, S. and Cnossen, F.D. (2022), "Talentmonitor", available at: <https://talentinderegio.com/talentmonitor/#introductie> (accessed 6 June 2023).
- Kristof-Brown, A.L., Jansen, K.J. and Colbert, A.E. (2002), "A policy-capturing study of the simultaneous effects of fit with jobs, groups, and organizations", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 87 No. 5, pp. 985-993, doi: [10.1037/0021-9010.87.5.985](https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.87.5.985).
- Kunerth, B. and Mosley, R. (2011), "Applying employer brand management to employee engagement", *Strategic HR Review*, Vol. 10 No. 3, pp. 19-26, doi: [10.1108/14754391111121874](https://doi.org/10.1108/14754391111121874).
- Kwon, K. and Jang, S. (2021), "There is no good war for talent: a critical review of the literature on talent management", *Employee Relations*, Vol. 44 No. 1, pp. 94-120, doi: [10.1108/er-08-2020-0374](https://doi.org/10.1108/er-08-2020-0374).
- Lauver, K.J. and Kristof-Brown, A. (2001), "Distinguishing between employees' perceptions of person-job and person-organization fit", *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 59 No. 3, pp. 454-470, doi: [10.1006/jvbe.2001.1807](https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.2001.1807).

- Lewis, R.E. and Heckman, R.J. (2006), "Talent management: a critical review", *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 139-154, doi: [10.1016/j.hrmr.2006.03.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2006.03.001).
- Lievens, F. and Slaughter, J.E. (2016), "Employer image and employer branding: what we know and what we need to know", *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 407-440, doi: [10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-041015-062501](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-041015-062501).
- Megehee, C.M. (2009), "Advertising time expansion, compression, and cognitive processing influences on consumer acceptance of message and brand", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 62 No. 4, pp. 420-431, doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2008.01.019](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2008.01.019).
- Nadeau, J. and Olafsen, A.H. (2015), "Country image evaluations and migration intentions", *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 11 No. 4, pp. 293-308, doi: [10.1057/pb.2015.8](https://doi.org/10.1057/pb.2015.8).
- Oltarzhevskiy, D. (2019), "Typology of contemporary corporate communication channels", *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, Vol. 24 No. 4, pp. 608-622, doi: [10.1108/ccij-04-2019-0046](https://doi.org/10.1108/ccij-04-2019-0046).
- Podsakoff, P.M., MacKenzie, S.B., Lee, J.-Y. and Podsakoff, N.P. (2003), "Common method biases in behavioral research: a critical review of the literature and recommended remedies", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 88 No. 5, pp. 879-903, doi: [10.1037/0021-9010.88.5.879](https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.5.879).
- Rampl, L.V. (2014), "How to become an employer of choice: transforming employer brand associations into employer first-choice brands", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 30 Nos 13-14, pp. 1486-1504, doi: [10.1080/0267257x.2014.934903](https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257x.2014.934903).
- Robinson, M.A. (2018), "Using multi-item psychometric scales for research and practice in human resource management", *Human Resource Management*, Vol. 57 No. 3, pp. 739-750, doi: [10.1002/hrm.21852](https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21852).
- Ronda, L., Valor, C. and Abril, C. (2018), "Are they willing to work for you? An employee-centric view to employer brand attractiveness", *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, Vol. 27 No. 5, pp. 573-596, doi: [10.1108/jpbm-07-2017-1522](https://doi.org/10.1108/jpbm-07-2017-1522).
- Schneider, B. (2001), "Fits about fit", *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, Vol. 50 No. 1, pp. 141-152, doi: [10.1111/1464-0597.00051](https://doi.org/10.1111/1464-0597.00051).
- Sekiguchi, T. (2007), "A contingency perspective of the importance of PJ fit and PO fit in employee selection", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 118-131, doi: [10.1108/02683940710726384](https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940710726384).
- Silva, A.J. and Dias, H. (2022), "The relationship between employer branding, corporate reputation and intention to apply to a job offer", *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, Vol. 31 No. 8, pp. 1-16, doi: [10.1108/ijoa-01-2022-3129](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijoa-01-2022-3129).
- Sivertzen, A., Nilsen, E.R. and Olafsen, A.H. (2013), "Employer branding: employer attractiveness and the use of social media", *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, Vol. 22 No. 7, pp. 473-483, doi: [10.1108/jpbm-09-2013-0393](https://doi.org/10.1108/jpbm-09-2013-0393).
- Slavkovic, M., Pavlovic, G. and Simic, M. (2018), "Employee recruitment and its relationship with employee satisfaction: verifying the mediating role of the employer brand", *Ekonomski Horizonti*, Vol. 20 No. 2, pp. 127-139, doi: [10.5937/ekonhor1802127s](https://doi.org/10.5937/ekonhor1802127s).
- Tanwar, K. and Prasad, A. (2016), "Exploring the relationship between employer branding and employee retention", *Global Business Review*, Vol. 17 No. 3, pp. 186-206, doi: [10.1177/0972150916631214](https://doi.org/10.1177/0972150916631214).
- Thunnissen, M. (2016), "Talent management: for what, how and how well? An empirical exploration of talent management in practice", *Employee Relations*, Vol. 38 No. 1, pp. 57-72, doi: [10.1108/er-08-2015-0159](https://doi.org/10.1108/er-08-2015-0159).
- Tumasjan, A., Kunze, F., Bruch, H. and Welp, I.M. (2020), "Linking employer branding orientation and firm performance: testing a dual mediation route of recruitment efficiency and positive affective climate", *Human Resource Management*, Vol. 59 No. 1, pp. 83-99, doi: [10.1002/hrm.21980](https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21980).
- Turban, D.B. and Keon, T.L. (1993), "Organizational attractiveness: an interactionist perspective", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 78 No. 2, pp. 184-193, doi: [10.1037/0021-9010.78.2.184](https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.78.2.184).

-
- Turban, D.B., Forret, M.L. and Hendrickson, C.L. (1998), "Applicant attractions to firms, influences of organization reputation, job and organizational attributes and recruiter behaviors", *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 52 No. 1, pp. 24-44, doi: [10.1006/jvbe.1996.1555](https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.1996.1555).
- Venhorst, V.A., Van Dijk, J. and Van Wissen, L. (2010), "Do the best graduates leave the peripheral areas of The Netherlands?", *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, Vol. 101 No. 5, pp. 521-557, doi: [10.1111/j.1467-9663.2010.00629.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9663.2010.00629.x).
- Verčič, A.T. and Čorić, D.S. (2018), "The relationship between reputation, employer branding and corporate social responsibility", *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 44 No. 4, pp. 444-452, doi: [10.1016/j.pubrev.2018.06.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2018.06.005).
- Verčič, A.T., Galić, Z. and Žnidar, K. (2023), "The relationship of internal communication satisfaction with employee engagement and employer attractiveness: testing the joint mediating effect of the social exchange quality indicators", *International Journal of Business Communication*, Vol. 60 No. 4, pp. 1313-1340.
- Wallace, M., Lings, I., Cameron, R. and Sheldon, N. (2014), "Attracting and retaining staff: the role of branding and industry image", in Harris, R. and Short, T. (Eds), *Workforce Development: Perspectives and Issues*, Springer Science, Business Media Singapore, Singapore, pp. 19-36.
- Young, P., Reinhart, J. and Heneman, H.G. (1993), "Effects of job attribute categories, applicant job experience, and recruiter sex on applicant job attractiveness ratings", *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 55-66, doi: [10.1007/bf00972349](https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00972349).

Corresponding author

Antonia Z. Hein can be contacted at: a.hein@pl.hanze.nl