



EMPLOYER BRANDING: EXPLORING ATTRACTIVENESS DIMENSIONS IN A MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT

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Received 31 October 2018; accepted 17 February 2019

Abstract. Attracting and retaining talented employees and gaining competitive advantage are important for organizations around the world. This study identifies and operationalizes the components of employer attractiveness from the perspective of potential employees. The study tests the employer attractiveness scale (EmpAt) by identifying the attractiveness dimensions of an employer brand among business students in the Czech Republic through exploratory factor analysis. We also search for similarities and differences among employer attractiveness dimensions through a cross-cultural comparison based on the results of previous studies. Businesses in today's globalised world need to attract potential employees globally and determine whether it would be better to use one corporate strategy or to customize their employer brand according to the cultural differences between countries. National, cultural, and gender differences are also investigated. The findings show factors that business students give the highest importance to when searching for an employer and that the factor's importance is influenced by gender. The findings of this study can be used to track the perceptions of current job applicants about the company and to appeal to "suitable target audiences" – potential employees. The results can be used by HR experts and practitioners in formulating and executing their communication and recruitment strategies.

Keywords: employer branding, organizational attractiveness, human resources, cultural difference, gender difference, recruitment strategy.

JEL Classification: M1, M3, D83.

Introduction

Employer branding is a growing field of study. The term "employer branding" has been defined in several ways. It has recently become a prominent topic in human resources management (HRM) research (Edwards, 2010; Martin, Gollan, & Grigg, 2011). Organizations are

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using employer branding to attract recruits and ensure that current employees are engaged in the culture and strategy of the organization. Developing a favourable employer brand requires managers and HR professionals to know which factors are important for attracting recruits to their organization (Eger, Mičík, & Řehoř, 2018; Mičík & Mičudová, 2018).

Attracting potential candidates is important to the recruitment process, which is key to organizations because human capital is crucial for competitive advantage (Brymer, Molloy, & Gilbert, 2014). This study builds on research by Berthon, Ewing, and Hah (2005) by testing the employer attractiveness scale (EmpAt) and analysing the relationships between its dimensions for business students in the Czech Republic.

The main purpose of this study is to identify potential employees' perception of employers and their intentions to apply for a job, examine which of the attractiveness dimensions are significant to university students, and investigate if differences in the perceptions of employer attractiveness emerge according to gender.

Berthon et al. (2005) and followers of their work call for further research to develop and refine the EmpAt scale due to their claim that cross-cultural differences in employer attractiveness are likely to appear across cultures. We have responded to this call by examining if various aspects of employer branding and attractiveness have equal importance across different cultures. Our study tracks cross-cultural differences and identifies similarities and contrasts among the dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding. Additionally, the study identifies which employer attractiveness attributes have been prioritized by national groups examined by earlier studies.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. First, a review of the literature on employer branding and organizational attractiveness is provided. Second, the dimensions of employer brand attractiveness are identified through exploratory factor analysis. Third, attractiveness dimensions based on gender are identified. Fourth, similarities and differences across aspects of employer branding attractiveness examined in the samples of several studies are identified and compared.

1. Employer branding

The term "employer brand" was introduced by Ambler and Barrow (1996) in their paper "The Employer Brand". The authors define "employer brand" as the package of functional, economical, and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employer. Employer branding refers to an organization's reputation as an employer and its value proposition to its employees (Barrow & Mosley, 2011). Botha, Bussin, and De Swardt (2011) note that the success of an employer brand is influenced by a number of factors, including target group needs, a differentiated employer value proposition (EVP), people strategy, brand consistency, employer brand communication, and the measurement of human resource (HR) employer branding efforts. The term "employer branding" suggests that an organization's characteristics as an employer are differentiated from those of its competitors. The term suggests that an organization benefits from employer branding when it is perceived as a great place to work by current employees. The employment brand highlights the unique aspects of the organization's employment offerings or environment (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Several studies have found that organizations with a good employer brand will attract more prospective employees (e.g. Cable & Turban, 2003; Sivertzen, Nilsen, & Olafsen, 2013; E. Alniacik, Ü. Alniacik, Erat, & Akcin, 2014) and be better able to retain them (Gittell, Seidner, & Wimbush, 2010). Having a favourable and distinctive employer brand is an important asset for organizations (Carpentier et al., 2017). However, little is known about how the perceptions that constitute this influential employer brand can be created, managed, or improved through recruitment communication and practices (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Slaughter, Cable, & Turban, 2014). It is posited that companies with strong employer brands can reduce the cost of employee acquisition, improve employee relations, and increase employee retention (Ritson, 2002; Berthon et al., 2005). In general, a positive employer brand image generates organizational attractiveness (Lievens, 2007), and attractiveness signifies congruency between the organization's values and goals and those of the prospective employees (Elegbe, 2018). Building a brand, improving public awareness, and increasing the loyalty of employees can influence recruitment of new qualified employees (Urbancova, Richter, Kucirkova, & Jarkovska, 2017).

Berthon et al. (2005) go even further and suggest expanding the model from three dimensions to five: **economic benefits** stay in the group, while psychological benefits are broken down into **interest value** and **social value**, and functional benefits are broken down into **development value** and **application value**. Berthon et al. (2005) identify these dimensions from the perspective of potential employees. They have also developed a scale measurement of employer attractiveness (Roy, 2008).

These five dimensions reflect the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer. The model with five core dimensions has been widely used in research on employer brand (Roy, 2008; Reis & Braga, 2016; Sivertzen et al., 2013; Biswas & Suar, 2013; P. Kaur, S. Sharma, J. Kaur, & S. K. Sharma, 2015; Arachchige & Robertson, 2011; Alniacik et al., 2014).

The role of employer branding is defined by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) as a set of subjective beliefs regarding an exchange between an individual and an organization. The literature on employer branding aims to offer human resources (or brand) managers the analytical frameworks, empirical knowledge, and practical tools they require to establish and communicate employer brands successfully (Mölk & Aurer, 2018). Also, the term reputation is often used to refer to the term employer brand. Some authors even define reputation as an integral part of employer branding (Verčič & Ćorić, 2018). Employer branding is relevant in the context of employee engagement and retention, but our study focuses on the recruitment aspect only. Model that represent effect of branding on engagement and retention is shown in Figure 1.

As can be seen in Figure 1, employer value proposition and employer reputation are the main dimensions of employer attractiveness, and the main dimensions of employer brand loyalty are organizational culture and organizational identity. What is not evident in Figure 1 is the overlapping effect of dimensions; employer value proposition and employer reputation also play a role in employer brand loyalty, and organization identity and organizational culture also have an impact on employer attractiveness (eg. Sears, 2003; Knox & Freeman, 2006; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Grigore & Stancu, 2011).

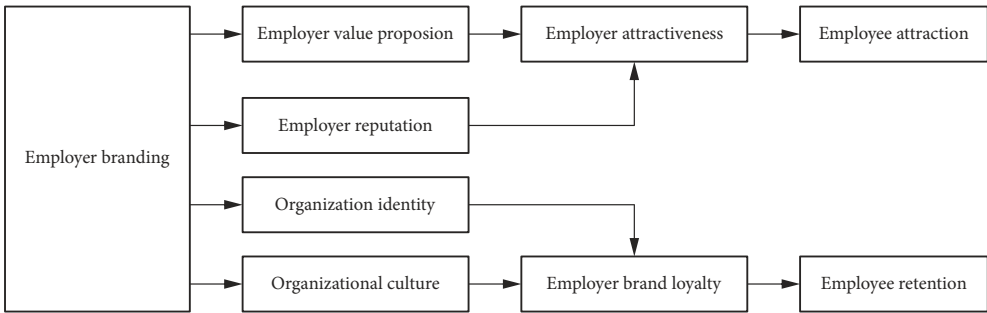


Figure 1. Effect of employer branding on retention and engagement of employees (source: own based on Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Berthon et al., 2005)

1.1. Employer branding and recruiting

Saini, Rai, and Chaudhary (2014) and Elving, Westhoff, Meeusen, and Schoonderbeek (2013) agree that the employer brand is an efficient marketing tool that helps businesses represent themselves well to potential applicants. Many organizations strive to be perceived as an attractive and valued employer. Companies use numerous recruitment activities to let potential employees know about career opportunities and company characteristics (Perkins, Thomas, & Taylor, 2000). Understanding the role of employer branding is key to the recruitment process that forms the candidate's experience and affects the employer's brand perception either positively or negatively.

Recruitment is defined as the process of sourcing (identifying a pool of potential applicants), attracting (generating and inducing interest of the potential targeted applicants), assessing (ascertaining work-related knowledge, skills, abilities, or other characteristics of an individual or group of individuals), and employing (engaging the services of or put a person to work) talent for an existing or new position within an organization (International Organization for Standardization, 2016). At present, when there is a shortage of skilled workers on the labor market, this process plays a very important role for all organizations.

Organizational reputation is significant factor in the recruitment process; it is formed through the company's image, which is in turn a reflection of the brand. Organizational reputation is defined as a set of characteristics that are socially constructed for an organization based on the organization's previous actions (Weigelt & Camerer, 1988; Sivertzen et al., 2013), and image is defined as a set of beliefs, ideas, and impressions a person holds regarding an object (Kotler, 2003) – in our case, the employer. Organizations need to recognize the factors influencing their employer brands and their recruitment processes which form the candidates' perception of the employer brand and influences the candidates' decision to continue a relationship with the organization. Additionally, employer branding supports the relationship between employers and employees by providing competitive advantage with a positive impact on employee behaviour, such as retention (Miles & Mangold, 2005; Ahmad & Daud, 2016). This is particularly important in knowledge-based and service industries, where competent employees are often in short supply. Whereas traditional recruitment strategies are short-term and reflect current organizational needs, employer branding is a long-term

strategy designed to maintain a steady flow of skilled employees (Srivastava & Bhatnagar, 2010; Roy, 2008). Organizations are increasingly using social media for recruitment, however, little is known about its effects on potential applicants' perceptions of organizations as employers. Online social media represent a promising new tool for employer branding and recruitment (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015; Nikolaou, 2014; Roth, Bobko, Van Iddekinge, & Thatcher, 2016).

1.2. Organizational attractiveness

Companies have always cared about what their employees think and say about them (Dabirin, Kietzmann, & Diba, 2017). Collective employee opinions not only shape the loyalty, engagement, and retention of existing workers but also influence how companies are seen publicly and how they are able to attract new talent. Companies can either benefit or suffer tremendously from the word-of-mouth their employees create and share (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013). Most of the research has comprised in-depth theoretical discussions of the concept of being an attractive employer/organization or investigations into the main attributes of an attractive employer/organization (e.g. Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Berthon et al., 2005; Joo & McLean, 2006). Organizational attractiveness can be defined as the benefits potential employees anticipate from working for a specific organization (Berthon et al., 2005; Alniacik et al., 2014). From this point of view, it is important to understand what attracts a job seeker.

Organizational attractiveness is also considered the power that motivates an applicant to focus on an employer brand and encourages existing employees to stay (Bakanauskiene, Bendaravičienė, & Barkauskė, 2017), as well as the degree to which potential and current employees perceive the organization as a good place to work (Jiang & Iles, 2011). Ehrhart and Ziegert (2005) have defined organizational attraction as the process of getting candidates to view the organization as a positive place to work and have examined it from the applicant's perspective. Organizational attractiveness has been measured using the EmpAt scale (described above), developed by Berthon et al. (2005) and derived from Ambler and Barrow's (1996) dimensions of psychological, functional, and economic benefits.

Attractiveness and the prioritisation of attractiveness attributes may vary according to cultural and demographic characteristics (Alniacik et al., 2014; Reis & Braga, 2016). Research shows that the personal characteristics of potential employees affect their perceptions of the attractiveness of companies (Albinger & Freeman, 2000; Backhaus, Stone, & Heiner, 2002). Moreover, female and male respondents may assess organizational attractiveness factors differently.

2. Methodology

In order to pursue the research objective – i. e. the identification of an employer attractiveness factors – we decided to adopt a quantitative research approach (Creswell, 2014). First, the study followed research by (Berthon et al., 2005) and tested the employer attractiveness scale (EmpAt) by identifying the attractiveness dimensions of an employer brand among business students in the Czech Republic through exploratory factor analysis (Mayers, Well, &

Lorch, 2010). Second, Kruskal–Wallis test (Kruskal & Wallis, 1952) was employed to analyze differences in attractiveness dimensions and the nonparametric Mann–Whitney test (Mann & Whitney, 1947) was used to identify the factor scores between females and males. Third, cross-cultural comparison based on the results of previous studies was conducted to identify the employer attractiveness attributes prioritized by national groups of respondents.

2.1. Objectives and research questions

The objectives of this study are threefold. The first objective is to identify the attractiveness dimensions of an employer brand among business students in the Czech Republic. We pose the following research question: What are potential employees' perceptions of employer attractiveness dimensions among business students in the Czech Republic?

The second objective is to examine whether statistically significant differences in attractiveness dimensions are observed based on gender. The relevant research question is as follows: Does the gender of the respondents (Czech business students) influence the level of importance they attribute to the dimensions of employer branding?

The third objective of the study is to identify similarities and differences between employer attractiveness dimensions through a cross-cultural comparison based on the results of previous studies. We pose the same research question as is posed in Alniacik et al. (2014): Are the aspects of employer branding and employer attractiveness being given equal importance in different cultures?

We meet the first objective through exploratory factor analysis using the principal components method followed by a rotation (McDonald, 1985). The number of original variables is reduced, and five key factors are identified. We meet the second objective by resting the following hypothesis: Aspects of attractiveness in employer branding are statistically significant based on gender. We meet the third objective by comparing similarities and differences between employer attractiveness factors and by testing the following hypothesis: The importance of attractiveness factors varies among the participants. A post hoc analysis of the test results is then conducted in order to compare importance levels between the paired dimensions.

2.2. Sample and data collection

A sample comprised of 281 final semester business students (209 females and 72 males) from two Economics faculties of two public universities in the Czech Republic was surveyed. The respondents ranged from 21 to 25 years of age. Their main field of study was business administration and management. Students from universities in Pilsen and České Budějovice well represent students from other economics faculties in Czech regions except Prague, where the situation in business activity, entrepreneurship, and in student employability is different.

Data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire that included demographic questions and the EmpAt scale developed by Berthon et al. (2005). Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they considered the listed items important in choosing an employer. Responses were given on a five-point Likert scale (1 = “not at all important”; 5 = “extremely important”).

2.3. Data analysis

The data analysis is done as follows. First, confirmatory factor analysis was used to identify the attractiveness dimensions of an employer brand among business students in the Czech Republic. Second, descriptive statistics and the Kruskal–Wallis test was employed to examine whether statistically significant differences in attractiveness dimensions are observed based on gender. Third, the cross-cultural comparison of current research in the Czech Republic and of the results of previous studies was used to identify similarities and differences between employer attractiveness dimensions.

2.4. Results

Data were analysed in three stages. In the first, 25 variables on the attractiveness scale were factor analysed.

Preliminary factor analysis: exploratory factor analysis

First, the item-total correlation was calculated for every item. The value for all items was greater than 0.3, and no items were eliminated. Then, the sampling adequacy of the items was examined via the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin test (KMO). The value for the KMO statistic varied between 0 and 1. A value close to 0 indicates that the sum of the partial correlations is large relative to the sum of the correlations, which would indicate an inappropriate factor analysis. Values between 0.7 and 0.8 are “good”, values between 0.8 and 0.9 are “great”, and values above 0.9 are “superb” (Kaiser, 1974).

KMO index is given by formula (1):

$$KMO = \frac{\sum_i \sum_{j \neq i} r_{ij}^2}{\sum_i \sum_{j \neq i} r_{ij}^2 + \sum_i \sum_{j \neq i} a_{ij}^2}, \quad (1)$$

where $R = (r_{ij})$ is correlation matrix of variables, $A = (a_{ij})$ is partial correlation matrix of variables.

Partial correlation matrix is obtained from correlation matrix following formula (2):

$$a_{ij} = \frac{v_{ij}}{\sqrt{v_{ii} \times v_{jj}}}, \quad (2)$$

where $V = (v_{ij}) = R^{-1}$ is inverse matrix of correlation matrix R .

Our data produced a value of 0.91487, indicating that the factor analysis was appropriate.

Also Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was used to determine the suitability and relevance of the data (Approx. Chi Square 3272.6683, df 300, $p = 0.0000$). Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity showed significant value of 0.000, indicating $p < 0.05$. Thus, it shows that the correlation between items is sufficient to run the factor analysis.

The Bartlett’s test of sphericity statistic indicates to what extent we deviate from the reference situation $|R| = 1$, i.e. identity correlation matrix. The test statistic T is given by formula (3):

$$T = - \left(n - 1 - \frac{2p + 5}{6} \right) \times \ln |R|, \quad (3)$$

where n is number of observations, p is number of variables (size of correlation matrix R), $R = (r_{ij})$ is correlation matrix of variables.

Subsequently, we used a principal component analysis with Raw Varimax rotation, and a factor extraction with respect to the MINEIGEN criterion (i.e. all factors with eigenvalues greater than 1) was employed. The five factors accounted for a cumulative 60.21% of the variation in the sample data. The initial eigenvalues and rotated component matrix are reported in Tables 1 and 2. Factor loadings < 0.45 are suppressed, and the items are sorted by loading.

Table 1. Initial eigenvalues (source: own, 2018)

Component	Total	% variance	Cumulative %
1	9.201	36.80	36.80
2	1.83138	7.33	44.13
3	1.63237	6.53	50.66
4	1.36031	5.44	56.10
5	1.02823	4.11	60.21

The components partially correspond to the former Berthon factors of the EmpAt scale. Berthon's factors are ordered from factor 1 to factor 5, as follows: Interest value (IV), Social value (SV), Economic value (EV), Development value (DV), and Application value (AV). The results of our factor analysis grouped items in the following order (see Table 3): In our factor 1, the Social value items dominate; Interest value items correspond fully with Berthon's factor 2; Application value items dominate in factor 3; our factor 4 consists of Economic value and Development value items (that is the reason for marking is as E-DV); finally, our factor 5 consists of the Development value and Application value items from Berthon's factors in the EmpAt scale (marked as D-AV). In both Berthon's study and ours, answers for the EmpAt scale items differ most for Interest value (IV) and Social value (SV). In our study, Social value (SV) and Interest value (IV) explain 44.13% of the variation. For further analysis, the factors will be labelled "factor 1 – SV", "factor 2 – IV", "factor 3 – AV", "factor 4 – E-DV", and "factor 5 – D-AV".

The following statistical analysis was performed on the scores for every factor and every participant. The score was computed as a linear combination of factor score coefficients (loadings > 0.45) and source values of the items, and the score was then rescaled to the original scale. Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations of the scores for every factor.

Table 2. Means and standard deviation of factor scores (source: own, 2018)

	SV	IV	AV	E-DV	D-AV
Mean	6,17	5.19	4.80	5.26	4.17
Median	6.36	5.24	4.86	5.38	4.24
Standard deviation	0.8107	0.7378	0.8189	0.7952	0.7846

Table 3 shows the items used for each attractiveness dimension. Regarding the reliability of each item, although factor loadings of 0.70 or over are regarded as ideal, loadings between 0.50 and 0.70 are also acceptable; in such cases, the items may be retained (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011; Reis & Braga, 2016). Item Q24 was retained, even though it did not meet the reliability criterion, for the sake of the multicultural comparison conducted later, which is based on the factors of the original EmptAt.

Table 3. Factor analysis of items (source: own, 2018)

Berthon items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Berthon factors	Questions
Q12	0.823					SV	Supportive and encouraging colleagues
Q10	0.820					SV	Having a good relationship with your superiors
Q11	0.802					SV	Having a good relationship with your colleagues
Q30	0.737					SV	Happy work environment
Q4	0.622					SV	A fun working environment
Q28	0.600					EV	Job security within the organization
Q26	0.578					AV	Acceptance and belonging
Q1	0.527					DV	Recognition/appreciation from management
Q18		0.756				IV	The organization produces innovative products and services
Q15		0.714				IV	Innovative employer; novel work practices forward-thinking
Q17		0.664				IV	The organization produces high-quality products and services
Q16		0.543				IV	The organization both values and makes use of your creativity
Q14		0.505				IV	Working in an exciting environment
Q25			0.737			AV	Opportunity to teach others what you have learned
Q27			0.643			AV	The organization is customer-orientated
Q29			0.514			EV	Hands-on inter-departmental experience
Q24			0.451			AV	Opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution
Q31				0.748		EV	An above-average basic salary
Q32				0.717		EV	An attractive overall compensation package
Q5				0.629		DV	A springboard for future employment

End of Table 3

Berthon items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Berthon factors	Questions
Q8				0.557		DV	Gaming career-enhancing experience
Q19				0.553		EV	Good promotion opportunities within the organization
Q7					0.785	DV	Feeling more self-confident as a result of working for a particular org.
Q6					0.666	DV	Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular org.
Q20					0.650	AV	Humanitarian organization, gives back to society

Legend:

	SV	Social value
	EV	Economic value
	IV	Interest value
	AV	Application value
	DV	Development value

Note: The “Berthon factors” column presents the original categorization of items according to the respective dimensions in Berthon et al. (2005), and Berthon’s items and questions are numbered as in his original EmpAt scale.

The data used in our study, as in Berthon et al. (2005) and Arachchige & Robertson (2011), were gathered from final-year business students through a self-completion questionnaire. Berthon et al. (2005) and Arachchige and Robertson (2011) also used the same 25-item scale (EmpAt) and seven-point Likert scale (Arachchige and Robertson added seven additional factors but reported the alpha for the original scale).

The reliability of the employer attractiveness scale was examined based on inter-item consistency using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. The alpha for the original 25 items used in Berthon et al (2005) study was reported as 0.96. Arachchige and Robertson (2011) reported an alpha of 0.888 for the same items in their Sri Lankan study. In our study, the alpha of the scale was 0.905. Alniacik et al. (2014) applied the same 25 items but on a five-point Likert scale; the alpha was 0.91. Roy (2008) obtained 0.904 using a modified scale. It can thus be concluded that EmpAt is a reliable scale for the measurement of the attractiveness dimensions of an employer brand.

Main analysis

The next task is to compare the factor scores of the respondents and determine the importance of each factor. Based on the assumption that the importance of the factors will vary among the participants, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H1: The means (medians) of factor scores for every factor are different.

First, the basic statistics were calculated. The means (medians) and standard deviation for every participant are presented in Table 2. The Kruskal–Wallis test was employed, and post-hoc analysis (multiple testing) was applied (Mayers et al., 2010).

In Kruskal–Wallis test all data are ranked from all groups together; i.e., rank the data from 1 to N ignoring group membership. Assign any tied values the average of the ranks they would have received had they not been tied. The test statistic T is given by (4):

$$T = (N - 1) \frac{\sum_{i=1}^g n_i (\bar{r}_i - \bar{r})^2}{\sum_{i=1}^g \sum_{j=1}^{n_i} (r_{ij} - \bar{r})^2}, \tag{4}$$

where n_i is the number of observations in group i , r_{ij} is the rank (among all observations) of observation j from group i , N is the total number of observations across all groups, $\bar{r}_i = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^{n_i} r_{ij}}{n_i}$ is the average rank of all observations in group i , $\bar{r} = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^g n_i \bar{r}_i$ is the average of all the \bar{r}_i .

The p-value is approximated by $\Pr(X_{g-1}^2 \geq T)$.

The p-value (= 0.0000) of the Kruskal–Wallis test supports hypothesis 1. The five samples (one for every factor) are independent of each other, and normality was not proved in any sample. The p-values of the post-hoc analysis are reported in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of post-hoc analysis (p-values) (source: own, 2018)

Factor(s)	SV	IV	AV	E-DV	D-AV
SV	–	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000
IV	0.000000	–	0.000003	1.000000	0.000000
AV	0.000000	0.000003	–	0.000000	0.000000
E-DV	0.000000	1.000000	0.000000	–	0.000000
D-AV	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	–

The p-values in the multiple testing show an exception to the result of the Kruskal–Wallis test. The difference between the score medians of IV and E-DV was not proved. The rest of the medians support the result of the previous Kruskal–Wallis test. The perceived importance of most factors differs for participants according to the mean values and medians in Table 2. Therefore, we conclude that participants give the highest importance to Social value. Interest value and Economy-Development value are the second-most important attributes to the participants in our study. The difference in perception between them was not proved. These factors are followed by Application value, and the participants give the lowest importance to Development–Application value.

Based on the theory of organization attractiveness outlined above, the following analysis focuses on the influence of gender on the factors’ importance. We investigate whether there is a statistically significant difference in perceptions of factors importance between men and women. We thus propose the following:

H2: The means (medians) of the factor scores differ between females and males.

To test the hypothesis, the survey data were divided according to gender. The first sample comprised the female scores for particular factors, and the second one comprised the male scores for every factor. We performed five tests, one for each factor of the EmptAt scale. Due to the non-normality of all sample couples, the non-parametric Mann–Whitney test was used (Mayers et al., 2010).

In Mann-Whitney test U is given by

$$U_1 = R_1 - \frac{n_1(n_1 + 1)}{2}, \tag{5}$$

where n_1 is the sample size for sample 1, and R_1 is the sum of the ranks in sample 1.

An equally valid formula for U in sample 2 is

$$U_2 = R_2 - \frac{n_2(n_2 + 1)}{2}. \tag{6}$$

For large samples, $U = \min(U_1, U_2)$ is approximately normally distributed. Test statistic $T(X, Y)$ is calculated according to formula (7)

$$T(X, Y) = \frac{U - \frac{n_1 n_2}{2}}{\sqrt{\frac{n_1 n_2 (n_1 + n_2 + 1)}{12}}}. \tag{7}$$

All the basic parameters were calculated for every sample and factor. The results are reported in Table 5.

Table 5. Gender sample parameters according to factors (source: own, 2018)

Factor	Total	SV	IV	AV	E-DV	D-AV
Mean/STD						
F	5.20/0.9958	6.29/0.7372	5.22/0.8788	4.91/0.7675	5.32/0.7678	4.25/0.7632
M	4.88/1.0677	5.81/0.9088	5.10/0.6820	4.48/0.8848	5.07/0.8492	3.95/0.8076
Median						
F	5.23	6.47	5.24	4.92	5.41	4.33
M	5.00	5.83	5.23	4.52	5.27	4.02

Table 6 shows the results of the Mann–Whitney tests. The p-value (= 0.000003) indicates that there is no relationship between the observed variables. Therefore, hypothesis 2 was supported.

The data shown in Table 6 suggest that females attach higher importance to attractiveness factors than males do. Moreover, females consider more items to be important in most

Table 6. Results of Mann–Whitney test: comparison of gender scores according to factors (source: own, 2018)

Factor	Total	SV	IV	AV	E-DV	D-AV
p-value	0.000003	0.000000	0.434727	0.000232	0.016255	0,002043

of the factors than males do. One exception is the Interest value items. In this case, the null hypothesis was not rejected (p -value = 0.434727), and the test indicates a concordance in the importance of IV items between females and males. We can also observe some concordance in E-DV items, given the significance level of 0.01.

Cross-cultural comparison based on the results of previous studies

Berthon et al. (2005) claim that cross-cultural differences in employer attractiveness are likely. The EmpAt cannot necessarily be extended cross-nationally without further psychometric testing. Berthon et al. (2005) identify the dimensions of employer attractiveness, which are likely to contribute to employer brand value. In Berthon et al. (2005), respondents were asked to rate the overall attractiveness of a well-known firm, in addition to the indicators in the EmpAt scale. A positive relationship was found between the five dimensions and overall attractiveness (Sivertzen et al., 2013). This part of our study examines which indicators of the EmpAt scale and which dimensions of attractiveness are important across cultural and national differences. To answer our third research question, we compared several studies that followed the survey conducted by Berthon et al. (2005). These surveys are described below.

The first objective of the survey conducted by Roy (2008) was focused on the attractiveness dimensions of an employer brand in an emerging market in India. The survey instrument was derived from the EmpAt scale developed by Berthon et al. (2005). Roy (2008) modified the scale and worked with seven factors (dimensions). Data were collected using self-administered questionnaires. Respondents (150 students of a management school) were asked to indicate the level of importance of each of the items in the scale using a five-point scale (Roy, 2008). The questioning was focused on the Indian companies that had been identified as the five best-managed in 2005. Therefore, this survey cannot be compared with those that accepted the original concept of Berthon et al. (2005).

Arachchige and Robertson (2011) focused on the factors that attracted Sri Lanka university graduates to potential employees. Their main objective was identifying the factors that were most important in determining the perceptions of job applicants. A sample of 221 final-year business students from Sri Lanka University was surveyed. Their research is based on the EmpAt scale developed by Berthon et al. (2005); the authors also compared the original 25 items (mean scores) between Sri Lankan and Australian students and used a seven-point Likert scale.

Sivertzen et al. (2013) asked Norwegian engineering students about three well-known Norwegian engineering firms in a web-based survey. Employer attractiveness was measured using the 25 indicators of the EmpAt scale developed by Berthon et al. (2005) on a seven-point Likert scale.

Alniacik et al. (2014) aimed to identify the perceptual differences in the importance levels of employer attractiveness dimensions between two cultures. The respondents consisted of 300 undergraduate and postgraduate students in Latvia and Turkey (half were employed and half unemployed). Data were collected by a self-administered questionnaire. The authors used 25 items of the EmpAt scale and a five point Likert scale.

The scale developed by Berthon et al. (2005) was also adopted in Reis and Braga's (2016) Brazilian study. The authors invited 3,000 professionals to fill in an online questionnaire. The

return rate was 34% (937 responses from participants aged 21 to 65). They used a five-point Likert scale. Reis and Braga (2016) present the results of five dimensions of the EmpAt scale developed by Berthon et al. (2005) but only for 20 items. The authors adjusted the original items by deleting those with the lowest load factor values. The different sample (i.e. not only young people and university students) and reduced number of EmpAt items imposed limitations on their comparison.

We used the EmpAt scale developed by Berthon et al. (2005) to measure employer attractiveness. Data were collected via self-administered questionnaire using 25 items of the EmpAt scale and a seven-point Likert scale. The respondents were young university students (281 university business students from two faculties of Economics in the Czech Republic).

We divided the employer attributes in each survey into three quartiles, making the arrangement of the items independent from that of the original seven-point scale (Arachchige & Robertson, 2011; Berthon et al., 2005; Sivertzen et al., 2013) and the five-point scale (Alniacik et al., 2014; Reis & Braga, 2016). Differences were observed regarding how each group of respondents ranked the employer attributes.

Items from the third quartile show the most-preferred employer attributes, and items from the lowest quartile show the least-preferred. Outputs obtained this way can be used to draw comparisons with other international surveys and identify possible cultural and national differences. Several limitations are imposed, however. For example, Sivertzen et al. (2013) examined a selection of specific enterprises, and the output of Reis and Braga (2016) displayed only 20 items of the original 25, and the study's sample comprised not only business students but also professionals.

Table 7 presents the monitored items of the EmpAt scale, placed in order of the area's level of importance in terms of the possible application to employer brand development. Figure 2 graphically shows the differences between the mean scores of the employer attractiveness items according to the nationality of the respondents shown in Table 7.

The findings on the importance of the EmpAt scale items in each survey (see Table 7) must be compared with the findings from other surveys describing where the partial attributes lie and their significance. The following outlines several partial conclusions:

- The results show that, for Australian students (Berthon et al., 2005), the "happy work environment" item of Interest Value was more important than the other attributes (including Economic Value) for choosing an employer. Overall, however, the items of Interest Value were more important than the other attributes for Czech business students.
- Items of Social Value and Economic Value are among the most-preferred attributes in Berthon et al. (2005). There is only one item of Development Value ("Gaining experience that will help your career"). However, several other surveys show very different results (students in Sri Lanka and Turkey place development value items above all others and students from Latvia have two development value items among 6 most-preferred attributes).
- Four items of Development Value appear among the six most important values for business students in Sri Lanka (Arachchige & Robertson, 2011). This represents an extreme outcome relative to other studies.

Table 7. Most-preferred employer attributes (25 EmpAt items) sorted according to the mean scores of employer attractiveness items (source: own, 2018)

Australia/2005	Sri Lanka/2011	Norway/2013	Turkey/2014	Latvia/2014	Brazil/2016	Czech Rep./2017
Berthon et al.	Arachchige & Robertson	Sivertzen et al.	Alniacik et al.	Alniacik et al.	Reis & Braga	Eger et al.
Happy work environment	Gaining experience that will help your career	The organization produces high-quality products and services	Recognition/appreciation from management	An above-average basic salary	Good promotion opportunities within the organization	Having a good relationship with your colleagues
Above-average basic salary	Provides opportunity for better jobs in the future	Attractive overall compensation package	Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for the organization	Good promotion opportunities within the organization	Innovative employer; novel work practices/forward thinking	Having a good relationship with your superiors
Attractive overall compensation package	Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for the organization	An above-average basic salary	Having a good relationship with your colleagues	Having a good relationship with your colleagues	The organization both values and makes use of your creativity	Happy work environment
Having a good relationship with your colleagues	Job security within the organization	Good promotion opportunities within the organization	Happy work environment	Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for the organization	Working in exciting environment	Acceptance and belonging
Gaining experience that will help your career	Happy work environment	Opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution	A springboard for future employment	Job security within the organization	Having a good relationship with your colleagues	Good promotion opportunities within the organization
Job security within the organization	Feeling more self-confident as a result of working for the organization	The organization produces innovative products and services	Job security within the organization	Recognition/appreciation from management	Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for the organization	Job security within the organization

Legend:

Interest	Social	Application
Economic	Development	

- Three items of Interest Value are among the most-preferred Employer Attributes in the survey from Brazil, and only the students from Norway (Sivertzen et al., 2013) also chose items of Interest Value (two) among the six most-preferred items.
- No Interest Value items are found in the sample of students from Turkey and Latvia (Alniacik et al., 2014).
- At least two out of the six most preferred attributes for the students from Australia, Norway, Turkey, and Latvia are Economic Value items. Only one item from Economic Value is among the most-preferred in the studies from Sri Lanka, Brazil, and the Czech Republic.
- The results show that the Application Value attributes appear in the survey outputs the least. This means that Application Value was the least-important attribute for all groups.

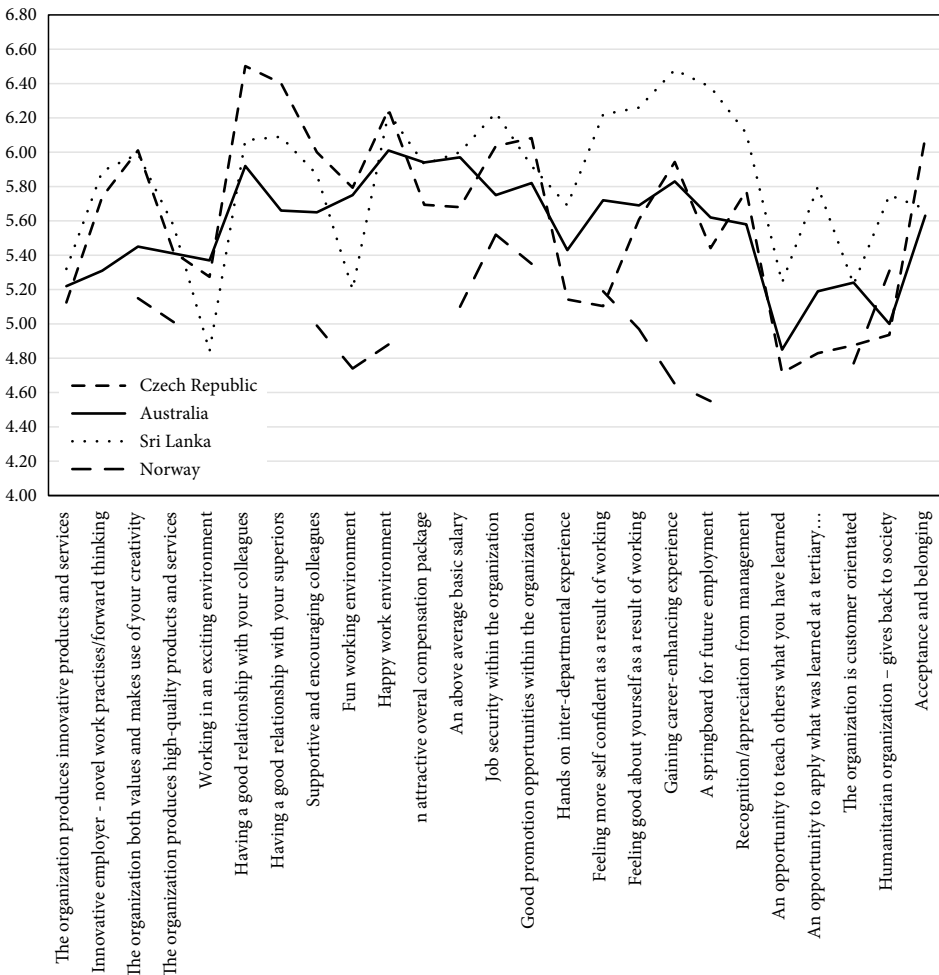


Figure 2. Differences in mean scores of employer attractiveness by nationality (source: own, 2018)
 Note: Research from Norway by Sivertzen et al. (2013) did not contain all the items from the study by Berthon et al. (2005).

This comparison contributes to the research on employer branding by identifying the attributes of employer attractiveness that potential employees value most. Table 7 shows that Economic Value and Social Value attributes are important for most groups.

Interest Value is a primarily symbolic attribute (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003) and concerns what an organization “is” (Srivastava & Bhatnagar, 2010); it might thus be most important for recruiting professionals from a group of job applicants (Reis & Braga, 2016). These factors are important for building a positive reputation, which will enhance intentions to apply for a job among potential employees, such as young people (Sivertzen et al., 2013).

Development Value is also an attractiveness factor that stands out. This attribute concerns whether an employer provides professional development and career growth opportunities. Development Value attributes were extremely important for students from Sri Lanka, Turkey, and Latvia. On the other hand, they were not among the preferred employer attributes for students from Norway or the Czech Republic.

Several partial conclusions can be drawn:

- The outputs of the six groups of respondents (see Table 8) show that, in the lower quartile, Application Value items appear most often. The Brazilian study is an exception; however, Reis and Braga (2016) narrowed the number of items to 20 from the original 25.
- Being innovative in terms of products and practices is of little importance for all groups of respondents, with the exception of those in Turkey.
- Brazilian respondents are again the exception, since two Economic Value items were among their least-preferred employer attributes. However, that study’s respondents did not consist exclusively of young people and students.

This comparison aimed to identify the employer attractiveness attributes prioritized by national groups of respondents examined in prior research. The findings provide insights that should help firms design employer brand strategies targeting people from different cultures and demographic contexts.

Conclusions

Discussion and implications

In the first stage, this study identified the attractiveness factors in employer branding and examined which ones (i.e. values) were important to business students in the Czech Republic. The study found that Czech business students from selected universities attached the highest importance to Social Value. Interest Value and Economy–Development Value were the second-most important. These factors are important for building a positive firm reputation, which will enhance intentions to apply among potential employees. Organizations searching for talented young people should build their recruitment strategy based on such evaluations. Our findings can be used to track the perceptions of current job applicants about the company and to appeal to “suitable target audiences” – potential employees. The results can be used by marketing and HR experts and practitioners in formulating and executing their communication and recruitment strategies.

Table 8. Least-preferred employer attributes (25 EmpAt items) (source: own, 2018)

Australia/2005	Sri Lanka/2011	Latvia/2014	Brazil/2016	Czech Rep./2017
Berthon et al.	Arachchige & Robertson	Alniacik et al.	Reis & Braga	Eger et al.
Opportunity to teach others what you have learned at university	Working in an exciting environment	The organization is customer-oriented	Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for the organization	Opportunity to teach others what you have learned at university
Humanitarian organization; gives back to society	Fun working environment	Working in an exciting environment	An attractive overall compensation package	Opportunity to apply what was learned at university
Opportunity to apply what was learned at university	The organization is customer-oriented	Opportunity to teach others what you have learned at university	Opportunity to apply what was learned at university	The organization is customer-oriented
The organization produces innovative products and services	Opportunity to teach others what you have learned at university	Hands-on interdepartmental experience	The organization produces innovative products and services	Humanitarian organization – gives back to society
The organization is customer-oriented	The organization produces innovative products and services	Hands-on interdepartmental experience	An above-average basic salary	Feeling more self-confident as a result of working for the organization
Innovative employer; new practices and ideas	The organization produces high-quality products and services	A fun working environment	Having a good relationship with your superiors	The organization produces innovative products and services

Legend:

Interest	Social	Application
Economic	Development	

The second stage of analysis examined the influence of gender on factor importance levels. A comparison between males and females indicated several differences. The females considered significantly more factors to be important, including Social Value, Application Value, Economic–Development Value, and Development–Application Value. Only Interest Value had the same perceived importance for males and females. The other studies described above did not examine gender differences. Our findings thus call for further research on employer attractiveness items and gender differences.

The influence of cultural and economic factors on the business students was observed when comparing the prior results. This stage of our study clarifies which factors influence the employment preferences of job applicants (business students) from the international point of view, which is a fundamental prerequisite for both recruitment strategies and the development of an employer brand. The findings shown in Tables 7 and 8 address the assumption made by Berthon et al. (2005), indicating that cultural differences in an organization have important implications for international brand building.

Our examination of attractiveness attributes contributes to the literature by providing a different viewpoint on gender difference. The survey on attractiveness examines the prioritization of attributes that are usually offered by employers and shows which ones are preferred by business students. Managing these attributes, which represent the values of the employer brand, contributes to employer branding and effective recruitment. In relation to managers and HR-practitioners the results of the present research indicate several suggestions. First, employer branding campaigns and recruiting should respect differences in factors importance among target groups from different countries and coming from different cultures. Results underline that for Czech business students attach the highest importance to Social Values. A deeper understanding of what factors influence the preferences of job applicants is a fundamental and necessary prerequisite for a recruitment strategy and for the development of an employer brand.

Limitations and issues for further research

This study has several limitations. First, its first and second stages are focused on the Czech Republic and on a population with a high education level. Moreover, the survey does not examine the phenomenon of employer attractiveness over time.

Second, final-semester business students from two Economics faculties were chosen as respondents for this study, as they are attractive in the labour market. Using students as respondents has both advantages and disadvantages; for instance, it can reduce the findings' external validity and generalizability (Berthon et al., 2005; Sivertzen et al., 2013). The sample represents students of the faculties of economics from the regions in the Czech Republic except Prague, as mentioned above. Generalizing these findings to students from other study programs could be misleading. On the other hand, almost all other studies (e.g. Arachchige & Robertson, 2011; Berthon et al., 2005; Sivertzen et al., 2013) have used the same kinds of participants (i.e. business students). Thus, our sample is homogenous and allows us to compare our results with those of the other studies. Such a comparison should assist in determining the most effective recruitment strategies for business students, a common recruitment target for organizations. The scope and depth of our discussion is compromised by being confined to the selected research surveys.

Third, the fact that the survey is answered by using self-reports by the respondents may be a limitation. However, research follows previously conducted studies which allows an above made international comparison.

Employer branding has become a widespread and growing practice in several studies mentioned earlier (Ahmad & Daud, 2016; Edwards, 2010; Reis & Braga, 2016). Our findings point to several possible directions for future research. We suggest conducting surveys focused on employer attractiveness in other countries, cultures, and socioeconomic conditions. Organizations in our increasingly globalised economy need to understand the impact of different cultures on the perceptions of potential employees, especially with regard to talent management (Collings & Mellahi, 2010; Egerová, Lančarič, Eger, & Savov, 2015; Schuler, Jackson, & Tarique, 2011). Moreover, future research should be focused not only on university students but also on other kinds of employees (e.g. Reis & Braga, 2016). As our study shows, it is also important to examine the influence of gender on the levels of importance attributed to the dimensions of employer branding.

Disclosure statement

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest. Specifically, there is no competing financial, professional, or personal interests from other parties.

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