

Employer branding: A pulling force of employee attraction?

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Abstract

Employer branding (EB) has been articulated as giving an identity to the company as an employer (Melin, 2005). Moreover, different researchers stress the vitalness of EB towards attracting, enticing and retaining workers (Tanwar and Prasad, 2016), especially due to the shortage of talent encountered by companies (Mosley, 2014). The main motivation for this study is to explore which employee factors are likely to attract candidates towards an employer and the extent that EB factors are selected over and above more common features like salary. Subsequently, the study focuses on one facet of EB, being the attraction factors luring candidates rather than those to retain the current workforce. This study also looks at EB in relation to other phenomena namely CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and recruitment.

The study presents two research designs. The first research question was analysed qualitatively using a Mentimeter as a rapid response system to elicit what is construed by EB and which attributes participants deem important in employment. Furthermore, to answer the second research question, the study adopted a quantitative approach by conducting a Vignette analysis. The vignettes reflect on different company scenarios, shared amongst respondents to determine the attractiveness of these employment features. Subsequently, the author discusses and gives recommendations based on the data collection acquired and the literature elicited to serve as insights to the reader.

From the data collected, this study gathered that people look for satisfaction, communication, working conditions, leadership, consistency, honesty and authenticity in employment which are all functional or psychological attributes.

However, the researcher added another vignette reflecting on wage to serve as a constant scenario which interestingly was rated higher than consistency.

Conclusively, the author believes that functional and psychological attributes must be given more importance in the employment package to enhance the company's competitive stance and make recruitment more efficient. Nonetheless, the author suggests that a balance must be found amongst these features and wage as although other attributes may be more attractive, wage was still a characteristic scored highly by participants.

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Abbreviation List

ACP - Anticipatory Psychological Contract

CSR – Corporate Social Responsibility

CV – Curriculum Vitae

EB – Employer Branding

EVM – Experimental Vignette Methodology

EVP - Employee Value Proposition

HR – Human Resources

HRM – Human Resources Management

SPSS - Statistical Package for Social Science

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Luring and retaining talent have become a dominant source of gaining competitive advantage especially after the shift from the industrial age to the information age (E.Alnaicik and U. Alnaicik, 2012). Employer branding, hereafter referred to as EB, is a relatively new concept. However, its practices have been adopted by different companies for quite some time now. Melin (2005) remarks that generally, this notion is described as giving an identity to the firm as an employer. Moreover, Aggerholm, Anderson and Thomsen (2011) articulated that employer brand management is recognised as an intrinsic part of the organisation's sustainable strategy. It has also been remarked that EB is a long-term solution aimed to resolve issues arising from shortage of talent which recruitment faces. As the latter mainly addresses the short-term solutions to this problem. The concept of EB suggests that, assisting recruitment with marketing initiatives is more likely to help organisations sustain a long-term relationship amongst their current and potential workers (Backhaus, 2016). Ultimately, the main aim shared by companies is to find and attract the best talent, hence, applicants who are motivated and professional in their work (Brown et al., 2003).

To be the best you must attract the best, therefore, impressions shared amongst the public regarding the prospective employer are critical (Gomes and Neves, 2011). In view of this, the purpose of this research is to remark which employees' attraction factors are deemed as most significant amongst participants, reflecting their importance on EB strategies implemented by companies.

1.1 Background of the research

Primarily, the concept of EB has been extracted from marketing and adopted by human resources practices (Edwards, 2009). As presented by Ambler and Barrow, EB emerged in 1996 defined as being the total package of functional, psychological and economic benefits provided by the company and identified with the same organisation. Drury (2016) further added that this calculates the firm's systems, values, policies and behaviours in order to pull, motivate and employ the employer's current and prospective workers. Although EB is referred to as the marketing within HR, these also differ in many ways. For instance, differences exist in the audience being targeted and in the different advertising content and channels. Particularly as EB focuses on telling the story of the company by noting the background, welfare, wage, training and development opportunities. Moreover, EB places its efforts in building a soft environment and not solely focused on the external image (Chunping and Xi, 2011).

Through EB evolution, companies have increased the adoption of EB strategies. Literature articulates that people are no longer seeking work, but they are looking for an employer, one who supports their development (Chunping and Xi, 2011). Additionally, the efforts of EB enable companies to compete for talent which according to research, organisations made up of the best talent succeed (ManpowerGroup, 2015). This rapid increase has been mainly since companies are operating in a labour market and the power is held by the employees or jobseekers themselves (Kirk, 2018). Consequently, organisations prioritise EB for recruitment purposes due to the shortage of talent faced (Mosley, 2014). Additionally, by motivating and enticing their employees to improve the quality of service delivered, companies can minimise costs and improve productivity (Chunping and Xi, 2011).

Conclusively, research mentioned in this section notes how significant EB is to many companies. Therefore, the rationale of this current study is to analyse the participants opinions and perceptions of this concept.

1.2 Background of the problem

The purpose of EB is to attract, engage and retain employees (Sokro, 2012) through communication targeting jobseekers (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Botha et al., 2011). Consequently, firms need to precisely examine the positive factors which are affecting the decisions made by candidates regarding job choices (Saini, Gopal and Kumari, 2015). Moreover, EB cannot be static and companies would be wrong to expect that once implemented EB will strive on its own. On the contrary, it needs constant feedback from employees by informing themselves through job satisfaction surveys, indices of loyalty and employee turnover whilst gaining feedback during the recruitment process (Chunping and Xi, 2011). This can be done by noticing the level of applications coming in and viewing their perception of the company and what made them apply for the specific role.

Literature focused on EB has brought a comprehensive image of this phenomenon and introduced many different concepts (Theurer et al, 2018). However, the field of EB still suffers from gaps in knowledge which makes the field worthwhile to investigate further (Babikova and Bucek, 2019).

1.3 Aim of the study

The purpose of this study is being proposed after the increase in importance highlighting the concept of EB amongst HR practices. The researcher aims to explore whether the literature articulated in chapter 2 and 3 regarding this concept corresponds with views gathered from participants. In addition, the study seeks to analyse which employee factors are likely to pull potential employees towards a typical organisation and the extent that EB factors are selected over and above more common features like salary.

It is right to note that this study will restrict itself by focusing on one facet of EB, namely the attraction factors rather than the factors that retain *current* employees.

1.4 Structure of the study

The structure of this dissertation is presented in six different chapters. This chapter presented the introduction to the study by highlighting the background of EB and presenting aims of the research whilst chapter 2 and 3 evaluates the academic literature revolving around EB in relation to the pull (attraction) factors. Chapter 4 discusses the method, measures, participants and procedures chosen to acquire the primary data. Chapter 5 presents a summary of the information collected and analyses done to discuss these findings. Subsequently, chapter 6 brings the dissertation to an end by concluding on the findings obtained via data collection and literature and provide discussions and recommendations for future research.

1.5 Summary

This chapter presented the overall purpose of this investigation. In the next chapter the focus will revolve around the concept of EB by analysing in further detail the introduction of this phenomenon, its revolution, why it has grown in significance and what research professionals think of this HR strategy.

Chapter 2 – Interpreting Employer Branding

2.1 Introduction

For this study, the researcher will present two sections within the literature review to tackle the two main research questions. Primarily, the initial literature review will investigate the concept of ‘Corporate Social Responsibility’, (hereafter referred to as CSR) and characteristics which make EB successful. Moreover, the researcher aims to explore the link between EB and Human Resources (hereafter referred to as HR) practices, specifically recruitment.

2.2 Corporate Social Responsibility as a wider context to EB

CSR has enhanced in its prominence and is considered as a strategy to create branding, a dominant competitive stance and building awareness towards environmental issues and inequality in the labour force (Bhattacharya, Sen and Korschun, 2011). Aguinis (2011) explained this term as relating to actions and policies adopted by companies based on the different contexts which are developed depending on the stakeholders’ expectations and economic, social and environmental performance of that same company. The stakeholders can be different entities such as clients and suppliers or individuals including employees, managers, regulators and investors to name some (Sarvaiya, Arrowsmith and Eweje, 2019).

Moreover, CSR can be divided into external and internal dimensions. The former includes strategies and initiatives to target ‘non-workers’ such as potential jobseekers, prospective investors and clients which normally include environmental, social or charitable initiatives (Brammer, Millington and Rayton, 2007). On the other hand, internal CSR tackles socially responsible campaigns towards the current workforce (Mory, Wirtz and Gottel, 2016).

Globally, companies have become more aware of the need to attract, recruit and retain talented workers to enhance the organisation's performance (Hinson, Agbleze and Kuada, 2018). As early as 1992, Judge and Bretz had already argued that if the workers and the company's values complement one another, then that is an indication of a flourishing job placement. Researchers articulated that prospective workers may not be solely interested in financial benefits but also in emotional and psychological attributes. Therefore, organisations are projecting a shifting focus from monetary incentives to other factors such as company culture, values, reputation and image amongst other factors to attract qualified personnel (Hinson, Agbleze and Kuada, 2018).

Furthermore, research shows that CSR aids in financial contribution towards the company (Lin et al., 2009; Surroca et al., 2010; Oyewumi et al., 2018; Lin et al., 2019; Jang et al., 2019; Bhattacharyya and Rahman, 2019; Chahine, et al., 2019; Kao et al., 2018). As the topic has increased in interest, workers are expecting their employers to implement CSR projects and consequently, businesses are pressured to perform better in this respect (Hsu and Chen, 2019). Interestingly, KPMG (2017) tracked CSR reports issued by larger companies over the years and found that three quarters of these were doing so. This is a high number considering that in 1993, only 12% of the companies were doing CSR. Conclusively, there is a growing academic interest in exploring the relation between CSR and Human Resources Management (HRM) in companies (Sarvaiya and Eweje, 2019).

2.3 Employer branding: a review of definitions

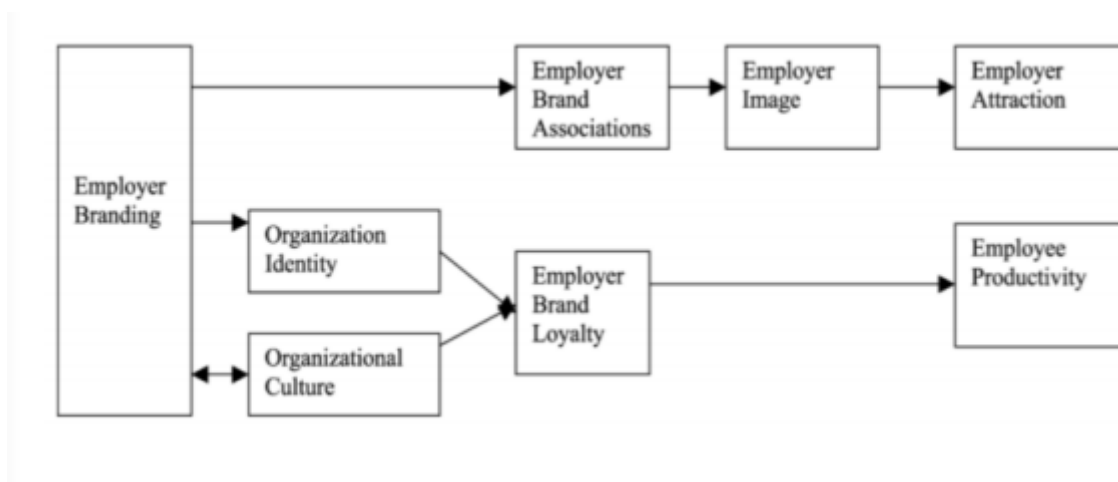
As noted in the above sections by different researchers, studies stress the importance EB has in attracting, motivating and retaining employees and gaining an increase in productivity (Tanwar and Prasad, 2016). Originally, this phenomenon was developed by Ambler and Barrow (1996) to stress the fact that companies should become more people oriented. Backhaus, Tikoo and Cheng (2014) stated that evolving one's EB gives companies an opportunity to create a unique identity which differs from their competitors.

Nonetheless, it is not sufficient for a company to focus solely on the functional attributes such as remuneration, location and job description. On the contrary, to build a strong EB, organisations must differentiate themselves by focusing on the psychological advantages through emphasising the core values of the brand (Lievens and Highhouse 2003; Näppä, Farshid, and Foster 2014; Sivertzen, Nilsen and Olafsen 2013). Furthermore, the company's employer brand personality is a critical component of the brand's identity which employees perceive to be part of the brand image (Kissel and Büttgen, 2015) all of which are critical assets to a powerful EB (Lievens and Slaughter, 2016). According to CIPD (2007) the phenomenon has increased in prominence lately due to the; power of the brand, employee engagement, credibility and strength of the market conditions.

Initially, branding was associated with products. However, this had then expanded its routes to HRM too (Ruchika and Prasad, 2017). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) remarked that EB is constructed off two main assets namely, brand association and brand loyalty, as shown in figure 1 below. The framework explains that through EB, the company can portray itself to the applicants and create an employer image which aids the company into increasing its employer attraction. Subsequently, EB helps promote the organisation's identity and the culture.

In return, these will help employees be more loyal to the company and enhance productivity. Conclusively, to get the most out of their EB strategies, companies need to grow their employee value proposition (EVP) (Jonze and Oster, 2013) especially due to the excessive competition within the labour market to attract and retain talent which has encouraged companies to actively improve their EB strategies (Tanwar and Prasad, 2017).

Figure 1 - Employer Branding Framework



Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004 p.505

2.4 The purpose of building an Employer Brand

The importance of EB has heightened due to the increased demand for knowledgeable and competent workers which is leading companies wanting to differentiate themselves from their competitors to gain talent (Ruchika and Prasad, 2017). In fact, Aggerholm, Andersen and Thomson (2011) suggested that EB management is becoming highly recognised as an intrinsic part of the company's sustainable strategy.

If developed well, EB is fruitful to companies as its efforts impact the decisions made by jobseekers prior to applying for roles. Therefore, during the decision-making process, the image of the organisation as an employer plays a vital role (Ruchika and Prasad, 2017).

These researchers also note that potential workers form a mental image of the organisation referred to as Anticipatory Psychological Contract (ACP). This represents the relationship, understanding and trust built between an individual and/or several workers. The ACP may be built through branding initiatives, word of mouth and through other information sources such as social media. Resultantly, EB helps the company understand the expectations of the employees to attract the right candidate (Ruchika and Prasad, 2017). Moreover, as minimal information about the labour market is found, jobseekers make use of signals to construct a perception of an employer (Biswas and Suar, 2018).

Losing experienced and skilled employees results in a loss of intellectual capital and reduces the company's ability to compete (Maheshwari, Gunesh, Lodorfos and Konstantopoulou, 2017). Notably, as the economy is still recovering from years of weak and suppressed growth this has led to employee turnover which thereby enhanced employers' concerns regarding talent shortage and retention (Cascio, 2014). In conclusion, EB principles need to be based on three criteria namely, consistency with company's realities, differentiation from competitors and attracting the targeted jobseekers (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Maxwell and Knox, 2009).

2.5 The relationship between Employer Brand, Human Resources and Recruitment

The connection between HR and EB is found in the attraction and recruitment of prospective employees which are considered as main HR practices (Moroko and Uncles, 2008). The HR function can be defined as the strategic cohesive outlook of employment, development and well-being of the workers in companies (Armstrong, 2012).

Multiple factors have soared competition and led to more efforts made by companies to recruit and retain the best talent such as; changing patterns in generations, change in culture and societies which have become more technological, shortage of workers, global competition for talent and people being more flexible and eager to changing their careers (Rampl, 2014; Rampl and Kenning, 2014; Backhaus, 2016; Bellou et al., 2015).

EB has been recognised as a strong asset for recruitment purposes especially when attracting jobseekers (Santiago, 2018). It is remarked that this can enhance the quality in the service delivery to the customers (Dhar, 2015; Wu et al., 2015). Correspondingly, Figurska and Matuska (2013) depicted some external EB benefits such as increased candidates applying for jobs, minimise recruitment costs, enticing the proper jobseekers whose competencies fit the role and easier connection with candidates. It is advised that recruitment processes are succinct and HR personnel develop an employee-centric dialogue with the prospective workers about the company's EB (ManpowerGroup, 2015). These may do so by noting the organisational culture and limit differing opinions (ManpowerGroup, 2015). Moreover, improper management of EB may lessen organisational brand progress (ManpowerGroup, 2015).

As expressed by Punjaisri and Wilson (2017) employees hold a vital part in shaping the company's corporate marketing and branding processes. Having employees who are not aware of how the brand knowledge is communicated externally, makes them unable to behave in a way the company wishes. Resultantly, companies are using EB strategies to attain new jobseekers and harmoniously, include their current workforce in shaping the company's culture and strategy (Rampl, 2014).

One must also keep in mind the different working generations and their preferences in the workplace environment, their work goals and how the companies can meet these wishes and desires (Maier et al, 2015). Furthermore, linking these ideas to CSR, the younger generations are more interested in having their employers participate in charitable events and empathise towards employers who place importance on the social value rather than the shared value only (Santiago, 2018).

Finally, HR sets to develop EB to communicate this with jobseekers by promoting their company culture and values, as well as portraying their message of a ‘great place to work’ (Armstrong, 2006; Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Dell, 2001; Kirk, 2018).

2.6 Characteristics of successful Employer Branding

Embedding EB in the minds of the current and prospective employees or shareholders is not easily achieved (Otken and Okan, 2016). It moves beyond the design sophistication of the premises, how well the website is presented or how nicely the offices are furnished. On the contrary, it is much more complex as it considers HR practices, communication, marketing and branding (Otken and Okan, 2016). Successful EB is not based on the company’s logo or adverts, oppositely, it focuses on the relationship between the business and the recruits (Otken and Okan, 2016).

As articulated in the next paragraph, the dissertation will analyse the organisation attractiveness and accuracy as two main aspects which contribute to EB successfulness.

2.6.1 Employer branding: Organisational attractiveness

Organisational attractiveness can be depicted by the ability of EB to attract future jobseekers as the company is able to position itself in the mind of the applicants (Santiago, 2018). The stronger the attractiveness of EB, the more powerful is the perceived EB value in the applicants perception (Santiago, 2018). Organisational attractiveness as defined by Berthon et al., (2005) encompasses the perceived benefits that a prospective candidate evaluates when being employed with a company. Therefore, this can only be achieved successfully once the company has understood the elements which contribute towards employer attractiveness (Berthon, Ewing and Hah, 2015). Jiang and Iles (2011) remarked that EB can be considered as a 'power' that attracts jobseekers towards the company and encourages current workers to remain loyal to the organisation. Researchers note that some factors of employer attractiveness may be inclusive of compensation, career development, job role and corporate culture which should be communicated well through EB to help companies achieve the 'employer of choice' title (Chhabra and Sharma, 2014).

Studies indicate that companies have always been attentive on their image as an employer in the minds of the potential workers, from the attainment, employment and retention strategies portrayed through EB (Dabirian et al., 2017). It may be argued that some dimensions of organisational attractiveness such as stability, work-life balance and work security are suggested as key elements of EB construed on employers' and potential workers' perception of organisational attractiveness (Jain and Bhatt, 2015). In fact, literature notes that HR professionals have made use of EB to increase the company's employment package (Barad, 2012; Minchington, 2015).

Nevertheless, research still shows that EB strategies are mostly in their immaturity stages (Balan, 2013). This may be because, as Minchington (2015) remarked, companies view this phenomenon as project-based or causing unnecessary administrative load, instead of depicting it as an investment for talent management. Moreover, these are uncertain about the return on investment from such initiatives. This dissertation aims to shed light on this problem to show companies what participants understand by EB and which factors they deem most important.

2.6.2 Employer branding: Organisational accuracy

The perception of what makes an EB successful or not has not been empirically studied which resulted in a great gap in one's comprehension of EB (Moroko and Uncles, 2008). A way to address this would be to test whether the attributes of corporate or customer brands are alike those of EB (Moroko and Uncles, 2008). In addition, all brands need to be included in the company's strategy as these all impact one another. Moreover, the quintessence of the company and customer brand needs to be considered in EB to guarantee consistency in the delivery on the portfolio of brand promises (Barrow and Mosley, 2005; Fraser, 2009; McKinsey, 2005; Minchington, 2010). In fact, research notes that companies with high employment offerings are those whose employer brand complements their customer and corporate brand(s) (Fraser, 2009; Minchington, 2010).

However, there is a risk that the information gathered by jobseekers from popular perception such as peers and word of mouth from current employees creates inconsistency in brand messages (Harris and Short, 2013). Literature noted that less experienced employees are more likely to lean towards companies who have a strong corporate brand which will complement their Curriculum Vitae (CV) (Harris and Short, 2013).

Therefore, highlighting the need for companies to share appropriate brand messages to the labour market and furthermore, communicate specific information which may be more persuasive than general data (Fyock 1993; Huang et al. 2011; Wilden et al. 2010).

Moreover, a disconnection is evident between what employees' value in a company and what employers perceive as important (Harris and Short, 2013). Chandler McLeod (2007) articulated that in a study conducted amongst job seekers and HR professionals in Australia, differences between what these two different bodies wanted was significant. In fact, employers ranked company brand, challenging and engaging work and powerful company values significantly higher than jobseekers did. On the contrary, employees perceived a positive working environment, good salary, performance bonuses and recognition, fair pay for a fair day's work and friendly management more important than employers did.

To conclude, EB is helpful in positioning companies in the mind of their customers and jobseekers. However, to be done successfully, it is imperative that the communicated corporate image corresponds to the organisational reality. This can be accomplished by aligning the values and mission of the company with the desired brand image (Harris and Short, 2013).

2.7 Research Question 1

In light of this study, reflecting on the above literature, the researcher is proposing to initially answer the first research question, noted below as;

'How is 'employer branding' construed?'

To tackle this question, the study aims to base its results on existing literature portrayed in this section and as seen in Chapter 6, compare these views with those shared by participants from the first data collection phase.

2.8 Summary

Conclusively, the first part of the literature review aimed to obtain a comprehensive view on what different researchers elicit regarding the concept of EB. The paper has so far gathered views on EB including its successful characteristics and recruitment to serve as basis for further discussion in Chapter 6.

Chapter 3 – Analysing Employment Features

3.1 Introduction

In the second part of the literature review, the writer will evaluate research concerning employer brand image and brand association including the impact on recruitment. In addition, the signalling theory and how to communicate a desirable employer brand image will be discussed. Lastly, the researcher will note how employees react to EB and some challenges faced. Furthermore, such points will contribute towards obtaining a response to the second research question articulated at the end of this chapter.

3.2 Employer brand image and brand association

Due to the increase in competition, to attract, motivate and retain their talented workers, companies strive towards becoming an employer of choice. Meaning that, highly skilled and competent candidates seek employment with these companies due to the reputation held in terms of company culture and HR practices (Sutherland, Torricelli and Karg, 2002). Scholars note that without a good employer image, candidates might be uninterested in the company and hence, not apply for a position (Chapman et al., 2005).

Besides attracting candidates, companies need to assess whether the applicants fit within the company culture and if a job- fit connection is portrayed (Marriott, 2001). As articulated by Valentine (2000) this helps success in recruitment. In addition, age and other demographic variables also show significant roles in value preferences (Gursoy, Chi and Karadag, 2013). Interestingly, Van Mossevelde (2010) stated that organisations with a strong employer brand attract more applicants even if the pay is lower than other companies whose EB is weaker.

Moreover, Tanwar and Prasad (2016) mentioned that EB efforts help lower turnover amongst workers. On the contrary Kashyab and Rangnekar (2016) in a study conducted noted that employer brand perception and trust in leaders were negatively associated with turnover intentions.

It is important to clarify employer image and employer reputation as although these terms are related to one another, they are distinct (Williamson, King, Lepak and Sarma, 2010). The company's reputation is concluded from multiple images of the firm shared by all members of that firm (Barnett, Jermier and Lafferty, 2006; Fombrun and Van Riel, 1997; Highhouse, Brooks and Greguras, 2009) and the judgement of the company based on financial, social and environmental impacts (Barnett et al., 2006). Contrastingly, employer image is one perception of the company held by one person (Steiner and Bryne, 2019). In addition, a company has one reputation but individuals can have multiple types of image perception based on the relationship or interest they have within the company (Highhouse et al., 2009, Treadwell and Harrison, 1994).

Collins and Stevens (2002) noted that brand associations include attitudes and perceived attributes. Attitudes are defined as the positive feelings that candidates or potential workers hold towards a company. On the other hand, perceived attributes are the jobseekers' opinion regarding work and the environment of that company. Similarly, employer brand image and association can be better yet referred to as employer brand personality.

3.3 Employer brand personality

This term reflects a set of attributes that are linked to a company (Slaughter et al., 2004) which concern the people's perception of the company's subjective traits (Lievens and Slaughter, 2016). The latter are alike to people's personality traits, hence the term used (Slaughter et al., 2004). Lievens and Slaughter (2016) express that employer brand personality allows candidates to experience what working with the company is like.

Scholars suggested that competence and warmth are vital in different areas such as stereotyping, leadership styles, automatic evaluation of faces and consumer behaviour (Cuddy et al., 2011). In fact, when customers judge a brand, they make conclusions about competency and how welcoming the brand is, which affects brand loyalty and purchase intention (Aaker, Vohs and Mogilner, 2010; Cuddy, Fiske and Glick, 2007; Kervyn, Fiske and Malone, 2012). Similarly, candidates develop beliefs on the employer's warmth and competence (Carpentier, Van Hoje and Weijters, 2019). During interviews, candidates' conclusions on the recruiter warmth and competence impacts their perception of the hiring company (Schreurs et al, 2005; Uggerslev et al., 2012). Furthermore, some elements used in prior research to note the company's personality perceptions are either related to warmth; such as sincerity and cheerfulness or to competence such as; prestige (Cable and Yu, 2006; Lievens and Highhouse, 2003; Lievens, Van Hoye and Schruers, 2005).

Conclusively, people relate warm companies as being friendly, have high morals and positive intentions towards their employees, clients and shareholders (Fiske, Cuddy and Glick, 2007; Kervyn, Chang, Malone, Korpusik and Ybarra, 2014; Maehle, Otnes and Supphellen, 2011).

Contrastingly, a competent organisation is considered as being intelligent, respected, efficient and known for reaching its goals (Fiske et al., 2007; Fiske et al., 2002, Highhouse, Lievens and Sinar, 2003). Consequently, the impact that EB has on recruitment will be further explored in the following section.

3.4 Employer brand and its impact on recruitment

Although varied in different countries, employment levels in most developed economies are very high and the competition for competent and skilled employees is fierce (Wilden, Gudergan and Lings, 2010). Increased competition within the labour market demonstrates that the number of candidates applying for a post decreases. Therefore, companies need to strategise their operations to ensure that the HR function can combat these challenges (Wilden, Gudergan and Lings, 2010).

In the previous chapter, Melin (2005) elicited EB as being the identity of the firm as an employer. However, as further elaborated by Bondarouk, Ruel, Axinia and Arama, (2014) EB is a long-term strategy of the firm, which acknowledges the perceptions of potential and current workers, to ultimately acquire a competitive stance when building a sensible brand identity. Ultimately, EB helps HR to design and portray the organisation's message to positively impact the candidates (Intindola, Lewis, Flinchaugh and Rogers, 2017). In fact, literature suggests that firms who have a strong brand are judged more positively by jobseekers (Elving, Westhoff, Meeusen and Schoonderbeek, 2013).

3.4.1 Relevance of the early stages of recruitment

It is of high importance that during the initial stages of recruitment, companies must provide the correct information to the candidates to persuade them to keep the firm in their list of potential employers (Chapman et al., 2005). Upon this stage, basing the decision on the information made available, candidates will narrow down this list (Allen et al., 2007).

Therefore, the information provided firstly is extremely important (Van Hove and Lievens, 2009) because, if the candidates do not apply, the company cannot reach these candidates through recruitment activities at a later stage (Hoppe, 2019). Scholars suggest that many perceive the company's website as a comfortable tool used to access information (Williamson et al., 2010). In fact, it has been researched that social media is being incorporated in EB especially for recruitment and organisations are investing more in building their social media presence through platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn (Davison, Maraist and Bing, 2011; Sivertzen, Nilsen and Olafsen, 2013). Subsequently, this will be explored more thoroughly in the below section.

3.4.2 Branding via E-HRM (Human Resources Management) platforms

As a result of the introduction of Internet Technology, recruitment methods have been altered and so have the efforts to influence the candidate's perception of the employer (Bondarouk et al., 2014). In fact, companies are utilising more online platforms such as job-boards, social media websites and corporate recruitment sites for recruitment purposes (Allen, Mahto and Otondo, 2007).

Moreover, online recruitment and companies' websites especially have become the dominant source of familiarity and image (Allen et al., 2007). Whilst prior research focused on the aesthetics and usability of the website (Cober et al., 2003; Williamson, King, Lepak and Sarma, 2010), research has now been extended to evaluate their effects on jobseekers perception of the company, such as the person-job fit (Chen, Lin and Chen, 2012; Greogry, Meade and Thompson, 2013; Lyons and Marler, 2011).

In addition to websites, companies are also incorporating other types of online portals, specifically, social media platforms to attract candidates (Intindola, Lewis, Flinchaugh and Rogers, 2017). Taking Facebook as an example, such platform offers various benefits to recruitment. Firstly, through the Facebook newsfeed, candidates can follow the company profile and see updates shared. Secondly, jobseekers can refer a friend to a company by sharing the company's post via Facebook. Lastly, every time one of the firm's 'followers' makes a new 'friend', the company's network of future prospective applicants increases (Caers and Castelyns, 2010). Therefore, companies not making use of social media platforms for recruitment purposes are now considering the resources needed to start doing so (Bondarouk and Olivás- Lujan, 2013).

To date, there is minimal research noting the effects social media has on recruitment, therefore, it is not very indicative if money spent on social media is a good investment (Carpentier, Van Hoye and Weijters, 2019). Nonetheless, observable evidence here portrays that the candidate's perception on a company can be influenced by the information accessible on social media about the employer (Frasca and Edwards, 2017). Supporting these views, Sivertzen et al., (2013) articulated that individuals who had read information about an employer on social media had a more positive perception of the organisations' reputation.

In addition, Kissel and Buttgen (2015) noted that the information made available on social media about a company was positively associated with perception of the brand image, which positively relates with employer attractiveness.

Therefore, literature to date suggests that displaying organisations' information online can have a positive impact on the company's reputation, brand image, employer image and employer attractiveness (Carpentier, Van Hoyer and Weijters, 2019). Nonetheless, not much research explains what makes social media platforms effective (Carpentier, Van Hoyer and Weijters, 2019).

In conclusion, when evaluating recruitment, Chapman et al., (2005) noted that within job-organisation features, the company image, and the job type are the strongest forecasts of work pursuit intentions. Therefore, companies should find ways to better their image (Hoppe, 2019).

This is especially important as although the company may be aware of its qualities, jobseekers have little information which lead to unbalanced or skewed information (Hoppe, 2019). In fact, the signalling theory (Spence, 1973) which will be discussed in the section to follow, imply that prospective workers have limited information available but they will use that information to deduce employer features (Connelly et al., 2011)

3.5 Brand equity and signalling theory

How a company attempts to recruit candidates is like how the firm tries to attract clients to buy its products and services (Cable and Turban, 2001). Research on brand equity from marketing can be used to understand how applicants develop perceptions about employers (Cable and Turban 2001; Collins and Stevens, 2002).

As noted in the previous section, recruitment literature so far has concentrated on candidate's reactions to roles and recruitment practices (Katiyar and Saini, 2016).

Based on the customer-brand equity (Keller, 1993) concept, Cable and Turban (2001) suggested three features of employer brand equity which are employer familiarity, reputation and image. The former reflects on the candidates' awareness about the company as a potential employer, which research shows that candidates perceive familiar companies better than others (Gatewood, Gowan and Lautenschlager, 1993). Moreover, how candidates and the public in general perceive the organisation is considered as the employer's reputation. Contrarily, the employer image is the prospective workers beliefs about the characteristics and associations related to the company as an employer (Banerjee, Saini and Kalyanaram, 2018).

Alike to the brand knowledge of customers, employer knowledge features are more likely to increase the chances that the company will be considered in the final decision phase of the candidates when they are evaluating job opportunities (Collins 2007; Collins and Stevens, 2002).

Research implies that the signalling theory (Spence, 1973) is the most fitting theoretical framework in studying the behaviours of candidates (Wallace, Lings and Cameron, 2012) as their decisions are mainly focused on signals obtained from different sources. This theory proposes that jobseekers use cues such as brands to develop their judgments of quality to avoid making the wrong decision (Banerjee, Saini and Kalyanaram, 2018). Therefore, this theory is very fitting as it is used when researching job-search behaviour of candidates as these do not have all the information about a company. Thus, employment decisions are uncertain and jobseekers dedicate a lot of time to analyse the potential employers based on the accessible information. In return, companies communicate signals through EB as an effort to gain an advantage over competitors (Wallace, Lings and Cameron, 2012).

Lievens and Highhouse, (2003) noted two categories of perceived attributes of employers; instrumental and symbolic dimensions. Instrumental dimensions are perceptions of functional attributes such as location and salary. Following, symbolic dimensions are intangible characteristics such as competence, sincerity and prestige. It is researched that companies can differentiate better from their competitors by symbolic characteristics; however, jobseekers are still influenced by both types of characteristics (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003).

Nonetheless, recruitment sources can differ as to how they can be used to examine each type of attribute. Job vacancy and website are better used to assess instrumental characteristics whereas social media can be used to obtain symbolic attributes (Carpentier, Van Hoje and Weijters, 2019).

Subsequently, the study will explore which attributes are to be communicated by companies to create a desirable brand image to gain a competitive stance.

3.6 Communicating a desirable Employer Brand Image

Attaining employees has become highly challenging during the past years (Hoppe, 2019). Rynes and Cable (2003) articulated that candidates are as focused in choosing a company which is fitting to work in as much as they are concerned about choosing employment which they can perform well in. Consequently, it is imperative for companies to develop an HR strategy to differentiate themselves from competitors to attract a competent talent pool (Bhatnagar and Srivastava, 2008).

Besides the importance of communicating a good employer brand image, research also note methods how this can be achieved. Upon their study, Cable and Yu (2006) analysed different recruitment methods namely, websites, career fairs and bulletin boards.

They concluded that media richness perceptions are positively related to how a company portrays its image and how the candidates evaluate that image (Hoppe, 2019).

Additionally, Baum and Kabst (2014) reflected that websites are better predictors of an organisation's familiarity, reputation and job information when compared to printed advertisement. Furthermore, Sottoli and Wanous (2002) mentioned that employees attained via referrals, re-hires or through internal vacancies, perform higher and have lower turnover. This point suggests a good employer brand image should be well portrayed both internally and externally.

Conclusively, Chapman et al., (2005) depicted that the type of job and the company's image are the most dominant signs of work pursuit intentions. Therefore, companies should be focused on increasing their employer image (Hoppe, 2019).

3.7 Employees response to EB

Focusing on EB from an external perspective, most of the research revolves around employers of choice targeting prospective workers (Love and Singh, 2011; Elving, Westhoff, Meeusen and Schoonderbeek, 2013). Some literature suggests that it is the company's characteristics such as the firm's attractiveness, remuneration package, relationship, career progression, recognition and brand image which have a great impact on a company when being considered as an employer of choice from both the current and prospective workers (Bellou, Chaniotakis, Kehagias and Rigopoulou, 2015). In fact, the company's image does not solely affect prospective investors but also employees (Maurya and Agarwal 2018).

Additionally, research notes that internal relationships, interactions and functions are highly important to increase positive beliefs of workers and entices them to work more effectively and profitably on company's projects (Ahmed and Rafiq, 2003; Saleem and Iglesias, 2016). Moreover, literature examines that strong EB lures more competent candidates (Collins and Stevens, 2002) and sets their expectations about employment (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003).

On the contrary, minimal studies have been conducted on how EB practices within the current workforce influence the company's outcome, which suggests a gap in literature (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). Especially due to the remaining unresolved questions such as whether EB lowers turnover, or if EB changes employees work behaviour, is satisfaction higher or is productivity better? These questions make this topic worth exploring (Kashyap and Ragnekar, 2016).

Nonetheless, Kucherov and Zavyalova (2012) indicated that organisations with dominant EB are advantaged over companies without. Studies also shows that companies with a good employer brand have higher retention rates and have more HR investments placed in activities for employees. In such companies, workers have a bigger say in decision taking. Conclusively, a dominant employer brand image predicts company's outcomes such as on worker's satisfaction, commitment and retention (Priyadarshi, 2011). Overall, when companies are innovative, an increase in the worker's trust in their management is shown (Whitener, 1997). Additionally, this means the employees' willingness to remain within the company increases if they feel proud of their employment (Jiang and Illes, 2011).

Conclusively, from the literature articulated in this section, it is suggested that good EB can have positive implications on the workers, however, more extensive research is needed. These interesting viewpoints will be examined in the data collection phase and the results will be summarised in Chapter 5.

3.8 Challenges of EB

As with any other research area, EB has its imperfections and weaknesses (Edwards, 2013). Firstly, there are differences in debates regarding EB specifically in the identifier, process and development of EB (Davies, 2008; Moroko and Uncles, 2008).

Secondly, many concepts especially EB, employer name, image and employer brand equity amongst other approaches differ in description and implementation (Edwards and Edwards, 2013; King and Grace, 2008; Lievens and Slaughter, 2016; Saleem and Iglesias, 2016). Additionally, EB research has been conducted in other similar areas which makes it more challenging to distinguish (Berthon, Ewing and Hah, 2005; Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin and Jones, 2005). Another weakness is the lack of global conformity with the selected segment of EB. Even though most research papers outline a focus on prospective and current HR, the majority focuses solely on recruitment (Lane, 2016).

In addition, despite the increase in interest, there is still a high level of ambiguity revolving around EB and what it entails especially within the HR function as it has the potential to cover many aspects such as recruitment, training and performance management (Edwards, 2013).

3.9 Other employee attraction factors

From an external point of view EB helps attain more competent applicants and is thus, an important asset for companies to acquire talented workers (Ewing et al., 2002; Edwards, 2009). Collins and Stevens (2002) examined students to determine which companies they favoured and their intention in applying for work with such organisations. It was depicted that participants preferred employers who had previously sponsored events at their school and companies with a strong corporate presence.

Additionally, Collins and Han (2004) remarked that the number of candidates applying for a post is highly related to the level of advertising, especially if this includes promotions for recruitment.

Initially, Ambler and Barrow (1996) had divided EB into economic, functional and psychological aspects. The former includes the financial package, salary and other payments given by the company, whereas functional benefits include opportunities such as career growth and other activities made available by the company. The psychological aspects refer to workers' perception of the job such as sense of fitting in, adaptability and purpose. Subsequently, for knowledgeable employees, the attributes which determine their loyalty to the company are; company development opportunities, a challenging work environment, training and potential career growth, pay based on work performance and profit-sharing (Sutherland et al., 2002).

Sharing similar views, Freeman (2002) had interviewed British college students and depicted eighty-four similar characteristics out of which twenty were deemed as most important. These included training for workers and potential growth, high starting wages, friendly culture and a good reputation amongst other features.

Lastly, Black, Mahnohar and Stehli (2013) noted that 80% of employees are interested in four categories of attributes relating to the leader, the organisation, the work itself and the rewards. Additionally, Annapoorna (2015) conducted a study in Turkey which found that good wages, popularity of the company, career development, supportive work environment, appreciation for work done and work-life balance present an attractive employer brand. Moreover, with regards to well- educated managers, Saurombe, Barkhuizen and Schutte (2017) noted that attributes such as reputation and image, culture and identity, strategic vision, CSR and environment are dominant in identifying an attractive employer brand.

Therefore, analysing employee attraction factors is important for companies as these can examine the perceptions of candidates to identify gaps for improvement and establish strong attraction and retention strategies (Tanwar and Prasad, 2017).

3.10 Research Question 2

Reflecting on the above literature, the researcher is proposing to analyse the second research question noted below as;

How does the ranking of the analysed employee attraction factors reflect as employer branding?

Through this research question, the study aims to examine which attributes are deemed most important which in return, reflect the importance needed to be placed on EB strategies when adopted by companies. For this to be achieved, the researcher will combine the views shared by researchers with those of the participants acquired in the data collection. The analysis may be found in Chapter 6.

3.11 Summary

In conclusion, the second part of the literature review aimed to gain a deeper understanding on what literature suggests regarding EB. In this section, the researcher explored how employer brand image and EB effects recruitment while noting the social media aspect of this. Additionally, this chapter covers employees' reactions to EB and how this can be communicated to employees to create a desirable stance. Furthermore, other employee attraction factors and some challenges and weaknesses of EB were expressed.

Chapter 4 – The Method

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the method undertaken in the data collection phases to acquire the needed information to answer both research questions. As explored in Chapter 1 and in the sections further below, this study had two research questions which required different research strategies. Therefore, the study adopted a mixed-method approach. Mixed-method research has been welcomed as a response to the ongoing, never ending, unfruitful debates revolving around the benefits and limitations of quantitative against qualitative research, referred to as the paradigm ‘war’ (Feilzer, 2009). One of the orderly sequences of this approach is starting a research with a qualitative approach to gain knowledge and further explore with quantitative methods (Agerfalk, 2013). In fact, complementarity is one of the main reasons mixed methodology is touted as important (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Venkatesh et al, 2013). Therefore, this approach was perceived as being fruitful to the present study as the researcher explored the first research question (RQ1) qualitatively and followed the research design quantitatively in the second research question (RQ2).

This chapter will be split in two sections to note the measures, procedures utilised for data collection, participants and analysis pertaining to each research question. Subsequently, the author shall refer to ethical guidelines followed, and limitations presented during this study.

4.2 First research question

For the first part of the data collection, the researcher obtained responses with the scope of answering the below question.

How is 'employer branding' construed?

The importance of this question is to enable the author to start off the research by noting whether participants comprehend EB which is the founding base of the investigation. Moreover, the responses, as seen in sections 2.2 and 3.2 would help the author obtain data to be utilised in the second part of the research. Purposely, through the analysis of this question the researcher would be able to determine the comprehension of EB and the characteristics mostly valued when one shows willingness to be employed with an employer.

4.3 Study 1 – The Adopted Measure

4.3.1 The Mentimeter

To answer RQ1, the Mentimeter was used as a rapid response system to obtain direct feedback from the respondents. Mentimeter is an online audience response system used to create interactive presentations (Iona, 2018). The adoption of the Mentimeter survey as part of the data collection was viewed from a qualitative perspective as the researcher's aim was to look at quality of the answers and not the quantity (Brazeley, 2012).

Mentimeter possesses many advantages for this study mainly being its freemium package (offering a free version and other premium versions) to cater to everyone's needs. In fact, the free version enabled the researcher to ask two questions which was sufficient for the study thus, no extra costs were incurred. Moreover, three entries per participant per question was set to heighten the number of responses and acquire a deeper data pool.

Furthermore, no other equipment was necessary besides Wi-Fi and an electronic device. Additionally, it is also an easy platform to use, making the research more fun and accessible to participants (Rudolph, 2018). Moreover, people spend a lot of their time on social media hence, using such a platform for research purposes was a great tool. Conclusively, the author had the ability to end the poll and present the results instantly which was beneficial to the study to get a prompt representation (Rudolph, 2018).

4.4 Participants

Forty-six people answered the survey on Mentimeter from the 29th of June 2020 till the 10th of July 2020 which aided the researcher to acquire a comprehensive outlook of the respondents' opinions. The author conducted a convenience sampling technique to recruit participants for the first data collection phase. This method recruits its participants based on accessibility, geographical proximity, disposition at a given time or readiness to participate (Dornyei, 2007). Due to the covid-19, the author refrained from getting the participants to meet up in one location thus, the questions reflecting on EB were alternatively shared using the Mentimeter on the author's Facebook newsfeed and groups made up of many University students and other fellow employees. Facebook was chosen as a medium since participants were able to answer the short survey at their convenience hence, providing anonymity (Kay and LeSage, 2009). Moreover, Facebook for data collection has been researched as being highly improbable to present biases which may skew future research and so, has been regarded as a good medium for data collection and for recruiting participants (Rife, Cate, Kosinski and Stillwell, 2016).

Moreover, the researcher wanted different opinions to determine participants' understanding of EB and the appreciated attributes as part of EB. Therefore, no restrictions on demographics were set which enabled the author to share the Mentimeter survey online to spread the target audience.

This was important to the author as having participants from different demographics meant that the study would be able to obtain diversified opinions and gather a comprehensive outlook of EB.

4.5 Procedure

To answer RQ1, questions as portrayed below were drafted based on the study's scope using the Mentimeter.

1. *How would you best describe the term 'employer branding'?*
2. *Mention three qualities/characteristics/attributes that you deem important as part of 'employer branding'?*

The responses for both questions were represented in two-word clouds respectively whereby the attributes mostly mentioned from the second question, were taken to build up the vignettes needed to be analysed in RQ2. An initial draft of these questions was tested on five participants as per Appendix 1. Modifications were made to the initial draft and this version was shared amongst the respondents online as portrayed in Appendix 2.

4.6 Data analysis

A thematic analysis was conducted to analyse the responses gathered from the Mentimeter. Thematic analysis is a method used for analysing qualitative data (Clarke, Braun and Hayfield, 2015). It is known for its flexibility as it is used to analyse interviews, focus groups, diaries or as in this case, qualitative surveys (Moller, Timms and Alilovik, 2009) amongst others. This approach is used to develop themes (Hewitt, 2010) emerged from the data collected which come up repeatedly. In fact, for this study, the words mostly mentioned appeared bigger in the word cloud as presented in Chapter 5.

4.7 Second research question

In the second part of the study, the researcher obtained responses with the scope of answering the question:

How does the ranking of the analysed employee attraction factors reflect as employer branding?

This question was intended to utilise the emerging themes associated with EB and evaluate the degree that participants favoured each. Conclusively, the researcher would be able to present the results and give feedback and recommendations.

4.8 Study 2 – The Adopted Measure

4.8.1 The Vignette

To answer RQ2, the author adopted an experimental vignette methodology (EVM). EVM revolves around presenting the respondents with attentive realistic construed scenarios to assess dependent variables such as intentions, attitudes and behaviours. Hence, increasing experimental realism and allows the researcher to control the independent variables (Aguinis and Bradley, 2014). In these experiments, participants are asked to choose or rate different hypothetical scenarios which differ from characteristics and are assumed to be important determinants of choice or rating. Values given to the characteristics are varied to allow the researcher to assume the relative importance of the attributes from the resulting rating or score (Hainmueller, Hangartner and Yamamoto, 2015). These surveys are also thought of as showing remarkably similar scenarios to that of real life as they replicate real occurring situations. Therefore, they are also depicted as being effective, incurring minimum to no cost and a widely relevant research tool to analyse people behaviour and decision making.

However, some disagree that vignettes lack external validity and do not precisely apprehend decision making in the real world. Survey vignettes are known for various biases such as hypothetical, social desirability, acquiescence, satisficing and other cognitive biases that may sabotage the validity of the experiment (Hainmueller, Hangartner and Yamamoto, 2015). However, in this study, the author did not adopt these in experimental conditions but more to prime participants to reflect about a scenario and evaluate how they would preferably respond.

EVM has two dominant types being explicit and implicit namely, paper people studies and policy capturing and conjoint analysis. The former involves presenting respondents with written vignettes and asking participants to make clear and direct decisions, judgement and choices or express their preferences (Auginis and Bradley, 2014). On the other hand, policy capturing and conjoint analysis present respondents with storylines of precisely manipulated variables (Carroll and Johnson, 1990) but respondents are asked to base their decision amongst all the scenarios (Aiman-Smith et al., 2002). For this study, the author wanted to analyse each vignette separately and then form a comprehensive outlook on all variables and thus adopted a paper people analysis approach.

4.9 Participants

The author consulted with seventy-two participants out of which twenty were face-to-face interactions and the other fifty-two via Google Forms. Like in RQ1, a convenience sampling technique was used to choose the participants. Convenience sampling is part of non-probability sampling which refers to the samples whereby the probability that participants are chosen in a sample is not known (Acharya, Prakash, Saxena and Nigam, 2013).

For the vignette analysis the researcher mainly sent out the survey link to fellow students both from the same and other University courses and fellow employees.

Furthermore, the researcher asked the participants to refer to their peers and provide their email addresses so the ethical forms could be sent out and when received, the survey link could be provided. Thus, the recruiter knew most of the participants which made them easier to access (Taherdoost, 2016). Moreover, the researcher focused on recruiting participants who were either soon embarking on their employment journey (specifically university students), individuals who had just started their careers (newly graduated) and others who had been in employment for some years. Hence, if these criteria were followed, convenience sampling was an effective, accessible technique to recruit participants. For additional analysis purposes, respondents of different genders and age groups were recruited. The sample was equally divided on gender. On the other hand, age categories were not equally distributed. The researcher was able to get more involvement from the younger generation (18-24 and 25-34-year-old) compared to the older categories (35-44 and 45-54-year-old). This is unfortunately a limitation of convenience sampling as the author found more participants available from the younger generation than from the older.

4.10 Procedure

The researcher drafted vignettes based upon the most mentioned characteristics in the word cloud obtained in the first stage of the investigation. The first version of these vignettes may be found in Appendix 3. The researcher noted that these scenarios included different variables, therefore, making it harder to elicit conclusions. Hence, these vignettes were separated and split into eight, reflecting on the seven most mentioned attributes and another scenario including a constant neutral scenario as per Appendix 4. A pilot study was conducted amongst two participants of different gender and age (male and female, 25-34 and 45-54) respectively. The pilot study did not find major faults or issues with the design.

The author established eight different vignettes each being within the same industry based in Malta which offer good wage (without specifying what the amount was), free parking, on-site gym, breakfast and lunch options and health insurance. These set variables were determined so the readers would base their decisions on the changing variables. Therefore, removing biases of having respondents rate a vignette low or high based on the constant variables rather than the employment features studied in this research.

These distinct variables included: satisfaction (job referral from a friend who has high praises about the company and a fitting job description), communication (by having weekly meetings with team and management), good working conditions (flexibility, remote working opportunities and health and safety measures), leadership (well experienced management and set training plan), consistency (structurdised, policies and procedures in place, technology invested), honesty (360 appraisals) and lastly authentic (employee surveys, employee centric approach) In addition, one vignette was left neutral by omitting any potential eliciting quality.

Vignette 1: Constant

Vignette 2: Satisfaction

Vignette 3: Communication

Vignette 4: Working conditions

Vignette 5: Leadership

Vignette 6: Consistency

Vignette 7: Honesty

Vignette 8: Authentic

Moreover, to follow the same protocol, each participant was asked to observe the below procedure prior to reading the vignettes.

Please read the following instructions;

You will be handed 8 vignettes (scenarios) about different job offers. The vignettes were shuffled so kindly read them in the order they are provided to you. Each vignette should be rated depending on its own attractiveness and not compared to others. Therefore, you are kindly asked to give a rating from 1-6 (as explained below) after each vignette. Different vignettes can be given the same score.

If you were Charlie, on a scale of 1-6,

1= without a doubt, not to be considered,

2= may be considered but not my ideal preference

3= may consider favourably

4= will consider and place in my list of preferences

5= will definitely consider and rank it high in my list of preferences

6= will consider completely as it fits my ideal preference

What score would you give to this offer?

The researcher gathered the responses between the 24th of July and 8th of August 2020. Due to the covid-19 uprise in cases, the author had to be flexible and conduct some of the vignette analysis face-to-face and others online through Google Forms. However, the same procedure was upheld for both instances. The face-to-face conducted vignettes were written down on flash cards and the number of each scenario was written on the top left corner.

To enhance accuracy, the vignettes were shuffled from one participant to the next thus, the number of the vignette helped the researcher note which scenario the respondents were reading and scoring. Shuffling was done either by hand or through the Google Forms setting function for face-to-face and online recruits respectively. Shuffling also helped reduce the chances of the same sequence being presented to all participants and hence raising the suspicion that scores reflect the specific sequence and not the specific stimulus elicited through each vignette. Participants were informed that each vignette was to be scored based on its own merit and not compared to the other scenarios. A forced choice (1-6) scale was used to rate these scenarios, being 1= *without a doubt not to be considered* to 6= *will be considered completely as it fits my ideal preference*. The idea behind this scale is that everyone has an attitude or an opinion even if they are not highly familiar with the concept (D'Alessandro, Lowe, Winzar, Zikmund and Babin, 2017). This benefited the study as the researcher wanted all participants to express an opinion and not choose the neutral option.

Moreover, in some instances participants were asked follow up questions either face-to-face or else via email to get better insights on their responses. Questions were asked either when participants did not rate any of the vignettes a score of 6, hence, the author wanted to analyse what the reasonings were. Otherwise, questions were asked when different vignettes were given the same score and the author asked the respondents what they liked or disliked and which would be their optimal or least preferred choice. The researcher took note of these comments in the *remarks* section on a spreadsheet software. Therefore, the initial responses were never altered. The researcher recorded the participants' answers on a spreadsheet for analysis purposes which will be referred to in Chapter 5 and 6.

4.11 Data analysis

The responses from vignettes were recorded in a spreadsheet software used for statistical analysis (Brazeley, 2018). The average score was recorded and standard deviation was calculated as presented in Chapter 5. These analyses were done to depict the ranking of the eight variables to determine how these reflect on EB. Subsequently, an additional analysis was conducted using the two-way ANOVA test to establish the relation between gender and age groups (the two set criteria) in relation to the variables of interest underlying EB. The two-way ANOVA test was conducted using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science).

4.12 Ethics

Ethical policies set by the University of Malta were respected throughout the study. The participants who were interested in engaging in the research were each given a consent form (Appendix 5) and subsequently, upon the data collection process, were given an information sheet (Appendix 6). Same procedure was followed amongst both face-to-face and online participants as sheets were presented either as physical copy or via email respectively. These documents ensured the respondents that any feedback given would be strictly used for research purposes and their anonymity would be respected. Moreover, any answers given could be eliminated from the study upon the participant request. In the vignette analysis, participants were asked to input their gender and age group. The author asked online respondents to provide their email address prior to participating so the consent form and information sheet could be sent. Contrarily, during the Mentimeter analysis, no personal information was requested.

Chapter 5 - Results

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the author shall present the data acquired through the Mentimeter and Vignette analysis respectively. The purpose of this chapter is to state the findings portrayed in a logical sequence without any interpretations. Hence, recommendations and feedback based on the results from both primary and secondary data collection methods will be further explored in Chapter 6.

5.2 RQ1

As per RQ1 (*How is employer branding construed?*) results acquired from the Mentimeter and presented in figure 2 below were acquired from the word cloud and show that most of the respondents associate EB with marketing and reputation. Subsequently, the secondary most mentioned words were recruitment, flexibility, image, environment, culture and identity. Moving on to the second question, the characteristics mostly mentioned as portrayed in figure 3 were authentic, satisfaction, working conditions, communication, consistency, leadership and honesty. In fact, these qualities were then used to formulate the vignettes for the second part of the research along with a constant neutral scenario added by the researcher.

5.3 RQ2

For the second research question (*How does the ranking of the analysed employee attraction factors reflect as employer branding?*), the author collected seventy-two responses split equally between males and females. As shown below in table 1, the author listed the characteristics in order based on the obtained mean for each vignette across all participants. A higher mean shows that participants ranked that vignette higher than others, thus, reflecting its increased attractiveness as an employment feature.

Table 1 - Vignette ranking based on mean score given

Vignette	Mean
Working Conditions (<i>vig 4</i>)	5.3
Authentic (<i>vig 8</i>)	5.0
Communication (<i>vig 3</i>)	4.7
Satisfaction (<i>vig 2</i>)	4.6
Leadership (<i>vig 5</i>)	4.5
Honesty (<i>vig 7</i>)	4.4
Constant (<i>vig 1</i>)	4.2
Consistency (<i>vig 6</i>)	4.1

As portrayed in table 1 the most preferred characteristic was ‘working conditions’ whilst the least rated was ‘consistency’. For further analysis, the author calculated the average score of the mean of each vignette presented in table 1 on a spreadsheet software using the formula “=AVERAGE” and highlighting all the cells indicating the means. This resulted in a 4.6. The researcher then calculated the standard deviation using the formula “=STDEV” and highlighted all the scores, which resulted in 1.2. Thereafter, the coefficient variance was calculated by dividing the standard deviation by the mean of all vignettes (1.2/4.6), resulting in 0.3.

This shows that the study has little variability between the constructs assessed across the sample as the coefficient is lower than 1 (Adler and Parmryd, 2010).

As an additional analysis, the researcher wanted to look deeper into the responses and analyse these based on gender and age group. A two-way ANOVA test was conducted on SPSS to determine the relation between these.

As per table 2, the data set was recorded by giving a number pertaining to males, females and each age group for ANOVA analytical purposes. As presented, the exact number of males and females' respondents were recorded. When looking at the age groups, two age groups namely, 35-44 years and 45-54 years were minimally represented which portrayed a liability, especially because the sample size was not powerful enough to reach substantial conclusions concerning those two age groups. In fact, that was a limitation presented upon the adoption of the convenience sampling technique.

Table 2 - ANOVA Test Between - Subjects Factors

		Value Label	N
Gender	1	Male	36
	2	Female	36
Age Group	1	18 to 24	47
	2	25 to 34	18
	3	35 to 44	3
	4	45 to 54	4

As per two-way ANOVA test, the results obtained were presented in the table below and overleaf.

Table 3 - Vignettes 1-4: Tests of Between - Subjects' effects

	Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Vig 1	Gender	.075	1	.075	.061	.805
	Age Group	16.011	3	5.337	4.361	.007
	Gender*Age group	6.043	2	3.021	2.469	.093
Adjusted R Squared = 18.5%						
Vig 2	Gender	.237	1	.237	.188	.666
	Age Group	4.009	3	1.336	1.064	.371
	Gender*Age group	.493	2	.247	.196	.822
Adjusted R Squared = 2.4%						
Vig 3	Gender	.005	1	.005	.003	.953
	Age Group	4.465	3	1.488	1.012	.393
	Gender*Age group	2.379	2	1.190	.808	.450
Adjusted R Squared = 1.1%						
Vig 4	Gender	.146	1	.146	.144	.706
	Age Group	5.752	3	1.917	1.890	.140
	Gender*Age group	1.207	2	.603	.595	.555
Adjusted R Squared = 2.7%						

Table 4 - Vignettes 4-8: Tests of Between - Subjects' effects

	Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Vig5	Gender	.812	1	.812	.555	.459
	Age Group	3.120	3	1.040	.711	.549
	Gender*Age group	2.629	2	1.315	.899	.412
Adjusted R Squared = 3.9%						
Vig6	Gender	2.850	1	2.850	2.003	.162
	Age Group	6.678	3	2.226	1.564	.207
	Gender*Age group	6.860	2	3.430	2.410	.098
Adjusted R Squared = 2.7%						
Vig7	Gender	4.237	1	4.237	3.333	.072
	Age Group	6.381	3	2.127	1.673	.181
	Gender*Age group	7.885	2	3.943	3.102	.052
Adjusted R Squared = 7.3%						
Vig8	Gender	.343	1	.343	.433	.513
	Age Group	2.514	3	0.838	1.058	.373
	Gender*Age group	2.300	2	1.150	1.453	.241
Adjusted R Squared = 1.4%						

It is noted that for an interaction to be statistically significant it needs to be less than 0.05 (Assaad, H.I, Hous, Zhou, Carroll and Wu, 2015). Based on the results acquired in this study, it may be depicted that the only slight significant interaction found was in the age group of the constant vignette which was calculated to 0.007. This shows that there was a slight significant difference between the scores of the participants based on their age group when rating the constant vignette. However, as two of the age groups were minimally represented, the researcher cannot assume that this interaction is actually significant. Moreover, in vignette 7, the gender by age group was calculated to 0.052 thus, slightly higher.

However, considering the minimal number of respondents pertaining to two of the age groups, the researcher assumed that the statistics showed no significance.

The tables also show the adjusted R squared of each vignette. These percentages are derived from the analysis gathered by the ANOVA which represent the proportion of the variation in the dependent variables accounted by the explanatory variables (Miles, 2014). For this study, the dependent variables are the vignettes which are being measured whereas the explanatory variables are the gender and age group criteria which may cause a change on the dependent variables. When there is no significance, the percentage is very small. This may be seen in the above tables as when compared to each other, the highest R squared percentage was in the constant vignette whereby in fact, it was the only vignette which had a significant variance.

Conclusively, the results presented in the study aided the researcher to get a better understanding of EB, the characteristics associated with it and the ranking of these, reflecting on their attractiveness. Throughout Chapter 5 the author was able to present the results acquired from both data collection phases to answer the predetermined research questions. Subsequently, in Chapter 6, the researcher will present discussions and suggestions based on the results of the data collection and research acquired through secondary sources to reach conclusions and give way to further research opportunities.

5.4 Summary

Conclusively, through the results obtained, the understanding of participants' perception of EB and the attributes most attractive were presented. Furthermore, the attractiveness of each characteristic as an employment feature were clearly portrayed. Moreover, from the additional analysis, it can be summarised that there were no significant interactions reflecting on whether gender and age groups differed in scores given to each vignette.

Chapter 6 - Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter summarises the findings and reflects on the results obtained whilst comparing and contrasting them with the literature referred to in Chapter 2 and 3. Moreover, the researcher provides implications and recommendations based on the findings and give suggestions for future research opportunities in light of EB. Ultimately, limitations encountered will be discussed followed by a conclusion.

6.2 Summary of Findings

As determined in Chapter 5 the ‘working conditions’ was the highest rated employment feature. In fact, from the remarks gathered, this attribute was perceived as important as it allows flexibility needed in our busy lives. Moreover, participants noted that this feature would benefit working parents and shows that the company trusts its employees. Furthermore, participants determined that the company’s motto should be ‘work to live not live to work’ which shows that employees look for employment which provides balance and flexibility.

On the contrary, ‘consistency’ was the least rated employment feature. Consistency refers to continuity, stability, security and control over the future for contingency purposes which are key elements of jobseekers perception of organisational attractiveness (Jain and Bhatt, 2015). In fact, from respondents’ feedback, stability and security were mentioned as synonyms to describe EB. However, clearly participants perceive other employment features as a motive for attraction above consistency. Actually, respondents remarked that the constant monitoring and supervision were not attributes of an ideal company scenario.

Moreover, consistency seems to put greater focus on the company's growth rather than the employee and the efforts of efficiency may result in less focus on quality work. On the contrary, technology was appreciated to track one's progress and processes and structures may serve as guidelines to newly recruited.

A changing focus from financial attributes to other psychological attributes were suggested by literature (Hinson, Agbleze and Kuada, 2018). Interestingly wage was not amongst the most mentioned characteristics, however, the 'constant' vignette focusing solely on pay was still rated higher than the 'consistency' vignette. In fact, participants reflected that employees should not base their career on pay as this provides temporary motivation. However, based on the score given and as elicited by respondents, money is still an important attribute which should not be overlooked.

Conclusively, Harris and Short (2013) noted that the employer's image must correspond to the employer's reality. This was portrayed in the study as some participants did not rate any of the scenarios a 6 as there were concerns that companies may give false promises and there is no such thing as a perfect scenario. This suggests that there are contradicting views and there are some trust issues between companies and jobseekers which emphasis the importance of honesty amongst employers.

6.3 Theoretical implications

Initially, this study shows that literature and participants establish EB as the identity of the firm as an employer (Melin, 2005) and associate it with culture (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004) and image (Ruchika and Prasad, 2017). Moreover, Tanwar and Prasad (2016) elicited that EB is important to attract, motivate and retain employees.

In fact, findings propose that many respondents associated EB to recruitment. Moreover, Freeman (2002) noted that training, potential growth, high salaries, friendly culture and good reputation were deemed as important. Correspondingly, participants in the Mentimeter analysis mentioned reputation, culture, growth opportunities, wage and development as attributes associated with EB. Actually, training was reflected in the 'leadership' vignette which was rated as the 5th most attractive scenario which from the remarks given, training was perceived as an important characteristic in employment.

Brad (2012) and Minchington (2015) elicited that HR personnel should use EB to enhance the company's employment offer. When reflecting on the seven most attractive employment features, and pay, the author emphasises that these characteristics should be well evaluated amongst employers.

Moreover, respondents determined a lack of trust between candidates and employers. This can be combated by lining up the values and mission of the organisation with the desired company image (Harris and Short, 2013). As researchers articulate, successful EB is based on the relationship between the company and employees (Otken and Okan, 2016) to send the message as being a 'great place to work' (Armstrong, 2006; Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Dell, 2001; Kirk, 2018). Thus, if this trust is broken it will do damage to the company as instead of attracting jobseekers, it will result in higher turnover and having an ongoing recruitment process.

Furthermore, the company needs to be careful of bad word of mouth advertisements. As Ruchika and Prasad (2017) suggest, jobseekers form a mental image of the organisation in their head built through branding initiatives, word of mouth and other sources such as social media.

Therefore, companies need to present a positive relationship that is maintained amongst their current and ex-employees and candidates as these are the ambassadors of the business and every bad comment may hinder the company's success. Resultantly, the employer may tarnish its reputation (which respondents associate it highly to EB) and as literature elicit, a company has one reputation (Highhouse et al., 2009, Treadwell and Harrison, 1994) which needs to be taken care of to attract qualified personnel (Hinson, Agbleze and Kuada, 2018).

Moreover, when exploring referrals, there were contradicting views as some mentioned that having a friend at work would give a sense of familiarity whilst others mentioned that job placement should not be based on friendship. Sottoli and Wanous (2002) noted that employees recruited through referrals, rehires or internal vacancies have better performance and higher retention which suggest that the employer image should be well portrayed internally and externally. Hence, this suggests that although only referrals were examined in this study which was attractive to some, it should not be the sole attribute presented in employment. Nonetheless, it should not be taken lightly by organisations as having current employees freely advertising the company as a good place to work serves as a good word of mouth and sets a positive image for the employer which is critical upon job offer decision-making (Ruchika and Prasad, 2017).

6.4 Practical Implications

Based on the findings, the author suggests that as flexibility and remote working were rated as most attractive, these should be considered highly by employers. Especially now that these have been adopted by many companies as an alternative way of working during the covid-19. In fact, many organisations implemented these features permanently into their structure. Therefore, if an employer does not offer these attributes, it may be perceived as having a lack of trust from the management and create a hostile environment.

Furthermore, it may also jeopardise the company's competitive power as these are perks highly appreciated by jobseekers thus, these may be the deciding factors when candidates are choosing between employment offers. Moreover, for some companies who offer breakfast and lunch at work, free transport to their employees, on-site free gym facilities, free parking or those whose offices are crowded and were looking to expand, this attribute is beneficial for cost cutting.

Furthermore, findings suggest that participants appreciate when employers include workers more in decisions. The author's recommendation would be to focus more on people and acquire an employee centric approach to create an environment which honours and values the employees so they can take care of the customers. This can be accomplished by including workers in decision making as when employers are innovative, it enhances trust in the management (Whitener, 1997).

With regards to pay, as reflected in section 6.2, although salary was not the sole deciding factor, it was still highly favoured amongst employees. From literature articulated in Chapter 2, Chandler McLeod (2007) elicited that employees consider a good working environment, good pay and financial incentives such as bonuses and recognitions, fair pay and friendly management more important than companies do. The author's suggestion to organisations would be to find a balance between monetary and non-monetary incentives. Hence, the employer needs to determine an attractive salary based on competitors and then determine the other attributes which will give the company a competitive edge.

Subsequently, it is important for companies to promote these employment features amongst jobseekers to provide the necessary information to make the candidates keep the organisation in their list of potential employment (Chapman et al.,2005).

The author encourages employers to promote these perks as if candidates are not intrigued to apply, then the organisation will not be able to reach these jobseekers through recruitment at a later stage (Hoppe, 2019). However, only attributes which are truly provided within the company should be advertised. Portraying a false picture will only sabotage the company. Therefore, the author recommends employers to reflect on the mentioned characteristics and determine which ones they are currently providing and if any others which fits within their strategy can be adopted. Moreover, they are to document this journey both internally and externally. This will show their audience that the company values its people and has them as part of its corporate strategy.

Exploring EB in relation to recruitment, the seven determined characteristics established by participants portray that prospective employees appreciate these features in employment and resultantly, may impact positively on employee retention. Linking to literature, Tanwar and Prasad (2016) elicited that EB lowers turnover. Figurska and Matuska (2013) noted that EB attracts competent candidates. As so, the author suggests recruiters should clearly define the persona they want to hire and what competences would be ideal for the role establishing those which are crucial and those which are considered an asset. Subsequently, take into consideration the culture fit of the persona amongst the team. Furthermore, EB is highly powerful for employers whose remuneration package does not exceed that of competitors (Van Mossevelder, 2010) hence, needs to consider other attributes to attract talent. As portrayed in the results of this study, although pay was still regarded as important, it was not rated the highest therefore, there are other attributes which candidates evaluate before engaging in employment.

Moreover, literature notes that companies need to communicate persuasive data and not general information (Fyock 1993; Huang et al. 2011; Wilden et al. 2010). Through the collection of data, it can be depicted that the seven established characteristics are perceived as the persuasive data which will entice jobseekers to engage in employment.

Therefore, the study suggests that recruiters should determine what the candidates are looking for and promote the attributes which are more likely to be of interest to them. For example, if the candidate is applying for a delivery person whose job role does not allow him/her to work from home, it is useless to promote remote working contrarily, focus on other attributes which he/she can benefit from. Furthermore, the author recommends businesses to be aware of their traits and promote these to gain a competitive advantage. To give an example, during the covid-19 many companies had to temporarily close their business whilst some received irreversible damage which forced them to shut down. As observed in the data collection and literature, job stability and security are traits looked for in employment. Hence, companies whose business' operations were not affected deeply by the covid-19 can promote the strength within their industry. Especially if wages are lower than their competitors, they may use these traits to create a competitive advantage.

Furthermore, EB weighs substantially on CSR as it is regarded as a strategy to create branding, enhance the competitive power and raise environmental awareness (Bhattacharya, Sen and Korschun, 2011). Whilst Santiago (2018) articulate that the younger generation are more interested in having employers who participate in charitable events, this was not represented in this study as when asked how participants would describe EB and which attributes were important, CSR was only mentioned once. Moreover, although the vignettes were not revolved around CSR (as this was not mentioned in the responses), upon follow-up questions, CSR, charity activities or volunteerism were not mentioned. The author understands that this does not mean CSR is not appreciated by employees however, based on the findings, this was not amongst the mostly appreciated attributes. Thus, concluding that from an HR perspective, companies should participate in CSR activities to have the company be associated as helpful and contribute towards society.

However, from primary data collection, when it comes to promoting attributes which affect the employees directly and are critical in their decision making, CSR is not believed to be amongst the deciding factors.

6.5 Future research

The literature elicited and data collection obtained has helped pave way for further research opportunities revolving around EB. Initially the author suggests exploring deeper the relation between CSR and EB as although literature noted a connection, this was not represented in the results. The author proposes that in a similar research design to this study, a scenario reflecting on CSR can be presented to help the researcher analyse how this would rank in comparison to other employment features. Furthermore, there has been substantial literature which suggests that portraying company's information online can result in a positive impact on the employer's reputation, image and attractiveness (Carpentier, Van Hoyer and Weijters, 2019). However, not much studies explain what makes social media platforms effective (Carpentier, Van Hoyer and Weijters, 2019). Therefore, the author depicts the need for future research on which online platforms employers should enhance their EB presence on. The author suggests that a survey can be sent out to participants reflecting on the different social media channels noting which are mainly used for employment purposes and on which platform people spend more time on. Subsequently, there is minimal research on how EB affects the company's outcome (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004) especially in turnover, work behaviour, satisfaction or productivity (Kashyap and Ragnekar, 2016). The author appreciates that this study elicits what employees find attractive in employment to help lower turnover. However, further research can be done by interviewing employers and employees to assess whether through EB employees had an accurate view of the company, knew what was expected from them and set a connection between the company and employees which impacted their work behaviour, satisfaction and productivity.

Subsequently, Harris and Short (2013) established a disconnection between what workers value in employment and what the company thinks is important. The author suggests that future research can be done by involving both employers and employees whereby their opinions can be viewed and contrasts and similarities can be elicited. Moreover, gender and age group amongst other demographics can be researched further to assess if any significant interactions are present based on the features appreciated in employment. Conclusively, research opportunities lie in developing empirically the concept of EB. The author suggests determining the dimensions and facets and see how they correlate to important outcomes such as performance.

6.6 Limitations

A dominant limitation present in the study's data collection phase was the outbreak of covid-19 which meant that the researcher had to adapt to the situation and continue the vignette analysis online. This meant that the researcher had to succumb to a lesser means of verifying the data collection process which may have impeded precision and hence reliability.

Another limitation was due to the convenience sampling method adopted which is prone to biases (Etikan, Musa and Alkassim, 2016). To limit these issues the researcher recruited a substantial number of participants from different demographics. However, yet due to the lack of accessibility of participants from the 35-44 and 45-54 age groups, these were minimally represented in the study.

6.7 Conclusion

This research has helped shed light on the importance of EB by elaborating on its multiple aspects rather than a unidimensional and often vague concept. The objective of this study was to reflect on the comprehension of EB and the attributes deemed important by participants. Furthermore, the study elicited on EB's increase in popularity and its importance as a recruitment tool which was not only acknowledged in literature but in primary research too. Moreover, the author depicted the importance in implementing proper EB in the company's HR strategy as if the employers' image is not reflected in the organisations' reality it will send mixed signals and may tarnish the employers' reputation. Conclusively, the study determined the need for companies to focus on functional and psychological employment features whilst finding a balance between the economic and financial attributes to heighten the employer's competitive advantage when looking for talent.

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Appendix 3 – Vignettes Initial Draft

Vignette 1

Charlie is looking for employment and was offered an entry level role as a ‘KYC (Know Your Customer) Agent after reading a degree in Criminology. If she accepts, she receives a remuneration package of 22,500euro and will be placed on a 6 month contract with a possibility of extension and an increase. Should the extension happen, she will also benefit from half yearly appraisals and will be given yearly performance bonus depending on whether the KPI’s would have been met. Her role will include verifying documents and escalating these to other departments should there be any signs of fraud. As part of the perks she will be getting free parking, on-site gym, breakfast and lunch options, health insurance and a 100euro voucher to spend on sport equipment. She will be working on a roster basis including weekends and public holidays. Her shifts are either from 8am - 4pm or 4pm till 12am, including a 30minute break. The company has over 650 employees and is one of Malta’s largest gaming companies. However, she is concerned about building a career in the gaming industry as she feels it is not as strong as the financial industry. However, gaining such experience will give her more opportunity to grow within the team both internally (within other departments [vertical and horizontal]) or externally if she looks for opportunities with other gaming companies.

Vignette 2

Charlie is looking for employment and is offered a role with MGA (Malta Gaming Authority) as a Sports Integrity Officer after she has obtained a degree in Criminology. MGA is a government organisation and her role will include investigating manipulation and corruption in sports within the betting industry, constructing reports including the evidence gathered in the investigation to be presented in the court of law. Furthermore, the candidate will be responsible for keeping up with the policies and regulations, attending conferences locally and abroad and serving as

compliance to other departments. If she accepts the role she will be placed on an indefinite contract with 6 months probation and will be given an initial salary of 23,000euro and increased to 25,000euro following probation. The division will be made up of her and the manager and is to work office hours (8am - 5pm) however, may be asked to stay overtime according to company exigencies to which the remuneration covers such. A yearly appraisal will be set whereby salary review may be in order. There are plans to employ other agents as juniors to whom Charlie will thus take a senior position. There is a possibility of vertical growth opportunities. Charlie feels that seeing this job is within a government organisation, it is much more stable however, as the department is small, growth opportunities may take longer.

Vignette 3

Charlie is looking for employment and is offered a role of an AML officer (Anti-Money Laundry) with Credorax Bank Malta. She will be a member of the Ongoing Monitoring Team, in respect to the KYC changes that occur within businesses, reporting directly to the AML Team Leader and providing support to the company globally. She will also be responsible for performing ongoing monitoring on KYC, AML and fraud checks on existing accounts. Moreover, she will be responsible for approving payments within the core banking system and liaising with internal teams such as Fraud, Financial Risk, Legal, Operations and Payment teams. Furthermore, she will be responsible for escalating the company's governance structure and ensuring compliance with internal and regulatory requirements and policies are upheld. She will be working shift basis 8-2pm or 2-10pm, Saturdays included. The remuneration package will be 1,500 gross monthly and then acquiring 100 shift allowance monthly. The company has fixed remuneration advances and this is dependent on experience with the company. As perks, she will also be getting parking allowance, private health insurance including dental and life, corporate gym rates, daily fresh fruit and family-friendly measures.

Appendix 4 – Vignettes communicated with participants

Please read the following instructions;

You will be handed 8 vignettes (scenarios) about different job offers. The vignettes were shuffled so kindly read them in the order they are provided to you. Each vignette should be rated depending on its own attractiveness and not compared to others. Therefore, you are kindly asked to give a rating from 1-6 (as explained below) after each vignette. Different vignettes can be given the same score.

If you were Charlie, on a scale; of 1-6,

1= without a doubt, not to be considered,

2= may be considered but not my ideal preference

3= may consider favourably

4= will consider and place in my list of preferences

5= will definitely consider and rank it high in my list of preferences

6= will consider completely as it fits my ideal

What score would you give to this offer?

Vignette 1

Charlie is offered a mid-senior level position with a gaming company based in Malta which provides a very good pay, in fact, highly exceeding all the offers he has gotten so far. With the remuneration package he is offered he would be getting a great increase when compared to his current employment.

Vignette 2

Charlie is offered a mid-senior position with a gaming company based in Malta which offers a good salary and good perks such as free parking, on-site gym, breakfast and lunch options and health insurance. A friend of his was the one who recommended Charlie to this company as he also works there and has high praises about the company. Moreover, the job description hit the nail on the head for Charlie as the tasks required interest him highly.

Vignette 3

Charlie is offered a mid-senior position with a gaming company based in Malta which offers good salary and perks such as free parking, on-site gym, breakfast and lunch options and health insurance. From the interviews conducted, the company informed him that the job entails weekly meetings which he would be invited to in order to brief one another on the tasks, plans and projects the department would be currently working on or plans to take on both in the short term and long term. This interested Charlie as he felt it was lacking in his current employment and although he had suggested it to them, it fell on deaf ears. Moreover, to make sure these meetings are effective, the company noted that should he take the role, he would be responsible for setting weekly one-to-one meetings with his team to discuss their progress, address any issues and monitor their performance to analyse the teams' strengths and weaknesses. Charlie is a people person and feels feedback is important.

Vignette 4

Charlie is offered a mid-senior position with a gaming company based in Malta which offers good salary and perks such as free parking, on-site gym, breakfast and lunch options and health insurance. If he was to accept the offer, the company informed him that the offices are open from 7am till 7pm and he can work his 8 hours any time in between. Moreover, as a result to covid-19, they have noted the importance of flexible working and have implemented this permanently

in their operations. Thus, he can work some days from the office and some days from home. In addition, health and safety is very important to the company and therefore, besides the essentials the company will provide all the amenities such as comfortable chair and desk to work comfortably from home.

Vignette 5

Charlie is offered a mid-senior position with a gaming company based in Malta which offers good salary and perks such as free parking, on-site gym, breakfast and lunch options and health insurance. If he were to accept the role, he would be placed in a department directly responding to the manager who in return responds to the head of department (HOD). His manager has more than 10 years of experience and the HOD has over 15 years of experience in the gaming industry. Therefore, Charlie feels they have a lot of knowledge to share. Should he accept the role he will be put on a 3 month training plan to be given guidance and build his competence within the company. Management also informed him that they have bigger plans for the company and are looking into strategically building the company which is why they are expanding.

Vignette 6

Charlie is offered a mid-senior position with a gaming company based in Malta which offers good salary and perks such as free parking, on-site gym, breakfast and lunch options and health insurance. The company is very process driven and has a structure in place. There are procedures already in place in order to ensure that company's policies are followed. The company has also invested in technology to ensure that the work done by its employees becomes more efficient and recorded. This is important to the company for contingency purposes. Charlie was also promised that should he accept the role, he will be given a handover from his colleagues so work can be continued effectively.

Vignette 7

Charlie is offered a mid-senior position with a gaming company based in Malta which offers good salary and perks such as free parking, on-site gym, breakfast and lunch options and health insurance. The company informed Charlie that he will be getting appraisals twice yearly to measure his strengths, weaknesses and assess his performance. Moreover, these meetings will serve as an opportunity to discuss in a more formal manner any issues which need clearance and any concerns raised both from the management and the employees' side. In fact, they believe that to get the most out of the appraisals, it needs to be 360. That means that Charlie will get an opportunity to rate his own performance and that of his manager/ superiors and the same goes to the latter. This method is known for increasing self awareness, creates culture openness and honesty and increases accountability.

Vignette 8

Charlie is offered a mid-senior position with a gaming company based in Malta which offers good salary and perks such as free parking, on-site gym, breakfast and lunch options and health insurance. The company is very driven towards growing sustainably and thus, shares its vision, mission and values with its people and makes sure management leads its teams towards achieving these objectives. The company values its people's opinions and thus, distributes two surveys yearly (every 6 months). The feedback gathered is taken into consideration and if benefiting, implemented in the company. The company also takes an employee centric approach as it feels its people are an asset to the company and they want their employees to be creative, speak up and keep the company innovative. Therefore, part of his role, Charlie will be having meetings with his department to see how the processes can be done more efficiently and if the company is providing the necessary tools needed to optimise the employee's productivity.

Appendix 5 – Consent Form

**Consent to take part in;
Employer branding: A pulling force of employee attraction?**

	Add your initials next to the statement you agree with
I confirm that I have read and understand the letter dated (13 th April 2020) explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. Member of researcher: Tiffany Sultana +0356 99464299	
I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential.	
I agree for the data collected from me to be used in relevant future research.	
I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the lead researcher should my contact details change.	

Name of participant	
Participant's signature	
Date	
Name of lead researcher	
Signature	
Date*	

*To be signed and dated in the presence of the participant.

Appendix 6 – Information Sheet

Tiffany Sultana

tiffany.sultana.16@um.edu.mt

mt(+356) 99464299

Information Sheet

Employer branding: A pulling force of employee attraction?

I would like to invite you take part in a research study. However, before you decide to do so, please understand the purpose of this research and your involvement. Kindly read the following information thoroughly. If anything is unclear or you need further information, please ask questions. Also, please read the below prior to deciding if you want to take part in this study or not.

Who am I and what is the study about?

My name is Tiffany Sultana and I am currently reading for a Master of Science in Strategic Management and Digital Marketing at the University of Malta. The idea to undertake such a study particularly resulted from the fact that I currently work within an HR department where employer branding is lacking. Therefore, I wanted to understand what employees or job seekers make of this term and if it was as powerful and necessary as some industries and companies seem to think.

What will taking part involve?

Your participation in this research will include a ‘Mentimeter’ focus group whereby you will be asked what is your understanding of employer branding; what job attributes/features you look for in employment and/or whether you think employer branding is important or if this is just another gimmick. On the contrary, to answer the second research question, students will be given three vignettes whereby these will be placed in order of preference to help analyse which attributes are deemed as most important according to the situation.

Why is your participation needed?

As you are reading a course within the University of Malta, that makes you either a current employee or a potential one in the near future. Therefore, your contribution will help the researcher get response from the current labour market.

Potential risks and/or benefits of participating in this research?

The term ‘Employer branding’ has grown in interest and is being adopted by many companies. Through this research, as the researcher, I want to compare how this term is understood by participants and see if it varies from the current literature. In addition, by analysing the vignettes, the most preferred job attributes upon the different situations will potentially help companies to truly understand what is wanted by the employers from the employees perspective.

Is participation confidential?

I would like to emphasize that all information acquired during both the focus group and the vignettes analysis will be confidential and used for the purpose of this research. Moreover, the property of the Faculty of Economics, Management and Accountancy and myself (Tiffany Sultana) will not be divulged to any third parties unless with a written consent from the participants themselves.

Storing of data

Kindly note that the information gathered from the research will only be accessed by the researcher, supervisor, FEMA and people concerned if asked for proof when submitting the thesis.

What will happen to the results of the study?

Once again, I will ensure that this information will remain confidential and property of FEMA and myself and will not be divulged to any third parties unless with a written request from the participants themselves.

Contact details

Researcher’s name: Ms. Tiffany Sultana

Researcher’s email address: tiffany.sultana.16@um.edu.mt

Researcher’s contact number: 99464299

Supervisor’s name: Professor Vincent Cassar

Supervisor’s email address:

vincent.cassar@um.edu.mt

Thank you.

Best regards,

Tiffany

Sultana

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