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Global employer branding

Influencing talent attraction and retention for current and prospective employees

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ABSTRACT:

The global talent competition has intensified, making employer branding a strategic lever for attracting and retaining talent in multinational corporations. This thesis examines how a global employer brand influences perceptions of attraction and retention, clarifying the concept and its connection to corporate strategy. Guided by the social identity theory and person-organization fit theory, the study employs an interpretivist, qualitative design, utilizing semi-structured interviews with ten final year Finnish and German students all of whom had previous work experience (most had about one year, but a few up to two years) gained through internships, student jobs, traineeships, or full-time positions directly relevant to their respective disciplines.

Findings indicate that global employer brands are comprising an instrumental-symbolic value proposition, credible promise-keeping systems (leadership, culture, and internal communication), and a global-local balance explicitly linked to strategic goals and KPIs (key performance indicators). Attraction is driven by faithfulness, value alignment, and honest signals during early touchpoints, with respondents highlighting crystal-clear, ethical communication over salary or role specifics. Retention hinges on fulfilling psychological contracts, providing development opportunities, offering reasonable treatment, and maintaining a sustainable work-life balance; consistent values in day-to-day practice strengthen identification and loyalty.

The MNC setting both attracts (mobility, learning, prestige) and constrains (bureaucracy, depersonalization), requiring careful judgement of global and local aspects. The study contributes an integrated global employer brand view that connects brand assets to identity/fit mechanisms and to talent outcomes, and offers practical guidance: design honest, lived-value propositions; align global messaging with local realities; and measure promise-keeping through attraction/retention indicators.

KEYWORDS: Global employer branding, employer brand perception, attraction, retention, Multinational corporations

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Abbreviations

CSR = Corporate social responsibility

MNC = Multinational corporation

KPI = Key performance indicator

MRQ = Main research question

RQ = Research question

GEB = Global employer brand

1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Persuasive brands are not predominantly constructed on the basis of products or specific characteristics, but rather on a convincing and precise intention – in this sense, a compelling reason that individuals can identify with (Sinek, 2009). This suggests that when the right employees for the company are selected, they can be transformed into brand ambassadors. Precisely, that is the task of employer branding: discovering the most talented individuals and attracting them to the business. This process is about acquiring talent and adding competitive strength to ensure lasting future organizational success in the market.

Fundamentally, employer branding is a marketing approach utilized both internally and externally. The overarching objective is to influence employees' perceptions internally and prospective applicants by creating an experience that binds employees to the business. Employer branding represents a figurative dimension that is not concrete like accessible resources (Aboul-Ela, 2016).

Nowadays, in most countries, there is immense and intense competition for the most qualified professionals. There are not enough competent employees to meet the needs of all companies, particularly when positions rely on specialized expertise (Dabirian et al., 2019). The global rivalry between competitors is intensifying, and companies and their associated brands compete in both international and domestic labor markets (Roshan et al., 2017). The presence of internationally recognized companies expands their brand promise from an overseas perspective; many businesses search for quality candidates worldwide, enabled by remote work and more permeable borders. A business's international atmosphere has a definite impression on employees, while firms adapt to local employment markets to ease entry (Špoljarić & Došen, 2023).

Advancement in itself also has a tremendous influence on firms. The digital era and the associated technological developments have long since dawned, and almost every facet of life is being digitalized. Therefore, companies need to align strategies appropriately, as today's workforce expects a digital culture (Küpper et al., 2021). All these changes have led to a shift in expectations and qualifications: hybrid work has become standard, and new digital capabilities are required (Kashive et al., 2022). In addition, social media is transforming recruitment and corporate perception by enabling closer relationships with stakeholders and drawing applicants' attention to the brand (Kucherov & Zhiltsova, 2021).

The labor market is likewise facing yet another significant shift. Generation Z is beginning to enter the workforce as the older generations gradually depart. Consequently, firms must adjust to a new set of expectations to remain successful. Above all, Generation Z is highly conscious of a healthy balance between professional and domestic life; if not managed, overlaps can cause adverse conditions such as burnout. Maintaining a psychologically fulfilling life is often prioritized over keeping employment, which requires employers to implement counter-measures through credible employer branding aligned with corporate identity (Hendriana et al., 2023). Survey evidence similarly shows a redistribution of power in employment relations, with many millennials and Gen Z open to switching employers if needs are unmet (Randstad, 2022).

A company has two types of brands at its disposal for employer branding. The first is the employer brand, perceived outwardly by potential candidates. To attract attention, the brand must stand out and communicate distinctive value propositions; at the same time, the internal component must not be forgotten, as current employees must be equally satisfied, or the external promise will fracture (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). However, unforeseen calamities may befall the business world. During 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the entire landscape, particularly the labor market. With this in sight, employer branding became a valuable instrument to consolidate the company's position and ensure continuity (Kucherov et al., 2022).

At the same time, the corporate brand is another brand the company must utilize appropriately. A corporate brand addresses various stakeholders and should ensure stability and a uniform perception among those directly involved, an especially demanding task for internationally competitive companies (Einwiller & Will, 2002).

Within this context, this thesis highlights a clear gap: although the significance of employer branding is widely recognized, little is known about how global employer branding impacts perceptions, specifically among students, regarding attraction and retention across culturally similar yet diverse environments. In this instance, the two countries under examination are Finland and Germany. By focusing on these two groups, the research examines how the strategic cues and emotional implications impact various markets and when local adjustments are necessary for practical understanding.

In synthesis, many opportunities are available for businesses to reframe perceptions among external and internal stakeholders to ensure individuals desire the organization for future employment. Nevertheless, one particular facet has not yet been thoroughly evaluated, namely the degree to which employer branding influences perceptions of attractiveness and the corresponding retention, both of which are highly significant for organizations and current and prospective employees. Moreover, altering this perception could affect employees' commitment, contentment, and allegiance to the organization in the future.

1.2 Objectives of the thesis

The overarching purpose of this master's thesis is to investigate the extent to which employer branding influences the perceptions of both potential and incumbent employees through the company's employer brand and its corporate brand, with a focus on attraction and retention. By following this approach, the research emphasizes how strategic cues and real-life experiences, when combined, alter authenticity and identification within an MNC environment. This ultimately results in the following research question for the thesis:

Main research question (MRQ): "How does global employer branding influence the perception of attraction and retention regarding incumbent and prospective employees?"

To be able to answer the MRQ, it is necessary to divide it into two sub-questions:

RQ1: Which factors of the brand influence employees' attraction to the company?

RQ2: Which factors of the brand influence employee retention at the company?

***Scope note:** The concept of a "global employer brand" and the strategic position it occupies are introduced conceptually in this thesis (see Chapter 4, Figure 11) and are not examined as a standalone empirical question.*

1.3 Delimitations

The thesis investigates the influence of employer branding on the attraction and retention of potential applicants and incumbent employees during the initial phase, with a particular focus on students. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten participants: five Finnish and five German students. The overall concentration is on attraction and retention; other potential business benefits of employer branding are acknowledged but not examined in depth. The two perspectives (Finland/Germany) are compared to reach a feasible conclusion. Each subject in the thesis is grounded in relevant existing literature, which also informed the interview questionnaire. The outcomes constitute the participants' perspectives rather than a universal interpretation.

To maintain honesty and ethical principles, the thesis used only language assistance programs (including Grammarly and DeepL) for grammatical improvements and subtle stylistic adjustments. It should be emphasized that all the analyses, explanations, and writings are by the author. This statement is to show sincerity and trust, since the author's native language is not English.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 1 introduces the topic, background, significance, research gap, research questions, delimitations, and structure. Chapter 2 examines the employer brand in internationally operating organizations and its potential influence on attraction and retention. Chapter 3 focuses on the corporate brand and internal branding (the internal counterpart to employer branding) and links these to attraction and retention. Chapter 4 reviews employer branding from its inception to recent perspectives and synthesizes links to attraction and retention. Chapter 5 explains the methodological structure and qualitative design. Chapter 6 presents the findings and analysis, followed by Chapter 7, which discusses and interprets the results. Chapter 8 concludes by outlining the research's implications, limitations, and possible future pathways.

2 Theoretical foundations of global employer branding

2.1 Understanding employer branding in a global context

In today's world, companies are increasingly expanding their boundaries, as attracting new, qualified employees is of immense importance to them. In general, the significance of the employer brand has become crucial for every company, including its presentation and perception. Two overarching objectives must be achieved to evolve the brand further. The first objective is to be seen as an employer of choice. Secondly, retaining employees is essential and a long-term task. Should this be achieved, the company will achieve a higher level of employee contentment and solidarity and, ultimately, a closer attachment between the company and employees (Spoljaric & Dosen, 2023).

These interrelated purposes are primarily associated with greater attraction and retention results in the existing literature (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). In addition, they are underpinned by cohesive internal branding and the culture (Barros-Arrieta & Garcia-Cabrera, 2021; Konecnik Ruzzier et al., 2021).

Since the present thesis takes a global view of employer branding, the relevant MNCs are essential to this endeavor. In other words, MNCs are comprehensive organizations that operate across multiple countries, regions, and linguistic contexts. Therefore, the employer brand must maintain a balance at the strategic stage that is consistently global, yet trustworthy locally, and introduces strong leadership in messaging and behaviors (Piekkari et al., 2022; Spoljaric & Dosen, 2023; Bonneton et al., 2022; Balmer & Greyser, 2006).

In the wake of digitalization and social media, employer branding signifiers are becoming increasingly powerful, extending their reach but also increasing the risk of negative consequences. Likewise, explicit instrumental and symbolic cues form attraction in the initial phase, and this extends beyond salary and job-specific information (Küpper et al., 2021; Kucherov & Zhiltsova, 2021; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Keller & Richey, 2006). Furthermore, authentic and unified signals safeguard the company's trustworthiness (Wang et al., 2022; de Chernatony, 2002).

Regarding attraction, MNCs need to implement a highly sophisticated talent management structure specializing in attracting and retaining employees. The visibility of opportunities for progression, mobility, equitable and effective communication, and helpful mentoring will demonstrate that the commitments made are being fulfilled (Bonneton et al., 2022; Vieira et al., 2024).

On the retention front, MNCs must consider a few factors to retain employees in the long term. Firstly, MNCs should not neglect the amount of work or employees' personal commitments, thus fostering a good work-life balance. In particular, the international structure can generate a kind of work intensity for MNCs. Proper support mechanisms should be in place to enable growth and professional advancement. By doing so, the employer can increase employees' professional capabilities. However, investment must also be made in the HR function to guide and support employees. With this investment,

employees will feel valued and, therefore, more likely to remain with the business (Udayanga et al., 2021). In general, the fulfillment of the psychological contract and the maintenance of a work-life balance further underscore long-term organizational engagement (Sandeepanie et al., 2023; Abord de Chatillon et al., 2023; Alzaid & Dukhaykh, 2023).

To explain these types, two theoretical perspectives are employed: social identity theory (employees incorporate corporate values into their own self-concept, which reinforces engagement) and person-organization fit theory (value alignment forecasts the decisions to remain or leave) (Maxwell & Knox, 2009; Löhndorf & Diamantopoulos, 2014; Mittal et al., 2022; Nanjundeswaraswamy et al., 2025; Ghielen et al., 2021; Tanwar & Kumar, 2019; Nadya et al., 2023; Hein et al., 2024).

According to the American Marketing Association, a brand can be perceived as a name, an emblem, or a visual representation. The brand effectively reflects the company; it portrays the values, experiences, and possible feelings that the company wants to convey, creating a unique identity that helps secure a superior position in the labor market (Najm Roshan et al., 2017). Within the framework of employer branding, these identity cues function simultaneously on an instrumental level (what can this particular position provide?) and a symbolic level (what can this connection signify?). As a result, attraction forms early, and retention is enhanced when the brand's promises are faithfully delivered (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Wang et al., 2022).

2.2 Global employer branding for talent attraction: Strategies and challenges

Both sides (employers and employees) benefit when firms attract the right people. Satisfied employees and company prosperity require consistently communicating accurate information about the employer —from the start through the end — emphasizing distinctive assets. Person-environment fit indicates that employees choose

environments that meet their needs; when this fit is evident, relationships and responsibilities feel aligned (Ghielen et al., 2021). A powerful attachment builds commitment and fulfillment (Spoljaric & Dosen, 2023).

Brands, not only products, carry human characteristics that influence candidates. The applicants prefer brands that reflect their own traits; personality cues engage emotionally and differentiate the firm (Shafiee et al., 2022). This is compatible with classic brand-personality work, and this also applies to corporate character studies (Aaker, 1997; Keller & Richey, 2006). Ambler & Barrow's employer brand comprises functional, economic, and psychological value; retention is typically more cost-effective than constant re-recruitment (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Spoljaric & Dosen, 2023), with subsequent work that connects those values to internal brand equity (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Social identity theory explains how a strong internal/external brand fosters identification, cohesion, and loyalty (Maxwell & Knox, 2009), and forecasts commitment and reduced fluctuation intentions (Löhndorf & Diamantopoulos, 2014; Mittal et al., 2022). Because a brand is ultimately perceived as meaning, management must ensure fit with corporate values and selection, using authentic, consistent signals throughout the touchpoints (de Chernatony, 2002; Wang et al., 2022; Kucherov & Zhiltsova, 2021). The fulfillment of the promises is the core of the psychological contract. Violating this has negative consequences for attraction and subsequent retention (Sandeepanie et al., 2023; Alzaid & Dukhaykh, 2023).

In the context of MNCs, the fundamental difficulty is achieving a proper balance between the global and local sides, a coherent promise with locally relevant proof points, avoiding over-standardized messaging, bureaucracy, or "polished but hollow" signals (Piekkari et al., 2022; Spoljaric & Dosen, 2023; Wang et al., 2022). Visible development, mobility, fair communication, and mentoring show that commitments are kept (Bonneton et al., 2022; Vieira et al., 2024).

2.3 Global employer branding for employee retention: Strategies for success

In simple terms, the retention depends on delivering on promises, internal branding arrangements, and global-local customization, which preserves the daily employee experience (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011; Vokić et al., 2023). The process of building a brand is an interplay of sending and receiving information. Signaling theory explains this exchange of information. When two entities hold differing information, an exchange occurs. In this scenario, the sender—the employer—transmits data to the job seeker—the information recipient. The aim is for the recipient to find the employer and the brand appealing. The receiver uses this interaction to arrive at a decision and simultaneously reduce the associated risk (Wang et al., 2022).

Regarding retention, the messages must always be upheld after the employee joins the organization. This is because when commitments are fulfilled in daily work life, trust and dedication towards the employer increase (de Chernatony, 2002; Rys et al., 2024). Figure 1 summarizes the instrumental and symbolic construct that highlights these cues. This demonstrates how functional, economic, and symbolic/identity signals can be combined, converging into the employer promise (de Chernatony, 2002; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003).

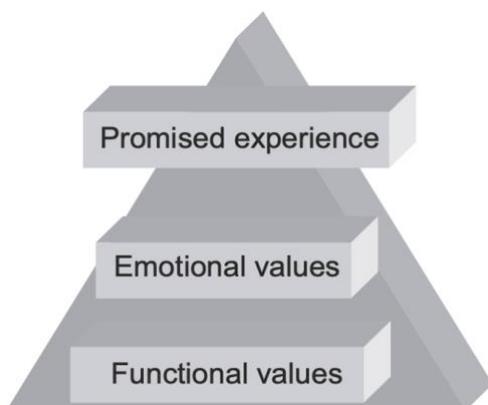


Figure 1: The employer brand pyramid: Functional and emotional values that converge in the promised experience (de Chernatony, 2002).

A powerful attachment to the company fosters a sense of commitment, leading to higher levels of fulfillment not only in a professional context but also in a personal sphere (Spoljaric & Dosen, 2023). Such a bond is maintained through ethical treatment, visible opportunities for progression, appreciation, and a work-life balance. These essential aspects of the psychological contract help to decrease departure tendencies (Sandeepanie et al., 2023; Alzaid & Dukhaykh, 2023).

It should be emphasized that if a company is well-structured and its employees align with the brand's values, it is tough for other companies to duplicate its success (de Chernatony, 2002). In other words, the alignment of values leads to "fusion": employees who can identify with the brand's values are generally unwilling to quit the company, even if attractive options are available elsewhere (Maxwell & Knox, 2009; Knezović & Jamak, 2023).

Especially for job seekers in the initial phase, a company's first impression is an essential indicator for future decisions. Lievens and Highhouse first introduced the instrumental and symbolic framework. (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Regarding retention, instrumental (growth, safety) and symbolic (identity, confidence) signals must be consistently experienced by employees after joining the company. Inconsistencies on this point undermine their engagement (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Wang et al., 2022). A powerful employer brand offers several advantages beyond attracting the best employees. Possible incentives to consider include financial rewards, company-specific rewards, work-life balance, and professional advancement opportunities (Samoliuk et al., 2022). Among the particularly effective levers that have to be tracked are internal mobility, perceived equitable compensation, overall management quality, and the potential incidence of burnout; in general, these propositions should be monitored regularly (Bonneton et al., 2022; Vieira et al., 2024; Vokić et al., 2023). From a broader perspective of brand prominence, Figure 2 shows the world's top 20 most valuable companies (2022), clearly demonstrating their steadfast presence across markets (Interbrand, 2022).

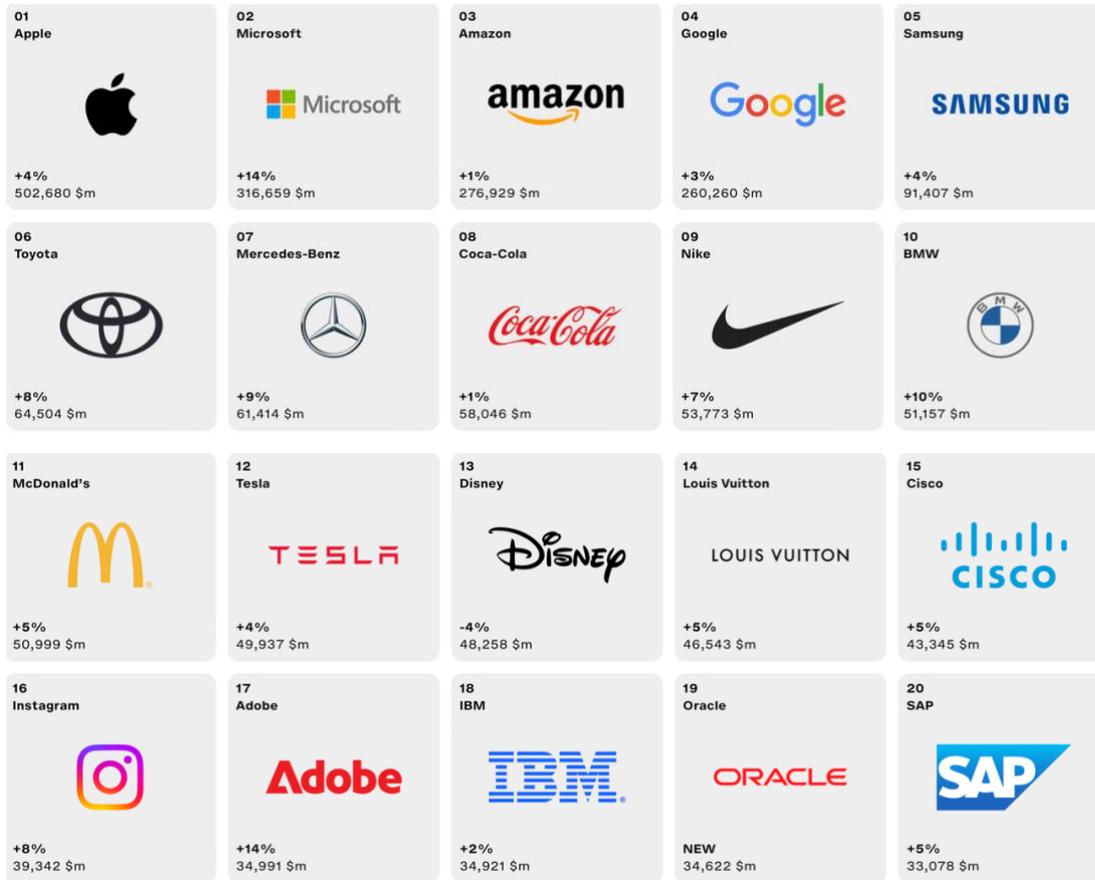


Figure 2: The most valuable brands in the world's top twenty (Interbrand, 2022).

Furthermore, the characteristics that attract employees are not necessarily the same. That is why employers today need to understand what employees envision and desire (Wang et al., 2022). In multinational corporations, global policies must be complemented by local adjustments in employee benefits, professional development, and communication. This ultimately helps to maintain a sense of belonging (Spoljaric & Dosen, 2023; Piekkari et al., 2022). The ultimate achievement that any company wants is to be the employer of choice. Financial incentives and a healthy work-life balance are essential. Further development opportunities, the company's interaction with society, and workforce diversity are fundamental (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). Furthermore, evidence suggests that these drivers are associated with higher identification and a reduced desire to leave the company. A more substantial brand equity is associated with a lower tendency to quit, further highlighting the importance of employer brand equity

as a key component of a successful retention strategy (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Ščiukauskė et al., 2024; Dženopoljac et al., 2023).

2.4 Synthesis and implications for employer branding theory

The employer brand equity, in this sense, encompasses alertness, connections, and reputation, which shape perceptions of desirability in initial decisions about a job opportunity, particularly in an MNC environment (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Balmer & Greyser, 2006; Spoljaric & Dosen, 2023; Bonneton et al., 2022). In contrast, awareness refers to the extent to which potential applicants are familiar with the employer brand (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Therefore, employer equity is an increasingly significant determinant of the desirability of appealing to talent (Backhaus, 2016; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). Thus, employer equity is the valuation that applicants hold of the company (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). For this reason, employer branding is crucial in the early stages to guide personal convictions in the right direction (Wang et al., 2022; Kucherov & Zhiltsova, 2021). By effectively leveraging its employer brand, the business can enhance its placement and maintain an overall advantage over competitors in the employment space (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Brexendorf & Keller, 2017; Dženopoljac et al., 2023). The corporate landscape is continuously evolving, and consequently, the brand must keep pace and adjust to ensure long-term success (Urde, 2016; de Chernatony, 2002; Ščiukauskė et al., 2024).

From a global perspective, sourcing and demonstrating an increasingly compelling employer is a highly competitive business for multinational corporations (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Balmer & Greyser, 2006; Dženopoljac et al., 2023). The challenge is cultivating an impressive contingent of talented and versatile employees for the worldwide conglomerate (Backhaus, 2016; Urde, 2016). For one, employees' cultural backgrounds must be considered to ensure the most appropriate responses for a successful initiative (Piekkari et al., 2022; Spoljaric & Dosen, 2023; Bonneton et al., 2022). An employer brand must include elements that resonate with the various employees and talents (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Tanwar & Kumar, 2019; Ghielen et al., 2021).

Similarly, economic drivers have to be recognized. Providing long-term employment stability and decent financial incentives should align with the respective countries to effectively attract talent (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). Operational criteria, such as career progression and the vacancy's content, are valuable factors that should be highlighted to attract talent (Sarkiunaite & Sciukauske, 2021; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). This calls for a careful balance between global and local presence, which retains the key meaning of the brand while allowing for a certain degree of adaptation (advantages, communication, and development) to meet local requirements (Spoljaric & Dosen, 2023; Piekkari et al., 2022; Bonneton et al., 2022; de Chernatony, 2002; Urde, 2009).

A fundamental question is how businesses can assess whether an enterprise is desirable. Among these are quantifiable variables, such as the number of applicants, hiring quotas, internal mobility, employee turnover, and the organization's perception by the outside world (as reflected in Glassdoor (Glassdoor, n. d.) reviews and employer awards, for example). Such information will help the company estimate its attractiveness, particularly in contrast to the competition. Given generational shifts in the labor force, companies must continually adapt and evolve to the ever-changing landscape. Especially about Generation Z, the authenticity of CSR programs, career awareness, and the ability to make initial contact digitally are all crucial factors that strengthen identification and the willingness to apply for a position at the employer (Küpper et al., 2021; Kucherov & Zhiltsova, 2021; Hendriana et al., 2023; Vieira et al., 2024).

In summary, the literature converges on a novel combination in which trustworthy cues (signaling theory), value alignment (person-organization fit theory), and brand identification (social identity theory) collectively drive attraction and retention outcomes relevant to MNC employer branding.

3 The brand in a corporate environment

3.1 The corporate brand: Definition and role

This chapter focuses on the secondary brand available to the business, namely the corporate brand. It begins with an overview and preliminary exploration. In the further course, the corporate brand and its essence are elucidated. This is immediately followed by a description of the purposes and aspects of developing the corporate brand. Once this is completed, the corporate brand's influence, significance at various scales, and consequences are covered. The generational shift and the foundations for establishing the corporate brand are highlighted. In the following section, the fusion of the corporate brand and employees' values is emphasized as the company's most precious asset. Subsequently, a profound insight into the core value of the corporate brand is introduced, symbolizing the brand's soul. To conclude, the corporate brand persona and the associated character are outlined.

Corporate branding focuses on the organization as the primary brand object and expresses its distinct identity to multiple stakeholder groups over time (Balmer & Greyser, 2006; Schultz, 2005). It draws on organization-level properties—vision, culture, values, symbols, and history—to signal "who we are" and "what we stand for," thereby differentiating the firm beyond individual products or services (Aaker, 2004; Hatch & Schultz, 2003). A coherent corporate brand aligns three arenas: an aspirational vision that guides direction, a lived culture of shared meanings and practices, and an external image formed by stakeholders' perceptions (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Figure 3 depicts the connection between the fusion of vision, culture, and image, as well as the touchpoints between stakeholders through which this is interpreted and developed (Hatch & Schultz, 2003).

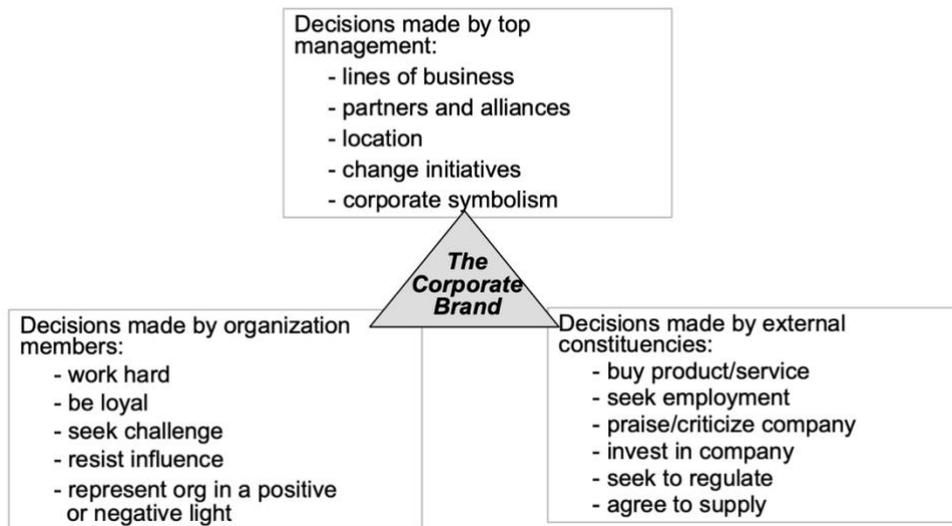


Figure 3: All the stakeholders involved in building the corporate brand (Hatch & Schultz, 2003).

Because corporate brands address diverse stakeholders, they typically embody richer meanings than product brands and gain an advantage when those meanings are distinctive, credible, and consistently enacted (Brexendorf & Keller, 2017). Effective governance, therefore, unites internal communication and leadership with vigilant monitoring concerning external perceptions and fulfilled commitments (Balmer & Greyser, 2006). At the heart of the brand lies an "inner core" of enduring values and promises that anchors change while guiding adaptation throughout markets and time (Urde, 2003, 2009, 2016). Figure 4 illustrates this internal core, highlighting how core values, value propositions, and the brand pledge work in tandem to sustain the brand identity continuously.

Corporate brands also operate through functional and emotional pathways. Functional routes emphasize performance and information; emotional routes cultivate meaning and attachment that are harder for rivals to imitate (Hartmann et al., 2005). Employees are pivotal carriers of both routes: their behavior and personal branding have to reinforce the corporate brand's values in everyday interactions (Potgieter & Doubell, 2020).

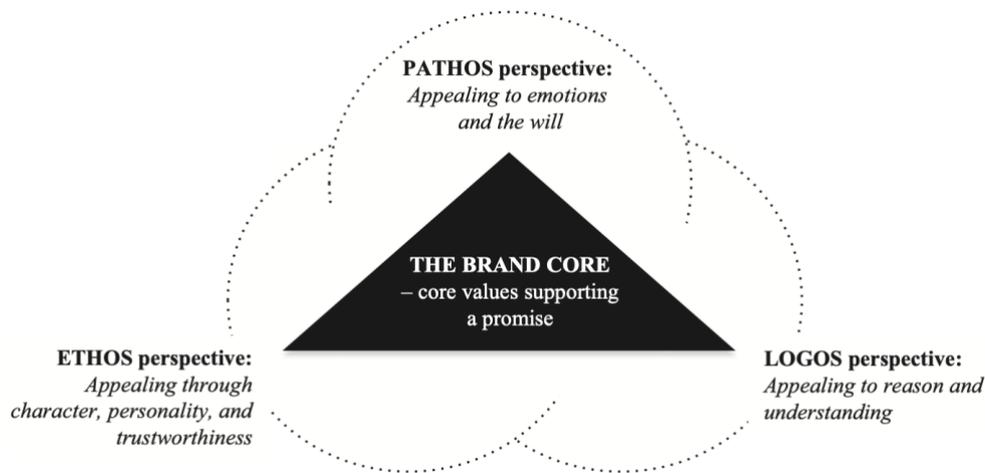


Figure 4: The dimensions of the inner brand core (Urde, 2016).

Aaker's brand personality framework offers a shared vocabulary for describing how brands take on human-like traits that aid recognition and identification. Figure 5 summarizes these personality attributes, which help explain the preferences associated with allegiance and the perceived match with stakeholder self-image (Aaker, 1997).

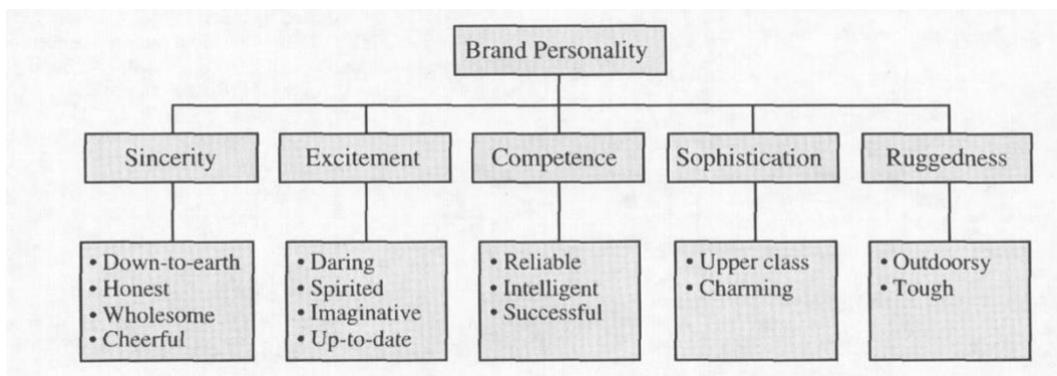


Figure 5: The brand personality examples (Aaker, 1997).

To conclude, Figure 6 presents a case example from Volvo regarding the organization's internal core. In this sense, it demonstrates how security and environmental responsibility were transformed from core values into coherent organizational choices, messaging, and stakeholder interactions (Urde, 2016).

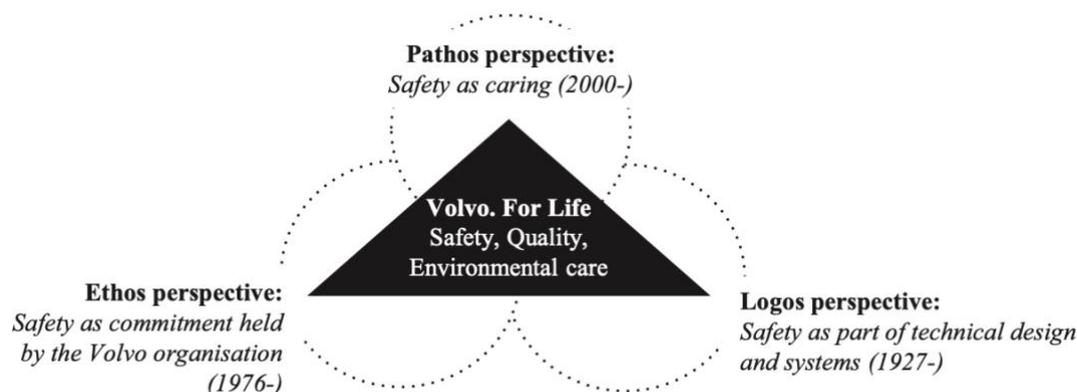


Figure 6: Example of the inner core brand value of Volvo (Urde, 2016).

Collectively, these perspectives establish the corporate brand as a distinct identity ecosystem and commit to aligning the vision, culture, and image of each stakeholder at the corporate level. This is underpinned by a lasting inner value core and manifested with functional and emotional cues (Balmer & Greyser, 2006; Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Urde, 2003, 2009, 2016).

3.2 Internal branding: Key concepts and strategies

Internal branding refers to the employer consciously shaping employees' comprehension, identification, and conduct towards the employer's brand, complementing externally oriented employer branding (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011; Ruzzier et al., 2021). In other words, this establishes the internal environment that makes the employer's commitments trustworthy in everyday working life, supporting both attraction signals and long-term retention.

Conceptually, internal branding integrates HR and marketing to advance understanding of the brand and foster shared senses among employees, which, in turn, fosters brand identification and commitment and ultimately leads to brand-consistent behaviors toward colleagues and customers (Barros-Arrieta & Garcia-Cali, 2021; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). This cause-and-effect relationship, involving brand communications, brand awareness/relevance, identification/engagement, and brand citizenship behavior, forms

a core system linking internal branding to outcomes such as service quality, reputation, and lower turnover (Barros-Arrieta & Garcia-Cali, 2021; Ruzzier et al., 2021).

Leadership is pivotal. Managers who represent the brand values and serve as role models strengthen message credibility and employees' willingness to internalize the brand (Terglav et al., 2016). Transformational leadership further sets up a sense of purpose, trust, and a belief in the power of change, helping employees align personal goals with brand goals (Binu Raj, 2022). When leadership activities align with the brand's communication, identification with the brand intensifies and skepticism decreases (Terglav et al., 2016). Internal branding works through both functional and emotional pathways. Beyond role clarity, training, and processes, emotional signals, values, goals, and authentic storytelling foster a bond with the employer that competitors cannot easily replicate (Garas et al., 2018; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Hoppe, 2018; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). Regarding MNCs, this emotional basis is essential for preserving a sense of unity worldwide while enabling local exposure to the values they share (Spoljaric & Dosen, 2023; Piekkari et al., 2022).

Two theoretical lenses clarify why internal branding matters for retention. Social identity theory explains how employees classify themselves within the employer brand as part of the corporate group, linking self-esteem to the organization's distinctiveness and superiority, thereby supporting loyalty and advocacy (Knop, 2022; Löhndorf & Diamantopoulos, 2014). Person-organization fit theory holds that value alignment indicates the level of commitment and willingness to remain with the company, making internal branding a vehicle for articulating and living those values (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). Outcomes include stronger brand understanding, brand engagement (emotional bond with the brand), and brand citizenship behavior (discretionary, brand-supporting acts), together developing brand champions within the company (Barros-Arrieta & Garcia-Cali, 2021; Löhndorf & Diamantopoulos, 2014; Binu Raj, 2022). Figure 7 summarizes this process from internal communications and leadership through

identification and commitment to behavior and performance (Barros-Arrieta & Garcia-Cali, 2021).

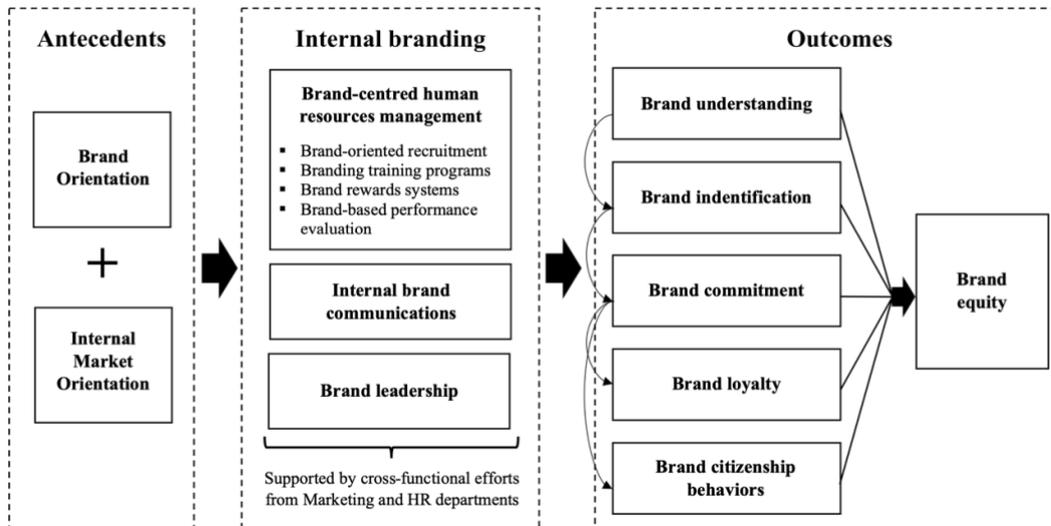


Figure 7: The process of internal branding (Barros-Arrieta & Garcia-Cali, 2021).

In conclusion, retention is a kind of hands-on operational check for internal branding: when values are lived consistently, employees perceive promise-keeping, develop attachment, and remain with the firm; when gaps appear, commitment erodes and exit intentions rise (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011; Ruzzier et al., 2021).

3.3 Internal branding for talent attraction

Internal branding strengthens a firm's attractiveness by aligning what employees understand, identify with, and act within the organisation with what candidates see outside it (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011; Ruzzier et al., 2021). When employees share a clear grasp of the brand's values and purpose, their day-to-day behaviours, word-of-mouth, and service cues make external signals more credible, raising perceived employer quality among prospective applicants (Barros-Arrieta & García-Cabrera, 2021; Wang et al., 2022).

Mechanistically, internal brand communication leads to brand understanding and identification of brand relevance, and to commitment to brand-consistent behaviours. This chain links the inside to outcomes that matter for attraction: a stronger reputation, more straightforward value propositions, and coherent touchpoints that reduce applicant uncertainty (Barros-Arrieta & García-Cabrera, 2021; Ruzzier et al., 2021). Leaders amplify the effect when they role-model brand values, which increases message believability and employees' willingness to internalize and advocate the brand (Terglav et al., 2016). Internal branding also supports instrumental and symbolic cues that shape early attraction: role clarity, growth pathways, and fairness (instrumental), alongside meaning, pride, and identification (symbolic) (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Fernandes et al., 2023). By making values lived rather than merely stated, internal branding strengthens signals of person-organization fit, helping candidates assess value congruence quickly and positively (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019; Ahmed et al., 2022).

In multinational contexts, a shared internal brand logic provides global consistency while allowing local expression of the same values, sustaining authenticity across markets that candidates compare online and offline (Spoljaric & Dosen, 2023; Piekkari et al., 2022). Practices that reinforce attraction include visible progression and mobility options, fair communication, mentoring, and supportive climates that demonstrate promise-keeping (Knezovic & Jamak, 2023; Fernandes et al., 2023).

In sum, internal branding is not separate from attraction; it is the credibility mechanism behind it. When employees understand and embody the brand, external signals appear authentic, reducing candidate risk and increasing the desirability of the employer (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011; Vokic et al., 2023; Soleimani et al., 2023).

3.4 Internal branding for employee retention

Internal branding aids retention by aligning values represented with the experiences lived. When day-to-day practices align with brand promises, employees perceive the psychological contract as fulfilled and fair, thereby strengthening their affective

commitment and reducing their intentions to quit (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011; Ruzzier et al., 2021; Knezovic & Jamak, 2023).

From a mechanical perspective, retention gains result from a series of measures, including continuous internal brand messaging, credible role modeling by managers, and coordinated HR marketing practices (such as training, role clarity, and recognition). These measures promote an awareness of the brand, identification with it, and brand-affirming behavior-voluntary actions that support the brand in everyday work life (Barros-Arrieta & Garcia-Cali, 2021; Terglav et al., 2016; Garas et al., 2018; Löhndorf & Diamantopoulos, 2014). Content matters. Employees remain when signals translate into professional development and mobility, mentoring, fair and transparent communication, and work-life balance, and when these are implemented and reflected in routines, not just messaging (Ahmed et al., 2022; Vokic et al., 2023; Soleimani et al., 2023). In MNCs, these elements must maintain a uniform global core while being adjusted according to local cultural and labor-market conditions to preserve credibility across sites (Spoljaric & Dosen, 2023). Outcomes include lower recruitment expenses, enhanced workforce resilience, and stronger organizational capability, making retention a practical test of internal branding quality (Fernandes et al., 2023; Ghaisani & Saragih, 2024).

4 The concept of employer branding

This chapter discusses employer branding, synthesizing key theories and models (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004), and explaining why it is critical in today's increasingly competitive talent landscape. Subsequently, the connections to these concepts are examined in relation to the two main variables in the thesis: attraction and retention. The emphasis is on how cues, values, and the fulfillment of commitments form perceptions in a multinational setting. The chapter concludes by outlining how employer branding complements the corporate and internal brands, and, in this sense, the subsequent sections will focus on attraction and retention.

4.1 Defining employer branding: Key theories and models

Intensifying competition for scarce skills makes employer branding a strategic lever for attracting and retaining talent (Sivertzen, 2013; Aboul-Ela, 2016). Following the seminal view, an employer brand is the bundle of Functional (progression), economic (incentives), and psychological (identity/attachment) benefits offered to employees and applicants (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Building on this, employer branding extends product branding logic to the employment relationship by positioning the firm as an employer of choice (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Backhaus, 2016). Two complementary perspectives organize the literature. First, the instrumental-symbolic view explains how job-related, tangible attributes (e.g., security, pay, learning) and symbolic meanings (e.g., prestige, innovativeness, warmth) jointly shape preferences, especially at early consideration stages (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Keller & Richey, 2006). Figure 8 summarizes typical value-proposition elements (Dabirian et al., 2017).

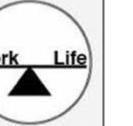
SEVEN EMPLOYER BRANDING VALUE PROPOSITIONS						
SOCIAL VALUE	INTEREST VALUE	APPLICATION VALUE	DEVELOPMENT VALUE	ECONOMIC VALUE	MANAGEMENT VALUE	WORK/LIFE BALANCE
						
Is this a fun place to work with talented people and a great organizational culture?	Is this an interesting place to work, with challenging but achievable goals?	Is the work meaningful and does it invite the application of knowledge and skills?	Are there opportunities for employees to grow and advance professionally?	Is work rewarded appropriately through salaries, benefits and perks?	Are managers good, honest leaders who inspire, trust, protect, enable and respect employees?	Are work arrangements flexible enough to achieve success on and off the job?

Figure 8: Possible value propositions (Dabirian et al., 2017).

Second, signaling theory clarifies how employer communications and touchpoints shorten information asymmetry: credible, consistent signals help candidates evaluate fit and risk (Wang et al., 2022; de Chernatony, 2002). Figure 9 illustrates how attraction is increasing in response to these signals (Chhabra & Sharma, 2014).

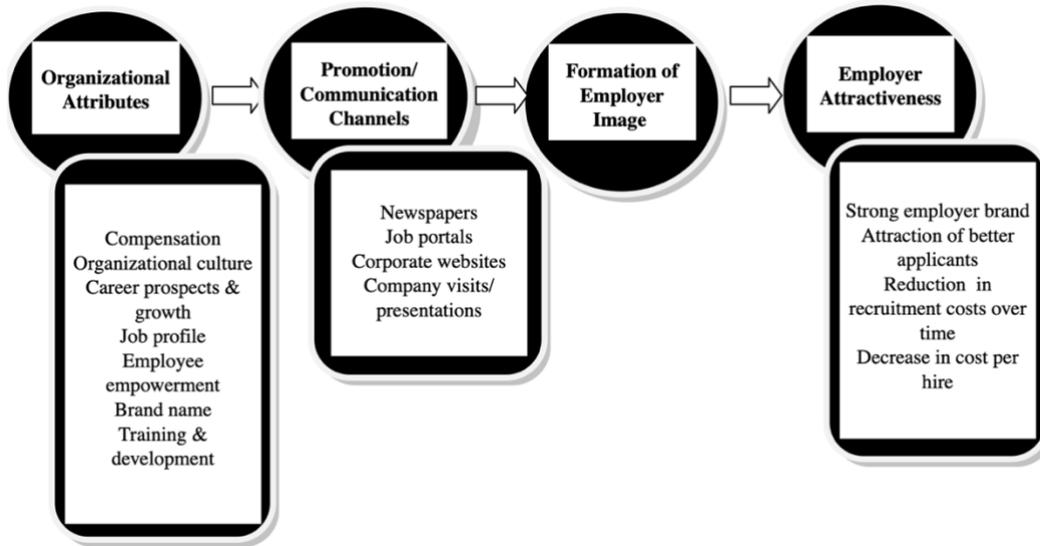


Figure 9: The employer branding attractiveness process (Chabra & Sharma, 2014).

The Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) model integrates external and internal sides: external positioning shapes applicant attraction and employer brand equity, while internal branding aligns employees' understanding and behavior with the brand promise, reinforcing commitment and performance (see Figure 10).

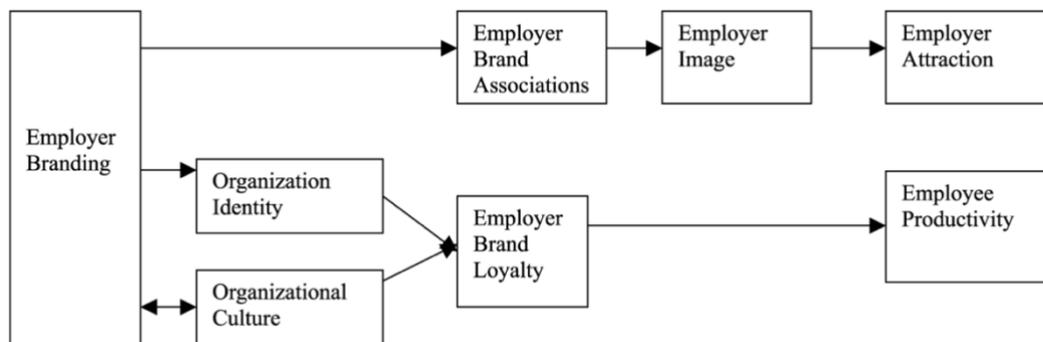


Figure 10: The process of employer branding (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

In this process, the psychological contract links post-hire evaluations to promises: when implicit/explicit commitments are fulfilled, trust and retention strengthen; perceived breaches erode commitment (Sandeepanie et al., 2023; Dabirian, 2021). Two further lenses explain why employer branding affects decisions to join and stay. Person-organization fit theory predicts attraction and retention from value congruence between

individuals and the firm (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). Social identity theory suggests that a distinctive, respected employer brand supports the employees' self-definition with the organization, encouraging loyalty and advocacy (Maxwell & Knox, 2009; Löhndorf & Diamantopoulos, 2014). Digitalization amplifies these dynamics. Social media and online evaluation websites broaden reach, accelerate feedback loops, and heighten both signaling power and reputational risk; therefore, coherent and authentic messaging is critical (Sivertzen, 2013; Kucherov & Zhiltsova, 2021). Symbolic cues around CSR Programs as well as diversity increasingly influence identification and perceived fit, but must be enacted, not merely stated-to avoid credibility loss (Buzzao & Rizzi, 2023; Kele & Cassell, 2023)

Strategically, employer branding functions as a resource-derived, hard-to-imitate intangible that improves talent outcomes and supports performance through brand equity effects (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Bharadwaj et al., 2022; Sciukauske et al., 2024). For multinational corporations, the challenge is to combine a consistent worldwide value proposition with locally trustworthy adaptations, maintaining promise-keeping across markets (de Chernatony, 2002).

4.2 Employer branding for talent attraction

Employer branding is an integral asset for a business when sourcing new talented employees. Amid the intense battle for potential candidates, persuasion is of immense importance. The essence of employer branding is that unique attributes and intrinsic qualities of the firm and the brand generate a compelling awareness that potential applicants will identify with and thus associate with—often via instrumental (role, security, development) and symbolic (values, prestige) cues that reduce information asymmetry (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Keller & Richey, 2006; Wang et al., 2022). Businesses with powerful employer branding are more likely to secure the most suitable applicants than companies with inferior employer branding. Its success is significantly based on (1) distinct brand attributes and image, (2) managers/employees who embrace the brand internally, and (3) an outside reputation that makes clear its capabilities (Backhaus &

Tikoo, 2004; Brexendorf & Keller, 2017). Regarding MNCs, a globally coherent core, coupled with locally meaningful language, reinforces trustworthiness (Piekkari et al., 2022; Spoljaric & Dosen, 2023).

The purpose of employer branding, broadly defined, is to convey the organization's merits and propositions, as well as its brand strength, to external and prospective applicants, aiming to be recognized as an employer of choice (Backhaus, 2016). Having an original, unique brand and a powerful identity can entice the most qualified applicants to commit to the organization. An initial alignment regarding values and identity cues enhances the likelihood of applications (Ghielen et al., 2021; Hein et al., 2024). In addition to drawing in applicants, retaining staff is another crucial component (Abiwu & Martins, 2024).

The very existence of employer branding is to portray the organization in a favorable light to the outside world and to attract potential candidates to the company in preference to alternatives. In this way, attractiveness is the foremost benefit of the employer branding approach. Furthermore, the business's desirability will contribute to the collective brand equity. In other terms, brand equity is the intrinsic recognition by others of the brand identity, the understanding of the firm that shapes the mindsets and foundational assumptions of prospective employees. Genuine, coherent messages (consciousness + relationships) enhance this impact and safeguard it from skepticism (Caputo et al., 2023; de Chernatony, 2002; Wang et al., 2022). Digital pathways increase coverage but also extend scrutiny, which is why communications must align with reality (Kucherov & Zhiltsova, 2021). Transparent CSR programs and equitable behaviors further magnify the perceived attraction (Hendriana et al., 2023).

4.3 Employer branding for employee retention

Contemporary organizations face a unifying challenge: retaining highly talented employees. In this sense, employer branding is instrumental in securing employee ownership. A significant part of this approach is that the employer recognizes the

employees as the initial clients and addresses them accordingly. Successful retention only occurs when external brand endorsements are supported by believable daily experiences for employees within the organization (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). The principle of employer branding for employee retention centers on the business emblem, intangible assets such as the name, and corporate personality. Various elements must be incorporated into the strategic deployment to accomplish these objectives (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Balmer & Greyser, 2006; Keller & Richey, 2006; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011).

Maintaining a powerful employer brand is the key to retaining employees. Therefore, the employer must strive to keep staff continuously, particularly in terms of the cognitive dimension known as the psychological contract. Having explicit expectations, transparent processes, and visible advancement opportunities enhances the perceived level of justice associated with this agreement, transforming the branding into an intention to remain (Alzaid & Dukhaykh, 2023; Mehta et al., 2024). In a worst-case scenario, if the employer fails to meet contractual obligations, the consequences are detrimental not only to the organization but also to employees. Ultimately, the desire to resign permanently from the organization. A failure to comply undermines identification and accelerates departure from the organization; in reverse, this implies that responsive fulfillment of promises, maintaining supporting resources, flexibilization, and effective communication within the organization lead to greater resilience in terms of commitment and retention behavior (Abord de Chatillon et al., 2023; Mehta et al., 2024).

4.4 Summary and synthesis of the theoretical framework

The thesis's underlying objective is to determine how employer branding, along with social identity and person-organization fit theory, can enhance the attraction and retention of prospective and incumbent employees. The primary emphasis is on the implications for attracting and retaining employees; other influences are recognized concisely to preserve the thesis's content and cohesion. Therefore, the fundamental forces that shape the relationship must be carefully investigated.

The framework comprises three brand assets: the employer brand (commitments to the outside world and signals to the market), the corporate brand (identity, values, leadership), and internal branding (the transformation of promises into everyday work). These brand assets function through four mechanisms signaling (instrumental + symbolic), person-organization fit (value alignment), social identity (identification), and the psychological contract (promise keeping) to achieve two primary outcomes: attraction and retention. For globally active organizations, trustworthy messaging and daily continuity are crucial, particularly amid disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. These cues translate from abstract brand commitments into real-life experiences that reinforce both recruitment and retention decision-making. Figure 11 (theoretical framework) illustrates this rationale. A feedback loop implies that effective retention enhances brand equity and generates greater future attraction, while breaking commitments (failure to fulfill promises) diminishes identification and increases the desire to leave the organization.

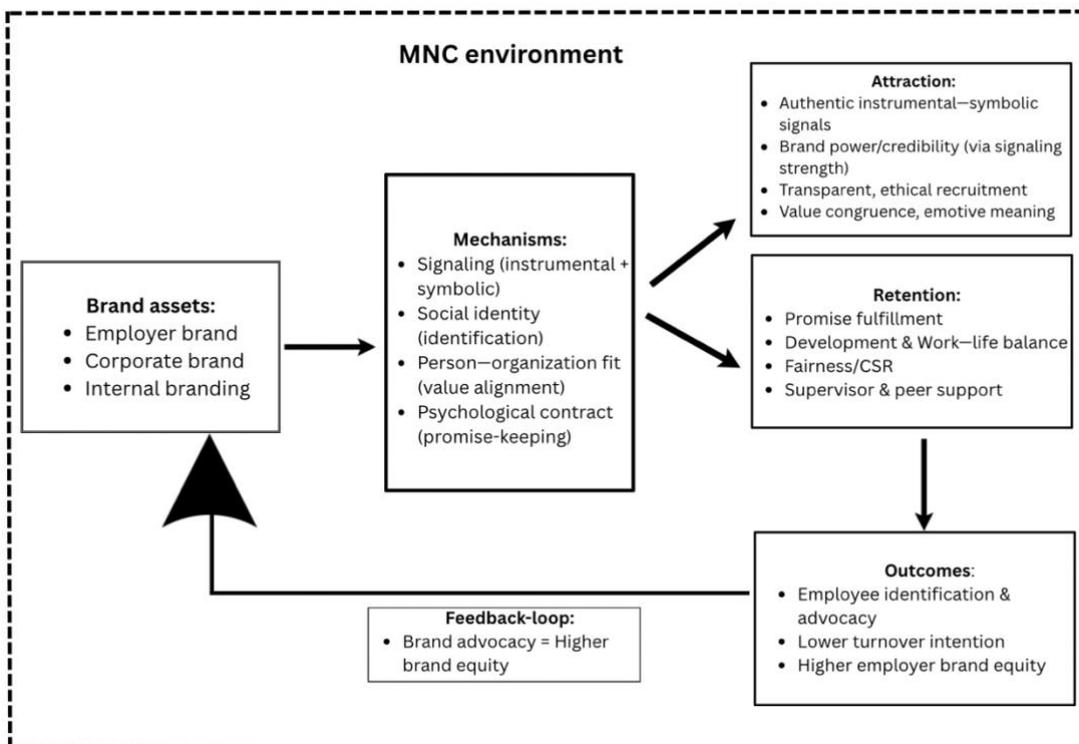


Figure 11: The literature-grounded framework.

The evidence is presented in chapters 6 and 7.5: Attraction (6.2: authentic signals, brand power/credibility (via signaling strength), transparent ethical recruitment, value congruence, emotive meaning), retention (6.3: keeping promises, development & work-life balance, fairness/CSR, support from supervisors/colleagues) and in the outcomes (6.3/7.5: identification, lower turnover intention, higher employer brand equity).

This framework is the guidance for the present empirical research of this thesis: Data collection and analysis map reported experiences to the components (employer, corporate, internal, employer branding), evaluate evidence for the mechanisms (identity, fit), and assess their contribution to the outcomes of interest with a focus on the MNC environment and convergence across cases.

The global talent competition has intensified, making employer branding a strategic lever for attracting and retaining talent in multinational corporations. This thesis examines how a global employer brand influences perceptions of attraction and retention, clarifying the concept and its connection to corporate strategy. Guided by the social identity theory and person-organization fit theory, the study employs an interpretivist, qualitative design, utilizing semi-structured interviews with ten final year Finnish and German students who all had previous working experience (internships, part-time or full-time jobs) directly significant to their respective disciplines.

Findings indicate that global employer brands are comprising an instrumental-symbolic value proposition, credible promise-keeping systems (leadership, culture, and internal communication), and a global-local balance explicitly linked to strategic goals and KPIs (key performance indicators). Attraction is driven by faithfulness, value alignment, and honest signals during early touchpoints, with the respondent drawing attention to crystal-clear, ethical communication over salary or role specifics. Retention hinges on fulfilling psychological contracts, providing development opportunities, offering reasonable treatment, and maintaining a sustainable work-life balance; consistent values in day-to-day practice strengthen identification and loyalty. The MNC setting both

attracts (mobility, learning, prestige) and constrains (bureaucracy, depersonalization), requiring careful judgement of global and local aspects.

The study contributes an integrated global employer brand (GEB) view that connects brand assets to identity/fit mechanisms and to talent outcomes, and offers practical guidance: design honest, lived-value propositions; align global messaging with local realities; and measure promise-keeping through attraction/retention indicators.

5 Research methodology

This chapter outlines the research's structure and provides reasons for it. The justification is grounded in the so-called "onion principle" (philosophy, approach, method/strategy, time frame), followed by a detailed description of data acquisition, sampling, and data analysis. As a last point, all the stages involved in establishing the research's credibility are explained.

5.1 Philosophical foundations and methodological direction

An interpretivist stance is adopted because the thesis seeks an in-depth understanding of how students make sense of employer branding in context, acknowledging multiple realities constructed through experience (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015; Lim, 2023). This aligns with a subjectivist ontology and a relational/constructivist epistemology, where meanings are co-created in social contexts (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). An axiological approach involves recognizing previously acquired knowledge and values, but these are limited by the use of retrospective note-taking during the investigation (Patton, 2014).

The research design is both inductive and exploratory, prioritizing emergent insights over hypothesis testing (Kim, 2021; Olawale et al., 2023). In addition, pragmatism was also identified as a viable option. However, it was dismissed since the main objective is not to achieve the state of "whatever functions" as a feasibility criterion, but rather to gain a comprehensive understanding and meaning in relation to the two distinct cultural groups (Turyahikayo, 2021; Hampson & McKinley, 2023).

5.2 Research design and strategic approach

A qualitative, mono-method design using semi-structured interviews elicits rich, situated accounts (Gill et al., 2008; Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Since two national groups are being interviewed, the overall design serves as a benchmark case for comparative analysis (Finland vs. Germany) throughout the single project. The perceptions were acquired at a given moment rather than accumulated over a long period (Wang & Cheng, 2020; Tuthill et al., 2020).

5.3 Primary and secondary data considerations

In the research, semi-structured interviews were used, grounded in the theoretical context of this thesis (employer branding, attraction, retention, MNC context). The guiding principles included: (1) general perceptions of employer branding, (2) attraction factors, (3) retention factors, (4) cultural impacts, and (5) emotional/identity-specific considerations. In this sense, open-ended questions and exploratory conversations were used to support greater depth and tailoring (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015; Gill et al., 2008).

All interviews were conducted online (via FaceTime, WhatsApp calls, or Skype) between March 10 and March 27, 2025. This setup was arranged to eliminate geographic barriers for the interview process. Additionally, all conversations were voice-recorded with participants' permission and transcribed word-for-word immediately afterward to ensure accuracy and richness.

5.4 Sampling logic, data acquisition, and analytical process

Purposive sampling targeted students near graduation who were actively considering employers, as they can be linked directly to attraction/retention perceptions (Patton, 2014; Campbell et al., 2020). Ten participants (5 Finnish, 5 German) were interviewed.

Information saturation was achieved with the eighth interview; however, two further interviews were conducted to verify the redundancy (Saunders et al., 2016). Each of the 10 interview participants had prior work experience related to their studies (internships, student/assistant roles, traineeships, or jobs in academic research). The majority of interviewees had approximately one year of work experience, while a small subset had as much as two years. Due to this hands-on experience and its impact on participants, their views are based on workplace experience rather than solely on theoretical knowledge of employer branding.

Participants were asked to participate in the interviews via direct communication with the researcher, with a focus on ease of scheduling appointments. Furthermore, participants were informed of the permission, privacy, and the option to withdraw before each interview. Table 1 provides a summary of the interview sample (n=10) by country, role type, and previous work experience (in years); anonymity is maintained through the use of pseudonyms.

Table 1: Summary of the interview process.

Interview Nr.	Participant code	Nationality	Role	Work-experience (in years)	Interview date	Interview duration (minutes)
1	P01	German	Student	2	10.03.2025	52
2	P02	German	Student	1	13.03.2025	55
3	P03	German	Student	1	11.03.2025	28
4	P04	Finnish	Student	1	21.03.2025	39
5	P05	Finnish	Student	1	24.03.2025	43
6	P06	German	Student	2	23.03.2025	27
7	P07	Finnish	Student	1	21.03.2025	43
8	P08	Finnish	Student	1	27.03.2025	33
9	P09	Finnish	Student	2	24.03.2025	43
10	P10	German	Student	1	27.03.2025	38

5.5 Data evaluation and interpretation

An inductive and thematic approach was applied (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The resulting transcripts were subsequently imported into MAXQDA to ensure a verifiable chain of evidence. The early coding was a fusion of data-guided codes and the simultaneous optimization of the codes into a coding scheme based on key areas (such as participant perception). As a next step, the codes were refined and organized into appropriate categories, then transformed into themes. Afterwards, the completed code output was exported to Excel to examine anomalies and observe Finnish-German distinctions. Related notes assisted in documenting the analytical choices made throughout the process (Patton, 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

5.6 Ensuring data integrity and trustworthiness

The formation of themes utilized three basic validations: (a) each interview required a concise and coherent narrative, (b) commonalities and distinctions among the interviews were identified, and (c) contrasting instances were incorporated to avoid biased conclusions. Abbreviated quotes were selected that related to the appropriate code sections and were subsequently added to the analytical paragraph to enhance the analysis further. Similarly, country distinctions were incorporated only if they showed consistent recurrence across both country groupings (Finland and Germany). These themes were subsequently examined in light of the complete data collection and in accordance with the theoretical frameworks employed in the thesis (signaling theory, person-organization fit theory, social identity theory), to demonstrate whether previous work is validated, improved, or enhanced (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saunders et al., 2016; Noble & Smith, 2015).

Such procedures reinforce the credibility of the findings by grounding the themes in a synthesized account, supported by converging and conflicting evidence, and highlighted by quotations (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Noble & Smith, 2015). Dependability and confirmability of the investigation are strengthened by a structured, transparently

documented coding review process and by the repeated, consistent reliance on the theoretical frameworks (Patton, 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2017; Golafshani, 2003). In this sense, transferability is enabled by presenting a rich, detailed explanation of the research scope, sample attributes, and the cross-country perspective on Finland and Germany, which facilitates an assessment of the applicability of the findings across different circumstances (Saunders et al., 2016; Golafshani, 2003).

6 Findings

This chapter addresses the main research question: "How does global employer branding influence the perception of attraction and retention among existing and potential employees?" In addition, each section of this chapter discusses the sub-questions (sub-research questions 1–2) explicitly. In the following, the interpretations represent the viewpoints of the participants, grounded in real work experience rather than theoretically based perceptions.

6.1 Perceptions of the global employer brand

The objective behind sub-research question 1. This section clarifies what the participants understand by a global employer brand and how this construction is strategically implemented. As such, sub-question 1 discusses in detail the essential elements of the brand (authenticity, peer-validated reputation, MNC scope, leadership/people practices) and the cultural framing (Finland vs. Germany) through which the respondents evaluate these aspects.

Generally, the participants viewed employer branding as more multifaceted than simply logos or advertising messages. Employer branding was perceived as a dynamic construct that incorporates a mix of visual elements, communication approaches, peer validation, and initial first impressions. The answers also show that employer branding was not understood as reducible to logos or slogans, but as a broader image shaped by many factors. Participants expressed that the employer brand was often the first impression

an organization made and that this impression could be very decisive in their later decision-making.

They explained that the company's image is formed through many channels, and that the first contact can already create expectations that are difficult to change later. In this sense, employer branding was described as a long-term process rather than a static concept. This shows that employer branding is much more than marketing, as it encompasses credibility, peer experiences, values, and how employees are treated in practice. (9/10 of participants emphasized that employer branding is multifaceted. It extends far beyond advertising messages and designs, and is frequently viewed as a living, long-term experience.)

Participants from both country groups interviewed remarked on how they perceive global corporations compared to local entities. Some described MNCs as an option that offers international prestige and structure, while others highlighted that it may also be risky due to corporate distance or a cultural mismatch. This suggests that the image of global organizations is not only shaped by positive associations, such as prestige, but also by critical reflections on distance and bureaucracy. Some participants explicitly said that the multinational context can make an organization appear attractive and professional, but at the same time, challenging to approach. Several students also explained that they believe multinational corporations are more structured and better organized, but can feel less personal than smaller companies. In this context, participants highlighted that global presence can be attractive, but they also emphasized that internationality is not automatically positive if it creates distance.

(All of the 10/10 participants have expressed that international visibility and diversity are appealing components of MNCs, but 7/10 have also voiced certain reservations regarding bureaucracy, stress, and distancing.) During the interviews, it was obvious that the participants were quite skeptical about overly prettified brands. Many pointed out the thin line between authentic expression and a marketing excess.

“There’s a fine line between making it sound fake and authentic. The companies that really are authentic manage really well to be attractive.” (P07)

“Sometimes I can find that social media marketing to be rather pretentious, and I can be suspicious of the true intentions of a company doing such employer branding.” (P03)

Several participants mentioned that authenticity is a crucial factor and that they quickly notice when communication appears staged. They explained that a brand that is too polished creates doubt, and that authenticity must be lived within the organization, not just communicated. In this sense, employer branding was associated with honesty and truthfulness, and participants criticized organizations that relied too heavily on marketing language. (7/10 of the participants were overly judgmental of glossy brands, while 6/10 directly aligned authenticity with being honest, inclusive, and actually living out values as opposed to just advertising taglines.)

Reputation appeared as a decisive factor for both attraction and retention. If the reputation is terrible, participants reported avoidance or reconsideration. Many respondents stated that their decision-making process is heavily influenced by peer reviews rather than by company communications. Accessible online platforms, such as Glassdoor (Glassdoor, n. d.), and discussions with friends helped them develop career ideas for an organization

“If reputation is really bad, I would not even once consider to work for the company... if the reputation is really going down, I would also consider to look for another job.” (P02)

“If I already knew beforehand that there’s something negative that has happened... then I would maybe avoid applying for them at all.” (P09)

“When applying to a company, I consider its reputation for how they treat their employees... I always look at websites like Glassdoor.” (P03)

The results, therefore, suggest that participants rely more on peer-to-peer knowledge and experience than on official employer brand communication. Reputation was also linked to credibility and trust in an employer. Participants stressed that a bad reputation

could prevent them from applying altogether, regardless of the benefits offered. This again shows how important credibility is for students when evaluating employers. (According to the interviews, 9 out of 10 respondents cited the company's reputation as a deciding factor, while 8 out of 10 clearly stated that peer ratings were important, with online platforms such as Glassdoor (Glassdoor, n. d.) and personal channels being seen as more trustworthy than corporate communications.)

The interviews also showed that the MNC environment itself is seen as part of the employer brand. Diversity and international teams were often described as enriching, while bureaucracy and distance were identified as risks. Mobility opportunities and leadership practices shaped perceptions.

“Working in a multinational company is actually kind of nice because you get to know a lot of people from a lot of different countries... it boosts your openness and growth of different cultures.” (P10)

“Big corporations can sometimes be very bureaucratic and very stuck in their ways... less flexible to changes in the working world.” (P03)

“If I apply for this company, I can sometime, if I want to move to England, I can. So it’s in that way. Yeah, it matters.” (P07)

“Important because that’s kind of my expectation if I’m going to apply to a multinational corporation.” (P05)

“The leadership is effective and efficient, and the communication has to be good... she would always make sure that we were not stepped on.” (P09)

“Usually also there’s like better training programs... more people you can learn from, more opportunities to develop your skills.” (P01)

Some participants stressed that these opportunities for international exchange are part of what makes MNCs stand out, while others emphasized that bureaucracy can also create a sense of distance. They also explained that leadership and management style are part of how they perceive the brand as a whole. This means that global employer branding is not only about external presentation but also about internal practices and

daily work experiences. (While 8/10 participants underscored international professional development and training opportunities, 7/10 named leadership and corporate culture, and 7/10 expressed bureaucracy and pressure as perceived risks.)

Throughout the interviews, participants often expressed their expectations and perceptions, not just in a practical sense but with a strong emotional undertone. The respondents repeatedly emphasized respect, inclusion, and the feeling of being heard.

“Treating everybody with respect would be like the most important characteristic for me that an organization should have that I work for.” (P02)

“It just makes you feel heard and makes you feel listened to when... you see that the company is considering these things as well.” (P07)

This shows that the answers contained not only rational arguments but also clear expectations on the emotional level. The emotional perspective was repeatedly mentioned across contexts, indicating that the employer brand is evaluated not only by rational factors but also by feelings of recognition and respect. Overall, this suggests that employer branding must also address the emotional level to be credible. (7/10 of the interview candidates listed respect, acknowledgement, and emotional connectivity as crucial aspects in the assessment of the employer brand.)

Finnish students frequently characterized employer brands as engaging when companies presented honest, straightforward values, were approachable, and were genuine. In comparison, the German students were more critical of employer branding and highlighted transparency, structure, and career development.

“To me, it would combine strong values like sustainability, well-being and ethics... a supportive culture, real growth opportunities and show that it values the employees.” (P08)

“Maybe the first one would be that the values align with mine and also to be a responsible and sustainable company... and to celebrate each other’s success is also very important.” (P08)

“Clear and transparent communication about the whole company... and what is the working environment like?... If they can provide that information... that’s a huge benefit.” (P05)

“If they are very consistent and they are transparent, clear and explain their actions and activities... then that’s going to be a good thing.” (P05)

This indicates that Finnish students focus more on values and sincerity, while German students put stronger emphasis on transparency and structure. This again shows how cultural context can shape students’ expectations of a global employer brand.

(5/5 of the Finnish students who participated underlined values, honesty, and inclusivity, while 5/5 of the German students pointed out transparency, structuring, and professionalism, but frequently in connection with skepticism towards highly glossed brands.)

Result for sub-question 1. The participants consider the employer brand to be a living, breathing entity and a validation of trustworthiness, rather than merely a visual design and advertising campaign. Authenticity (70%), peer-approved reputation (90%), leadership and daily interactions with colleagues (70%), as well as the MNC context itself (international visibility 100% vs. bureaucracy/detachment (70%) were emphasized in terms of the brand's strategic essence. From a strategic perspective, the value of the brand lies in its ability to transform initial interactions into long-term aspirations that influence subsequent decision-making. The underlying risk here is the potential disconnect between the message and reality, which can undermine brand trust. Cultural differences in viewpoint: Finnish university students prioritize honesty/values, while German university students emphasize structures/transparency—two contrasting approaches that nevertheless yield the same result: trustworthiness.

6.2 Factors influencing attraction

This section covers sub-research question 1 by identifying which employer brand characteristics generate genuine interest, or in other words, attraction, for an application. First contacts, communications, value alignment, peer reputation, career progression

opportunities, international awareness, as well as emotional/rational components and cultural aspects are investigated.

Participants described that employer brand communication strongly shapes their initial attraction to a company. Elements such as websites, career pages, and social media presence were seen as central in forming expectations. Participants highlighted that communication is the very first entry point into creating a picture of an employer. They explained that unclear or inconsistent communication can already be a reason not to consider a company. Participants also added that communication can influence not only attraction but also how credible they judge an employer to be. In this context, students emphasized that first impressions matter a lot. (6/10 of participants made it clear that the company's digital appearance and first perceptions are considered crucial factors in decisions that form attraction.)

“If on the website they say they have a good work life balance, they offer a lot of benefits... that would shape my expectations for the brand and employer.” (P01)

“Transparent and clear communication are the key things that I look for for potential corporations.” (P05)

Students emphasized that attraction is closely tied to shared values, ethical behavior, and corporate responsibility. Many highlighted sustainability and integrity as decisive. (8/10 respondents clarified that values and ethical convictions must be in harmony, especially sustainability, inclusivity, and trustworthiness, in attraction decision-making.)

“Maybe the first one would be that the values align with mine and also to be a responsible and sustainable company.” (P08)

“If they are very consistent and they are transparent, clear and explain their actions and activities... then that’s going to be a good thing.” (P05)

Values were mentioned as non-negotiable factors, and participants stressed that their decision to apply depends on whether the company demonstrates credibility. They

repeatedly emphasized that aligning values is a strong factor in choosing an employer. In this sense, values were not just an addition but a core requirement. This again shows that attraction is not only a rational but also a value-based process. Reputation was repeatedly described as a filter influencing whether students even considered applying. Negative reputation often led to avoidance. (9/10 of the interview participants expressed that reputation was the deciding factor. Online forums such as Glassdoor (Glassdoor, n. d.) or Kununu have a far greater influence on initial decisions than official branding.)

“If reputation is really bad, I would not even once consider to work for the company.” (P02)

“If I already knew beforehand that there’s something negative that has happened... then I would maybe avoid applying for them at all.” (P09)

Reputation was not only linked to prestige but also to trust and reliability. Participants stressed that a company’s reputation strongly influences first impressions. Overall, this shows that reputation functions as a decisive filter and can outweigh other positive aspects.

Participants valued career progression and opportunities for growth as significant factors in their decision to join. They emphasized structured development programs, training, and clear advancement paths. (8/10 in the interview process underlined that career progression is one of the most powerful attraction forces, and training / explicit growth was frequently cited as being crucial.)

“Usually also there’s like better training programs... more people you can learn from, more opportunities to develop your skills.” (P01)

“I think if they have clear practices, clear codes of conduct, and just this coherent leadership... then that would positively influence my decision to apply.” (P05)

Career development was seen as evidence that the company invests in its employees and takes them seriously. Participants also pointed out that these opportunities make a company more attractive than others that cannot offer them. Some even said that career opportunities can outweigh other factors in the decision process. This shows that career development is not just an additional factor, but central to attraction.

Many students regarded the possibility of working abroad or in diverse teams as an attractive feature of MNCs. (6/10 respondents reported that international visibility and mobility were a significant advantage, while German students considered this a key element in connection with multinational corporations, and Finnish students often viewed this option as a desirable addition.)

“If I apply for this company, I can sometime, if I want to move to England, I can. So it’s in that way. Yeah, it matters.” (P07)

“Working in a multinational company is actually kind of nice because you get to know a lot of people from a lot of different countries... it boosts your openness and growth of different cultures.” (P10)

Mobility and exposure to other countries were repeatedly highlighted as opportunities for personal and professional growth. Participants described that this international element could differentiate MNCs from local companies. Besides rational factors, attraction was also shaped by emotions. Feeling respected, supported, and treated as an individual was often mentioned. (7/10 of participants expressed that they view emotional and rational components, such as respect, acknowledgement, and assistance, on the same level as rational aspects concerning attraction.)

“Treating everybody with respect would be like the most important characteristic for me that an organization should have that I work for.” (P02)

“It just makes you feel heard and makes you feel listened to when... you see that the company is considering these things as well.” (P07)

This underlines that attraction is also strongly linked to emotional factors. Students explained that they want to feel welcome and valued from the very first steps of

interaction with a company. This again shows that employer branding is not only about communication but also about the emotional connection.

Finnish participants emphasized values such as sustainability, inclusiveness, and well-being as attractive, while German participants stressed transparency, professionalism, and authenticity in communication. (All of the 5/5 participants on the Finnish side prioritized values, honesty, and being consistent, while the German students ranked transparency, company structures, reputation ratings, and salary/benefits as significant.)

“To me, it would combine strong values like sustainability, well-being and ethics... a supportive culture, real growth opportunities and show that it values the employees.” (P08)

“Clear and transparent communication about the whole company... If they can provide that information... that’s a huge benefit.” (P05)

This suggests that although the themes are similar, cultural background influences which aspects are emphasized. This indicates that Finnish students are more emotionally oriented, while German students stress credibility and structure. (6/10 of the interview contributors underlined authenticity and were skeptical about excessively glossed media branding, mostly with descriptions such as it being too intentional.)

The answer to sub-research question 1. Attraction is framed by reputation (90%) and values/ethical alignment (80%). However, it is also driven by career progression opportunities (80%), supported by work-life balance (70%), and international visibility (60%). Likewise, initial communication, as the first point of interaction, is significant in setting expectations (60%), but is secondary to peer-based information sources (e.g., Glassdoor (Glassdoor, n. d.)) in the event of conflicting messages. Authenticity (60%), on the other hand, functions as a trustworthiness criterion, especially in the context of highly polished employer brands. The country variations are also reasonably coherent with those in section 6.1: Finnish respondents continue to appreciate values, honesty, and health and welfare, while German students continue to favor structure, transparency, compensation, and benefits.

6.3 Factors influencing retention

In this section, sub-research question 2 is assessed by evaluating the components of the brand that encourage employees to remain with the organization after recruitment. Among these are the everyday organizational experiences that either validate or contradict the brand promise.

Participants described retention as a multidimensional phenomenon, shaped not only by salary and contractual factors but also by trust, appreciation, and shared values. Many stressed that long-term commitment depends on mutual respect and also genuine care from the employer. Several respondents highlighted that their previous experiences, both positive and negative, strongly influenced their loyalty to the employer. Retention was therefore not seen as an automatic process, but as something that must be constantly earned through actions and credibility. Participants also expressed that loyalty is becoming increasingly conditional, and that organizations must continually prove themselves in employees' eyes. Overall, this shows that retention is strongly tied to lived experiences and not only to formal conditions. (9/10 in the interview process commented that career progression and growth are a significant factor in retention. Similarly, 9/10 of students emphasized that acknowledgement and company culture are seen as essential aspects of retention.)

Participants often spoke about unspoken promises of support, growth, and fairness. When these expectations were fulfilled, retention was strengthened. (8/10 of the students interviewed reported that they view trust, the fulfillment of promises, and credibility as fundamental elements of retention.)

“Towards the end of my traineeship, my manager approached me and said... we trust you and we have liked what you have done so far. So we would like you to stay.” (P07)

This demonstrates that mutual trust is among the strongest reasons to stay with an organization. Recognition was considered fundamental. Even small gestures of

acknowledgment made participants feel valued. (9/10 of participants said recognition and acknowledgment, ranging from minor acknowledgments to specialized training or advancements, were perceived as crucial for retention.)

“They openly told me that they would like for me to stay... when they offered me a training which is only reserved for full time employees... made me feel very, very appreciated.” (P06)

This shows that appreciation is a key factor for retention. Health and personal stability were essential for sustainable engagement. Respondents connected retention closely with employers’ care for mental health. (7/10 of the respondents pointed out that work-life balance, flexible working arrangements, and good state of health are important considerations when it comes to deciding to stay with the company in the long term.)

“I would say I look for a workplace that aligns with my values, such as a good work life balance and a positive working environment.” (P03)

This highlights how work-life balance has become a decisive factor in long-term retention. Opportunities to grow professionally were linked directly to loyalty. (9/10 of the students who were interviewed named career progression, training, or the chance to acquire additional skills as crucial factors in retention, which often overruled other benefits.)

“The most important for me would be probably the work culture... Then second probably career development. Seeing as I’m at the beginning of my career... a growth opportunity matters to me.” (P01)

Career opportunities were considered central to staying longer in an organization. While not the main factor, adequate pay was seen as a non-negotiable baseline. (7/10 of the interview students considered salary/other financial benefits to be an integral component of retention, but not the sole contributing variable.)

“In a long-term thinking, I think it’s important to know that there is like possibilities, for example, for salary raises and for getting like other financial benefits if you are working for the company.” (P07)

This shows that salary and benefits matter, but are rarely enough on their own to secure retention. If the company’s ethics did not align with their own, participants were clear that they would leave. (7/10 of the participants underlined that values, CSR, and ethical compatibility are significant for retention, especially concerning sustainability, fairness, and inclusiveness.)

“A company’s stance on ethical and social values plays a huge role in my decision to stay long term. If a company aligns with my own values like sustainability and fair treatment of people, I’m much more likely to remain committed.” (P03)

This underlines that retention is not only rational but also moral. Internships and early roles were often decisive in shaping long-term intentions. (6/10 of all participants associated retention with previous experiences, reputation, and how the company coped with crises, which decisively formed their trust in the organization in the long run.)

“When I decided to stay on after my traineeship, it was a lot about the tasks that I had been given because I felt like I was given responsibility and guidance.” (P07)

This demonstrates that positive early experiences can build loyalty and long-term bonds. Overall, participants emphasized community, recognition, and fairness. (7/10 participants in the interview process listed leadership behaviors, integrity, and fairness as core motivations for remaining with the organization.)

“If you treat the workers good and keep them happy, then they remain engaged with the organization longer.” (P09)

This shows that fundamental fairness and care are crucial for retention. Finnish participants stressed emotional connectedness, stability, and shared values, pointing to inclusiveness and mutual support as decisive. (All 5/5 of the Finnish students strongly favored values, inclusivity, and emotional connectivity, while on the German side, the

students highly preferred structure, career progression, fulfillment of commitments, leadership, and salary/benefits.)

“Maybe the first one would be that the values align with mine and also to be a responsible and sustainable company... the work environment is great and people lift each other up, rather than putting each other down.” (P08)

German students, on the other hand, emphasized structure, transparency, and professional clarity. They expected clear communication and consistent CSR practices from the employer.

“Clear and transparent communication about the organization’s actions, activities, how they treat their employees and what they can offer you... that’s a huge benefit.” (P05)

Thus, while Finnish students highlighted continuity and emotional safety, German students prioritized credibility and structured development. This demonstrates that cultural differences strongly shape how retention is evaluated. Across interviews, participants described retention in deeply emotional terms. Past experiences of being trusted, acknowledged, or disappointed shaped their willingness to stay. (8/10 of the interviewees stated that they consider trust, mutual respect, and emotional well-being to be significant factors in their decision-making process. Simultaneously, they associate long-term loyalty with being taken care of, valued, and acknowledged.)

“They seem to actually appreciate the work I do... saying something like that they would not survive without me.” (P09)

“Today’s work culture is very demanding and very stressful... taking mental and physical health into consideration really makes a huge difference.” (P08)

“If I was asking for a salary raise... and then a year goes by and the salary is not raised... I wouldn’t trust the company as much.” (P07)

Retention was therefore associated with stability, security, and trust in the employer. Participants explained that they decide to stay if they feel respected and treated fairly, and leave if these expectations are not met.

Several emerging insights have surfaced alongside the principal codes: Being skeptical of brand commitments: The participants "demand" that companies fulfill the claims they make, rather than just relying on glossy branding. Reputation and crisis-related behavior: Retention was significantly affected by how organizations behaved during crises and the transparency of their communication. Evolving opinions regarding loyalty: Students believe that loyalty is not automatically granted but must be earned by the company through trustworthiness and honesty. (6/10 of the student respondents voiced high opinions regarding the behavior of companies in crisis scenarios, as well as the skeptical mindset towards branding commitments. These aspects represent a significantly influential position regarding the elements of retention.)

In response to sub-research question 2, retention fundamentally depends on how the brand is transmitted in the workplace: Career advancement and recognition/work culture (90%) are particularly relevant, reinforced by trust/commitments that are upheld (80%), values/ethical concepts (70%), and work-life balance (70%); salary/corporate benefits (70%) are significant but not sufficient on their own. The corporate reputation, conduct (what is their aim? What will they do?), and experience in crises (60%) determine loyalty. Finnish respondents underlined emotional involvement, inclusiveness, and coherence; German participants, by contrast, highlighted structured progression, a transparent and comprehensive approach (all the details), and a balanced distribution of benefits.

6.4 Cross-cutting tensions shaping attraction and retention

This exploratory subsection synthesizes the findings from research sub-questions 1-2 and their link to the MRQ. Prestige vs. closeness: The international setting or opportunity is attractive, but it is simultaneously discouraging due to bureaucracy and

distance. Message vs. truth: Branding claims are assessed by demonstrated believability and peer input; any discrepancy causes a decline in attraction and retention. Values vs. Standardization: In this case, personal ethical norms and honesty clash with the more impersonal nature of MNC business processes.

Global employer branding has a significant impact on attraction and retention as a trustworthiness verification mechanism that must satisfy three criteria: (1) Authenticity (is the underlying message genuine?), (2) Peer-validated reputation (do external sources confirm this?), (3) The situation in practice (are leadership, growing opportunities, and fair procedures part of the work environment?). For employees seeking employment, the results of these assessments guide whether to apply for a job; for employees currently working at the company, the answers to these questions reveal whether they wish to remain with the organization. The international possibilities and this environment are particularly attractive (100%) due to the countless options. However, there is still a conflict between prestige and closeness (bureaucracy/distance (70%)), which brands must consciously control. The cultural context influences the nature of the pathways: Finnish students prioritize values/honesty, and overall health and welfare, while German students expect transparency/structures, and proven gratification. These differing desires ultimately lead to the same conclusion: a trustworthy alignment between both involved entities.

7 Discussion

The following chapter provides an interpretation and contextualization of the findings in relation to the main research question and the existing theoretical literature in this thesis. The primary goal is to go beyond the description and conduct an investigation into the emotional, cultural, and strategic elements of employer branding from a global perspective. By comparing participants' lived experiences with relevant frameworks, the chapter illustrates the significance of employer branding for attraction and retention, highlighting the importance of trust, credibility, and emotional congruence between employers and employees.

Many of the interview participants had about 1 year of work experience (with a small proportion having up to 2 years), so, in this sense, the interpretations reflect early-career viewpoints based on real workplace experiences rather than primarily theoretical perspectives. Given the sample's existing experience (one to two years), later- and mid-career drivers (long-term drivers, progression pathways) might be underrepresented in the interview reports.

7.1 Final framework

The final framework (see Figure 12) is grounded in the employer branding model initially conceptualized in this thesis. As illustrated at the head of Figure 12, MNC contextual conditions (Finland/Germany cohort, early-career experience, brand familiarity, perceived global-local fit/bureaucracy) form the relationships within the final framework. It summarizes the body of evidence in the study, as found in the MRQ replies, by including the attraction (RQ1) and retention (RQ2) paths. However, this new variant incorporates a more profound understanding derived from empirical findings. While the initial framework encapsulated the theoretical contributions, the final framework extends these contributions by explicitly elaborating on the challenges of employer branding in a multinational context and the corresponding strategic considerations.

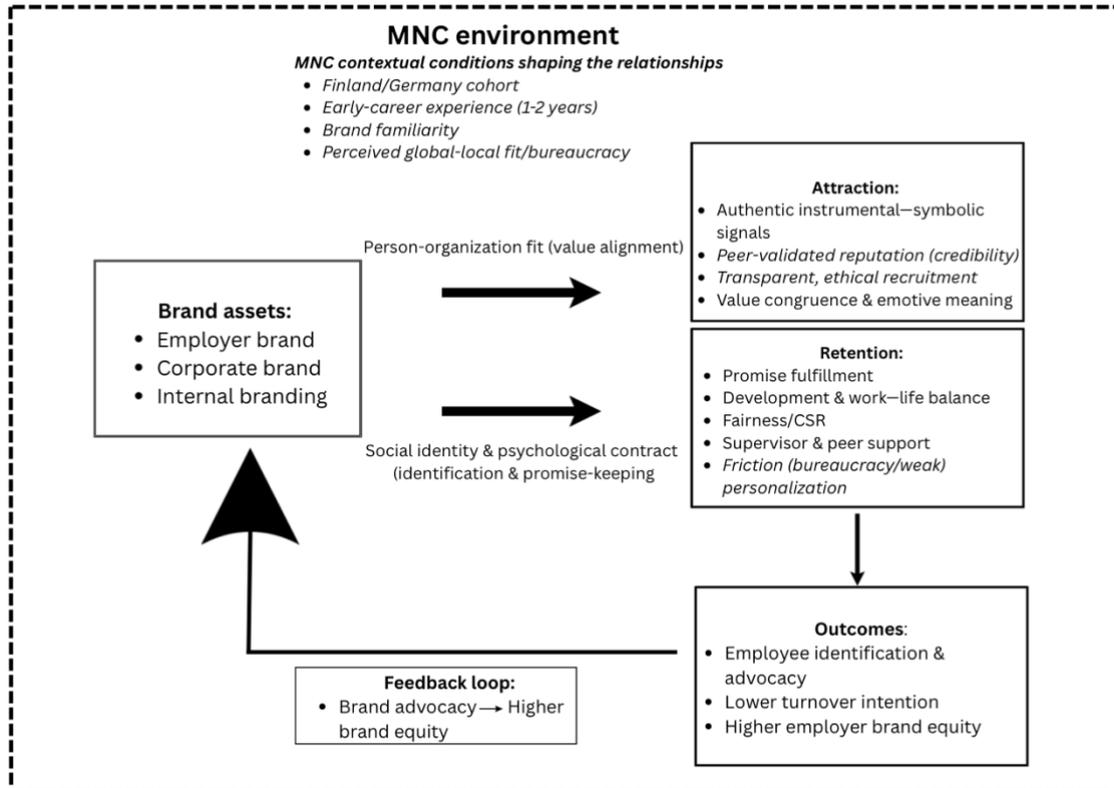


Figure 12: Final framework of the study

The brand assets nourish two pathways: (1) the person-organization fit (value alignment) concerning attraction, as well as (2) social identity and psychological contract (identification and promise keeping) regarding retention. As a result, increased retention boosts advocacy, thereby strengthening brand equity (a feedback loop). All components in the final framework, in italics, represent the observations that emerged from the findings.

The revision of the framework places much greater emphasis on the relationship between attraction and first impressions, as well as the emotional and symbolic significance of the brand and the alignment of values between the employer and the employee overall. This resonates closely with both person-organization fit theory and social identity theory. As both theories demonstrate, attraction is rooted in whether individuals envision themselves in the brand and see their own values mirrored in it. Most notably, the updated framework also incorporates cultural sensitivities and the

need for local adjustments in the MNC setting, as evidenced by the differing perspectives of the Finnish and German student interviewees noted during the interview process.

Regarding retention, the psychological contract is of significant importance, as it highlights the employer's commitment to fulfilling the pledges made, fostering reciprocal trust, and maintaining continuous acknowledgment, all of which are crucial to the relationship between the employer and employee. Work-life balance, CSR policies, programmes, and professional growth opportunities further enhance retention. These components validate the theoretical contributions of Ambler & Barrow (1996), Bonneton et al. (2022), and Spoljaric & Dosen (2023).

The final framework encompasses two findings-derived factors that are incorporated within the boxes instead of being considered as separate components: (i) employee responsiveness in multinational corporations, which is included in friction within the retention category, and (ii) strategic advantages. These can be found under outcomes and the feedback loop (employee advocacy -> higher brand equity). The first factor illustrates the dual role of global brands as both inspirational attractions and potential risks associated with the distance and bureaucracy of MNCs. The second element highlights how employer branding can serve as a long-term competitive differentiator, enhance brand equity, and facilitate the integration of global and local practices. In other words, these combined insights position employer branding as a strategic asset that can be leveraged rather than simply a communication device.

Contribution: The final framework validates the crucial role of value alignment, authenticity, and trust (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). In the same breath, the established literature is further enriched by incorporating the psychological contract (Sandeepanie et al., 2023; Abord de Chatillon et al., 2023) and cultural sensitivity in multinational corporations (Spoljaric & Dosen, 2023; Piekkari et al., 2022). Likewise, there are dual results of employee responsiveness and the strategic advantages that can be obtained. This defines employer branding as more than just an HR

communication toolset, but as a dynamically driven strategic enabler that organizations should leverage to drive their success.

7.2 Implications for attraction (RQ1)

According to the findings, attraction does not necessarily depend on salary or role type, but rather on an emotional response, identity conformity, and perceptions of the employer's brand. Respondents were sympathetic to organizations that demonstrated ethical conduct and offered facilitative communication, particularly during the initial moments of engagement, such as the hiring process or brand introduction.

This aligns with the person-organization fit theory, which suggests that individuals are drawn to companies whose values match their own (Ghielen et al., 2021; Hein et al., 2024). Previous research has also reinforced this by showing that when the employer brand mirrors individual values, attraction is strongly amplified (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). Participants favored brands they could envision themselves in, especially when the brand's character resonated with their personal ambitions. The data, therefore, indicates that attraction is grounded in values alignment and early impressions, which significantly shape employer credibility. The respondents evaluated potential future employers based on several signals, including relevant websites, social media presence, and recruitment scenarios, which influence their decisions.

In line with signaling theory, participants rejected overly polished branding and emphasized authenticity, noting that dishonest signals engendered skepticism and disengagement (Wang et al., 2022; Spoljaric & Dosen, 2023). This finding aligns with the conclusions reached by Kucherov & Zhiltsova (2021), who emphasize that social media cues can be either beneficial or detrimental to employer attraction, depending on how the organization's trustworthiness is perceived. Taken together, the findings support the view that employer branding functions as a symbolic transmission system, in which attraction rests not only on functional benefits but also on the emotional and

psychological meanings attached to the brand as a whole (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003).

Contribution: This section corroborates the person-organization fit theory by demonstrating that attraction is predominantly built through value alignment and credibility. The research in the thesis additionally complements an essential narrative by highlighting that students are exceptionally susceptible to authenticity in branding messages, thereby strengthening signaling theory (Wang et al., 2022; Kucherov & Zhiltsova, 2021) in the field of employer branding. Similarly, this highlights the symbolic layer of employer branding, which aligns with the fundamental concept of Ambler & Barrow (1996).

7.3 Implications for retention (RQ2)

The findings showed that retention is more strongly shaped by emotional attachment, value congruence, and trust in the employer's brand than by financial incentives. Participants emphasized that lasting commitment depends on keeping brand promises and on genuine internal interactions.

This aligns with social identity theory, which explains that employees identify with the organization's values and integrate the brand into their self-concept (Maxwell & Knox, 2009; Nanjundeswaraswamy et al., 2022). The stronger this connection, the harder it becomes to leave the organization. Similarly, person-organization fit theory supports the idea that retention is highest when values and organizational practices align (Ehlers et al., 2024; Nadya et al., 2023).

Participants frequently described retention in terms of the psychological contract: expectations of fairness, appreciation, and developmental opportunities. When promises were fulfilled, retention was strengthened; when broken, emotional distance and disengagement followed. This result echoes broader debates in the literature questioning the psychological contract's vulnerability in the modern workplace (Abord

de Chatillon et al., 2023; Sandeepanie et al., 2023). This highlights that retention is not an automatic process but must be continually earned through credibility, recognition, and meaningful growth opportunities (Alzaid & Dukhaykh, 2023; Ahmad et al., 2020).

Contribution: The present section validates social identity theory and person-organization fit theory by showing that long-term retention relies on alignment and on identification. This elaborates on the theories by demonstrating the pivotal role of the psychological contract in the MNC environment, affirming that credibility and relationship trust (Abord de Chatillon et al., 2023; Sandeepanie et al., 2023) are important determinants of retention. The results provide valuable insights into the interrelation between intangible elements, such as acknowledgement and fairness, regarding retention-related consequences, which are frequently not taken as seriously as financial inducements currently are.

7.4 Contextual drivers in the MNC environment

Operating in a multinational environment provided additional drivers for both attraction and retention. Participants associated MNCs with international visibility, prestige, and diverse work cultures. They emphasized opportunities for intercultural exchange, mobility, and professional advancement, thereby increasing the company's attractiveness and long-term engagement. At the same time, respondents acknowledged risks such as bureaucracy, distance, and lack of personalization in large corporations. This confirms the need for MNCs to balance global brand equity with local sensitivity and employee-centered practices (Bonneton et al., 2022; Spoljaric & Dosen, 2023). Existing body of literature underscores these frictions: although global organizational structures facilitate prestige and possibilities, they can also generate estrangement when processes within the MNC environment are viewed as inflexible or distant (Piekkari et al., 2022; de Chernatony, 2002), a level of stress that was also apparent in the participants' reports.

Generally speaking, the MNC environment itself was viewed as a contextual factor that could either amplify employer branding or lead to disengagement, depending on how cultural diversity, communication, and career paths were managed. This duality mirrors the conclusions of Maxwell & Knox (2009), who contend that the trustworthiness of global brands depends on maintaining equilibrium between external reputation and internal employee experiences.

Contribution: While this section validates previous studies on the opportunities and obstacles in the MNC setting (Bonneton et al., 2022; Spoljaric & Dosen, 2023), it also builds upon them by demonstrating how student awareness is associated with the prestige and multicultural possibilities in terms of attraction, while bureaucracy and detachment pose a danger to retention. Importantly, this argument highlights that MNC environments are not unbiased settings but dynamic forces that shape how employer branding is received.

7.5 Outcomes and strategic values

Employer branding that attracts and retains talent leads to brand endorsement and strengthened employee commitment. The findings suggest that strong employer brands provide:

- Sustainable competitive advantage,
- Elevated employer brand equity, and
- A reinforced global-local balance in MNC settings.

This shows that employer branding should be regarded not merely as communication, but as a strategic function that secures talent, builds loyalty, and strengthens organizational reputation in international markets.

Researchers have also discussed how employer branding not only provides competitive differentiation but also generates long-term value building (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Dzenopoljac et al., 2023). With this in mind, the results achieved through quality

employer branding exceed the scope of HR, as they equally influence organizational reputation (Balmer & Greyser, 2006) and company output (Soleimani et al., 2023).

Contribution: The overall input of this section is to present the connection between employer branding and employee capital in terms of organizational strategies. Previous contributions in the field of employer brand equity are validated, as are the competitive benefits (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). However, at the same time, this research enhances the available body of knowledge by adding that strategic employer branding in multinational corporations strengthens the relationship between global and local inclusion. This element was scarcely accounted for or emphasized in previous approaches.

7.6 Cultural differences: Finland vs. Germany

The study revealed consistent differences between the Finnish and German participants. On the one side, German students emphasized career advancement, structured communication, and transparency, while the Finnish students focused primarily on value alignment, inclusivity, and well-being.

These findings illustrate how cultural background shapes expectations toward employer branding. They also reinforce the challenge for global brands: balancing universal consistency with local adaptation to remain credible across diverse employment markets. This echoes previous literature on cultural assimilation in employer branding, emphasizing the necessity to adapt messages to local circumstances/expectations without compromising global unity (Spoljaric & Dosen, 2023; Bonneton et al., 2022). Equally, research on nation-organizational brand interactions underscores that national cultures influence how organizational values are embraced (Najm Roshan et al., 2017).

Contribution: This section demonstrates that cultural perspectives influence the driving forces behind attraction and retention. Thus, validating previous research on the difficulty of achieving a proper balance between global and local employer branding

initiatives (Spoljaric & Dosen, 2023; Piekkari et al., 2022). At the same time, it extends the literature by revealing that student perspectives in Finland and Germany represent two culturally similar yet distinct settings, demonstrating differences in their expectations regarding employer branding.

7.7 Emotional undertone and its implications

A remarkable emerging theme across the findings was the emotional dimension of employer branding. Participants frequently described respect, acknowledgment, and fairness as crucial for both attraction and retention. They also highlighted skepticism toward glossy branding and emphasized that credibility is tied to companies delivering on their promises.

Retention, in particular, was shaped by emotional tones such as trust, recognition, and care. Negative experiences, such as broken commitments or a lack of appreciation, led to disengagement. This underscores the role of emotions as decisive elements in the employer-employee relationship, extending existing theory by emphasizing that branding is not only rational but also deeply affective. This impression is supported by Ambler & Barrow's (1996) distinction between functional, economic, and psychological gains. However, it is equally reinforced by relatively recent research highlighting the significance of credibility and trust in employer branding (Hoppe, 2018; Knezovic & Jamak, 2023).

Contribution: A significant contribution in this present section is the emphasis on emotional underpinnings as an emerging domain of employer branding. Although previous conceptual models have acknowledged the psychological advantages (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003), this thesis extends the conversation. In relation to this discourse, it highlights how emotional trustworthiness, respect, appreciation, and being taken care of act as decision facilitators for attraction and retention. Thus, it offers a much more in-depth and impactful perspective on developing an appropriate interpretation of employer branding in the MNC context.

8 Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the key findings of the present study, highlights its theoretical contributions, outlines practical implications for multinational corporations (MNCs) and HR managers, and reflects on its limitations, offering suggestions for future research.

8.1 Key findings

Main research question (MRQ): “How does global employer branding influence the perception of attraction and retention regarding incumbent and prospective employees?”

The results suggest that employer branding is a strategic yet emotional driver in employees' decision-making. Attraction is primarily shaped by early impressions, value alignment, and brand credibility rather than by salary or role specifics (Ghielen et al., 2021; Hein et al., 2024). Retention depends on keeping brand promises, supporting employee development, and fostering an emotional bond with the employer (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Bonneton et al., 2022). Those patterns are most appropriately interpreted as early-career perceptions, since most participants have between one and two years of employment experience.

Concept clarification: What constitutes a global employer brand, and how can it be analyzed in relation to organizational strategy? A global employer brand is an inter-functional, strategic commitment that unites functional, economic, and psychological value for employees and applicants, aligned with the corporate brand and firm objectives (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Balmer & Greyser, 2006). Analytically, it integrates a clear instrumental–symbolic value proposition, systems to keep internal commitments (leadership, company culture, internal branding, communication), a balance between global and local images, and provide explicit coherence with the corporate strategies and KPIs (attraction, retention, employee empowerment/identification) to function as a strategic resource rather than simply a communication instrument (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Keller & Richey, 2006; Punjaisri

& Wilson, 2011; Terglav et al., 2016; Konečnik Ruzzier et al., 2021; Spoljaric & Dosen, 2023; Bonneton et al., 2022; Piekkari et al., 2022; Backhaus, 2016; Brexendorf & Keller, 2017; Dženopoljac et al., 2023; de Chernatony, 2002; Urde, 2003, 2009, 2016).

RQ1: Which factors of the brand influence employees' attraction to the company?

Attraction was found to be driven by signals of authenticity, value congruence, and the brand's emotive and symbolic meaning (Spoljaric & Dosen, 2023; Wang et al., 2022). Participants emphasized that transparent communication and ethical behaviour during recruitment were crucial for building trust.

RQ2: Which factors of the brand influence employee retention at the company?

The retention was shaped by psychological contract fulfilment, opportunities for career advancement, and a supportive work-life balance. Especially CSR programs and equitable behavior were found to reinforce emotional attachment and further increase employee self-identification with the organization's brand (Hendriana et al., 2023; Knezovic & Jamak, 2023).

In extension, the thesis identified that the MNC setting, in itself, functions as a situational force in attracting and retaining talent. In this sense, this environment facilitates international movement, cultural interaction, and social status, but simultaneously introduces several obstacles, such as bureaucracy and the inability to adapt to individual personalities (Piekkari et al., 2022; de Chernatony, 2002). Since all interview participants already had significant work experience (most had about one year; some had up to two years), the findings are reflective of early-career perspectives rather than simply theoretical outlooks.

8.2 Theoretical contributions

The present study makes several theoretical contributions. First, it validates social identity theory in the context of employer branding by showing that identification with an organization strengthens both attraction and retention (Maxwell & Knox, 2009).

Second, it reinforces person-organization fit theory by confirming that value alignment significantly impacts employer brand attractiveness (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019; Nadya et al., 2023). Third, it adds to the signaling theory research by demonstrating that authentic, credible, and consistent brand signals reduce uncertainty and build trust during the early stages of employer-employee interaction (Wang et al., 2022).

As a final point, it is worth noting that the present thesis contributes to the field through the final framework (Figure 12), which incorporates cultural viewpoints, emotional dynamics, and strategic-level deliberations particular to multinational corporate environments. Compared to previous employer branding concepts, this constitutes an expansion that considers both global and local relational aspects.

8.3 Practical implications and recommendations

The findings have direct implications for employers, HR managers, and brand strategists: Fulfilling the external brand claims in line with the internal reality within the organization to avoid breaches of the psychological contract and to maintain employee trust (Ambler & Barrow, 1996).

Maintaining an appropriate overall balance between global employer branding stability and cultural local adjustments. German respondents preferred structured communication and career progression, while Finnish respondents valued inclusivity and work-life balance (Spoljaric & Dosen, 2023; Bonneton et al., 2022).

Reinforcement of retention by internal branding initiatives that focus on employee development, CSR engagement, and emotional well-being (Knezovic & Jamak, 2023; Vokic et al., 2023). Acknowledging the changes that have taken hold over the generations, Gen Z places greater emphasis on authenticity, transparency, and meaningful work (Hendriana et al., 2023; Küpper et al., 2021).

Collectively, these initiatives provide multinational corporations with an opportunity to not only capture the most talented individuals but also to ensure the long-term loyalty of their employees to the organization. By doing so, the organization can convert employer branding into a powerful force for sustained competitive excellence and establish lasting organizational success.

8.4 Limitations and future research suggestions

While this thesis offers valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. The sample showcases early-career participants (one to two years of work experience), so mid- and late-career motivations may be underrepresented. First, the study was qualitative and based on a limited sample of Finnish and German students, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Second, the data represent the perspective of prospective employees rather than that of long-term employees, meaning retention insights are largely anticipatory. Third, the research did not incorporate employer or HR manager perspectives, which could have provided a more holistic view of employer branding practices.

Regarding future research, a more extensive sampling approach could be employed to enhance the study's findings. In this sense, participants from diverse cultural backgrounds could be selected, and individuals working in multinational corporations at this point may be chosen to verify the long-term retention results.

Another avenue of research that deserves attention is the assessment of the digital side of employer branding. In particular, this involves the impact of social media and hybrid work arrangements on awareness, attraction, and retention. Finally, longitudinal studies could explore how initial impressions of an employer brand evolve and affect employee loyalty for the business. In conclusion, the findings have to be approached from an early-career perspective formed by hands-on experience, which is especially evident in the themes of authenticity, promise delivery, and everyday organizational culture.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Semi-structured interview guide

The subsequent section outlines the semi-structured interview guide that was specifically tailored for this thesis. Within the interviews, the questions were carefully constructed to gather individual perceptions, lived experiences, and emotional insights concerning employer branding. Special attention was focused on attraction, retention, MNC (multinational corporation) settings, and cultural deliberations. The objective of the interviews was to establish an inclusive and forthcoming talkative ambience to encourage participants to express themselves freely, truthfully, and with as much information as they desired.

The time allocated for each interview ranged from 30 to 60 minutes and beyond, according to the extent to which the respondents were comfortable disclosing personal viewpoints and opinions, as well as the intensity of the conversations.

Interview Questions

Part 1:

Introductory Questions

1. Please introduce yourself briefly (name, age, etc.).
2. Where are you from? (Country – University).
3. Have you already thought about life after graduation?
 - a) What are your plans after you graduate from university?
 - b) What prospective jobs are you considering applying for?
 - c) Are there any prospective organizations you are interested in working for in the next step?
 - d) What expectations do you have about the working world? (Which factors are

important to you when selecting an employer? What makes an employer attractive to you personally as a potential workplace, and how do you think firms present themselves to future employees?).

4. What comes to your mind when you think about multinational corporations as employers right now?
5. What characteristics make an organization stand out as a great place to work?
6. What do you think working in a multinational corporation is like? How do you think cultural diversity in such workplaces influences the employee experience?
7. What are your personal thoughts on working for a multinational corporation? Would this be something you would consider for your future career?

Part 2:

Employer Branding & Attraction Questions

8. In your opinion, what makes an employer brand attractive to job seekers? Could you describe the key elements that define an appealing employer brand?
9. When considering applying to a company, what specific aspects of its reputation, workplace environment, or values influence your decision?
10. Could you please share a personal experience where the employer's brand was so impactful that you considered choosing to work for that particular organization?
11. How do your personal expectations of an employer influence your decision to apply for a job, and which aspects of the employer shape those expectations?
12. If a company were to face a crisis, such as an economic meltdown, employee layoffs, or significant public issues, what would be important to you regarding how the company manages these events that would influence your decision to apply?
13. To what extent does a company's involvement in corporate social responsibility (e.g., sustainability, ethical practices, diversity, community initiatives) influence your decision to apply for a job?

14. When evaluating potential employers, how do you prioritize factors like salary, benefits, career development, work culture, and job security? Could you explain which aspects matter most to you and why?
15. How important is it for you to see a clearly defined and transparent career progression when selecting an employer?
16. How would the reviews and opinions of former or current employees on sites like Glassdoor influence your decision to apply to a company?

Part 3:

Employee questions on retention

17. Can you please share a specific experience when a company made you feel appreciated and thus encouraged you to stay?
18. How do unfulfilled expectations or promises from your employer affect your long-term dedication to the organization?
19. Could you please share a situation in which a business in crisis has influenced your decision to either stay or leave the environment?
20. How do a company's approaches or viewpoints on ethical and social values influence your decision to stay with the business in the long term?
21. What aspects do you think a company should implement or offer to encourage employees to remain engaged with the organization?
22. How do your experiences at work shape how you talk about your employer to others? Would a positive or negative experience influence your long-term commitment?
23. Many companies have a strong and reputable brand name, while others focus on creating a positive working environment and culture to ensure employee satisfaction. How do a company's reputation, working environment, and values influence your decision to stay with the company?

24. From your viewpoint, how significant are financial benefits and rewards in maintaining long-term employment with a company?

Part 4:

Multinational Corporation (MNC) Environment Questions

25. How do the brand power, reputation, and status of multinational corporations influence your decision-making when applying for a job in such an environment?
26. How would you describe, or rather imagine, an employer brand of a multinational corporation that would be seen as appealing to potential applicants?
27. What factors would affect your choice to stay with a multinational corporation after being recruited?
28. How important is international career mobility and global working opportunities when considering applying for a job at a multinational corporation?
29. How do digital platforms like Glassdoor, LinkedIn, and social media influence your perception of multinational corporations as a potential workplace?
30. How do you view the corporate culture and leadership of management in multinational corporations as influential in your decision to apply for a job?
31. What makes employees stay longer in multinational corporations compared to local companies? Can you think of any specific factors that influence long-term commitment?

Once again, I would like to extend my sincere thanks for participating in the interview and for sharing your valuable knowledge.