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The influence of Employer Brand on firm's strategy

Suggestions to approach different
generational and gender
perspectives

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INTRODUCTION

Labor market is becoming more competitive than ever due to the presence of a great number of companies and talent scarcity. In this scenario, firms need to steer an effective HR strategy to respond to this issue and sustainably grow in the market. This view is based on a constitutive approach and Resource-based-view that perceive people as a fundamental resource to acquire competitive advantage in the market (Costa, 2005; Barney, 1991).

Since 1996, great attention has been paid to employer branding as a good response for this situation. Reporting the definition of the pioneers Backaus and Tikoo (2004), "*the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity"* in the internal and external environment of the firm aims to become the *employer of choice*. Indeed, the major objectives are to retain and motivate current employees and to attract potential talents from the labor market. Achieving these aims is relevant to improve the company performance by increasing internal commitment, enhancing retention, taking advantage of the effect of organizational identification, and escalating competitiveness by acquiring the best talents.

Employer branding management is the result of the contribution of different fields such as branding, public relationships, marketing, management, and especially, human resources. For this reason, it is able to comprehend different aspects targeting employees which were typically underestimated in the past. As for these fields, the call for customization is an essential starting point to steer a concrete and effective strategy to guarantee the success of the company. In the literature, there are many researchers and studies with the aim of investigating the drivers of motivation and attraction of people in regard to employers. The focuses were different according to job characteristics, gender, or generations; they highlighted the necessity to comprehend a lot of different factors that could impact employer perception. In this thesis, only the most recent studies will be analyzed in order to collect the current trends and best practices.

Due to the relevance of employer branding emerged in the last two decades, a literature review will be reported in the first part. Particularly, the first chapter will be dedicated to understand how was and is defined employer branding in the literature with a focus on its backgrounds and evolution. The second chapter will report the major drivers that could motivate management to steer an EB strategy, underlining that there are correlated aspects that need to be taken into consideration as Company Social Responsibility, talent scarcity, job-hopping, and the online social environment. To continue, the third chapter will give an account of the objectives that a comprehensive EBM strategy is able to reach. Here the central point is to understand how they could positively impact company performance. Lastly, the fourth section will be dedicated to the path to steer the employer branding strategy by analyzing each step that management should follow giving practical suggestions.

After the overview of the literature, a contribution will be given by this thesis presenting the result of empirical research. Taking reference to three important and recent studies such as Eger et al. (2019), Reis and Braga (2016), and Bussin et al. (2019), the goal will be to demonstrate how generational and gender perspective impacts employer perceptions in Italy. Quantitative and qualitative data will be reported. Employees and employers' points of view will be collected and presented highlighting the importance of customization according to different targets.

1. EMPLOYER BRAND MANAGEMENT

The Employer Brand Management (EBM) is a concept that combines notions of marketing, specifically branding, and human resources knowledge and expertise. As a conceptualization, it is born during the last years of the 20^{th} century. Indeed, the first definition was written in 1996 by Barrow and Ambler, it cites "*the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company*". In 2004, Backus S. and Tikoo S. broad the concept declared that employer branding is "*the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity"* and they distinguished the notion from employer brand. This latter describes the factors that differentiate the firm from the competition, creating a clear position of the firm in the mind of the target in a given situation as in the recruitment process for potential employees. The concept was examined from an organizational overall perspective.

A more pragmatic clarification was provided by CIPD, one of the major professional body for human resources and people development in the world based in the UK, that defined EBM as "*a set of attributes and qualities, often intangible, that makes an organization distinctive, promises a particular kind of employment experience, and appeals to those people who will thrive and perform best in its culture"* (www.cipd.co.uk).

Another perspective was described by Tumasjan et al. in 2020. Using a well-known concept in management such as equity and combining the marketing definition of branding, that defines EBM as: "*an approach in which the HRM processes revolve around the creation, development, and protection of employer brand equity in an ongoing interaction with potential and incumbent employees to achieve sustainable competitive advantages in the labor market"* (Tumasjan et al., 2020).

Revising these definitions shows that the Employer branding is seen as a practice that creates positive effects and consequences in the firm defined as "benefits" or a practice that helps to gain sustainable competitive advantage or "appeals" to the people that will work for the company or for the currently workers.

Considering the similarities with marketing research, it is fundamental to emphasize that differently from the basic idea of branding related to a combination of elements that helps the customer (external route) to recognize a specific company in the market, EBM addresses its strategy to current (internal direction) and potential employees for the same aim. Considering the target, the major goals of this strategy are: improving the retention and the loyalty of the current employees (Sharma, 2019); help the firm in attracting potential talent; increase the competitive advantage as a consequence; escalate the internal brand commitment; enhance the sense of participation of an organization (Gilani, 2017).

Employer brand Management combines internal and external marketing processes and human resources practices and they concern communication strategy, career development definitions, benefits for employees, and training programs, acting on the resonant leadership, skills management, and instilling an inclusive politics of behaviors. It is important to analyze that 20 years of academic researches is almost incomplete. As a matter of fact, most of the literature present emphasizes the good aspects of employer brand management and it seems to have reserved less interest on the negative impacts than it could have been. Furthermore, it seems not to be precisely investigating the variables that have an impact not only on the effectiveness of employer branding orientation but also on firm performance results (Tumasjan et al, 2020).

1.1 Rankings

Even if EBM seems to have a short story than other fields in academic history, its notoriety is steadily increasing. Companies are recognizing the good effects of been seen as an excellent employer in their daily routine such as during the recruitment phase and also in the acceptance of the psychological contract, a concept that goes beyond the juridic and economic contract between employee and employer. To make the efforts globally recognizable the companies have the objective to be included in the *World's Best Workplace*. It is one of the most important rankings that provides the list of 25 best employers of the world for each year and that elaborates the opinions of more than 10 million people and 10.000 companies. Companies have to subscribe to the website, then it will be analyzed by the team of Great Place to Work and at the end, it could receive the Certificate that demonstrates their effort in this field. From the report of the classification, it is possible to read the reason that has led a company to gain the first places, called "best practice". For example, in the *Italian Best Place To Word,* the first three places are reserved for: American Express Italia, which uses an innovative technique of gamification for the selection of the applicants; Hilton in which there is a particular treatment for the new entries who are treated as a guest in the hotel with their parents too to try the service; MSD Italia have created a program, called Inspire, to share the best contribution of teams and people and thank them (www.greatplacetowork.com).

During these last years, this classification was also released to dedicated targets such as the best companies for women or millennials. Others differentiating the parameters of rankings such as *PEOPLE Companies that Care 2020* reports the top companies based in the USA which were succeeded in business and, meanwhile, in care and concern for their employees, their communities, and the environment during the COVID-19 pandemic (www.greatplacetowork.com). Even the journal Fortune has its classification and this helps in understanding the great spread of the practice and the rush of the companies to settle their standards to be recognized as an "*employer of choice*" (www.fortune.com). The biggest companies were, since the beginning, aware of the potentiality of been counted among the best companies to work for. An example is what was declared on the website of Hewlett Packard, better known as HP, reported as one of the best great places to work help them in attracting the best talents and being like that is for them a good business to deal with (Costa, 2005).

In paragraph 2.4, the influence of online reviews and recommendations will be analyzed; in particular, it will be reported a studio related to the impact of employer rankings on potential employee opinions.

1.2 Background and evolution

Since the industry idea of Taylor Ford was born, the importance of the strategy became notable. Even if treated like machines, people were valuable resources to make the plant working, but they were not involved in the decision-making process. Then, the Toyotism idea catches on and changes the perception of people as resources to leverage. In particular, it claimed the importance of combining tangible (as plant, machinery, etc.), and intangible resources such as people, technology, intellectual property, competencies, and skills. Thus, in both of the two scenarios, the interrelation between the business idea and the human resource management is the essential point to enhance and steer the strategy, but only in the latter, people are recognized as the key element of differentiation. In this thesis, the position taken will be more in line with the toyotism perspective and the human resource will not be seen as a passive subject of the strategy. On the other hand, the approach will be a constitutive one defined as the view by which the human resources are fundamental to obtain a competitive advantage on the grounds that they are autonomous in the planning, develop and manage their value, and furthermore, they could bring innovative ideas to the firm (Costa, 2005).

1.2.1 Resource-based view

In the literature, there is an important theoretical foundation suggesting that HR could contribute to sustainable competitive advantage (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). This approach is the resource-based view (RBV) formulate by Barney in 1991. As a matter of fact, It stated on the "*assumption that human capital brings value to the firm and through the investment in human capital, firms performance can be enhanced*". Indeed, in his theory, he defines the resources as all the assets, intangible, and tangible, that allow the organization to implement its strategy effectively and efficiently. He declares that resources must be valuable, rare, non-substitutable, and difficult to imitate. In doing so, the firm could be able to acquire a position of competitive advantage because its environment is completely distinctive from the one of the competitors. Similarly, it will analyze the goals of employer brand management as creating an organizational culture in which the employee feels to be embedded in, be loyal to, and participate because he/she is recognized as a valuable resource for the firm (Barney, 1991). The resources are heterogeneous and rely on the causal ambiguity to not be imitated by the competitors.

The RBV is been deeply investigated revealing the inability to explain the differences between firms with comparable based resources. For this reason, in the literature emerged two main other paradigms in strategic management such as knowledge-based view (KBV) and dynamic capabilities perspective (Solesvik, 2018). Both are an extension of RBV and respond to its rigidity: the first enhance the prevalence of the knowledge as the major source of productivity for the firm (Grant, 2005); the second leverage the importance of the organizational and strategic routines (Eisenhardt, 2000). Given the opinion of Solesvik (2018), strategic management cannot rely only on a paradigm such as RBV, but it must consider a multi-paradigmatic approach. The reasons rely on the fact that researchers could not convey management to a single discipline, but they have to take into consideration studies that have several incommensurable approaches.

1.2.2 Human resource network model

Perceived in this way, HRM involved multiple roles in the firm such as the long-term strategical objective development and more operational processes elaboration. Of course, the integration of these roles is aimed at generating value for the organization. Dave Ulrich released its well-known model, called Multiple Role Model of HR management, in which he describes the combination of the roles that the HR department should cover in its duties, providing the schema reported below (Ulrich, 1997).

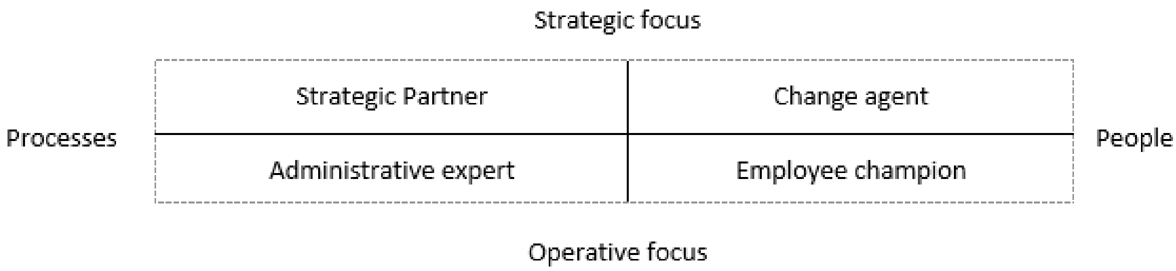

Figure 1 - Ulrich multirole model (Ulrich, 1997)

The model presented enhances the individual roles, instead of the HR department in his entire perspective: this is the major critique that the same author provided to his model in recent years. Co-authoring with Ingham, he recognized the importance of the sum of the parts, thus the relevance on the overall department's organization, to improve the value created for the stakeholder by HR. Reporting recent research made by RBL Group (2015), the authors highlight the impact that HR activities have on: the overall business performance, external customers, investors, communities, regulators, line managers, and of course, employees. These represent all the stakeholders that HR departments should take into consideration in developing their mission, vision, and strategy to enable the business to have a competitive advantage. To do so, HRM should focus mainly on improving relationships between people, blurring the separation of roles. HR specialist need also a set of linkages with other departments as procurement, information technology, marketing (this connection will be analyzed better in paragraph 2.3) and even facilities to reach their aim and build better performing teams. According to Ingham and Ulrich, the center of the attention to create such a network of relationships must be establishing capabilities that are able to respond to stakeholders' needs. To respond to how stakeholders will benefit from this, they report an increase in employee productivity, customers' commitment, the firm's reputation and, investors' reliance (Ingham and Ulrich, 2016).

The blur of the separation of roles described before should be seen as a future direction for the development of the firm organization. Considering the use of task forces, cross-functional teams, and networks as a positive trend confirmed in the literature, the knowledge era and the growing importance of people within an organization, the design of HR should follow this orientation too. For all these reasons, Ingham recently develops the "*HR network model*" reported in figure 2 (Ingham, 2019). The external circle contains all the groups that are part of the organization, instead, the internal one contains the groups within the HR department. The boundaries are not clear but blurred. Initially, he confirms the necessity of the presence of functional centers to maintain a certain level of control on people strategy, and even if there is a lot of automation, there is the need for services and local employee relation advisors. Then, he suggests training specialist project manager and consultant roles that help employees within project teams. In the center, the necessity to have specialist expertise is still present, but there is much more the possibility to hire them once the organization needs them and not having permanent experts. Following that, communities will become the place in which the firm could put together people with a common interest in a less formal way than in the center and increase the sense of belongingness once people are temporarily not part of projects. It could exploit people's natural motivation. For this latter reason, networks appear on the right upper side of the model to promote the innovation transversely to the organization because they will be composed of people that don't belong to the HR department. As it is possible to notice in the model, there are four roles, colored in blue, which are facilitators for the implementation of the part they belong to (e.g. team coaches ensure that the teams of projects work properly). Called HR network brokers, they are the staff of people that provide support in connecting all the networks, teams, and communities. It is the role that particularly signs the change with Ulrich's Model, replacing the business partner.

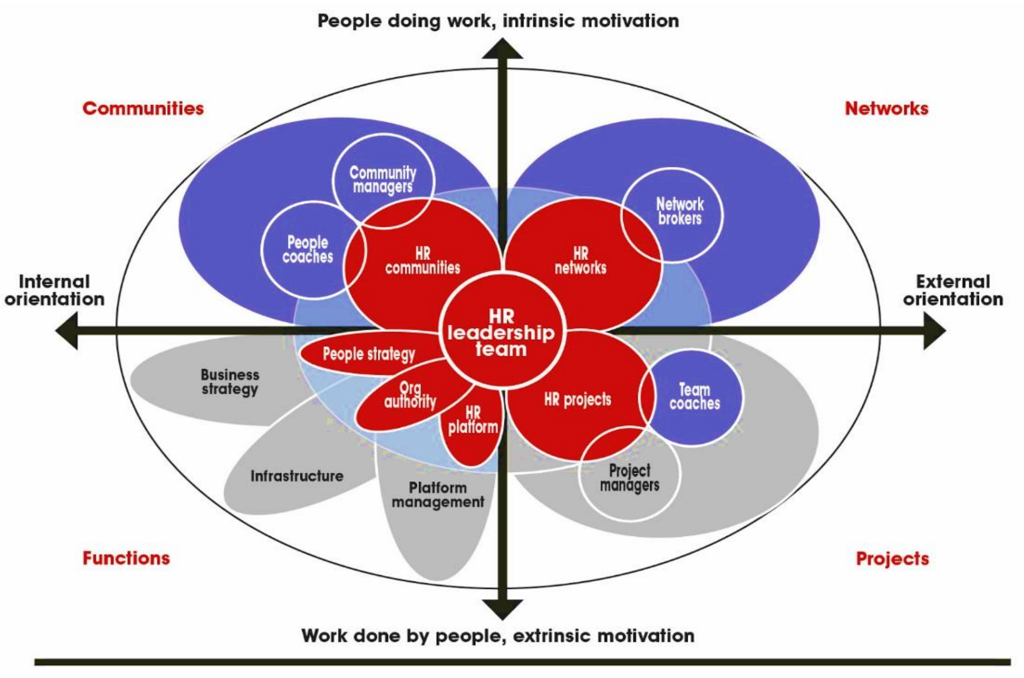

Figure 2 – The HR network model (Ingham, 2019)

For Ingham, this model will be potentially relevant for developing HR in an organization based on networks and people-centric (Ingham, 2019). In saying so, it is possible to notice the importance of the people flexibility and the necessity of creating an environment of common values to better perform as a group. In this direction, employer brand management appears to be part of the solution to effectively implement this kind of innovation at the organizational level.

2. DRIVERS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

To recognize the importance of employer branding management as a strategic activity to implement in firms, it has to be recognized which are the main reasons why it could be integrated into the best practices of firm management. In this vein, it could be valuable to investigate the interconnection with macro variables, trends, and attitudes that impact the companies' results.

In the following paragraphs, it will be analyzed the interrelationship between employer branding and: corporate Social Responsibilities activities; the actual labor market conditions; the progressively increasing of marketing importance in firms; the social interconnections environment in which the company is embedded; and, then evaluate employer branding as a source to ameliorate the integration between organizations during mergers and acquisitions.

2.1 The relationship with CSR

In doing such activities regarding employer branding management, it is possible to recognize similarities with what occurs in the Corporate Social Responsibility management strategy. This concept was defined as" *the obligations of the businessmen to pursue […] lines of actions which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society*" (Bowen, 1953). From 1953, many things have changed and now firms have obligations of declaring their activities in favor of ethical causes such as philanthropic and social activities or environmentally friendly actions. In Europe, the Directive 2014/95/EU, called the non-financial reporting directive, obliges the listed firms, banks, insurance companies, and organizations with public interests to present a statement in which they describe how they manage social and environmental issues (www.ec.europa.eu). This document's target is all the stakeholders of the companies: from financial investors to customers.

The essential and usually overlooked stakeholder seems to be the employees (Brammer, 2007) but still, they could prove the sincerity of CSR initiatives from the internal part of the companies. Due also to this reason, Carlin *et al*. (2019), in their studies, analyzed the relationship between CSR and Employer Branding. They highlight that the latter could be a key concept to design a framework to understand how it could feel a gap in the CSR branding process by taking care of employees. They mainly divided their focus on potential and current employees, using an approach of co-creation with them and by having an inside-out direction (Carlini et al., 2019). From their work, it is possible to emphasize the importance of the consistency between what the company public declares and what actually happens within the borders of the firms, which they called the *disconfirmation gap*. Recognizing that a good image could influence positively the perception of a brand, the events of misunderstandings and disconfirmation of the expectations of potential employees could create a sense of hypocrisy that could damage the position of the firm and the relationship with the employees. Also, it has been defined as a psychological contract breach (Edward,2010). The repercussion of this situation is the increase in employee turnover intentions and threat the feelings in which the psychological contract was based and could lead to a decrease in employee's performances. Thus, employer branding could be an opportunity to avoid this kind of situation ensuring an environment of acceptance in the perception of the brand and its CSR initiatives and likely having a positive effect on employee performance. According to the authors, there are two factors to work on to have success in the CSR employer brand that are: first, to create a value proposition that attracts employees in line with the firm's values; second, to ensure a consistent experience of CSR within the company (Carlini et al., 2019).

Another perspective in the literature was presented by Verčič and Ćorić (2018) which focus was on investigating the connections between reputation, CSR, and employer brand. According to their opinion in the literature, it seems that reputation is an umbrella concept that encompasses the latter two. Furthermore, even if it is a subject idea, reputation has been demonstrated that it has a great influence on the mind of the stakeholders. The research's target was senior college business students in the guise of potential employees of the most well-known national organizations. The results confirmed the positive relationships they look for and were confirmed by the previous literature analysis they conduct. In particular, a stronger connection was revealed between reputation and employer brand. Therefore, investing in one aspect leads to obtain benefits even for the other practices. To prove this, their sample was represented by organizations that were succeeding different dimensions of EB such as "*enhancing individual creativity and innovativeness, improving intradepartmental and interdepartmental cooperation and teamwork, developing personal skills, helping in individual career development and assuring employee satisfaction*" (Verčič and Ćorić, 2018).

In these regards, the conclusion takes into consideration the positive effect of investing in correlated initiatives such as CSR or working on reputation. Being consistent in all of them enhance the effects in a much wider perspective. The final demonstration highlights how employer branding could be a starting point for this process. A real case in which all this is working will be further analyzed (Technogym, paragraph 2.3).

Taking these two studies as a baseline, it could be possible to see clearly that EBM has to be implemented in the firm. In particular, the direction of the strategy must be in line with one of the rest of the activities that taking care of employees too, such as CSR. A proper strategy could also help the company to "win the war for talent" in a period of high unemployment (Bhattacharya and Korschun, 2008) attracting more potential employees. In the next paragraph, it will be demonstrated how this could lead to competitive advantage and help people in choosing the company instead of the contrary.

2.2 Labor market conditions and new attitudes

As said, macro-variables could impact on company's performance. One of these is the labor market conditions meant as the context in which the experts in human resources need to face and adapt to. In particular, evaluating the environment is a key point to develop a consistent and efficient strategy because by doing so, it is possible to understand the actual need of incumbent and potential employees in a micro-perspective: their behavior, attitudes, desires, and ambitions. Although, it is influential to evaluate macro-factors such as skill shortage, uncertain economic times, recession, presence of big companies, or crises. A brief parenthesis could be related to the particular year 2020. Indeed, the Covid-19's pandemic spread during this year, it has highlighted the big interconnection between small and medium firms and the external environment. It also has created the conditions for an economic downturn in the next years, generating a sense of uncertainty and the need for employees to look out for a trustful and secure workplace.

Understanding labor conditions, it could be interesting to evaluate new behavior patterns and attitudes that occur in the market. One of the major novelties for the employer to deal with is the phenomenon of job-hopping that is an increasing attitude of employees, especially the youngest. It is defined as the employees' tendency to change jobs frequently and hunting for new positions in other firms (www.gallup.com). In a Gallup[1] research (2020), they report some data about this trend, mainly regarding millennials – generations born from 1980 to 1996 - saying that they are inclined to change jobs three times more than the non-millennials and their willingness to stay in the same company for years is scarce. The actual problem for firms is the cost that this phenomenon generates: it is worth about 30.5 billion dollars annually only in US. They also report a lack of engagement and emotional connection (7 out of 10) with the firm and describe millennials as "*consumers of the workplace*". They also conclude with the signal of creating a labor environment that helps them to stay and be organizationally committed, which it is possible to call employer brand orientation (www.gallup.com).

A similar alarm was recently launched by Sharma (2019) who has investigated small and medium enterprises in India that are a threat by skill-shortage of a talented workforce. She reports the fact that big companies are hiring the best talent because they could have better remuneration, an effective recruitment policy, and retention strategies that smaller firms cannot afford. The totality of the enterprises she studied worth 8% of India's GDP and they provide 45% of the country's manufacturing output, thus they represent a big part of India's overall profit. Furthermore, she underlines the phenomenon of job-hopping as an emergence also helped by the presence of social networking service (e.g. LinkedIn) causing the high cost of turnover for small and medium enterprises. Besides this, the author reports the demographic problems of having more people going to retire than young entering the workforce (Sharma, 2019). A similar or more extreme scenario is represented by Italy that has 92% of this kind of

[1] Gallup is an American transnational advisory and analytics company based in Washington DC.

companies and they are generators of work for 82% of people (Il Sole 24ore, 2019) and the aging population is the talk of the town.

The call for retention in these kinds of companies, but also in the bigger ones, seems to be an important factor to work on. Employer branding could respond to this need and becoming a method to avoid the cost (affective, cognitive, economic) of losing substitute and re-oriented employees.

2.3 Marketing based conceptualization

To fully realize the value of employer branding, it could be useful to take a step back and correctly understand the concept of branding and its correlation. This is because the marketing approach of branding is better known and generally more used by companies. Thus, branding could be another driver to familiarize with EBM and help companies to see its potentiality and opportunities.

Initially, it is important to consider that the teams of marketing and HR must work together and jointly define the right policy, direction, purpose, vision, and mission of the duties of their company to guarantee consistency and correct communication, as also pointed out before. The guiding principle should be translating the "*brand thinking to people management"* (Mosley, 2014).

For this reason, the biggest companies have aligned their value proposition oriented to the customers to the internal target. For instance, Lego and Technogym Spa are good examples to explain what should be occurred. Lego is known for its building blocks, but also its strong brand identity. In this company, the working method and the innovation practice has the slogan "*Systematic Creativity*" that also represents the modus operandi in which people should work there and the firm organizes the structure. Employees are asked to have the "*ability to connect, disconnect, and reconnect with different groups"* (Mosley, 2014). In doing so, people could easily approach the company and understand its value, without creating, for instance, a disconfirmation of what they expect from the company. In the other case, Technogym Spa is a renowned company that deals with training equipment and goods related to wellness. From the beginning, the company's mission is to be known as "*the wellness company*" by customers, but also by its employees. For this reason, they guarantee high standards of social corporate responsibility; they gain the first place in the ranking *Great place to work* in 2003 and receive rewards that define it as the "*healthiest place to work*" (Forbes, 2017). In both cases, the marketing branding approach respects the strategy of the employer branding and they are consistent.

To go in deep with the relationship between branding and EBM, it could be useful to look at researchers that in the literature have used marketing's objectives and reasoning to verify the results of employer branding in terms of firm performance. A recent example is the research made by Tumasjan et al. in 2020. It takes care of understanding which are the main correlations between EB and firm's results considering, as factors of the first, the recruitment efficiency and the creation of positive affective climate within the company. Even if the results of their research have demonstrated that the external factor (recruitment efficiency) is not correlated with the firm performance in contrast with other researches, they confirm the positive effect of creating a good internal climate within the company as a variable to enhance firm performances. In their discussion of the results, they also realize that their contribution is important to demonstrate the relationship between branding orientation, brand equity, and the brand value chain with HR management practices (Tumasjan and al., 2020).

The complementary aspect of these two strategies will also be analyzed in terms of the positive effect that has employer brand in incumbent employee's behavior. Thinking of the importance of customer care service in the customer experience could be a suggestion to work on the wellness of employees within the company. Moreover, especially in service companies, employees are in the front line with the customer in the market. They are at a step behind the brand identity and they should be able to conduct the customer in an experience in line with the brand position. Otherwise, all the activities could disconfirm the expectations and, in the worst case, make the brand reputation the identity meaningless, and all the efforts in vain.

2.4 Social interconnections

As a third driver to help companies to find reasons why EBM has to be taken into consideration, there are all the social interconnections in which the company is embedded in. Thinking about the opinions of stakeholders such as investors, policymakers, employees, the community close to the firm, the public opinion, and media could be reasonable to take into account their perception of the firm. Among others, the internet and social media have boosted the resonance of people's opinions and word-of-mouth in these kinds of environments that could not be anymore ignored.

To demonstrate this attitude, it could be valuable to think about the reviews' websites that are increasing in numbers in the last ten years as a consequence of the incrementing necessity of people to have feedback from someone else on the web. It appears that 8 Americans out of 10 regularly check online reviews before purchasing (Semrush). Review websites regard topics such as restaurants, products, services; more recently, websites related to the employers have appeared too. Examples of the latter are Indeed, Glassdoor, and Ambitionbox, which receive a lot of contributions especially abroad. In Italy, this practice and this kind of website are not so active, the exception is Milan in which this behavior is starting. However, the direction is marked almost everywhere. Indeed, it is fundamental to recognize that these platforms allow a current or former employee to share their experience with the employer online. These sources become for the people who will read them a point to start to evaluate a company, especially because they are considered truer as not been under the company's control. These networks "*play an important role in the job seeker's decision […] because these sources are perceived to be more credible as employees have no self-interest in promoting* (reviewing) *the organization*" (Gupta and Saini, 2018; Lee and Youn, 2009; Van Hoye and Lievens 2007).

With this perspective, it is important to increase the commitment to creating a good company climate environment that could be reflected even online. The highlight on online contents must be taken into consideration for their capability to keep constantly the opinions available, differently from the offline word-of-mouth that companies were used to deal with. For this characteristic, two researchers Saini G. and Jawahar I., in 2019, were able to conduct empirical researches on the data available from Glassdoor which they describe as the largest and most complete database from which they choose 285 companies and 39,100 employee reviews posted in six months.

Their starting point was to fill the gap in the literature that there was according to the influence of employer reviews on employer branding. To investigate it, they analyzed three main aspects: firstly, the impact of employer rankings and employment experience on employee endorsement; secondly, if the employee work experience characteristics (full-time or part-time, established or newcomers workers), could differ the results of the first point; thirdly, they check the solidity of the opinions reported in the rankings and the actual reviews in social media platforms (Saini and Jawahar, 2019).

For the first point, they define recommendations as a "*superior measure*" and a " *the best indicator of an employer's internal brand strength*" to evaluate employer strength (Saini and Jawahar, 2019). As a consequence, appearing in the rankings helps the company to be recognized as an employer of choice and influences potential employees' opinions. Investigating the second goal of the research, they found out the differentiation of employment experience is reflected in online reviews. For instance, part-time workers focus more attention on work-life balance aspects than full-time employees, who instead, evaluate more career opportunities. In light of these results, at the end of the paper, they propose practical implications that could be summed up first, investing in culture, values, and senior management increases favorable reviews; second, personnel should spend more time answering online recommendations to improve the perception of the company; third, training people on the consequences of sharing internet reviews and making them aware of the importance of their opinion; fourth, it could be reasonable to tailor the message of employer branding according to the segment they want to reach (e.i. part-time vs full-time) (Saini and Jawahar, 2019).

Another focus was adopted by Sakkaa and Ahammadb (2020) on how employees' well-being could directly affect their online behavior and how their social interaction could impact it on the first. They ended up with their theoretical analysis: an integrated framework (Fig. 3) which represents for this thesis another brick. Indeed, from their model, it is been highlighted that not only the social media usage could be a point to leverage to increase the employees well being, but also that it represents a necessary passage to obtain employee brand advocacy. Theoretically, they have demonstrated that this result is affected by the psychological well-being of the employees within the company. Perceived as a circle, the researchers also analyzed another part of the process: the social well-being and attachment. It is affected by the internal communication and the affective relationships that are built in the in-house environment. Brand advocacy, meant as a sense of values and mission endorsement, represents a variable for social well-being. The authors found out that this latter and the employee self-well-being converge on affecting the employee brand engagement (Sakkaa and Ahammadb, 2020). In the process, another outcome important to emphasize in this model is the influence of stakeholders. As previously reported, their opinion could be affected by staff members acting in processes of external branding aim to reach outer company environment, internal branding with the purpose to better affect current employees and managers, and employers' branding referring to potential customers. For these reasons, in the opinion of Sakkaa and Ahammadb (2020), it is reasonable to work on employee brand advocacy starting from the aspects that are on the left side of the schema.

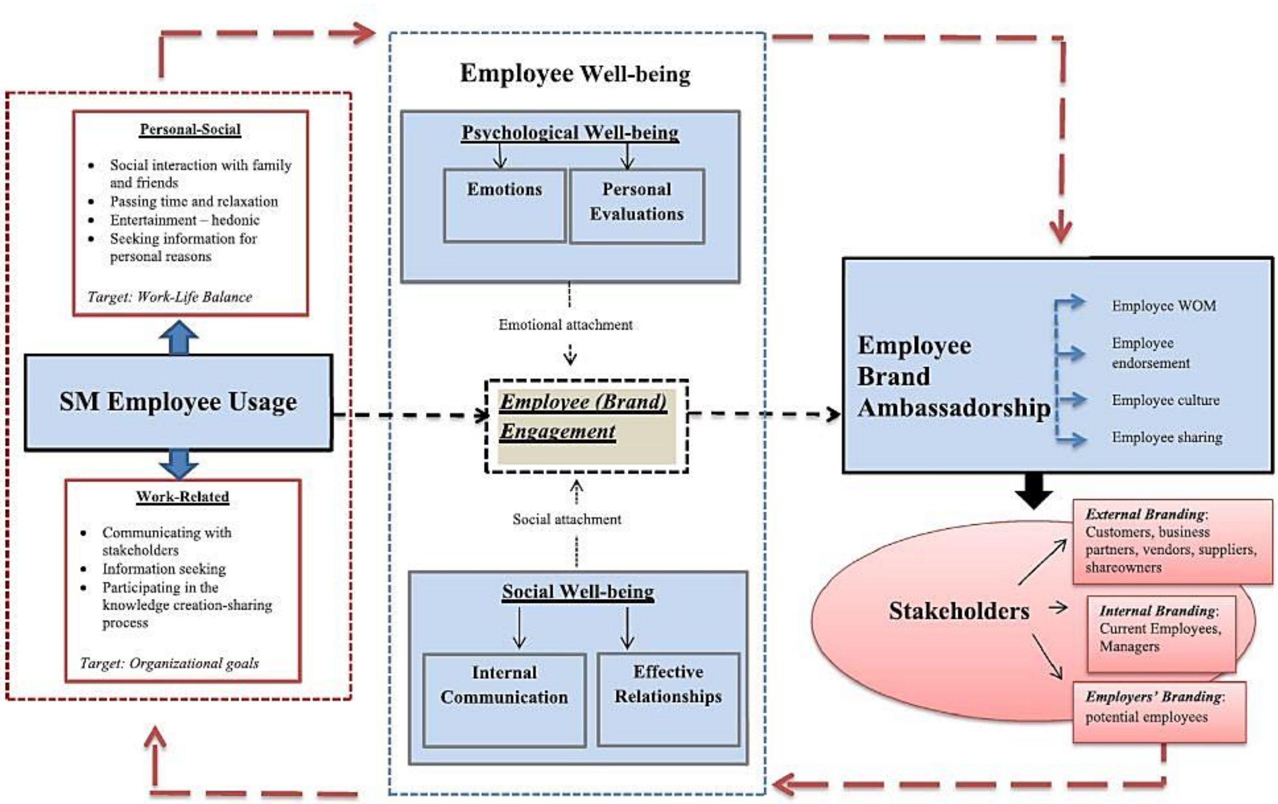

Figure 3 – Brand advocacy and its relation with employees' social media usage and well-being (Sakkaa and Ahammadb, 2020)

Going in deep with the analysis of their paper, it could be possible to read about numerous of interest previous researchers, but the one of Cervellon and Lirio (2017) could be also reported to integrate this thesis's approach. As a matter of fact, they have identified four main dimensions in which employees are or should be engaged to improve favorable outcomes from a firm perspective. The dimensions are the following: the one of the WOM, already pointed out; the "*employee endorsement*" of the company products and services as an advisor for their friends/followers; the "*employee sharing*" that consider the element of share and like firm's content; and the fourth, the "*employee culture*" which rely on the online behavior of the employees respecting to the brand' values, culture, and policy. To enhance the engagement in online communication they also prove that in recent years, companies are reserving benefits for those employees who are more active. This demonstrates increasing attention on this topic. Cervellon and Lirio (2017), also highlighted that the belongingness of a generation could affect the approach that the company should use to improve brand ambassadorship with employees. For instance, they reported that baby boomers (1946-1964) do not see separation on personal or work social media, a difference that instead is hardly perceived among young generations (Generation Y). This leads the thought of a customization of the strategy that the company should use to engage employees that belong to different generations (Cervellon and Lirio,2017).

Revising the three research that have been reported in this paragraph, it seems that tailoring the message to better reach a certain segment of employees, is a good practice for employer branding management. This represents part of the background necessary to develop my empirical research in which a special focus will be related to generations' differences and be useful to create comparisons with recent researches.

2.5 Mergers and acquisitions

Mergers and acquisitions (M&A) could represent the fourth driver for a company that has an interest in following this direction. Considering merger as the combination of two companies that *merge* in one and acquisitions as the prevalence of a company to another that is *acquired* by the first, the juridical approach and law concept will be left behind. Besides this, it could be important to understand that there are many reasons why a company could approach an M&A that are: to lower the cost of capital and obtain financial advantages; to boost the firm's results; to realize economies of scale; to diversify the production for higher growth of products or markets; to increase market share and create market access abroad; to re-align strategical and technological innovation; to take advantage of tax relief; to undervalued target in financial terms; to diversify the risk of management (Boruah A, 2018).

Having this list in mind, it is possible to understand that there are numerous reasons why companies choose to follow this route. The point of this thesis is to highlight how important is to to deal with personnel and manage them to obtain the best advantages in terms of the company's results. The same reference of the previous list is inspirational in this sense. As a matter of fact, Boruah A. (2018) reports a focus on the impact that a merger and acquisitions could have on human resources. It recognizes nine problems related to it that are: "*voluntary turnover of key people and losses of expertise; job losses; lowered commitment and disloyalty; performance drops and lowered productivity; motivational problems; dissatisfaction, frustration, confusion, and stress; dysfunctional behavior and sabotage; people refusing assignments; health problems; and, power struggles"*. It is undermining to understand that all these problems could impact a lot on the performance of the merged company, especially in the target one. But, although this list could represent the main risks and failure of human management during M&A and it seems to be truthful, the research cited does not go in deep with the analysis. However, it could be useful to further research that could investigate better these consequences and improve the suggestions to ameliorate the integration of companies that are merging.

Other authors dedicated their studies to this theme, particularly to improve the comprehension of human resource importance during M&A. An example is a study of Rodríguez-Sánchez et al. (2018) whose focus is to propose an integrated model for HRM. It also confirms most of the problems mentioned by Boruah (2018). Their framework responds to the failure, that other authors pointed out, of managing human resources in the second stage of the process: the integration step[2]. This phase represents the one

[2] To implement mergers and acquisition is necessary to proceed in three stages: planning, implementation and integration.

in which after the announcement, there is the actual combination of the two companies: financially, economically, and structural. In their research, they analyze the second stage of a multinational leading company mergers process. They follow four main points that are*: "leadership and integration team; change and restructuring process; human resources resistance; valuable HR retention".* They described these factors analyzing the importance of each of them for the successful integration of companies.

For the interest of this thesis, one last element, the retention of valuable human resources, should be considered. Indeed, in a structural change, the parent company must recognize in the target company the resources that are necessary for its success. The resources could be machinery, capital, and even personnel.

In the research, it was reported a great plan of internal communication that was described as "*frequent, clear and honest*" and valuable to "*respond to their* [actual target company employees] *concerns*". In doing so, the parent company was able to reach confidence and recommendations from their new employees that were happy to join its vision and mission. This goes against dysfunctional behavior or the sabotage problem that was pointed out in the list before (Boruah, 2018). It also reported that this program helped to receive numerous applications from their parents, relatives, and friends. In this way, the company could be able to catch more potential talents and thus to enhance the opportunity to acquire the best talents ensuring a competitive advantage for the company. Of course, this creates a good situation for the company that is traslated into most people that stay within the firm (85%) (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2018) avoiding the voluntary turnover. Moreover, it also creates a sense of participation, acceptance, and belongingness that typically could be obtained by an employer branding management approach. For this reason, it is possible to affirm that most of the practices described in the study are almost the same that a company adopts when starting an employer branding process and they are necessary for succeeding in mergers and acquisitions too.

3. OBJECTIVES OF EBM

Since the beginning of the explanation of the concept of EBM, the literature reported describes many goals that could be reached following a certain direction and best practices. Although these objectives were mentioned, it could be reasonable to verify the actual contributions of each of them in the company's performances. To demonstrate how employer branding could lead the company to ameliorate its presence in the market and its attractiveness, a variety of literature researches will be analyzed and described.

Particularly, the research will have a better focus on the favorable consequences of increasing the commitment to the employer brand; the increase in the retention and the impact on turnover; the advantages of creating an organizational identification by the employees and improve their loyalty to the brand; and, finally the growth in competitiveness and attractiveness with a deepening on how to measure this latter.

The following advantages are intercorrelated, however, for a reason of clarity of exposing, they will be separated in different paragraphs.

3.1 Increase the commitment

Employer branding seems able to enhance a firm's performance and retain employees. For many years, it has been investigated how these relationships could be possible trying to figure out which are the mediating factors that make it possible. According to many authors, commitment seems to be one of the most important.

Cambridge Dictionary defines commitment as the *"willingness to give your time and energy to a job, activity, or something that you believe in"* (www.dictionary.cambridge.org). Only by reading this definition, it is possible to imagine that the company should invest time and resources to obtain this kind of feeling within its team members because the willingness represents a positive emotion related to doing something, for instance, a job, and maybe make it more interesting and enthralling.

In one of their study, Hager and Seibt (2018) examined the analysis of commitment by making reference to Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) who elaborated a framework dedicated to this theme. They recognized three mind-sets of commitment: the affective, the continuous, and the normative. The first one includes all the emotions related to the workplace, for instance, the positive sense of pride of being part of a team or play a particular role. The second one, the continuous commitment, regards the perceived cost of losing the position that the employee is covering e.g. all the efforts used to arrive at acquiring certain competencies and acknowledgment. Instead, the normative encompasses the perceived obligation derived from the employer/employee relationship. According to the authors, commitment and emotions that spring in the employee's mind are able to reduce absenteeism, turnover and increment the company's performance as a consequence (Hager and Seibt, 2018).

Other authors call similar attitudes as *motivation.* It is defined as the "*enthusiasm for doing something*" or "*willingness to do something".* Catching the similarities between the two definitions and for the purpose of this research, I will treat them as synonymous.

Taking this direction, it is possible to make comparisons among the results of three different kinds of researchers and sectors: the first concerns the retention and motivation of Egyptian employees with the major focus of understanding the correlation between EB and two factors such as retention and motivation (Al Badawy et al., 2017); the second is focused on corporate brand identity in an employee's perspective and on how, by leveraging on commitment, it could enhance the brand performance in UK banking sector (Buil I. et al, 2015); the third analyses the mediating role of commitment to support employee's retention in a public agency in New Zealand (Arasanmi C. and Krishna A., 2019). To conclude, a further analysis on Hager and Seibt (2018)' study will be done to underline the importance of customization of employer branding on affecting organizational commitment.

In the literature review of the first paper, written by Al Badawy et al. (2017), it is reported the evolution of employer branding over the last two decades. Particularly, a section is related to the objectives of EBM reporting, among others, the improvement of retention. They also mentioned numerous reasons of turnover that typically occur: misalignment between the job and the employee, no career growth, job offers, possibility to receive higher compensation by competitors, lack of motivation and low morale, disconfirmation related to job's expectations, work-life unbalanced, mistrust work environment, problems with the management (Al Badawy et al., 2017). They also reported that the most performing people are commonly the first that leaves the organization. For these reasons, according to their opinion, employer branding management seems to help to resolve the problem of retention and the actual cost of turnover. Keeping this position in mind, the authors investigated, in a sample of 95 people working for Egyptian institutions, two main relationships: on one hand, employer branding and retention; on the other hand, employer branding and motivation. Basing on the literature review, they supposed a positive relationship for both. The results demonstrated that the first relationship was insignificant, even if positive; instead the second was highly significant and positive. It is also reported that the first results are not in line with most of the previous researchers. However, the second demonstrates that employer branding practices enhance the employees' motivation (Al Badawy et al., 2017).

To better understand the results obtained, in their conclusions, they suggest to future scholars to test the mediating role of motivation. Hence, the analysis of the third paper will be useful to complete their view. Nevertheless, it is far better to previously analyze the study written by Buil et al., in 2015 that also the Al Badaway (2017) et al. has taken as reference.

Indeed, Buil et al. (2015) investigated the corporate brand identity from the employee's perspective. They focused on the UK banking sector because they recognized the necessity for this branch to re-obtain trust from customers after the financial crises that occurred in the previous years. Moreover, according to their opinions, the service brands have to invest more in corporate brand identity, especially concerning employees' point of view. In their opinion this has to do with employees are the ones in direct relation with the customers and could impact the customer's perception of the brand. For the target they chose (employees) it is possible to make a comparison with employer branding practices. In fact, corporate brand identity is the overall strategy that the company pursues to position its brand in the mind of the customers. As shown in Figure 4, the corporate brand identity management involves activities in common with employer brand management, among the others, the human resource initiatives, and employee focus.

As a matter of fact, the authors studied the employees' commitment to understanding if it could ensure better customer satisfaction, thus indirectly obtain an increase in the firm's performances.

In their analysis, the definition of commitment is reported as follows: *"the extent to which an employee performs his/her role, including the brand promise delivery, based on the brand standards"* (Punjaisri et al., 2009). Hence, they were not only focusing their attention on the willingness to act in a role but also on be aligned to brand standards. It means that they analyze the matching between employees and all the set of rules, values, policies that the brand claim. They also highlighted the role of satisfaction in the employees' attitude at work. In the model of their research is reported the schema of hypothesis they have verified.

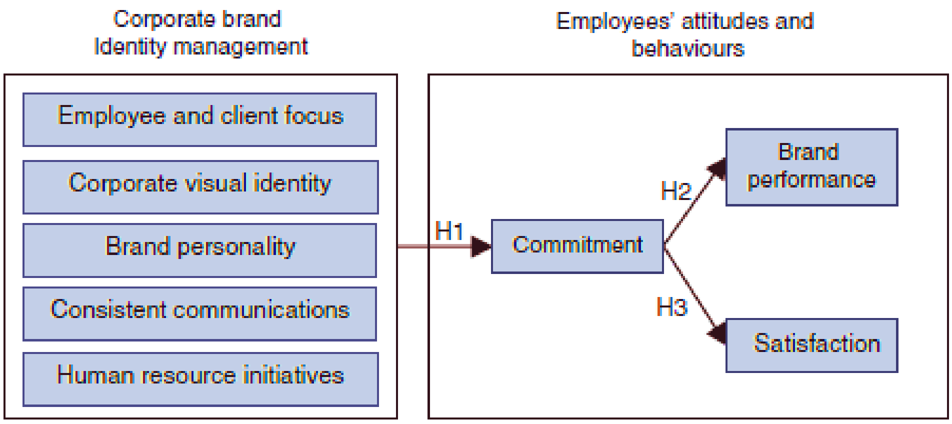

Figure 4 – Conceptual model of Buil et al. (2015)

The first hypothesis (H1) regards the effects of CBI on employee commitment; the second (H2) is related to this latter and the increase in brand performance; the third (H3) would like to explore the correlation between commitment and satisfaction. The results of their empirical research have confirmed all these three relationships highlighting the evidence of the importance of Corporate brand identity management in which companies need to pay more attention and efforts (Buil I. et al, 2015)

As it is been disclose, the third paper will fill the gap concerning the limitations of the empirical research of the first. It could also help to complete the view about the role of employer branding and its objective in enhancing a firm's performances.

In the research of Aransami and Krishna (2019), the mediating role of employee's organizational commitment is been analyzed to comprehend the relationship between organizational support and intention to stay (retention). Their focus on commitment is due to the importance that is perceived by the authors as an attitude that they describe as "*highly desirable*". Even in their opinion, it commonly affects the organization's performance by involving the employees. According to the authors, this process is enhanced by the presence of the *social exchange theory* rules (Blau, 1964) in which their theoretical framework is based. The theory deepens the relationship between the employer and the employees by supposing that there is a sense of reciprocity that harbor in the subjects involved. In this vein, once the employee perceives any kind of perceived organizational support (POS) seems that born in him/her a sense of reciprocal duty and obligation that enhances his/her performance, and hence, one of the firms. In the POS, the authors included particularly all those kinds of activities aimed at supporting the employees in their job, taking care of them ensuring their well-being within the borders of the company and out of the job. In the perceived organizational support, it is possible to recognize the activities related to employer branding.

The results of this study confirm only partially a mediating role of organizational commitment in the relationship between POS and employee retention. However, this research verifies the importance of organizational support for the wellness and commitment of the employees, and that it could predict employee retention.

To conclude this comparison, it is important to emphasize that, although not all the results are able to fully demonstrate the hypothesis, they represent a good base to admit the importance of employer branding in enhancing the employee's commitment. Having demonstrated it, the further step was to highlight how motivation could improve the sense of belongingness, of duty and reciprocity, that help the company to improve its performances.

Having demonstrated that commitment affects the company's result, it could also be relevant to understand that it is could also be affected by job characteristics. Hager and Seibt, in 2018, dedicated part of their study to go in deep into this aspect. They submitted a survey to 183 people between 18 and 69 years from which they gather interesting results. They demonstrate that full-time employees seem to be more satisfied than people with a part-time job. Then, they were able to see that older employees are more motivated than the younger ones. Moreover, they perceived a difference according to job level: managers seem to be less affected by normative commitment than subordinates (Hager and Seibt, 2018). This study suggests a correlation between job characteristics and commitment and by doing so it is able to underline the importance of customization of employer branding even concerning work traits. Similar outcomes will be analyzed in the following paragraph, outcomes related to other aspects such as cross-cultural differences and gender.

To continue the analysis of the objectives of EBM and their role in the company's results, another important aim needs to follow: the increase of retention. Although some pieces of evidence went already mentioned in this paragraph, the next section will be dedicated to it.

3.2 Raise retention and lowering turnover

As pointed out up to now, one of the major employer branding's goal is to increase the retention of the company's employees and lower the turnover. Moreover, it has been discussed the cost of turnover due to the depart of personnel, especially those who are more expert and trained.

To sum up, what was previously reported about this topic, the paper of Sharma (2019) could be the starting point. It reported a highlight on the importance of retention for small and medium enterprises. The relevance of the issue was discussed especially related to job-hopping and the need of identifying a proper solution for companies. In this vein, more of her article will be analyzed. Besides, the study of Gilani and Cunnigham in 2017 will be taken into consideration to explain how companies should act to obtain retention and less turnover. In the end, to better integrate the overview, research of

Thalgaspitiya (2020) will be considered to confirm the potentiality of retention for companies.

Starting with the conclusions of Sharma's article (2019), she called attention to the highest scores obtained from the survey given to the employees of the enterprises she focused on. The questionnaire, that was proposed to employees, was based on the employer's attractiveness scale (EmpAt scale) developed by Berthon et al. in 2005, based on 5 factors: economic value, social value, development value, interest value, and application value (Berthon et al., 2005)[3]. The results of their research demonstrated that economic value was the factor that has less impact on their mind, instead the interest value resulted to be the more interesting one, followed by the development value. The first factor is easily understandable as the opportunity to have higher compensations or promotion opportunities; on the other hand, the second represents the capability of the workplace and of the job to be innovative, stimulating, challenging, and creative; the latter instead evaluate the appreciation, the possibility to grow within the borders of the company (Reis and Braga, 2016; Berthon et al., 2005). Thus, the author ended up with the consideration that those companies who invest only in the economic value are perceived not interest in the eyes of employees and defining it as "*a dangerous mistak*e". On the contrary, for attracting talents and retain them, companies have to invest more in creating a sense of *we* and "*culture openness*". Similar concepts were also mentioned and reported in the previous paragraph related to the sense of belongingness and alignment with the brand standards to better involve the employees in the organization. From the results, it is also possible to read that the same importance should be given to training and development. In doing so, the firm could avoid the risk that employees look for other opportunities in the market (Sharma, 2019). Otherwise, the company creates the conditions for the job-hooping phenomenon and negatively affect its performances.

Another perspective is given by Gilani and Cunnigham in 2017 they organize the present literature since the first years of 2000 in a new conceptual framework (see Fig.5). They

[3] Berthon, Ewing and Hah in 2005 created a list of variables, divided into the 5 factors reported, with the aim of develop a scale to investigate the employer attractiveness by an employee's perspective. See paragraph 3.4.1 Measure attractiveness.

aim at demonstrating the influence of EBM on retention. All the phases necessary to develop employer branding in a strategical perspective are reported in the schema.

The next chapter will explain the steps on the upper side, those aspects that involve the value propositions and the definition of brand attitudes, core values, and, organizational culture. Right now, the lowest part will be analyzed.

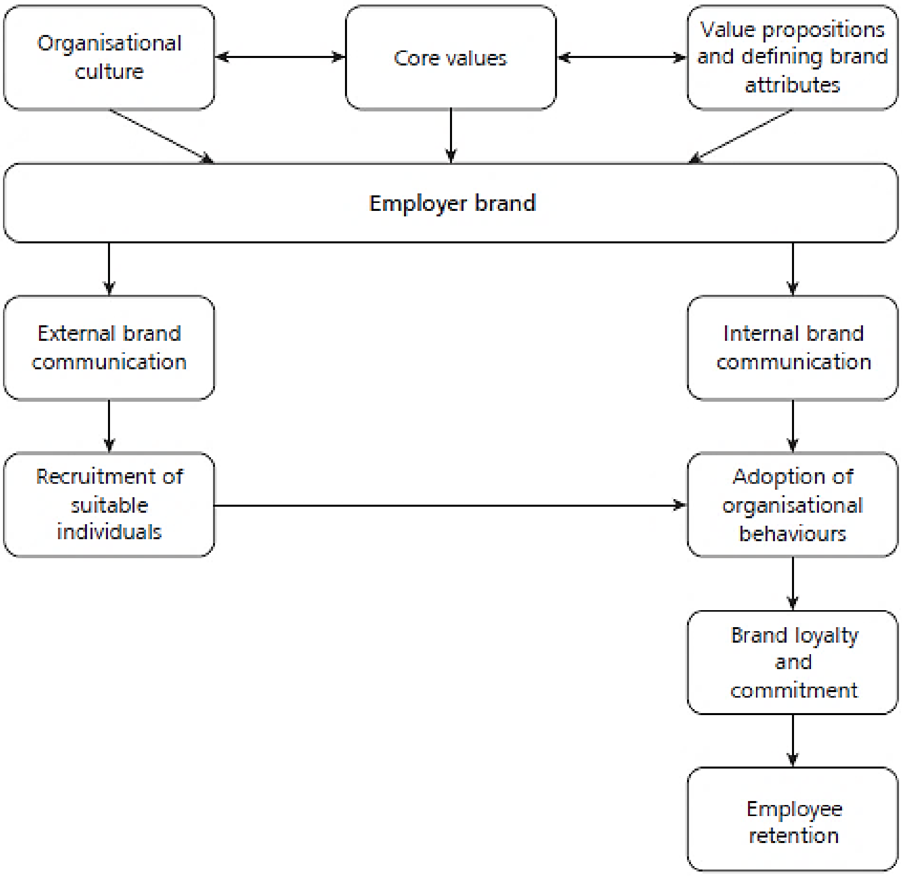

Figure 5 – Employer branding conceptual framework

(Gilani and Cunningham, 2017)

Similarly to the opinion of Sharma (2019), in the framework it is possible to recognize the importance of the creation of the common value that here is called “*organizational behaviors*” as something that is directly linked to brand loyalty, and then to the improvement of retention. In doing so, according to the literature, employer brand strategy could improve company performances. Indeed, it creates a series of advantages for the company such as recruitment efficiency, engagement, and motivation that impacted retention. In this way, the company could avoid the costs of searching, training, and integrate new human resources into the organizational structure (Gilani and Cunningham, 2017).

To confirm the direction, the recent study of 2020 written by Thalgaspitiya, could be helpful to go in deep with the analysis of the role of retention for the company's performance. Its focus was to investigate the variables of employer branding that have a major impact on the intention to stay. The sample used for the study was represented by 245 Sinhalese executive employees of the apparel sector in Sri Lanka. Particularly, the author inquired into the relationships between retention and: first, look for a direct linkage with positive employer branding; second, with growth need strength; third, the psychological contract; and, fourth, the organizational identification.

Some variables investigated could be comparable with the previous: the second is similar to what was described as *development value;* the third is related to the relationship between employer and employee, based on expectations and the perception of organizational support (POS); instead, for the fourth element, the organizational identification, a paragraph will be dedicated to it because it has an important role in employee's wellness and performance.

All the variables described predicted an increase in employee retention, including employee growth need strength that is resulted the most impactful. So the findings reported that for executives, development value and in particular variables such as challenging work-place and opportunity of career are the most valuable factors that impact their motivation to stay within the same company (Thalgaspitiya, 2020).

Considering the job level of the people interviewed, it could be important to say that probably the work is a valuable part of their life and a supposition could lead to thinking that it is a priority for them. Hence, it could be supposed that the development value within the company has an important role in their decision process. For these reasons, it could be said that the target chosen could be one of the main limitations of this study because it does not represent the overall typologies of employees. However, it shows the importance of how the impact of some factors depending on the class of workers could vary. This may suggest that an employer branding customization needs to do to reach different targets depending on the generations' belongingness, gender, and position within the firm.

In conclusion, this last study and the previous confirm the thesis of this paragraph: retention is influenced by employer branding strategy and enhance company's performance by limiting turnover and the cost related to it.

3.3 Taking advantage of organizational identification and loyalty

Another decisive goal that leads companies to implement employer branding is to increase organizational identification and improve the loyalty of the employees to the brand.

As stated in the introduction of this chapter, the objectives are correlated and with them also the researches that help in understanding their effectiveness. For this reason, it could be reasonable to start with a further comment on the conceptual framework of Gilani and Cunningham (2017). Indeed, in the lower part of it, it is possible to see that the two objectives of this paragraph are directly correlated with employee retention. Moreover, there are factors that help to strengthen retention among employees. The reasons why this happens are well-explained in the literature.

Since the first pioneers of the theme EBM, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), recognized that once the organizational values and beliefs are aligned with those of the employees, their performance is greater and so the retention. The importance of not having misalignment and disconfirmation on what was externally communicated to potential employees and what actually happens within the company's borders is fundamental. This is because the behaviors that they adopted needs to be in line with the ones that are expected by the company and lead them to be more productive, more loyal, and enhance the feeling of stay (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004).

A recent confirmation of this is attributable to Tumasjan et al. (2020) who reported that the benefits that EBM obtain are related to the positive climate it creates within the organization. In establishing such a positive environment, they demonstrate that staff members improve their performances, and enhancing the company's results too. Moreover, companies could obtain more investing in incumbent employees, instead of focusing on the potential ones, because positively affecting the performance of every single employee, it is possible to leverage the team's performance too (Tumasjan et al., 2020).

The importance of the employee behaviors'alignment was also investigated by Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos (2014) with a special focus on brand champions. They are meant as those employees who are motivated at the point to become brand ambassadors at work and even off the job and *"contribute to an organization's branding efforts",* as a fan of the brand. For these reasons, brand champions are also defined, as the best outcome employer branding could obtain.

The researchers looked for answers asking employees that belong to the retail bank sector. They chose it for two main reasons: the first is linked to the importance of corporate brand for a company that does not involve physical goods, and thus the relevance of the sense of trust that the brand should instill in their customers; the second concerns the commercial part in which employees are involved in the relationship with the customers and how much employees could affect the customer's perception of the service, and so the brand. Indeed, the actions of the brand champions are also called "*employee brand-building behaviors*" in the sense that they are able to increase the brand image and help the company to communicate it within and outside the company. This contribution is intrinsic to the interaction with customers, friends, families, and colleagues. The sense of belongingness to the brand in these subjects becomes part of their self and more is the brand value perceived, greater will also become the sense of pride and the effectiveness of their communication to others. This is why their organizational identification becomes strong at the point that is natural for them to act in line with the brand, participate in brand development, be loyal to it, spread positive WOM out of the job, and thus increase the positive outcomes inside and outside the company (Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos, 2014).

In the results of the research, the authors, Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos (2014), highlighted that the level of organizational identification could lead to two different approaches: for a high level it corresponds the brand champions, for a low one it coincides a less sincere and less effective translation of it. Although employees with a low organizational identification perceive the support of the organization, recognizing the efforts of employer branding of the firm, their actions are not translated into out-of-the-job brand-building behaviors. Indeed, it occurs that the POS leads to positive feelings too and it could be an incentive on-the-job, but without affecting behaviors off the job. The behaviors that they adopt are only to achieve benefit from that specific behavior and not in a wider sense for the welfare of the company. This explanation is based on reasoning about the social-exchange mechanisms of Blau (1964) and revealed also from the results of the research of Löhndorf B. and Diamantopoulos A. (2014). Hence, it confirms that the company should invest a lot in creating a sense of pride and on communicating the value of the employer to obtain brand-building behaviors even out of the borders of the company.

For the reasons reported, brand champions are considered the best results and their presence enhances firm performance, by taking advantage of a positive brand attitude not only on-the-job but also out of it. Having in mind that brand champions are those employees that have the highest organizational identification level and that they could create the conditions for a better environment within the company, it is possible to conclude that this objective of EBM enhances their performances and the one of the company by consequence. Moreover, the sense of wellness within the company could lead to the employee to be more loyal to his/her employer.

As said, all the objectives are intercorrelated and the following ones are not an exception. Competitiveness and attractiveness could be seen as consequences of low turnover, high retention, more loyalty, and organizational support. Hence, the successive paragraph has the role to complete the overview about how employer branding could lead the companies to greater performances.

3.4 Boost competitiveness and attractiveness

Competitive advantage and attractiveness are the last two objectives that will be analyzed in this thesis. Some notions about their effect on the company's performance were already mentioned. However, here their role will be deeper investigated.

Before starting, it could be relevant to understand which are the definitions of both concepts. The competitive advantage represents all the factors that allow a company to generate a markup that is greater than the one of its market competitors. It could be attributable to the following factors: the structure cost, branding, the product, or service offered, the distribution network, the intellectual property, and the customer service (Investopedia). On the other hand, attractiveness constitutes "*possession of qualities or features that arouse interest*" (Oxford Languages) and especially related to employer is been defined as *"the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization"* (Berthon et al., 2005).

By the way, even if they are defined in a pretty different sense, they seem to lead to creating an improvement on the brand's appeal to customers, to current and potential employees, and stakeholders with the same aim of enhancing the firm's performance. The key element is to leverage the differences between the company over the competitors.

As reported by Sharma (2019), the rise in the intention of the employees to stay increases the competitive advantage of the company by creating an environment in which good people are involved and prefer it to one of the competitors. By doing so, the company could leverage on people sure to remain within its borders, and that will not lose eventual cost of training, of welfare or economic compensation. It could also project a longer strategic plan, looking forward instead of focusing on the short/medium term, that could guarantee a sustained competitive advantage. Translating this concept into behaviors, the company is aimed at obtaining the negative answer to questions like: "if competitors offer you the same job, role, compensation, and welfare, will you choose to leave the company?" or "if competitors offer you better benefits, would you leave?". Of course, the first answer could be influenced by the typical preference of people of stability over change, but the second recognizes to the company a positive and influential position in the mind of the employee that guarantee that the employer branding strategy is working. Moreover, it is possible to understand which is the competitive advantage of having the same talent at a lower cost for the company. A study of the leading employment agency Randstad (*employer brand research 2020*) said that companies pay 10% more the employees if they have a weak brand and that the

50% of people of the sample would prefere a good reputantion company than a better compensation and reward.

Considering another perspective, attractiveness leads employees to choose the company over the competitors and represents "*an attitude* […]" that affects "*toward viewing the organization as a desirable entity with which to initiate some relationships*" (Aiman-Smith et al, 2001). In this sense, it seems that attractiveness target more potential employees and the external environment. However, it is important to remember that the sense of pride in being part of an organization is another nuance of attractiveness from the perspective of current employees. According to Sharma (2019), employer branding could be an attractor for new talents by leveraging on be an appealing place in which employees would like to work for. Furthermore, in her perspective, EBM could be very relevant for sectors in which skill-shortage is present such as IT organizations. Consequently, attractiveness should be defined as an influential variable for sustainable competitive advantage (Sharma, 2019). As already reported, many companies, such as HP, have declared that be considered one of the *best places to work* represents a good point for their business for attracting potential talents and allow them to have the best resources to work with (Costa, 2005). In a resource-based view, the approach of creating the best place guarantees a flourishing investment in the medium-long term.

The position of HP awakes more questions related to the *Best place to work certification*s. Some of the inquiries are related to the reasons why companies look for certifications from third parties and how they could actually improve the company's performances. As previously said, they are third-party certifications that companies could obtain, and they are translated in rankings. They have the advantages to be: comparable among each other because entities settle parameters to judge companies; credible because they are released by third-party that are not company-owned; transparent because their method and data are available. For these reasons, companies are incrementally asking for certifications, not only for evaluating HR practices but also to certificate, for instance, their ethics, code of conducts, their supply chain, and their environmental footprint.

For this increasing success and to answers to the questions related to this argument, the researchers Dineen and Allen in 2016 investigated the benefits, consequences, efficacy of what they called Best Place to Work (BPTW) certifications, meant as all kinds of accreditation of standards that verify the company's environment for incumbent and potential employees. The name is referred to the most famous certifications already mention in the paragraph related to rankings (*1.1* - Rankings), but the study aimed at standardizing all the attestations that have the same method, procedures, and goal.

In this vein, they would demonstrate why companies should invest in them. For doing so, they look for patterns in two main relationships related to: internally, they supposed a negative correlation between collective turnover rate and BPTW certifications; and, externally, they investigate the relationship between this latter and the application pool quality. For both, in the previous paragraph, it has been demonstrated why they contribute to the company's performance and for this reason, it will not be repeated here.

As moderator variables, they included diversity, salaries, size, job openings, and applicant pool quality. In the analysis of the results, the first two were excluded because they seemed to be insignificant related to the issue they look at, instead, the latter three were comprehended in the study, and further, the outcomes will be reported. The research was conducted within three years in a sample of 624 companies that were participants in BPWT certifications. In this time frame, their HR investments were also analyzed (Dineen and Allen, 2016).

Basing on signaling theory, the authors recognized in the certifications a credible and comparable indicator that could be read by employees for choosing the company over the competition. By consequence, the results demonstrated that the presence of certifications enhances the motivation to stay, negatively affecting the collective turnover rate. Here, it can be said that, because certifications bring pieces of evidence of what the company is doing for its employee and because of the social-exchange theory, turnover is the natural answer for the attention received, as reported in the paragraph dedicated. Furthermore, the Dineen and Allen (2016) showed evidence that the application pool quality increase once a company is been recognized by a third party as the best place to work. Particularly, the size of the company seems to be a decisive variable in its effectiveness. Indeed, smaller firms resulted to be more advantageous than the larger ones. The authors justified this result considering that small companies in being mentioned in the rankings, are not only improving their branding, but they are able to increase the number of people that know them and hence, improve the probability to receive a higher amount of applications and by consequence incrementing the quality of the pool of candidatures. In the contrast, typically larger firms are well-known by job-seekers and thus the certifications have a lower impact on a candidate because they have already run for the office in that particular company (Dineen and Allen, 2016).

The doctors Dineen and Allen have also investigated the correlation between application pool quality and the job openings, meant as the number of vacancies available that could be filled in the next 30days. They demonstrated that when the job openings are scarce, BPTW certifications help in attracting a better pool of job seekers. To complete the overview of the paper, it is also significant to report that turnover is not affected by the repeated signals related to BPTW shreds of evidence, what they called *crystallization* because only a single initial third-party certification is "*sufficiently credible*". Furthermore, having more than one certification, the "*celebrity"* phenomenon, does not impact the turnover rate (Dineen and Allen, 2016).

To conclude, the management should recognize the importance of third-party certifications for incumbent and potential employees for many reasons: acquire the best talents and retain them, to demonstrate the efforts in HR practices and make them objectively recognized in the market, to guarantee the acquirement of talents in the skill-shortage period, to enhance the company attractiveness over the competitions, and for small companies, to reach the job seekers that otherwise were not able to know the firm.

Following the indications described until now, it is possible to summarize that employer branding could be a great starting point for attracting talents. What was not said, it is that is important to understand which are the target the company should attract. An interesting example was given by Momot and Lytvynenko in 2019 who explored the Ukraine banking sector attractiveness by focusing on the perspective of the Millennials generation. The sector was chosen because they recognized a problem in attracting this generation because of the worsening of the image of banks as employers. Indeed, the authors realized that after the 2007-2008[4] and the 2014-2015[5] financial crises, banks are not perceived as good as in the previous years. According to the authors, banks are not recognized as good employers because they have attached a *"strong stereotype"* of rigidity that does not attract millennials.

The research was divided into two main parts: one related to the study of the attitudes of millennials towards information, media, and social networks; another part concerns the translation on the previous results on advice for enhancing the trust on banks as employees (Momot and Lytvynenko, 2019).

Even if this thesis will not report the suggestions, this study is significant to understand that employer branding could help the company, or even a sector, to regain trust from the audience both internal and external. It is also useful to demonstrate that a decisive analysis must be undertaken to understand which the main issues are related to the target the company would like to achieve. The authors, Momot and Lytvynenko (2019), additionally prove that inquiries concerning attitudes and values related to specific generations need to be done. In this case, the importance of analyzing Generation Z is due to the prominent position that they will go through in most of the sectors, especially the most recent ones such as technologies and their applications.

3.4.1 Measure attractiveness

The last paper analyzed highlighted the importance of customization and the issue concerning the relativization of attractiveness depending on generations. Many researchers have dedicated their study to understand how attractiveness could be calculated aiming at verifying which are the factors that most influence the people's opinion toward a company, particularly the focus was potential employees. For this reason, it could be important to integrate the narration about attractiveness with the analysis of these researches. As it has been already introduced, it will be analyzed in deep the Berthon et al.'s employer attractiveness scale (EmpAt, 2005), which is the most

[4] The 2007-2008 crises, also called global financial crisis (GFC) is referred to the well-known financial and economic crise that occurred in these years. It was due to an excessive risk-taking of banks and a unconscionable emissions of derivates uncovered.

[5] It is the crise related to Ukrainian revolution that see the destitution of president-in-office Viktor Janukovyč and the subsequent Crimea's war between Russia and Ukraina.

known and widely used by researchers, even from the ones that in this thesis were reported, suggesting its suitability to address employer branding strategy.

Reis and Braga's article (2016) will be analyzed to report the importance of the EmpAt scale to investigate generational perspectives. Besides this, another study of Eger et al. (2019) will be mentioned to emphasize that customization does not depend only on generations, but researchers have applied the scale to verify other kinds of patterns related to employer branding, such as gender influence and cross-cultural differences.

In the end, to complete the overview about how to measure attractiveness, comparisons between the scale into account and more recent ones will be done, even if they present a lot of similarities.

Starting from the article released in 2005 it is significant to understand the variable that Berthon et al. have defined to offer a template for measuring employer attractiveness. The authors started their approach by making references to Ambler and Barrow (1996) who are recognized as the pioneer for employer branding research. Not only for this reason, but they are also important in the literature for the authors because they designed the first schema of factors related to employer attractiveness. They defined three elements that after were extended by Berthon et al.. The variables comprehend functional, psychological, and economic factors.

As it is possible to see in Fig. 6, the EmpAt scale is composed of five-factor:

1. *Interest value*, which assesses the employer's characteristics of offering a challenging environment, innovative services and products to deal with and, the usage of creativity;
2. *Social value,* which is related to the social aspects of the work environment such as team performance, funny workplace, good colleagues relationships;
3. *Economic value*, which assesses the economic sphere such as the salary or the production premium availability and the job security;
4. D*evelopment value* is the fourth factor of this scale and comprehends all the features related to career perspective, the possibility to be appreciated in a workplace by management;

5. *Application value* concerns tutorships with colleagues, the possibility to make others learn from you, and what has linked to the company's humanitarian actions toward society.

1. INTEREST VALUE
1 - The organisation produces innovative products and services
2 - Innovative employer – novel work practices/forward-thinking
3 - The organisation both values and makes use of your creativity
4 - The organisation produces high-quality products and services
5 - Working in an exciting environment
2. SOCIAL VALUE
1 - Having a good relationship with your colleagues
2 - Having a good relationship with your superiors
3 - Supportive and encouraging colleagues
4 - A fun working environment
5 - Happy work environment
3. ECONOMIC VALUE
1 - An attractive overall compensation package
2 - An above average basic salary
3 - Job security within the organisation
4 - Good promotion opportunities within the organisation
5 - Hands-on inter-departmental experience
4. DEVELOPMENT VALUE
1 - Feeling more self-confident as a result of working for a particular organisation
2 - Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organisation
3 - Gaining career-enhancing experience
4 - A springboard for future employment
5 - Recognition/appreciation from management
5. APPLICATION VALUE
1 - Opportunity to teach others what you have learned
2 - Opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution
3 - The organisation is customer-orientated
4 - Humanitarian organisation – gives back to society
5 - Acceptance and belonging

Figure 6 – Employer attractiveness scale (EmpAt)

(Berthon et al. 2005)

For each of these elements, in Fig. 6, according to the authors, it is possible to read which are the five elements that composed each of them. They describe the behaviors in which the five elements are translated into the workplace. The starting questions for assessing this template is: *"How important are the following* [factors] *to you when considering* *potential employers?"* and the answers are given using a seven-point Likert scale (1=Not important at all, 5=very important).

As said these aspects are correlated with what was elaborated by Ambler and Barrow (1996). There can be an association between interest and social value and the psychological benefits, as well the development and application values can be associate to functional benefits, finally economic value to the economic ones.

The researchers Berthon et al. have also suggested many applications in which their scale could be used. As already reported, the scale is useful as a template for assessing attractiveness as well as for understanding which are the features that are most important for our target. Moreover, they recognize the possibility to use the EmpAt scale to track changes in time towards employees' opinions.

As mentioned, in this thesis, many studies in which the scale was used in a wide range of contexts have been encompassed. For instance, Sharma in 2019 applied the template in India to verify which are the most interesting features for employees who are working in technologies in small and medium enterprises. A further contribution was given by Verčič and Ćorić in 2018 that used the scale to measure perceived employer branding to investigate its relationship with corporate reputation and CSR.

Another important research that integrates the wide usage of the EmpAt scale is the one of Reis G. and Braga B. (2016). They adopt the scale to inquire the attractiveness of employers from a generational perspective. In the research, they comprehend baby boomers[6], boomers[7], and generation Y[8] who were the generations that were co-operating in the workplace at the time. In the analysis of their results, it is possible to read which are the variables that most interesting various generations. For instance, they highlight the great difference between the perception of the interest value of baby boomers (first place) on the respect of the opinion of generation Y who do not have so much interest in it (fourth place). This study, as many that are been analyzed, confirm the opinion that EBM should be customized according to the characteristics of the target

[6] People born fro 1946 to 1960
[7] Also called Generation X, it comprehends people born from 1961 to 1981
[8] Also named Millenians, it comprehends people born from 1982 to 1996

that wants to achieve and that the EmpAt scale could be used to obtain this kind of information (Reis and Braga, 2016).

Due to this approach, many other researchers used the scale to investigate other aspects that influenced the potential employee's opinion. This result created the condition for Eger et al. (2019) to look into the studies that were published from 2005 by Berthon et al. to their research, passing across many others such as the one of Reis and Braga (2016) and gives them the possibility to make comparisons among cross-cultural different approaches to employer attractiveness. Indeed, the majority of these researches have in common the use of the EmpAt scale and several similarities among methodology and sample taken. This latter was in all composed by business students in the final years. The main difference among them was nationality and thus this has become the focus to investigate on.

Eger et al. (2019) started their research given more attention to: the influence of employer attractiveness factors on Czech Republic students; the possibility to analyze a gender impact on it; and, in the end, a cross-cultural investigation trying to figure out if there are variables that are more considered by different nationalities. The results of the first point will be analyzed only concerning the comparison related to the third point.

The outcomes of their research demonstrated a great influence of gender on respect of attractiveness, particularly females are more attached, and they give more importance to employer branding's variables in general than males. Interest Value seems to be the only variable that was not impacted by the gender approach.

On the other hand, talking about the other focus of investigation on cross-cultural differences more has come to the surface. To make clear the comparison among nationalities, they created a matrix in which on one side is reported the six-most evaluated items recognized by the EmpAt scale, on the other, they matched the results of other past studies divided by nationality. The countries that they included were: Australia (referring to Berthon et. Al, 2005), Sri Lanka (referring Arachchige and Robertson, 2011), Norway (referring to Sivertzen et al. 2013), Turkey (referring to Alniack et al., 2014), Latvia (referring to Alniack et al., 2014), Brazil (Reis and Braga, 2016) and the Czech Republic. Even if, this list is incomplete considering all the countries around the world, the matrix is able to highlight relative and absolute differences that could be important for the companies that are facing potential employees belonging to these nationalities. Not only, it could make clearer the necessity for customization.

Generally, the study reported little interest in the application value by all the nationalities, and only Norwegians and Czechs demonstrated attention to one of its variables (respectively 5th and 4th position). Instead, in all the nationalities at least one factor related to the economic value is considered. However, there is more specific attention to some variables according to a given nationality: it seems that Sri Lanka students are more interested in the development value of a company, reporting 4 out of 6 variables regarding this aspect; rather, the Brazilian sample appears to be more attracted by the interest value; and more is revealed by Czechs that seems to pay attention to the social value more than the rest (first three positions were dedicated to it). More of this kind of analysis is narrated on the study of Eger et al. (2017), nevertheless, at this point, it is not necessary to consider all the comparisons, but to understand message behind this research. Indeed, the major contribution of this study is that it responds to the call of Berthon et. al to investigate the differences of perception of employer attractiveness factors among different cultures. It highlights the necessity of customization according to the target. Furthermore, since the freshness of the research, it could enhance the importance of the request for more inquiries on the development of the EBM strategy. Moreover, it accentuates the need for researchers to respond to more questions, even the most specific one (i.e. how to reach a particular target) that it is possible to achieve by implementing employer branding properly.

With regards to studies that in the narration have already been analyzed, it is now important to making again reference to the one of Hager and Seibt published in 2018. In point of fact, this article contributes to the comparability among the EmpAt scale and two other methods of calculating attractiveness. They are also more recent than the one of Berthon et al. and they are the one of Trost (2013) and the one created by the same authors (Hager and Seibt, 2018)[9].

[9] Unfortunately, these two last researchers are not available in free access on the web, thus information are taken from the elaboration of Hager and Seibt in 2018. Moreover, Trost publication is available only in German.

Chronologically starting, Trost is the first it could be analyzed. In his book, he suggests five main categories of employer's characteristics that could generate attractiveness in the labor market. As it is represented in Fig. 7, even if they are calling with different names, Trost in 2017 report most of the values of Berthon et al. (2005).

1. OFFERS	2. TASKS	3. COMPANY
Pay	Interesting tasks and projects	Products and services
Incentives	Internationality	Company success
Career opportunities	Innovation	Location
Work-life balance	Influence	Reputation
		Job security

4. EMPLOYEES	5. VALUES
Personality	Organizational culture
Level of education	Quality of Leadership
Teamwork	Trust and flexibility
Diversity	

Figure 7 –Trost's employer characteristics (2013)

The main differences are according to the *Employees factor,* in which Trost included the employees' attitudes, personality, and level of education to the social aspects considered by the EmpAt scale. Moreover, the author comprehended the job characteristics by looking at the specific items related to the tasks, responsibilities, and positions covered by employees. Other nuances could be seen in the *Company factor* that also encompasses the location in which the company is situated (Trost, 2013; Hager and Seibt, 2018). Considering the importance that some places are obtaining in these last years (i.e. Silicon Valley for technology or Carrara marble district for construction), this last factor seems to be valuable to figure out on a scale which aim is to evaluate attractiveness.

Hager and Seibt in 2017 created a scale of thirteen items that converge in four factors: 1) *social component* which extends all the job characteristic concerning the company's importance, team-work, and what is socially valuable*; 2*) economic benefits, career prospects and reputational factors are agglomerate into *status and perspective; 3) independence and interest* reveal all the variables related to the employee's self-reliance and the involvement of the job; *4)* the latter consider the factors of work-life balance and represent the option to prioritize low responsibility at work, they called it *avoidance* *of responsibility.* Even here, it is possible to emphasize that there are aspects that were not taken into consideration by Berthon et al. (2005) and Trost (2017); for instance, the concept of low responsibility preference. Nevertheless, this thesis does not have the aim to verify which variables should be used, but only to present the literature devoted to this theme.

Conversely, this deepening had the aim to reveal a sensible approach of researchers to attractiveness and the necessity for them to help companies to understand which variables are more valuable in the eyes of employees. More explanations were dedicated to Berthon et. al (2005) because of its wide use and verifications available that convince of its suitability to reach this aim. However, it does not mean that other scales are less worthwhile compared to the EmpAt one. Further researches, especially empirical ones, are necessary to evaluate this aspect because up to now only a few studies were dedicated to this aspect.

4. HOW TO PLAN AND IMPLEMENT EMPLOYER BRANDING

Since now, it has been discussed what is employer branding management, why is becoming increasingly more and more important, which are the main drivers that companies should evaluate to choose to implement EBM, and in the latter chapter it has been encompassed how its outcomes could lead the company to increase its performances. All those aspects were described to make management aware that the direction to take is to implement an employer branding strategy for many different reasons, starting from the idea that even if the company does not perform an EB strategy, it has one anyway. To complete the purpose of this part of the research which is to examine the present literature review and help companies to face employer branding with a long-term view, now it is time to offer practical ways of implementing EBM. Particularly, the following paragraphs will be dedicated to a deepening on how management should plan, implement and measure an employer branding strategy.

To develop the following narrative, among the others, one paper written by Sousa et. al (2016) will be used as a reference and baseline to treat how companies could implement employer branding. This is because it is one of the few researchers that was dedicated to a real-business case study and it encompasses all the stages and methods that a leading Portuguese company had passed across approaching employer branding since the beginning (Sousa et al., 2016).

As it also was said in the first chapter dedicated to understanding the concept of employer branding, this field originates from a mix of other disciplines that were already present in management studies. According to Sousa et. al (2016), these disciplines are: marketing, corporate and internal branding. Their contributions to the implementation of the field under examination will be further analyzed with the aim of highlighting that employer branding could be seen as a mix of different disciplines. To integrate the review about contributions, it could be relevant to add Design Thinking to the list: reference about its application to HRD will be done. Moreover, an ethical perspective will be given to complete the overview. This further development has also the role of make management aware that the acknowledgments that they have acquired for these fields are useful for the implementation of employer branding.

After that, having clarified each role, it will possible to understand which path the company needs to follow for planning, implementing, measuring, and further monitoring an EB strategy within its borders.

Moreover, changes in needs and attitudes of stakeholders, as also employees, will be reported to help management to recognize future situations that could impact their business. A successful example of this is represented by the Covid-19 pandemic which has radically changed people's way of living and working.

Explanations and deepening about some frameworks and pieces of advice for management will be reported. However, the purpose is not being exhaustive since the great number of models, suggestions, and strategies that the literature presents. The actual goal is highlight and focus on the points that could be relevant in the evaluation of an employer branding strategy. The criteria chosen is to look at the more recent articles, the most used, and more referenced practices.

4.1 Contributions by different approaches and fields

To start this practical part, it is relevant to focus on the contributions that different approaches could positively affect employer branding strategy, even if they do not belong to the human resource field. Resuming some concepts learned in the past chapters, it is understandable that techniques and methods that are typically used in marketing or branding could be very important for the success of the EBM strategy. Especially, it could be relevant to pay more attention to some interrelationship between human resources and these fields. The importance of this deepening is due to the necessity of making clear that employer branding is a new field yet and for this reason more consolidated techniques and methods could be helpful to translate EBM into a sustainable strategy.

It is remarkable to notice that a lot of the references of this thesis were taken by journals of different fields. Examples of reviews are: Gilani and Cunnigham (2017) to which many mentions were done belong to "The Marketing Review" journal; the first paper dedicated to Berthon et al.'s EmpAt scale (2005) was published on the "International Journal of Advertising", even if it reports one of the most used methods to evaluate employer’s attractiveness; the relation between reputation, EB and CSR was released in the “Public Relations Review” journal (Verčič and Ćorić, 2018); last “Academy of Management Journal” in which Dineen and Allen described the importance of BPTW certifications. Of course, these were just few examples; however, the literature that talks about employer branding shows influences from other fields. Something that must not be underestimated is that, human resource discipline gives the major contribution to this theme by providing to all these fields another perspective. The point to draw attention to is that in employer branding, every aspect acquires the sense of attracting, motivating, and retaining people. The mistake that typically occurs is to confuse the administrative duties of human resources and the strategy that instead there is behind them. Here, it is relevant to look more at the contributions and the competitive advantage that people management could lead to the company.

The pioneers of the theme, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), highlighted this concept in their article underling the contribution of internal and external marketing to attract, motivate, and retain human resources. The authors suggest taking inspiration from the notions of marketing to attract current (internal) and potential (external) employees. Even Berthon et al. (2005) emphasized the role of internal advertising and adding internal branding to the list recommending to not forget the internal audience and the importance to transfer the brand essence to employees.

Mosley (2014) in his book translated these pieces of advice into practical indications for companies. In the initial phase, he argued the adequacy of the team that should develop the EBM strategy. According to his opinion, it should be composed of strategists and professionals who are able to gather the best practices from all the fields and properly merging them. He suggested a direct relationship among the teamwork to the management, the human resources leadership, and the branding specialist. Their capabilities should be measured on the ability to gather insights from the internal and the external audience, be able to translate them into a proper employer value proposition in line with the brand and marketing management, and then implement it in micro and macro policies. It could be also relevant to consider that concepts such as Value Propositions are taken from the marketing field and used by management for several objectives, even if they were developed for specific subjects. More about this aspect will be further analyzed. Last but not the least, the team has to guarantee that these policies should be appropriately communicated to the stakeholders. This process should be synergic in every step. For this reason, choosing the right team, according to Mosley (2014), is the first key to success in the strategy.

Considering more than one perspective and point of view in elaborating an HR strategy could be very difficult. For this reason, an innovative way of analyzing, developing, and implementing the strategy is necessary. According to the opinion of Bailey et. al. (2019) Design Thinking (DT) approach could be a solution. It could also be able to respond to the challenging context that HR face during these years such as skill shortage. Defined as *"a human-centered process that emphasizes observation, collaboration, fast learning, visualization of ideas, rapid concept prototyping, and concurrent business analysis which ultimately influences innovation and strategy*" (Lockwood, 2010, p. 11) seems to be a proper solution for HRD. Indeed, it has the capability to be a process that enhances co-creation, participatory learning, prototyping, and monitoring, and able to respond to the most complex issues by integrating several viewpoints. To understand the depth of analysis that this technique is able to achieve, Bailey et al. (2019) reported a study-case of Global Entrepreneurial Talent Management 3[10]'s team which objective was to explore the future skills that will be required in the labor market investigating how education should be adapted to develop these kinds of competences. The authors aimed to give more insights about DT and how this mindset could be a major contribution to HRD to find out proper and customize solutions. The steps described in the research will be also analyzed further in this thesis. The diagnosis phase and the participatory learning will be underline reporting the necessity of listening to the stakeholders' opinion and frame the problem in the most useful way for a specific case. To conclude the part related to DT, it could be relevant to say that even this discipline originates from an interdisciplinary approach, and a lot of the instruments and frameworks belong to other fields. In this vein, the Design Thinking approach could be a way to develop a sustainable employer branding strategy.

[10] GETM3 is European funded project which aim is to combine the requests of three stakeholders (universities, students and employers) concerning the young talents future development. Its approach is inter-sectorial, inter-disciplinary and inter-generational. (https://getm3.eu/)

The evolution of the employer branding perspective has highlighted issues that were not taken into consideration in the past. For this reason, the more the field is growing and the theme of EB is been analyzing by scholars, the more attention should also be paid to the ethical implications of all those strategies. During the researches for this thesis, attention was also paid to this aspect, especially following the discussion about corporate social responsibility. In the literature, some authors have been interested in understanding the consequences of such policies. A good example of this trend is the paper of Pittz et al. (2017), published in the *Business and Professional Ethics Journal* in which the authors ethically investigate the international recruitment process. Specifically, they were interested in understanding the effects of recruitment policies done by firms located in developed countries on developing countries' economies. The questions they advanced were almost related to: as first, the issue of "*brain drain*" and the impact that recruitment could have on this phenomenon, reminding the problem of education investment loss that affect the economies; as second, the synergy that could create firms and nations to enhance recruitment efficacy and the consequences on migration countries. In their research, the authors focused their attention on "*self-initiated expatriates*" and *"skilled immigrants",* trying to separate the migration from poverty to the migration pulled by recruitment processes (linked to HR policies). The authors made also reference to the field of *nation branding,* which is the marketing process that helps a country to enhance its position in the market, particularly referring to international relationships, as an attractor for talents (Kerr and Wiseman, 2013). This kind of strategy could impact migrations' flow, and hence, workforce availability, especially the more skilled ones. As such, the consequences could affect most developing countries and giving more advantages to the developed ones (Pitzz et al. 2017).

Even if in this thesis, the ethical perspective will be not studied in deep, a mention was necessary to complete the overview of this theme. Indeed, the importance of developing and implement ethical policies should be taken into account. Hence, the philosophical and ethical field should be included in the HR development process strategy.

From now on, all the techniques that belong to the fields will be reported. The ethical perspective should be always taken into account as underground to obtain a sustainable development of the firm and its human resources, although further and more specific researchers are necessary to explore the ethical implications and perspectives of employer branding.

4.2 Development approach

To develop an employer strategy, it is necessary to have in mind some steps to follow to properly implement a competitive and suitable strategy for the firm. The method presented follows four steps: diagnosis, benchmarking, implementation phase and, monitoring and improvements. The first phase is the *diagnosis*, in which the management has to understand which are the gaps and problems that it has to deal with according to its employer role among all the stakeholders. In the second step, an external look is necessary. Indeed, *benchmarking* is relevant to understand which actions, strategies, and efforts competitors are implementing to be able to create a differentiation position in the market. *Implementation* then is the third stage in which the actions are applied to the case. Here some models will be presented to better help management in organizing the strategy. In the end, the *monitoring and improvement* phase takes into account the relevance of continuing the analysis and control of the development and changes of stakeholders' needs to better tailoring and fix eventual gaps or problems.

4.2.1 Diagnosis: analysis and benchmarking

Diagnosis represents the first step that a company should do before start planning the actions to be taken to implement employer branding. This phase is essential to recognize gaps, problems, strengths, and weaknesses in the current employer branding strategy. It is valuable here to say that even if the company has never implemented an EB strategy, still it has one. Indeed, it is important to remember that employer branding is the combination of all the characteristics that people perceive of an employer; thus, even if the company does not implement a particular strategy, people have an opinion about that. This is was emphasize by Minchington and Thorne in 2007 and it represents a good point to start because it enhances the importance of establishing a direction that is in line with the corporate values, strategies, and brand.

Throughout the literature review described up to now, a particular focus was dedicated to the issue of customization according to many factors such as gender, nationalities (Eger et al., 2019), generational (Bussin et al., 2019; Reis and Braga, 2016), and job characteristics (Hager and Seibt, 2018). Investigation about the items that are perceived more attractive by talents was described referring for instance Berthon et al. 2005 and their EmpAT scale. By remembering this, it could be possible to imagine how important the diagnosis phase is in recognizing the variables that are most valuable for the employees. In the practical example of the Portuguese company described by Sousa et al. (2016), this phase was developed by investigating using a qualitative and quantitative method. Particularly, they undertook a series of individual interviews (29) and a focus group investigation. By doing so, they were able to understand which are the main gaps and problems related to employer branding and the real perceptions of workers.

After that, a more delicate phase follows because it is necessary to extrapolate the topics that are recurrent, more valuable, and important giving the opinion of employees and other stakeholders (i.e. shareholders), but also considering which are the issues that the company cares about. Prioritization of the issues needs to be done. Following the example of Sousa et al. (2016), it could be reasonable to merge features that could belong to the same theme by linking citations and data gathered during the study. The reporting of direct speech of employees is essential in this part because it could actually give the right point of view of people without any kind of interpretation This process ensures less misunderstanding and misleading constructions (Sousa et al., 2016).

In the paper, three main topics were detected and called with explanatory words as *employees, empowerment, and engagement*. *Employee* matter was related to the fact that the human resource division seems not to be focused on them, but mostly on the administrative part, giving too little attention to people management. *The empowerment* theme included the difficulty of the management team of delegation, communication, and harmonization in a global strategy. The last, *engagement* topic was linked to the lack of a sense of belonging, loyalty, and misalignment between employees and company strategy. Moreover, schemas and summaries were created to better focus the topics and their aspects (Sousa et al. 2016). This method was also suggested by Mosley in his book (2004) in which he also underlines the importance of this phase for better tailoring the strategy to current employees' perceptions (Mosley, 2004).

4.2.1.1 Total Rewards Framework

In the phase of diagnosis, it is necessary to have a framework because it will avoid forgetting any factor that should be analyzed. In this paragraph, it could be reasonable to cite one of the main important methods recognized by HR researchers and managers called the *Total Rewards Model.* It is a holistic approach that encompasses all the benefits that employees receive in the workplace. It includes intrinsic and extrinsic factors that impact the employees' employer perception. As discussed in the article written by Hareendrakumar et al. (2020), the Total Reward model is able to understand the psychological aspects that are expected by employees, recognizing that people never respond to a precise algorithm; hence, human resources should be managed carefully. What is important to highlight about this method is that it recognizes a list of factors that a company should analyze and implement in its HR strategy to attract, retain, and motivate employees (Hareendrakumar et al.,2020).

The Total Reward Model has been studied by many researchers and different frameworks are present in the literature. They vary particularly considering the factors to include. In this vein, some variations will be reported with the aim to highlight that there are questionable and customizable aspects to consider. This is a remarkable issue that is always necessary, particularly once human resources are the subject of the topic.

WorldatWork association was the first entity that introduced the Total Reward Model. It is an association of professionals founded in 1995 with the aim of sharing best practices in people management. Initially, they were related only to payroll practices and wage information, however, with the evolution of the labor market, the aspects included have become more and more (worldatwork.org). In figure 8, there is reported the schema provided by WorldatWork. It is possible to see in the center the main aspects included in the framework and it is relevant to highlight that not only the economic part is mentioned, but it is one of the five factors that a total reward strategy should take into consideration. It is also important to give relevance to the left side of the schema:

the influence of the external environment is included in the reasoning to develop the HR strategy.

Figure 8 – Worldatwork's Total Reward Model (WorldatWork.org)

Culture, leadership, social norms, regulations are some of the aspects that are mentioned and impact how the Total Reward strategy is perceived by employees. A deepening on benchmarking will follow this paragraph, as well as the evaluation on the external environment.

Considering this influence, the study of Hareendrakumar et al. (2020) is helpful to clarify the impact of the five factors (the ones at the center of the schema). Particularly, they investigated the perception of HR strategy's fairness by employees. The incorporation of the sense of equality has been studied refereed to its mediating role between the Total Reward model application and employee loyalty (Hareendrakumar et al.,2020). What concerns the contribution of loyalty in the company performance has already been discussed in paragraph 3.3. More about the concept of fairness and its perception related to organizational justice has been analyzed by the authors. Part of the discussion will be reported with the purpose of highlighting the importance of customization, the subjective perception, and the external features that affect fairness perception.

Indeed, Hareendrakumar et al. (2020) mentioned three aspects related to the justice concept that impact the employees' sense of fairness: the first concerns the distribution of the outcomes called *distribution justice*; the second, the *procedural justice*, regards the allocation of the benefits; the third is called *interactional justice* and it encompasses all the decisions taken about how employees are treated and informed. In this overview, it is possible to understand that the Total Reward Model should not only take care of what should be the rewards but also how they will be allocated, communicated, and distributed. With the aim of giving practical suggestions on how implementing employer branding, a deepening of fairness is necessary. This is because it could be important to understand that people's perceptions evolve; thus, how they perceive their contribution to the company. According to Hareendrakumar et al. (2020), HR management aims to maintain the feeling of people that they are treated fairly following their contribution. In this vein, they investigated the relative strength of each factor of the Total Reward Model. Their sample was represented by 324 employees that comprehend executives and non-executives from Kerala, a south Indian state. The authors discovered that factors as work-life balance, benefits, and career growth are more impactful than the others. Here, it is possible to see similarities with what is reported according to attractiveness and the analysis of the most valuable factors in the employee's perception.

As for attractiveness and Berthon et al. EmpAt scale, the Total Reward Model could be the subject for analyzing generational preferences. To better comprehend the link between the two, a study by Bussin et al. (2019) could be helpful. Indeed, the authors used the Total Reward Framework to understand which are the factors that most attract skilled youth that belong to Generation Y[11]. The research was conducted in two main phases: firstly, they collect information by using a quantitative method in a sample of students of South Africa; secondly, they perform a qualitative data collection including not only young people but also managers, executives, and HR professionals. To better understand the differences, to offer comparisons according to the generations, they also investigated the preferences of baby-boomers and boomers. In their paper, they reported the results presenting three schemes of the Total Reward model divided by generations and scaling the preferences from one (most important) to seven (least important) (Bussin et al., 2019).

[11] In this research, the Generation Y comprehend people from 1981 to 2000 differently from the previous researches that have been discussed in this thesis.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data analysis done by Bussin et al. (2019) remarks some of the results has been reported for attraction factors. In the following figure (n. 9), it is possible to see the seven most important rewards for young employees. By looking at the center of the schema, it is easy to understand that attraction is the aim of the model.

The results claim that the youngest generation is attracted by career growth development and leadership. In addition, benefits such as retirement, medical aid are factors that young employees consider important in the evaluation of the job offer. Remembering the citations *"remuneration as a motivational tool in today's competitive era may be a dangerous mistake"* of Sharma (2019) and looking at the result of this study, it is possible to say that it could be a trend. Particularly, is interesting to evaluate the focus on the 6th and 7th positions. Indeed, here, it is notable that informal recognition and non-financial rewards are in a higher position than formal and bonus payments. These are examples of clues that are important to gather in the phase of diagnosis to better tailoring the HR strategy to the company's people.

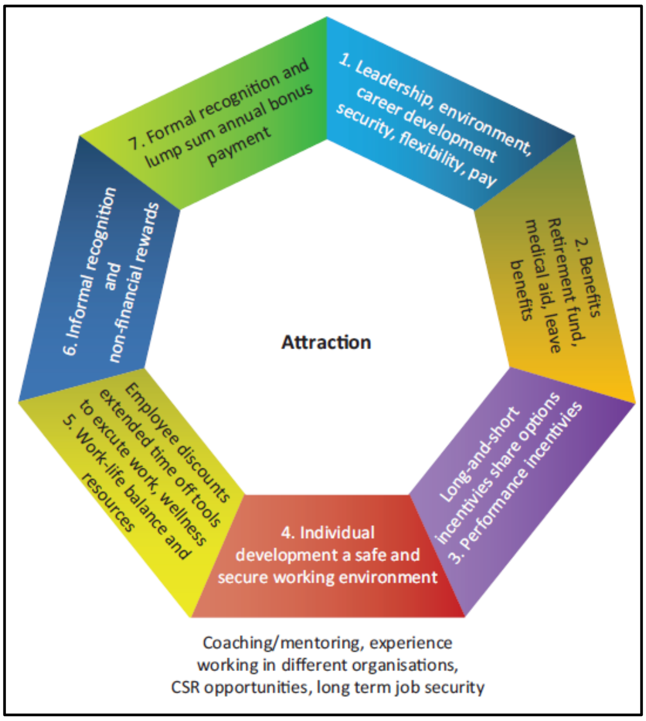

Figure 9 – Total reward model for youth preferences (Bussin et al., 2019)

In the end discussion of the paper, the authors, Bussin et al. (2019), reported a reflection that could integrate the critical analysis of data and contribute to offering practical pieces of advice to managers. Indeed, they suggest that even if in the results it is possible to see that career growth and leadership are on the top factor of attraction, it should be important to take care of the age of respondents and their responsibility in the society. Particularly, they would like to emphasize that people that just entering the workforce have probably different priorities on the respect of an older employee who has a family or has some investments to economically maintain. Furthermore, young people are typically more ambitious and aspire to a better career position for their future, usually more than older people (Bussin et al., 2019).

The reflection should help managers and professionals to understand that target analysis should be done periodically to better fit the changes in the labor market and generational preferences.

To summarize, the diagnosis phase is very delicate, and helpful to target the subject of an HR strategy: the company’s employees. Moreover, a quantitative and qualitative analysis should be conducted to better understand the patterns, attitudes, issues related to the company. Different methods or frameworks are present in the literature to help HR professionals to investigate the perception of employees: more space was dedicated to the Total Reward Model only because recent studies were dedicated particularly to it. Although, also EmpAt scale could be a way of gather information about the attraction factors and the most valuable features for the company’s employees. It is also important to remind that in this phase solutions and improvements should not be detected and the aim is to gather as much information as possible.

Unfortunately, considering an employer branding strategy only by analyzing the situation within the border of the company and the perception of internal employees could not be enough. The company is part of a wider environment that should be considered. In this vein, an external analysis must be done in order to align the HR strategy with one of the competitors. The concept of fairness could help understand that it should not only be true within the company but also in the respect of the actions taken by the competition. For this reason, the following paragraph will be dedicated to benchmarking.

4.2.1.2 Benchmarking

As anticipated, benchmarking is the following step that a company should go through once it has developed its employer branding strategy. This phase is not only necessary to align the company's actions with the market, but it could be also very important to take inspiration and ideas from the external environment. Indeed, benchmarking is helpful to understand which are the standards, the methods, the strategy implemented by other companies that are possible to use as a baseline. Gilani and Cunnigham (2017) in their literature review about employer branding defined benchmarking as a *"vital part"* referring to Mosley (2007). They explain that this method could create a better employment experience by absorbing the best practices from the best employer in the market. Mosley (2014) advices focusing on external reputation, attraction research, competitor analysis, new joiner, and exit surveys.

There are many reasons why benchmarking is strategically necessary. Remembering the issue related to skill shortage, job-hopping, and a more and more competitive environment in which the company is called to work, this phase could lead it to understand which are the benefits that potential employees look for understanding why the most attractive companies are considered in this way. According to Bixby et al.'s article written in January 2021, benchmarking's outcomes could suggest which are the Total Rewards package that competitors offer. In their opinion, the analysis could be very accurate and provide a list of actions related to the various issues. They suggested looking for practices regarding, among the others, diversity, and inclusion, leave policies, health care coverage, retirement policies, and insurance (Bixby et. al, 2021).

For doing so, it is important to choose properly the companies to use as a benchmark. Some suggestions could lead to choose the companies that belong to our sector or the ones that are most attractive for the target chosen, or more the Best Places to Work using the rankings that are available according to geological position, sector, size, or target. The relevance of this process was also underlined by Joo and McLean (2006) in their article particularly referred to the use of the leaderboards. They emphasized that the companies that are considered the best places to work are also the ones that have the best HR practices and that probably their employees generate more benefits for the organization. By comprehending this relationship, it is possible to learn more by rankings and particularly from the top-level companies (Joo and McLean, 2006). For instance, in the practical suggestion of the research of Sousa et. al (2016), benchmarking was conducted on five big groups that belong to different sectors to the respect of the chosen company. They collected insights from all the public sources available such as web pages, social networks, ethics statements, and shared material. With these data, they provide a schema of summarized sentences that they used to make comparisons with the actual actions taken by the company and also to take inspiration to resolve issues that have arisen in the analysis phase (Sousa et al., 2016).

Benchmarking stage concludes the macro phase of analysis and diagnosis of the actual situation of the company before starting the process of implementation of an EBM strategy. As initially said, here it is relevant to take into account that, although a company does not implement an HR strategy, employees' perception and emotional engagement are ongoing anyway. For this reason, the analysis phase is relevant to identify what is perceived by workers to better understand the current issues and points of strength that the company already presents. Once the internal investigation is done, benchmarking provides a better overview looking at how other companies behave in the external environment. At this step, it is important to share the data with the working team and make sure that everyone could understand the results obtained. As it has been presented, schemas are useful in this regard.

After this process of data gathering and analysis, it is time for the implementation path. In the following paragraph, it will be presented how the outcomes acquired during the study could be translated strategically for the company purpose.

4.2.2 Implementation phase

Once management has gathered the necessary insights, discussed the major issues that emerged, and then looked outside the company for comparison, it is time to address a strategy to implement.

Before going on, it is relevant to understand the priorities for stakeholders and try to evaluate the various aspects of each gap that was found. This is what Sousa et al. 2016 suggested in their case study that has been used as a benchmark in this thesis. They identified three main aspects to work on related to the major issues detected in the diagnosis phase (employees, engagement, and empowerment). For each one, they considered a coordinated and strategic list of actions to change the company's situation. Continuing their example, they individuated the goals to achieve (*1. Aligning the Organisation with the Group's strategy; 2. Improving the performance of the organizational structure; 3. Communicating effectively; 4. Retaining and engaging employees* (Sousa et. al, 2016)) and they detected the areas to work on. Here, it is relevant to understand that actions are described in practical ways, listed, and reported in a scheme to be more concrete and useful to look at. Furthermore, the activities were aligned among each other and their correlation is simple to understand for the reason of clarity; thus, easier to implement. Last but not least, another element to consider is evaluating the match between the overall schema of HR activities, branding and corporate management's goal.

If all this process seems straightforward, actually it may be very difficult to achieve. For this reason, in the literature, some frameworks are present in order to help management in the implementation phase. According to some of the contributions cited in the previous paragraph, some models were created for purpose of other fields and then adapted and used in different ones such as human resources. Two examples of this will be reported to better understand the correlation among different departments and to practically present a model that could be used in this phase. At first, the Value Propositions framework will be presented followed then by the Balanced Scorecard model which both belong to the marketing area. Of course, to better describe the translation into the human resources sphere they are called *employee value proposition* (EVP) and *human balanced scorecard (HBS)*. Due to the high number of researchers that have been dedicated to these models, in this thesis, the explanation of them will be taken for granted. However, they will be introduced also according to their contribution to human resource management, especially to employer branding.

Starting with the Value proposition model, it is one of the most used methods to analyze, evaluate and implement a marketing strategy to achieve and attract the target customers, invite them to purchase and make them loyal to the brand. Citing Lusch et al. (2007), it is possible to define it as *''a promise the seller makes that value-in-exchange will be linked to value-in-use. When a customer exchanges one with a seller s/he is* *implicitly assuming the value-in-exchange will at least result in value-in-us that meets or exceeds the value-in-exchange"* (Lusch et al., 2007). As said, this technique was translated by the human resource for employer branding by using as target the employees and the value-in-exchange described could be seen as the psychological contract. As such, the employee value proposition is aimed at attracting, motivating, and retaining talents and workers in the company. The terminology could be different, but the concept is the same. The initial point is to think about the *buyer persona* and translate the same technique to a *candidate persona*. Indeed, among other reasons, management tends to use this model because it is familiar since that is typically used for other purposes (e.g. marketing approach). EVP has also the advantage to be simple and intuitive. This is due to the fact that, after the diagnosis phase, the EVP is helpful to gather and collect information in a certain order. Randstad spa, a global leading employment agency, conduct an analysis in 2020 in which they reported the main aspect that an EVP should mention. They included: work-life balance, compensation and rewards, job security, career path, and pleasant working atmosphere (www.Randstad.it). What is important to highlight of this study is not the results obtained, but to make notable that Randstad is using the EVP model to communicate with target companies. Considering employment agency's core business, the methods of communication they use are studied to achieve their clients that are the management of the firms. For this motivation, it could be reasonable to think that EVP is a good and effective tool to explain human resources dynamics to companies' boards and it could be a suggestion for HR managers.

Having in mind that the Employee Value proposition could be effective to help in the strategic process, more should be said about which elements should be considered. Another point of view could be offered by Rob Bothma who is a professional of Business Solution at Oracle corporation. In one of his recent articles of 2019, he also wrote about this issue. In respect to the research of Randstad, he included the organizational culture, highlighting the necessity of employees to be in line with the corporate value and strategy. Remembering the necessity of this alignment to increment the organizational identification (that was been analyzed in paragraph *3.3 Taking advantage of organizational identification)* as one of the objectives of EBM, this element is not pointless. Indeed, a lot of attention should be dedicated to it and this represents another reason for the relevance of including professional marketing and corporate strategists in the development of employer branding suggested by Mosley (2014).

Furthermore, to provide a practical approach that could be used by management Rob Bothma (2019) suggested and reported some questions that could help to verify the alignment between the EVP developed and the organizations' objectives. The inquiries regard six main points: the first is related to the alignment of EVP with the overall strategic objectives of the company; the second considers if the strategy could attract potential talents; the following regards if it is able to retain and motive current employees; the fourth considers the external market and the position that the company could achieve implementing the EVP program (leader or follower); the fifth address the problem if the employees and candidates are able to understand the differentiation policy of the firm; the sixth inquiries the feasibility of the strategy (Bothma, 2019).

Even Sengupta et al. (2015) focused their attention on the aspects to consider for EBM. Particularly, it could be relevant to report here their study according to the impact on psychological contract of work values and demographic variables. Related to work values, they considered intrinsic (e.g. personal preferences, life, attitude, etc.) and extrinsic (e.g. hierarchical position, incentives, etc.) individual orientation that professionals should take into account in the implementation phase. Then, they highlighted that the perception of the package of benefits is affected by individual preferences and by demographic variables (e.g. age, education, gender, nationality) as it is been also demonstrated in numerous researchers in this thesis (Eger et al, 2019; Bussin et al., 2019; Reis and Braga, 2016; Hager and Seibt, 2018). Hence, the capability to translate all these preferences and elements in a proper strategy to implement is the real challenge to achieve a personalized and effective employer branding strategy.

On the other side, the Balanced Scorecard is another model developed by Kaplan and Norton in the early 1990, which has marketing origins too (**www.professionalacademy.com)**. The goal of the framework is to present a tool that could be useful for management to understand the wellness of a company. Especially, the model would like to encompass all the stages and objectives that a company should pass and achieve to be able to succeed in the market.

The Balanced scorecard comprehends four aspects that the management should take into account managing the firm, which are: the *financial part* that has the role to understand the Return On Investment (ROI), the sustainability of the cash flow and monetary aspects; the customer side that encompasses *the relationship with the clients*, their retention and perceptions of the brand; then there are the *internal processes* that regard all the stages and processes that need to be internally implemented to achieve the strategy's goal; last, *learning and growth* is the part that most interested HR because it considers the perception of the employees, the turnover and their satisfaction. A schema that reports each aspect related to the four parts is presented in Figure 10.

Figure 10 – Balanced Scorecard (www.professionalacademy.com)

Before going on, it could be relevant to consider that the Balanced Scorecard is not the opposite of EVP or a method that should be used as an alternative. Indeed, HBS could be matched to EVP and used as a translation of the strategy into practical actions to follow. To cite Fattah and Syaripudin (2016) the advantage of the Balanced Scorecard is to provide a way *"to translate the mission and the strategy into operational objectives"* by disaggregating the goal into internal processes. To make it more clear and helpful, it is possible to imagine a real-case situation. Supposing that in the diagnosis phase, issues about the customer care service have emerged and the objective of the firm is to ameliorate the loyalty program for customers, a way could be to attract candidates that could ameliorate the relationships with clients and implement a series of actions to enrich their experience. By doing so, the Balanced scorecard allows the company to outline the actions to take and understand the correlation among each of them analyzing the four main aspects related to them, from financial to non-financial side.

A relevant demonstration that this model could be used by management is given by the philosophical analysis of Fattah and Syaripudin in 2016. In their paper, they demonstrated how financial and particularly, the non-financial perspective could affect the company performance. The study is interesting because they analyzed the role of intangible assets in-depth, especially human resources, the *"intellectual treasures"* as they called it. Indeed, they dedicated more space to learning and growth, rather than the other three parts, to study how much it could improve the company's performance. As it has been done in the paragraph about the objectives of EBM, the authors identify that performances grow by investing more in non-financial aspects. They highlight the indirect correlation between strategic internal actions and company performance. In the case study, they demonstrated that high-quality human resources decrease the number of errors (in the example, damage good quantity was taken as an indicator). To evaluate this relationship, they used three main steps: the first is "*Performance effect"* which has the objective to understand the correlation between the activities (one action as the results of others)*,* "*Performance Triggers*" that considers the importance of having standards to achieve, the third is the *"Financial relations".* By presenting these three elements Fattah and Syaripudin (2016) emphasize the role of the strategy as a series of causal relationships that management has to imagine and implement. For the difficulty of this issue, frameworks are necessary to help to design the path to follow to achieve the company's objectives and outline the relationships among variables included in the model. It is helpful to consider each area of the model for every action to better develop a comprehensive strategy to implement.

In the literature, different versions of the model are presented, and they could be used as a pointing start. However, according to the strategy and the corporate main issues, the management should look at the one that most reflects the need of the company and design it to better achieve its own company's strategy. To give an example Fattah and Syaripudin (2016) suggested a list of indicators to include in the learning and growth perspective. They comprehended compensation, involvement and engagement, employee skills, career development (starting from the new-entries program to career path).

To conclude the analysis of the two frameworks, it could be important to say that there is not the best method to use or the best way to follow. Management could choose the framework that most reflects the need of the firm. Furthermore, it is been said that the two models could also be matched to better develop the strategy.

To complete the overview according to the implementation phase, some clues could be reported referring to the book of Mosley (2014). His suggestions enhance the narrative of this thesis by advising practical elements that management should add to the things to consider in the implementation phase. Particularly, the author called attention to four main challenges he named *give-and-get, strength-and-stretch, POD vs POS,* and *Global vs local*. The first, give-and-get, pointed out the importance of balancing benefits and duties in the relationship with employees. The strength-and-stretch point underlines the relevance of understanding which are the current strengths of the firm and which are the elements that management should aspire to achieve. This challenge particularly regards the aspiration, called the *forward momentum,* and the consistency with the position that the company is covering. Management here has to understand which are the line that separates a consistent approach and the *wishful thinking* that could never be achievable. The third issue that Mosley reports is the POD and POS challenge. The acronyms stand for point of differences (POD) and point of similarities (POS). They are referred to the external environment of the firm, the market, and they emphasize the necessity to understand how much the strategy differs from the competition and how much it is similar. The goal is to balance what is already known by customers (POS) and what management would like to communicate and aspire to (POD), maintaining the consistency and comprehensibility of the strategy. The last difficulty in the implementation phase that the author reported is to figure out the right strategy between a local or global approach, especially for multinational companies. The main issue could regard the flexibility of the strategy according to its local adaptability and how much executives control the actions of local administrators.

According to this last point, the article written by Bixby et al. (2021) pointed out the importance of global harmonization of the human resource strategy for entities that have locations spread worldwide. They argued that in a global perspective and considering the market and its evolution, a harmonization of the benefits that are recognized to the employee should be aligned in every department. In particular, they distinguished harmonization and equalization saying that the first tactic is better because it allows making people actually perceive equality among countries. Indeed, It is important to consider the culture, the law, and the benchmarks among different areas. Another relevant aspect they mentioned was related to mergers and acquisitions reporting some of the motivation already analyzed in this thesis in the paragraph dedicated to this theme (2.5 Mergers and acquisitions). Moreover, they underlined the importance of customization of the benefits approach by companies saying that "*each market must be closely analyzed*" to achieve a competitive advantage in the market (Bixby et al., 2021).

To end up the part dedicated to the implementation phase, it is also relevant that every strategy should take into consideration pre-implementation standards and KPI's that the company aims to achieve. The criteria should be defined for the short, medium, and long term. This phase should be taken seriously in order to verify if the strategy is able to achieve its purpose and to monitor its progress. Examples of KPIs could be the ROI, organization well-being, improvements of people opinions, corporate reputation.

To sum up, the implementation phase is a delicate process that should consider a lot of different elements. Management must translate the insights obtained during the diagnosis phase in a proper strategy to implement according to the particularity of its company. There is no formula that is effective for every firm and tailoring the strategy to the company is a necessity. The frameworks presented are just examples to practical help management to design employer branding strategy and the elements to consider are a list of advice to check.

4.2.3 Monitoring and improvements

At the end of the process of strategy definition and the implementation phase, it is important to communicate to management that the proceeding of development could not stop. In fact, there is always the need to compare the actual measurements and the standards set to understand if there are misalignments in order to fill the gaps ongoing. The capability of effectively catches the points of strength and weakness of the strategy is necessary to improve it during the work. Here, it is possible to understand the importance of setting intermediate goals to achieve to be able to comprehend the direction that the strategy is taken. Moreover, as Mosley (2014) reports in his book, leading companies change or update their strategy every four or five years. This is due to the cyclical changes in individuals and in the market that management should always be aware of. They have also to be able to comprehend and anticipate needs and attitudes.

Even more, monitoring and improvements are necessary once a paradigmatic or relevant change occurs. In these last two years (2020/2021), an example of this kind of phenomenon is evident: the Covid-19 pandemic. The consequences of this event are under our eyes, nevertheless, an employer's perspective will be analyzed with the purpose of demonstrating the importance of being ready to revise and update the employer branding strategy. The article of Andrea Goodkin (2020) focuses the attention on this aspect. The author highlights the change in people's priorities with respect to the Covid-19 pandemic repercussions. For instance, the threat to health has increased the perception of the need for the wellness and well-being of employees. To validate this trend, she reported that people are more stressed and experience anxiety over Covid-19 virus referring to several studies. Moreover, because of the lockdown, practices such as smart-working, remote learning have become part of the working life. Note that the pandemic has changed not only modalities but also perceptions and relationships such as the one between employees and employer or among colleagues. For this reason, Goodkin (2020) has reported the necessity for the company to better tailoring the strategy in respect of the needs expressed by employees during these kinds of events. The objective that management has to keep in mind is to create the best working environment for their employees, because only in this way they are more productive and effective in their job, and hence, increasing the company's performance (as previously analyzed in this thesis in chapter 3 – Objectives of EBM).

Of course, the Covid-19 pandemic is an extreme example of the events that the management should take care of. Although, there are events that could be even easier to predict and to understand such as employees aging that could address several challenges for the company's board too. Remembering the discussion of Bussin et al., in 2019, they addressed the attention to the difference between younger and older people. They underlined the impact of having a responsible role in society, family duties, and economic viability.

By way of conclusions, monitoring and improvements is an endless process that management has to do in order to better implement the strategy, to change the direction of it in the proper time (if need), to better tailor the necessities of employees, and to address the actual priorities of workers and potential talents. Only if these processes are done in the right way and time, the company is able to maintain its sustainable competitive advantage in the market.

5. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

As it has been described in the previous chapters, employer branding is a contemporary companies' need to attract and retain potential candidates and current employees in a situation of applicant scarcity and an increasingly competitive labor market. Furthermore, it was underlined the highlight on the need for customization and specific internal environmental analysis. For these reasons, a contribution to the field, in the shape of empirical research, will be offered and presented in the following paragraphs. The goal of the study case is to provide a wider analysis of how generational perspective and gender impact employer perceptions in Italy and its attraction. To pursue this objective a quantitative and qualitative data analysis was done on Italian high educated people. Employees and employers' points of view were collected using these instruments pointing out the need to invest in an employer branding strategy from both sides and highlighting differences in employees' drivers of motivation.

The following paragraphs will describe the methodology, the data collection approach, the sample, and the results obtained. To begin with, further analysis will be done on three of the papers already presented which are the one of Eger et al. (2019), Reis and Braga (2016), and Bussin et al. (2019). Indeed, they were used as reference and benchmark to structure the quantitative empirical study of this thesis trying to overcome their limitations and following the suggestions that the authors advise for further research. Besides, a qualitative contribution will integrate and validate the result obtained from the quantitative part. To conclude, a discussion of the strategical usability of this study and supplementary suggestions for further research will be reported.

5.1 Empirical research Contribution

Eger et al. (2019), Reis and Braga's (2016), and Bussin et al. (2019) ' studies offered a great contribution to the analysis of, respectively, professionals' generational perspectives, business students' cross-cultural and gender differences in perceiving the attractiveness of employers and factors of attraction of Generation Y. Now on, a more detailed and structural analysis will be done on both studies in order to highlight differences and similarities. Then, their limitations will be described. In the end, it will be explained how this thesis could overcome some of these by itemizing the empirical research's criteria and modus operandi.

Starting with the common elements, it is possible to mention the sample, the method, and the objective. Their sample was represented by people who have, in the majority, a high educational level. Particularly, Reis and Braga (2016) asked professionals, 71,90% were graduates, already entered the workforce; Eger et al. (2019) used final semester business students; instead, Bussin et al. (2019) focused on both students and workers. Reis and Braga (2016) and Eger et al. (2019) used the Employer Attractiveness Scale of Berthon et al. (2005) and demographic questions to investigate generational and gender perspectives. Equally, the nationality of the respondents was circumscribed to one of the researchers (Brazil, Czech, South African). The similarities between the quantitative method of their research were also recognized by the authors Eger et al. (2019) who used the data obtained by Reis and Braga (2016) to make cross-national comparisons. The study conducted by Bussin et al. (2019) is taken as a reference for the qualitative part and the interpretation of data using the Total Reward Framework.

Starting with the quantitative analysis and its comparability with the studies of Eger et al. (2019) and Reis and Braga (2016), the limitation could be seen in the different ways of categorizing generations, particularly referring to birth years and birth ends of each one. For this reason, a little translation of generations occurred. Moreover, Reis and Braga (2016) did not include Generation Z (1996-2015) in their study because at that time people did not enter the workforce and their focus was professionals. Instead, Eger et al. (2019) analyzed their perspective using final semester young education students, considering people born from 1994 to 1998, even if they were not workers.

Combing all these aspects, the empirical research of this thesis would like to try to overcome some of the major limitations and offer a study that could be comparable with those of the authors mentioned. It has also the pretense to be useful for management and easy to comprehend and apply.

The criteria chosen allows the possibility to add Italians preferences in a cross-cultural and gender analysis in the future. Moreover, comprehending Generation Z could help management to better address their strategy to new generations entering the workforce by giving to strategists more data to consider and look at. Integration to the analysis of past research is also related to the investigation about gender influence on attractiveness aspects which was not performed by Reis and Braga (2016) and Bussin et al. (2019). Besides this, the study would like to offer a tool and a methodology for management to acquire these pieces of information by themselves. The data will be also represented with the Total Reward Framework, as was done by Bussin et al. (2019), in order to highlight the most evaluated items for each generation included in the sample. The implicit advice is to suggest a best practice of obtaining the necessary data to customize the strategy to implement. Indeed, management could use the same process to focus on their employee's necessities and perspectives by changing the sample to investigate, including for example their employees. Moreover, other scholars from different nations could repeat the same research and making a cross-cultural comparison.

The empirical research will be conducted using EmpAt Scale because of the already described point of advantages such as the wider use, the comparability, and its objective that is the same of this study. Even though other scales could comprehend more elements, the EmpAt Scale remains the most used and, thus, the most comparable with other studies which is one of the aims to evaluate. Among the others, it is important to mention Eger et al. (2019) and Reis and Braga (2016). The scale will be particularly used to cross-check the point of attractiveness among different generations and between females and males. Unfortunately, an official and complete Italian translation is not available in the literature. For this reason, a personal one was done with the aim of properly report the concepts of Berthon et al. (2005) in the sample mother tongue. Some translations were adapted from Bonaiuto et al.' study (2010) of Sapienza University of Rome which aim was to measure the efficacy of employer branding in Italy too.

As Eger et. al (2019), Reis and Braga (2016), and Bussin et al. (2019), the nationality will be defined as one of the authors, which means Italian was not included in the cited studies.

The sample will be selected among high education people who hold at least a bachelor's degree or people who are in the ending phase of it. All the generations already entered the workforce will be included comprehending Generation Z (from 1996). Only people in the labor market will be considered, with the exception to also embrace people that have already accepted to join a specific workplace. It has to do with the possibility to say that they have chosen an employer respecting some parameters that this research has the aim to discover. All the companies will be considered, even if they do not have an explicit campaign of employer branding, reminding the fact that an EB perception is presented even though the company does not strategically control it.

Generations will be classified using the ISTAT institute's categorization (2016). In Figure 11, it is reported the start and the end born year, and the name for each generation. Notice that, the classification does not divide the generations always using the same range of years. Indeed, the subdivision is due to the characteristics, particularity, major historical events, and attitudes of each generation.

Generation		**Definition**
From	*to*	
1926	1945	Reconstruction Generation
1946	1955	Baby boomers
1956	1965	Boomers
1966	1980	X Generation
1981	1995	Millenians or Y Generation
1996	2015	Z Generations or I-Gen

Figure 11 – Generation classification (ISTAT, 2016)

Considering the objective of the research as evaluating the perception of different generations in the workforce, the Reconstruction Generation has been excluded from the results. Even Boomers were not considered in the sample due to their age, the difficulty to ask their opinion with the methodology chosen, their closeness to retirement, and also the importance of catching the real needs and perceptions of people that are currently in the workforce. Consequently, the focus of the study comprehended X Generation (or Boomers), Millennials (also called Generation Y), and Z-Generation.

The quantitative method is helpful to understand macro-dynamic. Despite this, it could be difficult to understand the real motivations that are behind a quantitative response. For this reason, a contribution to the research was given completing the analysis with a qualitative one. Two respondents from each generation included in the research were interviewed to investigate the reasons behind their responses. Neither Eger et al. (2019) and Reis and Braga (2016) used this kind of method in their research, by contrast, it is present in the study of Bussin et al. (2019). The main and common aim of their and this research is to validate the results obtained in the quantitative research by asking respondents for additional information in respect of their quantitative answer.

Also, a sample of firms was included for two reasons: to better complete the overview and to consider each side of the relationship between employee and employer. Particularly, respondents were asked to motivate their survey's answers by giving explanations. First, they were questioned about their job and their studies to confirm the right match with the criteria of the sample. Secondly, part of the questions was dedicated to investigate the reasons behind their evaluation given in the survey particularly according to the aspect that has been evaluated the most and the least. Thirdly, to conclude the interview, interviewees were asked to narrate some changes in their life experiences that have changed their current employer's perceptions. On the other hand, firms were inquiring about their interest in the employer branding topic and their strategic position in the market.

5.2 Data collection and sample

For quantitative data collection, word-of-mouth was used to share the questionnaire. Friends, university classmates, colleagues of mine were invited to answers the form. The survey was spread online, and people were asked to use a link to have access to it. Social media as LinkedIn and WhatsApp were used. Google Form was used to prepare it. The questions could be divided into an initial demographic questionnaire and then the EmpAt scale. They were asked to think about their ideal employer and answer to each element comprehended in the scale using a five-option Likert scale (1= not important at all, 5=very important) (as in the studies of Reis and Braga and 2016, Bonaiuto et. al.,2010). In figure 12, it is outlined a summary of the

Employer Attractiveness scale of Berthon et al. (2005) to facilitate the readability and the interpretation of the data study. The Italian integral form is reported in Appendix I. At the end of the questionnaire, people were asked about the possibility to do an interview. To individuate the sample for the qualitative research, only the generational criterion was used. Particularly, two respondents from each generation included were interviewed. The qualitative research was used to validate the results of the quantitative results and to understand which are the reasons that have guided respondents in their evaluation of the ideal employer. Initial questions were related to their study and their job correlation. Then, they were asked to motivate the scale resulted in their survey. Stories of life experience were asked to better understand the motivation of answers. The interview guide that follows is reported in Appendix II.

1. INTEREST VALUE
A challenging work environment that stimulates innovation and creativity. Items: innovative product, forward-thinking, use of creativity, product quality, excting environment
2. SOCIAL VALUE
A positive and pleasant social and interpersonal environment Items: relantioships with collegues and superiors, team and workplace atmosphere
3. ECONOMIC VALUE
A workplace with a attractive compensation package, economic opportunity and job security Items: above-average compesantion, job stability, promotion opportunities, inter-departmental experience.
4. DEVELOPMENT VALUE
A work environment that enhances the self-confident and esteem and skills development Items: contribution to self-esteem and recognition, carreer-enhancing experience, appreciation from management
5. APPLICATION VALUE
An environment that allows to apply expertise and convey knowledge, is customer-oriented and humanitarian Items: opportunity to teach others, client-orientation, humanitarian objectives

Figure 12 – Employer attractiveness scale' aspects

(elaboration of Wardani and Oktafiansyah, 2020)

There is not a specific number of people to whom the link to the questionnaire was sent to and thus it is no possible to calculate a return rate.

The total number of responses was 161. The valid respondents were 104; 68 of them were women (65%) and 36 were men (35%). 57 answers were excluded because they did not respect at least one of the criteria used. Particularly, 39 people did not have a high education; 2 were not Italian; 17 were not entering the workforce; 3 were Baby Boomers. Some of them have more than one criterion for been excluded.

Analyzing the composition of education level was: 35% had a bachelor's degree; 61% had a Master's Degree; 3 had a First Level Master Degree; 2 had a Second Level Master Degree. Most of the people were working full time (74,04%). 22,12% were working part-time and the 3,84% answered that they are about to work in a specific company soon. About the sector in which respondents were operating: 68% said in the tertiary sector and the 26% in the secondary industry, the rest 6% were working in the primary one.

The focus of the following table will represent the distribution by generations of the total answerers, including the not valid one.

Generation		**Definition**	**n. of total answers**	**Percetage**
From	*to*			
1956	1965	Boomers	3	1,9%
1966	1980	X Generation	25	15,5%
1981	1995	Millenians or Y Generation	51	31,7%
1996	2015	Z Generations or I-Gen	82	51%

Figure 13 – Respondent' generational distribution

To collect the point of view of firms, a qualitative interview was done. Two Italian-based organizations were chosen, *Labomar Spa* and *Randstad Italy*. They were selected for different criteria in order to figure out distinct perceptions and opinions. As first, Labomar Spa is a B2B company that is considerably growing in recent years. It was born in 1998 as a pharmaceutical laboratory. It now produces food supplements, probiotics, medical devices, and cosmetics. It is a family business company, owned by the Bertin family. All its five facilities are based in Treviso. It has 200 employees (www.labomar.com). In September 2020, it initiated the procedure to go public revealing the necessity of having more funds to invest in its projects (www.trevisotoday.it). As second, Randstad Italy has a completely different story behind it. Randstad Holding NV was born in Amsterdam in 1960 and opened its first branch in

Italy in 1999. It is the global leader in HR services industry. Particularly, Randstad Italy has 300 subsidiaries with over 2300 employees (www.randstad.it). Its headquarter is based in Milan. Even Randstad Italy is increasingly growing, and it has recently launched an employment campaign for about 300 people to hire (www.randstad.it).

Human resource directors of both companies were contacted via email. The interview guide was sent to interviewees before the meeting. Interviews were done using a remote method as videocall. Particularly, firms were asked to explain their efforts on employer branding: the need for them to retain and building employee loyalty and their response to talent scarcity. They were always asked to describe concrete and real examples in every answer in order to point out and catch how they deal with the theme of this thesis. In the end, a question related to the attention of generations was asked. The integral interview guide is reported in Appendix II – *Interview guide for firms*.

5.3 Employer attractiveness scale validation

As suggested in the study by Reis and Braga (2016), a pretest of the survey was performed. Four people were asked to interpret the survey and check the rightness of the translation, the understanding of the scale, and the technical compilation of the form. The test highlighted a problem of comprehension of the question related to Berthon's EmpAt scale. At the beginning, some of the translations were taken from Bonaiuto et al. study (2010). In their research, the introducing question to EmpAt scale was *"Affinché un'organizzazione sia il tuo datore di lavoro ideale, quanto è importante ciascuno dei seguenti aspetti".* In the opinion of the tested sample, the question was too difficult to understand. They claim that the interpretation was not immediate, they reported the necessity to read the question several times. For this reason, the question was adapted to the suggestions. The clearest option was to translate in Italian "*How important are the following [factors] to you when considering potential employers?"* (Berthon et al., 2005) in *"Quanto importanti sono i seguenti aspetti quando pensi al tuo datore di lavoro ideale?"*. After the approval of the tested sample and having checking the rightness of the translation, the survey was sent to the rest of the sample.

After that, the questionnaire was fillable online for about two entire weeks.

Dimensions	Outer loadings
INTEREST VALUE (AVE: 0,63; composite reliability: 0,89)	
The organisation produces innovative products and services	0,70
Innovative employer – novel work practices/forward-thinking	0,81
The organisation both values and makes use of your creativity	0,89
The organisation produces high-quality products and services	0,77
Working in an exciting environment	0,81
SOCIAL VALUE (AVE: 0,75; composite reliability: 0,94)	
Having a good relationship with your colleagues	0,89
Having a good relationship with your superiors	0,85
Supportive and encouraging colleagues	0,88
A fun working environment	0,85
Happy work environment	0,89
ECONOMIC VALUE (AVE: 0,73; composite reliability: 0,93)	
An attractive overall compensation package	0,89
An above average basic salary	0,87
Job security within the organisation	0,87
Good promotion opportunities within the organisation	0,86
Hands-on inter-departmental experience	0,79
DEVELOPMENT VALUE (AVE: 0,66; composite reliability: 0,90)	
Feeling more self-confident as a result of working for a particular organisation	0,82
Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organisation	0,85
Gaining career-enhancing experience	0,88
A springboard for future employment	0,81
Recognition/appreciation from management	0,71
APPLICATION VALUE (AVE: 0,57; composite reliability: 0,87)	
Opportunity to teach others what you have learned	0,74
Opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution	0,80
The organisation is customer-orientated	0,74
Humanitarian organisation – gives back to society	0,79
Acceptance and belonging	0,73

Table 1 – Average variance extracted of EmpAt scale's dimensions

Once the survey was closed, a test of scale validity and reliability of factors was carried out. IBM SPSS was used to conduct quantitative data analysis.

Firstly, an investigation on distribution was conducted pointing out that data did not present a normal distribution. A graphical method was used to investigate it. Secondly, to verify convergent validity, average variance extracted (AVE) was applied as Eger et al. 2019 and Reis and Braga 2016 have done in their research. In the table (*Table 1 - Average variance extracted of EmpAt scale's dimensions)*, the results are reported.

According to Hair et al. (2011), the outer loading resulted from each factor should be higher than 0,70. In the table, it is possible to see that items are all above this value. On the other hand, the value of AVE should be between 0,50 and 0,70 to be considered acceptable. In our sample, every factor has a satisfactory result and thus reliability is confirmed (Hair et al., 2011). No items were excluded from the results and the EmpAt scale was analyzed in its entirety.

5.4 Results

Results will be reported focusing firstly on quantitative data analysis and secondly on the qualitative data.

Before separating the data according to generations, data were analyzed in the entire sample to individuate differences in descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and correlation between variables. It should be important to disclaim that, for statical reasons, Gender is identified as 1 is male and 0 is female and generations were renamed into 1 is Generation X from 1966-1980, 2 is equal to Generation Y from 1981-1995 and 3 is Generation Z from 1996-2015.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Generation			1						
2. Gender			-0,176	1					
3. Interest Value	4,05	0,907	,208*	-0,016	1				
4. Social value	4,38	0,84	,373**	-,203*	,449**	1			
5. Economic Value	3,93	1,045	,251*	-0,124	,469**	,530**	1		
6. Development value	3,91	0,946	,331**	-0,039	,512**	,485**	,615**	1	
7. Application value	3,41	0,866	0,112	0,021	,474**	,380**	,453**	,547**	1

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 – Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations in all the sample

Starting from descriptive statistics, it could be important to see that Social value has the highest mean score (M=4,38, SD=0,84), followed by Interest Value (M=4,05, SD=0,907). Instead, the Application value presents the lowest mean score (M=3,41, SD=0,866). Looking at the correlations between factors, the results reported a high correlation between Development Value and Interest Value (0,512 p<0.01, note that this occurred even in the Reis and Braga (2016) results). The highest correlation is between

Development Value and Economic Value (0,615, p<0,01), followed by Development and Application Value correlation (0,547, p<0,01). Observing the gender effect (female=0, male=1) it is possible to see that Social and Economic Value seemed to be more appreciated by women. The correlation with generations could be seen in the Social Value that seemed to be more evaluated by younger people. The lowest correlation score with age is related to Application Value that worths more for people with higher age.

After this macro analysis, the data was separated between generations and according to gender to better investigate the influence of these two variables on the employer's perception. Having this objective in mind, descriptive statistics and Mann-Whitney U test (Mann and Whitney, 1947) will be reported. To conclude, the Total Reward Framework will be used to compare the responses according to generations.

Before going on, it is important to say that the sample is not homogenous in numerosity: from generation X, only 13 were collected. Due to this issue, a descriptive analysis was preferred. A similar problem was also detected by Bussin et al. (2019) in their study according to the generations between 1946 and 1964 as Baby Boomers and Boomers. Due to this difference in numerosity, results obtained from this sample must be evaluated with caution.

In the following table (*Table 3 – Attractiveness factors for generational groups)*, means scores, divided from generational groups and attractiveness aspects, were reported.

	N.	**Interest value**		**Social value**		**Economic value**		**Development value**		**Application value**	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Z-Gen	53	4,26	0,70	4,66	0,61	4,19	0,89	4,25	0,75	3,55	0,84
Y- Gen	38	3,84	0,99	4,24	0,90	3,71	1,07	3,58	0,91	3,24	0,84
X-Gen	13	3,77	1,12	3,69	0,91	3,54	1,22	3,54	1,22	3,38	0,92

Table 3 – Attractiveness factors for generational groups

As first observation could be starting that Application Value was evaluated less than all the other aspects from each generational group as it was predictable from the total data analysis conducted before (Z-Gen M=3,55; Y-Gen M=3,24; X-Gen M=3,38). This aspect includes items related to the opportunity to teach others, the humanitarian goals of the firm, and the sense of belongingness. Particularly, Millenians evaluated the least this aspect (M=3,24). A second observation is that Generation Y and Generation Z evaluated the most Social Value, which respectively has a mean score of 4.66 and 4.24. Instead, Boomers gave the highest score to Interest Value. At the second place in a top-three classification, Z-Gen and Y-Gen were aligned too with Interest Value; X-Gen reported Social Value. In third place, the Development Value is present for Z- Gen and Economic Value for Millennials. Boomers equally evaluated Economic and Development value.

The same analysis was done related to gender. Mean scores revealed more attention to Social Value (Δ=0,3) Economic Value (Δ=0,28) and Development value (Δ=0,08) from females than males. The other results pointed out that there is no difference in attractiveness aspect according to gender, reporting approximately the same mean score and standard deviations (Interest value Δ=0,03; Application Value Δ=0,01).

	N.	Interest value		Social value		Economic value		Development value		Application value	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Male	36	4,03	0,91	4,19	0,82	3,75	1,13	3,86	0,99	3,42	0,81
Female	68	4,06	0,91	4,49	0,84	4,03	0,99	3,94	0,93	3,41	0,90

Table 4 – Attractiveness factors grouped by gender

After that, the non-parametric test of Mann-Whitney (1947) was used to assess the influence of generations and gender on the variables of the EmpAt Scale and to verify its significativity. It is a widely used test because it allows to check differences across dependent variables with respect to an independent variable among not-normally distributed and ordinary scale data. It will be used to investigate generation and gender as independent variables. It is also useful to compare the results with other studies already presented in the literature review such as Reis and Braga (2016) and Eger et al. (2019) in which the test was applied too.

By using this test, the two following hypotheses were verified for each aspect of the EmpAt scale:

First hypothesis	
H_0	The distribution of the variables is equal across generations
H_1	The distribution of the variables is not equal across generations

Second hypothesis	
H_0	The distribution of the variables is equal between gender
H_1	The distribution of the variables is not equal between gender

At the beginning, the first hypothesis was tested. As it is possible to see in Table 4, the Mann-Whitney U test (1947) revealed an influence of generation on the different aspects related to employer attractiveness. This is particularly true when the comparison is made between Generation Y and Generation Z in which all the comparisons are significant ($p < 0{,}05$) except for application value ($p=0{,}084$). As shown by table 3, the means of Z Generation are higher than Millennials revealing a general higher evaluation of the different aspects and giving the result of Mann-Whitney U test (1947), this difference is significant. Looking at the comparisons between X Generation and Y Generation, all are insignificant and the null hypothesis is retained. Thus in this sample, the generational aspect does not influence the perception of the employer attractiveness items. Instead, the analysis between X Generation and Z Generation pointed out that belongingness to these generations impacts on the dependent variables, Social and Development Value, reporting higher evaluation from younger people. In the descriptive analysis, Z Generation evaluated more the social aspect than X Generation (Gen-Z M=4,66). The null hypothesis is retained for Application Value for all the comparisons and it underlines the lowest interest that generations give to this aspect (Z-Gen M=3,55; Y-Gen M=3,24; X-Gen M=3,38).

Mann-Whitney U test (1947) was also performed to verify the second hypothesis according to gender (as in Eger et al. 2019 research). Results are reported in table 5 – *Influence of gender*. All the comparisons were non-significant and null hypotheses were retained with the only exception of Social Value. As observed in the correlation analysis, this aspect was more evaluated from females than males; the difference, observed in descriptive analysis about Social Value, is significant. From the correlation data analysis, even Economic Value reported higher attention from females, but the Mann-Whitney U test (1947) verified its insignificance.

Mann-Whitney U - grouping variable generation						
		INTEREST VALUE	**SOCIAL VALUE**	**ECONOMIC VALUE**	**DEVELOPMENT VALUE**	**APPPLICATION VALUE**
Gen-X vs Gen-Y	Mann-Whitney U	244,500	165,500	231,500	246,500	207,500
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0,954	0,061	0,725	0,991	0,363
	Null hypothesis	Retained	Retained	Retained	Retained	Retained
Gen-Y vs Gen-Z	Mann-Whitney U	768,500	747,500	741,000	601,000	805,500
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0,036	0,014	0,022	0,001	0,084
	Null hypothesis	Rejected	Rejected	Rejected	Rejected	Retained
Gen X vs Gen-Z	Mann-Whitney U	270,500	146,500	239,000	230,000	334,500
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0,186	0,000	0,068	0,049	0,862
	Null hypothesis	Retained	Rejected	Retained	Rejected	Retained
Significance level: 0,05						

Table 5 – Comparisons between generational groups

Mann-Whitney U - grouping variable gender						
		INTEREST VALUE	**SOCIAL VALUE**	**ECONOMIC VALUE**	**DEVELOPMENT VALUE**	**APPPLICATION VALUE**
Gender	Mann-Whitney U	1202,500	958,000	1050,000	1169,000	1194,500
	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0,873	0,040	0,207	0,692	0,829
	Null hypothesis	Retained	Rejected	Retained	Retained	Retained
Significance level: 0,05						

Table 6 – Influence of gender

To conclude the analysis of quantitative data, in table 7 – *Frequency distribution for attraction items*, mean scores related to each aspect will be reported. Using a descriptive analysis, it is possible to understand which are the items that matter for each generation. To better investigate and understand these results, the Total Reward Framework will be used. (Figure 14 - *Generational Total Reward schemas*). Indeed, this kind of visualization is helpful to highlight the preferences of each group by reporting the top-seven items that obtained the highest mean score. This method was also used by Bussin et al. (2019) with the aim of better communicate the results obtained. Colors were used to help the analysis and the comprehensions of the patterns (green=innovative value; light blue=social value; yellow=economic value; red=development value; blue=application value).

	Gen-Z		Gen-Y		Gen-X	
1. INTEREST VALUE	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**
1 - The organisation produces innovative products and services	3,57	0,87	3,26	1,22	2,77	1,36
2 - Innovative employer – novel work practices/forward-thinking	4,17	0,73	3,71	1,11	3,85	0,99
3 - The organisation both values and makes use of your creativity	4,34	0,92	3,84	0,97	4,00	1,15
4 - The organisation produces high-quality products and services	3,87	1,00	3,79	1,07	3,23	1,42
5 - Working in an exciting environment	4,66	0,83	4,37	0,97	4,46	1,13
2. SOCIAL VALUE						
1 - Having a good relationship with your colleagues	4,68	0,61	4,34	0,88	3,92	1,12
2 - Having a good relationship with your superiors	4,62	0,69	4,21	0,91	3,92	1,26
3 - Supportive and encouraging colleagues	4,70	0,61	4,24	0,91	4,15	1,07
4 - A fun working environment	4,30	0,80	3,74	1,03	3,08	1,04
5 - Happy work environment	4,51	0,82	4,16	1,03	3,69	0,95
3. ECONOMIC VALUE						
1 - An attractive overall compensation package	4,25	1,09	3,76	1,02	3,62	1,26
2 - An above average basic salary	3,87	1,07	3,63	1,10	3,08	1,26
3 - Job security within the organisation	4,36	0,86	3,92	1,00	4,08	1,12
4 - Good promotion opportunities within the organisation	4,26	0,86	3,58	1,22	3,62	1,50
5 - Hands-on inter-departmental experience	3,87	1,04	3,34	1,15	2,92	1,12
4. DEVELOPMENT VALUE						
1 - Feeling more self-confident as a result of working for a particular organisation	3,83	0,98	3,24	1,02	3,46	1,45
2 - Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organisation	3,92	1,03	3,05	1,01	3,46	1,13
3 - Gaining career-enhancing experience	4,43	0,72	3,76	1,10	3,77	1,36
4 - A springboard for future employment	4,28	0,93	3,79	1,02	3,31	1,49
5 - Recognition/appreciation from management	3,91	1,10	3,55	1,13	3,62	1,04
5. APPLICATION VALUE						
1 - Opportunity to teach others what you have learned	3,32	1,07	3,45	1,11	3,69	1,03
2 - Opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution	3,21	0,93	2,97	0,94	3,31	1,03
3 - The organisation is customer-orientated	3,64	0,96	3,21	0,99	3,38	1,26
4 - Humanitarian organisation – gives back to society	3,28	1,01	3,00	1,09	2,85	1,46
5 - Acceptance and belonging	4,25	0,96	3,79	0,99	3,62	1,19

Table 7 – Frequency distribution for attraction items

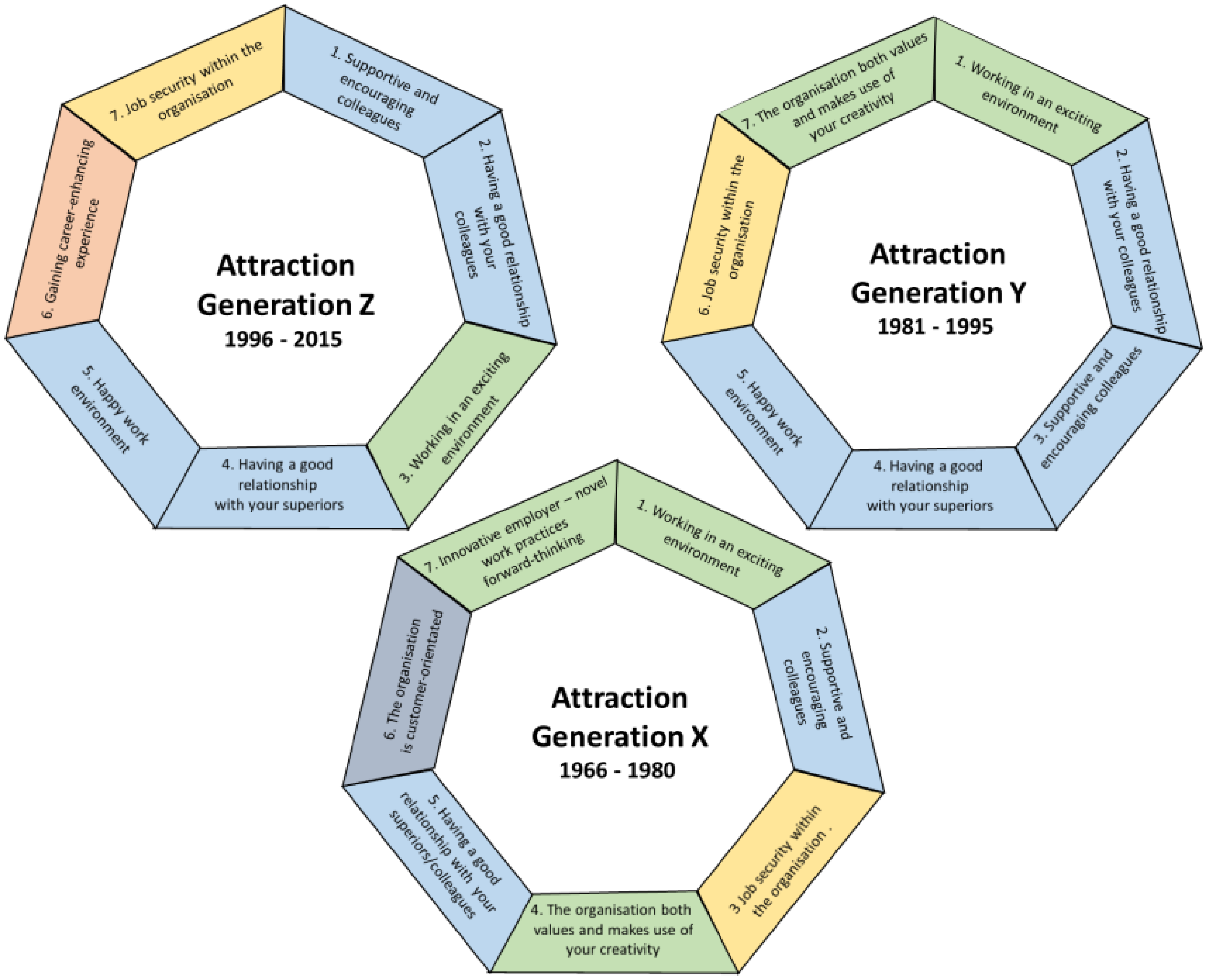

Figure 14 – Generational Total Reward schemas

Looking at this framework, it is clearer the role of each aspect. Notably, Social Value represents the most repeated item for each generation. Particularly, it could be seen that the relationship with colleagues and superiors is a fundamental aspect to all the generations. The item *"Job security within the organization"*, which is included in the economic sphere, is also cared from each generation. From Innovation Value, the factor "*Working in an exciting environment"* repeats itself in each schema. Another relevant note could be to underline that only Generation from 1996 to 2015 have considered an item of the development aspect (see in red) related to recognition from the management, sense of belongingness, and career experience. No generations have reported interest in the Application Value in their best seven-positions rank. As it was described in the data analysis previously disclosed, this aspect is the least important to all the generations included in the sample.

Now on, qualitative research will be reported. It has the aim of validating and understanding the motivation behind the answers that is been just analyzed. For reasons of clarity and relevance, only parts of the interviews will be reported in the shape of indirect speech. Particularly for the two firms involved, Labomar Spa and Randstad Italy, the results were sent to the HR department; approval of the text was asked in order to avoid misunderstanding and to report their correct point of view. This was done also for the interviewees of the survey respondents even if in a more informal way.

As it was explained, two respondents from each generation were randomly chosen and interviewed. They were Francesco Pizzol and Anna Comacchio from Generation Z; Damiano Leibanti and Laura Toigo from Generation Y; Milena Morelli and Paolo Gussetti from Generation X. They are all working for private companies, except for Anna Comacchio and Paolo Gussetti who are working for state enterprises. They all confirm that they are highly educated people and, except Damiano Leibanti and Francesco Pizzol, their studies are coherent with their current job. Only Damiano Leibanti has two part-time contracts (68% and 12%) and they all have permanent contracts except for Anna Comacchio.

Francesco Pizzol and Anna Comacchio were both experiencing their first employer and they both evaluated the social part as the most important one. They were 24 years old. Anna claimed that the social side has a great impact on people's work because it helps people being more efficient even when the job is not in line with the expectations. She also highlighted the importance of having a constructive relationship with her superiors to better perform and grow within the company, which was also represented in the evaluation she gave in the survey to this item. On the contrary, she reported low attraction to items related to the application value. She claimed that maybe she could be biased by the particularity of her employer, which is public. She reasoned on the fact that it is difficult for her to perceive a sense of belongingness to the employer, even if she had a really good relationship with her colleagues. At the end of her interview, she explained the importance that had her first work experience to better tailor what she is looking for in the future: she revealed the difficulty of perceiving the social aspect during the recruitment process with a new company, but this aspect is certainly something that retains her to her current job place. Instead, other aspects that she could objectively evaluate are the economic value and the development value such as the compensation and the career-enhancing experiences and this has helped her to assess other workplaces. On the other side, Francesco reported attention to the social aspect focusing on the importance of support and on the *learning by doing* concept in relationship with others. He also stressed the idea that his interest is not on the economic value, because he is only 23 years old and he is living with his family. He celebrated more the opportunity to grow professionally. He reported the same concept as Anna Comacchio revealing the importance of the environment in motivating and stimulating people. He claimed that economic compensation could not have the same result. His point of view related to employers has changed during his studies for his bachelor's degree thesis. He interviewed the CEO of Roncadin Spa and he studied the business case of a leading company as Brunello Cucinelli that both address lot of attention on employees with innovative ideas. In saying so, Francesco Pizzol revealed attention on the Interest Value, which is the aspect related to innovation, forward-thinking and, creativity; even if in the survey he had evaluated it as the least important. He also underlined the importance of engagement and motivation of employees to be competitive in the market of talents.

Among the Millennials (1981-1996), Damiano Leibanti and Laura Toigo were interviewed. They are respectively 34 and 30 years old. They evaluated the application value as the least important aspect. About the most important, they made a completely different choice. Damiano Leibanti evaluated better the economic value revealing that he did not look for the social aspect at work. He claimed that work is necessary to economic stability, thus he always looked at opportunities with attractive compensation and above-the-average salary. In contrast, Laura Toigo agreed with Anna Comacchio and saying that the social aspect is the most valuable factor. Their opinions also coincide with the fact that the social part is one of the main motivations to remain in a particular firm instead of leaving. The most relevant item for Laura Toigo is *"Having a good relationship with your colleagues".* She reported that her colleagues are also friends and trustworthy people. Damiano Leibanti and Laura Toigo agreed on the importance of the item *"job security in the organization*". Damiano Leibanti has had more than one employer in his working life differently from Laura who has always worked in the same workplace. For this reason, during the dialogue, he reported an important change in the perception of the employer during his last experience. As for Laura Toigo, in past job researches, Damiano Leibanti always looked at an employer with whom he could have a personal relationship too. He was working as a business trader and he invested a lot of time doing extraordinary work. With this background, he understood the importance of having more time to dedicate to social life outside the firm and he looked for companies that may guarantee him a better life-work balance. For this reason, he is working part-time in two different companies that have the right working hours and free time ratio according to his opinion and preference. In contrast, Laura Toigo affirmed that her ideal job would be one more in line with her passion in terms of job duties and tasks.

Milena Morelli and Paolo Gussetti were asked to report their point of view as members of the X Generation (1966-1980). Both declared a relevance of the social aspect, particularly revealing the importance of having a good relationship with colleagues. Another aspect that they have in common is that they are parents of young children. They both affirmed that this event has changed their perspective with respect to the employer focusing more on job stability. Milena Morelli stated that motherhood has changed her priorities: before she was always looking for a career-enhancing experience and then she preferred stability and work-life balance. As Laura Toigo and Anna Comacchio stated, Milena Morelli said that the social aspect is hard to catch in the other external environment, but it is one of the main drivers to stay within the company. An additional link between Paolo Gussetti and Milena Morelli interviews was the importance of management recognition and acceptance. According to their opinion, this aspect is relevant and particularly Paolo Gussetti said that if there is a lack of it, it is an issue to consider. Moreover, they perceive the relationship with superior a way to work more peacefully.

After having interview respondents, the focus switched on the point of view of firms. As mentioned, Labomar Spa and Randstad Italy HR managers were interviewed. Especially, Cristina Bettin, HR manager was the interlocutor for Labomar Spa and, Paola Molaschi, HR Talent Acquisition Manager, was the one of Randstad Italy. In the organizational charts, they belong both to the HR department: Cristina Bettin reports directly to the CEO Walter Bertin, instead Paola Molaschi reports to Valentina San Giorgi who is the Chief Executive HR Officer.

Starting with the perspective of Labomar Spa, it was interesting to highlight the coming attention on HR that Cristina Bettin narrated. Even if there is not a department dedicated to employer branding, this theme is perceived as really important. The CEO, Dott. Walter Bertin, has always been a strong ambassador of the company. Labomar Spa is dedicating lots of efforts to support external and internal communication as positive drivers for employer branding. In fact, beside the external tools (social media, newspapers articles), there are several tools used for internal communication (newsletter, a magazine twice a year) that have been recently extended with the Labomar Channel (videos positioned in many areas of the company to share information, celebrate employees and share KPI's). An important project for the Company in 2021 is the application to obtain B-Corp Certification that includes a series of practices, among the others many HR policies, to continue to grow as a sustainable company. From the interview emerged that the population in Labomar is very young and the levers used for motivation and retention are mainly training and development programs based on the role evolution. The management believe that young employees consider very important to have the opportunity to live in a learning environment where they can improve their skills, and thus they have evaluated these kinds of drivers for them. The monitoring of people's wellness and engagement has been done in this organization two years ago and a future survey will be programmed also in consideration of the development path that the company is following. Talent scarcity was another theme of discussion in which Cristina Bettin gave her opinion. She claimed that there is not a real problem with the lack of talents and it is not impacting the company growth. She explained that Labomar Spa is in direct contact with universities and it has an intensive internship program that guarantees the acquisition of the best talents. Moreover, Labomar Spa managers are usually guests at university events, and this allows the company to increase the awareness of its employer brand. On the other hand, the company is suffering more from the scarcity of specific skills and competencies in technical areas such as the electrical and electronic maintenance. The last question was dedicated to generational differences, to which she reported great attention to young employees, that are always been the focus of the company. She explained that the priorities of the first six months in which she was working at Labomar Spa were focused on many aspects, but the people strategy that the company is implementing for the future surely will take care of the different drivers of motivation that people have.

The other viewpoint that will be reported is the one of Randstad Italy presented by Paola Molaschi. She has been working working in the organization since 2014 in the HR department and in 2018 she became Talent Acquisition Manager of some line of businesses of Randstad Group Spa. Differently from Labomar Spa, Randstad Italy has a matrix organization in which *talent acquisition* is one among the others. More functions are represented by learning and development, compensation and benefits, company social responsibility (CSR), functions organization, and health and safety. Employer branding has not a department dedicated to it and Paola Molaschi explained that almost every employee of the firm is playing a role in creating a solid employer brand positioning. Paola Molaschi particularly reported the example of the account managers, that is the most numerous professional figures by whom Randstad Italia is composed, and who every day have the responsibility to communicate the brand and increase its awareness with clients and candidates. Considering the importance of attracting the best talents, Randstad Italy has identified the Candidate Manager and the Candidate Specialty. These roles have the focus of individuating the best people in the labor market in line with the firm expectations. By having this professional figure, the company is able to better accomplish this aspect of employer branding. A question related to the independence of the Randstad Italian branch from the Randstad Holding NV was asked in addition to the interview guide because of the internationality of the firm. She explained that every country has quite large independence in translating the strategy into efficient local practices, even though they have to follow process guidelines. Examples of it are represented by the policy of internal promotions (e.i. 80% of internal vacancies must be filled with internal promotions), the people review process and, the recruitment path. The interview continued talking about the functions that are synergically working to enhance the employer branding positioning. Paola Molaschi cited the results of the annual *"Randstad Employer Brand Research"* in which more than 6000 companies worldwide are included, highlighting the increasing performance of Randstad (www.randstad.it). She claimed that these results were possible only with the works of everyone. Concerning how Randstad is practically making loyal and motivating current employees, she reported the importance of internal horizontal and vertical career path that allows people to change their role remaining within the company's borders. She also underlines the relevance of the life-long learning practices in achieving this aim. In Randstad, an employee engagement survey is periodically done (depending on the period e.i. during the Covid-19 pandemic it was submitted every 15days). Moreover, a system called *"Great Conversations*" allows to have feedbacks every quarter during a confrontation conversation between an employee and his/her head. In this way, the company has real-time feedback about the actual situation of people engagement. According to the opinion of Paola Molaschi, talent scarcity is one of the major issues that companies have to be worried about. She states that it depends on demographical problems, geographical distribution, and education rate. As a company, Randstad has started a campaign in October and November 2020 to attract more talents. She gave feedback on the results of the hiring campaign previously cited, saying that more than 200 people were hired since that period. She underlined the issue of individuating the right talents in the market because of the complexity of, what she defines as *"a hybrid role"* of one of the Account Manager professional roles that include administrative, commercial, and recruitment tasks. Certainly, Paola Molaschi highlighted that talent scarcity has changed the recruitment process and hiring campaign communication (e.i using social media). In her opinion, this leads to hire less engaged candidates and enhance the necessity of having practices dedicated to motivating them. To conclude the interview, Paola Molaschi was asked to report concrete examples about HR practices that have as base criteria the generational differences. She firstly reported that 38 years old is the average age of Randstad employees in Italy and they are mostly belong to Generation Z, X, and Y. She answered that it is well-known that there are different drives of motivation for each generation, although it does not represent formal criteria to steer employer branding strategy.

Besides this, she considered differences in generational perspective as a very important factor in playing leadership roles and in motivating people.

5.5 Discussion

The focus of the research was to highlight the differences in generational and gender perceptions of the employer. Given the fact that the numerosity of the sample could not be comparable with one of the previous and cited studies (e.i. Eger et al. 2019; Reis and Braga 2016; Bussin et al., 2019), qualitative data analysis was integrated with the quantitative one as was done in other references of this thesis (Bussin et al 2019). According to the numerosity of the sample, the analysis of Generation X must be taken with caution because of the low number of responses obtained (13) which was not homogenous with respect to the others two (Gen-Z=53; Gen-Y=38).

Another issue to disclaim is that all the respondents have revealed a bias about their quantitative responses during the qualitative interview. They were in difficulty separating their actual employer experience from the ideal one that in the survey was asked. Particularly, Anna Comacchio claimed that her current experience has completely changed her opinion and perception about her ideal employer. This aspect differentiates the present study from the previous because it includes merely current workers, excluding people that are only students. Thus, the research was able to individuate and gather real perceptions and feelings that are present in the relationship between employer-employee and this bias, even if it has to be considered to interpret the results, could not be considered a problem of misunderstanding. Moreover, it gives the possibility to better understand which kind of life experience impacts on people's perceptions. Among the others, parenthood was underlined by Boomers.

The quantitative analysis has pointed out evident attention to the Social Value by all the generations. This means that the characteristics of the work environment and the relationships with colleagues and superiors are perceived a valuable reason to choose a workplace or to stay within a company. This is also easy to see in the Total Reward Framework, in which at least two social items are reported. Looking at the results, it is possible to highlight that Social Value is more appreciated by women and younger people. Mann-Whitney U test (1947) has confirmed both comparisons. In addition, qualitative research' results endorsed this trend except for Damiano Leibanti. About this aspect, more has emerged from the interviewees. Indeed, even though it is perceived in this way, the social aspect is a subjective feeling that could not be catchable during the recruitment process. For this reason, according to the opinion of Anna Comacchio, Laura Toigo, and Milena Morelli, social value is a driver to stay within a company. Thus, this research could demonstrate that there is also an issue related to what is important as a driver to motivate and retain people within the company and what people consider valuable to leave the organization and join another workplace.

The results of the quantitative and qualitative research have also confirmed the opinion of Sharma (2019) reported in the literature review. She claimed that investing only in economic motivation could be a "*dangerous mistake*" because it is not a driver of motivation for people, especially the youngest. According to Anna Comacchio and Francesco Pizzol, economic value is not as stimulating as the social aspect. By contrast, economical aspects may represent drivers to leave the company because they are objective factors that could be evaluated during the recruitment process. These results allow to state that management has to evaluate which drivers have to leverage with respect to the objective to achieve.

Besides the macro-aspects, a deeper analysis was also done, and it has to do with each item that compose the various aspects with the aim of better inquiry the attractiveness factors for each generation. "*Job security within the organization*" is considered the most valuable item among the others related to Economic Value. It is possible to see it in all the Total Reward Frameworks (Figure 14) in which the seven best attractors items are reported according to each generation. Particularly, this item was evaluated by Boomers in the quantitative analysis and confirmed in the qualitative one by Paolo Gussetti and Milena Morelli. The reasoning behind this response is related to family duties; on the other hand, Francesco Pizzol claimed that it is not important for him because he has not this responsibility. Here, it is evident the role of generational belongingness in evaluating the different items. Even *"Working in an exciting environment"* is an item that represents a good attractor for people: especially for Millennials and Boomers for whom it is the best one. As said, social aspects such as the one related to relationships with superiors and colleagues were among the best attractive items across all the generations.

The results reported in this study have confirmed some pieces of evidence reported by other authors achieving the objective of be compared with past investigations. As an example, the qualitative interview with Damiano Leibanti what Saini and Jawahar (2019) demonstrated in their study. They inquired the employer perception according to the job characteristics, particularly it could be important to remember the correlation with part-time or full-time workers. They underline a focus on the work-life balance for part-time workers as revealed by Damiano Leibanti. In this thesis the analysis of this correlation was not conducted, however this could be a topic to investigate through further analysis.

Another aspect on which all the generations agree on is the lowest importance of the Application Value. The sense of belongingness, the humanitarian objectives of the company, and the opportunity to teach others may not to be a driver for each generation, neither according to gender. Indeed, although there were differences in the evaluation among generations, no one was significant according to the Mann-Whitney U test (1947). Considering this, the reasoning could lead to thinking to re-evaluate the relevance of Company Social Responsibility. As explained in paragraph 2.1 – *The relationship with CSR*, CSR has become relevant in company affairs for its capability to attract stakeholders from financial investors to customers. From the sample, the results obtained suggest excluding employees, who seem that they do not care about this aspect as other stakeholders. This realization could be important to consider when the company is creating its communication plan: once the target is the employees, this kind of reasoning could not be considered valuable. Both Randstad Italy and Labomar Spa are investing a lot in this narration reporting that the first company has a department entirely dedicated to it, that is in direct line with the HR Chief Executive Officer, and the second is working in order to obtain B-corp certification which is strictly related to CSR communication. Of course, this relationship should be more investigated, and it could be the theme for further research to better understand the influence of this aspect on attractiveness.

The interviews with HR managers have confirmed part of the recounting that was presented in the literature review part as in paragraph 2.3 – *Marketing based conceptualization* and 4.1 – *Contributions by different approaches and fields*. In both case studies, the interlocutors revealed the fundamental role of HR to construct and strengthen the position of the company brand in the market. Reporting the opinion of Paola Molaschi, she said that every employee is an ambassador of the brand, and only by working on them, it is possible to sustainably grow in the market. Moreover, only by creating a functional synergy between departments such as branding, marketing and communication, and HR, the company could be able to efficiently reach a coherent and strong brand positioning. Employer point of view has also highlighted the necessity of monitoring and having feedback about employees' wellness. In this vein, the interviews have reported a data-driven approach to HR management with the aim of effectively steer the company strategy.

The interviewees have also reported that employer branding is a theme of interest for companies, especially in this period in which the issues related to talent scarcity and demographical problems are emerging. Moreover, firms' interlocutors have revealed high attention on the drivers that motivate their employees and on generational perspectives.

5.6 Final consideration

The studio of this thesis could represent a step forward in the analysis of the company population. Monitoring and obtaining feedback from them, as it has been demonstrated, is a relevant step to achieve the major employer branding goals. The method that this thesis has presented could be a replicable instrument to investigate a specific group of employees according to gender or generations. It has also the advantage of being widely used in different case studies highlighting the possibility to reach numerous objectives and obtain helpful information about employees. The usability of the EmpAt scale is a piece of evidence.

As demonstrated, there are different perceptions related to drivers: management has to valorize social aspects to motivate people to stay within the company and make them loyal; by contrast, to attract talents in the labor market, economic aspects are more valuable. Furthermore, these aspects changed according to generational belongingness.

Moreover, the Total Reward Framework could be used to better highlight the result of the analysis and it represents a good option to underline the most valuable aspect of respondents. It has also the advantage of being easy to read and understandable and for this reason, a proper graphical instrument to communicate to people and management even if they are not professionals.

To conclude, the results of this study could be compared to the research of Reis and Braga (2016), Eger et al. (2019), and Bussin et al. (2019) and give a contribution to the current literature according to employer branding. Further analysis could investigate the differences among the results, especially those referred to the cross-cultural perception, adding Italian preferences to the sample, and a Total Reward Framework for the attraction of Generation X and Z.

CONCLUSION

To be an *employer of choice* is becoming a necessity for companies to compete in the market. As seen, employer branding represents the idea that employees have about their employer; consequently, even if a company does not steer a strategy related to it, it has one. Furthermore, it is a concept that also small and medium enterprises have to deal with to retain, motivate and attract the best talents in the market that are captivated by bigger companies (Sharma, 2019).

Talent scarcity, brain drain, job-hopping, demographic issues are the major reasons why firms need to invest more in an employer branding strategy, especially in Italy where these phenomena are currently escalating. It is important to consider the cost of turnover that is representable in loss of know-how and skills, finding and training new candidates, and re-orienting employees. Moreover, it is relevant to report that people represent the fundamental resource for company growth, especially in an increasingly digital and competitive market according to a constitutive approach and Resource-Based-View conceptualization.

As described in the literature review and in the result of the empirical research, there is the need for customization and tailoring the Employer Branding Management to better target internal employees and external candidates as potential talents. Besides, it was demonstrated that there is a great difference in the perception between the drivers to leave a workplace and the ones to stay within the company borders. Investigating current employees and analyzing the external environment, benchmarking the best companies, is the starting point to understand what motivates and interests people. It is important to remember that each company's population is different and there is not a unique formula. For this reason, in this thesis, some modi operandi have been collected and reported from the literature review to give management the possibility to choose the more suitable for its company. One method was reported in the part dedicated to the empirical research to demonstrate how Italian management could investigate its internal environment, providing Employer Attractiveness scale translation for quantitative analysis and an interview guide for the qualitative one.

In the most recent studies, different factors were analyzed to investigate how they influence employer perceptions, among the others, nationality, job characteristics, and gender could be mentioned. In the view of this thesis, generational and gender factors were questioned demonstrating the relevance of these variables to better understand the drivers that motivate, retain, or attract people according to their ideal employer.

The results obtained would suggest the management to investigate and monitor their current employees and to steer the strategy according to the results obtained. The interviews with HR managers have confirmed this necessity. As seen in the practical suggestions, the priorities that have emerged from employees need to be aligned with the overall company strategy. The company has to move forward with synergic processes among different departments to achieve this aim.

To conclude, it is relevant to draw attention to people management to allow the company to perform and sustainably grow in the increasingly competitive market. Particularly, this thesis would highlight the importance of investigating employees' perceptions to gather better information for three main reasons. Firstly, it gives management the possibility to customize their employer branding strategy using actual or even real-time feedback. By doing so, the company is able to be more efficient in achieving the goal of retaining and motivating workers, not forgetting the impact that it has on company performance. Secondly, it could help companies in acquiring a position of employer of choice in which people are more attracted and enjoy the workplace by choosing the company before the job for its own sake. Hence, the company could be able to attract the best talents and face talent scarcity. Thirdly, it allows management of multinational firms to personalize their presence in different nations and ameliorate their efficacy by individuating the cross-cultural perceptions' discrepancies.

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APPENDIX I – Questionnaire

Cosa ti attrae di più di un datore di lavoro?

Sono Giulia Sartori, studentessa di Management all'Università Ca' Foscari (VE).

I miei studi di laurea si concentrano sull'employer branding: l'attrattività del datore di lavoro agli occhi del lavoratore. La serie di domanda a cui ti chiedo di rispondere in maniera sincera e attenta sono volte ad analizzare le differenze generazionali che attraggono i candidati e i lavoratori nelle aziende.

I dati che verranno raccolti saranno utilizzati esclusivamente per finalità di ricerca e verranno elaborati in forma anonima e aggregata.
La raccolta dell'indirizzo email ha il solo scopo di individuare eventuali risposte multiple degli intervistati.

Per maggiori informazioni 862452@stud.unive.it

GRAZIE PER IL TUO CONTRIBUTO!

*Campo obbligatorio

Indirizzo email *

Il tuo indirizzo email

La tua data di nascita in quale periodo si inserisce? *

- ◯ 1926 - 1945
- ◯ 1946 - 1955
- ◯ 1956 - 1965
- ◯ 1966 - 1980
- ◯ 1981 - 1995
- ◯ 1996 - 2015

Genere *

- Maschio
- Femmina

Di che nazionalità sei? *

- Italiano
- Altro

Qual è il tuo più alto titolo di studio? (anche in fase di conseguimento se hai l'intenzione di terminarlo) *

- Laurea triennale
- Master di 1° livello
- Laurea magistrale
- Master di 2° livello
- Nessuna delle precedenti

Attualmente stai lavorando? *

- Full time
- Part-time
- No, ma inizierò a breve in un determinato posto di lavoro.
- No

Se sì, in che settore stai o inizierai a lavorare? *

- Primario
- Secondario
- Terziario
- Non sto lavorando

Quanto importanti sono i seguenti aspetti quando pensi al tuo datore di lavoro ideale? 1=per nulla importante, 5= assolutamente importante *

	1. Per nulla importante	2	3	4	5. Assolutamente importante
Produce dei beni/servizi innovativi	○	○	○	○	○
Adotta pratiche innovative nella gestione dei lavoratori	○	○	○	○	○
Dà spazio e valorizza la creatività	○	○	○	○	○
Produce dei beni/servizi di alta qualità	○	○	○	○	○
E' un ambiente stimolante	○	○	○	○	○
Ho un buon rapporto con i colleghi	○	○	○	○	○
Ho un buon rapporto con i superiori	○	○	○	○	○
Ho colleghi incoraggianti e di supporto	○	○	○	○	○
E' un ambiente di lavoro divertente	○	○	○	○	○
E' un ambiente piacevole	○	○	○	○	○

Offre remunerazioni economiche attrattive					
Offre un salario maggiore della media					
Offre sicurezza e stabilità economica					
Offre buone opportunità di promozioni					
Da' la possibiltà di fare esperienze pratiche in diversi dipartimenti					
Da' la possibiltà di fare esperienze pratiche in diversi dipartimenti					
Saper di lavorare per questa azienda, mi fa' sentire più sicuro di me					
Saper di lavorare per questa azienda, mi fa' star meglio con me stesso					
Offre la possibilità di fare esperienze utili per la mia carriera					
Può essere un trampolino di lancio per futuri impieghi					

Ricevo riconoscenza e apprezzamenti dal management					
Mi dà l'opportunità di insegnare agli altri ciò che ho imparato					
Mi dà l'occasione di insegnare agli altri ciò che ho imparato in contesti terzi all'azienda					
L'interesse dell'azienda è rivolto ai consumatori/clienti					
Ha degli scopi umanitari					
Mi sento di appartenere e di far parte dell'azienda					

Saresti disponibile per un'intervista? Max 30 minuti *

Scegli

Sì

No

Se si, scrivi qui numero di telefono e mail

La tua risposta

APPENDIX II – Interview guide

Interview guide for respondent

Each interview was customize referring to the response to the survey: the symbol “*” reported in the following interview guide was replaced with the respondent's answer. At the beginning of the interview, people were asked to allow to record the interview. Then the following questions were asked**.**

1. EN: Where do you work and what is your job?
   IT: Per che azienda lavori e che mansione svolgi?

2. EN: What did you study at university? Are your studies coherent with your current job?
   IT: Che studi hai fatto? Sono coerenti con il lavoro che svolgi?

3. EN: In the questionnaire, you have evaluated your ideal employer by rating different items. These were individuated according to 5 aspects that were: development value, interest value, economic value, application value, and social value. You evaluated with the highest grade the aspect *, could you tell me why this category is the most important for you talking about your ideal employer?
   IT: Nel questionario a cui hai risposto, ti è stato chiesto di valutare diversi aspetti in base all'idea di datore di lavoro ideale. Questi aspetti si possono ricondurre a 5 macro argomenti, quali: sfera economica, sociale, propria applicazione personale, alla carriera e all’innovazione d’azienda. Dai tuoi risultati, è emerso che dai molto valore alla sfera *, mi potresti dire come mai questo aspetto prevale sugli altri?

4. EN: Among the category *, you evaluated the item * as the most important for you. Could you tell me why?
   IT: All’interno della sfera sociale, In particolare hai valutato l'aspetto xxxxx come maggiormente importante rispetto agli altri, come mai?

   Ps: if the items were more than one, people were asked to compare them and tell the most important or a sort of rating.

5. EN: On the contrary, you evaluated the category * as the least important for you, could you tell me why?
   IT: Hai valutato invece la macro-categoria xxxx come meno importante tra tutti, come mai?

6. EN: Are there labor or personal experience that impact your perception of the ideal employer? Could you tell me if your priorities have changed at a certain point when looking for an employer? Could you please describe it?
   IT: Ci sono esperienze lavorative o personali che secondo te ti hanno influenzato dall'idea di tuo datore di lavoro ideale? Sapresti dirmi se sono cambiate le tue priorità in un certo momento nei confronti della ricerca di un datore di lavoro ed eventualmente descriverlo?

7. EN: When you are choosing to change your employer, do you always put as priorities the aspect you evaluate as most important? Could you tell me some real examples?
   IT: Quando devi scegliere di cambiare un posto di lavoro, metti sempre al primo posto gli aspetti che hai valutato con un punteggio più alto? Riesci a riportare degli esempi personali?

Interview guide for firms

1. EN: To begin our interview, I'd kindly ask you to introduce yourself and your company, highlighting your role in the organization chart.
   IT: Inizialmente, vorrei chiederle di introdursi e presentarmi un quadro generale dell'azienda e del suo personale collocamento all'interno dell'organigramma.

2. EN: Is there a department entirely dedicated to employer branding in your firm? If yes, is it composed by whom? Is it autonomous in the decision? Is there a person who directly reports to the management board?
   If not, could you tell which is the department that takes care of this aspect? Which is the functional part to which the department is connected to?
   IT: In azienda, vi è un dipartimento dedicato all'employer branding?
   Se sì, da chi è formato? Qual è il suo grado di autonomia decisionale? Fa

direttamente riferimento al board?
Se no, riuscirebbe a dirmi se vi è comunque un dipartimento che si occupa di questo aspetto? A quale dipartimento è stata annessa questa funzione?

3. EN: Recent researches and scholars in human resources have reported an increasing need for firms to pay attention to their employees. Particularly, it seems to be important to make them loyal and motivate them. Do you perceive this need as real? How are you responding to this issue as a firm? Could you please report some real examples?
   IT: In moltissimi studi di settore e in particolare in relazione alle risorse umane, è emerso un incremento del bisogno dell'azienda di fidelizzare e motivare i propri dipendenti. Quando è reale questa necessità? Come la state affrontando? Mi saprebbe fornire degli esempi concreti?

4. EN: Which are the practices that human resources management is using more with regard to current employees? Is there a process to track the wellness of internal employees?
   IT: Quali sono le pratiche che più vengono utilizzate nei confronti dei dipendenti interni? Vi è un monitoraggio dello stato di benessere aziendale?

5. EN: Looking outside the firm at the labor market, it seems that there is an increasing difficulty on attracting the best talents within the company. Moreover, a recent trend reported that there is a lack of some professional figures, a problem of talent scarcity. Some scholars said that, among the other motivations, this could derive from demographical problems. Do you perceive this phenomenon as real? Which are the professionals that are less present in the market? How this issue is impacting your company's growth?
   IT: Guardando invece ora all'ambiente esterno all'azienda, possiamo dire che dall'analisi dei dati del mondo del lavoro, sembra crescente la difficoltà di attrarre i migliori talenti all'interno delle aziende. In più, sembra che sia presente il problema della mancanza di alcune figure professionali e del talent scarsity, derivante anche da problemi demografici.
   Quanto è reale questo fenomeno al giorno d'oggi? Quali sono le figure che più

diventano difficili da reperire per voi? Come sta impattando la vostra crescita aziendale?

6. EN: Which is the strategy that are you adopting to tackle talent scarcity? Is there attention to generational differences related to your current employees and potential workers in your HR management decisions? Could you please tell me some company policies that follow this criterion?
   IT: Quale strategia state adottando in azienda per combattere la talent scarsity? Nelle decisioni del vostro team manageriale, vi è attenzione alla differenza generazionale dei vostri dipendenti e dei candidati che volete attrarre? Riuscirebbe a farmi degli esempi di politiche aziendali che hanno alla base questo tipo di criterio?