

Employer Image and the Intention to Apply: A Cross-National Analysis

ABSTRACT

Employer branding is believed to contribute to superior human resources as it increases the chances to 'win the war for talent'. So far, however, research has been neglecting the employer image in a cross-national context. I surveyed 2,079 students in Germany, China, Hungary, and India and asked them about their perception of the employer brand of a multinational enterprise as well as their intentions to apply for a job at this company. The results show that selected facets of the employer image vary across the different countries. However, these differences are less striking than cross-cultural research may suggest which provides opportunity for a global positioning of the employer image.

INTRODUCTION

Demographics as well as the shortage of a skilled workforce have brought companies to reconsider their attractiveness as an employer in order to “win the war for talent”. The attraction of superior human resources is crucial as they provide organizations with sustainable competitive advantages (Lado & Wilson, 1994; Pfeffer, 1994; Wright, Ferris, Hiller, & Kroll, 1995). “It is particularly important for companies to influence job seekers’ application intentions [...] because firms cannot select from or continue to recruit job seekers who do not take this first step” (Collins, 2007: 180).

The main obstacles in attracting valuable staff are the interchangeability of jobs and company profiles inside the same industry (Maurer, Howe & Lee, 1992; Taylor & Collins, 2000, Thomas & Wise, 1999), and the rudimentary knowledge of applicants in an early recruitment stage (Barber, 1998; Turban, 2001). In order to overcome these shortfalls, a powerful and unique employer image is essential (Lievens, Van Hove & Frederik, 2007). This is underlined by recent research which supports the crucial role of a company’s image concerning its perception as an attractive employer (Knox & Freeman, 2006). In order to identify a more complete model of job seekers’ preferences and decision behaviour, researchers put increasing emphasis on brand equity and brand identity concepts (Cable & Turban, 2001; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003).

Although previous research provided a meaningful insight into the impact of the corporate image on the job choice (e.g. Collins 2007), there is still a lack of solid understanding on how the employer image influences a job seekers’ intentions to join a company. Studies which put particular emphasis on the role of the employer image concerning the job choice in a cross-national context are lacking so far. Therefore, it is unclear whether the employer image is equally popular for attracting potential staff across countries and whether the impact of image facets varies across countries.

In order to address this research gap, I empirically observe if the employer image impacts students' application intentions. Moreover, I scrutinize if the impact of employer image facets students' application intentions stays constant among different countries or if respectively, facets such as task attractiveness or career opportunities have a different weight across countries. By doing so, I examine if an international positioning approach as employer of choice is possible at all. Furthermore, I uncover which facets of the employer image perform well across countries and which facets should better be communicated on the national level only.

By applying brand equity theory combined with results from cross-cultural research, I deduce hypotheses about the impact of Employer Brand Equity (EBE) on application intention in different countries. To test the hypotheses I apply a multi group comparison in structural equation modelling (SEM) built on data gathered in Germany, China, India, and Hungary.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Findings from the interface of marketing and human resources show that job applicants do not have complete information about potential employers. They interpret the activities and information provided by a company as signals of what their working experience in that company will be like (Rynes, 1991). An applicant's intention to apply to a company is therefore influenced by perceived characteristics rather than actual ones. These perceptions of a company form the employer brand (Backhaus, 2004).

Brands are a part of the company's most valuable resources and can be described as amalgamation of associations related to a company or a product (Aaker, 1991). Strong brands evoke a specific, unique, and desirable image which influences the preference structure of the targeted stakeholders (Aaker & Jacobson, 2001). This leads to an attraction toward the brand. The strength of a brand is reflected by its brand equity which is the "set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand [...] that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product

or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers" (Aaker, 1991: 15). Such brand equity is said to play a crucial role in consumers' decision making for various reasons. It is said to (1) increase the probability that the branded product or service will be among those considered when a purchase is imminent, to (2) generate positive effects toward the branded product or service, and to (3) create points of differentiation as well as reasons to choose the brand over its competitors (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993). The concept of brand equity is not only applicable to product marketing but also to the branding of the firm as an employer (Rynes & Barber, 1990). Hence, as "consumers do with products and services, job seekers form beliefs about potential employers" (Collins & Stevens, 2002: 1122). Accordingly, Employer Brand Equity (EBE) can be defined as "a set of employment brand assets and liabilities linked to an employment brand, its name and symbol that add to (or subtract from) the value provided by an organisation to that organisation's employees" (Ewing, Pitt, de Bussy & Berthon, 2002: 14). Just as strong product brands increase the attractiveness of a product, strong employer brands will increase the attractiveness to a company as employer (Collins & Stevens, 2002). This is supported by several studies:

Belt & Paolillo (1982) evaluated the image of 20 fast-food establishments. By comparing the establishment which performed best to the one which performed worst,, they found that applicants' responses to organizations with a better image was significantly higher. Fombrun and Shanley (1990) also indicated that image was a major component of early job choice decisions. Rynes & Barber (1990) suggest that certain organizational characteristics, such as the ability to pay or corporate culture and organizational values, form a general impression of the attractiveness of the organization as employer. This organizational image is supposed to heavily influence initial decisions of the applicant since he or she only disposes of a small amount of information at the beginning of the job choice process (Rynes, 1991; Rynes, Bretz & Gerhart, 1991). Gatewood, Gowan & Lautenschlager, (1993) found empirical support for Rynes' (1991) suggestion. By comparing five groups of students, they were able to depict the

favourable impact of an organizational and a recruitment image on the “potential job applicants' intentions to pursue further contact with a firm” (Gatewood et al., 1993: 423). As shown in the study by Turban & Keon (1993), “organizational characteristics affect applicants' perceptions of and attraction to organizations” (1993: 185). The underlying rationale is that easily observable characteristics will particularly affect the applicants' impressions of organizations, which would consequently be most likely to influence applicant attraction to organizations. Turban, Forret and Hendrickson (1998) found out that the employer brand image positively influences both applicant perceptions of recruiter behaviour and post-interview job and organizational attributes. Collins & Han (2004) observed organizations in terms of job applicant pool size and quality. They showed that corporate advertising and company reputation were significantly and positively related to the number of applicants as well as to their perceived quality. Collins & Stevens (2002) showed that attitude toward a company and employer specific knowledge both impact the actual application decision. Collins (2007) emphasized these results by showing the significant impact which job information has on the intention to apply. Knox & Freeman (2006) used an adaptation of Dukerich and Carter's (2000) model of the corporate image management, and reported that the employer brand image correlates positively with the application intention of potential recruits. According to these results, I have concluded that the employer image is a major predictor when considering possible applicants to the company. Thus, I assume that:

Hypothesis 1. The intention to apply is positively influenced by a company's employer image.

Even though cultures are meant to get more and more interconnected as the world grows closer together, intercultural studies give broad evidence of the still existing differences at the country level (Hofstede, 1980, 1991, 2001; House, Hanges, Mansour, Dorfman & Gupta,

2004). Cultural differences implicate the existence of different value systems across the cultural areas. This is based on the statement that “the core of culture consists of traditional [...] ideas and especially their attached values” (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952: 181). Values and social norms have an impact on the motivation of individuals, and influence attitudes toward a subject (Aizen, 1991).

Following comparative cultural studies (e.g. House et al., 2004), value systems across countries may differ on several dimensions. However, in terms of recruitment and job seekers’ decision process certain cultural aspects may be more important than others. I, consequently, assume that institutional collectivism and the system of equal opportunity will be less influential on the relationship between perception and motivation than in-group collectivism, power distance or future orientation. If cultures vary strongly in these dimensions, differences can also be seen in terms of the impact which employer image facets have on the intention to apply. Thus, high values for in-group collectivism may increase the impact of beliefs about the working environment as well as collegiality at the workplace. Power distance, however, may have an influence on the importance of career opportunities since power distance “is the degree to which members of an organization or society expect and agree that power should be shared unequally” (Hofstede, 2001: 75). In consequence, it increases the importance of social status as well as the acceptance of status differences between subordinates and supervisors. Students who come from power distant cultures may be more attracted to companies which provide good career opportunities; they can climb the ladder faster and effectively achieve social prestige quickly.

In view of that, job applicants may have divergent value systems depending on their cultural background, leading them to respond to different organizational characteristics. In different cultural areas, facets of the employer image may vary in importance.

Although the impact of employer image on students’ intentions to apply has so far not been surveyed internationally, there still seems to be preliminary evidence that its impact may

vary across nations. Rehu, Lusk & Wolff (2005) found major differences in motivational factors for employees in Germany and the United States. German employees were motivated by an improvement of their working conditions while US employees were more attracted to payment based incentives. Deresky (2000) stated that the living conditions in a country affected the incentive preferences of individuals significantly. Aaker, Benet-Martinez & Garolera (2001) examined brand image customization and its impact on brand performance depending on the cultural system. In their study, they found evidence for increased brand performance if the brand image was customized in differing cultural areas. Kiriazov, Sullivan & Tu (2000) argue that employees in Eastern Europe were attached to characteristics of the old planned economy such as job security, guaranteed pay, and highly structured jobs. Moreover, several studies argued that national culture moderated the antecedents of long-term buyer-seller relationships (Dash, Bruning & Guin, 2007), luxury value perception (Wiedmann, Hennigs & Siebels,, 2007), and the purchase behaviour of foreign products (Klein, Ettenson, & Morris 1998). Hence, preference structures may differ across cultures. This requires the adaptation of branding concepts as well as employer branding concepts (Usunier, 1996). This leads to the assumption that:

Hypothesis 2. The nationality of the potential applicant will moderate the importance of the employer image facets for the employer image.

Insert figure 1 about here.

METHODOLOGY

Design of the employer image

To understand how decision processes are influenced by the brand image, marketing researchers employ associative memory models since the brand image is rooted in the individual memories (Anderson, 1983; Wyer & Srull, 1989). According to such memory models, information is stored in nodes (specific bits of information) and interconnected by links which can trigger the activation of further bits of information if the link is strong enough (Keller, 1993). Thus, “information about and memory of a product brand (and presumably an employer brand) have two key dimensions: (a) the node itself, or awareness of the brand or employer and (b) its links to related information, or the associated feelings and knowledge of the brand or employer” (Collins & Stevens, 2002: 1122).

Brand memory or brand image is a multifaceted, latent construct consisting of interdependent bundles of associations (Keller, 1993). Prior research has already tried to identify the main facets of the employer image. Gatewood et al. (1993) focused on the ability to pay, business strategy, culture and values, and organizational demographics. Turban & Greening (1997) chose to observe the corporate social performance as an indication of working conditions and company culture. Backhaus (2004) identified the following aspects of employer image: compensation, advancement, work-family balance, climate, challenging work, and a supportive environment. Lievens & Highhouse (2000) conducted a confirmatory factor analysis which delineated six factors: Compensation, advancement, job security, task demands, location, and work with customers. These inquiries indicate that the employer image is particularly reflected by the attractiveness of payment, career and development aspects, task characteristics, and social factors. By following established employer image scales (e.g. Collins, 2007; Collins & Stevens, 2002) I, accordingly, chose the perceived working atmosphere, work-life comfort, career opportunities, task attractiveness and compensation as reflections of the employer image.

In addition to the specification of the employer image facets, it is necessary to define whether the construct is formative or reflective. According to prior research, an image is defined more accurately as a reflective construct (Wilson, Callaghan & Stainforth, 2007), which is why I chose to define the observed employer image facets as a reflection of the employer image.

Sample

The data was collected via survey by a professional market research agency. Items were translated into the respective language of the different countries and retranslated to ensure comprehensibility. The initiator of this study was a multinational German technology venture. In the following, it shall be called the FIRM. The survey was conducted in August/ September 2007 in four countries at 63 universities (33 universities in Germany, 10 universities in China, 9 universities in Hungary, and 11 universities in India). This resulted in a sample of $N = 2,257$ business and engineering upper level undergraduate students (Germany ($n=1110$), China ($n=299$) Hungary ($n=523$) and India ($n=325$)). 32% stated to be finishing their studies within one year. The average age of the participants was 22.6 years, and they were at maximum two years away from taking their final exams. 72.5 % were male students, and 72% studied engineering. From this sample, the students who stated not to know the FIRM at all were deselected since these students would not be able to evaluate the FIRM concerning its employer image. This measure resulted in a final sample of $N = 2,079$.

Measurement

 Insert table 1 about here.

Employer Image Facets. I posed 13 questions to evaluate the employer image of the FIRM, ranging from 1 = *does not apply* to 5 = *fully applies*. These items were adapted from

previous organizational attractiveness research (Collins, 2007; Collins & Steven, 2002; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003), and have proven their explanatory value among business and engineering students' application intentions. However, most studies observed the impact of employer knowledge or employer image as a whole (e.g. Collins, 2007) instead of the way different image facets trigger recruitment outcomes. It is, therefore, essential to empirically observe the factor structure of employer image. I conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using the AMOS 6.0 software package (Arbuckel, 2006; Arbuckel & Wothke, 1999) to check whether the observed items load on different image dimensions or whether they form only one factor. At first, I tested a one-factor-model which also turned out to be the model with the worst fit (RMSEA = .12; PCLOSE = 0.0; CFI = .819; NFI = .814). Then I tested several models with multiple latent factors. Finally, the CFA showed a five-factor-model to best fit the data (RMSEA = .028; PCLOSE = 1.0; CFI = .947; NFI = .921). To validate this result, I furthermore conducted a test for internal consistency, showing that all of Cronbach's alpha values were above .70, indicating sufficient reliability. After this procedure, I considered whether the items also fit together in terms of meaning and theoretical aspects, which further underscored the factor structure. Finally, I labelled the factors working atmosphere, career opportunities, work-life comfort, task attractiveness and payment attractiveness. To provide an overview, table 1 displays the items with their factor loadings on the respective image dimension, and Cronbach's alpha values.

Working atmosphere was measured by three items. One exemplary item was "The FIRM offers good opportunities for promotion". Cronbach's alpha of this scale was .823. Career Opportunities were measured by three items which merged into each other. One exemplary item was "The FIRM has a pleasant working environment". Cronbach's alpha of this scale was .789. The Work – Life Comfort was also evaluated by three items. An exemplary item was "The FIRM offers flexible working times". Cronbach's alpha of this scale was .748. The Task Attractiveness was measured by three items. An exemplary item was "The FIRM offers

challenging assignments”. Cronbach’s alpha of this scale was .766. The Payment Attractiveness was measured by the item “The FIRM offers an attractive income”.

Intention to Apply. The items to measure the independent variable were adapted from an intention scale proposed by Highhouse, Lievens and Sinar (2003). Here, three items were initially linked to form the intention measurement. However, CFA and reliability analysis both showed that deleting the dichotomously coded Item “I consider the FIRM as a potential employer” increased the model fit of the CFA, as well as the internal consistency of the scale. I therefore decided to employ a two-item scale to evaluate the intention to apply to the FIRM. An exemplary item is “I would recommend the FIRM to a friend looking for a job”. The Cronbach’s alpha was .764 of the final scale, and thus showed a significant improvement of the original three-item scale with an alpha of .641.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

To test the hypotheses, structural equation modeling (SEM) with AMOS 6.0 was performed. SEM allows for building and testing latent constructs which the employer image was defined by. Moreover, SEM has the unique ability to simultaneously evaluate complex webs of linkage among variables (Hult et al., 2006). Hence, SEM allows a more powerful assessment of multiple independent and dependent relationships than traditional multivariate techniques (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 2005). In addition to that, multiple group analysis can be performed to evaluate if students in different countries are equally driven by employer image factors. In order to compare relationships between latent constructs across groups, I employ a four step approach:

In the first step, I analyze the measurement model by conducting an unconstrained multi group confirmatory factor analysis (MGCFA) to check for configural invariance; by doing so, I check if the factor structure is equal across the observed countries. In the second step, I analyze a nested MGCFA with equal measurement weights. The determination of these

measurement weights to one value in all sub groups (countries) provides information given that the meaning or structure of the applied factors is equal in the different countries. Only in this case, it can be ensured that the factors measure the same constructs in the different countries and hence, can be compared among the groups. In the third step, I analyze an unconstrained MGSEM to observe if the theoretical model fits the empirical data. In the last step, I constrain the measurement weight in the MGSEM to one equal value across the observed countries, as I did for the MGCFA. With this final model, I test the hypothesis of the relation between the employer image, its facets and the intention to apply to be moderated by the cultural context.

To evaluate the quality of the measurement models and SEMs, I employ the comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990) and the normed fit index (NFI; Bentler & Bonett, 1980) besides chi-square testing because of their stability and robustness (Gerbing & Anderson, 1992). In addition, the root means square error of approximation (RMSEA; Steiger, 1990) will be reported due to its advantages such as known distribution and non-sensitivity to sample size (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Previous cross-cultural research argued that certain constructs would either not be significant or would be expressed differently in different cultures (Douglas & Craig, 2006). This might be particularly true for attitudinal aspects (Aaker et al., 2001). In order to test for differences in factor structure across the observed countries, measurement invariance ought to be checked. I defined this invariance as equality of measurement weights. This metric invariance is mandatory for comparing the relationships between latent constructs across groups (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). To test the multi group model, the unconstrained original model has to be compared to the more restrictive nested model assuming measurement invariance. According to Cheung & Rensvold (2002), equivalence can be estimated if the ΔCFI is smaller or equal to -0.01. I applied this test in this study because of

its robustness. This test of invariance allows for stating whether or not the two models have the same causal structure between items and constructs (Bollen, 1989).

Insert table 2 about here.

To ensure that the quality of data and analysis is on the highest level possible, I check for multi-collinearity and common method bias. To test for multicollinearity, I employ zero-order correlations and the variance inflation factor (VIF).

As shown in Table 3, all correlations stay below 0.7, indicating no significant risk for multi-collinearity (Anderson, Sweeney & Williams, 1996). Furthermore, all VIF values stay far below 10 ($VIF \leq 2.0$) and thus indicating multicollinearity problems not occur (Aiken & West, 1991).

To test for common method bias, I use a procedure proposed by Hult et al. (2006). According to this procedure, I add the same source factor to the indicators of all model constructs in the SEM (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Fetter, 1993), and compare the two models with each other - in model one, the same-source factor loadings are estimated freely (unconstrained model) whereas in model two the factor loadings are constrained to zero (constrained model). Since I have found no change in path significances between the constrained model and the model considering common method bias, I can assume that common method bias is not a major problem for this analysis.

Insert table 3 about here.

Table 4 shows the results of the unconstrained and the nested MGCFA. The constrained measurement model (RMSEA = .029; PCLOSE = 1.0; CFI = .939; NFI = .910), assuming equal factor loadings across the different country groups, has a slightly worse fit than the unconstrained model (RMSEA = .028; PCLOSE = 1.0; CFI = .947; NFI = .921). Yet, it is still

acceptable since ΔCFI is smaller than -0.01. The similarity of the factor loadings underpins the assumption of an equal factor structure among the countries and therefore the comparability of the results.

Table 5 shows the results of the unconstrained SEM without consideration of cultural effects. It has an adequate fit ($\chi^2 (308) = 959.792$ $p \leq 0.001$; RMSEA = .032; PCLOSE = 1.0; CFI = .945; NFI = .921) and all estimates are highly significant across the countries ($p \leq 0.001$). All of the proposed image facets are associated positively with the employer image which in turn has a significantly positive effect on the intention to apply. Interestingly, payment attractiveness has the weakest influential power on the image. Accordingly, hypothesis 1, asserting a positive association between employer image and the intention to apply, can be accepted.

Table 6 displays the nested model which shows worse fit indicators than the unconstrained model ($\chi^2 (335) = 1008.5$ $p \leq 0.001$; RMSEA = .030; PCLOSE = 1.0; CFI = .943; NFI = .918) but still fits the data acceptably, as CFI and NFI exceed .90 and RMSEA stays below .08 (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). Since the ΔCFI between the unconstrained and the nested model is less than .01, the nested model is accepted for the analysis.

 Insert table 4 about here.

 Insert table 5 about here.

 Insert table 6 about here.

Table 6 depicts the standardized estimates for each country. Since it is not only the aim of this paper to observe the strength of the estimates but also to compare them across countries, I test for significant differences between the image dimensions on the country level. Therefore,

I proceed as follows: At first, I calculate critical ratios for differences between the image dimensions. Then, I use these values to conduct a t-test in order to identify significant differences between these dimensions across the observed countries (Arbuckle, 2006). Note that significant differences are calculated between the unstandardized coefficients, not between the standardized ones. This comparison shows some variables to differ significantly between countries: Task attractiveness is less important for a favorable employer image in China and Hungary than it is in Germany or India. Payment attractiveness is significantly more important in Hungary than in China or Germany, whereas in China working atmosphere has the greatest impact on a favorable employer image. Yet, the facets “career opportunities” and “work-life comfort” are equally strong across the observed countries; this means that their impact is not moderated by the students’ nationality.

In spite of these results, the overall influential structure is similar across the surveyed nations. All indicators are highly significant in every country, and none of them change the sign in dependence of nationality. Therefore, hypothesis 2 only finds partial support since some of the image facets work equally in all observed countries.

Insert figure 2 about here.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this paper was to contribute to the understanding of the employer image and its impact on the probability to join a company. The main goal was to enrich the research field of *Employer Branding* by conducting a cross-national comparison of the employer image impact. I used an international comparative survey of undergraduate university students to test if the impact of employer image on the intention to apply significantly varies among countries. The results indicate certain cross-cultural differences in the importance of the image facets. The cultural background in particular moderated the importance of working

atmosphere, task attractiveness and payment attractiveness whereas career opportunities and work-life balance were not moderated.

The perceived attractiveness of the job-tasks seems to be central to potential job applicants in Germany and India. To Chinese and Hungarian students, this facet of the employer image is less relevant when deciding in favour of a potential employer. They are therefore more willing to accept an initial job offer with tasks that are less interesting if other components, such as the working atmosphere, are adequately developed. These differences may be culture based. Hungary, for instance, has a performance and future orientation that is less distinct than it is in India and Germany. Performance orientation is related to the concept of need for achievement (House et al., 2004). Individuals with a great need for achievement have an affinity for challenging tasks and for taking responsibility for their actions (McClelland, 1987). Individuals from cultures with a high performance orientation may therefore be more attracted by challenging tasks than individuals from cultures with a low performance orientation.

China, just as Hungary, are characterized by a low future orientation. Future oriented individuals have “a strong capability and willingness to imagine future contingencies, formulate future goal states and develop strategies for meeting future aspirations” (House et al., 2004: 285). Cultures with a low future orientation, however, are more present-oriented and strive to simplify their lives. These cultures may be less willing to take responsibility from the beginning as well as challenging tasks that are difficult to perform. They may therefore be less attracted to organizations claiming such job characteristics. Since future and performance orientation scores relatively low in Hungary, this may be an explanation for the differences to Germany and India in terms of the importance of offering attractive tasks in order to increase students’ application tendency. In China, performance orientation is equal to that in India and Germany, even though task attractiveness has a significantly lower impact than it has in Germany or India.

However, besides a low future orientation, the Chinese culture is less assertive. Assertive cultures sympathize with competition, they value the taking of initiative, and they expect demanding and challenging targets. On the contrary, less assertive cultures are more focused on a cooperative spirit and try to maintain cordial relationships and harmony with their environment. This may explain why Chinese students seem to value task attractiveness less than their German, Hungarian and Indian counterparts. This may also explain why the working atmosphere, for them, is of a significantly higher value for their application choice. Their affinity for a pleasant working environment, team work and team culture may be additionally fostered by high in-group collectivism since such cultures have great respect for family and collegial relationships.

Interestingly, an attractive salary is the least influencing factor of the employer image and thus has a lower impact on the intention to apply than e.g. the perceived work-life comfort does. This holds true for all countries, even if a significantly higher salary affects the employer image of Hungarian students.

Besides these results, a high homogeneity seems to exist regarding career perspectives and personal development. These characteristics are important to students from all four countries. This may be due to equal power distances in the observed countries. Societies with a high power distance agree on the assumption that power should be shared unequally. Thus, individuals of such societies value social status and accept status differences between subordinates and supervisors. Individuals from societies with a high power distance, such as Germany, Hungary, China and India are attracted to opportunities that will allow them to raise their social status. Accordingly, a company offering good promotion opportunities will attract students from power distant cultures. Moreover, students from Germany, China, Hungary and India seem to be equally attracted by organizations fostering work-life comfort. Just as career opportunities, this employer image facet provides the opportunity of an international positioning as attractive employer.

The results show that even though differences exist due to nationality, the overall influential structure on the employer image and the intention to apply is to a large extent similar across the observed countries. This implies the possibility of a common, worldwide positioning as employer. Differences in some of the employer image facets exist but do not make such a fundamental difference in apply-intentions as intercultural studies suggest (e.g. House et al., 2004). It indeed seems like business and engineering students may have some kind of “global” mindset, enabling a global positioning approach as employer. This may be due to the fact, that students are more likely to be exposed to other cultures because of their travelling and information behaviour (Douglas & Craig, 2006). Hence, they are also more likely to adopt perceptions from other cultures and to develop attitudes according to them.

LIMITATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

Several limitations apply to this study demanding further research. First of all, in order to genuinely identify causal structures, longitudinal designs would be needed. It would be able to state if the assumptions held true over time only with powerful long term observations of students’ attitudes, intentions, and actual behaviour. Additional advancement could be achieved by evaluating further constructs such as perceived behavioural control, actual behavioural control and normative beliefs, since these factors contribute significantly to the prediction of intentions and behaviour (Aizen, 1991). Hence, future research is well advised to address these shortfalls and by doing so, advance the understanding of intentions to join a company and the impact of the employer image. Concerning this sample, several limitations apply. First, I only evaluated students. In consequence, I cannot draw direct conclusions for non-student applicants such as young professionals or less qualified applicants. These groups potentially differ in their mindset and preference structure, resulting in a different valuing of the several employer brand facets (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin & Jones, 2005). Furthermore, I cannot control whether these potential differences occur similarly across the observed countries. Neither can I control whether the cultural background magnifies or

diminishes a different valuing of employer brand facets. , It would consequently be interesting for future research to evaluate a broader spectrum of potential applicants in culturally divergent countries in order to observe whether similarities and differences occur likewise across countries for other applicant populations than university students. Second, this sample predominantly consists of male engineering students. As prior research shows, the job seekers' mayor as well as their personality traits predict their job preferences (Highhouse, Zickar, Thorsteinson, Stierwalt & Slaughter, 1999; Turban & Keon, 1993). In accordance with this point of view, Hannon (1996) found that engineering students were more attracted to big organizations than liberal art students. Thus, it remains questionable if the results can be generally applied to the total population of university students or if the implications only account for business, and, most of all, for engineering students.

Prior research focussing on the employer image often breaks the job seekers' perceptions of different companies down into one main sample to draw conclusions. I decided to pursue a single company approach since effects which "appear to be recruitment method differences could result from organizational differences" (Breaugh, 2008: 109). However, to adhere to common scholarly practice, I validated the results further by incorporating two additional brands into the analyses. Both are well-known companies from the automotive sector and direct competitors of the FIRM. With the new sample (N=6237) obtained from this recoding procedure, I ran the analysis again proving the three-company model to fit as equally as the original (one-company) model ($\chi^2(308) = 2324,249$ $p \leq 0.001$; RMSEA = .030; PCLOSE = 1.0; CFI = .951; NFI = .943). Furthermore, none of the regression parameters changed in significance. Thus, the results seem to even hold true for other companies. Nevertheless, research should continue addressing this issue as the additional brands all come from the automotive industry, and therefore do not allow for controlling industry differences.

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TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLE 1

Measurement of the latent variables, confirmatory factor analysis and reliability analysis results

Items	Variables	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's α
Tendency to apply after graduation	Intention to Apply	0.79	0.76
Recommendation		0.81	
Pleasant working environment	Working atmosphere	0.77	0.82
Corporate management style		0.80	
Team work and team culture		0.78	
Good opportunities for development	Career Opportunities	0.72	0.79
Good opportunities for promotion		0.76	
Qualification and further education		0.75	
Flexible working time	Work – Life – Comfort	0.63	0.75
Good work-life-balance		0.76	
Attractive location		0.75	
Challenging assignments	Task Attractiveness	0.71	0.77
Latitude for independent creative work		0.78	
Rapid assumption of responsibility		0.68	
Attractive Income	Payment Attractiveness	-	-

TABLE 2
Analytical procedure

Steps	Model	Modification	Model Fit	Meaning
1	MGCFA	Unconstrained	CFI: .947 NFI: .921 RMSEA: .028 PCLOSE: 1.0	Configural Invariance : The structure of the latent constructs/factors is equal across countries.
2	MGCFA	Nested (equal measurement weights)	CFI: .939 NFI: .910 RMSEA: .029 PCLOSE: 1.0	(Full) Metric Invariance of the Measurement model: The latent constructs have the same meaning in all observed countries.
3	MGSEM	Unconstrained	CFI: .945 NFI: .921 RMSEA: .031 PCLOSE: 1.0	The theoretical SEM fits to the data.
4	MGSEM	Nested (equal measurement weights)	CFI: .943 NFI: .918 RMSEA: .030 PCLOSE: 1.0	(Full) Metric Invariance of the SEM: Coefficients can be compared across countries.

Note: MGCFA = Multigroup confirmatory factor analysis; MGSEM = Multigroup structural equation modeling

TABLE 3
Means, standard deviation and correlations among variables

Items	M	SD	Correlations															
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
Intention to Apply																		
Tendency to apply after graduation	3.21	1.08	1															
Recommendation	3.32	0.99	0.62(**)	1														
Working atmosphere																		
Pleasant working environment	3.82	0.78	0.34(**)	0.40(**)	1													
Corporate management style	3.69	0.78	0.31(**)	0.33(**)	0.60(**)	1												
Team work and team culture	3.82	0.80	0.31(**)	0.34(**)	0.56(**)	0.60(**)	1											
Career Opportunities																		
Good opportunities for development	3.94	0.83	0.33(**)	0.34(**)	0.40(**)	0.42(**)	0.47(**)	1										
Good opportunities for promotion	3.77	0.86	0.27(**)	0.28(**)	0.37(**)	0.36(**)	0.39(**)	0.58(**)	1									
Qualification and further education	3.77	0.86	0.23(**)	0.30(**)	0.34(**)	0.34(**)	0.41(**)	0.51(**)	0.55(**)	1								
Work – Life – Comfort																		
Flexible working time	3.31	0.97	0.28(**)	0.25(**)	0.41(**)	0.38(**)	0.30(**)	0.28(**)	0.32(**)	0.32(**)	1							
Good work-life-balance	3.44	0.88	0.27(**)	0.29(**)	0.45(**)	0.39(**)	0.34(**)	0.26(**)	0.32(**)	0.27(**)	0.61(**)	1						
Attractive location	3.48	0.97	0.28(**)	0.26(**)	0.37(**)	0.34(**)	0.30(**)	0.27(**)	0.27(**)	0.28(**)	0.43(**)	0.45(**)	1					
Task Attractiveness																		
Challenging assignments	3.77	0.86	0.29(**)	0.30(**)	0.34(**)	0.36(**)	0.39(**)	0.40(**)	0.39(**)	0.41(**)	0.33(**)	0.31(**)	0.33(**)	1				
Latitude for independent creative work	3.44	0.97	0.29(**)	0.28(**)	0.40(**)	0.44(**)	0.39(**)	0.35(**)	0.35(**)	0.33(**)	0.50(**)	0.45(**)	0.38(**)	0.53(**)	1			
Rapid assumption of responsibility	3.52	0.87	0.24(**)	0.22(**)	0.35(**)	0.40(**)	0.36(**)	0.32(**)	0.36(**)	0.31(**)	0.38(**)	0.36(**)	0.34(**)	0.45(**)	0.40(**)	1		
Payment Attractiveness																		
Attractive Income	3.87	0.83	0.26(**)	0.26(**)	0.34(**)	0.34(**)	0.35(**)	0.41(**)	0.46(**)	0.43(**)	0.35(**)	0.32(**)	0.37(**)	0.38(**)	0.44(**)	0.33(**)	1	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Note: N = 2257

TABLE 4

Confirmatory factor analysis: unconstrained and constrained model with equal measurement weights

		Unconstrained Model												Nested Model			
		Germany			China			Hungary			India			Germany	China	Hungary	India
		B	S.E.	β	B	S.E.	β	B	S.E.	β	B	S.E.	β	β	β	β	β
Recommendation	Intention to	1.00		0.83	1.00		0.95	1.00		0.80	1.00		0.72	0.86	0.77	0.76	0.77
Tendency to apply after graduation	Apply	0.96	0.06	0.75	0.54	0.09	0.63	0.78	0.09	0.64	1.05	0.15	0.72	0.72	0.77	0.68	0.66
Team work and team culture	Working atmosphere	1.00		0.78	1.00		0.81	1.00		0.70	1.00		0.66	0.78	0.74	0.73	0.65
Corporate management style		0.98	0.04	0.77	0.84	0.07	0.75	1.08	0.08	0.79	0.97	0.09	0.75	0.77	0.76	0.78	0.75
Pleasant working environment	Career Opportunities	0.99	0.04	0.79	0.77	0.07	0.65	1.07	0.08	0.75	0.94	0.10	0.71	0.78	0.71	0.74	0.71
Qualification and further education		1.00		0.68	1.00		0.66	1.00		0.79	1.00		0.67	0.71	0.69	0.74	0.65
Good opportunities for promotion	Work – Life – Comfort	1.16	0.06	0.77	1.01	0.10	0.71	0.91	0.06	0.75	1.14	0.11	0.78	0.76	0.77	0.77	0.72
Good opportunities for development		1.07	0.05	0.76	1.25	0.12	0.85	0.85	0.06	0.72	0.85	0.09	0.65	0.75	0.76	0.74	0.71
Attractive location	Task Attractiveness	1.00		0.52	1.00		0.55	1.00		0.67	1.00		0.55	0.54	0.59	0.63	0.54
Good work-life-balance		1.19	0.08	0.74	1.53	0.19	0.81	1.08	0.09	0.78	1.10	0.15	0.65	0.75	0.70	0.78	0.67
Flexible working time		1.46	0.10	0.78	1.25	0.16	0.66	1.15	0.09	0.74	1.33	0.17	0.73	0.76	0.72	0.76	0.72
Rapid assumption of responsibility		1.00		0.73	1.00		0.60	1.00		0.65	1.00		0.64	0.72	0.66	0.61	0.62
Latitude for independent creative work		1.28	0.06	0.82	1.43	0.15	0.80	1.05	0.10	0.66	1.15	0.13	0.69	0.80	0.81	0.70	0.72
Challenging assignments		0.93	0.05	0.66	1.26	0.14	0.77	0.98	0.09	0.65	1.04	0.12	0.63	0.69	0.72	0.61	0.60

Note: B = unstandardized coefficients; β = standardized coefficients

Measurement weights were fixed across countries in the nested model

TABLE 5
Results of the unconstrained SEM

		Germany			China			Hungary			India		
		β	B	S.E.									
Working Atmosphere	← Employer Image	0.80	0.93	0.06	0.94	2.02	0.38	0.82	0.91	0.10	0.91	1.11	0.15
Career Opportunities	← Employer Image	0.87	0.97	0.06	0.86	1.73	0.35	0.80	1.16	0.12	0.94	1.13	0.15
Work – Life – Comfort	← Employer Image	0.86	0.91	0.07	0.80	1.55	0.32	0.78	1.05	0.12	0.84	0.85	0.14
Task Attractiveness	← Employer Image	0.94	1.00		0.61	1.00		0.80	1.00		0.91	1.00	
Payment Attractiveness	← Employer Image	0.58	0.89	0.06	0.58	1.53	0.31	0.65	1.19	0.12	0.58	1.09	0.15
Employer Image	→ Intention to Apply	0.61	0.92	0.07	0.45	0.85	0.24	0.61	0.65	0.09	0.55	0.74	0.13

Note: B = unstandardized coefficients; β = standardized coefficients

All β values significant ($p \leq .001$)

TABLE 6**Results of the nested SEM and description of international differences**

Relation between constructs		Germany	China	Hungary	India
Working atmosphere	← Employer Image	0.80 ²	0.91 ¹³⁴	0.83	0.91
Career Opportunities	← Employer Image	0.87	0.83	0.80	0.94
Work – Life – Comfort	← Employer Image	0.85	0.87	0.78	0.85
Task Attractiveness	← Employer Image	0.94 ²³	0.66 ¹⁴	0.78 ¹²	0.91 ³
Payment Attractiveness	← Employer Image	0.58 ³	0.60 ³	0.65 ¹²	0.58
Employer Image	→ Intention	0.60 ²³⁴	0.43	0.62	0.55

Note: Reported coefficients are standardized regression coefficients (β)

All β values significant ($p \leq .001$)

¹²³⁴ = significant different to Germany, China, Hungary, India

FIGURE 1
Research model

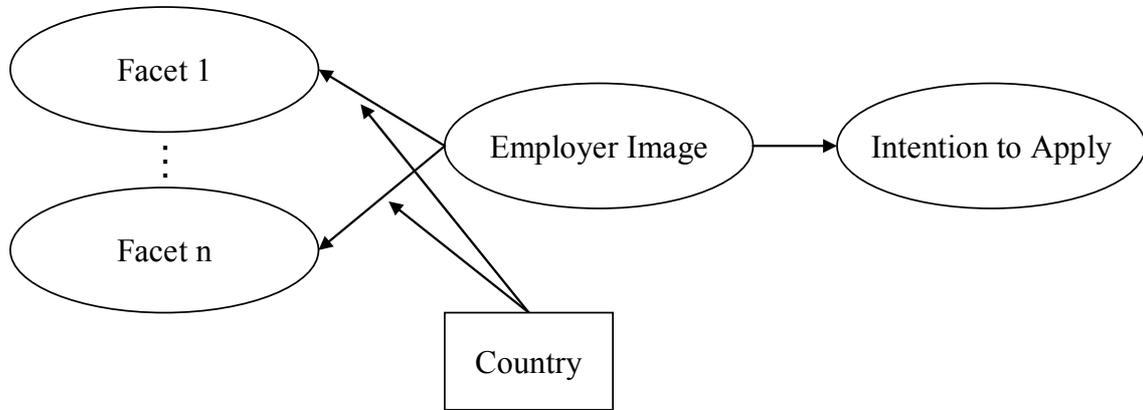


FIGURE 2
Results of the SEM for the different countries

