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Conceptualizing Cross-Border Identity-Based Employer Brand Management

Abstract

Due to a raising need for high potentials and decreasing birth rates in many industrialized countries, the recruitment of talents will become one of the biggest challenges for national and cross-border companies. In this regard and as a result of a general brand focus in the last years, brand management principles have recently been applied to employers and termed employer brand respectively employer brand management. Even though the concept of employer brand management came up amongst practitioners in the 1990s, employer brand management is still lacking a comprehensive theoretical foundation. Therefore, the goal of this paper is to conceptualize employer brand management on the basis of the identity-based brand approach and to characterize employer brand identity and employer brand image as core constructs. Furthermore, it is shown, how national culture and national development influence the employer brand perception process in the international context. The result is a cross-border identity-based employer brand management model that assists cross-border companies in defining and managing an adequate strategy which meets the demands of the target groups.

Conceptualizing Cross-Border Identity-Based Employer Brand Management

Introduction

Due to raising foreign direct investments and market liberalizations, business becomes more and more international. The ability of a cross-border company to deal with the resulting competitive pressure not only depends on its successful management of all business units and departments (Oesterle, 2005) but is especially determined by its competent work force. Because of a structural change from an industrial to an information society, knowledge worker with intercultural competencies and outstanding management qualities nowadays become a key success factor for cross-border companies.

But the raising need for these high-potentials is contrasted with a decreasing talent pool due to shrinking birth rates in many industrialized countries. As an answer to the shortage of the high-potential pool that many western companies are confronted with since the upcoming of the New Economy in the 1990s, the consulting company McKinsey and Company proclaimed the so called *war for talent* (Axelrod et al, 2001; Chambers et al., 1998). While today many companies have to struggle for talented recruits, high-potentials can select their employer of choice. Therefore, the recruitment of talents will become one of the biggest challenges for national and cross-border companies.

In this regard and as a result of a general brand focus in the last years, brand management principles have recently been applied to employers (Ambler, Barrow, 1996) and termed employer brand respectively employer brand management. Companies use branding activities in order to promote themselves as a good place to work and to differentiate themselves in a positive way from other employers in order to attract high-potential candidates.

When it comes to the international context, cross-border companies can choose between different branding strategies which range from local orientation with differentiated domestic

market activities to global orientation with fully standardized world market activities. In order to realize cost-reduction and scale effects, especially companies for consumer goods prefer a global strategy. But the heterogeneous consumer reactions raise doubt, whether global branding activities can create a worldwide standardized brand image and assume that the brand perception differs in the international context (Erdem et al., 2006; Hsieh, 2002; Hsieh et al., 2004; Hsieh, Lindridge, 2005; Roth, 1995). Especially national economy and culture are supposed to have an impact on the brand perception process. In order to anticipate these effects as a basis for strategic decision making and to manage the employer brand in the international context, a thorough understanding of the employer brand perception process is necessary for cross-border companies.

In this regard, the purpose of this paper is to conceptualize cross-border employer brand management. Even though the concept of employer brand management came up in the 1990s as an answer of practitioners to the labor shortage, employer brand management is still lacking a comprehensive theoretical foundation. Therefore, the first goal of this paper is to identify an appropriate brand approach. As the employer brand is – according to state of the art in branding research – interpreted from an identity-based view, it is necessary to characterize employer brand identity and employer brand image as relevant constructs and identify constitutive construct elements. The second aim then is to show, how economic development and culture can influence the employer brand perception process. The synopsis of aim one and two results in goal three that is a cross-border identity-based employer brand management model which assists employers to identify variations between employer identity and image depending on national economy and culture. Goal four is to define a process for cross-border identity-based employer brand management.

Conceptual foundation

Identification of an Appropriate Brand Management Approach

The comprehension of the term *brand* and the interpretation of *brand management* have changed gradually in the last years due to converting market settings (Meffert, Burmann, 2005). Today, the brand is interpreted as a social psychological phenomenon with a focus on subjective and emotional aspects. According to the identity-based brand approach, a brand can be defined as a set of needs with specific characteristics which sustainably distinguishes this set of needs from others addressing the same basic needs from the target group's point of view (Burmann et al., 2003).

The identity-based brand approach supplements the external demander perspective with the internal identity perspective to a holistic brand concept. Even though a consumer focus is necessary for a brand's success, brand image is already a result of branding activities and thus only a part of the branding design field. A brand primarily has to be internally designed in order to be externally accepted as a unique competence-based set of attributes. Thus, brand image and brand identity are crucial constructs of the identity-based brand management.

The brand identity represents the core of a brand from an internal perspective. It can be interpreted as a statement concept (Kapferer, 1992) which includes all characteristics a brand expresses firstly inwards and then outwards. This statement concept is constituted by the interaction between the internal target group among themselves and between the internal and external target groups of the brand. There is a constant exchange between brand identity and brand image through the marketing mix as a brand's steering concept and the feedback of external target groups. This interaction can change the identity as well as the image in the course of time (Burmann, Meffert, 2005). The brand image represents a multi-dimensional attitude construct in terms of an inner conception in the mind of a recipient as a result of the individual, subjective recognition and decryption of all brand signals (Burmann, Meffert,

2005). It can be interpreted as the impact concept from the view of a recipient with regard to his evaluation of the brand's ability to fulfill individual needs.

According to Burmann and Meffert (Burmann, Meffert, 2005), the theoretical foundation of the identity-based brand approach is the combination of the market based view (Barney, 1991; Penrose, 1959; Prahalad, Harmel, 1990; Selznick, 1957) with it's structure-conduct-performance-paradigm and the resource based view (Bain, 1959; Mason, 1939; Porter, 1980/1981) with it's resource-conduct-performance-paradigm. The main goal of brand management is to differentiate a company's products and services from its competitors. As the market-based view assumes free trading of resources, it is not possible to create a brand with a single focus on the outside-in perspective since all differentiating resources can immediately be supplied and imitated from competitors. The differentiation can only be achieved when unique resources and competencies of a company are also taken into account. At the same time, a solely orientation on company-specific characteristics would weaken a company's market position since the success of a brand is determined by the consumers behavior at the market. According to the market and resource based view, a brand can be interpreted as a company's ability to combine its resources in line with market requirements (Burmann, Meffert, 2005).

Employer Brand Management as Stakeholder Specific Management Approach in order to Generate Recruit Preferences for Employers

The framework for employer brand management is the corporate brand which promotes a corporate entity with it's products and services to multiple stakeholders of a company. Within the scope of employer brand management, the reference object for branding activities is the company itself with a focus on it's role as an employer. According to this, the employer brand is the result of a particular stakeholder perception of the corporate brand by potential, actual

and former employees. Hence, the employer brand is a stakeholder specific manifestation of the corporate brand with a complement of employer characteristics. The actual brand performance is a job position's benefit package like salary, work content etc.

Companies use employer brand management in order to position themselves as an employer of choice at the labor market (Backhaus, Tikoo, 2004; Cable, Turban, 2003; Collins, Stevens, 2002). By affecting the behavior of all target groups at all relevant job markets, the aim of employer brand management is to maximize the employer brand value as a key indicator for employer brand equity (Ambler, Barrow, 1996; Backhaus, Tikoo, 2004; Berthon et al., 2005; Collins, Stevens, 2002).

Even though employer brand management evolved in parallel to the identity-based brand approach, only few academic analyses interpret the employer brand as a holistic concept (Backhaus, Tikoo, 2004; Lievens et al., 2007). But especially the holistic view of the identity-based brand approach with a focus on the interaction between identity and image is suitable for the analyses of variations in the employer brand perception process in the international context. From an identity-based view, the employer brand can be defined as a set of needs with specific characteristics which sustainably distinguishes this set of needs from others addressing the same basic needs from the target employees' point of view at the labor market (Sponheuer, 2010). With regard to diverse employee groups, the internal perspective of the employer brand addresses all current employees of a company and refers to the internal job market; the external perspective focuses on potential as well as former employees and refers to the external job market (see figure 1). Employer brand management can be defined as the operative and strategic management process of planning, implementing, steering and controlling of all employer brand activities (Sponheuer, 2010).

Insert figure 1 here

Basic Strategies for Cross-Border Employer Brand Management

When it comes to the international context, companies can choose between different branding strategies which range from local orientation with differentiated domestic market activities to global orientation with fully standardized world market activities. Depending on the advantages of a global standardization and the need for localization, one can determine four basic strategies for cross-border employer brand management (see figure 2). They follow Bartlett and Ghoshal's basic typology of cross-border management strategies (Bartlett, Ghoshal, 1998/ 2002).

Insert figure 2 here

International employer brand management focuses domestic labor markets since the aim of international companies is the realization of domestic business success. The international employer brand is mainly designed to fulfill the needs of domestic target groups. If needed, cross-border branding activities of an ethnocentric strategy follow the domestic company's branding design.

Multinational employer brand management stretches the uniqueness of each labor market. Hence, employer brands have a maximum of local orientation and are designed to fulfill the needs of local target groups. Because of the huge heterogeneity of all local labor markets, employer brand management activities of a polycentric strategy go along with local personnel politics of the multinational company.

Because of the striving for global efficiency, the activities of a global employer brand management are standardized to a maximum with a world labor market orientation. As a consequence of this geocentric strategy, mostly solely one global employer brand is designed and implemented worldwide regardless of any local adaptation requirements.

Transnational employer brand management combines in a regiocentric strategy the advantages of a global orientation and the need for local adaptation. Hence, standardized

employer brands are designed for homogenous labor market segments. Within the scope of defined personnel politics standards, each subsidiary can adopt it's employer brand to local demands in order to meet the requirements of domestic labor markets.

Cross-Border Identity-Based Employer Brand Management Model

Employer Brand Identity as Statement Concept

Analogous to the considerations of Burmann and Meffert, basic principles for an employer brand's manifestation are interaction, continuity, consistence and individuality (Burmann, Meffert, 2005). According to this, employer brand identity can be defined as the consistent, in time and space constant features of a brand which sustainably shape the brand's unique character from the inner perspective and can be affected by the interaction between internal and external target groups (Burmann et al., 2003; Sponheuer, 2010). Hence employer brand identity is a statement concept which includes all characteristics a brand represents at first inwards and then outwards. Depending on the perspective, there are two different identity categories with each two identity forms. From a status-perspective, the as-is identity represents the self-perception by a company's current employees and manifests itself in the actual implementation of all by the management defined contents of the brand; the as-should identity stands for the target identity for which the employer strives for. From the perspective of identity attribution, the self-perception of the employer brand held by internal target groups (like employees) expresses itself in the employer brand identity; the outer perception of the employer brand held by external target groups (like potential employees) conveys itself in the employer brand image. Because of the personnel marketing mix and the feedback of external target groups, there is a continual linkage between employer brand identity and image that can change both constructs in the course of time.

Personnel Marketing Mix as Steering Concept

In order to promote it's unique employer brand identity in the international context, a company at first has to define it's as-should identity as a result of all requirements from domestic and international stakeholders. The management then has to deduce an adequate strategy which positions the target identity at all domestic and international business units and at the external labor market. In order to do so, the defined as-should identity has to be consolidated into an essential benefit proposition which transports a brand's character in an authentic, comprehensive way. After that, the positioning strategy has to be implemented at an operational level by embedding the employer brand in the mind of internal and external target groups in terms of employer- and need-specific contents. This means from an internal perspective to transform the as-is identity into the as-should identity in all domestic and international business units. From an external perspective, it means to position the employer brand at the domestic and international labor market with the personnel marketing mix as steering concept of the employer brand. Following the marketing mix for consumer goods, the personnel mix consists of the elements

- performance (i. e. all decisions concerning the actual job offering of a company like job description, relevant demands, competencies and tasks),
- compensation (in terms of compensation policy, fringe benefits, work time and vacation regulations),
- equipment (e. g. facility, working materials),
- processes (in terms of touch points between employer and employees),
- communication (claim, promotion channels etc.).

Need of Congruity between Employer Brand Identity and Image

Like written before, the aim of employer brand management is to maximize the employer brand value as a key indicator for employer brand equity. From an internal perspective, the behavioral relevance of the employer brand is mainly affected by the employer brand identity in all domestic and international business units and expresses itself in the employees' commitment, loyality etc. From an external perspective, the behavioral relevance of the employer brand is mainly influenced by the employer brand image and conveys itself in the employer brand awareness and preference of recruits worldwide. Because of the constant interaction between the internal and external perspective of the employer brand, brand management has to ensure, that the employer brand does not suffer from schizophrenic characteristics and transports congruent impressions. Following the identity-based brand approach of Burmann and Meffert (Burmann, Meffert, 2005), an utmost congruity between the internal and external perspective of the employer brand is a prerequisite for a strong employer brand.

From a theoretical point of view, the risk of a diminished employer brand management success due to incongruent brand signals can be explained by Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance. Festinger states, that individuals strive for cognitive congruity in the sense of a non-contradictory combination of inner experiences, cognitions and attitudes (Festinger, 1957). As individuals experience the inner state of cognitive dissonance as an unpleasant tension, they try to avoid it in advance or try to reduce it in retrospect (Festinger, 1957). From an external perspective, contradictory employer brand statements could diminish the attraction of an employer and with that reduce talents' application intentions. Because brand messages can only be rigidified by steady repetition of identical stimuli, potential applicants only learn on the basis of revised constant experiences to react in a certain way and to establish an inner brand attitude. In the case of a brand dilution, talents could become unsure

about the employer brand's benefit proposition so that their trust in the brand's performance could be reduced.

Employer Brand Image as Impression Concept

Like the comprehension of the term brand, the interpretation of the term image has changed gradually in the last years. Image theory today is mainly influenced by attitude research, so that image can be interpreted as an attitude construct with cognitive and affective elements (Trommsdorff, 2009). Following state of the art research in image theory (Burmann, Meffert, 2005; Keller, 1993), employer brand image can be defined as an attitude construct which represents an inner embedded, consolidated, judgmental impression of an employer in the mind of potential, actual and former employees as a result of the individual recognition and decoding process of all employer brand signals. According to Burmann and Stolle (Burmann, Stolle, 2007) one can assume, that this attitude construct manifests itself in two different layers depending on the level of abstraction. In terms of a multidimensional evaluation, it manifests itself in constitutive brand dimensions (partial images); in terms of an overall evaluation of the employer brand, it manifests itself on the highest hierarchical level as a holistic impression respectively attitude (overall image).

The employer brand image represents the outer perspective of the employer brand in the sense of an impression concept from the perspective of external target groups. The impression thereby refers to the subjectively perceived suitability of the employer brand to fulfill individual needs. Analogous to the differentiation of the employer brand identity, there are two different image forms from a status-perspective. The as-is image represents the outer perception of the actual brand performance; the as-should image stands for the ideal image from the perspective of external target groups.

Identification of Constitutive Employer Brand Image Elements

Employer Brand Associations

Following scheme theory, employer brand knowledge is stored as semantic information in the individual's mind and is arranged in associative networks for smaller information units and schemes for superior, consolidating information units (Bartlett, 1916). As means-end-theory states, semantic information is a result of a link between subjectively evaluated performance bundles (means) and individual values of the recipient (end) (Tolman, 1932). Associations are stored in a hierarchical structure in terms of means-end-chains. Following Walker and Olson, the basic structure of means-end chains consists of concrete and abstract attributes, functional and psychological consequences, instrumental and terminal values (Walker, Olson, 1991) (see figure 3).

Insert figure 3 here

State of the art research confirms that associations are an important element for the conceptualization of employer brand image since important research models interpret brand image as bundle of relevant brand associations (Backhaus, Tikoo, 2004; Burmann, Stolle 2007; Keller, 1993;). Scheme- and means-end-theory further suppose that there exist different types of employer brand associations depending on the abstraction level in terms of summarized information (Alba, Hutchinson, 1987; Chattopadhyay, Alba, 1988). One can assume, that the higher the abstraction level, the higher the information content and behavioral relevance of the stored associations. Following Keller, employer brand associations can be classified into three major categories of increasing scope: attributes, benefits, and overall image (Keller, 1993).

Employer Brand Attributes

Employer brand attributes can be defined as essential features whicht substantially characterize an employer from the perspective of employer brand recipients. Due to their descriptive character, employer brand attributes represent the lowest level of employer brand information. Like scheme- and means-end-theory illustrated, recruits choose their future employer on the basis of benefit related imaginations which result from subjective recognition and individual interpretation of employer brand attributes on a higher hierarchical level. Hence, employer brand attributes are the fundament for the emergence of benefit related imaginations and accordingly built the basic components for the conceptualization of the employer brand image.

Like existing (employer) brand research models show, there different forms of employer brand associations. Here, attributes are distinguished according to how directly they are linked to the employer brand performance. Instrumental attributes are those features which characterize an employer in an actual, objectively observable way. They include recipients' imaginations about work content, environment, promotion opportunities, salary etc. Abstract attributes are those features which characterize an employer in terms of emotional, ideal and social psychological aspects.

Employer Brand Benefit

Employer brand benefit is the personal value which potential, actual and former employees attach to the employer brand. It is the aggregation of all relevant instrumental and abstract employer brand attributes and represents a multidimensional construct with different need categories. Here, employer brand benefit is interpreted as a three-dimensional construct with a functional, economic and symbolic dimension. The functional category includes all aspects which directly recur on the instrumental features of a job offer like work content, work

environment and job security. Economic benefit implies all monetary aspects which recipients anticipate with the job offer like salary and fringe benefits. The symbolic benefit is a result of an individual's striving for group membership, self-expression and differentiation.

Overall Employer Brand Image

The overall employer brand image is the result of an individual aggregation of all functional, economic and symbolic employer brand benefit dimensions and hence is characterized by the highest abstraction level. As stated before, employer brand image manifests itself depending on the level of abstraction in two different layers namely in partial images and in the overall image. The latter one represents the overall employer brand image which can be equaled to the employer brand attitude.

National Characteristics Affecting Employer Brand Perception

National Culture

National Culture can be interpreted as the totality of all key assumptions, values, norms, attitudes and beliefs of a social entity that expresses itself in a variety of behavioral patterns and artefacts (Kutschker, Schmid, 2011). It is a collective programming of the mind that influences the mental structuring of real-life phenomena like perception, thinking styles and behavior of a cultural group (Hofstede, 1980). Hence, one can assume that the perception and interpretation process of employer brand signals are influenced by culture. First research on consumer behavior revealed recently, that standardized brand management activities are perceived and interpreted through a kind of cultural filter and thus lead to different brand images in the international context (Erdem et al., 2006; Hsieh, 2002; Hsieh et al., 2004; Hsieh, Lindridge, 2005; Roth, 1995). Hence, one can assume that the same effect can be observed with regard to cross-border employer brand management. Relying on the cultural

dimensions of the GLOBE study, one can assume the following effects of culture on the identified employer brand image dimensions.

In cultures with a high score in uncertainty avoidance, the functional employer brand benefit dimension is emphasized higher and its impact on the overall employer brand image is higher than in cultures with a low degree in uncertainty avoidance. A high degree of uncertainty avoidance leads to a tendency of risk avoidance and little tolerance towards change (de Luque, Javidan, 2004). Therefore, recruits from cultures with a high degree in uncertainty avoidance orientate themselves on the functional dimension in order to try to inference on a job's uncertainness like job guarantee, occupational safety, health protection etc.

In cultures with a high degree in power distance, the economic and symbolic employer brand benefit dimensions score higher and their impact on the overall employer brand image is higher than in cultures with a low degree in power distance. High power distance relates to a high tendency towards privileged positions and a separation of society into social classes (Carl et al, 2004). Thus, recruits from cultures with a high degree in power distance appreciate financial and social status which expresses itself in the economic and symbolic employer brand benefit dimensions.

In cultures that score high in individualism, the economic and symbolic employer brand benefit dimensions are pronounced higher and their impact on the overall employer brand image is higher than in cultures with a high degree in collectivism. In individualistic cultures, aspects like autonomy, self-determination etc. play an important role. Therefore, recruits from individualistic cultures try to express their self-esteem and independency through the economic and symbolic employer brand benefit dimension.

In cultures with a high degree in gender egalitarism, the functional employer brand dimension is pronounced higher and its impact on the overall employer brand image is higher than in cultures with a low degree in gender egalitarism. High gender egalitarism corresponds with a

low tendency to distribute social roles depending on the biological gender (Emrich et al, 2004). Therefore one can assume that recruits from cultures which score high in gender egalitarism attach more value on merely functional aspects of a job than on masculine aspects like the economic or symbolic benefit of a job offer.

In cultures with a high degree in assertiveness, the economic and symbolic employer brand benefit dimensions are stressed higher and their impact on the overall employer brand image is higher than in cultures with a low degree in assertiveness. Members of assertive cultures tend to aim for personal success, compete with others and reward individual performance. Hence, they stress monetary and status aspects which express themselves in the economic and symbolic dimension.

In cultures with a high degree in future orientation, the functional and economic employer brand benefit dimensions are pronounced higher and their impact on the overall employer brand image is higher than in cultures with a low degree in future orientation. Members of future oriented cultures are characterized by responsibility and persistence and attach value to parsimony (Ashkanasy et al., 2004). Therefore, recruits from future oriented cultures focus on the functional and economic dimension as basis for their long-term, financially successful career.

In cultures with a high degree in performance orientation, the economic and symbolic employer brand benefit dimensions are stressed higher and their impact on the overall employer brand image is higher than in cultures with a low degree in performance orientation. Members of performance oriented cultures tend to promote competition and materialism and reward individual success (Kabasakal, Bodur, 2004). That is the reason why one can assume, that recruits from performance oriented cultures focus on the economic and symbolic employer brand benefit dimension as expression of their personal success.

In cultures with a high degree in humane orientation, the functional employer brand benefit dimension is pronounced higher and its impact on the overall employer brand image is higher that in cultures with a low degree in humane orientation. Humane orientation manifests itself in the way members of one culture interact with each other and in the institutionalized social programs of a society (Kabasakal, Bodur, 2004). Because recruits from humane oriented cultures attach value to the structure of their day-to-day work and the interconnection in the company, they choose their future employer with regard to the functional image dimension.

Economic Development

Besides national culture, economic development is the second important contingent variable which influences the employer brand perception process in the international context. The importance of national wealth for employer brand management becomes clear with regard to brand management for consumer goods. There, the relevance of a country's economic development results from its influence on consumer behavior. In the case of a low income per capita, consumers ask for basic, functional goods they need for their daily life (Roth, 1995). With increasing financial resources, they desire products that express status and prestige (Hsieh, Lindridge, 2005). In the same vein, one can assume that national culture also has an impact on the decision-behavior of recruits during their employer choice process. The impact could be as follows:

In countries with a high economic development, the symbolic employer brand benefit dimension is pronounced higher and its impact on the overall employer brand image is higher than in countries with a low economic development. Recruits from countries with a low income per capita focus on a job's monetary aspects in order to ensure their daily life. With an increasing income per capita, psychological values like status or prestige gain importance.

Cross-Border Identity-Based Employer Brand Management Model as Synopsis of Findings

Within the identity-based employer brand management model, temployer brand identity as statement concept from the inner perspective and employer brand image as impression concept from the outer perspective are the core constructs (see figure 4). The employer brand image construct represents the dependent variable and is designed as follows in a three-dimensional manner: Employer brand attributes represent the hierarchical lowest level of employer brand information and can either be instrumental or abstract in nature. Their densification on a hierarchical higher level results in the employer brand benefit with a functional, economic or symbolic dimension. The aggregation of the employer brand benefit leads on the highest abstraction level to the employer brand attitude which represents a one-dimensional overall evaluation of the employer on a good-bad continuum.

Insert figure 4 here

Like written before, there is a constant interaction between the internal and external perspective of the employer brand whereas an utmost congruity between identity and image is a prerequisite for a strong employer brand. However, an empirical analyses of the as-should identity and the as-is image is only possible, if both constructs are designed in the same manner. Hence, the employer brand identity as independent construct is also designed as a three-dimensional construct with instrumental and abstract employer brand identity attributes; functional, economic and symbolic employer brand identity benefits and an overall employer brand identity.

Since national culture and economic development have a huge impact on the employer brand perception process in the international context, the two constructs are integrated into the research model as moderating variables. The two moderating variables influence the research model in a twofold way. On the one hand, national culture and economic development work like a decoding filter and lead to a selective impression of the personnel marketing mix'

branding signals. On the other hand, the two moderating variables work as collective programming of the mind and influence the manifestation form of the employer brand image dimensions and their influence on the overall employer brand image.

Managerial Implications

As pointed out before, the brand perception process in the international context is influenced by national culture and economic development. These contingent factors can evoke different employer brand images and lead to a discrepancy between employer brand identity and employer brand image (see figure 5).

Insert figure 5 here

As an utmost congruity of employer brand identity and employer brand image is a central predisposition for employer brand equity, cross-border companies have to implement an adequate employer brand management strategy. In order to define and manage an adequate strategy which meets the demands of the target groups, brand executives can refer to the designed cross-border identity-based employer brand management model. In a first step, the model assists in identifying the right level of local adaptation and global standardization depending on national culture and economic development. After the analysis of the internal and external starting point, the model helps in a second step to segment a company's target groups depending on the contingent variables into homogenous clusters and to formulate goals for each cluster. In a third and fourth step, the model assists in defining an adequate employer brand management strategy and in implementing this strategy in all business unites. In a last step, the model helps to sustain the defined goals and to analyze the congruity between employer brand identity and image.

Research Implications

This paper contributes to the research field of employer brand management by formulating a conceptual foundation and by pointing out the influence of national culture and economic development on the brand perception process in the international context. In addition to that, a holistic framework for cross-border identity-based employer brand management was conceptualized. The model explicitly focuses the interaction between employer brand identity and image under the influence of relevant macroeconomic factors. In this context, employer brand identity and image as central perspectives of an employer brand were conceptualized.

Limitations

One limitation of the paper has to be seen in its conceptual character. A broad empirical study conducted in cultural and economic diverse countries would help to validate the designed research model and would give further insights into cross-border employer brand management. Furthermore, national culture and economic development are two contingent factors among others which influence the employer brand perception process in the international context. Therefore, the analysis of other influencing factors like country-of-origin or industry image would contribute to cross-border employer brand management.

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Figures

FIGURE 1: Employer brand image and identity as central perspectives of employer brand

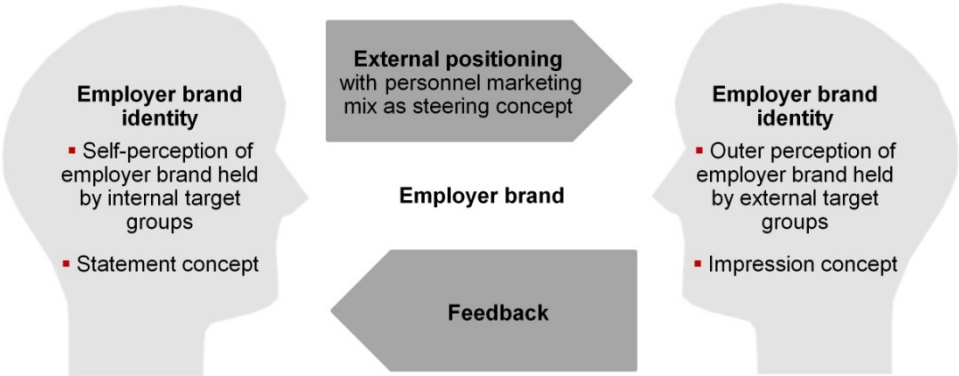

FIGURE 2: Basic strategies for cross-border employer brand management

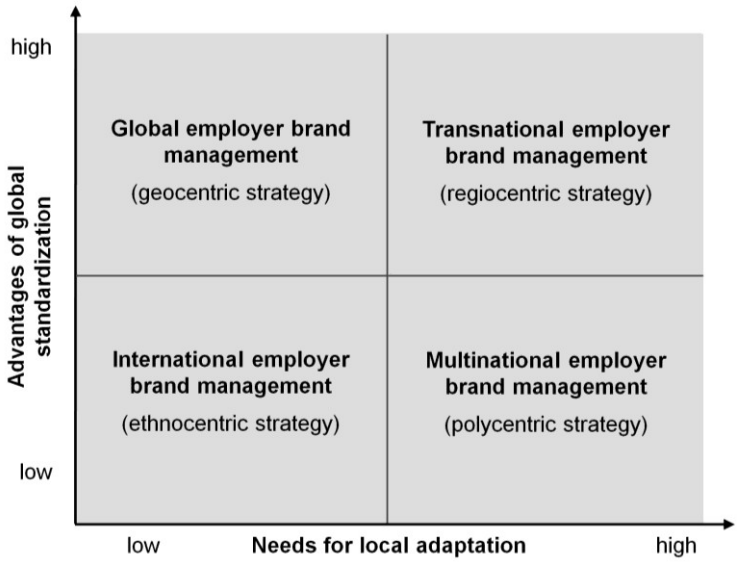

FIGURE 3: Basic structure of means-end-chains

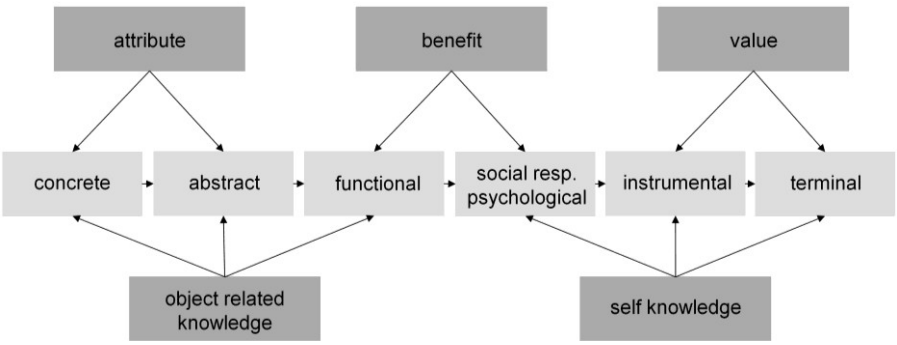

FIGURE 4: Cross-border identity-based employer brand management model

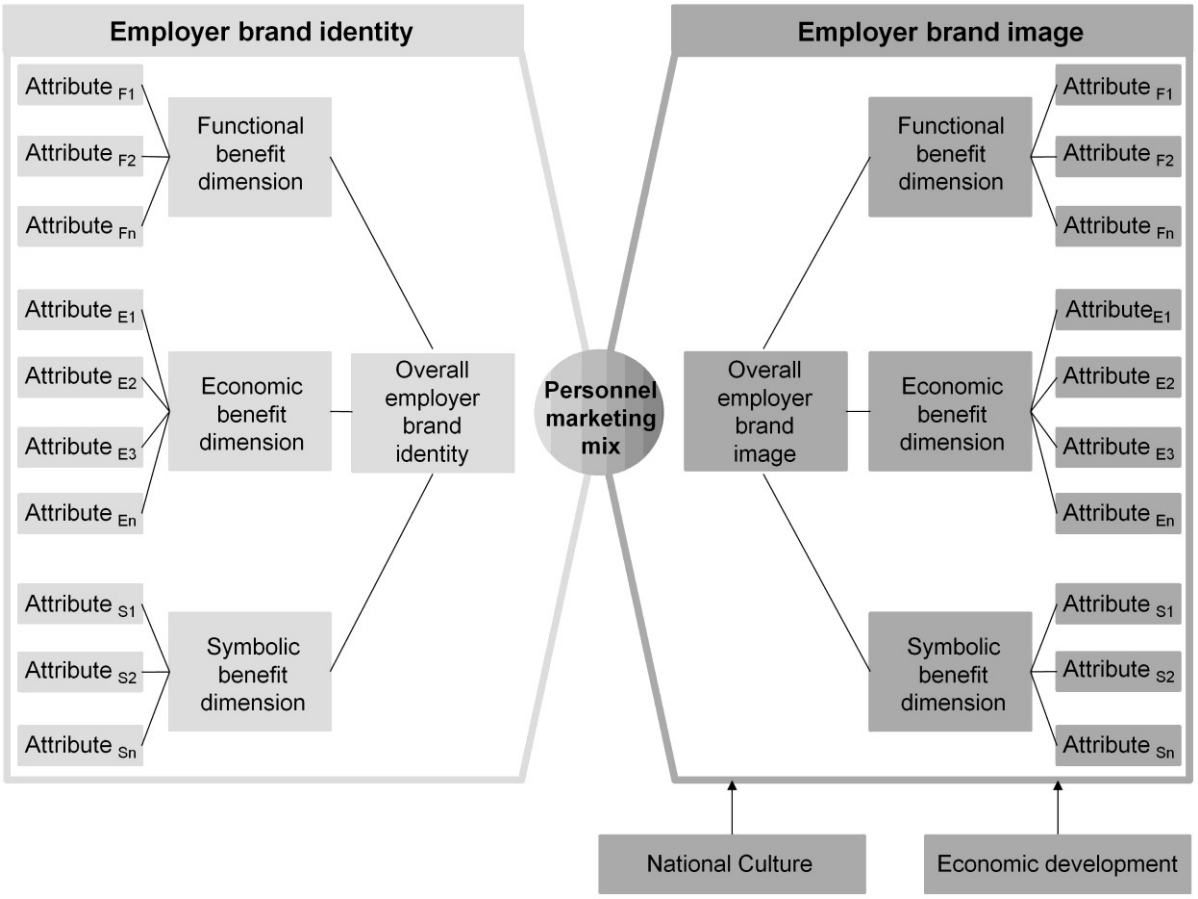
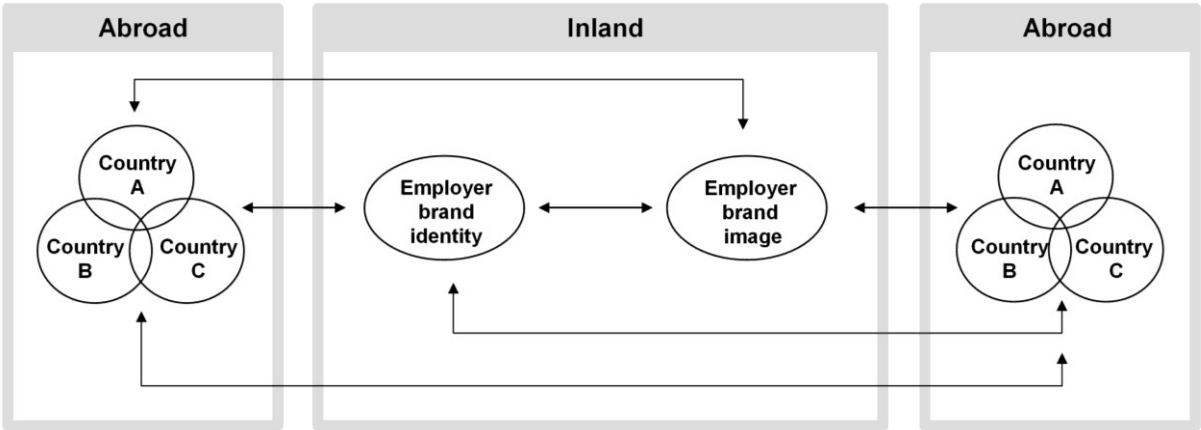
FIGURE 5: Areas of conflict in cross-border employer brand management