

The relationship between employer branding, corporate reputation and intention to apply to a job offer

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Abstract

Purpose – Employer branding is a topic that has gained relevance in the organisational world. Currently, organisations need to differentiate themselves, and one of their biggest challenges is the search and retention of talent. One of the factors that have been associated with attracting talent is employer branding. However, studies that explore the relationship between this, corporate reputation and the intention to apply for a job are scarce. As such, this study aims to analyse the mediating role of corporate reputation in the relationship between employer branding and the intention to apply for a job offer.

Design/methodology/approach – To achieve the goals, data were collected from 225 Portuguese adults. The response rate was 75%. Based on a survey, respondents reported their perceptions of employer branding of a specific organisation, and they rated the organisation's reputation and their intention to apply to that organisation.

Findings – The results showed that employer branding (interest value; social value; economic value; development value; application value) positively influenced an organisation's corporate reputation, which, in turn, increased an individual's intention to apply for an employment offer in that organisation.

Originality/value – The present study is a contribution to the literature on employer branding, as it reinforced the importance that employer branding and corporate reputation play in the intention of applying for a job offer.

Keywords Employer branding, Corporate image, Corporate reputation, Intention to apply, Intention to apply for a job

Paper type Research paper

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Data availability: The data is available only upon reasonable request to the authors.



Introduction

With society in constant change, marked by technological growth, the success of organisations depends directly on human resources. Thus, organisations to survive in the current job market are facing several challenges to grow, sustain themselves (Mosley, 2007) and obtain competitive advantages (Sivertzen *et al.*, 2013). In addition, employers must align their strategy with elements that are attractive to different groups, conveying a clear and realistic internal and external brand message. This has been named employer branding, and its goal is to build and transfer the credibility of an organisation as a great place to work.

Employer branding was first studied by Ambler and Barrow (1996) and focuses on developing a positive image of organisations to improve the talents' attraction and retention. According to Chhabra and Sharma (2014), corporate investment in employer branding is a recent and relevant trend for organisations since one of the biggest corporate challenges is the search and struggle for qualified talent.

Job seekers often consider multiple organisations when they intend to apply for a job and may use corporate reputation as a source of information regarding working conditions in different organisations (Cable and Turban, 2003). According to Weigelt and Camerer (1988), reputation is the set of organisational characteristics socially constructed and based on organisations' previous actions. Therefore, initial decisions to choose a job are often related to the image or reputation of the employer (Gatewood *et al.*, 1993). In this way, the perceptions formed by potential candidates about the image or reputation of the organisation are based on the organisational information available and will influence the decision to apply or not, to a job offer in that organisation. According to Sivertzen *et al.* (2013), corporate reputation has a positive relationship with the intention to apply for a job. Therefore, an organisation with a positive level of corporate reputation makes it more attractive in the market (Cable and Turban, 2003). In sum, employer branding and corporate reputation are key elements in attracting and retaining the best employees (Cappelli, 2001).

Despite being a strategy with a high impact on different organisational stakeholders, there is still much to understand about how employer branding impacts the decision to apply for a job in rural zones because most studies have focused on cities and industrial zones (Cordes and Vogel, 2022; Kashyap and Verma, 2018).

As such, this study aimed to analyse how the candidate's perceptions about employers are related to their decision to apply for a job offer in the Portuguese context. For that, we explored how the dimensions of employer branding are related to corporate reputation, and this, in turn, influences the applicants' decisions to apply for a job offer. Hence, our research question was:

RQ1. How does the applicants' perception of the employer relate to corporate reputation and to the intentions to apply for a job offer?

Based on the empirical demonstrations (Gupta and Saini, 2020; Santiago, 2019), we hypothesized that employer branding by improving the corporate reputation of an organisation will lead to an increase in the intention to apply for a job offer.

This study will contribute theoretically to the literature on employer branding and corporate reputation and to the applied field of human resources management, specifically the recruitment and selection processes. Understating the process through which the perception of the applicants about the company influences the decision to apply for a job offer will enable Portuguese organisations to improve their employer branding and recruitment strategies more purposefully and, at the same time, ameliorate their corporate reputation.

Theoretical reasoning and hypotheses development

The relationship between employer branding and intention to apply

The term employer branding emerged in the 1990s, with the work of [Ambler and Barrow \(1996\)](#); the main aim was to attract, retain and commit potential talents, applying the organisational strategic elements. [Ambler and Barrow \(1996\)](#) showed that brand management provided a coherent management structure to simplify and focus priorities, increasing productivity and improving recruitment, retention and engagement. According to [Backhaus and Tikoo \(2004\)](#), there are differences between brand management and employer branding. While the first seems to be exclusively directed to the external public and oriented to the promotion of products and/or services, the second seems to be directed, both to the internal and external public. In employer branding, products are jobs, which must attract, develop and motivate employees, meet their needs and be framed with the organisational goals ([Gupta et al., 2018](#)).

[Ambler and Barrow \(1996\)](#) defined employer branding as the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by work and recognised by the organisation. As such, employer branding provides three types of benefits:

- (1) functional (concern the activities offered to employees for their development);
- (2) economic (material and monetary rewards); and
- (3) psychological (related to feelings of belonging to the organisation, sense of direction and purpose) ([Ambler and Barrow, 1996](#)).

For [Highhouse et al. \(2003\)](#), organisations must differentiate themselves from their competitors and be seen as attractive employers for potential candidates and current employees. For this reason, organisations are paying greater attention to their image, reputation and culture, to ensure advantages over their competitors. This is also one reason why employer branding is used for effective attraction and retention of talented employees ([Gupta et al., 2018](#)). Likewise, [Backhaus and Tikoo \(2004\)](#) mentioned practices of attracting candidates based on employer branding actions have increased to reach a balance between organisational expectations, employees and potential candidates. For the authors, employer branding includes:

- functional benefits (desirable elements of the work itself, such as salary or flexible benefits); and
- symbolic benefits (related to the individual's perception of the organisation, such as the prestige or social approval that a candidate feels when joining an organisation).

[Sullivan \(2004\)](#) defined employer branding as a long-term strategic process focused on managing knowledge about the organisation and on the perception that employees, and potential employees, have about the organisation. Therefore, employer branding must place the organisation on the market, giving it a good image while promoting it as a good place to work.

Despite the multiplicity of employer branding definitions, researchers seem to agree about its importance for organisations since it can work as a remarkable strategy for better positioning it in the market and to have a reliable and attractive employer image to work. Therefore, the purpose of employer branding is to ameliorate the image of employees in the organisation and to recognise it as a "good place to work" by passing this message abroad. In addition, it also intends for those employees to transmit the organisation's values to potential candidates and ensure that everyone meets the defined goals while promoting their commitment to the organisation ([Sakka and Ahammad, 2020](#)). Thus, organisations that do not recognise the importance of employer branding, and fail to implement it strategically, tend to be at a disadvantage in the market.

With the concept of employer branding, the concept of employer attractiveness emerged, which resulted from the need for employer branding strategies to make the organisation more attractive. Therefore, the more attractive the organisation is to work for, the better its employer branding will be (Berthon *et al.*, 2005). Although the concepts of employer branding and employer attractiveness are related, there are differences. Employer attractiveness emerged from the communication and brand of the organisation, the recruitment processes and the characteristics of the function, while employer branding is a marketing tool whose purpose is to highlight the attractive characteristics of the organisation, for the interior and exterior of the same, to increase the interest of potential candidates and for them to see it as a crucial choice (Berthon *et al.*, 2005). Hence employer attractiveness is a form of strategic management to reduce the costs of the recruitment, selection and retention processes (Cordes and Vogel, 2022).

Ehrhart and Ziegert (2005) defined employer attractiveness as the perceived benefits of a job in an organisation, i.e. an employing organisation is seen as attractive when it does its best to make potential candidates consider it a good place to work. Berthon *et al.* (2005) defined it as the expected benefits that an employee perceives while working for the organisation. Berthon *et al.* (2005) expanded Ambler and Barrow's (1996) employer branding model from three to five dimensions:

- (1) *Value of interest*: assesses whether employer attractiveness is influenced by innovative work practices, employee creativity, production of new and higher quality products and having a pleasant work environment, that is, it demonstrates the level of attraction of a candidate for an organisation (this dimension results from the improvement of the psychological benefits, proposed by Ambler and Barrow (1996));
- (2) *Social value*: evaluates whether employer attractiveness is affected by a healthy work environment, favourable to good interpersonal relationships (this dimension results from the improvement of psychological benefits, proposed by Ambler and Barrow (1996));
- (3) *Economic value*: assesses whether employer attractiveness is influenced by above-average remuneration, job security and promotion opportunities (this dimension results from the improvement of economic benefits (Ambler and Barrow, 1996));
- (4) *Value development*: assesses whether employer attractiveness is influenced by employer recognition, by professional career development as a starting point for future employment opportunities (this dimension results from the improvement of functional benefits by Ambler and Barrow (1996)); and
- (5) *Application value*: assesses whether employer attractiveness is influenced by the opportunity for employees to apply and teach what they know in a customer-oriented environment and for humanitarian actions (this dimension results from the improvement of the functional benefits of Ambler and Barrow (1996)).

Employer attractiveness was operationalised considering the attractiveness factors highlighted by potential candidates when choosing an employer (Berthon *et al.*, 2005). These factors are considered by candidates aligned with their needs and expectations (Cable and Turban, 2001). Even so, several authors have proposed different approaches to research these attributes. For example, Highhouse *et al.* (2003) suggested that attractiveness factors can be instrumental and representative qualities in which candidates refer to what the organisation offers and what is beneficial to them (salary, flexible hours, location), in turn, for employers, they represent intangible assets (prestige, degree of business innovation, culture).

Regardless of whether there are different ways of understanding employer attractiveness and its operationalisation, they all focus on identifying the factors that lead potential candidates to opt for one organisation over others (Berthon *et al.*, 2005).

According to Berthon *et al.* (2005), as organisations seek to attract new employees, the impact of employer branding will increase, and only when organisations work to integrate these factors will be able to successfully compete to attract talent. Thus, employer attractiveness seems to lead to employer branding (Berthon *et al.*, 2005). Employer branding has been consistently associated with attracting talent to organisations (Ahmad *et al.*, 2020) and higher retention rates (Kashyap and Verma, 2018). For example, Chandrasekaran (2020) showed that organisations that had in their strategy and employer branding practices increased the attraction and retention of talent. Also, Arasanmi and Krishna (2019) highlighted the positive relationship between employer branding and workers' intention to apply and their retention. Similarly, Kashyap and Verma (2018) demonstrated that employer attractiveness was positively related to employer choices and retention due to positive corporate reputation management, such as talent management practices. Moreover, employer attractiveness appears to be influenced by the context, culture and nature of organisations; that is, the sector of employment, private or public, acts as a signal to potential applicants (Cordes and Vogel, 2022). According to Oh *et al.* (2014), job applicants use these signs to appraise the job, the employer and their decision to apply (or not), in a way that the attraction to the public sector is smaller when compared to the private and nonprofit sector (Cordes and Vogel, 2022).

The mediating role of corporate reputation

Corporate reputation has been associated with employer branding and employer attractiveness. Organisations with positive corporate reputations tend to be more attractive to candidates and can affect a candidate's decision to apply for a job offer due to the image they have of the organisation (Potgieter and Doubell, 2020).

Fombrun and Shanley (1990) were the pioneers of research on corporate reputation. Given its multidisciplinary nature (Human Resource Management, Marketing, Administration, Sociology and Accounting), there is no consensual definition (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001; Helm, 2005; Wartick, 2002). For example, Fombrun and Shanley (1990) suggested that it represents an intangible asset which generates tangible results and can positively influence the behaviour of the main stakeholders. Therefore, corporate reputation is represented by the desired images and the organisation's identity (Macêdo *et al.*, 2011). Fombrun and Shanley (1990) argued that corporate reputation is an organisation's ability to respond to the expectations of multiple stakeholders through socially elaborated and validated judgment criteria. For Gotsi and Wilson (2001), corporate reputation results from the evaluation of an organisation by its stakeholders when considering the set of organisational attributes conquered over time. This perception can be evaluated in a general or specific way, such as, for example, dividing it into the financial corporate reputation, environmental corporate reputation and social corporate reputation. For Roberts and Dowling (2002), corporate reputation encompasses a set of organisational attributes developed over time that influence the way stakeholders perceive the organisation's corporate conduct. Barnett *et al.* (2006) suggested that reputation can be divided into three types:

- (1) active (characterises reputation as an intangible asset of organisations);
- (2) evaluation (reputation is a product of the moral evaluation of stakeholders); and
- (3) perception (comprises reputation, from the perception of stakeholders, more specifically the organisation's customers).

Since corporate reputation has been considered as the organisation's image (the information received by individuals about the organisation, through the organisation's advertising and/or social networks) or the organisation's identity (alignment between the perceptions of different groups with the organisation's identity), its main characteristic is that it comes from the inside to the outside of the organisation. For this reason, we cannot mention corporate reputation without addressing corporate image. The corporate image can be adapted, but under no circumstances can be controlled by the organisation, as it depends on several external factors (market variation, legal requirements, media coverage) and other external forces that influence the perception of the company (Barnett *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, since organisations cannot control everything that is said about themselves, what they should do is pay attention to the feedback they receive and analyse whether the idealised image corresponds to the intended image.

In sum, corporate reputation is an intangible asset that is sometimes added to superior financial performance, is outlined in the long-term, subject to and associated with the organisation's assessment, and is construed by its consumers, suppliers, employees and partners. Therefore, the greater the reputation of an organisation, the greater the candidates' motivation to apply for a job offer (Edwards, 2010).

Barber and Roehling (1993) suggested that the intention to apply for a job offer is related to personal interest. Some authors (Cable and Judge, 1994; Roberson *et al.*, 2005) identified three types:

- (1) intention to apply for a job offer (personal desire and intent to submit action to a job offer);
- (2) intention to pursue a job (the intention to actively pursue a job or remain on the list of candidates for an offer); and
- (3) the intention to accept a job (the likelihood that a candidate will accept a job offer if offered). These last two seem to be the most relevant in the selection process.

Similarly, Highhouse *et al.* (2003) explored candidate intentions in a recruitment process and identified three components:

- (1) attractiveness of the organisation;
- (2) intentions towards the organisation; and
- (3) prestige of the organisation.

According to Highhouse *et al.* (2003), intentions seem to mediate the effects of the attractiveness and prestige of the organisation in the choice of the organisation as an employer. Indeed, organisations with a good reputation are more attractive in the eyes of investors, customers, suppliers, employees and candidates and can more easily ensure their maintenance over time (Roberts and Dowling, 2002).

Several studies have shown that the organisation's ability to recruit new talent is provided by organisational reputation (Gatewood *et al.*, 1993; Rynes *et al.*, 1991). Turban *et al.* (1998) showed that the perceptions of candidates about the attributes of the position and the organisation were linked to its corporate reputation, showing that the better the perception of the organisation, the greater the attractiveness felt. Thus, Turban *et al.* (1998) evidenced that the reputation of the organisation had a significant influence on attracting potential candidates. Organisational attractiveness and employer branding depend on several factors that, in turn, will influence the intentions to apply for a job (Saini *et al.*, 2014). Sivertzen *et al.* (2013) showed that certain organisational attributes, namely, innovation and psychological value, were predictors of corporate reputation,

which, in turn, influenced the attraction of potential employees. Other studies showed that the attractiveness, image and reputation of an organisation can significantly influence, positively or negatively, the intention to apply for a job offer (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003; Kumari *et al.*, 2020; Sivertzen *et al.*, 2013; Turban and Greening, 1997). Recently, Subbarao *et al.* (2022) showed that the use of social media as a management strategy to improve corporate reputation not only contributed to ameliorating the corporate image of the organisation but also led to higher rates of job search. Similarly, Keppeler and Papenfuß (2021) evidenced the significant role of employer branding for corporate reputation management and recruitment purposes. Therefore, based on the literature, we defined the following hypotheses (Figure 1):

- H1a.* Corporate reputation will mediate the positive relationship between the value of interest and the intention to apply for a job offer.
- H1b.* Corporate reputation will mediate the positive relationship between the social value and the intention to apply for a job offer.
- H1c.* Corporate reputation will mediate the positive relationship between the economic value and the intention to apply for a job offer.
- H1d.* Corporate reputation will mediate the positive relationship between the development value and the intention to apply for a job offer.
- H1e.* Corporate reputation will mediate the positive relationship between the application value and the intention to apply for a job offer.

Method

Participants and procedure

We collected data from 225 participants, of which 76.9% were female. The mean age was 39.23 years old ($SD = 12.56$). Most participants were from an inland zone of the country (35.6%) held graduation in social sciences (53.3%) and worked in administrative (36%), research (33%) and education areas (31%).

We emailed participants from our list of personal contacts to ask them to participate in a study about intentions to apply for a job. Those who answered our email received another one with the hyperlink to the survey and asked them to sign an informed consent. In that email, we also assured the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. From the 300 emails sent, we obtained 225 valid (response rate = 75%).

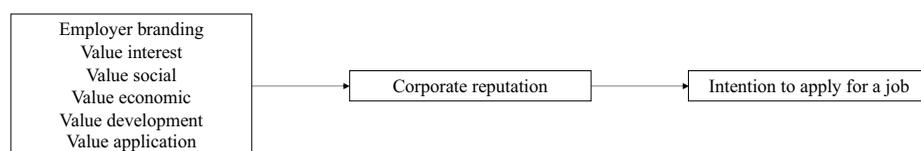


Figure 1. Conceptual model: the mediating role of corporate reputation on the relationship between employer branding and intention to apply to a job offer

Measures

Employer branding. We used the 25-item Employer Attractiveness Scale (EmpAt; [Berthon et al., 2005](#)). The scale assessed the five dimensions of employer attractiveness, and each one included five items:

- (1) value of interest ($\alpha = 0.85$; e.g. “[. . .] an exciting work environment”);
- (2) social value shown to have high reliability ($\alpha = 0.82$; e.g. “[. . .] a relaxed work environment”);
- (3) economic value ($\alpha = 0.76$; e.g. “[. . .] a salary offer above the market average”);
- (4) development value ($\alpha = 0.76$; e.g. “The recognition of my performance by the leadership”); and
- (5) value application ($\alpha = 0.75$; e.g. “[. . .] an active role in society”).

The items were answered using a seven-point Likert scale (1 “not at all important”; 7 “very important”).

Intention to apply for a job offer. To measure the intention to apply for a job offer, we used the five-item scale of [Highhouse et al. \(2003\)](#). This assessed the intentions to apply to the organisation (e.g. “I would accept a job offer from this organisation”) with the items being answered on a five-point Likert scale (1 – *strongly disagree* and 5 – *strongly agree*). The Cronbach’s alpha was 0.84.

Corporate reputation. We used the corporate reputation scale ([Turban et al., 1998](#)). It included four items (e.g. “I have heard a lot of good things about this organisation”), answered on a five-point Likert scale (1 – *strongly disagree*; 5 – *strongly agree*) ($\alpha = 0.92$).

Data analyses

Firstly, we analysed the reliability, using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient (α) to determine the internal consistency, the descriptive statistics and the correlations with SPSS version 25 (IBM® SPSS® Statistics version 25) ([Hayes, 2018](#)). Secondly, to test hypotheses, we performed mediation analyses with Model 4 of the macro-PROCESS in SPSS ([Hayes, 2018](#)).

Results*Descriptive statistics*

[Table 1](#) presents the descriptive statistics, correlations and reliability indices.

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Value interest ^a	6.20	0.74	(0.85)						
2. Social value ^a	6.40	0.62	0.64**	(0.82)					
3. Economic value ^a	6.23	0.71	0.65**	0.52**	(0.76)				
4. Development value ^a	6.42	0.62	0.63**	0.65**	0.60**	(0.76)			
5. Application value ^a	6.04	0.77	0.73**	0.58**	0.59**	0.62**	(0.75)		
6. Corporate reputation ^b	4.43	0.69	0.25**	0.23**	0.23**	0.27**	0.30**	(0.92)	
7. Intention to apply ^b	4.53	0.63	0.28**	0.30**	0.25**	0.25**	0.29**	0.60**	(0.84)

Notes: *N* = 225; **p* < 0.05, ***p* < 0.001; ^a Scale from 1 to 7; ^b Scale from 1 to 5; Cronbach’s alphas are in brackets

Table 1.
Descriptive statistics,
correlations and
Cronbach’s alphas

Hypotheses testing

H1a. *H1a* expected that corporate reputation would mediate the relationship between the value of interest and the intention to apply for a job. The results showed that the indirect effect of corporate reputation on the relationship between the value of interest and intention to apply for a job was 0.12, with a 95% CI (0.04, 0.24), indicating a statistically significant indirect effect. Furthermore, the model explained 38% ($R^2 = 0.38, p < 0.01$) of the variance. The relationship between the value of interest and corporate reputation (a; $B = 0.24, p < 0.01$) and between this and the intention to apply for a job (b; $B = 0.52, p < 0.01$) was significant. Plus, the total effect (c; $B = 0.24, p < 0.01$) between the value of interest and intention to apply for a job was also significant. After the introduction of corporate reputation, the effect of the value of interest on the intention to apply for a job remained significant (c'; $B = 0.12, p < 0.05$), proving to be a partial mediation. As such, *H1a* was supported.

H1b. *H1b* expected that the relationship between social value and intention to apply for a job was mediated by corporate reputation. The results showed a significant indirect effect (0.13, CI 95% [0.04, 0.25]) that explained 39% ($R^2 = 0.39, p < 0.01$) of the variance in the intention to apply for a job. The relationship between social value and corporate reputation (a; $B = 0.25, p < 0.01$), between the latter and the intention to apply for a job (b; $B = 0.51, p < 0.01$) and the total effect (c; $B = 0.30, p < 0.01$) were significant. When corporate reputation entered the model, the effect of social value on the intention to apply for a job remained significant (c'; $B = 0.17, p < 0.01$), suggesting a partial mediation. As such, *H1b* was supported.

H1c. *H1c* expected that the relationship between economic value and intention to apply for a job was mediated by corporate reputation. The results showed a significant indirect effect (0.12, CI 95% [0.05, 0.18]), explaining 38% ($R^2 = 0.38, p < 0.01$) of the variance. The relationship between economic value and corporate reputation (a; $B = 0.22, p < 0.01$) was significant and the relationship between corporate reputation and the intention to apply for a job (b; $B = 0.52, p < 0.01$) as well. The total effect (c; $B = 0.22, p < 0.01$) between economic value and the intention to apply for a job was also significant. After the introduction of corporate reputation, the effect of economic value on the intention to apply for a job remained significant (c'; $B = 0.10, p < 0.05$), revealing a partial mediation. As such, *H1c* was supported.

H1d. *H1d* suggested that the relationship between development value and intention to apply for a job was mediated by corporate reputation. The mediation results showed that the indirect effect was significant (0.16, 95% CI [0.07, 0.27]), that explained 37% ($R^2 = 0.37, p < 0.01$) of the variance. The relationship between development value and corporate reputation (a; $B = 0.30, p < 0.01$) and between this and intention to apply (b; $B = 0.52, p < 0.01$) was significant. Plus, the total effect (c; $B = 0.26, p < 0.01$) between development value and intention to apply for a job was significant. After introducing the corporate reputation, the effect of value development on the intention to apply for a job was no longer significant (c'; $B = 0.10, p > 0.05$), revealing a full mediation. As such, *H1d* was supported.

H1e. *H1e* expected that the relationship between application value and intention to apply for a job was mediated by corporate reputation. The results showed that a significant indirect effect (0.14, 95% CI [0.06, 0.24]), that explained 37% ($R^2 = 0.37, p < 0.01$) of the variance. The relationship between application value and corporate reputation (a; $B = 0.26, p < 0.01$) and the relationship between this and the intention to apply for a job (b; $B = 0.52, p < 0.01$) were significant. The total effect (c; $B = 0.23, p < 0.01$) was also significant. After the introduction of corporate reputation, the effect of application value on the intention to apply for a job

remained significant (c' ; $B = 0.09, p < 0.05$), lending support for partial mediation. Thus, *H1e* was supported (Table 2).

Overall, all the hypotheses were supported and thus demonstrated that all the dimensions of employer branding (value of interest, social, economic, development and application value) influence the applicants' decision to apply for a job offer by improving the corporate reputation.

Discussion

This study demonstrates *how* employer branding may influence the decision of applying to a job offer by exploring the process through which it occurs. Hence, we test whether employer branding relates to the intention to apply for a job offer by analysing the role of corporate reputation as a mediator. This study contributes to a more comprehensive approach to employer branding and its relationship with the applicants' decision to apply (or not) for a job in the Portuguese working context.

Main findings

The results show that the five dimensions of employer branding, proposed by Berthon *et al.* (2005), are positively and significantly related to the intention to apply for a job. Thus, the better the employer branding, the greater the intention to apply for a job in that organisation. Therefore, the results are in line with Berthon *et al.* (2005), that is, all dimensions of employer branding interest value (level of attraction of a potential employee to an organisation); social value (related to a pleasant and relaxed work environment); economic value (linked to economic issues, such as above-average salary); development value (employee appreciation) and application value (employee opportunity to apply their knowledge in an organisational context), seem to count towards attracting candidates to an organisation. Recently, Cordes and Vogel (2022) demonstrated that employer branding was related to the attractiveness of applicants towards a job and influenced their decision. Kashyap and Verma (2018) also showed that employer branding predicted not only the decision to apply for a job offer but also reduced turnover intentions. In 2019, Santiago also evidenced the role of active management strategies to improve their employer branding to

Predictors	Corporate reputation	Intention to apply
Value interest	0.24**	0.12*
Corporate reputation		0.52**
	Indirect effect 0.12 CI95% [0.04, 0.24], $R^2 = 0.38, p < 0.01$	
Social value	0.25**	0.17**
Corporate reputation		0.51**
	Indirect effect 0.13 CI95% [0.04, 0.25], $R^2 = 0.39, p < 0.01$	
Economic value	0.22**	0.10*
Corporate reputation		0.52**
	Indirect effect 0.12 CI95% [0.05, 0.18], $R^2 = 0.38, p < 0.01$	
Development value	0.30**	0.10
Corporate reputation		0.52**
	Indirect effect 0.16 CI95% [0.07, 0.27], $R^2 = 0.37, p < 0.00$	
Application value	0.26**	0.09*
Corporate reputation		0.52**
	Indirect effect 0.14 CI95% [0.06, 0.24], $R^2 = 0.37, p < 0.01$	

Table 2.
Summary of the
mediation analyses

Notes: $N = 225$; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.001$

attract and retain millennials. [Sivertzen et al. \(2013\)](#) also showed that the organisation's employer branding increased its attractiveness to potential job candidates.

Furthermore, the results reveal that the better the organisation's corporate reputation in the labour market, the greater the intention to apply for a job. That is, the greater the reputation of the organisation, in terms of the image of the workplace, the greater the motivation of candidates to work there ([Edwards, 2010](#)). Thus, the results are consistent with the empirical evidence. For example, [Turban et al. \(1998\)](#) showed that the organisational reputation has a strong influence on attracting potential candidates. Also, [Saini et al. \(2014\)](#) showed that organisations with a better image in the market had higher rates of intention to apply for job offers. Similarly, when organisations have formal management strategies to ameliorate their corporate reputation, for instance using social media, it is likely that the number of applicants for job offers increases ([Subbarao et al., 2022](#)).

Theoretical implications

The results show a statistically significant indirect effect from the five dimensions of employer branding on the intention to apply for a job offer through corporate reputation. That is, employer branding increases the corporate reputation of an organisation, which, in turn, will increase an individual's intention to apply for a job offer. This pattern of results was evidenced by [Sivertzen et al. \(2013\)](#), who showed that some dimensions of employer branding, namely, the psychological, application and innovation value, influenced corporate reputation and that this was positively associated with the intention to apply for a job offer. [Edwards \(2010\)](#), in his systematic literature review, also highlighted the relationship between the dimensions of employer branding, corporate reputation and organisational attractiveness to potential candidates. More recently, [Erlinda and Safitri \(2020\)](#) showed that employer branding and organisational attractiveness were antecedents of intentions to apply for job offers. Additionally, [Cordes and Vogel \(2022\)](#) demonstrated that the social and organisational representation of an employer explained why employer branding influenced the decision of an applicant to apply for a job. Similarly, [Santiago \(2019\)](#) demonstrated that, for millennials, employer branding strategies tended to ameliorate the image of an employer, which resulted in higher motivation to apply for a job offer in that organisation. In a similar vein, when organisations value and implement active strategies to manage their branding, they tend to have fewer the costs with recruitment, hiring and training of new employees due to the higher rates of retention that are explained by a positive corporate image by employees and other stakeholders ([Kashyap and Verma, 2018](#)).

In sum, we can conclude that the five dimensions of employer branding, together with corporate reputation have a positive impact on the intention to apply for a job offer and that corporate reputation mediates the relationship between employer branding and the intention to apply for a job. Thereby, an organisational focus on implementing strategies to better manage their branding and reputation not only will likely increase the number of candidates but can also reduce the costs of hiring and training new employees.

Managerial implications

The results show that the five dimensions of employer branding and corporate reputation have a positive impact on the intention to apply for a job and that reputation mediates the relationship between employer branding and the intention to apply for a job within the Portuguese context. Hence, these findings may contribute to Portuguese managers who want to improve the quality of the recruitment and selection process by creating strategies that enable organisations to improve their branding and, consequently their reputation. In

the Portuguese context, markets are increasingly globalised and competitive, with new entries and exits every day and with a constant struggle regarding the competition; it is extremely important to attract and retain the best candidates. In this way, employer branding can act as a strategic tool for human resource management for each organisation that intends to attract, recruit, retain and involve talented people since its success depends on how its image is developed, communicated and marketed. So, employer branding is a priority investment for the present and the future of Portuguese organisations because it allows attracting the best talents, improves the organisation's brand, and helps them to achieve a better position in the market.

Nowadays, it is not only organisations that choose candidates, but these also choose where they want to work, and they tend to value factors that go beyond the salary and include benefits that bring additional value to their professional experience. As such, the more diversified the benefits offered (work and family life balance; flexible hours, telework, pet-friendly practices, daycare for employees' children; offer of a gym within the organisation; day off on your birthday; one week or a weekend offered by the organisation, among others), the greater the capacity of the organisation to attract and retain the most talented, and, at the same time, gain a competitive advantage over its competitors. In this sense, and considering the above, some employer branding strategies may be creating digital strategies to strengthen the brand (digital marketing) (Keppeler and Papenfuß, 2021). The digital strategy can be used both to recruit talents and to retain current employees (e.g. create Employer Branding campaigns on the internet, especially on social networks (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn), create a corporate blog allowing employees to participate through the production of content; invest in videos and photographs that show the daily life, record testimonials from current employees to use in recruiting and talking about your organisation's goals and purpose to attract the ideal candidate, among others) (Subbarao *et al.*, 2022).

Limitations and future directions

Despite the contributions of the study, this had some limitations. The first limitation is related to the sample size ($N = 225$). Although the number of participants is accepted for investigation, it is a small sample, which limits the generalisability of the results. Secondly, we used a non-probabilistic sampling process – a convenience sample – that is, not all individuals in the population had the same probability of being part of the sample (Marôco and Bispo, 2006). This can impact the representativeness of the sample, as it is unlikely that this method covers all the characteristics of the population (D'Oliveira, 2007). Thirdly, the online data collection limits the interaction with respondents, which may lead to a lack of understanding of some questions, leading to answers that do not reflect their reality and/or perception. Fourthly, we used self-reported measures, which can bias the answers and lead to the common method bias (MacKenzie and Podsakoff, 2012).

Future studies would use a larger sample to test the model. It would also be interesting to analyse other variables relevant to the intention to apply for a job offer, such as the use of social networks and their influence on corporate reputation. Moreover, the combination of different methods should be used, in future studies, to overcome the limitations inherent to the cross-sectional design of this study, for instance, through a longitudinal study. At last, future studies should investigate what drives individuals from generation z, which might be useful for employer branding strategies and better management of corporate reputation. Hence, individual differences between millennials and those from generation z should be explored within this theoretical framework.

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