

**EMPLOYER BRANDING AS A FORM OF SPORT
EVENT SPONSORSHIP: THE CASE OF A
MULTINATIONAL INDUSTRIAL FIRM**

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ABSTRACT

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Title Employer branding as a form of sport event sponsorship: The case of a multinational industrial firm	
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<p>The growth of new industry sectors and the ascent of burgeoning economies have increased competition between companies to secure a skilled workforce. To ensure competitiveness in these rapidly changing markets, companies have striven to build successful branding strategies. Although employer branding is becoming a popular trend in the world of practicing managers and scholars, perspectives are still evolving.</p> <p>The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of employer branding from the perspective of a business-to-business (B2B) multinational company's (thereafter, "the case company") current employees. In this study, a sport sponsorship project acted as an employer branding activity, which aimed to affect employee opinions toward the case company as an employer.</p> <p>The chosen research strategy was a single-case study, which was implemented by an electronic survey. The research target group included the case company's current employees, and the questionnaire was sent to 3,200 individuals by e-mail. Overall, 716 employees participated in the survey, resulting in a response rate of 22.4%. The data were analyzed via SPSS statistics and PLS 3.2 software.</p> <p>The results of this study indicated that a sport sponsorship project, when used as an employer branding activity, had a positive impact on employee opinions toward the case company as an employer on multiple levels. The proposed hypotheses that were formed from previous literature were accepted, and strong support for the developed research model was obtained.</p> <p>This study is amongst the first to provide empirical results of employer branding in the sport sponsorship context. The positive outcomes underline the feasibility of sport sponsorship as an effective strategy for achieving employer branding goals.</p>	
Keywords Employer branding, Sponsorship, Organizational commitment, Employee satisfaction	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Continuously changing business environments have created different demands for companies' business strategies in the current market. Therefore, companies must constantly respond to increasing demands for a talented workforce (Leekha Chhabra & Sharma, 2014). From the perspective of multinational companies, one of the major reasons for the growing demand for skilled employees is the growth of new industry sectors, such as digital communications, biotechnology, and nanotechnology. The simultaneous ascent of burgeoning economies is also increasing the competition for skilled workforces (Chambers, Handfield-Jones, Hanking, & Michaels, 1998). Thus, it is crucial for companies to develop strategies and operations to both attract potential talent and retain their current employees (Leekha Chhabra & Sharma, 2014). Developing an employer brand is an effective method for managing this vital area in today's challenging markets (Moroko & Uncles, 2008).

Brands are seen as the most valuable assets in firms, and employees are the most important resource in companies (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Per Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), brand management is the key activity in companies' business operations, and employees have an increasing role in the success as well as the evolution of an organization's brand (Moroko & Uncles, 2005). Brand management in organizations is usually developed around either corporate image or product development. In addition to branding activities, brand management can also be a part of human resource management (HRM). This branding activity has been termed "employer branding" (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Attraction, recruitment, and retention of the best talent have always been challenges for organizations. Over the past decade, companies from various industries (e.g., Siemens and Coca-Cola) have striven to build successful employer brand management strategies to ensure their competitiveness in different business environments. Improving an employer brand is an effective method for attracting and retaining the most talented workforce, and it subsequently secures the brand's success. Notably, firms that embrace their employer branding will gain a competitive edge (Moroko & Uncles, 2008); thus, employer branding is an effective method for companies to use to differentiate themselves from others competing for the same talented workforce (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Employer branding is a relatively new approach in company operations as well as academic studies. The term "employer brand" was originally introduced by Ambler and Barrow (1996), who defined it as "the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company" (p. 187). However, the employer branding literature provides multiple definitions of the term. For example, Sullivan (2004) defined it as "a targeted long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perception of employees, potential employees, and related stakehold-

ers with regards to a particular firm” (p. 1). Per Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), an employer’s brand consists of unique features of the company’s employment offerings and environment.

In recent years, employer branding has become a more important topic for both academic researchers and practising managers. The importance of employer branding is based on its strong and direct impact on a firm’s corporate prestige, talent management, and employee engagement level (Martin, Gollan, & Grigg, 2011). Per Moroko and Uncles (2005), employees are increasingly impacting both the development and the success of company brands. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) stated that employer branding is becoming the most significant tool for companies to use for managing current employee retention and attracting potential talent.

Employer branding could be a valuable concept for practising organizations and scholars alike. Over the past decade, there has been significant interest amongst academics as well as practitioners who want to understand the effectiveness of employer branding. Even though branding is a developed concept in both the marketing literature and practising organizations, perspectives of employer branding are still evolving (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Earlier research primarily focused on the examination of employer branding as a phenomenon from the conceptual perspective, and empirical studies are almost non-existent (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). Additionally, the literature mainly focuses on the external effects of employer branding, such as recruitment processes; therefore, little is known about employer branding from the internal perspective of companies, such as what attributes make an employer’s brand attractive to current employees (Maxwell & Knox, 2009).

1.1 Study Objective and Research questions

This study aimed to bring additional insights into the identified research gaps. The goal was to examine the impacts of employer branding in a B2B multinational company (hereafter, “the case company”). More specifically, this study investigated the effectiveness of employer branding from the perspective of the case company’s current employees and responded to the call for more empirical research on employer branding from the internal perspective (Maxwell & Knox, 2009).

This study also aimed to expose the impacts of employer branding in the case company during sponsorship cooperation with a sporting event organization (the Nordic Skiing World Championships in Lahti 2017). The case company was executing employer branding to develop its current employees’ perceptions of the company as an employer. Desirable outcomes included improved employer image, employer attractiveness, and employee satisfaction, commitment, and productivity. The results of this study will help the case company understand the effectiveness of employer branding and consequently help improve their employer brand in the future.

The main research question was as follows:

RQ1: How does a sponsorship project affect current employees' opinions toward the employer?

Additionally, three sub-research questions were proposed:

RQ2: How does a sport sponsorship project affect employer attraction from the perspective of current employees?

RQ3: How does a sport sponsorship project affect employees' satisfaction toward the employer?

RQ4: How does a sponsorship project affect current employees' organizational commitment toward the employer?

1.2 Research methodology

The chosen research strategy was a single-case study. As a research method, a case study is an appropriate strategy for testing theories and models in a real-life context because it enables the researcher to retain the comprehensive characteristics of real-life circumstances (Yin, 2003, p. 2). Eisenhardt (1989, p. 534) defined a case study as "a research strategy that focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings."

A single-case study is an appropriate research strategy when the following apply: a) the study aims to answer "how" and "why" questions that are interpreted by the environment, b) the researcher has either little or no control over the behaviour of those involved in the study, and c) the research focus is on a contemporary set of events (Yin, 2003, pp. 5–8). Per Perry (1998), a case study is an adequate research method for studying complex and contemporary topics. In addition, Yin (2014, p. 51) stated that "a case is a suitable theme for a single-case study if it can be described as critical, unusual, common, revelatory, or longitudinal."

Case studies typically utilize different data collection methods, such as questionnaires, interviews, observations, and archives. Data collection methods are either quantitative, qualitative, or a combination of both approaches (Eisenhardt, 1989). This study used the quantitative approach, and the data collection method was a questionnaire/survey. The target group of the study included the case company's current employees. Considering the defined features of the methodological decision above, the chosen strategy was consistent with the study's overall purpose.

1.3 Definitions of key terms

1.3.1 Employer branding

Employer branding was the main concept of this study. As previously stated, Ambler and Barrow (1996) defined employer brand from the perspective of benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing organization (p. 187). Martin and Groen-in't Woud (2011) introduced the definition of employer brand as being known amongst key stakeholders for providing a high-quality employment experience and a distinctive organizational identity, which employees value, engage with, and feel enough confidence in to promote it to others.

1.3.2 Sponsorship

Per Meenaghan (1991, p. 36), sponsorship is "an investment, either in cash or in kind, in an activity in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that activity." Lee, Sandler, and Shani (1997, p. 162) in turn defined sponsorship as "the provision of resources (e.g., money, people, equipment) by an organization directly to an event, cause, or activity in exchange for a direct association (link) to the event, cause, or activity. The providing organization can then engage in sponsorship-linked marketing to achieve either their corporate, marketing, or media objectives."

1.3.3 Employee organizational commitment

Sheldon (1971, p. 143) defined organizational commitment as either an "attitude or an orientation toward the organization that either links or attaches the identity of the person to the organization." Per Meyer and Herscovitch (2001, p. 301), commitment is "a force that binds an individual to a course of action that is of relevance to a particular target." Porter, Steers, Mowday, and Boulian (1974, p. 604) defined organizational commitment as the "strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization." In addition, Porter et al. (1974, p. 604) divided commitment into three different factors: "1) A strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; 2) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and 3) a definite desire to maintain organizational membership."

1.3.4 Employee satisfaction

The term "employee satisfaction" has been defined as the level of an employee's emotional orientation toward the work role that he/she occupies in the company (Lease, 1998). Smith et al. (1969, p. 6) defined job satisfaction as either a feeling toward or affective responses to facets of the situation. Dawis and Lofquist (1984) defined employee satisfaction as resulting feelings from the

worker's appraisal of the degree to which the work environment fulfils the individual's needs.

1.3.5 Employer attraction

Berthon, Ewing, and Hah (2005, p. 156) defined employer attraction as "the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization."

1.3.6 Employee productivity

Bernolak (1997, p. 204) demonstrated employee productivity as follows: ". . . how much and how well we produce from resources used. If we produce better goods from the same resources, we increase productivity. Or, if we produce the same goods from lesser resources, we also increase productivity."

1.4 Study structure

This study consists of six main sections. It begins with an introduction, which provides an overview of the research field, the study's objectives, and the research questions. The second section reviews the concept of sport sponsorship. The third section presents previous literature examples regarding employer branding and the research model of this study. The fourth section introduces the research methodology. The fifth section (the results) presents the empirical results of the single-case study. Finally, the sixth section concludes this thesis with a discussion on both the theoretical and managerial implications of the study, the research limitations, and ideas for future research. The study's structure is shown in Figure 1.

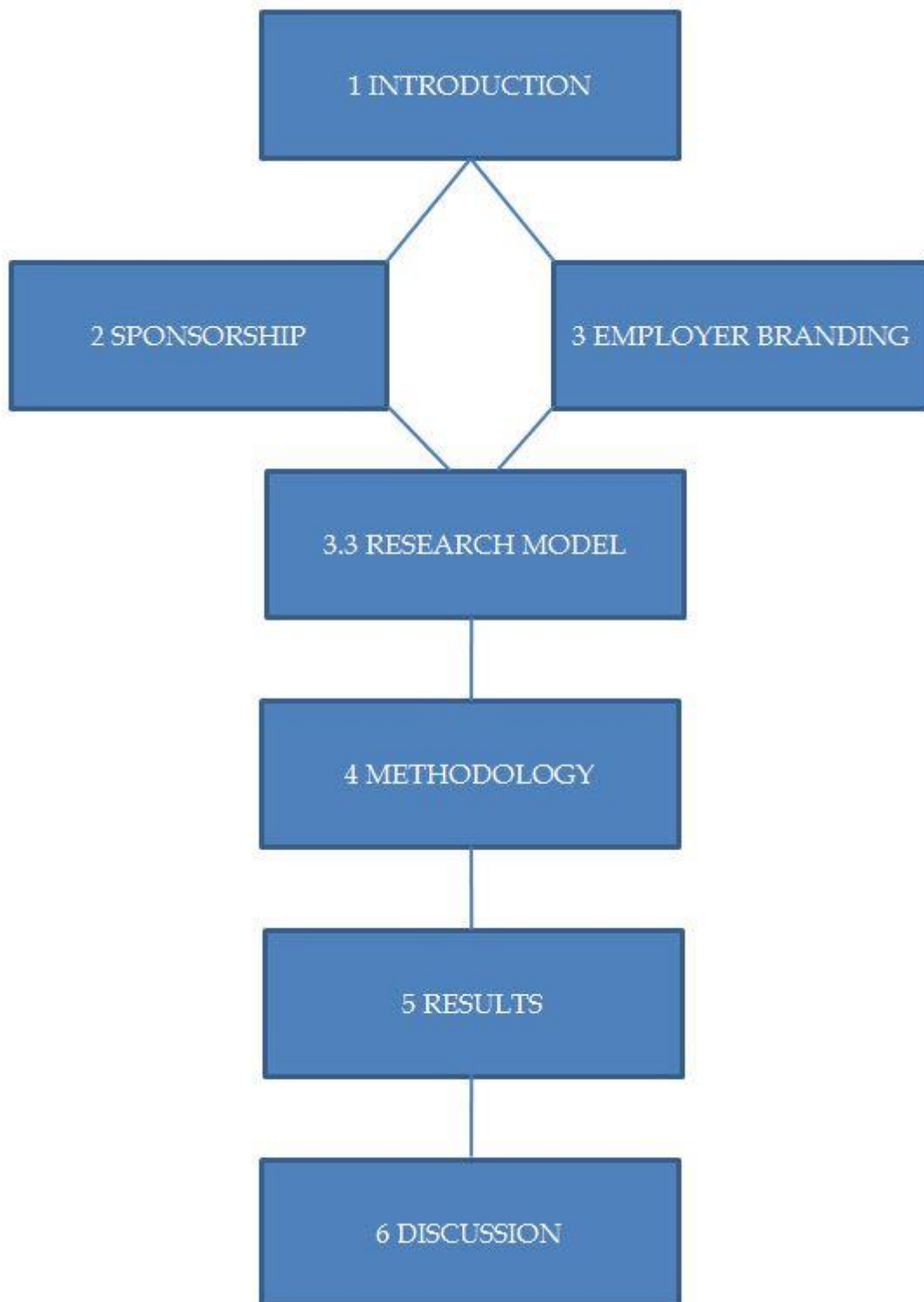


FIGURE 1 Study structure

2 SPORT SPONSORSHIP

2.1 Sponsorship and employer branding

A growing strategical function in practicing companies is the use of sponsorship as a tool for employer branding. From the perspective of employer branding, the impacts of sponsorship activities have not been examined previously in the marketing literature. This study aimed to fulfil this research gap by expanding general knowledge of these two concepts. This chapter reviews the literature on sponsorship and displays connections between sponsorship and employer branding. Because this study focused on sport sponsorship, the discussion of sponsorship is mainly limited to the sport context.

2.2 Sport sponsorship

Sport sponsorship has become a popular global marketing tool for many companies over the last few decades, and it is currently becoming a massive “industry.” Sponsorship in general, which is already a well-known promotional method in marketing, is enjoying growing popularity in many global business environments (Meenaghan, McLoughlin, & McCormack, 2013). Sponsorship is currently a vital part of funding for a broad range of sport, art, and social events (Speed & Thompson, 2000). Per the International Events Group (IEG) (2016), the total sponsorship spending in global markets was estimated to reach 60.2 billion US dollars in 2016. Total spending is growing continuously, despite economic difficulties worldwide (Figure 2).

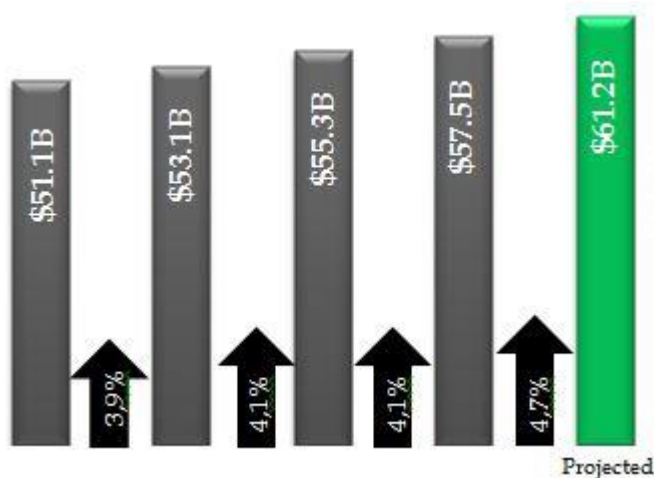


FIGURE 2 Total sponsorship spending (IEG, 2016)

Researchers have endeavored to identify the reasons why growing numbers of companies are investing in sport sponsorship. Therefore, it is beneficial to examine sponsorship objectives from the perspective of practicing companies. Sponsorship can be a highly multifunctional communication tool in companies' business operations, and it is crucial that corporations create measurable objectives for their sponsorship activities (Meenaghan et al., 2013). Sponsorship can support and help develop organizational goals, such as improvement of the corporate image, development of brand awareness, and sales growth of products and services (Gardner & Shuman, 1988). In addition, Hoek, Gendall, and West (1990) found that sponsorship objectives related to improving goodwill, management interest, and staff recruitment are desirable goals for companies' sponsorship projects.

Early studies have provided empirical results of prior objectives that explicated companies' motivation to execute sponsorship projects. Per Abratt, Clayton, and Pitt (1987), the priority in corporate sponsorship projects concerns media objectives, such as reaching target markets and cost effectiveness. Garner and Shuman (1988) provided empirical results to support this perspective and identified other priorities. Per their wide survey, which included analysis of 300 Fortune 500 companies' sponsorship practices, they stated that corporations' main priority in sponsorship projects included broad corporate objectives, such as enhancing their corporate image (Garner & Schuman, 1998). In line with this, Cornwell and Maigan (1998) identified the enhancement of brand image as one of the most important objectives, and they identified the generation of goodwill as a primary sponsorship objective. Furthermore, Witcher, Craigen, Culligan, and Harvey (1991) identified marketing objectives as a priority in companies' sponsorship projects. Marketing objectives in this context include increasing the awareness of brands (Shankling & Kuzma, 1992). In addition, Pope (1998) identified personal objectives as a commonly accepted objective in corporate sponsorship programs. Later studies provided personal objectives as a fourth commonly accepted category of sponsorship objectives (Pope, 1998). In current business environments, companies can use sponsorship as a strategy to achieve objectives that are more specific. For example, Cousen, Babiak, and Bradish (2006) identified sponsorship as a tool for removing cultural barriers.

Dean (2002) separated sponsorship objectives into economic and non-economic dimensions. Economic objectives include increased revenues and profits, increased brand awareness, and increased channel member interest in the brand. Non-economic objectives include improvement of the corporate image, boosting employer morale, goodwill within the community, recruiting new employees, and altruism (Dean, 2002). Based on our general understanding of employer branding, these sponsorship objectives have the same targets as employer branding objectives, including recruiting new employees and improving corporate image (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Therefore, we can clearly state that sponsorship activities are a suitable function in employer branding strategies.

The durations of a sponsorship's cooperation and programs follow varying time spans. Fenton (2009) stated that the duration of a sponsorship relationship may have a role in determining objectives, and duration affects the evalua-

tion of the sponsorship program's objectives. Sponsorship relationships and programs usually last at least three years, with the average being five years, and they are changing over time. Therefore, it is useful to consider setting objectives within a certain time span (Fenton, 2009).

Measuring sponsorship objectives is a crucial task for practicing managers; however, finding these measurement factors has been difficult because the effectiveness of sponsorship is usually related to a mixture of current and past sponsorship projects (Dean, 2002). Per Pham (1991), it is only possible to measure project effectiveness by analyzing it via experimental designs to verify the control of irrelevant variables (Dean, 2002).

2.2.1 Sponsorship and corporate social responsibilities

Sponsorship is recognized as one of the most significant marketing strategies currently in use (Roy & Cornwell, 2004) because it enables companies to achieve objectives on many crucial levels. One of the most prominent sponsorship trends in recent years has been the growth in sponsorship activities that are associated with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

In recent decades, the concept of CSR has continued to increase in significance. Although CSR has been defined broadly in previous academic literature, in general, it indicates the operations taken by companies to honor their employees, communities, and the environment in ways that go beyond what is legally demanded (McWilliams, Siegel, & Wright, 2006). Per Enderle and Tavis (1998), CSR is the practice and policy of corporate social involvement at a level that satisfies social needs.

From the perspective of practicing companies, CSR is a broad concept to consider. Lerner and Fryxell (1988) claimed that CSR actions should be connected with a firm's social values and expectations. Pinkston and Carrol (1996) classified firms' CSR business activities into economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic dimensions. Economic responsibility refers to a firm's liability to be productive, profitable, and economically viable. When fulfilling these economic responsibilities, companies should operate within a legal framework. Regarding ethical CSR responsibilities, companies need to execute appropriate behavior that is based on recognized societal values and norms. Philanthropic responsibilities refer to voluntary operations that aim to both improve society and ensure overall quality of life (Pinkston & Carrol, 1996). Polonsky and Speed (2001) identified sponsorship, customer relationships, and philanthropy as activities that can fulfill CSR objectives. Sponsorship has direct links to marketing resources and goals; this feature underlines that sponsorship is a potentially effective tool for fulfilling a company's economic and social goals (Thorne McAlister & Ferrell, 2002).

Most CSR-linked sponsorship studies have focused on the connection between CSR and sponsorship as well as its effects. The sport context is a usable method for spreading CSR because sport has features that are effective in that arena, such as youth appeal, positive health effects, social interaction, sustainability awareness, and cultural integration (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007).

Per Plewa and Quester (2011), by linking these features from direct corporate campaigns to sponsorship campaigns, a company can appear to be both sincere and selfless.

CSR-linked sponsorship has the most effective impact in the sport event context (Uhrich, Koenigstorfer, & Groeppel-Klein, 2014). Sponsors of mega-events, such as the FIFA Football World Cup and the Olympic Games, increasingly link their sponsorship activities to CSR initiatives that surround these events, which is a growing trend. Hence, companies now focus on leveraging sponsorship activities at such events (Uhrich et al., 2014). Weeks, Cornwell, and Drennan (2008, p. 639) defined sponsorship leveraging as “the act of using collateral marketing communications to exploit the commercial potential of the association between a sponsee and sponsor.”

In CSR-linked sponsorship, companies have different kinds of desirable and achievable objectives. In general, CSR-linked sponsorship enables companies to acquire external and internal objectives. Plewa and Quester (2013) identified external objectives as consumer satisfaction, purchases, and retention of customers. In turn, internal objectives focus on employee motivation, satisfaction, and retention (Plewa & Quester, 2013). Djaballah, Hautbois, and Desbordes (2016) identified the development of brand image as the most desirable objective in companies' CSR-linked sponsorship campaigns. In addition, Djaballah et al. (2016) identified other common objectives in CSR-linked sponsorship, such as brand awareness, product communication, internal communication, and improving direct sales. Dowling, Robinson, and Washington (2013) identified additional strategic sponsorship CSR objectives, such as employee development, subtle research marketing, and corporate peer legitimacy.

Researchers have identified several different outcomes from executed CSR-linked sponsorship activities. For example, Walker and Kent (2009) found positive outcomes from certain campaigns, such as improved reputation, positive word of mouth, and the development of merchandise consumption behaviors. Per Kim, Kwak, and Kim (2010), sponsorship CSR projects may achieve universal effectiveness and attraction. These identified benefits from CSR-linked sponsorship clarify why a growing number of multinational corporations are engaging in sponsorship and CSR within the same strategic function.

As stated earlier, CSR projects have both internal and external stakeholders to consider. In the context of this research, it is purposeful to examine the concept from the internal perspective. Previous studies have suggested that companies' CSR activities have positive effects on current employees and also increase employer brand attractiveness from the perspective of external stakeholders (Backhaus et al., 2002; Peterson, 2004). Per Ali, Rehman, Ali, Yousaf, and Zia (2010), companies can increase employee commitment levels toward an organization by executing well-managed CSR. CSR activities that aim to impact current employees' welfare have been recognized as one of the most effective strategies for improving employee commitment. To obtain these outcomes, it is important to both influence and involve current employees effectively in these CSR activities. The more employees are influenced by CSR actions, the higher

their commitment level will escalate toward the employer. Additionally, improvement in employee commitment levels will enhance productivity; therefore, a well-managed CSR strategy might also positively influence overall organizational performance (Ali et al., 2010.) These identified outcomes are also desirable from the perspective of employer branding (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

2.2.2 Sponsorship relationships

Sponsorship is a multidimensional entity because, during projects, companies have opportunities to communicate with several different stakeholders. Sponsorship enables companies to achieve broad benefits for corporate businesses, such as improving brand image. These are attainable when sponsorship is used as a tool to communicate and connect with a broad range of a company's main stakeholder groups (Meenaghan et al., 2013).

Several researchers have attempted to identify the most crucial audiences of sponsorship. For example, Gardner and Shuman (1987) identified four different types of entrants—channel members, the corporation, the public, and sponsored organizations—and five different audiences—consumers, financial institutions, community leaders, channel members, and employees. In addition, Polonsky (1995) identified current consumers, potential customers, and the public as the most important audience in sponsorship.

In sponsorship projects, companies can create versatile relationships with every level of company's main stakeholders. Meenaghan et al. (2013) provided a platform (Figure 3) that illustrates the sponsorship relationships in the B2B context. Figure 3 proposes that sponsorship enables communication between every stakeholder in a company's business chain, from distributors to customers and from current employees to shareholders.

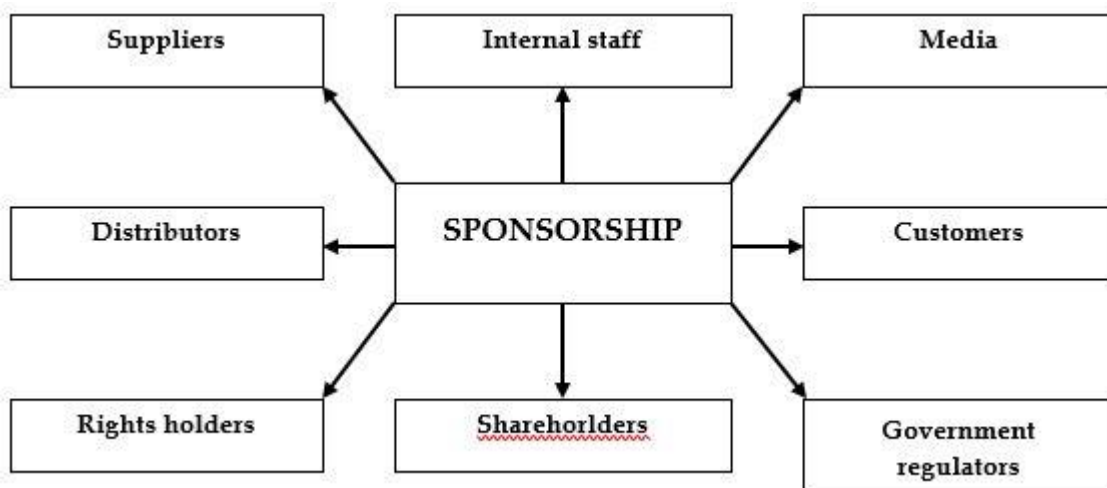


FIGURE 3 Sponsorship – A multistakeholder relationship platform (Meenaghan et al., 2013)

2.2.3 External sponsorship relationships

Companies' sponsorship relationships consist of both internal and external dimensions. By using sponsorship as a communication method in a relationship between internal and external audiences, companies can differentiate themselves from their competitors (Weeks et al., 2008). The multistakeholder relationship platform (Figure 3) provides a broad range of sponsorship targets that companies should consider during sponsorship projects. Naturally, customers are one of the most crucial targets; however, based on the objectives of this study, the main stakeholder group to consider is "internal staff."

Companies can involve many levels of stakeholder groups in sponsorship (Figure 3), which enables communication and thus a relationship with each stakeholder group (Meenaghan et al., 2013).

Mass markets play both visible and strong roles in sponsorship; therefore, customers are vital to a company's business (Meenaghan et al., 2013). In the B2B context, it is also important to create strong and effective relationships with suppliers, trade associates, and distributors. Sponsorship has been identified as a capable tool for developing engaged relationships between a company and its crucial business parties. For instance, sponsoring major international events allows companies to achieve objectives in the B2B context by representing their business solutions and thus challenging their counterparts. This enables companies to both create and develop business relationships with suppliers, distributors, and other associates (Meenaghan et al., 2013).

Companies occasionally need to work with governments and regulators to generate corporate business. Targeting sponsorship investments toward specific events can create opportunities to connect with those entities (Day, 2011). In certain markets, regulations and restrictions play a strong role in a company's operations (Cotton, 2012). Meenaghan et al. (2013) suggested that, in highly-regulated markets, it is beneficial for companies to provide a policy framework for local regulators to expand their understanding of the company's business.

Rights holders have been identified as an important stakeholder group in sponsorship projects (Chavanat, Martinent, & Ferrand, 2009; Pearsall, 2010). Per Farrelly, Quester, and Burton (2006), the relationship between a sponsoring company and the rights holders are long term. For example, Coca-Cola has been a sponsor of the Olympic Games since 1928, and that is one of the most well-known sponsorship cooperation in the world. This sponsorship collaboration has been noticed as very successful for both involved parties (Meenaghan et al., 2013).

2.2.4 Internal sponsorship relationships

As noted in the previous literature, sponsorship is a positive tool for achieving internal benefits. Per Cunningham, Cornwell, and Cote (2009), sponsorship is an effective strategy for internal marketing. Khan and Stanton (2010) also suggested that, in addition to using sponsorship to achieve external objectives,

sponsorship significantly affects the internal audience (i.e., firm's current employees). Internally-focused sponsorship activities can be described as follows: "Management should weigh the potential internal marketing value when contemplating any sponsorship program. Sports-related internal communications can create cohesion, elicit pride in the company, and enhance perceptions of it as a vibrant 'winner' or leader in its industry. Employees may find that their company's identification with a team or an event strengthens their relationship with customers" (Farrelly & Greyser, 2007, p. 24).

Companies can use sport sponsorship projects as a strategy to communicate with and influence the firm's shareholders. This stakeholder group, together with a company's internal staff, creates the entirety of the internal audience of sponsorship projects (Meenaghan et al., 2013). According to Meenaghan et al. (2013), sponsorship is an effective tool for maintaining and developing the relationship between a company and its shareholders. Company's investments in sponsorship usually increase the visibility of a brand and therefore can strengthen brand value. This consequence is a naturally desirable effect from the perspective of shareholders (Meenaghan et al., 2013). The link between sponsorship and shareholders in the marketing literature has focused on investigating the relationship between sponsorship and shareholder wealth. Per Clark, Cornwell, and Pruitt (2009), successful sport sponsorship campaigns increase brand value. This positive implication impacts shareholder wealth. Additionally, sponsorship projects can also cause negative impacts. For example, sponsorship scandals, such as doping cases, can negatively affect a company's image, which may in turn negatively affect shareholder wealth (Allen, 2009; Sassenberg & Johnson Morgan, 2010).

Within sponsorship projects, companies can potentially achieve versatile and significant internal impacts (Meenaghan, 2001). One of the most effective methods for achieving positive outcomes is to involve a company's current employees in the project during the sponsorship processes. For instance, Meenaghan (2001) stated that internal communication during sponsorship projects is effective for improving employee satisfaction and loyalty toward the company. Internal communication is considered a strategic tool for managing interactions and relationships between stakeholders (e.g., employees) at every level of an organization (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Ridder (2004) argued that high-quality, effective communication positively affects employees' opinions toward the organization. These positive outcomes include commitment and trust (Ridder, 2004). In turn, increased satisfaction and loyalty to the company affect the quality of interactions with customers (Gabbot & Hogg, 1995; Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml, 1991). Employee loyalty and satisfaction are also important objectives in employer branding (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Sponsorship activities enable companies to develop a positive organizational culture and improve their corporate and employer images from the perspective of employees. Moreover, successful sponsorship projects have been found to improve employee morale, increase corporate pride, refresh corporate perceptions, and develop a sense of shared enterprise (Meenaghan et al., 2013).

Identification with a sponsorship target (e.g., a specific team) has a favorable relation with organizational identification and employees' organizational commitment (Hickman, Lawrence, & Ward, 2005). Hickman et al. (2005) also found that sponsorship activities can increase employees' willingness to satisfy customer needs. Per Olejniczak and Aicher (2010), the most effective indicator of organizational identification is the perceived prestige of the sponsorship target. Sponsorship projects affect a company's person-organizational (P-O) fit and perceived image from the perspective of current employees (Zepf, 2008, p. 5). These identified internal impacts are also essential for employer branding strategies. Therefore, sponsorship can potentially help achieve employer branding goals.

2.2.5 Attitudes toward sport sponsorship

Attitudes toward certain marketing strategies and sponsorship targets are generally considered important from the perspectives of both scholars and practicing companies (D'Astous & Bitz, 1995; Speed & Thomas, 2000). Positive attitudes toward sport events and/or sponsorship in general can be associated with a positive influence toward the sponsor (Speed & Thomas, 2000). Individuals' personal perceptions of events strongly affect their attitudes. For instance, D'Astous and Bitz (1995) argued that, people who perceived an event as attractive believed that sponsoring the event positively affected the sponsor's image. In addition, Crimmins and Horn (1996) suggested that sponsors can achieve positive effects from "gratitude" that arises amongst fans who have strong positive attitudes toward the event. These statements reflect that sponsors can improve responses to their sponsorship if the selected projects are targeted toward markets that already display positive attitudes (Speed & Thompson, 2000).

The perceived status of the sponsorship project might affect the benefits that individual persons receive indirectly from the sporting event. Persons may also receive positive perceptions from the sport event, even if they lack any personal preferences for it (Speed & Thompson, 2000). Events of high status engender positive feelings regarding sponsors if the audiences have a high regard for the event. One of the best examples of this kind of event is the Olympic Games (Stipp & Schiavone, 1996), which most people view in a positive light.

In the sport sponsorship context, researchers have also identified different dimensions of attitudes toward brands. Speed and Thompson (2000) indicated that attitudes toward brands in the sponsorship context can be categorized under three different constructs: overall attitude toward the sponsor, perceived sincerity of the sponsor, and perceived ubiquity of the sponsor. Sponsors who have a more positive image receive better acceptance of their sponsorship projects when compared to companies with inferior images (Javalgi, Taylor, Gross, & Lampman, 1994; Stipp & Schiavone, 1996). Sincerity of the sponsor has been recognized as an important dimension of attitudes in the sponsorship context. Companies can gain preferable responses in sponsorship projects if the projects are perceived to be sincere and motivated by philanthropy (Armstrong, 1988; D'Astous & Bitz, 1995).

Sponsorship projects might also cause negative outcomes to the company. For example, companies that sponsor widely in many different fields simultaneously might cause negative attitudes toward their brand. Speed and Thompson (2000) argued that sponsors that have broad sponsorship-portfolio are possibly less committed to each sponsorship parties and therefore they might have lower credibility as a sponsor. On the contrary, companies that have a small sponsorship portfolio and are associated with only a few events and/or targets might achieve outcomes that are more positive (Speed & Thompson, 2000).

Based on the findings of sport sponsorship from previous literature, this study proposed the following hypotheses:

H1: Sponsorship, as an employer branding activity, has a positive impact on organizational culture.

H2: Sponsorship, as an employer branding activity, has a positive impact on organizational identity.

3 EMPLOYER BRANDING

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the concept of employer branding. Firstly, the definitions and previous findings of employer branding are presented. Secondly, the conceptual framework of employer branding will be expressed to clarify the employer branding process and explain the theoretical construct involved.

3.1 Conceptualizing employer branding

To clarify the concept of employer branding, it is first necessary to define the concepts of brand and branding. In general, a brand can be defined as a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or a combination thereof that is meant to identify either the goods or services of a seller (or a group of sellers) and to differentiate them from competitors' goods and/or services (Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman & Hansen 2009). Swystun (2007, p. 14) defined brand as "a mixture of attributes, tangible and intangible, that are symbolized in a trademark, which – if managed properly – creates value and influence".

Branding was initially used to develop the image of physical products and to differentiate products from their competitors (Peters, 1999). Per Levitt (1980), branding is a process of communication that aims to affect the image and reputation of organizations' products and/or services. Keller (1998) stated that, when creating a brand, it is key to choose a name, logo, symbol, package design, and other attributes that identify the brand and differentiate it. Brand management is generally linked to customer relationships (Keller, 1998). Supporting this perspective, Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis (1986) stated that brands set goals to fulfil customers' functional, symbolic, and experimental needs.

Building a brand is a multidimensional process in organizations. Today's employees have a larger role in executing brand-building processes. Employees' behaviors can reinforce advertised brand values; therefore, firms can gain more credibility when communicating brand values and/or messages to external audiences. From the perspective of operating managers, it is crucial to consider how current employees' values and behaviors can be aligned with a brand's desired values (Harris & Chernatony, 2001).

Brand management in practicing organizations was initially created and operated around either corporate image or product development. In addition, brand management can be a beneficial tool for collaborating with HRM. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) claimed that brand management, concerning HRM, has been termed "employer branding." In addition, Martin et al. (2011) stated that employer branding is a process that includes marketing and HR techniques working jointly to create an employer brand. The term brand is generally linked to a company's products and corporate brand. Additionally, product and cor-

porate branding are targeted to external audiences, such as customers. Employer brand in turn consists of characteristics of a firm's identity as an employer, and employer brand messages have both internal and external targets groups (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

A strong employer brand is a desirable goal for organizations because it increases attractiveness from the perspective of the external audience. From the internal perspective, strong employer brands increase engagement and create higher retention rates of high-quality employees, which have been found to subsequently affect organizational innovation. These benefits can help firms progress certain operations, such as financial and business models, products and services, processes, and delivery mechanisms (Martin et al., 2011).

Employer branding is understood as an umbrella under which both marketing activities and HR management reside. It is a moderately new approach in the academic literature. As a research discipline, employer brand was initially introduced by Ambler and Barrow (1996), who executed an exploratory study amongst UK companies to investigate whether marketing tools and brand management are beneficial in employment situations. Despite some empirical resistance to the introduction of marketing tools and practices, the authors concluded that marketing tools and HRM, when used together, can create the concept of employer brand. The results of Ambler and Barrow's (1996) study indicated that employer branding projects yield important benefits, such as higher retention rates of current employees and increased employer attraction from the perspective of potential talent.

3.1.1 Effects of employer branding

Employer branding is a process in which marketing tools, communication, and HR management are applied to create a brand (Martin et al., 2011). These marketing tools, such as corporate branding, internal marketing, relationship marketing, and corporate reputation, are linked to HR management concepts, such as recruitment processes and organizational behavior (Moroko & Uncles, 2008).

Employer branding is seen as a multifunctional activity in organizations, and its effects deliver logical, plausible, and positive outcomes to companies (Moroko & Uncles, 2005). As a versatile function, per Lievens (2007), employer branding consists of three steps. The first step is to develop a value proposition to current employees and potential talent; this is a crucial element when conveying the features of employer brand to the audience (i.e., current employees and potential talent). Value propositions express the characteristics that make a company a great place to work. The second step is to transmit the value propositions of the employer brand to the external audience (i.e., potential talent). This activity can be defined as external marketing, and its goal is to attract the targeted external audience. The third step consists of marketing and communication actions that are targeted toward current organizational personnel. The goal of this activity is to transmit the brand's promises to employees and involve them in the organizational culture (Lievens, 2007).

Employer branding consists of two different dimensions: internal and external. Internal employer branding aims to impact firms' current employees, and external employer branding focuses on attracting potential talent. Per Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), employer branding also aims to differentiate a firm from other companies. In addition, Moroko and Uncles (2005) stated that employer branding brings the concepts of marketing and HRM under one umbrella in an interactive process between the internal and external operations of the company.

3.1.2 External employer branding

The function of external employer branding is to send messages to targeted audience members that present attractive elements of the firm as an employer. This strategy aims to reach and attract the best potential talent (Harris & Chernatony, 2001). Sending distinctive employer brand messages expands awareness of the company as an employer and attracts potential talent. Employers can create direct communication with potential recruits by sharing important organizational dimensions, such as the firm's values (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

The functions of a skilled workforce are to add value to the firm and to deliver the company's brand promises effectively to selected targets (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). This has been found to lead to better customer interactions (i.e., employees with talented skills and consistent values are able to fulfill and sometimes exceed customers' expectations of the brand promise) (Pringle & Gordon, 2001). Fulfilling and/or exceeding customer expectations toward the brand increases satisfaction amongst the external audience, which in turn leads to customer loyalty (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Heskett, Jones, Loveman, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1994). Hatch and Shultz (1997) stated that companies with highly talented employees and loyal customers can increase the firm's profitability and revenue growth.

External employer branding also has a strong link to recruitment processes. In the recruitment literature, employer brand has been shown to be a particularly significant predictor of early judgements made by new employees about their employers (Gatewood, Gowan, & Lautenschlager, 1993). In addition, Turban, Forret, and Hendrickson (1998) noted that a positive employer image can impact a potential applicant's perceptions of an employer's organizational attributes.

Therefore, companies with effective employer branding can achieve better external reputations, and positively perceived reputations increase employer attractiveness and employee retention rates (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Michaels et al, 2001).

3.1.3 Internal employer branding

Employer branding has the same elements as internal branding, and both concepts relate to organizations' current employees. Per Bergstrom, Blumenthal, and Crothers (2002), internal branding consists of three functions: a) effective communication of the brand to employees, b) convincing employees of the

brand's relevance and worth, and c) linking every job in the company to successful brand delivery (Betrhon & Ewing, 2005). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) claimed that internal employer branding affects current employees' brand loyalty toward the employer. In general, employer branding is a tool for companies to deliver key brand messages to internal stakeholder groups in the organization. This internal communication verifies that employees are properly aligned with the company's brand (Keller, 2002).

Employee satisfaction and loyalty have been identified as critical goals for employer branding. Companies with loyal and satisfied employees have a high retention rate (Heskett et al., 1994), and their employees often share positive information about the company to both internal and external audiences (Reichheldt, 1996). Herman (1991) found that positive word of mouth (WOM) regarding organizations engenders camaraderie both within and across the teams, which in turn leads to greater company loyalty. In addition, Chambers et al. (1998) stated that current employees have an important role in spreading positive information about the firm to external audiences (i.e., the potential workforce). Positive WOM then increases the attractiveness of the employer and leads to a better reputation from the perspective of prospective employees (Moroko & Uncles, 2005).

3.2 Employer branding framework

Organizations can use employer branding to execute recruitment and retention activities within an assimilated HR strategy. Employer branding positively affects employee retention, recruitment processes, staffing, training and development, and career management. These activities are crucial for developing synergy and should be managed under one umbrella (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) introduced a conceptual framework that clarifies the employer branding process. This framework (Figure 4) illustrates a process where employer branding is seen as vital to developing employer attraction (external audience) and employee productivity (internal audience). As shown in Figure 4, employer branding creates two principal assets. In the external processes of employer branding, brand associations are the main asset and the determinant of employer image, which in turn leads to greater employer attractiveness. In the internal processes of employer branding, employer brand loyalty is a principal asset that acts as a determinant of employee productivity. Brand loyalty is built from both organizational culture and organizational identity (Figure 4).

This study aimed to investigate only the internal impacts of employer branding. The factors that were suggested to explain external impacts (e.g., employer attraction) were connected to the internal context in this study. Hence, this study also investigated the case company's current employees' perceptions of employer brand association, employer image, and employer attraction.

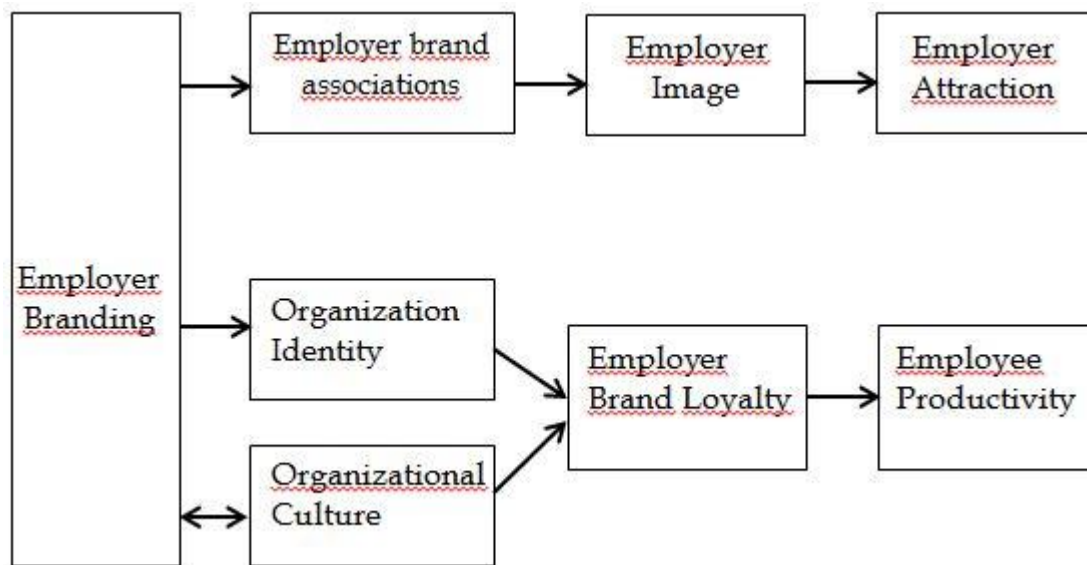


FIGURE 4 Employer branding framework (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004)

3.2.1 Employer brand associations

Per Aaker (1991), brand associations are the thoughts and ideas that the brand name arouses in the minds of consumers. Brand association also evokes feelings on a more sensory level. Some consumers have sentimental reactions and memories of tastes and/or smells regarding a brand (Supphellen, 2000). Broniarczyk and Alba (1994) noted that brand association consists of adequate usage situations, product attributes, and provision of customer benefits. Brand associations can vary between brands and in the minds of consumers. For example, Kodak and “photography” as well as Volvo and “safety” are inexorably linked (Farquhar & Herr, 1993). These strong associations can be defined as brand-specific associations (Farquhar & Herr, 1993).

Per Aaker (1991), brand associations include 11 different types:

1. Product attributes
2. Intangibles
3. Customer benefits
4. Relative price
5. Use/application
6. User/customer
7. Celebrity/person
8. Lifestyle/personality
9. Product class
10. Competitors
11. Country/geographic area

Keller (1993) classified brand association into three main categories: attributes, benefits, and attitudes. Attributes are consumers' descriptive opinions, which define products and/or services. Attributes can also be considered either product-related or non-product-related (e.g., thoughts on price, user imagination, and brand personality). Benefits can be defined as consumers' personal opinions and values toward a brand's attributes. These brand associations convey what consumers think about what the brand (product or service) can do for them. In addition, benefits can be separated into functional, experimental, and symbolic dimensions. Finally, attitudes are the overall evaluation of a brand from the consumer's perspective (Keller, 1993). Brand associations can be further separated into corporate and product associations (Chen, 2001).

Employees and prospective talent create their perceived employer brand associations via employer branding processes. Additionally, information sources that are not managed by the company might affect perceived associations. These unknown desired associations should be identified proactively to create successful employer branding campaigns. Identified positive outcomes of these processes include an increased number of qualified applicants for professional positions (Hutton, 2001).

Employer branding plays a strong role in engendering the desired employer brand associations. Thus, employer brand association is the result of employer branding (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). In addition, brand associations have been found to affect employer brand image. For instance, Keller (1993) argued that the perceived value of the brand image is influenced by brand associations in the person's mind.

3.2.2 Employer brand image

To understand the term "employer brand image," it is beneficial to clarify the term "brand image." Brand image is related to either product or non-product attributes, and it contains functional and symbolic benefits (Keller, 1993). Biel (1991) argued that overall perceptions of brand image consist of attributes and associations that people connect to the brand. These connections can be either "hard" (functional attributes) or "soft" (emotional attributes, such as trustworthiness).

Employer brand image as a concept has the same elements as brand image, with the only difference being that employer image is directed toward employment situations. Employer image consists of both functional and symbolic benefits of the employer brand that describe elements of employment with that firm. Functional elements of the employer brand include objective terms, such as salary, benefits, and contributions. These terms are desirable attributes for employees, which affect their perceptions of the employer. Symbolic elements of the employer brand encompass employees' perceptions about the prestige of the firm (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

3.2.3 Employer attraction

Employer attraction is a desirable objective of employer branding processes. The more attractive an employer, the stronger the organization's employer brand (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Berthon et al. (2005, p. 156) defined employer attractiveness as "the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization."

Employer brand image has a positive relation to employer attraction, which has been noted in numerous studies (e.g., Belt & Paolillo, 1992; Gatewood, et al., 1993; Tom, 1971; Turban & Greening, 1997). One theory to support this perspective is that employer image affects attraction, which is in turn related to the P-O fit concept. This theory consists of claims that potential employees have needs, personalities, and values, and they assimilate these to the employer image that they have created. It has been found that, the stronger the match between an employer and employees' values, the higher the attraction level of the organization from the perspective of employees (Cable & Judge, 1996; Judge & Cable, 1997; Schneider, 1987).

Kristof (1996, p. 6) defined P-O fit as "the compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when either (a) at least one entity provides what the other needs or (b) they share similar fundamental characteristics or (c) both." Previous studies have found that P-O fit has a relationship with employees' work-related attitudes (e.g., Chapman, Uggerslev, Carrol, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005; Kristof-Brown, Jansen, & Colbert, 2002). These work-related attitudes include employees' satisfaction with their employer (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Many researchers have noted the relationship between P-O fit and satisfaction. For instance, Verquer, Beehr, and Wagner (2003) found that increased P-O fit will increase employees' job satisfaction. In turn, poor P-O fit leads to declines in overall job satisfaction (Wheeler, Buckley, Halbesleben, Brouer, & Ferris, 2005).

Based on the findings of employer brand association, employer brand image, and employer attraction presented above, this study proposed the following hypotheses:

H3: Sponsorship, as an employer branding activity, has a positive impact on employer brand associations from the perspective of current employees.

H4: Employer brand associations positively affect employer brand image from the perspective of current employees.

H5: Employer brand image has a positive impact on employer attraction.

H6: Employer attraction has a positive relationship to employees' overall satisfaction.

3.2.4 Organizational identity

Organizational identity has a strong connection to the employer branding concept (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Some previous definitions of employer branding have included the notions and attributes of organizational identity. These notions underlined the distinct connection between organizational identity and employer branding (Dell, Aispan, Bodenberg, Troy, & Hickey, 2001).

Organizational identity has generally been defined as the characteristics of an organization that are recognizable by employees (Dell et al., 2001). Per Albert and Whetten (1985), organizational identity consists of elements that are central, enduring, and distinctive to organizations. Dutton et al. (1994) argued that organizational identity consists of a collective attitude of the members of a company and their thoughts regarding the organization as a group. Employees' have a desire to identify themselves with their company. If organizational identity is perceived attractive, members will make that identification (Dutton et al., 1994).

Organizational identity is built amongst members of an organization and is the outcome of both internal and external communication (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000). A company's managers have the opportunity to modify organizational members' perceptions of organizational identity using different communication messages, such as sharing information regarding organizational goals, policies, and practices (Gioia et. al., 2000). In addition, Scott and Lane (2000) stated that, with these communication messages, organizations can influence the desired employer images from the perspective of current employees.

Employee commitment and loyalty are critical goals of employer branding strategies, and organizational identity affects these elements (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Crewson, 1997). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) stated that organizational identity is the attitudinal contributor to employer brand loyalty. Moreover, employee commitment and loyalty increase with increased identification (Crewson, 1997). In addition, Allen, Shore, and Griffeth (2003) found that organizational identity correlates to job satisfaction.

3.2.5 Organizational culture

Employer branding is a multifunctional tool that companies can utilize to improve organizational culture and identity, which lead to higher employee commitment. Therefore, organizational culture and identity are crucial tasks for employer branding managers (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Organizational culture consists of a firm's general assumptions and values, which members of the organization teach to new employees. These cultural elements can be defined as behaviors in the workplace (Schein, 1985). Organizational culture is developing continuously and changing employee behaviors. It also acts as a guide to match employees' behavior with that of other co-workers (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Organizational culture is generally defined as a multidimensional concept that consists of a complex set of values, beliefs, assumptions, and symbols.

These elements define the way that companies manage their business (Barney, 1986). Deshpande and Webster (1989, p. 4) defined organizational culture as “the pattern of shared values and beliefs that help members of an organization understand why things happen and thus teach them the behavioral norms in the organization.” Per Louis (1983), culture can have comprehensive impacts on a company because an organization’s culture defines relevant employees, customers, suppliers, and competitors. It also describes what kind of interactive relationship a company has with these actors (Louis, 1983).

Schein (1985) stated that culture consists of artifacts, values, and assumptions (Figure 5). Artifacts are the visible, tangible, and audible results of activities that are attached to values and assumptions, which are beliefs about reality and nature. Finally, values consist of principles, philosophies, goals, and standards that are considered to have essential worth.

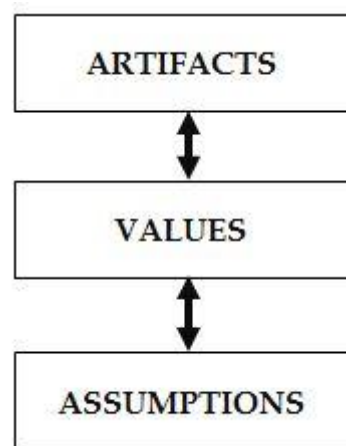


FIGURE 5 Schein’s model of culture in organization (Schein, 1985)

From the perspective of employer branding managers, it is crucial to develop a productive and supportive organizational culture. Employer branding and internal marketing have been identified as a tool that can develop an organization’s culture as desired. Without a clear picture of an organization’s cultural demands, employees lack guidance to behave in the expected manner. Organizations should use internal communication channels effectively to promote the company’s cultural values to employees. By using employer branding and internal marketing, a company can strengthen and/or change its cultural elements by guiding employees toward the desired work behavior and supporting their quality of life at work (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Organizational culture has a role in the development of organizational commitment. Therefore, it is crucial for employer branding strategies. Deal and Kennedy (1982) and Peters, Waterman, and Jones (1982) argued that organizational culture has a strong link to organizational commitment, and it acts as a crucial predictor of this desirable organizational behavior. Gifford, Zammuto, Goodman, and Hill (2002) stated that improved organizational culture benefits

the quality of employees' working circumstances. This in turn leads to increased employee commitment.

In addition, the relationship between organizational culture and job satisfaction has been the focus of several previous studies (Arnold & Spell, 2006; Jian & Klen, 2000; Mckinnon, Harrison, Chow, & Wu, 2003). These studies provided clear support for the relationship between the two concepts. Nystrom (1993) found that a strong organizational culture tends to positively impact employee job satisfaction. Additionally, Sempene, Rieger, and Roodt (2002) found that job satisfaction predicts employees' perceptions of organizational culture.

Based on the empirical findings of organizational identity and culture, this study proposed the following hypotheses:

H7: Organizational identity has a positive impact on employee satisfaction.

H8: Organizational culture has a positive impact on employee satisfaction.

3.2.6 Job satisfaction

Employee job satisfaction has been recognized as an important research factor in organizational psychology from the perspective of academic scholars (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001). In recent organizational studies, job satisfaction was one of the most investigated concepts (Currivan, 2000). Job satisfaction generally refers to positive emotions toward a certain job (Mueller, Wallace, & Price, 1992), and it has been understood as the level of an employee's emotional orientation toward the work role occupied within the company (Lease, 1998).

Based on Herzberg, Mausner, Peterson, and Capwell's (1957) proposition, job satisfaction consists of two main dimensions: motivation and "hygiene." Hygiene issues relate to an employee's working environment. These elements include salary, interpersonal relations, working conditions, supervision, and company and administrative policies. Although hygiene issues have no direct impact on satisfaction and they do not motivate employees, they do have a connection to employee dissatisfaction. Hence, if hygiene issues are managed well, employees are satisfied. Motivators generate employee satisfaction toward the work environment by meeting individuals' needs for meaning and personal growth. These motivators include issues such as the work itself, achievement, responsibility, advancement, and recognition. When hygiene elements have been conquered, motivators will increase job satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1957).

Previous studies have attempted to identify the correlation between job satisfaction and employee commitment. Job satisfaction has been widely identified as a significant influencer of organizational commitment (Bluedorn, 1982; Iverson, 1992, Lincoln & Kalleberg, 1990). Syptak, Marsland, and Ulmer (1999) found that satisfied employees tend to be more productive, creative, and committed to their employers than those who are dissatisfied.

3.2.7 Employer brand loyalty

The definition of employer brand loyalty is generally analogous with the concepts of employee engagement, employee organizational commitment, job involvement, and organizational citizenship behavior (Robinson, Perryman, and Hayday, 2004). In this research context, it is beneficial to consider the concepts of employer brand loyalty, employee engagement, and organizational commitment.

Employer brand loyalty correlates to employees' organizational behavior. Per Aaker (1991), brand loyalty is the affection that a consumer has for a brand, which is usually based on a positive exchange between the customer and the brand. Brand loyalty is created through the establishment of trust between the brand and the customer. It includes characteristics that loyal customers enjoy to the extent that, even if a brand makes changes to its products and/or services, customers are unlikely to defect to another brand (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Chaudri and Holbrook (2001) divided brand loyalty into two dimensions: behavioral and attitudinal. The behavioral dimension refers to consumers' willingness to repurchase a product and/or brand in the future, whereas the attitudinal dimension refers to customers' commitment levels toward a brand. In the employment context, brand loyalty refers to employees' commitment to their employer. Employer brand loyalty also contains behavioral and attitudinal dimensions (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Regarding employer branding, employee engagement is similar to employer brand loyalty (Robinson et al., 2004). Even though engagement has been defined as a concept that is similar to organizational commitment, previous literature has differentiated these two concepts. For example, Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzales-Roma, and Bakker (2002, p. 74) stated that engagement reflects an employee's "positive, fulfilling, and work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption." Engagement has commonly been understood as consisting of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral elements. These dimensions are associated with individual role performance (Saks, 2006). In addition, Shuck and Wollard (2010, p. 103) noted that employee engagement refers to "an individual employee's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state that is directed toward desired organizational outcomes." Kahn (1990, p. 694) described personal engagement as follows: ". . . the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances. Personal disengagement refers to the uncoupling of selves from work roles; people withdraw and defend themselves either physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances."

Employee engagement is related to job satisfaction and organizational involvement. For instance, Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes (2002) argued that, when job satisfaction and organizational involvement are high, employees tend to be engaged with the organization. Moreover, highly engaged employees perceive employer brand positively. Their mindsets are characterized by consecration, vitality, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Regarding employer branding, the attitudinal dimension of employer brand loyalty refers to employee commitment to the employer (Chaudri & Holbrook, 2001). Commitment has been defined and researched broadly. The common theme amongst various definitions of organizational commitment is that an individual/employee has some kind of link to an organization (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1982). Commitment refers to an individual's faith in and acknowledgement of the company's values and goals. Committed employees desire to execute considerable effort on behalf of the firm and are willing to uphold organizational membership (Porter et al., 1974).

The definitions of employee organizational commitment have generally similar elements to employee engagement, organizational citizenship behavior, and job involvement (Robinson et al., 2004). Sheldon (1971, p. 143) defined organizational commitment as follows: "An attitude or an orientation toward the organization, which links or attaches the identity of the person to the organization." According to Meyer and Herscovitch (2001, p. 301), commitment is "a force that binds an individual to a course of action that is of relevance to a particular target." Organizational commitment is often separated into attitudinal and behavioral approaches. Attitudinal commitment focuses on the formation of an attachment that exists in the relationship between the employee and the organization. It encompasses the level of an employee's psychological identification and involvement within the organization (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). Behavioral commitment is understood as an employee's intention to continue to work within the same organization (Meyer, 1997).

Organizational commitment can be divided into three different psychological states: affective, continuance, and normative. Affective commitment reflects a desire to maintain membership in an organization, which develops largely as the result of work experiences that create feelings of comfort and personal competence. Continuance commitment reflects a need to remain, and it results from recognition of the costs (e.g., existence of side bets, lack of alternatives) associated with leaving. Normative commitment reflects an obligation to remain that results from internalization of the loyalty norm and the receipt of favors that require repayment. In addition to these components, each employee has a commitment profile that reflects his/her desire, need, and obligation to remain (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Employee commitment level correlates with job satisfaction, productivity, and organizational performance (Ali et al., 2010; Koch & Steers, 1978). Koch and Steers (1978) found that commitment is a better predictor of turnover than job satisfaction. From the perspective of the employer, employee commitment toward the organization is highly important and critical to the company's functions. From the perspective of employees, it is also important to gain a strong and committed relationship with the employer. Employees might think that their expertise in a specific job would not be in demand at either another company or in employment market in general (Scholl, 1981). However, repeatedly changing one's employment situation may cause damage to his/her reputation as a stable and loyal employee (Staw, 1981).

Employee organizational commitment affects productivity. A positive relationship between these concepts has been confirmed by several different studies (Angle & Perry, 1981; Deepa, Palaniswamy, & Kuppusamy, 2014; Khan, Jam, Akbar, Khan, & Hijazi, 2011; Woodman, 1989). Organizational commitment is crucial for increasing the general performance of the company (Ekmekci, 2011). Per Woodman (1989), employees should be committed to an organization to make task designs, technology, structure, and strategies work productively. In addition, Pasmore and Fagans (1992) argued that organizational commitment determines the effectiveness of the organization, and effectiveness is naturally linked with productivity (Van De Voorde, Van Veldhoven, & Paauwe, 2009).

3.2.8 Employee productivity

Employee productivity is crucial to an organization's overall business performance (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Productivity consists of efficiency and effectiveness (Karr-Wisniewski & Lu, 2010). Bernolak (1997, p. 204) defined productivity as follows: "How much and how well we produce from resources used. If we produce better goods from the same resources, we increase productivity. Or, if we produce the same goods from lesser resources, we also increase productivity."

Previous literature has underlined that employee job satisfaction is connected to productivity. For example, Miller and Monge (1986) stated that highly satisfied employees are motivated, which subsequently increases productivity. Organizational culture also has a connection with productivity. Hellriegel, Slocum, and Woodman (1998) stated that successful and effective companies have an organizational culture that stimulates involvement in important activities, such as decision making, goal setting, and problem solving. In addition, the authors proposed that encouraging a culture that affects employee involvement in a company's daily activities can influence an employee's performance (Hellriegel et al., 1998).

In this study, productivity resulted from organizational commitment, which came from perceived satisfaction toward the employer. Based on the findings of employee satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee productivity, this study proposed the following hypotheses:

H9: Employee job satisfaction toward the employer has a positive impact on organizational commitment.

H10: Employee organizational commitment positively affects productivity.

3.3 Research framework and hypothesis of the study

The literature review of this study examined the concepts of sport sponsorship and employer branding. In addition, it displayed the connection between these two concepts. The previous literature contains no studies that directly discuss sport sponsorship and employer branding under the same umbrella. However, some studies have provided several different outcomes that support the feasibility of sport sponsorship projects as an employer branding activity (Ali et al., 2010; Keller, 1993; Meenaghan et al., 2013, Olejniczak & Aicher, 2010).

The research model of this study, which is presented in Figure 6, considered a sport sponsorship project as an employer branding activity that aimed to impact current employee opinions toward the case company.

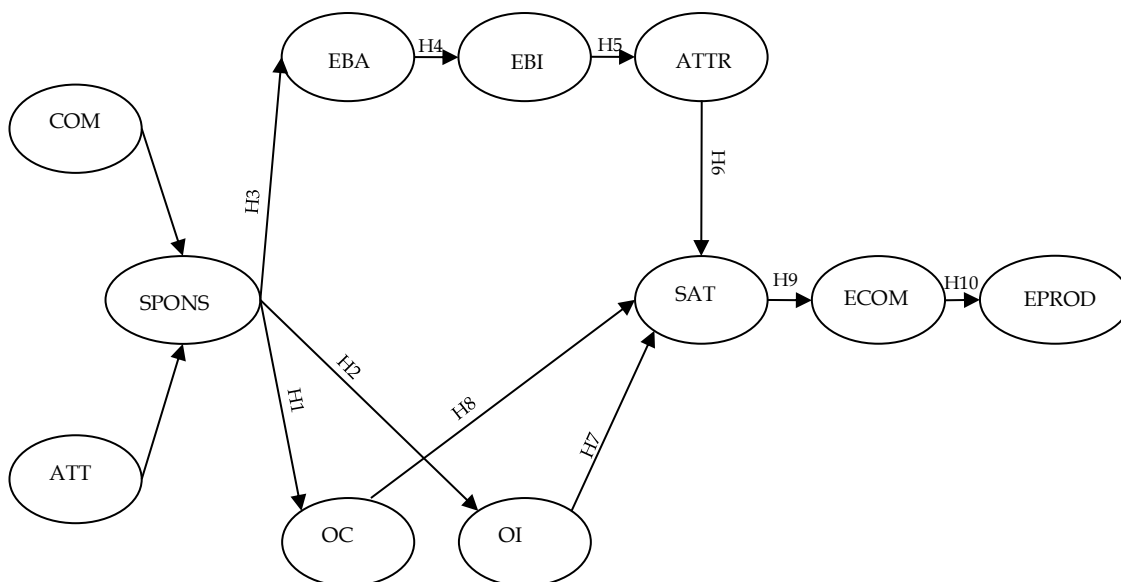


FIGURE 6 Research model

Notes: COM - Project communication & Communication quality; ATT - Attitude toward sport sponsorship; SPONS - Sponsorship; OC - Organizational culture; EBA - Employer brand association; OI - Organizational identity; EBI - Employer brand image; ATTR - Employer attraction; SAT - Overall satisfaction; ECOM - Employee organizational commitment; EPROD - Employee productivity

Earlier chapters examined previous studies that supported the hypotheses' development. The proposed hypotheses and the key supporting literature are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1 Key supporting literature for the hypotheses

Hypotheses	Key supporting literature
H1: Sponsorship → Organizational culture	Ali et al., 2010; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Meenaghan et al., 2013; Meenaghan, 2001
H2: Sponsorship → Organizational identity	Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Hickman et al., 2005; Olejniczak & Aicher, 2010
H3: Sponsorship → Employer brand associations	Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Hutton, 2001; Keller, 1993
H4: Employer brand associations → Employer brand image	Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Keller, 1993; Zepf, 2008
H5: Employer brand image → Employer attraction	Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Belt & Paolillo, 1981; Gatewood et al., 1993; Tom, 1971; Turban & Greening, 1997
H6: Employer attraction → Job satisfaction	Chapman et al., 2005; Kristof-Brown et al., 2002; Verquer et al., 2003
H7: Organizational identity → Job satisfaction	Allen et al., 2003; Hickman et al., 2005; Meenaghan, 2001
H8: Organization culture - Job satisfaction	Jian and Klen (2000); Meenaghan (2001); Sempene et al. (2002); Mckinnon, et al. (2003); Arnold & Spell (2006); Meenaghan et al. (2013)
H9: Job satisfaction → Commitment	Bluedorn, 1982; Harter et al., 2002; Heskett et al., 1994; Iverson, 1992; Lincoln & Kalleberg, 1990; Syptak et al., 1999
H10: Commitment → Productivity	Ali et al., 2010; Angle & Perry, 1981; Deepa et al., 2014; Woodman, 1989; Khan et al., 2014

4 METHODOLOGY

A researcher's chosen methodology leads his/her study's general direction; it is an overall masterplan that justifies all decisions made in the research process and integrates them into a coherent framework (Patton, 2002, p. 39). Yin (1981) claimed that social science research methods can be divided into four categories: case study, experiment, history, and simulation. This study aimed to investigate the impacts of employer branding in the case company via the chosen research strategy of a single-case study. This chapter discusses the methodological choices that aimed to achieve the study's objectives.

4.1 Case study as a research strategy

The research strategy used in this study was a single-case study, which is a widely recognized and popular methodology in social science research (Yin, 2014, p. 4). Case studies have proven to be excellent tools for generating and testing theories in the field of strategy (Gabbert, Rui grok, & Wick, 2008). As a research method, the case study is a suitable strategy for testing theories and models in a real-life context, and it also enables the researcher to retain the comprehensive characteristics of real-life circumstances (Yin, 2003, p. 2). Eisenhardt (1989, p. 534) stated that the case study is "a research strategy that focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings." Additionally, case research is particularly proper when the considered phenomenon cannot be understood if removed from its social context (Perry, 1998).

The focus of case studies is not to find generalized information but to expand our knowledge of certain phenomena (Johnston, Leach, & Liu, 1999). It is a strategy that enables the attainment of various aims (Eisenhardt, 1989), such as providing descriptions (Kidder, 1982), testing theories (Penfield, 1986), and engendering theories (Gerick, 1988).

Case studies include either one or a maximum of a few cases, which are selected for a special reason. In the business environment, the case is commonly either an organization or some part of it, such as a department or headquarters. Additionally, the case might also be a functional element within the organization, such as either a process or a structural feature (Alastair, Koskinen, & Peptone, 2005, p. 154). Per Yin (2012, p. 6), "the case" is generally a restricted entity, such as an organization, a person, an event, a behavioural condition, or other social phenomenon.

In general, single-case studies are easier to implement. However, a multiple-case study might elicit greater confidence in the research findings (Yin, 2012, 7). The single-case study is a rational research strategy when the case represents a critical test of an existing theory, an extreme and/or unusual circumstance, a common case, or when the case offers either longitudinal or revelatory

meaning (Yin, 2014, p. 56). In turn, a multiple-case study is a rational research strategy when the case follows a replication (not sampling logic). Notably, the researcher must choose every case carefully (Yin, 2014, p. 63).

Research design in empirical studies encompasses more than a work plan; rather, it is the cornerstone of the entire study. Per Yin (2003, p. 20), a case study research design requires multiple steps to get from “here” to “there.” In this context, “here” refers to the starting point, which should include an initial set of research questions to be answered, and “there” is when a study provides a set of answers and conclusions regarding the initial questions (Yin, 2014, pp. 27–28). Philliber, Schwab, and Samloss (1980) determined four problems that the research design should consider: (1) what question to study, (2) what data is relevant, (3) what data to collect, and (4) how to analyse results (in Yin, 2003, p. 22). Per Yin (2014, p. 29), case study research design consists of five important components:

1. Research questions
2. Propositions, if any
3. Unit(s) of analysis
4. The logic that links the data to the proposition
5. The criteria for interpreting the findings

Case studies can employ either embedded or holistic perspectives. With single- and multiple-case studies, these dimensions divide case studies into four research designs. Yin (2014, p. 50) defined this perspective as the “2x2-matrix.” Holistic cases consider different situations, such as why and how an organization accomplishes designated policies for promotions (holistic level). In embedded cases, the attention is directed toward different subunits. Even though the case might focus on a single organization, the analysis might concern outcomes from either different parts of the organization or its functions, such as a specific group of employees, whether from a sample survey, an analysis of the employees’ records, or some other source (Yin, 2012, p. 7).

Case study research is not restricted to a single source of data. In most cases, the best results are achieved when a study investigates multiple sources (Yin, 2012, p. 10). In addition, Eisenhardt (1989) argued that case studies could combine several different data collection methods when aiming to achieve a study’s objectives. The data collection methods used in most case studies include questionnaires, interviews, and archives (Eisenhardt, 1989). Yin (2012, p. 10) listed those as well as others to create six common data collection methods for executing case studies:

1. Direct observations (e.g., either human actions or a physical environment)
2. Interviews (e.g., open-ended conversations with key participants)

3. Archival records (e.g., student records)
4. Documents (e.g., newspaper articles, letters, e-mails, and reports)
5. Participant-observation (e.g., being identified as a researcher but also filling a real-life role in the scene being studied)
6. Physical artifacts (e.g., computer downloads of employees' work)

Regardless of the data source, the evidence of these data collection methods may be either qualitative (e.g., words), quantitative (e.g., numbers), or a combination of both (Eisenhardt, 1989). Qualitative data generally consider non-numeric data, such as word tables. Quantitative data focus on numeric data, such as ordinals, intervals, and ratio measures (Yin, 2012, p. 11).

After considering the available methods, the embedded single-case study was the most convenient strategy for achieving the objectives of this study. The chosen data collection method was the questionnaire, and the evidence was drawn from a quantitative survey, which, per Hirsjärvi, Remes, and Sajavaara (2005, p. 125), is a traditional data collection method. In quantitative surveys, a comprehensive amount of data is collected in a standardized form from a broad number of people at a single point in time (Brymann & Bell, 2007, p. 56). The survey questions should be identical for every respondent (Hirsjärvi et al., 2005, 184).

4.2 Data Collection and practical implementation

The survey questionnaire was directed toward the case company's current employees, and the data were collected via an online survey. This type of data collection method can have several advantages, such as quickness, the opportunity to gather a large quantity of good quality data, the opportunity to categorize respondents, low expenses, and data objectivity (Birks & Malholtra, 2007, p. 274).

The questionnaire was constructed in English and translated into Finnish by the author. This study used the Webropol 3.0 online survey solution platform for data collection. The link to the questionnaire was sent to 3,200 individual employees' e-mail addresses, and 716 of the case company employees responded. Employees had a possibility to respond to the survey questionnaire during 27.2. - 12.3.2017. Respondents were motivated to participate in the survey via a raffle that offered the chance to win an iPad Mini.

4.2.1 The questionnaire

Zikmund, Babin, Carr, and Griffin (2010) stated that a questionnaire should be planned such that respondents can easily understand every question and word of the survey. The questionnaire of this study was created via structured claims that were drawn from scholarly articles. Original items were modified into suit-

able forms by the author of this study. The survey consisted of 10 different factors, including 47 questions and/or statements. All these items are presented in the appendix. Per Bryman and Bell (2007, pp. 161, 162), multiple-indicator measures can verify study reliability. In addition, the questionnaire included questions regarding respondents' background information, such as gender, age, work position, work history in the case company, work location, and whether the employee took part in an employer branding activity (the sports event). These questions were located at the end of the questionnaire.

As previously mentioned, the questionnaire consisted of 10 different factors. Project communication and communication quality were measured using five different items adopted from Hänninen and Karjaluoto (2017), which were related to attitudes toward sport sponsorship and employee perceptions of sponsor-event fit that were adopted from Speed and Thompson (2000). Three items were adopted from Yoo and Dontu (2001) to measure employer brand associations, and three items related to employer brand image were adopted from Nguyen and Leblanc (2001). Employer attraction was measured using a four-item scale by Lievens (2007). Organizational identity-related items were adopted from David, Kline, and Dai (2005), which consisted of seven items. Organizational culture was measured using a seven-item scale that was provided by Dawson, Abbot, and Shoemaker (2011). The measurement scale of overall employee satisfaction toward the employer consisted of two items, which were adopted from Ryan, Chan, Ployhart, and Slade (1999). Employee organizational commitment was measured using five items, which were adopted from Fernandez-Lorez, Gavilan, Avello, and Blasco (2016). Finally, three items were used to measure employee productivity and personal performance. Two of these items were adopted from Karr-Wisniewski and Lu (2010) and the third was adopted from Robertson, Jansen Birch, and Cooper (2012) to measure employee productivity and personal performance. Original items were modified to fit perfectly to the context of this study; however, it was necessary to make only minor changes. Questionnaire items were measured via a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Per Metsämuuronen (2005, p. 61), a 7-point Likert scale is a better option for measuring participants' opinions than a 5-point Likert scale because it provides more reliable results. Survey completion took approximately 5–10 minutes.

4.3 Data analysis

The collected data were transferred from the Webropol 3.0 online survey platform to the IBM SPSS statistics program. SPSS was used to prepare the raw data and to execute the exploratory factor analysis. After this pre-analysis, a confirmatory factor analysis was executed by using PLS 3.2.6 software (Ringle, Wende & Becker, 2015).

At the beginning of the analysis, the data were checked against insufficient responses; notably, no insufficient responses were found. After the first phase,

the data analysis included a general statistical analysis, which considered general information, such as variables of the respondents' background information, frequencies and percentage shares. The results of the basic information are presented in Table 2. The impact of the background variables on the measured factors were also analyzed via the SPSS statistical program.

The second stage of data analysis involved the use of IBM SPSS Statistics software to conduct an exploratory factor analysis. Per Metsämuuronen (2005, p. 598), the purposes of an exploratory factor analysis are to disclose different combinations of responses and to classify these into latent factors. This phase concerned different variables and classified these into factors by evaluating how strongly these variables loaded to a certain factor (Metsämuuronen, 2005, p. 600).

Thereafter, the exploratory factor analysis was executed, and the data were moved to PLS program for further analysis. This stage of data analysis concerned confirmatory factor analysis, which is a common and growing statistical method for modeling the relations between different data variables (Hoyle, 2012, p. 3). Confirmatory factor analysis is also known as structural equation modeling (SEM) (Metsämuuronen, 2005, p. 632). SEM has commonalities with other statistical models, such as multiple regression analysis, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and principal factor analysis (Hoyle, 2012, p. 4.). When in the stage of confirmatory analysis, the researcher has a clear previous understanding of the factor structure. The function of confirmatory factor analysis is to either confirm or cancel any previous understanding that is based on empirical data (Karjaluoto, 2007).

SEM consists of two different dimensions: the inner model presents the constructs of the study and examines the relationship between used constructs, and the outer model examines the relationship between constructs and the indicator variables (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2014, p. 12).

5 RESULTS

This chapter presents the study's results. First, the respondents' demographic and background information are presented. An examination of the exploratory factor analysis, the measurement model, and the structural model follow. Finally, evaluations of the presented hypotheses are discussed.

5.1 Respondents' background information

Of the 716 valid responses, 60.6% were from males and 39.4% were from females. The age groups were divided into 5 different categories: between 36-45 years of age, which comprised 30.0% of all respondents; 46-55 years of age (28.4%), 26-35 years of age (24.7%), over 56 years of age (13.4%), and 18-25 years of age (3.5%).

The work location was divided into 17 different countries (Table 2), with the majority of respondents working in Finland (51.0%). The second largest work location was Sweden (21.6%). The other country locations reached only minor percentages of the overall number of respondents. Therefore, the work location variable was recoded into three different groups: Finland, Sweden, and other countries.

Work experience at the case company was divided into five different time spans. In total, 59.90% of all survey participants had been working at the case company for more than 10 years. Other work experience included 5-10 years (14.0%), 2-5 years (12.7%), and less than two years (12.3%). A minor group included employees with short-term temporary contracts (1.1%).

Position in the case company was also addressed in the questions regarding background information. The options were based on commonly used classifications in the case company, which consisted of four alternatives: "employee with no direct reports and no project responsibilities" (37.2%), "employee with direct reports" (31.6%), "employee with no direct reports and project responsibilities" (26.5%), and "other, please specify" (4.8%).

The case company's organization was divided into six working divisions: Division 5 (40.2%), Division 6 (21.4%), Division 3 (12.7%), Division 2 (12.0%), Division 4 (9.5%), and Division 1 (4.2%).

In the section on background information, there was also a question that sorted out employees' participation according to the case company's employer branding activity during the sponsorship process. Respondents could answer either "yes" or "no," and 75.7% of all respondents participated.

TABLE 2 Background information

	N	Percentage
Gender		
Male	434	60.6
Female	282	39.4
Total	716	100
Age		
18–25	25	2.5
26–35	177	24.7
36–45	215	30.0
46–55	203	28.4
Over 56	96	13.4
Total	716	100
Work experience in the case company		
Short-term temporary	8	1.1
Less than 2 years	88	12.3
2–5 years	91	12.7
5–10 years	100	14.0
Over 10 years	429	59.9
Total	716	100
Work location		
Finland	365	51.0
Sweden	154	21.5
Estonia	6	0.8
Russia	27	3.8
Poland	0	0.0
Czech Republic	26	3.6
Austria	16	2.2
Latvia	1	0.1
Lithuania	0	0.0
Italy	0	0.0
Belgium	23	3.2
China	29	4.0
Australia	0	0.0
France	2	0.3
United Kingdom	10	1.1
Germany	27	3.8
Some other country	30	4.2
Total	716	100

(continues)

TABLE 2 (continues)

Work division		
Division 1	30	4.2
Division 2	86	12.0
Division 3	91	12.7
Division 4	68	9.5
Division 5	288	40.2
Division 6	153	21.4
Total	716	100
Position		
Employee with direct reports	226	31.6
Employee with no direct reports and project responsibilities	190	26.5
Employee with no direct reports and no project responsibilities	266	37.2
Other, please specify	34	4.8
Total	716	100
Participation in the employer branding activity		
Yes	542	75.7
No	174	24.3
Total	716	100

This study used an SPSS one-way ANOVA and Independent Samples t-test to identify the impacts of background variables on the measured constructs. Respondents' work location was the most significant background variable. Work location variances were separated into three different groups: Finland (n=365), Sweden (n=154), and other countries (n=197). The analysis provided statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) in 37 out of the 47 items. Generally, respondents from Finland and other countries answered more positively to the items than the respondents from Sweden. The results are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3 Work location, means, sig-values

Work location	Finland (N=365)	Sweden (N=154)	Other countries (N=197)	
Items	Means	Means	Means	Sig.
EBA 1	5,92	5,57	5,84	.017**
EBA2	6.24	5.49	5.76	.000***
EBA3	6.69	6.57	6.62	.434 ns
EBI1	5.76	5.71	5.99	.038**

(continues)

TABLE 3 (continues)

EBI2	5.34	5.19	5.65	.000***
EBI3	4.91	4.58	5.45	.000***
ATTR1	6.21	5.95	6.09	.045**
ATTR2	5.80	5.82	6.06	.024 ns
ATTR3	5.76	5.41	5.95	.000***
ATTR4	5.81	5.53	5.90	.018**
OC1	4.99	4.75	5.43	.000***
OC2	5.19	4.60	5.14	.000***
OC3	5.07	4.97	5.52	.000***
OC4	5.51	4.84	5.66	.000***
OC5	4.29	4.42	5.10	.000***
OC6	5.55	5.06	5.18	.000***
OC7	5.28	5.09	5.53	.002***
OC8	5.76	5.77	6.09	.005***
OI1	5.85	5.55	5.99	.000***
OI2	4.82	4.96	5.45	.000***
OI3	5.53	5.39	5.72	.024**
OI4	5.67	5.43	5.73	.038**
OI5	5.82	5.51	6.03	.000***
OI6	6.00	5.69	6.03	.001***
OI7	6,20	6,03	6,22	.113 ns
ECOM1	6.29	5.91	6.11	.002***
ECOM2	6.19	5.69	6.08	.000***
ECOM3	5.91	5.19	5.91	.000***
ECOM4	6.34	6.31	6.42	.592 ns
ECOM5	6.05	5.53	5.93	.004***
EPROD1	6.17	5.92	6.21	.004***
EPROD2	6.21	5.94	6.22	.004***
EPROD3	6.07	5.91	6.22	.020**
SAT1	5.65	5.44	5.60	.106 ns
SAT2	5.56	5.34	5.55	.100 ns
ATT1	5.27	5.21	5.43	.319 ns
ATT2	5.03	4.79	5.25	.011**
ATT3	5.30	4.94	5.24	.023**
ATT4	5.73	5.24	5.55	.001***
ATT5	5.58	5.37	5.59	.300 ns
ATT6	5.61	5.43	5.51	.450 ns
COMM1	5.57	5.77	5.74	.146 ns
COMM2	5.41	4.97	5.43	.003***
COMM3	5.60	5.03	5.44	.000***
COMM4	5.77	4.88	5.38	.000***
COMM5	5.74	5.04	5.51	.000***
COMM6	5.46	4.59	5.18	.000***

Notes: *** $p < 0.01$ - strongly significant; ** $p < 0.05$ - significant; ns - not significant; COM - Project communication & Communication quality; ATT - Attitude toward sport sponsorship; SPONS - Sponsorship; OC - Organizational culture; EBA - Employer brand association; OI - Organizational identity; EBI - Employer brand image; ATTR - Employer attraction; SAT -Overall satisfaction; ECOM - Employee organizational commitment; EPROD - Employee' productivity

The Independent Samples t-test was used to evaluate the impact of an employer branding activity that was executed during a sponsorship project. The t-test is the most common method used to compare the means between inde-

pendent groups. The requirements for executing the t-test include that variables should be distributed normally and that the data are based on an interval scale (Karjaluoto, 2005, p. 19). The analysis provided statistically significant differences in 13 of the 47 items. The results indicated that the employer branding activity had a positive influence on the employees' perceptions of the case company as an employer. The results are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4 Participation, means, means difference (sig. values)

Did you participate in employer branding activity?	Yes (N=542)	No (N=174)	Mean differences
ITEMS	Means	Means	Sig.
EBA 1	5.89	5.65	.029**
EBA2	5.91	6.07	.175 ns
EBA3	6.68	6.52	.079 ns
EBI1	5.89	5.56	.005***
EBI2	5.45	5.24	.040**
EBI3	5.00	4.96	.764 ns
ATTR1	6.11	6.13	.865 ns
ATTR2	5.93	5.70	.037**
ATTR3	5.81	5.49	.010***
ATTR4	5.82	5.63	.081 ns
OC1	5.13	4.84	.028**
OC2	5.05	5.05	.964 ns
OC3	5.20	5.06	.190 ns
OC4	5.40	5.44	.745 ns
OC5 *	4.63	4.26	.009***
OC6	5.34	5.35	.951 ns
OC7	5.31	5.31	.983 ns
OC8	5.96	5.52	.000***
OI1	5.87	5.70	.086 ns
OI2	5.11	4.78	.006***
OI3	5.57	5.49	.439 ns
OI4	5.69	5.45	.029**
OI5	5.85	5.67	.077 ns
OI6	5.95	5.93	.848 ns
OI7	6.18	6.13	.557 ns
ECOM1	6.15	6.16	.953 ns
ECOM2	6.02	6.14	.287 ns
ECOM3	5.72	5.87	.219 ns
ECOM4	6.40	6.21	.074 ns
ECOM5	5.90	5.93	.768 ns
EPROD1	6.11	6.17	.447 ns
EPROD2	6.13	6.24	.147 ns
EPROD3	6.10	6.02	.369 ns
SAT1	5.59	5.60	.856 ns
SAT2	5.51	5.52	.875 ns
ATT1	5.38	5.06	.010***
ATT2	5.11	4.82	.027**

(continues)

TABLE 4 (continues)

ATT3	5.24	5.10	.257 ns
ATT4	5.58	5.56	.907 ns
ATT5	5.55	5.49	.637 ns
ATT6	5.57	5.48	.510 ns
COMM1	5.80	5.57	.063 ns
COMM2	5.39	5.09	.013**
COMM3	5.46	5.36	.379 ns
COMM4	5.46	5.49	.774 ns
COMM5	5.56	5.41	.245 ns
COMM6	5.24	5.06	.233 ns

Notes: *** $p < 0.01$ – strongly significant; ** $p < 0.05$ – significant; ns – not significant; COM – Project communication & Communication quality; ATT – Attitude toward sport sponsorship; SPONS – Sponsorship; OC – Organizational culture; EBA – Employer brand association; OI – Organizational identity; EBI – Employer brand image; ATTR – Employer attraction; SAT – Overall satisfaction; ECOM – Employee organizational commitment; EPROD – Employee productivity

5.2 Factor analysis

Researchers should verify that all data satisfy preconditions before executing a factor analysis (Karjaluoto, 2005, 31–32). Sample size significantly affects the success of factor analysis, and it has a prominent effect on communalities between the measured issues. A sample size of 300 is generally considered to be a good amount to execute a factor analysis. When communalities are high, the sample size can be under 100 to reach a satisfactory level (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2013). The sample size of this study met these conditions. Blaikie (2003, p. 220) stated that communality is the sharing of common variables that are explained by the factors that are in place. As suggested by Karjaluoto (2007), communality values under 0.3 should be removed from further analysis if the items are not essential to the theory and hypotheses of the study. This study's data had good communality values, with only three variables having communality below the required level (EBA2, EBA3, and OC7). The items related to employer brand association (EBA2, EBA3) were kept despite the low communality value because these items had a significant role in the theory and hypotheses of this study. The one item that measured organizational culture (OC7) was extracted from further analysis because the communality of the item was low, and the item was not theoretically relevant.

To confirm the convenience of the sample, this study executed Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's tests. The purposes of the KMO test are to measure the sampling applicability of the items and to verify that the chosen items are applicable for the exploratory factor analysis (Blaikie, 2003; Karjaluoto, 2007). If the results from the KMO test provide a value under 0.70, the circumstances for continuing the analysis are considered unsatisfactory. In turn, when the KMO test provides a value over 0.90, the circumstances to continue the analysis are considered good (Karjaluoto, 2007, p. 44). The value of the KMO

test of this study was 0.970, which indicated excellent conditions to continue the analysis. The purpose of using Bartlett's test is to confirm that there is enough correlation between variables within a factor. The sig. value of this study was 0.000, which verified a good precondition for further analysis (Karjaluoto, 2007, p. 44).

Exploratory factor analysis was implemented using principal axis factoring and varimax rotation. These methods are widely used in explorative factor analysis (Karjaluoto, 2007, pp. 45, 46; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013, p. 688). The purpose of principal factor extraction is to maximize the variance extracted (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013, p. 688), whereas varimax rotation aims to increase strong loadings and lower weak loadings (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013, p. 692). Based on the performed analysis, seven factors were formed as follows:

1. Items related to organizational culture, employer brand image, organizational identity, employee satisfaction, and employer attraction
2. Items related to employees' organizational commitment and employer attraction
3. Six items related to attitudes toward sport sponsorship and one item related to project communication
4. Items related to project communication
5. Items related to employee productivity
6. Items related to organizational identity
7. Items related to employer brand association

After the rotation, those seven factors explained 65.1% of the total variance, cumulatively, as follows:

1. 45.5%
2. 7.0%
3. 4.0%
4. 2.8%
5. 2.7%
6. 1.8%
7. 1.4%

5.3 Measurement model

The analysis of the measurement model of this study was conducted by partial least squares structural equation modelling (SEM-PLS) with SmartPLS 3.2 software (Sarstedt, Ringle, Smith, Reams, & Hair, 2011). SEM-PLS software enables the analysis and interpretation of two stages sequentially. The first stage estimates both the reliability and the validity of the measurement model. The second phase concerns the assessment of the structural model. Feasibility of the measurement model can be estimated by (1) analysing item reliabilities, (2)

looking at the convergent validity of the measures combined with individual constructs, and (3) assessing discriminant validity (Hulland, 1999).

The factors of the measurement model were guided via exploratory analysis, and the factor structure was modified to ensure a good fit with the theory of this study. As noted by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), confirmatory analysis is generally used to specify the expressed relationship between items and different variables. This process enables continued inspection of the relationship between latent variables (i.e., constructs). Additionally, both reliability and validity of the measurement model should be analysed to form a basis for the structural model analysis (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

The internal consistency reliability of the measurement model is generally evaluated by using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012; Hair et al., 2014, p. 115). Cronbach's alpha has been used to measure this internal consistency most often in previous studies. It enables the evaluation of the reliability based on the inter-correlations of the considered variables, and it supposes that all the variables are equally reliable (Hair et al., 2014, p. 101). Cronbach's alpha focuses on the number of items in the scale. In addition, it subordinates internal consistency reliability, which in turn requires that conservative measures of internal consistency should be examined (Hair et al., 2014, p. 101). Cronbach's alpha can be substituted with composite reliability in the measurement process (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Hair et al., 2014, p. 101). Metsämuuronen (2005, p. 67) stated that Cronbach's alpha measures inter-correlations between indicators, whereas composite reliability does not assume equal indicator loadings in measurement (Hair et al., 2014, p. 115). This study used composite reliability to display the internal consistency reliability.

Composite reliability values can be between 0 and 1. Higher values refer to greater reliability. In exploratory research, values over 0.60 are generally acceptable; in more advanced research, values above 0.70 are recommendable (Hair et al., 2014, p. 102). In this study, all composite reliability values were at 0.772 or greater; hence, the internal consistency reliability achieved the required level.

In research, t-values indicate the statistical significance of the factor loadings, and values over 1.96 ($p < 0.05$) are acceptably statistically prominent (Hair et al., 2014, p. 102). The t-values of this study indicated statistical significance in every item that reached values of 10.018 or greater. A satisfactory factor loading should be either at or above .60 (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). All factor loadings in this study exceeded the required level, except for item EBA2 (.563). The composite reliability, factor loadings, and t-values are presented in Table 5.

TABLE 5 Factor loadings, composite reliability, and t-values

Factor	COMPOSITE RELIABILITY	ITEM	STANDARDIZED LOADINGS	T-VALUES
Communication	0.955	COM1	.871	58.711
		COM2	.903	98.655
		COM3	.926	116.852
		COM4	.892	74.690
		COM5	.905	97.215
		COM6	.793	46.338
Attitudes	0.963	ATT1	.894	86.585
		ATT2	.887	78.478
		ATT3	.914	112.557
		ATT4	.926	120.905
		ATT5	.915	114.294
		ATT6	.869	71.679
Organization identity	0.921	OI1	.809	41.988
		OI2	.735	36.105
		OI3	.751	35.728
		OI4	.775	35.870
		OI5	.817	46.373
		OI6	.838	53.435
		OI7	.811	43.046
Organization culture	0.931	OC1	.861	78.426
		OC2	.882	94.750
		OC3	.820	47.710
		OC4	.798	40.182
		OC5	.802	43.551
		OC6	.715	30.692
		OC8	.795	47.052
		Employer brand association	0.772	EBA1
EBA2	.563			10.018
EBA3	.718			15.276
Employer brand image	0.919	EBI1	.907	132.668
		EBI2	.922	130.523
		EBI3	.840	46.332
Employer attraction	0.935	ATTR1	.916	117.134
		ATTR2	.927	132.541
		ATTR3	.753	26.170
		ATTR4	.932	142.094
Job satisfaction	0.917	SAT1	.903	77.868
		SAT2	.936	204.256
Commitment	0.943	ECOM1	.889	69.622
		ECOM2	.922	111.248
		ECOM3	.844	47.993
		ECOM4	.804	37.073
		ECOM5	.920	117.682
Productivity	0.937	EPROD1	.945	156.855
		EPROD2	.944	156.064
		EPROD3	.845	33.842

Sponsorship was modelled as a formative second-order factor in the model consisting of two sub-dimensions, namely, Project communication & communication quality and Attitude toward sport sponsorship.

The second order's indicator (outer) loadings ranged between 0.795 and 0.835 and were all significant ($p < 0.01$). The outer weights ranged between -0.029 and 0.227. The weights were not significant ($p > 0.05$) for the items ATT2, ATT4, ATT5, COM2, COM3 and COM5. The VIF values also suggest retaining the formative second-order factor structure (inner VIF values for both sub-dimensions (ATT and COM) were below 5 (2.030). The VIF values for the item-level (outer VIF values) ranged between 2.089 and 5.674. Although four VIF values (ATT3, ATT4, ATT5, COM3) slightly exceeded the threshold of 5, we retained the items due to their absolute contribution to the sponsorship construct and the high indicators' outer loadings (see Hair et al. 2014, p. 129). According to Hair et al. (2014, p.129), in this situation "the indicator would generally be retained".

The convergent validity of the measurement model was analyzed through AVE values. AVE measures should indicate greater values than the variance divided between the construct and other constructs in the model, such as the squared correlation between two different constructs (Hulland, 1999). AVE values above 0.5 are considered acceptable (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The AVE values for measured factors in this study achieved the required level (Table 4). Discriminant validity was analyzed using cross-loadings and the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Hair et al., 2014, p. 145). Based on the conducted analysis, the square root of AVE achieved greater values than the correlation values amongst latent variables. Therefore, the discriminant validity of the model was verified. The values of the AVE, factor correlation, and the square root of AVE are presented in Table 6.

TABLE 6 Average Variance Extracted (AVE), factor correlations, and square root of AVE (diagonal).

	AVE	ATT	ATTR	COM	EBA	EBI	ECOM	EPROD	OC	OI	SAT
ATT	0.812	0.901									
ATTR	0.783	0.551	0.885								
COM	0.779	0.712	0.564	0.883							
EBA	0.539	0.515	0.496	0.503	0.734						
EBI	0.792	0.587	0.778	0.587	0.504	0.890					
ECOM	0.769	0.477	0.776	0.464	0.419	0.609	0.877				
EPROD	0.832	0.326	0.512	0.352	0.289	0.435	0.550	0.912			
OCULT	0.659	0.618	0.769	0.637	0.468	0.793	0.627	0.456	0.812		
OI	0.626	0.576	0.675	0.563	0.444	0.723	0.564	0.440	0.780	0.791	
SAT	0.846	0.493	0.766	0.494	0.363	0.678	0.708	0.528	0.742	0.668	0.920
SPONS	n/a	0.922	0.611	0.920	0.554	0.638	0.519	0.371	0.687	0.624	0.542

Notes: COM – Project communication & Communication quality; ATT – Attitude toward sport sponsorship; SPONS – Sponsorship; OC – Organizational culture; EBA – Employer brand association; OI – Organizational identity; EBI – Employer brand image; ATTR – Employer attraction; SAT –Overall satisfaction; ECOM – Employee organizational commitment; EPROD – Employee productivity; n/a: not applicable

5.4 The structural model

The structural model evaluation tested the hypotheses. To identify the statistical significance of the relationships, the hypotheses were evaluated using bootstrapping with 5,000 re-samples (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). Bootstrapping is a nonparametric method (Davison & Hinkley, 1997) that uses a repeated random sample instead of an original sample. It does so to engender a bootstrap sample that can provide standard errors for hypothesis testing (Hair et al., 2011). The bootstrap sample enables testing of the significance of estimated coefficients in PLS-SEM (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009).

5.4.1 Direct effects

Path coefficients (β , [-1, 1]) and coefficient of determination (R^2 values) measures were the primary evaluation criteria of the structural model. These measures aimed to display the relationship between the factors of the study (Hair et al., 2011). Generally, values of the path coefficient above 0.2 indicate significant effects between measured constructs (Hair et al., 2014, p. 201). The path coefficient measures found in this study indicated significant effects on the paths at multiple levels. Communication and attitudes toward sponsorship formed the sponsorship factor, having significant factor loadings on their second-order sponsorship construct (for communication $\beta = 0.535$, t-value 10.993 and for attitude $\beta = 0.541$, t-value 11.319). Sponsorship had a significant effect on organizational identity ($\beta = 0.624$, t-value 21.862), organizational culture ($\beta = 0.687$, t-value 28.252), and employer brand association ($\beta=0.554$, t-value 17.325). Thus, H1, H2, and H3 were accepted. Employer brand association was found to have a positive impact on employer brand image ($\beta = 0.504$, t-value 13.111), which means that H4 was supported. The relationship between employer brand image and employer attraction was strongly positive ($\beta=0.778$, t-value 40.702), thereby providing support for H5. Employer attraction had a positive impact on job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.451$, t-value 9.076), which means that H6 was accepted. The lowest path coefficient was in the relationship between organizational identity and employee job satisfaction. Although the results indicated a positive relation, the effect was small ($\beta = 0.140$, t-value 3.101). Organizational culture was positively associated with job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.286$, t-value 5.503). Therefore, H8 was supported. Job satisfaction had a strong positive impact on commitment ($\beta = 0.708$, t-value 26.751), thus supporting H9. Finally, commitment had a positive impact on employee productivity ($\beta = 0.550$, t-value 13.999). Therefore, H10 was supported. The results are presented in Table 7.

The effects of the independent construct on the coefficient of determination (R^2) values of the dependent constructs can be assessed through the f^2 effect size. The effect size should be interpreted as follows: small ($f^2 < 0.02$), medium ($0.02 < f^2 < 0.15$), and large ($f^2 > 0.35$) (Hair et al., 2014, p. 186). The f^2 values of this study ranged between 0.021 and 1.533, indicating mostly large effects to the

R² values. Only the effect of organizational identity on the R² value of job satisfaction was small. The results are presented in Table 7.

TABLE 7 Direct effects

	β	f^2	Hypotheses
H1: Sponsorship → Organizational identity	.624***	.637	Accepted
H2: Sponsorship → Organizational culture	.687***	.892	Accepted
H3: Sponsorship → Employer brand associations	.554***	.443	Accepted
H4: Employer brand associations → Employer brand image	.504***	.341	Accepted
H5: Employer brand image → Employer attraction	.778***	1.533	Accepted
H6: Employer attraction → Job satisfaction	.451***	.230	Accepted
H7: Organizational identity → Job satisfaction	.140**	.021	Accepted
H8: Organizational culture → Job satisfaction	.286***	.066	Accepted
H9: Job satisfaction → Commitment	.708***	1.005	Accepted
H10: Commitment → Productivity	.550***	.433	Accepted
	R^2		
Sponsorship	.991		
Organizational identity	.389		
Organizational culture	.471		
Employer brand association	.307		
Employer brand image	.254		
Employer attraction	.605		
Job satisfaction	.651		
Employee commitment	.501		
Employee productivity	.302		

Notes: *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; ns – not significant; n/a: not applicable

R² values were used to explain the amount of variance of dependent latent variables in the structural model. Evaluation of the R² values varies between different research disciplines. In the field of marketing research, R² values can be evaluated as follows: substantial 0.75, moderate 0.50, and weak 0.25 (Hair et al., 2011). The R² values of this study ranged between 0.254 and 0.991. Sponsorship explained 47% (R²=0.471) of the variance of organizational culture, 39% (R²=0.389) of the variance of organizational identity, and 31% (R²=0.307) of the variance of employer brand association. Employer brand association explained 25% (R²=0.254) of the variance of employer brand image. Employer brand image explained 61% (R²=0.605) of the variance of employer attraction. Organizational culture, organizational identity, and employer attraction combined explained 65% (R²=0.651) of the variance of employee satisfaction toward the employer. Job satisfaction explained 50% (R²=0.501) of the variance of employee commitment, which explained 30% (R²=0.302) of the variance of employee productivity.

The structural model of this study is shown in Figure 7.

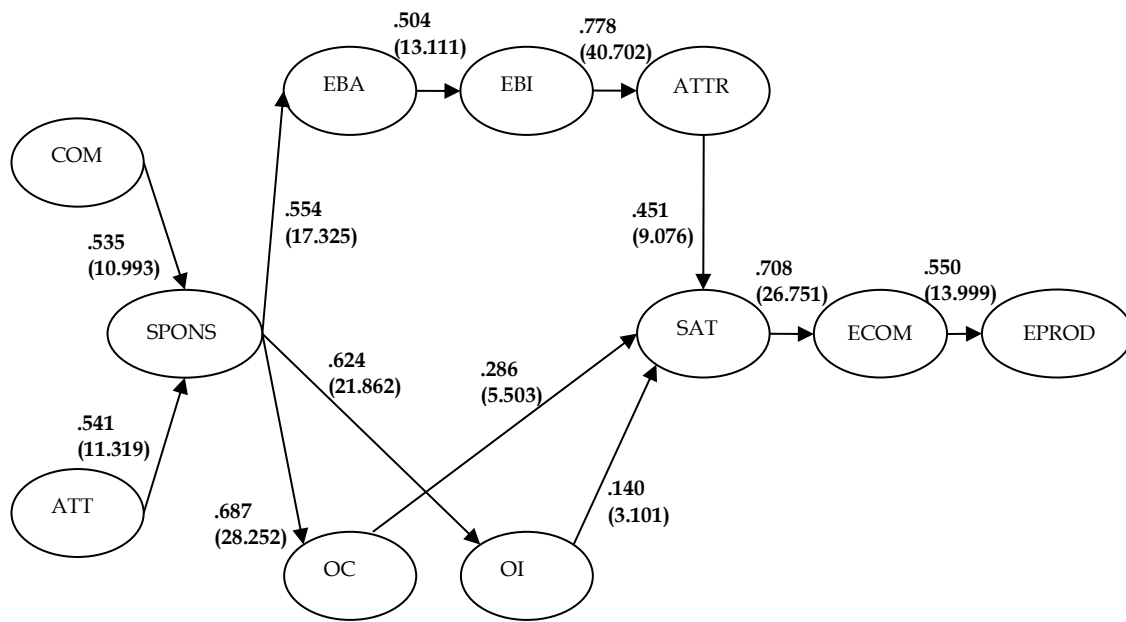


FIGURE 7 The structural model

Notes: COM – Project communication & Communication quality; ATT – Attitude toward sport sponsorship; SPONS – Sponsorship; OC – Organizational culture; EBA – Employer brand association; OI – Organizational identity; EBI – Employer brand image; ATTR – Employer attraction; SAT – Overall satisfaction; ECOM – Employee organizational commitment; EPROD – Employee productivity

6 DISCUSSION

This final chapter of this study discusses the empirical findings and considers the theoretical contributions and managerial implications that can be drawn from the results. This chapter also answers the research questions, presents an evaluation of the study, discusses limitations, and proposes opportunities for future research.

6.1 Theoretical contributions

Employer branding has become an increasingly popular trend in academic discussions. In competitive global markets, companies are striving to create tools to retain their most valuable employees (Leekha Chhabra & Charma, 2014). In addition, companies need to create a positive image to continuously attract the best potential job candidates (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). These general statements outline the importance of employer branding. As a relatively new concept in the marketing discussion, employer branding has not been extensively studied. In this study, employer branding acted as a form of sport sponsorship, and the research focused on expanding our knowledge of this strategical approach. Even though sport sponsorship and employer branding have been noticed as universal and common concepts in the marketing literature, no previous studies had connected these two areas under one umbrella.

The main purpose of this research was to examine how a sponsorship project as an employer branding activity affected the case company's current employees. In addition, this study aimed to investigate how a sports sponsorship project can affect employees' organizational behaviors and attitudes, which are central to employer branding. These behavioral and attitudinal dimensions included areas such as employee job satisfaction and employee organizational commitment. Therefore, this study provided the following research questions:

The main research question:

How does a sport sponsorship project affect current employees' opinions toward the employer?

Additionally, three sub-research questions were proposed:

RQ2: How does a sport sponsorship project affect employer attraction from the perspective of current employees?

RQ3: How does a sport sponsorship project affect employee satisfaction toward the employer?

RQ4: How does a sport sponsorship project affect current employees' organizational commitment toward the employer?

The research model of this study was built upon the conceptual employer branding framework that was provided by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004). The model was modified to fit this research context. This study is the first to provide empirical results from a sponsorship project from the employer branding perspective. The results underlined that the concepts of sponsorship and employer branding can connect under the same strategical function. In addition, the results expanded our understanding of the concepts of employer branding and sport sponsorship.

The results also showed that a sport sponsorship project, as an employer branding activity, can have both direct and positive relations with the employer brand association, organizational culture, and identity. Keller (1993) and Hutton (2001) had noted the relationship between employer branding activities and employer brand associations previously. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) suggested that employer branding has a relationship with organizational culture and identity. Hickman et al. (2005) and Olejniczak and Aicher (2010) also supported this perspective by arguing that sponsorship projects have a connection to organizational identity. In addition, it has been suggested that sponsorship projects improve organizational culture (Ali et al., 2010; Meenaghan et al., 2013). These previously proposed theories are in line with the results of this study, and these positive relationships were confirmed by the data.

Per Keller (1993) and Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), employer brand association is the determinant of employees' perceptions of employer brand image. This study noted the positive relationship between these concepts, and the results are in line with previous theories of this relationship. Additionally, employer brand image affects employer attractiveness (e.g., Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Belt & Paolillo, 1981). In this study, the results between these two constructs were significant and positive; thus, the outcomes were in line with previous studies (e.g., Gatewood et al., 1993; Turban & Greening, 1997).

Regarding employer branding, increased employee satisfaction, commitment, and productivity are desirable objectives (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). In this study, sport sponsorship, as an employer branding activity, positively affected overall employee satisfaction, which was explained jointly through organizational identity, organizational culture, and employer attraction. In turn, employee satisfaction had a positive effect on commitment. This relationship was in line with previous research as well (e.g., Bluedorn, 1982; Iverson, 1992; Lincoln & Kalleberg, 1990). In addition, employee commitment had a positive effect on productivity, which correlated with the results found in many previous studies (e.g., Angle & Perry, 1981; Deepa et al., 2014; Khan et al., 2011; Woodman, 1989).

These findings provide answers to the proposed research questions. Therefore, this study indicated that a sport sponsorship project, as an employer branding activity, positively impacted employees' opinions toward "the case

company” as an employer on multiple levels. Employer branding, in this context, improved employees’ perceived employer brand associations, employer brand image, and employer attraction. In addition, improved organizational culture and identity were identified from the results. The results also indicated increases in job satisfaction, employee organizational commitment, and employee productivity.

In summary, this study produced the first empirical results of a sport sponsorship project in the employer branding context. The research data indicated a positive relationship between every construct that was measured, and the results aligned with previous research. Based on the results, it can be stated that, in the case company, sponsoring an event positively affected employees’ opinions toward the employer in this research context.

6.2 Managerial implications

Improving employer brand has been recognized as an effective method for retaining and attracting the most talented workforce. Successful employer branding strategies enable companies to gain a competitive edge and therefore secure brand success (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). Previous studies on employers have mainly focused on the external effects of employer branding; therefore, there is a lack of understanding regarding what makes an employer’s brand attractive to current employees (Maxwell & Knox, 2009).

In terms of management, this study aimed to expand the knowledge of managers regarding employer branding and sport sponsorship, and it provided an excellent example of how to use employer branding as a form of sport sponsorship. Additionally, this study showed how sponsorship as a strategic tool can help companies achieve employer branding objectives.

The findings provided several positive outcomes that are beneficial to consider from the perspective of practicing managers. The achieved benefits included increased employee satisfaction and commitment, improved organizational culture, and a higher level of employer attraction.

One of the most important dimensions to consider from the perspective of practicing managers is to create a sponsorship project strategy that involves current employees effectively (Meenaghan, 2001). Project communication quality is important when aiming to involve an internal audience (Meenaghan, 2001). In addition, the sponsorship target is crucial to employees’ attitudes toward the sponsorship (Speed & Thomas, 2000). Well-identified sponsorship targets can affect an employee’s willingness to participate in sponsorship projects (Hickman et al., 2005). Additionally, when employees perceive project communication positively and have positive attitudes toward sport sponsorship projects, their willingness to participate in the projects increases (Meenaghan, 2001). The results of this study indicated that the case company’s surveyed employees had positive attitudes toward the sport sponsorship project and its target, and they evaluated the project’s communication efforts positively.

The results also indicated that companies should select a sponsorship target that engenders positive attitudes in the minds of their employees. In addition, during the sponsorship process, it is crucial to create a communication strategy that satisfies employees' needs and expands their knowledge of the sponsorship project.

Meenaghan et al. (2013) suggested that the effectiveness of the sport sponsorship process can be increased by effectively involving employees in the process. The results of this study aligned with that suggestion. The duration of the sponsorship project in the case company was approximately one year. During the project, several different activities that aimed to increase employee involvement were executed. The results of this dimension of the study indicated positive impacts on employees' opinions toward the employer. Employees who participated in the activities evaluated the sponsorship project and the company as an employer positively. These results underlined the importance of employee involvement in sport sponsorship projects.

Per Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), employer branding, as a strategic tool, improves an organization's current employees' perceptions of a firm as an employer. This is an important goal from the perspective of practicing managers. In this study, the sponsorship project was key to achieving employer branding goals. Based on the positive results from the sport sponsorship project as an employer branding activity, the executed approach is recommendable for use in other sponsorship contexts.

6.3 Evaluation of the research

In the field of social sciences, the most commonly used methodology for evaluating research quality is to analyze the research through construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Yin, 2014, p. 26). When comparing quantitative research to the qualitative approach, the researcher should consider that the evaluation of the research must differ between these research designs. In the quantitative approach, the evaluation mainly consists of analysis with numeric values (Yin, 2012, p. 11). In general, reliability refers to repeatability of the measurement results, and validity refers to the appropriate measurement of the examined concept (Bryman & Bell, 2007, pp. 163, 165). Both the validity and reliability of this study were analyzed via confirmatory factor analysis with PLS 3.2 software.

All measures used in this study were adapted from previous peer-reviewed studies to maximize both its reliability and validity. In addition, the hypotheses of this study were developed from previous theories that had already been either tested or proposed in previous studies. The strength of these previously accepted measures was that they had been tested amongst many people, which enabled the comparison of achieved results with other studies using the same measures (Metsämuuroinen, 2005, p. 58). Only one item that measured organizational culture (OC7) was removed because the

communality of the item was low and it was not theoretically relevant to this study.

The convergent validity of the measurement model was analyzed through AVE values (Hulland, 1999). Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggested that AVE values should be above 0.5 to achieve a good level of validity. The discriminant validity was analyzed through the square root of the AVE (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The square root of all AVE values should indicate greater values than its highest correlation with any other construct (Hair et al., 2014, p. 104). Fornell-Larcker's (1981) criterion was used to evaluate discriminant validity. The results of these commonly used validity evaluations confirmed both the convergent and discriminant validity of this study.

Internal validity refers to the examination of the causal relationship between factors (Yin, 2014, p. 46). In other words, it concerns the internal reliability of the research (Metsämuuroinen 2005, p. 65). Both the internal validity and the reliability of this study were analyzed through factor loadings and composite reliability. All the factor loadings (except EBA2, 0.563) exceeded the suggested limit (0.60); thus, the measurement model of this study was reliable. As suggested by Bagozzi and Yi (2012), composite reliability values should be above 0.6 to exceed the required level of reliability. Per the executed analysis, the internal reliability and validity exceeded the suggested level. The composite reliability values of this study ranged between 0.772 (EBA) and 0.963 (ATT), indicating validity and reliability of the measurement model.

Roe and Just (2009) stated that external validity refers to situations where the findings can be generalized to other settings, such as to another sample of different people and during a different time. In this study, the sample size was high (N=716). However, it is notable that this study was carried out in a specific context and responses were voluntary, both of which may constrain the generalization of the results to other settings. In other organizations, cultures and/or contexts might be divergent.

To ensure the reliability of any study, research documentation should be done with care (Yin, 2014, p. 49). All phases of this study and the overall process were documented carefully to ensure transparency of the research process.

6.4 Research limitations

One important element of this study was the examination of whether a sport sponsorship project is a capable tool for achieving employer branding goals. In addition, this study aimed to examine how employer branding, as a form of sport sponsorship, works. Despite the positive results, some elements might cause limitations to this research context.

The data of this study were based on the convenience sampling method, which might cause some limitations when generalizing the results. The survey was targeted toward the case company's current employees, and it was sent to

3,200 persons via e-mail. The final number of respondents was 716. The overall number of the case company's personnel is approximately 26,000. Thus, the sample was based on a rather limited group of employees from that organization. The generalization of the results therefore should be made with caution.

The original language of the survey items was English, and the items were then translated into Finnish. Therefore, it is possible that some respondents may have misunderstood some questions. In addition, the survey participants may have responded dishonestly to some of the questions. These contingent misinterpretations are challenging to control (Hirsjärvi, Remes, & Sajavaara, 2009, p. 195). The participants might also have had more positive opinions toward the case company as an employer than those who did not participate in the study. This attitudinal dimension might also distort the data values.

This study was a single-case study that concerned a sport sponsorship project from the perspective of employer branding in the case company. The results showed that the project was successful. However, the results might be divergent during different times and/or in other contexts. For instance, this study found work location as a statistically significant background variable regarding the responses. Additionally, the data were collected during the sport event that the case company was sponsoring. This might have distorted the results in a more positive direction. Against this background, the results should be interpreted within these limitations.

6.5 Future Research

Employer branding is still an evolving concept in the management and marketing literature. This study is the first research to provide empirical results from a sport sponsorship project from the perspective of employer branding.

Longitudinal research would enrich the data and potentially provide results that are more detailed. It would also allow for interpreting the results more clearly if the data were collected both before and after the project. A longitudinal approach might also more thoroughly support the results of this study and therefore improve both the validity and reliability of this research.

It would be beneficial to test the research model of this study in different cultures, industries, and contexts. Implementing empirical research in different situations would expand our understanding of the study's concepts.

As previously mentioned, there is a lack of empirical results regarding employer branding as a form of sponsorship from both the internal and external perspectives. This study focused on the internal impacts of a sport sponsorship project on a certain organization. It would be purposeful to also investigate how sport sponsorship projects enable companies to achieve external employer branding goals. A possible research approach would be to investigate how sport sponsorship projects impact employer attraction from the perspective of

potential talent. Empirical results from these kinds of studies would expand our knowledge of the concepts of employer branding and sport sponsorship.

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APPENDIX 1

LIST OF SURVEY ITEMS IN ENGLISH

Project communication & Communication quality

COMM1 The Lahti2017 event has been communicated well in the case company

COMM2 The case company has provided useful information for me concerning to the Lahti2017

COMM3 The case company's communications concerning to the Lahti2017 event has been efficient

COMM4 The case company has actively communicated issues related to the Lahti2017

COMM5 The case company has used suitable communication channels for me concerning to the Lahti2017 event

COMM6 Lahti2017 communication has made me interested about the Nordic Ski World Championships and the case company's presence there

Attitudes toward sport sponsorship

ATT1 There is a logical connection between the case company and the Lahti2017 event

ATT2 The image of the Lahti2017 event and the image of the case company are similar

ATT3 The case company and the Lahti2017 event stand for similar values

ATT4 The case company and the Lahti2017 event fit together well

ATT5 It makes sense that the case company sponsors the Lahti2017 event

ATT6 The case company's investment to the Lahti2017 event is a really good value for money in sense of brand visibility

Organization identity (please rate the case company in the light of following attributes)

OI1 Not expert - Expert

OI2 Not compassionate - Compassionate

OI3 Not innovative - Innovative

OI4 Not sincere - Sincere

OI5 Not trustworthy - Trustworthy

OI6 Not skilled - Skilled

OI7 Not experienced - Experienced

Organizational culture

OC1 The case company supports, empowers and rewards their employees

OC2 The case company is employee focused

OC3 The case company constantly reinforces the company's culture

OC4 Training is important within the organization

OC5 The case company has a focus on employee retention

OC6 The case company is an organization where there are many opportunities to relocate

OC7 The case company is an organization where employees do more than is required of them

OC8 The case company aims to do what is right

Employer brand association

EBA1 Some characteristics of the case company come to mind quickly

EBA2 I have difficulty in imagining the case company in my mind

EBA3 I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of the case company

Employer brand image

EBI1. I have a good impression of the case company as an employer

EBI2 In general the case company has a good image as an employer in the minds of employees

EBI3 I believe that the case company has a better image than its competitors

Employer attraction

ATTR1 For me, the case company is a good place to work

ATTR2 The case company is attractive to me as a place for employment

ATTR3 I am interested in learning more about the case company

ATTR4 A job at the case company is very appealing to me

Overall satisfaction

SAT1 Considering everything, how satisfied are you with the content of your job

SAT2 Considering everything, how would you rate your overall satisfaction toward the case company as an employer at the present time

Organizational commitment

ECOM1 My commitment to the case company is long-term oriented

ECOM2 I desire to work for the case company for a long time

ECOM3 I would feel sad if I had to leave the case company

ECOM4 I am loyal to the case company

ECOM5 I feel myself a part of the case company and I wish to remain like this in the future

Employee productivity

EPROD1 Overall I feel I perform my job effectively

EPROD2 Overall I feel I perform my job productively

EPROD3 Over the last three months, I have been very productive in my job

Notes: All items were measured on 7 point-scales ranging from 1=*strongly disagree* to 7=*strongly agree*

APPENDIX 2

ITEM DETAILS

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
COMM1	5,74	1,242
COMM2	5,32	1,435
COMM3	5,43	1,321
COMM4	5,47	1,389
COMM5	5,53	1,376
COMM6	5,20	1,717
ATT1	5,30	1,434
ATT2	5,04	1,422
ATT3	5,21	1,362
ATT4	5,57	1,407
ATT5	5,53	1,489
ATT6	5,54	1,557
OI1	5,83	1,028
OI2	5,03	1,256
OI3	5,55	1,151
OI4	5,63	1,153
OI5	5,81	1,096
OI6	5,94	,927
OI7	6,17	,913
OC1	5,06	1,337
OC2	5,05	1,333
OC3	5,17	1,239
OC4	5,41	1,283
OC5	4,54	1,463
OC6	5,34	1,384
OC7	5,31	1,211
OC8	5,85	1,203
EBA1	5,82	1,273
EBA2	5,95	1,540
EBA3	6,65	1,013
EBI1	5,81	1,174
EBI2	5,40	1,147
EBI3	4,99	1,398
ATTR1	6,12	1,073
ATTR2	5,88	1,124
ATTR3	5,74	1,310

ATTR4	5,78	1,256
SAT1	5,59	1,057
SAT2	5,51	1,135
ECOM1	6,16	1,147
ECOM2	6,05	1,267
ECOM3	5,75	1,473
ECOM4	6,35	1,044
ECOM5	5,91	1,333
EPROD1	6,13	,876
EPROD2	6,16	,902
EPROD3	6,08	1,028

Notes: All items were measured on 7 point-scales ranging from 1=*strongly disagree* to 7=*strongly agree*