



# How has employer branding influenced organisations operating in Ireland's overall recruitment strategy?

by

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## Abstract

This research intended to investigate how employer branding has influenced the overall research strategy of organisations operating in Ireland. Employer branding is a strategy used by organisations to present themselves in the employment market to potential employees for their organisation. In recent years, and with the enhancement of social media and the internet, employer branding has become a crucial strategy for businesses to use within their recruitment strategy. This research aimed to conduct a literature review and discover what previous studies have said about different areas of employer branding and then conduct primary research qualitative interviews to gain first-hand knowledge of the topic within Irish-based organisations. Then these two areas of the study were compared against each other to discover similarities or differences between the primary and secondary research.

These primary research interviews were carried out with 8 participants following a semi-structured approach in which some questions may not be asked as the participant may have answered this question within their answer to a previous question. This approach also left it open for follow up questions on certain answers that may have been given.

After conducting this study, the researcher has found that employer branding does have a great influence on the overall recruitment strategy of Irish based businesses in many ways. It forces companies to differentiate themselves from their competitors in how they attract people to apply to work at their business. However, there is a difference in employer branding strategies based on the size of the organisation and the financial capital that is available to that organisation. The themes that emerged from this study have helped break the overall research question down into smaller objectives by looking at areas such as the return on investment from employer branding and the challenges organisations face with regard to employer branding.

This study then concluded by laying out recommendations for companies with employer branding and will also provide recommendations for future research on the same or a similar topic.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

This study is to be conducted to research how employer branding affects organisations operating in Ireland's overall recruitment strategy. Employer Branding concerns the image and the perception of the organisation by potential and current employees (Taylor, 2019) with this dissertation analysing the view toward the potential employees that an organisation could recruit. Within the global world of today, the war for talent has increased the need for an efficient employer branding strategy. This is a result of the increased competition from global companies entering into the Irish market (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). Also, due to the sheer amount of information online for prospective candidates in the current age, an effective employer brand is an increasingly important aspect of the recruitment area of human resources (Figurska and Matuska, 2013). The attractiveness an employee has towards an organisation is significantly affected by the image that the employer portrays online (Turban and Greening, 1997).

Companies know that they need to develop this employer brand, as the name of the company alone will not attract the talent they need. In recent years, online recruitment platforms and social networking sites have experienced a large percentage of growth in users that have made them prime tools to use for recruitment (Ouiridi et al, 2016). This has forced organisations to focus on using social media and recruitment websites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and Indeed to promote their employer brand and use aspects such as employee testimonials or promoting that they engaged in corporate social responsibility activities to try and increase the attractiveness for potential employees.

The reason for carrying out this study is that there have been multiple studies conducted on this topic before, from countries like India and the United States, but there could be no specific studies found on this topic centred around organisations within Ireland. Therefore, it is important to conduct a study from the Irish perspective to discover how employer branding is used within the recruitment process in this country. Also, the studies that have been conducted previously on this topic, have focused on a specific look at one nation that is not Ireland, or have focused on one specific area, such as social media recruitment, the generational differences in employer branding or employer branding in the long term. It is therefore important for a study to be carried out looking at the employer branding topic as a whole within Ireland while leaving it open for studies in the future which may be more focused on a specific area of employer branding.

This study will begin by looking at these previous employer branding studies within a literature review. These studies will be sorted and broken down under sub-headings, such as the previously mentioned generational differences or employer branding as a long-term strategy, to categorise and discuss their content in a more efficient way will then progress to discuss the overall research question and the sub-questions, which will be used to discover an answer to this overall research question, which will both be used within the qualitative interview process. Chapter 4 will discuss the methodology of this study and will answer why qualitative methods of

research were used for this study. Limitations, ethical concerns and more about the interviews and sample will be discussed in this chapter. Chapter 5 will then be used to list the findings and analysis discovered from the conducted interviews. This will lead into chapter 6 in which these findings will be discussed and compared to the literature in chapter 2 to see if the findings and the literature complement or contradict each other. Chapter 7 will develop a conclusion to this study and will discuss recommendations for the current practice of employer branding related to the findings of this study. A personal learning statement from the researcher will also be included in chapter 7.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This literature review aims to discover and analyse the literature surrounding recruitment, recruitment methods, and the use of employer branding within recruitment. Employer Branding concerns the image and the perception of the organisation by potential and current employees (Taylor, 2019), with this dissertation analysing the view toward potential employees than an organisation could recruit. Recruitment is an area within the human resource management field that also draws on practices from psychology within the process (Rasim, 2008). The art of using e-recruitment, which is using the internet to search for prospective workers (Deb, 2009), is also a new topic of study as this area of using recruitment has only come to fruition efficiently within the last 15 years as a result of new technological advances helping companies seek lower costs and a faster paced process (Alzhrani, 2020).

The process of employer branding is important for any business as the image of an organisation and its reputation as a prospective employer are fundamental aspects of recruitment behind the decision of whether a prospective candidate will want to work for said organisation or a competitor (Gilani and Cunningham, 2017). A successful employer branding strategy can lead to 50% more qualified candidates and 2x faster recruitment processes (Linkedin, 2021). These statistics have led to employer branding being a strategy of high importance in recent years (Itam, Misra and Anjum, 2020). The employer brand's main purpose is to convey the values and culture of an organisation to prospective employees to increase its reputation in the jobs market (Collins and Han, 2004). These values, which need to be ingrained into the culture of the organisation, should be the main focus of the business strategy and the culture in which they are trying to present (Arachiage and Robertson, 2013).

Within this increasingly global age, a brand name for an organisation can be instantly recognisable around the world. An example of this is perhaps the biggest global brand in the world, Coca-Cola, which is sold in all but two countries, Cuba and North Korea, in the world being instantly recognisable by its distinct red colour and font of its company name on the products (Hebblethwaite, 2012). This presented brand by Coca-Cola, through its brand name, aforementioned distinctive colour and products help increase the brand awareness of the company towards the consumer and the jobs market as being instantly recognisable (Berry, 2000). Being as instantly recognisable as Coca-Cola helps the employers brand as it puts the image in people's minds that this successful organisation is a great place to work and it will never go under which leads to the perception of increased job security and a feeling of the potential employees wanting to work there, therefore attracting an increased number of applications for these positions due to this positive perception (Moroko and Uncles, 2008).

To conduct a literature review on employer branding and how it effects affects organisations overall recruitment strategy, it is important to understand the recruitment process, the history behind it and how it has evolved and changed into the majority online employer branding process that we see today. Understanding these concepts is essential to researching employer branding as it gives a wide context on why employer branding is needed and how the concept of employer branding has formed.

## 2.2 The Recruitment Process

Sills (2014) explains how the first step in any recruitment process before constructing job descriptions and specifications is for the human resources teams to understand the strategies that the organisation as a whole is taking. This is so that the needs of the company are met within the recruitment process and the human resources and recruitment teams know what they are looking for. Understanding the needs and objectives of the business and the ideal candidate is crucial when constructing a job description as the key skills and competencies listed can help make or break your recruitment drive (Breaugh and Starke, 2000). However, identifying the pool of applicants is an important step in the process as it may be possible to recruit internally with promotions from lower rungs of the organisational ladder. It may be possible for human resources teams to split their recruitment methods between internal and external pools to increase their chances of sourcing the ideal talent candidate for the positions listed.

Sourcing the right medium to display your job descriptions to target your intended candidate market is key. In the modern age the most useful tool for recruitment is the internet. Specific social media sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook are effective in using these strategic tools of placing the job advertisement within groups or forums that are geared toward the job position desired (Emanuela, 2018). These are found to be groups such as a marketing specific group or one for bartenders which can allow job posting so only your target market of potential candidates will see this.

These external pools of candidates may be overwhelmingly filled with passive candidates. These are candidates that suit the skillset of the talent that an organisation is looking for but do not apply for the role directly and allow the organisation to approach them with interest in recruiting them for their skillset rather than the vice versa scenario of the candidate searching for the organisation (Gilch and Sieweke, 2020). The aforementioned social media websites that contain specific groups for differing areas of operations are an effective way for companies to reach passive candidates and research their skills for suitability to the position needed before reaching out.

However, no matter how good your recruitment strategy is, if an organisation does not communicate with its applicants in a time efficient manner throughout the process, then these candidates will not wait and will simply move on to a competitor of this organisation and bring their skills and talent to them instead (Chambers et al, 1998).

The way to attract these internal and external pools of candidates and increase their attractiveness to the organisation, is to have an efficiently constructed employer branding strategy. This enables the company to market itself effectively and ensure the recruitment process runs smoothly.

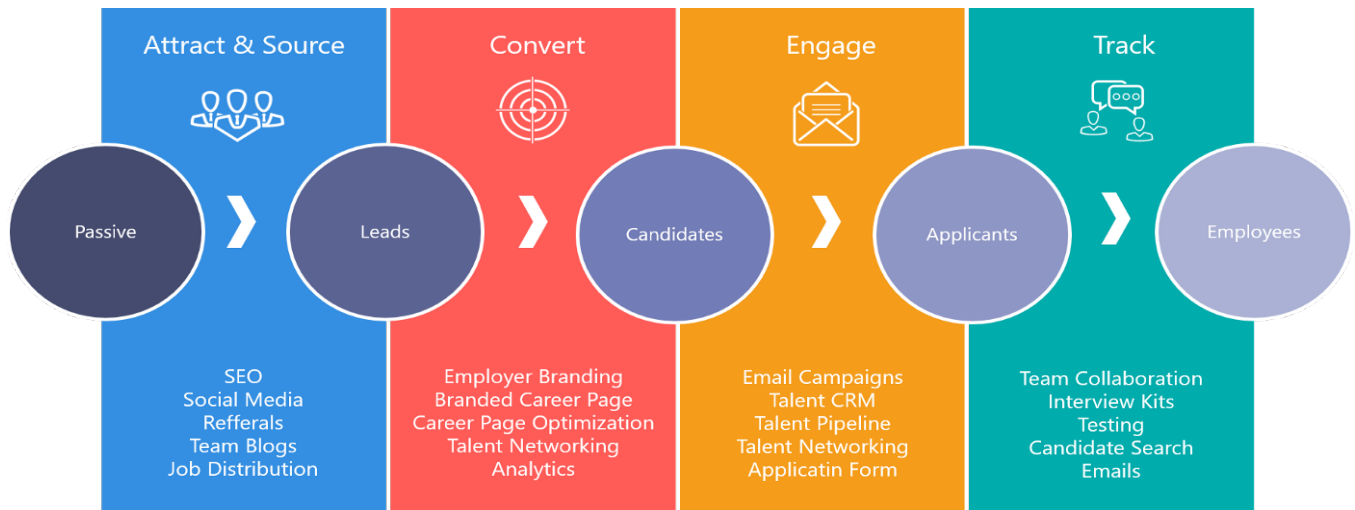


Figure 1: Stages of Inbound Recruiting (Martic, 2017)

### 2.3 History/Background of Recruitment

According to Taylor (2019), traditional recruitment methods are becoming less and less widely used due to the ongoing trend of using social media and overall online means for the recruitment and selection process instead. These declining traditional methods include: responding to advertisements, current employee referrals, walk-in application or through a service such as a job centre. These means have been deemed to be slower (Hogg, 2000), have increased costs (Ogunniye et al, 2021) and they have limited space to post information about the role or the company to candidates (Kerrin and Kettley, 2003).

People are naturally curious about things and have an apprehensiveness to change. They seek more information before making decisions, and after making them, to justify to themselves and others that the decision they are making is the right one. In the traditional method of recruitment, advertisements were posted in newspapers or on paper on noticeboards. These methods only had space for small areas of text to post the job title, company name and the ideal candidate with lack of a detailed job description and information about the company which only evolved to be included within recruitment practices with the innovation of online recruitment (Sivabalan, Yazdanifard, Ismail, 2014). This, therefore, left employer branding within recruitment to be a relatively uninvolved process as this lack of space and information left word of mouth and anecdotal experience as the key factors in the traditional employer branding process.

Traditionally, there has been a divide between how small and medium-sized enterprises (SME's) conduct recruitment and how larger firms conduct their recruitment methods. The presence of a dedicated human resources is likely to not exist within these SMEs as there is not enough capital flowing through the business to justify having a dedicated human resources team and often a senior member of staff that is already employed within the business takes on this role (Cardon and Stevens, 2004). This person within an SME is likely to factor culture and personality into their decision within the selection process over experience as they search for candidates who they predict to make a seamless transition into the business (Davidson, 2011). Also, within

smaller firms, employees are more likely to take on more tasks that may be outside of their initial job description as they are typically within flexible labour markets with changing goods and services. This is traditionally reinforced by word-of-mouth candidates as they are able to get first-hand knowledge from current employees and use it in determining whether the job is right for them (Floyd, 2003).

Carbery and Cross also explain how these traditional recruitment methods, which were favoured until the recent influx of social media and updated internet mediums, could be time consuming due to each curriculum vitae (CVs) having to be analysed by hand throughout a potential broad number of candidates who might not be what the recruiter is looking for in the first place. This has been streamlined with these new online innovations with the invention and implementation of technology to only show CVs with the keywords a recruiter is looking for to that recruiter. However, with relation to employer branding, this can help organisations as the quicker process of these keyword searches helps improve employer responsiveness time and increases attractiveness to prospective candidates (Sivertzen, Nilsen and Olafsen, 2013). These textbooks, give an important insight into how the recruitment process operated before the invention and modernisation of social media and the internet with the authors being impartial towards the subject and laying the information out in an informative manner.

For larger organisations, some of these methods of recruitment are still used today in tandem with the emerging role of e-recruitment. Recruiting graduates on campus is still an effective way of tapping into this large pool of talent with lots of potential (McCracken, Currie and Harrison, 2016) directly to try and get them to apply for the positions available in your business over your competitor and apply a more personal approach to the process with recruiters on site to answer questions and help attract these candidates with effective employer branding. This also helps larger companies gain a competitive advantage as they have the capital to run these recruitment events.

As a result of these traditional recruitment methods, the process of employer branding was virtually non-existent. There was no way for job applicants to search about the company, their values or their activities in the community and most, if not all, of the details about a company in which a person was applying to, was conveyed through word of mouth.

## 2.4 How recruitment is changing

### 2.4.1 E-Recruitment

With the increase of globalisation and there being many more international companies present within Ireland in 2021 (Shanahan, 2021) compared to previous years, there is a high level of competition within the recruitment process as companies try and attract the top talent to suit their needs and to help the company gain a competitive advantage against their rivals (Kyove et al, 2021). This process of increased foreign direct investment in Ireland by global companies, along with the aforementioned innovations online, has encouraged over 90% of recruiters (Brahmana and Brahmana, 2013) to mostly abandon traditional methods and adapt to the ever-changing environment of e-recruitment. E-Recruitment boasts many benefits over traditional recruitment for

companies such as, larger candidate pools, reduced costs, cutting application-to-hire time and ease of use (Handlogten, 2009).

Tsareva and Kolpakova (2020) outline how to implement these modern methods of recruitment within an organisation and the steps that need to be taken to be effective in gaining a competitive advantage. This article introduces the importance of targeted advertising towards potential candidates to attract them to apply. As there is lots of competition out there in the modern world, this advertising is one of the most important key tools in the recruitment process as a prominent employer brand and recruitment marketing strategy has been shown to help induce a candidate's intent to apply for a role (Alashmawy and Yazdanifard, 2019). This article presents us with the view that employer branding in recruitment combines human resources and marketing to help an employer communicate their identity and reputation as a place to work to aspiring candidates. The authors use a range of varying sources, in layman's terms, to explain what these subjects such as employer branding are and how best that recruiters can use this process to develop an efficient strategy in a broad sense.

#### 2.4.2 Social Media in Recruitment

The main attractiveness of organisations preferring online recruitment methods over traditional recruitment methods is that the online capabilities have proven to show a reduction in costs and an increase in efficiency (Brandao et al, 2019). Using social media sites, such as LinkedIn and Facebook, are free to join and use with all job advertisements posted on both sites being free too. While there may be a paid element to the service in order to promote the posting higher than competitors, jobseekers tend to browse through these sites often and do not typically only apply for the top postings that they see. These job postings can be viewed by any user of these websites around the world for no cost which helps broaden the talent pool for the organisation and increase their likelihood of selecting a candidate that is best suited for the job description of the role and the culture of the organisation. However, this may result in a waste of resources due to the high number of applications received that need to be processed for the role (Mano, 2001). This is where it may be worthwhile for larger organisations to invest in software with the primary function of sifting through these applications looking for key words and phrases and passing on a select few to the human resources team.

However, there can also be negative aspects to using social media when trying to promote your employer brand. Employee testimonials used on social media to attract candidates do have effect on recruitment levels but candidates prefer to hear from independent word of mouth sources rather than the business (Piric, Masmontet and Martinovic, 2018). This means that negative comments on social media from former employees may be trusted more than what the company itself says. This can impact on the organisation's corporate reputation in the long term (Hanu, Amegbe, Mensah, 2021). It is accepted that responding to these comments is the right thing for companies to do as they show they are not shying away from negativity (Hayes and Carr, 2021). Employers can then use this to address policy changes within the business. However, conducting exit interviews has been shown to reduce the number of these negative comments as the issue is addressed swiftly with the relationship between the company and the outgoing employee remaining high (König, Richter, Isak, 2021).

## 2.5 Employer Branding in recruitment

### 2.5.1 Employee Value Proposition

To commence an employer branding process, a business must first develop their employee value proposition. This proposition describes an organisations values, culture, trends and current image within the market and what that organisation can offer to a prospective employee (Chhabra and Sharma, 2014). An effectively communicated employee value proposition to the target audience helps achieve the desired results and saves money and time. Exposing the organisations values helps develop the companies culture centred around the goals of the organisation, which therefore helps produce a brand and culture that is exclusive from competitors and hard to match (Melewar, Gotsi and Andriopoulos, 2012). A candidate that has knowledge of the organisations values and culture forms an employer brand image can encourage employees to submit an application for a role and have an increased level of attractiveness towards the employer. It helps employees to convey what is in it for them to work at this organisation over their competitor (Paadi, Barkhuizen and Swanepoel, 2019).

Key areas within the employee value proposition that prospective candidates prioritise are the salary and benefits, developmental opportunities, an efficient work-life balance and job security (Samoliuk et al, 2022). Recent graduates have shown to be mindful of monetary and non-monetary rewards from companies (Dessler, 2013) while also prioritising interpersonal relationships that will help them achieve their own goals and boost their personal performance with room for development (Pop, Swanepoel and Barkhuizen, 2013). As the initial prospective workforce gets younger and more likely to be straight out of university without much experience, it is important for organisations to cater to these values while trying to understand how best to market them online. This can be a challenge in modern times with the spread of remote work so efficient policies have to be drafted and distributed to the talent pool in a comprehensible manner (Samoliuk et al, 2022). Also, this may vary from region to region, and while a company may have an overall global brand, being able to adapt to different regions is key to success in the global world of today.

These values are just the start of a wider passage of attributes that potential employees consider and value when job searching (Berthon et al, 2005 as cited in Reis and Braga, 2015). These 5 values listed are the Interest Value (which is an environment that encourages innovation and creativity and provides a challenging and stimulating job), the Social Value (a positive social environment), the Economic Value (job security, above average wages, promotion opportunities), the Development Value (development of skills and career advancement experiences) and the Application Value (opportunity to apply expertise and convey knowledge to others). All of these values should be readily available by organisations to potential employees to provide the most information possible and to encourage potential candidates that the company will be a positive place to work.

### 2.5.2 Organisational Attractiveness and Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a concept that shows a company's responsibility towards its stakeholders, the environment and the broader society of the world (Fordham and Robinson, 2018). An employer brand which

communicates their CSR practices adequately to possible candidates increases the attractiveness towards that institution if they anticipate that these practices align with their own goals and values (Jakob et al, 2022). However, using this practice in the modern age can actually backfire and have the opposite effect on potential applicants as the values and practices communicated as part of the CSR strategy that a business implements need to actually reflect the actions that the business takes. The performance of CSR practices needs to match the CSR values communicated to applicants (Jakob et al, 2022). Positive CSR values and the application of them that align with potential applicants' personal values help convey an image and understanding of what working for this employer will be like and how they will be treated.

### 2.5.3 Employer Branding as a Long-Term Strategy

Due to the increasingly competitive environment in the world, employer branding has become a long-term strategy for organisations and is seen as an essential area of operations (Biswas, 2013). While the number of highly educated individuals in the world has increased in recent years, there is a talent scarcity due to this competitive environment which is coupled with an aging population in western countries in the world. However, once an external employer brand is put in place and utilised, a company must develop an internal employer brand in order to retain these employees (Lievens, 2007).

Developing this internal employer brand relies on a strong psychological contract between the employer and the employee. This refers to the relationship between the two and the expectations they hold for one another (Hussain, Tahir and Khan, 2021). The psychological contract itself is taken from the employees' perspective to analyse whether or not their employer is fulfilling their duties towards them. If there is a favourable perception of this by the employee it could lead to high productivity and motivation rates within the business. However, the opposite could be true if the employee perceives that the psychological contract is not being fulfilled which leads towards higher turnover rates. This is not the desired outcome by employers as retaining employees is cheaper than acquiring them (Smith, 2022). A well developed, long-term, employer brand and employee value proposition aims to promote the more favourable outcomes from the psychological contract.

Alternatively, a long-term strategy here is important as it enables organisations to benchmark their strategy against competitors and compare how they are working (Maxwell & Knox, 2010). An example of ways to do this include monitoring social media followers and engagement, examining the volume at which applications are received by your organisation and by analysing the quality of candidates that do apply to the business (Doyle, 2022). An efficient employer branding strategy can lead to an increase in the quality of candidates as they tend to know more about the company (Wilska, 2014). Also, employers that have detailed job descriptions which list their specific requirements for candidates to have leads to candidates self-selecting themselves out of the potential applicant pool; therefore, leading to an increase in the quality of applications (Lievens and Slaughter, 2016). Doing this can help shed light on if the employer branding practices that an organisation is undertaking are working or not and if they can tweak and changed in order to increase the aforementioned competitive advantage.

#### 2.5.4 Generational Differences

In recent times, looking at generations, we are told by Eger, Mičák and Řehoř, (2018) that companies need to evaluate their image overall and not just in the recruitment process, because younger generations, such as millennials and generation Z, will research every aspect of a company when they are within the recruitment process to determine if the brand image suits them personally and if the company shows off that it includes opportunities for personal and professional growth. This showcases a theoretical factor of employer branding in loyalty. If a person is hired by a business due to being attracted by employer branding material with the promise of certain concessions when employed and thus finds that what attracted them to apply was truthful to how work in the business actually is, they are more likely to be loyal to the business in the long term and try work their way up the ladder in the company. This study on the relationship between employer branding within recruitment for millennials is further expanded upon by Kucherov and Zhiltsova (2021) with various assumptions and hypotheses laid forward portraying millennials as not being afraid to say their expectations and that they are influenced directly by what they see on social media from companies when they are searching for jobs. Therefore, it is important to be able to link this article and the previous article mentioned together in this study when looking at the future of e-recruitment and the trends that can bring the activity forward.

Following on from the previous point, it has been theorized by Rutter, Roper and Lettice (2016) that social media sites, such as Twitter, are a prime way for organisations to be active with posts, pictures, competitions etc. in order to communicate with people and show what the brand is all about. While this can help shed a positive light from this employer brand onto potential candidates who are doing their own research, it also gives the opportunity for people to reply to these posts and share their anecdotal experiences relating to the organisation and give feedback on products which may sway a potential candidates opinion of the company negatively if the employer is not seen to be addressing this feedback and acknowledging it.

However, determining which social media site to use for the most promotion of the employer brand, and how to use them, depends on the market of potential employee that the company is looking for. This requires the business to have an understanding of their target market and which platforms they are more likely to use (Pandita, 2021). The different generations of Baby Boomers (1940-59), Generation X (1960-79), Generation Y (1980-1994) and Generation Z (1995-2010), all have differing characteristics and usage rates on varying social media platforms. The overwhelmingly computer literate Generation Z is more likely to search and apply for jobs while conducting research on differing social media websites to look for photos of the workplace, the working environment and to learn more about the culture of the institution that they are interested in applying for (McCrindle and Fell, 2019).

#### 2.6 Conclusion

The literature researched here gives us evidence to show that employer branding is an important strategic area within the modern world that, if worked effectively, can help employers gain a competitive advantage within the



market they operate. An employer brand contains many different components and must be analysed and created to target the ideal talent that an organisation identifies. Candidates in the modern world are easily swayed to join a competitor of their current employer if the benefits offered are greater than the ones in which they currently receive. An employer brand conveying these benefits and the company values is key to attracting these passive candidates away from competitors and to your business.

However, a company needs to recognise that a “one size fits all” employer brand does not work in the current climate and it is important to differentiate the tactics used to project the employer brand, the employee value proposition and the corporate social responsibility practices dependent on who the target is for potential talent to join the organisation. The war for talent in the modern world has ensured that organisations must use these differentiating tactics in order to gain the aforementioned competitive advantage within their industry.

## Chapter 3: Research Question

### 3.1 Research Question

This study is being carried out with the aim to answer the research question “How has employer branding influenced organisations operating in Ireland’s overall recruitment strategy?” While this question is broad, the goal of asking, and answering, this question is to articulate and combine the personal and professional experience that recruiters, human resource managers and other workers involved in the employer branding process have. The research discussed above in chapter 2 indicate that employer branding is still being researched as an emerging topic with different aspects being discussed and analysed from different cultures. Therefore, the research asked in this project aims to help fill the gap in the Irish market of analysing employer brand practices and outcomes and how these are focused and changed to suit this specific market.

This research question has stemmed from the lecture given by Pauline Kelly-Phelan (2021) entitled “Employer Branding and Psychological Contract” in which it was explained the importance of a strong employer brand in gaining a competitive advantage with a positive brand image. This information interested me as I had been applying for graduate roles after completing my undergraduate degree with a tendency to apply to roles where I knew the name and reputation of the company through brand name before I had read the job description. The main objective of this research question is to determine how one company ensures they are chosen over another by prospective candidates when looking for a job.

### 3.2 Sub-Questions

There are a small number of sub-objectives which will be used to help answer the main research question being asked. These are:

#### 3.2.1 - Is employer branding a valuable tool in attracting candidates to work in Irish based organisations?

- This question is constructed to help determine if employers have noticed a percentage of candidates that have increased attractiveness towards the role due to what they see on the company website and on social media.

#### 3.2.2 - How are companies measuring the return on investment from employer branding techniques?

- This research objective is included to analyse how companies are measuring if their employer branding strategy is working or not. This can be measured through seeing if the number of applications has increased, the time to hire has been lowered or the cost to hire has been lowered.

#### 3.2.3 - What are the challenges facing Irish based organisations when it comes to employer branding?

- Are organisations finding roadblocks in their process when they try and identify and convey their employer brand? This is derived from the literature above as there is a gap within this sub question within the literature. Virtually none of the sources stated speak of challenges in employer branding and the process that is taken to determine the employer brand.

### 3.3 Hypotheses

This study aims to test a number of hypotheses relating to the research question and the sub questions asked above:

H1: Sufficient employer branding will help a company have an increased volume of applications

H2: The return on investment has improved in the organisation as a result of using employer branding.

H3: Organisations are able to overcome challenges from competitors and other employer branding methods to gain a competitive advantage.

### 3.4 Conclusion

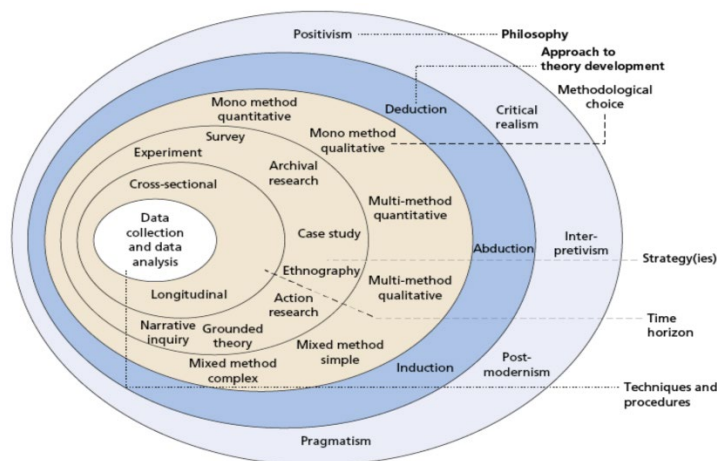
These research sub questions and hypotheses are derived from the literature review conducted above to help answer the overarching research question and title of the research. The researcher will use these research questions as the backbone of the primary research conducted with interviews as discussed in the following chapters to discover more about employer branding in Irish based organisations and how a good employer brand strategy can influence an organisations overall recruitment strategy.

## Chapter 4: Research Methodology

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter will be used to discuss the methods used to formulate an answer to the research question asked in chapter 3 combined with the research objectives. The aims and objectives of the research will be discussed in this chapter.

The research onion has been used to help in the structure of this study and has been crucial in aiding the researcher into an understanding of the differing areas of research and how best to conduct this study with analysis needed on the differing strategies of data collection. (Saunders et al, 2019). This onion helps understand why the choice of conducting interviews was made over other data collection methods such as surveys and questionnaires. Choosing the correct research method for this project is essential as it can affect the overall outcome of the research.



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**Figure 2:** The Research Onion

This chapter will discuss research approaches, philosophy and methodology as explained in the research onion in action to peel away the layers and conclude with the choice of research method in qualitative research made for this study and why other methods, such as quantitative methods, were not chosen. This chapter will then discuss the type of interview that the researcher aims to carry out, which is a semi-structured interview type, and why this best suit the research at hand.

This chapter will then conclude by discussing the pilot study to be used in this research, the time considerations of this study, the sampling technique, the ethical concerns and whether there were any limitations in conducting this research.

### 4.2 Research Philosophy

A research philosophy refers to the beliefs and assumptions you have about the development of knowledge during the research process (Saunders et al, 2019). Research philosophy also refers to the way you view the world

with a look at what is acceptable knowledge and how is this knowledge acquired. Essentially, the adopted research philosophy can have an effect on the outcome of the research conducted. The assumptions that you make throughout the process can help have a profound effect on the outcome also. These philosophical choices and assumptions need to be well thought over and chosen so that the researcher is able to defend them upon conclusion of the research. Determining this approach to the research through peeling away the different areas of the research onion helps understand the data collection methods and the analysis to be used for the data collected.

#### 4.2.1 Epistemology

Within the research philosophy there are two aspects, Ontology and Epistemology. Ontology refers to the nature of what exists and is the study of theories about what makes up reality (Lewis-Beck et al, 2004) while epistemology “concerns what constitutes acceptable knowledge in a field of study” (Saunders et al, 2019). These two aspects are important when choosing an approach towards your research as one may be more appropriate than the other when conducting the research. Within the area of epistemology there are two considerations: positivism and interpretivism.

Positivism is a paradigm by which the truth is derived from facts that can either be proven or disproven and that only knowledge that may be observed and measured by the senses and the sciences can be considered as truth and valid (Ryan, 2018) and that this research should be undertaken in a value free manner. The positivist paradigm within research is associated with quantitative research conducted using raw data and numerical values gathered from questionnaires and surveys. Alternatively, interpretivism is a second paradigm that epitomises reality through the social actions and meanings created by people through social constructions (Walsham, 2006). This interpretivist paradigm is concerned with qualitative research and the use of interviews through the rapport built between researcher and participant.

Contrasting between the two paradigms, as previously mentioned building rapport between researcher and participant is a crucial aspect of interpretivist research as it can help the researcher step into the shoes of the interviewee and understand their point of view on the research topic and help gain a deeper insight (Arghode, 2012). Interpretivism under epistemology uses qualitative research which requires more detail in the raw data and for the process to be taken under a micro approach. Alternatively, as positivist research is value free and there is little or no rapport between the two parties and is an objective philosophy that may ignore social facts which are important for understanding the data and hearing subjective experiences to have diverse data (Park, Konge, Artino, 2020).

Following on from researching these different aspects of the research philosophy and the paradigms associated with them, this study is being conducted from an interpretivist epistemological philosophical approach. Through literature conducted, it can be seen that the overwhelming majority of the researchers involved in conducting their respective studies also used this approach (Chhabra and Sharma, 2014; Ambler and Barrow, 1996; Kumari,

Dutta and Bhagat, 2020; Kerrin and Kettley, 2003). This, therefore, makes it the most appropriate choice. Also, a positivist epistemological approach would not be appropriate due to the nature of this study in aiming to discover “How has employer branding influenced organisations operating in Ireland’s overall recruitment strategy?” which can only be answered by gauging the personal experiences and opinions of people in business and is not based on hard facts and figures. The raw meaning behind the data provided by interviewees needs to also be explored and analysed to form an answer to this question (Saunders et al, 2019).

### 4.3 Research Approach

The next layer of the research onion is about the two different approaches to research; deductive and inductive research. Deduction involves starting from a theory, developing and testing the hypotheses of that theory and revising the theory to discuss the findings (Locke, 2007). Theoretically, the deductive approach brings the research from theory to data. This enables the deductive approach to evolve with any theoretical underpinnings from which a varying number of alternative hypotheses can be formed (Woiceshyn and Daellenbach, 2017). The deductive approach to research is generally tested using quantitative data, working with numbers. Also, the deductive approach is mainly associated using the positivist research philosophy (Saunders et al, 2019).

On the other hand, “inductive research is a study in which theory is developed from the observation of empirical reality; thus, general inferences are induced from particular instances” (Collis and Hussey, 2014). An inductive approach involves the collection of data and upon analysing this data, a theory is formed. Therefore, the deductive and inductive methods are reverse of each other. Using the inductive approach to research involves identifying themes with a goal to understanding the context of the research and branching away from a singular truth. Inductive research is motivated by new empirical observations that help to highlight unique phenomena (Corley, Bansal and Yu, 2021). The inductive approach is generally related to qualitative research.

This study will be undertaken using an inductive approach. The rationale for using the inductive approach over the deductive approach is that this study will be conducted to research how employer branding practices influences overall recruitment strategy in Irish based organisations which can only be achieved by collecting the data and conducting a thematic analysis to identify the common themes which arise from this study. A thematic analysis provides a voice to the experiences that participants of the study have and helps with analysis of these responses (Deshpande and Telang, 2022). This allows the study to be driven on the experience of these participants and the answers they give to develop themes. These themes are used to identify common patterns from different organisations which can be pieced together to aim to construct an answer to the overall research question.

### 4.4 Methodological Choice

This study will be undertaken using qualitative research. Qualitative is the most fitting choice as the study itself is subjective and cannot be carried out or answered in a concrete manner as if it was a quantitative study. Interviewing research participants is the backbone of this study and it is only through this method that discovering their opinions through their experience is appropriate. Using these interviews within the qualitative

method of research allows for description of peoples experience and what led to them taking the actions that they took (Rahman, 2017). These interviews help discover the human aspect behind statistics and decisions. Also, using semi-structured interviews within qualitative research allows for the answers that participants give to certain questions to be expanded upon by the researcher to find out more about the subject at hand from the prior question (Fossey et al, 2002). The relationship formed between the researcher and the participant in this process overall helps the researcher find out more about certain aspects of the study at hand from the participant as they are more inclined to relate and open up with their experiences.

As discussed above, using qualitative research is the appropriate choice as other studies surrounding the topic of employer branding also use this method. Discovering more about this topic in aim to answer the research question and sub questions is only possible through a method approach such as qualitative and a numerical approach of quantitative methods would not sufficiently lead to answers to the research questions.

There is a mixed methods approach to research that may be used. This combines both quantitative research and qualitative research. This approach can be seen to integrate the positivist and interpretivist philosophical frameworks to aid in research complex topics (Dawadi et al, 2021). Using these two methods together can help in certain cases where one of these single methods is not sufficient in constructing an answer to the research question at hand. However, when implementing this approach there are certain considerations that need to be taken into account, with the main one being which of the two, quantitative or qualitative, methods take precedent and is given more importance. This process can also be more time consuming and has increased costs (Collis and Hussey, 2014).

The aim of this research is to discover “How has employer branding influenced organisations operating in Ireland’s overall recruitment strategy?” and this question is not suited to being answered through data and numbers but rather through the aforementioned experience and opinions.

#### 4.5 Qualitative Data Collection

Qualitative data is collected through interviews. The interviews for this study are helpful in getting an understanding of an employer brand and how it influences the recruitment strategy of the organisation in which they work. These interviews will be conducted in a semi-structured format. This format is useful as respondents are asked open ended set questions comprised of a source question(s) and other supporting questions relating to the topic at hand (Jamshed, 2014). If a question that the researcher has prepared is answered within the response to another of the questions, then this question can be skipped over. However, these questions can be replaced with others if the interviewer recognises that there is a need to expand further on one of the questions. This is why effective active listening skills in the process of open-ended questioning is essential (Nemec et al, 2017). With the signing of a consent form from participants, these semi-structured interviews will be recorded to allow the transcriptions to be analysed accurately.

## 4.6 Time Consideration

The time horizon (consideration) area of the research onion helps the researcher understand whether the research they are conducting is looking at one particular period of time, or different periods of time. This translates to being related to a cross-sectional research study or a longitudinal research study (Rindfleisch et al, 2008). A cross-sectional study involves researching data associated with a population at one singular, specific point in time while longitudinal involves taking multiple data points in the research over a set, extended period of time. Cross-sectional studies often involve the use of surveys but can also be conducted using interviews (Collis and Hussey, 2014). This study will be conducted using cross-sectional research as it is based on the view of how employer branding has affected overall recruitment strategy at this particular point in time. If this study was aiming to discover this research question over an extended period and focus on how employer branding is evolving and changing into the future, then longitudinal research would be more appropriate.

## 4.7 Sample

Saunders et al (2019) introduces us to two different sampling methods. These are probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling is used in cases above 50 participants and the main data collection method associated with probability sampling is surveys. Probability sampling uses random selection to choose the sample from a population. On the other hand, non-probability sampling uses the subjective judgements of the researcher when selecting the sample. Within non-probability sampling, not all members of the population have an equal chance of being part of the sample. This type of sampling is usually associated with qualitative research.

This research was conducted using purposive sampling under the non-probability sampling method. As this way of sampling is also known as the judgemental sampling method, it is used by researchers who use their own judgement to choose cases that best suit the study at hand and to meet the particular objectives of the case study. This means that the researcher actively sought out potential participants with the view that they could provide useful information and knowledge for the study (Campbell et al, 2020). Therefore, this is why the approach to the study that was undertaken, was chosen, to seek out this knowledge, experience and useful information.

The participants for this study were found through the social media website LinkedIn. The researcher used purposive non-probability sampling to source these participants and judge whether they would be useful for this study due to their job descriptions on their profiles showing that they have knowledge of the topic of this study. These participants were researched by job title and organisation by the researcher using this type of sampling to judge whether they would be a good fit or not. Then, they were direct messaged by the researcher explaining the study, why it was being completed, how the interview would take place and how long it would take place for. The actual participants of the study were part of the researched sample on LinkedIn and were the only ones who had replied to the researcher and shown interest in participating. These participants originated from different industries such as recruitment agencies, large multinational corporations, logistics companies, the healthcare



sector and non-profits. The job role of these participants ranged from recruiters on the lowest rungs of the corporate ladder to human resource professionals in a business partner role, which enabled the researcher to get differing experienced answers during the interviews.

Interviews with these participants were conducted over Zoom and they were recorded and transcribed to enable the researcher to analyse the data for the purpose of this study. Upon conclusion of the interviews, eight participants had been interviewed as part of this study. The average length of these interviews was 20 minutes long. The questions asked in these interviews were of a personal nature to the interviewee and their personal experience in order to draw on that and apply it to the research question and research objectives. These included questions such as “Did you take this organisations brand into consideration when applying for your current role?” and “Do you think that an organisation having a strong brand contributes to the attractiveness of an organisation? If not, what does?” This varied depending on how much experience the interviewee had with the more experienced participants taking more time. The full list of questions asked within these interviews will be available in an appendix below.

#### 4.8 Pilot Study

Due to the availability of a limited number of recruiters and HR professionals, it was important to conduct a pilot study to ensure that the questions asked lead to answers that are relevant for the study. A pilot study helps the researcher to understand the issues that they will have with their interview questions and how these can be modified to be appropriate to respond to the research objectives (Malmqvist et al, 2019). The number of interviews conducted overall was 8 which left a limited number of these available to attribute towards the pilot study, therefore only the first interview conducted was used as a pilot study to determine the suitability of the questions and the participants.

The researcher then determined that the questions that were being asked were suitable for the study but expansion questions which pertained to the answers given by the interviewees were needed in order to further learn the knowledge that they had acquired on employer branding. Therefore, the researcher asked the participants to expand on certain areas of their answers to previous questions in order to extract more knowledge on them ascertaining to the research objectives. Knowing that this was essential would not be possible without the one interview pilot study.

#### 4.9 Thematic Analysis

To analyse the data collected, a thematic analysis has been conducted in order to identify familiar themes throughout each of the 8 interviews and compare them together against the literature discovered in Chapter 2. This comparison is used to discover if the findings from the primary data collection complimented or contradicted the literature. The process has been explained and understood by the researcher by following Braun and Clarke’s six phases of thematic analysis.

To start with for this thematic analysis, I printed off all 8 transcripts of the interviews so they were easier to familiarise with. Coding was then used to help and identify commonalities in the data and extract themes under the research question and sub questions. These themes were then reviewed throughout each transcript to ensure what was said is relevant for the theme identified before the write up of chapters 5 and 6 began in the analysis, findings and discussion of the themes.

#### 4.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethics concerns “moral principles and decision making, governance issues and codes of conduct for a business” (Goel and Ramanathan, 2014). Ethical concerns must be considered when conducting research.

This research was kept ethically fair through a number of different ways. Firstly, within the remit of primary research, all interviews conducted have been collected and stored anonymously. None of the research participants are identifiable to anyone but the researcher. This data is securely kept on a laptop that is password protected in which the password is only known to the researcher until being transferred to a USB stick kept and accessed only by the researcher. Each participant was informed of these measures before the interview through the use of information sheets for participants and consent forms to be signed by participants, both which detail these measures.

All participants were given as much details about the research as possible and they were also presented with the opportunity to withdraw from taking part in the research project at any time. This to avoid any harm coming to the participants, whether that be mentally, emotionally or physically. Confidentiality as guaranteed to all participants at multiple points throughout the process.

#### 4.11 Limitations to the Study

As previously mentioned, non-random sampling uses subjective judgement to select the sample for a study. As a result of using this, the sample selected for the research project was not random and could lead to potential bias by the researcher when selecting this sample.

A mixed-methods approach in the research could have been more appropriate to gather more participants for the study and to broaden the research with the goal of having more knowledge available to answer the research questions. However, due to time constraints of this study, accessing the number of participants needed is not feasible within the time frame so the researcher is constrained to choosing the most appropriate of the three research methods.

Also, when researching articles and previous studies during the literature review stage of this study, many of the articles were found to contain very specific information relating to the topic of study conducted by the researchers of those articles with a general overview of employer branding and how it works in the modern sense taking time to find. This limitation, combined with the time limit placed on this study forced the researcher to

generalise during the process and use articles from other countries and niche studies to fit towards the researcher's vision for this study.

Additionally, when aiming to conduct interviews for this study, finding participants who were willing to participate in the qualitative interviews required for this study proved to be difficult. As Ireland is only emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic, many roles have been switched to remote working which has reduced the availability of potential participants. These potential participants are now inundated with online meetings, work to be completed while also maintaining the home in which they live, which can prove to be time consuming if they have children. This can, therefore, leave them less time to be available during the day for participation in an interview for this study. This limitation left the researcher to direct message as many people on LinkedIn as possible who fit the criteria of recruiter or HR professional who would have experience with employer branding and the recruitment process. While some responses were received, a lot of these messages went unanswered and the researcher was able to get in contact with 8 willing participants for the study who fit the criteria.

#### 4.12 Conclusion

Within this chapter, details of the research methodology were discussed and analysed as to how they will be used within this study. The researcher analysed the different layers of the research onion and explained the varying methods of research within each layer. It was then decided by the researcher, within each area of the research onion, of which methods best suit the study at hand and the qualitative data collection used within the study.

The interviews to be conducted as part of this study are in line with how previous studies into the same topic or similar topics carried out their research. These interviews will enable the researcher to gain knowledge on employer branding through real world personal experience from people involved in using this method of talent attraction. Within this chapter, in-depth analysis of the data collection methods of the study were discussed along with the limitations and ethical considerations that were taken into account from the onset of the study.

The data collected from these interviews was listened to by the researcher in order to produce a transcript of each audio recording from the interviews. These transcripts were auto-generated by Microsoft Word and were edited by the researcher at the same time as they were being listened to, to ensure that the audio recordings (what the interviewees and the researcher actually said) matched the auto generated transcript. This was carried out to ensure all transcripts contained accurate data to be analysed for the study.

Chapter 5 of this project will discuss the findings and analyse the data collected from these interviews with relation to the research question and sub questions discussed in chapter 3.

## Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis

### 5.1 Introduction

While set questions were developed for these qualitative interviews, the interviews themselves were conducted in a semi-structured manner which led the responses from the participants to lead the process and determine which question would be asked next by the interviewer. As the participants of these interviews are all recruitment or human resource professionals but they are employed within different industries to each other, the researcher felt that the semi-structured interview approach is the most appropriate. The participants to these interviews will remain anonymous during the process of the research project and will be referred to by number codes, such as “Participant #1” and “Participant #2” etc. The identity of the participants to the study will only be known to the researcher.

The participants themselves varied in ages ranging from professionals in their early twenties with only a few months or a years’ experience within their field to professionals in their forties in higher positions with years of experience across one or many industries. These more experienced professionals were very valuable to this study as their range of experience helps with the understanding of how different businesses within the same, or different industries handle employer branding the same or different to each other.

The participants of the interviews of this study consisted of 5 women and 3 men from a range of different backgrounds with the commonality of working in a recruitment or human resources role. The researcher had originally planned to conduct 10 interviews but due to time constraints, only 8 were possible.

### 5.2 Sub-Question 1 – Is employer branding a valuable tool in attracting candidates to work in Irish based organisations?

#### 5.2.1 Theme 1 – Company Prominence

Firstly, a theme uncovered relates to the prominence of the company name throughout the world ascertaining to how well known that name is around Ireland and the world. This theme was not found in every participant of the research but was found in some. It was found that if a company has a well-known name throughout the world, then candidates are more likely to apply for that company based on name recognition alone. This is evident in the literature review above in which Biswas (2013) discusses how employer branding is a long-term strategy and how companies need to keep their employer branding strategies updated to stay ahead in a competitive environment. It can be seen through these interviews that the name brand itself from some companies is enough to attract talent and it may not require a review of employer branding strategies for a few years. Therefore, this contradicts Biswas but may also support it as the statement in itself is true but varies from company to company and depends on the size of the company.

Participant #6 stated: *“so [redacted company name] would be a very well-known company globally and would have a good online presence”*

when asked if they had taken the employers brand into account when applying for roles.

This was also evident with Participant #2 who mentioned that they wanted to work for a large well-known organisation within the logistics industry due to the scale of their operations so that pushed them to apply for companies they had first-hand knowledge of initially.

Participant #7 stated: *“the brand was a big part of my decision when applying for the job”*.

Participant #6 also mentioned about candidates coming to their recruitment agency over their competitors because of the name value associated with the company and their reputation within the jobs market being high:

*“We would get candidates all the time come to us and say like “I want to come to you because of your reputation” and we would have candidates come back 2-3 years later looking for us to help get them another role, so they’re trusting us a second time”*

### 5.2.2 Theme 2 – Graduate Attractiveness

A theme found within some of the data collected from these interviews shows that when recruiting graduates, the need for employer branding practices within the recruitment process is low. This is as a result of graduates finishing their courses with relatively little to no experience and just wanting to be successful getting any role possible within their field to acquire experience. Participant #3 highlighted this in their own experience by saying:

*“... when you’re finishing your masters, you’re throwing an awful lot of applications out and hoping something sticks.....the brand of whatever company I ended up at was less important than starting to earn a bit of money and experience”*

Participant #5 also explained that while they checked out employment reviews of the business they now work in once they had been contacted but originally, they just applied to every company hiring within their industry to formulate experience:

*“I would have gone on Glassdoor after being contacted but I did not take employer branding into account when leaving college as I just wanted to gain some experience first”*

Alternatively, branding towards graduates can be important in promoting the type of business you are or the operations you carry out. This is present in Participant #1’s experience as they wanted to work in a non-profit organisation but that this was their only requirement when looking for roles:

*“I wanted to work in a non-profit and so I think maybe at the time of applying the branding wasn’t important to me other than that”*

This data collected contradicts what has been found by Eger, Mičik and Řehoř, (2018) in the literature review above. Eger, Mičik and Řehoř, (2018) in this section describes how younger candidates for jobs research every aspect of the company and look at their social media pages and website to try and see if what the company says

matches with what the company does. Some of the participants of this study that are part of this younger generation have mentioned that they utilised employer branding within the hiring process for their current role but these practices were mainly carried out during the preparation for an interview and not when they were applying for roles.

Participant #8 stated that a big part of their decision to continue through the hiring process for their role and have the desire to work for their current employer stemmed from a video sent outlining the company's practices which contained recommendations from their customers so as to highlight their culture:

*"On our website.... there is a particular video that was created with Volvo that featured the managing director, it went through where he would've started off, the company culture and how the people working in the company were like a family to him.....when I saw the video, I knew I really wanted to work there"*

Participant #4 described how word of mouth from family was what gave them the final push to continue through the hiring process and that they were able to contact current employees of the business to gauge whether the role would be the right fit for them:

*"I obviously had like family and stuff that would have known about the company and people who worked in it when it originally started out told me how it became what it is now..... I definitely brought in all that and other people's opinions in"*

This word-of-mouth type of employer branding has been found in the literature review above by Floyd (2003), has been traditionally associated with an old style of employer branding but is also useful in hiring practices for smaller companies which may not have the finances available to employ a larger branding method. This participant explained how this business was a small business that operated as a call centre so had little usage for a structured employer branding process. Therefore, the literature examined in chapter 2 above is supported by this anecdotal statement.

### 5.2.3 Theme 3 – Culture is more attractive than salary or benefits.

A common theme emerging from 6 of the 8 interviews conducted is that candidates in the job market these days are prioritising the culture of an organisation when they are applying for roles. Salary and benefits are a big part of why people choose to work in specific roles over others but ultimately this has to be combined with promoting the culture of company in order to attract talent.

Participant #8 has mentioned how in interviews, candidates would mention the posts that the company would make on social media which showcased employee testimonials and other aspects associated with the culture of the company and how they have influenced their decision to apply to work with the company:

*"People would mention the video or they would mention "you know I've seen the kind of things you do on social media""*

Participant #8 also mentioned that when prospective candidates apply for the jobs on the employment website Indeed, they would be presented with a profile page giving details about the company and the culture:

*“There would be a company profile page with a little bit about the company.....where the job would be linked to the employer brand and the type of company that we are.....trying to put the message across that not every time you are offered an additional euro to go somewhere else, sometimes we can be the better choice even if we are not the highest paying”*

This is also found in the business in which Participant #3 is employed in:

*“it just came out recently that its LinkedIn’s number one place to work for the second year in a row based on the growth opportunities and the development it affords its employees”*

This factor is reinforced by businesses having an efficient employer value proposition describing its values, culture, trends and current image in the market and what they can offer a prospective employee (Chhabra and Sharma, 2014). This evidence on culture in an organisation aligned with its value proposition supports Melewar, Gotsi and Andriopoulos, (2012), reviewed in the literature review and can be seen throughout multiple participants answers within these qualitative interviews, such as Participant #8, Participant #3 above and Participant #7 who said that they see the employee value proposition:

*“.....as a unique selling point in the market. In our case we aim to sell our career progression opportunities and also the working culture”*

Forwarding on from this, it is clear to see that the world is becoming more conscious on social and environmental issues, like getting involved in non-profits in the local area or having an environmental pledge, and this can be a pull factor when discussing culture in organisations. As is rooted in the literature review by Jakob et al (2022), corporate social responsibility statements need to be reflected in their actions. It is these actions that can increase the pull factor for candidates to work in organisations. This viewpoint is shared by all participants to this study:

*“Yes, I believe it (Corporate social responsibility) creates a positive outlook on the organisation, and it shows that we care for our surrounding communities”*

Participant #7

*“They definitely engaged in local charities. They’d always be donating as much as they could or being seen involved as sponsors, giving sponsorship to different charity events around the local area”*

Participant #4

*“Our company has pledged zero carbon by 2040 in their operations.....that’s really important and it might attract more people than before because were now actually experiencing the physical effects of climate change.....for a company pledging to do something about that is a great thing”*

Participant #3

*“Seeing companies put effort back into the community or into students shows that there is an actual care for society, but it also shows they plan on longevity and to stay around because companies don’t put a lot of money in the community to merge or sell in a couple years”*

Participant #5

*“Candidates going for interviews with other companies would always look at company’s websites and kind of seeing what they are doing and it would definitely make companies kind of more attractive for top talent anyway”*

Participant #6

### 5.3 Sub-Question 2 – How are companies measuring the return on investment from employer branding techniques?

#### 5.3.1 – Theme 1 – Increase in applications

One of the main ways the participants of this study have measured a return on investment from employer branding techniques is an increase in applications.

*“As most of our investment goes towards advertising on social media platforms, we calculate that against the number of candidates applying for our available positions”.*

Participant #7

*“It was definitely an increase in applications.....the uptake was brilliant in applications”*

Participant #4

*“We definitely do have an increase in applications and more people are getting in contact before applying to find out more about the role”*

Participant #5

*“For all roles, as we have developed the companies name brand, it kind of sells itself really and we use that to measure our return on investment”*

Participant #3

This increase in applications is a clear indicator that efficient employer branding practices are in place and working. It has been shown by Pop, Swanepoel and Barkhuizen, (2013), in chapter 2 above that providing more information about the business and its practices can lead to increased applications as it encourages the candidate to want to work somewhere that aligns with their own personal goals.



### 5.3.2 - Theme 2 – Increase in quality of applications

Another way the return on investment was measured throughout the organisations that the participants to this study work in is by looking at the quality of applications and if the applications themselves and the candidates during the hiring process has improved.

*“When we are interviewing people, we are seeing if they know enough about the company and since we implemented a quality employer brand, the candidates in interviews seem to know more about us”*

Participant #5

*“We have seen people in their cover letters or interviews tell us that they want to join us specifically because of what they saw on our website and social media”*

Participant #1

*“People that have seen our employer branding stuff online and talk to us about our branding within the hiring process tend to be a better fit for us culturally and enjoy working here more”*

Participant #8

This shows us that employer branding has and can lead to better quality candidates as they understand what the company that they apply for is prioritising in terms of its culture and if those cultural values fit their personal values. This can have an effect on retention for the organisation also, as these candidates with a values match will be more likely to stay.

## 5.4 Sub-Question 3 – What are the challenges facing Irish based organisations when it comes to employer branding?

### 5.4.1 – Theme 1 – Competing with larger firms

Some of the interviewees are employed by smaller firms compared to others. A massive challenge these smaller firms are presented with is getting their name out there and building their reputation compared to other multinational conglomerates. The issue of doing everything they can developing their value proposition and corporate social responsibility stances can be overshadowed by the simple fact that if the company itself is not recognisable by its name or practices locally, nationally or internationally, it will lose out to larger companies.

*“When a company is smaller, they don’t have as much finances and money for all these resources..... but we really try push our culture and the purpose of the product and how it’s actually helping people’s lives.....we kind of have to really concentrate on pulling peoples heartstrings a bit when we’re doing our employment”*

Participant #5

*“You are competing for the same talent as these companies so you would find sometimes a competitor might have something that’s particularly good and you might say that was really good to draw attention to that but we lack the resources to do that”*

Participant #8

*“There are eight call centres all in the one area, one or two are bigger than the others so they are able to advertise more and promote themselves more than we are”*

Participant #4

*“Aviation is an everchanging business and a lot can change in a short time span so keeping our communication and brand adaptable to time and circumstance with trying to keep up with larger competitors who may be faster is of the utmost importance”*

#### 5.4.2 – Theme 2 – Comments and reviews on social media

Another theme found throughout the qualitative interviews conducted in relation to challenges Irish based organisations face with employer branding is the negative comments and reviews from current and former employees and customers and clients. These have the potential to impact the attractiveness towards an organisation for potential candidates as the opinion that they have of the organisation could be swayed from looking at them.

*“We see (negative feedback) from candidates who might not have been successful in interviews or if they have not gotten feedback for a couple of weeks; it is important to address these as they can reflect badly on the company’s image”*

Participant #6

*“We try steer away from rescheduling or cancelling interviews last minute because these can lead to a negative review on Glassdoor or Indeed and its best to avoid that kind of bad exposure really”*

Participant #1

*“We would often get a lot of negative stuff from people who used to work there or people who said the job descriptions did not match the job itself.....so we have started using exit interviews to try and overcome that and get feedback off employees”*

Participant #4

*“When you get reviews, we would think it’s important to engage with all of them, positive and negative because at the end of the day everyone has room to improve..... we have started looking at our policies and seeing if*

*they need to be updated because of something that was said in one of these negative interviews and updating that”*

#### Participant #5

These comments from these participants address how their organisation have in the past, and will in the future, receive negative comments on online posts from former employees who question the working practices that these organisations have. They then explain that it is important to address these points for their businesses as it can reflect positively in the future on their brand if their practices and policies are shown to have learned and evolved through this constructive; albeit negative, feedback.

There is a contrast in this from Participant #3 who suggests that his organisation, a large multinational, will always receive negative feedback no matter what they do so it is not a priority to read, respond and act on any negative feedback and reviews received on social media platforms:

*“You’re always going to get a few disgruntled employees..... (redacted company name) are one of the biggest companies in the world and they know they are being watched all the time but a few bad former employee reviews are nothing to worry about for them”*

## 5.5 Conclusion

Chapter 5 has laid out the findings from the qualitative research interviews conducted with 8 participants for this study to answer the 3 sub questions, found in Chapter 3, which in turn will lead to a formulated answer and discussion for the overall research question. The questions asked helped to understand how employer branding practices are perceived and conducted in different types of organisations, from new and small companies to large multinational conglomerates that operate around the globe.

The themes found throughout this research leads to an interesting thought process on the overall topic of employer branding which will be discussed in the next chapter. These themes found will also be compared and related to the literature in Chapter 2 to determine if the real world practices compliment or contradict the literature discovered. These themes have shown that there is room for further research on the topic of employer branding and these will be discussed in the recommendations towards the conclusion of this study.

## Chapter 6: Discussion

### 6.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 will be used to discuss the findings and themes listed in chapter 5 with these findings been compared and analysed to the literature that was discovered and discussed in chapter 2 above. These themes will be analysed and discussed individually, as they were in the last chapter, with an attempt to evaluate and answer each research sub-question.

### 6.2 Sub Question 1 – Is employer branding a valuable tool in attracting candidates to work in Irish based organisations?

#### 6.2.1 – Theme 1 – Company Prominence

Through these qualitative interviews we have discovered that people will be more obliged to apply for a role without searching the details of the company's value proposition or corporate social responsibility strategies if the name of the company itself is instantly recognisable globally. If the name brand of the company is efficiently worked and recognisable, candidates for roles with these companies will want to work here simply for the egotistical factor of telling their family and friends that they work for this company. It has become clear that employer branding practices for these larger companies do not have to be as established and clear cut as that of smaller companies once it can be seen that the name of the company has been established worldwide. Examples of an instantly recognisable name brand would be Coca-Cola, Microsoft, Google and Meta.

The literature review, examines the literature surrounding employer branding as a long-term strategy. Maxwell & Knox (2010) explains how a long-term strategy with employer branding is important as it allows companies to benchmark their own practices against their competitors and discover what they need to change in order to gain a competitive advantage. However, the findings of this study have shown that certain companies can get so big that employer branding strategies are not needed or are only needed for more senior roles within the organisation to try and entice experienced people from other companies to come and work for them. Therefore, it has been seen that these companies do have strong employer branding practices but the effect on organisational attractiveness for candidates and potential candidates is low, once the name brand has been established.

Turban and Greening (1997) tell us that the attractiveness a potential candidate has towards an organisation is referenced by the image that employer portrays. This is in line with what has been found throughout this study as it has been shown that some companies that offer extravagant benefits to their employees have an increased attractiveness factor for potential employees, than those that don't. Therefore, we can see that the literature compliments the study here with the benefits large organisations implement, such as Google with their reputation for being a fun place to work, increasing the name brand of the organisation. This, in turn, discourages potential employees from further researching the employers value proposition.

### 6.2.2 – Theme 2 – Graduate Attractiveness

As seen in chapter 2, McCrindle & Fell (2019) tell us that generation Z are more likely to research the culture of the organisations they are interested in applying for as organisations have realised that social media is a good way to promote their employer brand (Rutter, Roper and Lettice, 2016). However, the interviewees of this study have explained that when they graduated from third level education, they applied to any and every role within their industry as the main desire they had when graduating was to just start earning some money and experience within their subject field. This has been exacerbated by Participant #3 and Participant #5.

Based on the initial attractiveness factor to the organisation, this has contradicted the literature and shown that the younger generation of graduates, who have been thought to research all aspects of the company before applying, are not deep diving into organisational values or corporate social responsibility practices until a later stage.

However, during the interview process itself, after being successful with their applications, graduates if the younger, more computer literate, demographic are more likely to research all areas of the organisation to determine not only if they are a good fit for the organisation, but if the organisation is a good fit for them. Kucherov and Zhiltsova (2021) explain in chapter 2 that millennials and generation Z are not afraid to speak up about their expectations to companies on areas such as the type of business they are attracted to working for, such as Participant #1 who wanted to work for a non-profit, and other areas and that they will turn down roles if they feel that they are not a good fit for them culturally. Therefore, in terms of graduate attractiveness, the literature overall supports what has been found in this study in some areas but can contradict it also.

### 6.2.3 – Theme 3 – Culture is more attractive than salary or benefits.

After conducting this study, we can see that the information in the literature review aligns with what the participants of the interviews said in that culture is more attractive to candidates than salary or benefits. Melewar, Gotsi and Andriopolous (2012) explain that for an organisation to be successful at attracting talent, they should build their culture around the values that they have identified and included in their employee value proposition. This can help organisations develop an organisational culture that is unique from their competitors. An example of how this culture can be more attractive for employees than salary and benefits is from Participant #3 whose organisation was listed by LinkedIn to be the best place to work for the second year in a row. This shows that the company puts effort into developing its culture and promoting that so that they can hire the best talent that there is.

Paadi, Barkhuizen and Swanepoel (2019) tell us that the employee value proposition helps employees see what's in it for them to work for a company over their competitor and that this value proposition should be the company's unique selling points as an employer. This fact is emphasised and complimented by Participant #7 who explained that they use their employee value proposition as an opportunity to sell career progression opportunities and emphasise the culture of the organisation.

Overall, we can see that employer branding is a valuable tool to attract candidates to an organisation. This can be seen as the development of the employer brand helps the name of the company reach a prominence level that is instantly recognisable by the jobs market. This encourages potential candidates in all locations to apply. However, there is a difference in age and experience level of candidates. Graduates are more likely to just apply to any role that enables them to get experience but more experienced candidates are more likely to choose an organisation with an attractive culture over salary and benefits.

### 6.3 Sub-Question 2 – How are companies measuring the return on investment from employer branding techniques?

#### 6.3.1 – Theme 1 – Increase in Applications

The first theme under the second sub research question is the increase in applications that the participants have found as a significant return on investment from increasing and refining their employer branding techniques is an increase in applications.

A clear indicator that employer branding practices are working in a business is an increase in applications. This shows that the talent pool out in the employee market is attracted to working in the organisation and the employer branding practices of showcasing the culture and values of the organisation are fulfilling the task that they were designed for. In a general sense, attractiveness to an organisation has been shown to be affected by the employer image (Turban and Greening, 1997) as Participant #3 told us that the company's name brand and reputation sells itself as the image of the organisation is high. However, Pop, Swanepoel and Barkhuizen (2013) tell us that an employer can have an even bigger increase in applications if the values presented by the company match the personal goals of a candidate that to the organisation. This has been shown by Participant #1 who wanted to work in a non-profit organisation and his current employer, which is a non-profit, presented their values as such that they represented how a non-profit company should operate. Therefore, this increased Participant #1's attractiveness to work in this organisation.

The implications for this for employers are that they must try and cater their employee value propositions and corporate social responsibility to their target talent market. This will help ensure that the candidates that are attracted to the organisations values and culture are a good fit for the organisation and that the organisation is a good fit for them.

#### 6.3.2 – Theme 2 – Increase in quality of applications

The second theme found under research objective 2 is that of the increase in the quality of applications. Companies are using this as a measure to understand if their employer branding strategy is working or not within the recruitment and selection process. In chapter 2, we are told by Wilska (2014) that an efficient and proper employer brand helps with the increase in applications as the candidates themselves tend to know more about the company and whether it fits their personal values and cultural goals or not. This is reinforced by Participant #8 who explains that while they were conducting interviews, candidates would explain that they had seen the

company's promotional activities online, such as employee testimonials, green charters, the values of the company and showcasing their culture with pictures and videos of activities the teams in the company do together. This had allowed the candidate to determine if they were a good fit for the company and if the company was a good fit for them and enable them to tailor their application and interview to suit what the company was looking for.

Alternatively, Lievens and Slaughter (2016) tell us that an increased employer branding strategy should also extend to job descriptions. These job descriptions should list the type of candidate that a company is looking for and explain about the remuneration an applicant will receive if they are successful within the recruitment process, along with details of what the company is looking for culture wise to fit with their employee value proposition. The authors explain that this will allow for people who are considering applying to the company to self-select whether they are the right fit for the job or not. In turn, this leads to a higher quality of applications as applicants have already self-determined whether they are right for the job or not. This is complimented within the primary research of this study by Participant #5 who says that candidates in interviews tend to now know more about the company than they did before a competent employer branding strategy was put in place.

Therefore, we can see that companies in the Irish market use the same methods to measure return on investment from employer branding techniques. These are the increase in applications and the increase in quality of applications. To measure this they must metric these factors from before an efficient employer brand was introduced to after.

## 6.4 Sub-Question 3 – What are the challenges facing Irish based organisations when it comes to employer branding?

### 6.4.1 – Theme 1 – Competing with larger firms

One of the biggest challenges facing Irish based organisations in recent years with employer branding is the increased competition from larger firms. Participant #5 mentioned how smaller companies do not have as much capital available to use on employer branding practices that larger firms do. The result of this is that Participant #5's organisation has to push their culture to try and find those candidates that would fit it the best so they stay in the business for the long term. This compliments Condon and Stevens (2004) as they explained how SME's lack finances and tend to have smaller HR teams with more responsibility to look for a cultural fit in their talent and aim for a seamless transition.

Also, because of this lack of capital, larger firms have the ability to advertise their brand more than SME's (McCracken, Currie and Harrison, 2004). This article gave the example of larger firms having the ability to actively recruit candidates on campus, which brings a personal effect to the process and encourages applications by exposing the name brand of the company first and foremost. Participant #4 speaks on this point who explained there were multiple businesses in a small area within the same industry and that some were larger than others.

They explained that this led to these firms having a greater ability to advertise to attract candidates than the smaller firms. Therefore, this article and the primary research here support each other's point.

Finally, participant #7 explained how that in the aviation industry, larger companies tend to be faster when making changes to their business or updating their branding models. This fact is also related to the increase in capital that larger firms tend to have in comparison to smaller and medium size enterprises. Brahmana and Brahmana (2013) explain how an increase in foreign direct investment into Ireland has encouraged recruiters in all companies to approach the recruitment market with the same strategies as these larger multinational firms, but some are left behind as a result of having less capital to make the change or having bigger teams so the change is made quicker. Therefore, in this instance the literature is also supported by the primary research undertaken.

#### 6.4.2 – Theme 2 – Comments and Reviews on social media

These comments from these participants address how their organisation have in the past, and will in the future, receive negative comments on online posts from former employees who question the working practices that these organisations have. They then explain that it is important to address these points for their businesses as it can reflect positively in the future on their brand if their practices and policies are shown to have learned and evolved through this constructive; albeit negative, feedback.

Piric, Masmontet and Martinovic (2018) explain how applicants prefer independent word of mouth reviews about companies rather than looking at employee testimonials posted by the company as this allows them to hear the positive and the negative. It is important to conduct exit interviews to ensure that there are fewer negative reviews out there (König, Richter and Isak, 2021). This literature is supported by Participant #4 who explains that their company uses exit interviews to overcome this negative feedback. However, if there is negative feedback, Participant #6 says that it is important to respond to these so that the company image is not damaged. This supports the literature of Hayes and Carr (2021) who also say that it is important to respond to negative feedback. Participant #5 explains that exit interviews and negative reviews give the company an opportunity to update policies and address issues. Hanu, Amegbe and Mensah (2021) reiterates this as changing policies can help reduce damage in the long term. Doing this can help achieve efficient and effective long term employer branding practices.

However, it is important to note that Participant #3 explained how his company is one of the biggest MNE's in the world and that replying to negative reviews online would be a waste of time for them as they get so many but recruitment practices will not be affected because of the size of the organisation. This directly contradicts the literature mentioned above where it has been found that replying to every review can be beneficial for your business.

Therefore, it has been determined that the biggest challenges to Irish organisations in relation to employer branding in the present and the future are the competition they are up against from larger firms with more



capital to spend, and reviews and comments on social media which may reflect badly on the organisations image as a brand.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

### 7.1 Conclusion

This study was carried out to investigate the research question “How has employer branding influence organisations operating in Ireland’s overall recruitment strategy?” The study took primary and secondary research into account, looking at what previous studies have said on the same topic and discovering if the primary research carried out in this study complimented or contradicted this secondary research. The primary research in this study was carried out using qualitative interviews. These interviews were analysed through thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke’s guidelines.

The literature discussed the topic of employer branding and how it has been incorporated in recent years within the recruitment process. The research looked at how social media is an integral part of employer branding in the modern age and combined this with the literature on generational differences in employer branding to discover that there is no “one size fits all” approach to employer branding. Then, this literature was analysed to derive the 3 research questions, which lead to the interview questions located in the appendix, that would help derive an answer to the overall research question. Afterwards, 8 participants were interviewed, on Zoom, as part of this study to extract their first-hand knowledge on the topic and evolve the themes from their transcripts.

After being analysed for themes, they were then compared to the literature in chapter two to analyse the similarities, or differences, between what the secondary and primary research say and then these were compared to the overall research question. Out of the 8 participants, the general consensus was that employer branding is an essential area of the overall recruitment strategy but that there is a difference in the employer branding practices of larger firms to smaller firms and the strategy needs to be tailored as such.

This research project concludes that employer branding does have a positive effect on organisations operating in Ireland’s overall recruitment strategy. This was found through the research conducted on the 3 research objectives which break this overall research question down into smaller parts. This study found that the recruitment strategy of organisations in the modern world is shaped primarily by employer branding. Every aspect of the recruitment process, whether it be job descriptions or using social media is shaped by employer branding. This study proves to us that from the very start, everything an organisation does can have a positive or negative effect on the potential jobs market. This is why organisations need to develop their employee value proposition, enhance their corporate social responsibility practices and convey these aspects throughout the organisation’s social media, job descriptions and website.

### 7.2 Recommendations

In order for smaller companies to develop their brand strategy and attempt to gain that competitive advantage, they must first understand what employer branding is and why it is being carried out. The definitions of employer branding and the reasons behind its use in participants organisations was not very clear. Therefore, these

participants would benefit from using the CIPD factsheets on employer branding (CIPD, 2020). There is further reading from Farrand (2018), Erickson and Gratton (2007) and more available at the end of this fact sheet to help with understanding of the employer brand. This should then be followed up by internal training sessions on employer branding, which should not take more than 2 training sessions to understand before implementing the process into the recruitment strategy. Carrying this out should have a limited cost effect as the information is freely available online and the training sessions can be carried out in person during working hours using in-house HR teams.

Also, in the modern age, corporate social responsibility tactics are crucial for businesses to attract talent. Only some of the participants of this study said that their business undertakes corporate social responsibility practices. Implementation of strong CSR practices can result in an advantage over your competitor within recruitment (Polívka, 2013). Therefore, it is recommended to these participants businesses that they should implement strong CSR practices to show that they are giving back to the community and to help attract talent. The implementation of this process should take around a year, as the planning and implementation stages are not quick, and should have a cost effect of €1000+ depending on what practices they decide to use. An example of a high-cost CSR measure is Paradoxx who are committing to be the world's first 90% plastic-free hair care brand and an example of a relatively low-cost effect CSR practice is Dublin Bus who developed the 'Dublin Bus Workplace Gender Policy and Guidelines' to help make their company more LGBTQ+ friendly (5 Top Brands Doing CSR Successfully, 2022). The planning stage of developing the CSR practices should begin immediately, however, as seen in these two examples, there are multiple different ways CSR practices can be carried out. Tailoring these practices to your business operations, such as Paradoxx, can help in speeding up the process.

There are multiple ways develop and enhance this research. Firstly, conducting this study with a greater timeframe than what this study had when being carried out could help develop the process with more participants in the primary research and a better enhanced literature review. This project was mainly focused on the Irish market overall and not on a specific industry, so there is the potential to rediscover the process of employer branding in Ireland while looking at one specific industry rather than looking at organisations operating in Ireland like this study has.

### 7.3 Personal Learning Statement

During the process of completing this dissertation, I underestimated the process and thought it would be quicker to do than it was. Completing this dissertation has helped me develop time management skills, especially during the final month when I was scrambling to find interview participants while also writing the methodology chapter and combining that with trying to maintain a social life. I have learned for the future that planning out the process is key to completion; without a plan in place, this dissertation could not have been completed. However, during the process I realised that the plan was flawed and would not work as this dissertation was a much bigger piece of work than I had originally thought. In the future, I have learned to look for participants earlier in the process for

interviews, this would help me with not having to reduce the number of participants from 10 to 8 like I did with this study.

Also, the literature review element of this project has helped me with my critical thinking skills while aiming to discover what was relevant to the overall study and what should be included. My ability to research has also been developed due to this dissertation. I had completed assignments before this but nothing on this scale so it was an eye-opening process.

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## Appendix

### Interview Questions

1. How long have you been working for your current organisation?
2. What is your role within this organisation?
3. What would you say employer branding is?
4. What do you think the employer value proposition is for your organisation?
5. Did you take this organisations brand into consideration when applying for your current role?
6. How much importance is placed on an employer brand for recruitment within your organisation?
7. How has this employer brand been incorporated into each aspect of the recruitment and selection process in your organisation?
8. How has your organisation identified what their employer brand is? (What steps did they take to do this?)
9. Have you noticed an increase in job applications and the quality of them since the introduction of an employer brand within your organisation?
10. Have these efforts resulted in the time to hire being reduced since their implementation?
11. Does your organisation use social media platforms to promote their employer brand? If yes, which ones do you use?
12. Which of these platforms do you get the most engagement on?
13. Have you seen any negative aspects of using these social media sites to promote your employer brand?
14. What is your company doing to overcome these negative aspects?
15. How is your organisation measuring the return on investment from your employer brand tactics?
16. Do you think that an organisation having a strong brand contributes to the attractiveness of an organisation? If not, what does?
17. Is your organisation aware of online review sites such as Glassdoor.ie? (a website where employees and former employees anonymously review companies and their management).
18. Does your company actively use these online review sites to address any negative feedback given by employees and former employees?
19. What do you think are the future challenges facing your company when it comes to employer branding?

20. Does your organization engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities? (e.g support or sponsor non – profit organisations or social projects)
21. Do you think corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities influence your organization’s employer brand?  
If yes, how so?