The relationship between brand attractiveness and the intent to apply for a job
A millennials' perspective

Joanna Santiago
*Department of Management, Instituto Superior de Economia e Gestao,
Universidade de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal*

Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to understand the relation between the dimensions of employer brand (EB) attractiveness and the intention to submit a job application to the organisation. An increase of competitiveness in the business world has resulted in an increased effort by organisations to improve the processes of recruitment and retention of talented professionals, as the human capital of organisations is extremely important for their growth and sustainability. Regardless of an organisation's size, the difficulties faced in recruiting and retaining highly qualified human capital are tangible. In this sense, the research problem identifies EB as being a strategic element for attracting future employees to work for an organisation.
Design/methodology/approach – This study used both quantitative (a questionnaire survey) and qualitative (in-depth interviews) data to investigate the perceptions of future and current employees.
Findings – Evidence from 281 respondents (of which almost 60 per cent belong to the millennial generation) who participated in the quantitative study supports the multi-dimensionality of EB attractiveness, highlighting the importance of economic factors, such as an above-average salary or opportunities for promotion, which are seen to be less important to millennials when considering future job prospects. Interestingly, the results of the qualitative research for current employees show slightly different concerns, in that career progression appears to be crucial.
Originality/value – The study findings not only offer a basis for research on the dimensions of employer attractiveness, but also, they serve as a managerial guide towards enhancing companies' ability to attract, retain and motivate talented individuals.
Keywords Brand attractiveness, Employer brand
Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction
Over the past decade, the scope of branding activities has increased to include not only potential and current consumers, but also to broaden the understanding of other stakeholder groups, such as suppliers, shareholders, the local community and, in particular, employees (King and Grace, 2009; Jiang and Iles, 2011; Xie *et al.*, 2015; Jain and Bhatt, 2015). The changing paradigm of generations, society and cultures, which have become manifestly more technological, as well as the shortage of labour, global competition for employees, and persons' willingness to change careers more often have escalated the competitiveness and resulted in an increased effort by organisations in the processes of recruitment and retention of the best professionals (Rampl, 2014; Rampl and Kenning, 2014; Backhaus, 2016; Bellou *et al.*, 2015). This predominantly occurs in the services sector, where organisations must constantly find ways of managing their customer contract employees to ensure that their

behaviour supports the delivery of high-quality service (Chebat and Kollias, 2000) and therefore internal branding becomes a key strategic issue. The effective branding of an organisation as a potential or current employer can give a company an advantage in the "war for talent", by attracting and retaining a talented workforce (Alnıaçıka *et al.*, 2014), which is, in turn, crucial for delivering quality service to the customer (Dhar, 2015; Wu *et al.*, 2015). An employer's brand has thus become a powerful resource for recruiting employees for services and for attracting new candidates.

Despite the substantial investigation available on linking brand associations with employer brand (EB) attractiveness, research into how to become a first-choice employer is limited (Rampl, 2014). In this context and addressing this research gap, our study aims to test the relationship between employee brand attractiveness and intention to submit a job application to the organisation.

To test the study hypothesis, we apply the EmpAT scale proposed by Berthon *et al.* (2005) and link it with the intention to submit a job application, as proposed by Highhouse *et al.* (2003). Specifically, we test whether brand personality traits affect EB attractiveness for current and potential employees. This study aims to specifically understand job candidates' perceptions of the organisation to which they are applying, as well as the brand attractiveness perception of current employees. In particular, the behaviour of the millennial generation, which is a force that has begun to change the work culture of many organisations is analysed (Ferri-Reed, 2014). The empirical study was based on quantitative and qualitative data collected through questionnaires and in-depth interviews with both job candidates and current employees, focusing on one specific case – a financial group, which has a solid global presence and specialises in the provision of financial and banking services.

The paper is organised as follows. In Section 2, the literature is analysed, a definition of EB and its attractiveness is presented, and the features of the millennial generation are examined. Next, the conceptual framework and research hypotheses are introduced. Section 5, empirical section begins with the description of a sample and unit of analysis and it concludes with the study of EB as a factor of talent attraction for a company. The results of the questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews are presented. Finally, the conclusion section summarises the major contributions of the research, as well as the study limitations and the implications for theory, practice and future research.

2. Literature review
2.1 Employer brand
Organisations can cultivate close relationships with employees, just as consumers do with product brands (Ambler and Barrow, 1996). Consequently, employers reflect traits that correspond to those portrayed by product brands. The concept of employer branding has emerged as a consequence of the application of marketing principles to human resource management (Alnıaçıka *et al.*, 2014). To emphasise the fact that companies should become more people oriented, Ambler and Barrow (1996) introduced the term EB. According to the authors, EB refers to all those benefits offered by an organisation to its employees to build a unique identity in the eyes of employees and applicants and thus encourages them to stay with, or to join the company. Employer branding is therefore a term used to portray how organisations communicate their offer to potential and existing employees to acquire and maintain their loyalty and also promote the organisation as a firm that is a different and desirable employer (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Jiang and Iles, 2011). Kucherov and Zavyalova (2012) also viewed employer branding as a new field of the study of human resource management and they considered employer branding to be a progressive approach based on general branding theory, which uses specific branding principles and tools to make the process of managing people more efficient.

Employees do indeed play a crucial role in corporate marketing and the organisational branding process (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2017), which is even more important when it comes to the services sector. According to Chebat and Kollias (2000, p. 67), "service firms depend heavily on the ability of customer contact employees to properly deliver their services". Accordingly, if employees lack adequate knowledge of the brand and do not demonstrate a connection with an externally promoted brand identity, then they are unable to behave in the way desired by the organisation. For this reason, organisations are increasingly using EB to attract new employees and as a means to ensure that current employees are involved in the organisation's culture and strategy (Rampl, 2014). EB thus represents a further extension of branding theory and research, "involving efforts to communicate to existing and prospective staff that the organisation is a desirable place to work" (Jiang and Iles, 2011, p. 98).

Several researchers have pointed out that organisations with a strong EB appeal to more talented job candidates and also help to retain talented employees (Alnıaçıka et al., 2014; Rampl and Kenning, 2014). In order to develop a favourable EB, managers have to comprehend what the crucial factors are, in order to attract potential candidates to a company.

2.2 Employee brand attractiveness

The ability of EB to attract future employees expresses an organisation's position in the minds of candidates. One of the strong competitive advantages that EB attractiveness conveys is the selection of the target audience, which is a way to attract new talent to organisation and increases the possibility of recruiting such talent (Berthon et al., 2005). Organisational attractiveness therefore represents "the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organisation" (Berthon et al., 2005, p. 156). The stronger the attractiveness of an EB, the more robust is the perceived EB value in the candidates' perception. Jiang and Iles (2011) also saw EB as "a power" that draws candidates' attention to the organisation and encourages current employees to stay loyal to a company. In our paper, we consider employer branding by applying a progressive human resource development approach based on general branding theory, which uses some branding principles and tools (e.g. target audience identification, segmentation and promotion) to improve the efficiency of the process of people management.

In their paper, Kucherov and Zavyalova (2012) defined EB as a quintessence of those qualitative features of the employer that are attractive to a target audience. These features are described by a totally positive image and an appropriate set of both material (economic) and non-material (psychological and symbolic) advantages for differentiating a company in the job market.

Thus, employee brand attractiveness is regarded as a multi-dimensional construct. Berthon et al. (2005) developed and validated a multi-item scale to identify and operationalise the dimensions of employer attractiveness. According to these authors, the attractiveness of an employer's brand can be equated by the interest, social value, economic value and the development and cooperation that it can hold, according to the perspective of potential employees. As this concerns the social value, it is associated with a pleasant and relaxed work environment. With regard to economic value, the monetary question of above-average salary, contractual stability and career progression are core factors. Finally, development offers a strong valuation of the employee, providing security and appreciation of their contribution, which in the perspective of a future employee is considered to be an added value for career progression (Berthon et al., 2005). EB is thus affected by the employer's notion of attractiveness, in the sense that a brand can be considered to be a key, strong, and advantageous factor, which influences the value judgements of potential employees. EB is essentially the reflection of the identity and culture of an organisation, and its employees are the main messengers of brand awareness. Berthon et al. (2005) appealed for further research of the employer attractiveness scale in different cultures to map out cross-cultural differences.

In this study, we examine Portuguese millennials' perception of EB attractiveness. According to projections for the Portuguese economy for 2018–2020, the labour market is expected to have some improvement. Employment growth will be accompanied by slightly positive changes in the labour force, which are associated with the return of inactive people to the labour market and a progressive increase in retirement age. The blend of these two factors should result in the unemployment rate maintaining its downward path, which is projected to be below 6 per cent by 2020 (Banco de Portugal, 2018).

2.3 Millennials in the workplace

Generational differences are likely to determine what individuals want from their work, what kind of workplace environment is wished for, and how organisations can satisfy these wants and desires (Maier *et al.*, 2015). According to authors, millennials think that "rules are made to be broken" (p. 388), as they reject the thought that their generation has to stay within the rigid restrictions of a job description. Millennials (also called Generation Y) are also the first generation to have grown up with the internet, and therefore they take electronic collaboration for granted and are highly adaptive to nascent technology. Members of Generation Y prefer to work in a transparent organisation in which the corporation's mission, values, operations and conflicts are openly shared (Ferri-Reed, 2014). Furthermore, they are more attracted to work for employers that engage in charitable and philanthropic causes and tend to place more importance on an organisation's social value, rather than its share value. Organisations need to embrace these generational differences in order to support their millennial employees in achieving creativity and productivity, and the organisation must first "inspire them", if it wants to attract and retain the Generation Y employees (Ferri-Reed, 2014).

According to the "Millennial Survey 2018" carried out by Deloitte (2018), which involved 10,455 millennials from 36 countries, millennials are less loyal and have less trust in companies. While suspicious of business motivation and ethics, they are looking for business leaders who are focused on contributing positively to society. According to the study, 43 per cent of millennials plan to leave their workplace within two years (compared to 38 per cent in 2017) and only 28 per cent expect to stay more than five years (compared to 31 per cent in 2017). Among those millennials who plan to leave their jobs during the next two years, 62 per cent would consider the "gig economy" as an alternative to full-time employment. As seen in the survey, those companies and senior management teams that are most aligned with millennials in terms of purpose, culture and professional development are more likely to attract and retain the best millennial talent and, in turn, are better positioned to potentially achieve greater organisational performance.

3. Conceptual framework and hypotheses

The purpose of this study is to understand the dimensions of the attractiveness of the employer's brand and its influence on the attraction of future millennial employees to work for organisations.

3.1 Conceptual model

This study proposes a conceptual model, focused on EB attractiveness (both for current as well as potential future employees) and the intention to submit a job application to the organisation. With this objective, this study proposes a conceptual framework (Figure 1) linking the dimensions of employer attractiveness based on a comprehensive 25-item EmpAT scale proposed by Berthon *et al.* (2005) (see Table AI) and the three dimensions of intention to submit a job application proposed by Highhouse *et al.* (2003) (see Table AII). Both of these scales have previously been validated in past research. In a more recent study, Saini and Chaudhary applied both concepts in the Indian context and confirm a positive
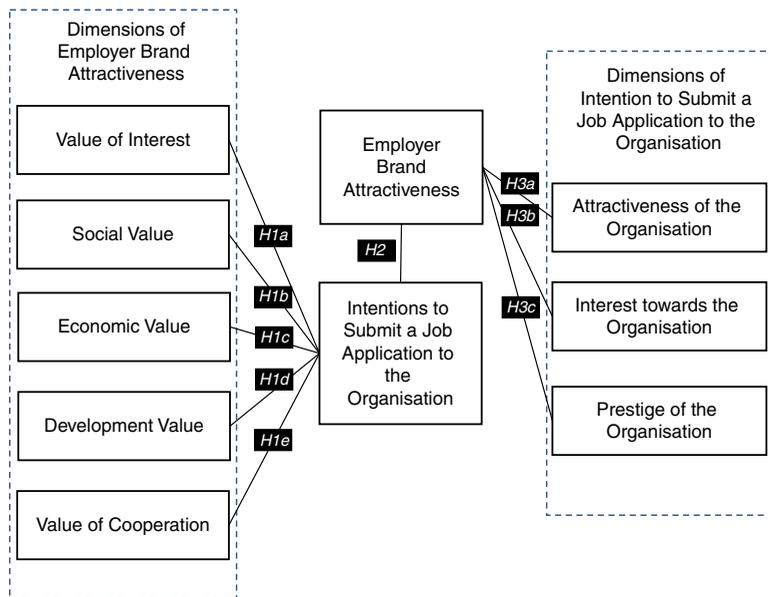
Figure 1.
Conceptual model

relationship between employer attractiveness and prospective employees' intention to apply to that organisation for a job. In our paper, we examine this relationship through the perspective of the millennial generation in Portugal and base our research on the premise that the attractiveness of an EB influences the intention to submit a job application to the organisation.

3.2 Research hypotheses
Being a first-choice employee brand is a valuable advantage for an organisation (Rampl, 2014). In her study, for the first time in the literature, Rampl (2014) investigated the drivers of employer first-choice brand and identifies employee's brand emotions as being essential for establishing a strong EB. According to Berthon *et al.* (2005), the benefits that a prospective employee expects to achieve while working for a specific organisation reveal the attractiveness of the employer's brand. The authors considered the following categories of principles: value of interest, social value, economic value, development value and value of cooperation. As these values have an impact on EB attractiveness and intention to submit a job application, we can propose the hypotheses *H1a–H1e*.

The value of interest is an improvement of the "psychological benefits" proposed by Ambler and Barrow (1996), which evaluate the extent to which a future employee is attracted by an organisation that offers innovative work practices and makes use of the employees' creativity to produce high-quality innovative products and services. As there are indications of a relationship between the value of interest and the intentions of submitting a job application to the organisation, this study proposes to test the following hypothesis:

H1a. There is a positive relationship between value of interest and intention to submit a job application to the organisation.

Social value is also an enhancement of the "psychological benefits" proposed by Ambler and Barrow (1996) who analysed to what extent a future employee is attracted by an

organisation that offers a fun, good working environment. Considering the relationship between social value and the intentions of submitting a job application, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1b. There is a positive relationship between social value and intention to submit a job application to the organisation.

Economic value is derived from an improvement of the three inductive dimensions (functional, psychological and economic) proposed by Ambler and Barrow (1996). This attests to the extent to which a future employee is attracted to an organisation that provides above-average salaries with a benefits package, job security and career development opportunities. Considering the relationship between economic value and intention to submit a job application, this study proposes to test the following hypothesis:

H1c. There is a positive relationship between economic value and intention to submit a job application to an organisation.

Cooperation value emerges from the improvement of Ambler and Barrow's (1996) "functional benefits", and it estimates to what extent a future employee is attracted to an organisation that offers recognition, self-esteem and trust, along with an experience that provides career enhancement and works as a "launch pad" for future jobs. In this sense, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1d. There is a positive relationship between development value and intention to submit a job application to the organisation.

The value of cooperation is again based on an improvement of the "functional benefits" of Ambler and Barrow (1996). This value verifies the extent to which a future employee is attracted to an organisation that provides an opportunity for the employee to apply what they have learned in the workplace and to share it with other employees in a customer-oriented and socially responsible environment. Thus, we propose that:

H1e. There is a positive relationship between value of cooperation and intention to submit a job application to the organisation.

Companies make a mindful effort to build themselves up as attractive brands and communicate their employer branding efforts to their relevant target audience. Some studies (e.g. Wilden *et al.*, 2010) have shown that companies invest in brand activities to build a stronger EB and that one of the major objectives of such efforts is to attract more talented employees.

Attractiveness of the employer's brand is defined as the imagined benefits that a future employee recognises when working for a specific organisation, which become important in as a way of attracting employees with superior skills and knowledge and a primary source of competitive advantage (Berthon *et al.*, 2005). The value of an organisation's job submission intention comes from evaluating the positive responses to organisation's recruitment messages, based on the assumption that these responses can be generalised, according to the actual choice of an organisation. According to this principle, the scale suggested by Highhouse *et al.* (2003) presents the following dimensions: attractiveness of the organisation, intentions in relation to an organisation and prestige of the organisation.

There is evidence that the stronger the attractiveness of an employer's brand, the stronger the intention is to submit a job application to an organisation, and thus the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2. There is a relationship between brand attractiveness of the employer and intention to submit a job application to the organisation.

Attractiveness of an organisation is reflected in the attitudes of future employees towards certain organisations as place for a potential future job. However, this attractiveness is passive in nature, because it does not necessarily imply that actual behaviour is carried out based on an opinion of an organisation. This passivity allows future employees to be attracted to many organisations simultaneously. More active research on the organisation by future employees would require resource conservation and a more limited number of accessible possibilities. Considering that there is a positive relation between the attractiveness of an organisation and the attractiveness of the employer's brand, the following hypothesis is proposed:

> *H3a.* There is a positive relationship between attractiveness of the organisation and attractiveness of the employer's brand.

The intentions derived from the perceptions of the social adequacy of behaviour which results in the evaluation of intention will predict a more concrete pattern of behaviour, rather than the evaluation of attitudes. The notion that intention predicts behaviour with better than general attitudes has been based on empirical research (Kim and Hunter, 1993). Considering the positive relationship between intention to work for an organisation and the attractiveness of the employer's brand, the following hypothesis is stated:

> *H3b.* There is a positive relationship between intention towards the organisation and EB attractiveness.

In addition to evaluating the attitudes and intention towards an organisation, many studies have attempted to evaluate the perception of the prestige of the organisation – the degree to which organisations are perceived as being a "good organisation to work with" (Highhouse *et al.*, 1998, 2003; Rampl, 2014; Rampl and Kenning, 2014). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

> *H3c.* There is a positive relationship between prestige of an organisation and EB attractiveness.

4. Methodology and data

The nature of this study is explorative, as it consists of causal links between the specificities of the attractiveness of the employer's brand and the intention of future employees to submit a job application. It consists of a cross-sectional analysis of a particular case, studied at a given time, and according to a predefined time interval (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). The selection of a single case study – Alpha C Portugal (whose real name remains confidential), an international service company operating in Portugal, offered an opportunity to observe and analyse the perception of this employer's brand attractiveness in Portugal.

The data collection techniques used were a combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses, using a mixed research model (Saunders *et al.*, 2009), as well as the use of multiple data sources, namely, a questionnaire survey (addressed to job candidates) and semi-structured interviews (with current employees). A non-probabilistic sampling technique (snowballing) was adopted for the questionnaire survey. A selection from the respondents was made, to ensure that the study population incorporates potential employees who intend to submit a job application to the organisation cited in the case study. The survey was carried out using the Qualtrics online platform, which facilitated the collection of data from a significant sample over a short period of time. Qualitative data collection was carried out in accordance with the concept of semi-structured interviews, conducted with the prior consent of the organisation and the interviewees. The interviews were conducted individually and face-to-face, using a tape recorder (with prior consent of the interviewee regarding the

recording of the interview) for later text transcription and analysis of the findings. The questionnaire was predominately based on the Likert-type agreement scales and Cronbach's αtest was applied to evaluate the consistency of each of the variables of the quantitative scales present in this investigation. In order to verify the normality of the variables, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was applied. Subsequently, in order to answer the research questions and to validate the research hypotheses, simple and multiple linear regressions were performed.

5. Statistical analysis and results

5.1 Unit of analysis
This study is grounded on one specific unit of analysis, known here as: Alpha C Portugal. Alpha C Portugal is a financial group, with a solid global presence which specializes in financial and banking services. It is a leader in Europe and is present in 74 countries, employs 186,390 employees worldwide, and operates in 3 business areas, where it holds a prominent position in the form of Alpha C, Alpha Invest and Alpha Retail. For investment, Alpha occupies the top position in Europe and has a strong presence in the Americas, as well as a solid and fast growth in the Asia Pacific region. The selection of a single case study offered an opportunity to observe the intention to submit a job application to the organisation by potential future employees.

Alpha C Portugal currently contracts approximately 4,000 employees. The average age of Alpha C Portugal employee is 34 years old, and 54 per cent of employees are women. Alpha C Portugal is supported by specialised teams in London and Paris, which provide corporate and investment banking services to more than 350 national and international organisations. Directed to serving organisations, financial institutions and institutional clients, Alpha C Portugal offers a wide range of services, ranging from day-to-day banking to more sophisticated investment banking solutions.

5.2 Sample characterisation
The survey was answered by 291 individuals, although only 281 of these responses were considered complete and valid, with 10 responses being excluded (as the questionnaire was not completed). The final quantitative sample was composed of 281 respondents, corresponding to 56.2 per cent females and 43.8 per cent males. Most of the respondents are young adults (up to 35 years of age), with the most pertinent age range being between 26 and 35 years old (58.7 per cent). Therefore, we can assume that the study effectively represents the opinions of millennials. Regarding the level of education, the majority of respondents (56.2 per cent) hold a Post-graduate or Masters' degree, followed by those with a Bachelors' degree (40.2 per cent). With regards to professional situation, 74.7 per cent of respondents are employed and 34.5 per cent of the respondents stated that they have a work experience of 6–10 years, while 31 per cent mentioned that their experience was less than 5 years, followed by 16.4 per cent who mentioned that they have an experience of between 11 and 15 years.

The interviews were carried out with a total of nine employees of Alpha C Portugal: four departments' directors, three team leaders and two co-workers. Most of the interviewees are male (six out of nine). Regarding the length of service with Alpha C Portugal, three of the respondents have worked for more than five years with this organisation, while four of the interviewees have been employed by the organisation for at least three years and up to two years with the organisation. See Table AIII for a more complete sample characterisation.

5.3 Reliability and internal consistency
Cronbach's α test was applied to evaluate the consistency of each of the variables of the quantitative scales present in this investigation. According to the analysis, the

consistency of the EB attractiveness scale is very good, presenting a value of 0.912 and likewise, the scale of intention to submit a job application exhibits an excellent consistency, with a value of 0.916.

5.4 Hypotheses validation
In order to validate the research hypotheses, simple and multiple linear regressions were performed. The validity of the regression assumptions was first tested through the assumption of the normal distribution of errors/residues with the graphical representation of normal probability. The assumption of homoscedasticity or variance of errors is constant and is showed by the graphical representation of a scatter diagram, through which it can be determined that the values are close to 0 and that in this case the error variance proves to be constant. The D–W test was performed to ascertain the independence of the errors or absence of autocorrelation. The absence of multicollinearity was also confirmed. Taking into account the evidence of this evaluation, it can be stated that the assumptions are valid, which means that none of the assumptions is violated.

A multiple linear regression was used to answer the first research question and to validate the research hypotheses *H1a–H1e*, in which the dependent variable was the intention to submit a job application to an organisation and the independent variables are the value of cooperation, value of interest, social value, development value and economic value (see Table AIII for synthesis of the regression models).

With respect to the adjusted coefficient of determination (R^2 adjusted), it is indicated that 1.7 per cent of the total variation of the scale "intention to submit a job application to the organisation" is justified by the variation of the variables of: value of cooperation; value of interest; social value; value development; and economic value. Given that: $F(5) = 158.874$ test, p-value = 0.104, $\alpha = 0.05$), it can be assumed that the model is not significant, as it does not reject the null hypothesis and its validity cannot be attested. The standard error of the estimate ($S = 9.273$) is high, which indicates a less good fit between at least one of the analysed values of the sample and the values estimated by the model. In order to verify the impact that the independent variables have on intention to submit a job application to an organisation, it is observed that value of cooperation ($\beta = 0.156$, $t = 0.865$, p-value = 0.388, $\alpha =$), the value of interest ($\beta = 0.296$, $t = 1.503$, p-value = 0.134, $\alpha = 0.05$), social value ($\beta = 0.099$, $t = 0.445$, p-value = 0.656, $\alpha = 0.05$) and developmental value ($\beta = 0.182$, $t = 0.819$, p-value = 0.414, $\alpha = 0.05$) have an impact on the intention to submit a job application, confirming *H1a*, *H1b*, *H1d* and *H1e*; except for economic value ($\beta = -0.404$, $t = -1.265$, p-value = 0.207, $\alpha = 0.05$), which therefore does not validate *H1c*.

Thus, the regression model is presented as follows:

$$Y = 52.630 + 0.156 \times X1 + 0.296 \times X2 + 0.099 \times X3 + 0.182 \\ \times X4 + \epsilon j \quad (j = 1, \ldots, n), \tag{1}$$

where Y: intentions to submit a job application to an organisation, $X1$: value of cooperation, $X2$: value of interest, $X3$: social value, $X4$: development value and ϵj: model errors.

In order to validate hypothesis *H2*, two simple linear regressions were applied. For the regression model, the adjusted R^2 diagnosis that 2.3 per cent of the total range variation of EB attractiveness is justified by the variation of the variable "intention to submit a job application". According to the F-test ($F = 1,405.144$, p-value = 0.010, $\alpha = 0.05$), it can be assumed that the model is significant, as the null hypothesis of this test is rejected, and its validity is verified. The standard error of the estimate ($S = 14.429$) is high, which expresses a less good fit between at least one of the analysed values of the sample and the values estimated by the model. Finally, the influence that the independent variable has on the scale of attractiveness of the employer's brand was evaluated, attesting that intention to

submit a job application ($R = 0.165$, $t = 2.598$, p-value $= 0.010$, $\alpha = 0.05$) has an impact on EB attractiveness, which leads to the confirmation of *H2*. Thus, the regression model is represented as follows:

$$Y = 113.337 + 0.1258 \times X + \epsilon j \quad (j = 1, \ldots, n), \tag{2}$$

where Y: scale attractiveness of the employer's brand, X: intention to submit a job application and ϵj: model errors.

In order to answer the third research question and to validate the hypotheses *H3a*–*H3c*, a multiple linear regression was applied, with the varying scale depending on the employer's brand variety of attractiveness, and the independent variables of: attractiveness of the organisation; intentions in relation to the organisation, and; prestige of the organisation. Considering the regression model, through the adjusted R^2 analysis it is considered that 1.9 per cent of the total variation of the variable scale attractiveness of an employer's brand is expressed by the variation of the variables of: attractiveness of the organisation; intentions in relation to the organisation, and; prestige of the organisation. Using the F-test ($F(3) = 530.240$, p-value $= 0.057$, $\alpha = 0.05$), it can be verified that the model is significant, as the null hypothesis of this test is rejected, proving its validity. The standard error of the estimate ($S = 14.462$) is high, exposing a less good fit between at least one of the analysed values of the sample and the values estimated by the model. Regarding the impact that the independent variables have on the EB attractiveness scale, it was found that attractiveness of the organisation ($\beta = 0.139$, $t = 1.441$, p-value $= 0.151$, $\alpha = 0.05$), intention ($p = 0.715$, $\alpha = 0.05$) and organisational prestige ($\beta = 0.038$, $t = 0.365$, $p = 0.715$, $\alpha = 0.05$) has an influence on an employer's brand attractiveness, which confirms the validity of *H3a*–*H3c*. Thus, the regression model is represented as follows:

$$Y = 111.134 + 0.715 \times X1 + 0.41 \times X2 + 0.154 \times X3 + \epsilon j \quad (j = 1, \ldots, n), \tag{3}$$

where Y: attractiveness of the employer's brand, $X1$: attractiveness of the organisation, $X2$: intentions towards the organisation, $X3$: prestige of the organisation and ϵj: model errors.

5.5 Results of the qualitative study

In order to determine what makes EB attractive to current employees, a qualitative analysis was based on the Social Identity Approach to organisational identification model explored by Maxwell (2009). On closer examination, attributes related with employee compensation include tangible rewards, such as salaries and benefits, and also intangible rewards, such as training and career advancement opportunities. There are some differences when it comes to the importance of salary – whereby some of the interviewees stated that levels of salary were good, while others claimed that they are not the best in the market. Interestingly, the most-emphasised component of compensation that was most appreciated by all the respondents were the learning opportunities, both in terms of training and career progression. Management style was considered favourably by most of the employees and the most appreciated factors were: promotion and opportunities to participate in cross-cutting projects; career progression, greater openness and internal information sharing. Importantly, the interviewees stressed that management does not have any concern when it comes to retaining talented employees. Finally, the characteristics and values attributed to the products and services of the organisation reveal some small divergence, but predominantly the company is considered to be an organisation of excellence, reflecting a strong internal brand image and the existence of social responsibility policies and ethics.

5.6 Discussion of the results

The quantitative analysis of this study focused on the intention to submit a job application to Alpha C Portugal by future employees and also their perceptions of this particular employer's brand attractiveness. Interestingly, all the hypotheses were validated, except for hypothesis *H1c* "there is a positive relationship between Economic Value and Intention to Submit a Job Application to an Organisation". This leads us to conclude that for the perception of Portuguese millennials, above-average salary, compensation package, job security and promotional opportunities are not the key factors that influence their intention to submit a job application.

Interestingly, the results of the qualitative analysis show that those attributes that the current employees and managers of Alpha C Portugal consider to be the most attractive are slightly different from those mentioned by job candidates, which may imply that the efforts applied to become the "first-choice employer" may not have had the desired effect, especially from an internal point of view. The needs, skills and knowledge of the employees are part of an organisation's competitive advantage and it is thus fundamental that all the employees of an organisation have the opportunity to understand the organisation's brand, as the brand is intrinsically linked to their job functions and thus employees can be the brand's drivers.

6. Conclusions

The way in which an employee sees the organisation becomes an echo of perceptions regarding it, which is an essential point for organisations to take into consideration when developing their messages according to the needs of internal and external markets. The results obtained in this study indicate that almost all the dimensions of EB attractiveness have an influence on the intention of millennials to apply for a job, with the only exception being economic value. This is an interesting finding, both from an academic as well as a professional perspective, and therefore we would suggest future research into what millennials find to be truly attractive in an organisation and what can help them to decide where to apply for a job. It is crucial for organisations to understand these elements of brand attractiveness, in order that they can appeal and retain talented employees. By looking at the strongest dimensions of their EB attractiveness, companies can be capable of developing their marketing and human resource strategies in accordance with the needs and objectives desired by job candidates and current employees. The changing generations and the different attributes that attract their attention with regards to EB may not have an equal weighting in the eyes of current employees.

With regards to the limitations of this study, the generalisability of the findings may be placed into question, based on two major restraints. First, the study covers only one case study, and second, it is based on the analysis of a small sample sizes for both the qualitative and the quantitative study. Future research is suggested which should use wider company/ sector coverage and employ a larger sample size.

References

Alnıaçıka, E., Alnıaçıka, U., Eratb, S. and Akçin, K. (2014), "Attracting talented employees to the company: do we need different employer branding strategies in different cultures?", *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 150, pp. 336-344.

Ambler, T. and Barrow, S. (1996), "The employer brand", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 4 No. 3, pp. 185-206.

Backhaus, K. (2016), "Employer branding revisited", *Organisation Management Journal*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 193-201.

Backhaus, K. and Tikoo, S. (2004), "Conceptualizing and researching employer branding", *Career Development International Journal*, Vol. 9 No. 5, pp. 501-517.

Banco de Portugal (2018), "Projeções económicas", *Boletim Económico*.

Bellou, V., Chaniotakis, I., Kehagias, I. and Rigopoulou, I. (2015), "Employer brand of choice: an employee perspective", *Journal of Business Economics and Management*, Vol. 16 No. 6, pp. 1201-1215.

Berthon, P., Ewing, M. and Hah, L.L. (2005), "Captivating company: dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding", *International Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 24 No. 2, pp. 151-172.

Chebat, J.C. and Kollias, P. (2000), "The impact of empowerment on customer contact employees' roles in service organisations", *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 3, pp. 66-81.

Deloitte (2018), *The Deloitte Millennial Survey 2018*, Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited.

Dhar, R.L. (2015), "Service quality and the training of employees: the mediating role of organisational commitment", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 46, February, pp. 419-430.

Ferri-Reed, J. (2014), "Millennializing the workplace", *The Journal for Quality and Participation*, Vol. 37 No. 1, pp. 13-14.

Highhouse, S., Lievens, F. and Sinar, E.F. (2003), "Measuring attraction to organisations", *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, Vol. 63 No. 6, pp. 986-1001.

Highhouse, S., Beadle, D., Gallo, A. and Miller, L. (1998), "Get'em while they last! Effects of scarcity information in job advertisements", *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, Vol. 28 No. 9, pp. 779-795.

Jain, N. and Bhatt, P. (2015), "Employment preferences of job applicants: unfolding employer branding determinants", *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 34 No. 6, pp. 634-652.

Jiang, T.T. and Iles, P. (2011), "Employer-brand equity, organisational attractiveness and talent management in the Zhejiang private sector, China", *Journal of Technology Management in China*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 97-110.

Kim, M.S. and Hunter, J.E. (1993), "Attitude-behaviour relations: a meta-analysis of attitudinal relevance and topic", *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 43 No. 1, pp. 1001-1142.

King, C. and Grace, D. (2009), "Employee based brand equity: a third perspective", *Services Marketing Quarterly*, Vol. 30 No. 2, pp. 122-147.

Kucherov, D. and Zavyalova, E. (2012), "HRD practices and talent management in the companies with the employer brand", *European Journal of Training and Development*, Vol. 36 No. 1, pp. 86-104.

Maier, T., Tavanti, M., Bombard, P., Gentile, M. and Bradford, B. (2015), "Millennial generation perceptions of value-centered leadership principles", *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality and Tourism*, Vol. 14 No. 4, pp. 382-397.

Maxwell, R. (2009), "Motivating employees to 'live the brand': a comparative case study of employer brand attractiveness within the firm", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 25 Nos 9-10, pp. 893-907.

Punjaisri, K. and Wilson, A. (2017), "The role of internal branding in the delivery of employee brand promise", *Journal of Brand Management: Advanced Collections*, Vol. 15 No. 1, pp. 57-70.

Rampl, L.V. (2014), "How to become an employer of choice: transforming employer brand associations into employer first-choice brands", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 30 Nos 13-14, pp. 1486-1504.

Rampl, L.V. and Kenning, P. (2014), "Employer brand trust and affect: linking brand personality to employer brand attractiveness", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 48 Nos 1-2, pp. 218-236.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2009), *Research Methods for Business Students*, 5th ed., Prentice-Hall, Harlow.

Wilden, R., Gudergan, S. and Lings, I. (2010), "Employer branding: strategic implications for staff recruitment", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 26 Nos 1-2, pp. 56-73.

Wu, Y.C., Tsai, C.S., Hsiung, H.W. and Chen, K.Y. (2015), "Linkage between frontline employee service competence scale and customer perceptions of service quality", *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 29 No. 3, pp. 224-234.

Xie, C., Bagozzi, R.P. and Meland, K.V. (2015), "The impact of reputation and identity congruence on employer brand attractiveness", *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, Vol. 33 No. 2, pp. 124-146.

Further reading

Berry, L.L. (2000), "Cultivating service brand equity", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 28 No. 1, pp. 128-137.

Foster, C., Punjaisri, K. and Cheng, R. (2010), "Exploring the relationship between corporate, internal and employer branding", *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, Vol. 19 No. 6, pp. 401-409.

Gapp, R. and Merrilees, B. (2006), "Important factors to consider when using internal branding as a management strategy: a healthcare case study", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 14 Nos 1-2, pp. 162-176.

Keller, K.L. (1993), "Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 57 No. 1, pp. 1-22.

Saini, G.K., Rai, P. and Chaudhary, M.K. (2013), "What do best employer surveys reveal about employer branding and intention to apply?", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 21 No. 2, pp. 95-111.

Corresponding author

Joanna Santiago can be contacted at: joannas@iseg.ulisboa.pt

Appendix 1

Dimension	Definition	Items
Value of interest	"[…] the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer that provides an exciting work environment, novel work practices and that makes use of its employees' creativity to produce high-quality, innovative products and services"	Working in a challenging work environment Innovative employer – innovative work practices/disruptive ideas The organisation values and makes use of its creativity The organisation provides high quality products and services The organisation provides innovative products and services
Social value	"[…] the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer that provides a working environment which is fun, happy, and which provides good collegial relationships and a team atmosphere"	A fun work environment Have a good relationship with your superiors Have a good relationship with your colleagues Encouraging and collaborative colleagues Good working environment
Economic value	"[…] the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer that provides an above-average salary, a compensation package, job security, and opportunities for promotion"	Good opportunities for promotion within the organisation Opportunity for inter-departmental practical experience Good working environment Above-average base salary
Development value	"[…] the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer that provides recognition, self-worth and confidence, together with a career-enhancing experience and a springboard to future employment"	Appreciation of your performance by management A launching pad for future jobs Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organisation Feeling more confident as a result of working for a particular organisation Gaining professional experience
Value of cooperation	"[…] the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer that provides an opportunity for the employee to apply what they have learned and to teach others, in an environment that is both customer-orientated and humanitarian"	Socially responsible organisation – contributes to society Opportunity to apply what has been learned in a tertiary institution Opportunity to teach others what you have learned in the work context Acceptance and belonging The organisation is customer-oriented

Source: Berthon *et al.* (2005)

Table AI.
Employer brand
attractiveness

Appendix 2

Dimension	Definition	Items
Attractiveness of the organisation	"The company as a potential place for employment"	For me, this organisation is a good place to work I am only interested in this organisation as a last resort This organisation is attractive to me as a place of employment I am interested in learning more about this organisation Playing a role in this organisation is very appealing to me
Intentions towards the organisation	"[…] should reflect a forward-looking approach to dealing with the company in the future"	I would accept an offer of employment from this organisation I chose this organisation as one of my first choices as an employer If this organisation invited me for a job interview, I would accept I am willing to give my best to work for this organisation I would recommend this organisation to a friend who is looking for a job
Prestige of the organisation	"[…] aspects of a company with regards to social influence, such as reputation, popularity, and status"	Employees are proud to say that they work in this organisation This organisation has a good reputation This organisation has a reputation for being an excellent employer I consider this organisation to be a prestigious place to work at There are many people who enjoy working in this organisation

Table AII.
Intentions to submit a job application to the organisation

Appendix 3

Synthesis of the regression Model 1

Model	Variables	R² adjusted	F	df	Sig.	SE of estimative (S)	Standardised coefficients (β)	t	Sig.	Non-standardised coefficients (B)
1	(Constant)	0.017	158.874	5	0.104	9.273		17.817	0.000	113.337
	Value of cooperation						0.072			
	Value of interest						0.139			
	Social value						0.040			
	Development value						0.075			
	Economic value						−0.121			
	Intentions to submit a job application to the organisation scale							2.598	0.010	0.1258

Synthesis of the regression Model 2

Model	Variables	R² adjusted	F	df	Sig.	SE of estimative (S)	R	t	Sig.	Non-standardised coefficients (B)
2	(Constant)	0.023	1,405.144	1	0.010	14.429		9.366	0.000	49.755
	Intentions to submit a job application to the organisation scale						0.165	2.598	0.010	0.106
	Employer brand attractiveness scale									

Synthesis of the regression Model 3

Model	Variables	R² adjusted	F	df	Sig.	SE of estimative (S)	R	t	Sig.	Non-standardised coefficients (B)
3	(Constant)	0.023	576.834	1	0.010	9.245				
	Employer brand attractiveness scale						0.165			
	Intentions to submit a job application to the organisation scale									

Synthesis of the regression Model 4

Model	Variables	R² adjusted	F	df	Sig.	SE of estimative (S)	Standardised coefficients (β)	t	Sig.	Non-standardised coefficients (B)
4	(Constant)	0.019	530.240	3	0.057	14.462		16.209	0.000	111.134
	Attractiveness of the organisation						0.139	1.441	0.151	0.715
	Intentions towards the organisation						0.011	0.097	0.923	0.41
	Prestige of the organisation						0.038	0.366	0.715	0.154
	Employer brand attractiveness scale									

Table AIII.
Synthesis of the
regression models