The relationship between employer brand and intention to apply: a study of the perceptions of graduating millennials at entry level

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Abstract

In a progressively tight and competitive UK labour market, companies are increasingly utilising employer branding principles to engage with the best candidates and become an employer of choice in today’s war for talent (Moroko & Uncles, 2008; Wilden et al, 2010). However, the growing number of millennials entering the labour market has created a demographic structure where employers must now adapt to the new values and expectations of the modern workforce in order to successfully attract talent to their business.

For that reason, this research project aims to understand the link between the employer brand of an organisation and graduating millennials’ intention to apply for a role in that company. Attention will be dedicated to evaluating measures of employer attractiveness, perceptions of brand accuracy and the impact of the value propositions made by an organisation through their employer brand. This will be achieved by utilising a mixed methods approach consisting of online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, which will both engage with graduating millennials at UK universities.

The findings of this dissertation highlight the importance of developing differentiated brand messages, which must also be clearly communicated to successfully attract the research sample to an organisation. The results also show the highly significant role of employer reputation in shaping the application decisions of graduating millennials, particularly the crucial impact of negative associations. While corporate social responsibility does not come across as being highly influential on the sample’s intention to apply, the media and word of mouth can certainly be considered to strongly shape the application-related decision-making process of graduating millennials. These findings fill a gap in current academic literature on employer branding and provide insight into the labour market behaviour of Generation Y.
Declaration

This dissertation is the student’s original work unless referenced clearly to the contrary and no portion of the work referred to in the dissertation has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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1. Introduction

This section aims to introduce the research topic by giving an overview of the key literature underpinning this project and will conclude with the aims and research questions of this dissertation.

1.1 Background

An employer brand has been defined as “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company” (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 187) and as “the set of distinctive images of a prospective employer” (Wilden et al, 2010, p. 58). These definitions highlight the two main aspects that have come to encompass the present understanding of the concept of employer branding. The first of those is candidates’ perception of the benefits offered by an organisation to its employees, which impacts on how attractive prospective applicants consider the company to be as an employer and can position a firm in the minds of their target audience (Ewing et al, 2002). The second key aspect of the concept of employer branding is the distinctiveness of the image of an organisation, meaning it must stand out from competing firms for its employer brand to be considered strong, successful and efficient (Alniacik et al, 2014). The rationale for the need for employer branding and the explanation for its continued growth lies in wider labour market trends, which have meant that alongside the expectation for applicants to prove their suitability to employers, it is now the employing companies that must also market themselves to attract the best candidates (Heilmann et al, 2013). As the UK continues to experience a tight labour market with more available jobs than workers, highly qualified and competent applicants typically have the opportunity to choose between different firms in their search for employment (Srivastava & Bhatnagar, 2010). This has made it increasingly important for organisations to develop an attractive employee value proposition and differentiate themselves from other companies in order to achieve the best human capital that can become their competitive advantage in the marketplace (Bellou et al, 2015). For that reason, employer branding has grown to be a crucial part of firms’ everyday recruitment and marketing activities, developing from a simple promotional technique to a high-level strategy that can influence the successfulness of a company not only in the labour market but also in its core activities (Moroko & Uncles, 2008; Wilden et al, 2010).
However, as members of the millennial generation continue to enter the labour market, they are bringing along new trends, values and personalities, meaning that the strategies utilised for attracting previous generations are no longer sufficient for engaging with the modern expectations of Generation Y (Celikdemir & Tukel, 2015). As millennials are predicted to constitute over 50% of the workforce by 2020 (Barbuto & Gottfredson, 2016), the shifts brought on by demographic changes are receiving increasing attention in the field of employer branding (Kultalahti & Viitala, 2015). For that reason, this dissertation will focus on the millennial generation in particular, which for the purposes of this research project has been defined as anyone born between 1980 and 2003 (Hurst & Good, 2009). As companies continue to rely on employer branding to attract the best talent in a highly competitive labour market, it is crucial for them to understand the new expectations and characteristics of Generation Y in order to match their strategic approach to the changing workforce trends. Therefore, this dissertation will look to develop an improved understanding of the behaviour of Generation Y in the labour market by setting a particular emphasis on application decisions. Furthermore, a specific focus will be placed on the millennials about to complete their university studies as graduates are widely considered to be a crucial source of valuable, qualified and competent human capital for organisations (Pitcher & Purcell, 1998). Despite employees being considered one of the key stakeholders for any organisation (Lemmink et al, 2003), a great deal of research has been dedicated to evaluating the role of branding from a customer perspective (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Harris & de Chernatony, 2001; Holt, 2002), while branding in an employee attraction and recruitment context has been a largely underrepresented matter in scholarly writing. Furthermore, the working style preferences of Generation Y have been researched by many authors (Krahn & Galambos, 2014; Martin, 2005; Solnet & Hood, 2008), however, the topic of attracting and recruiting graduating millennials in particular has received relatively little attention (Terjesen et al, 2007), which is exactly the contribution this dissertation is looking to make.

1.2 Research aims and questions

This research project aims to understand the link between the employer brand of an organisation and graduating millennials’ intention to apply for a role in that company by analysing how the value propositions made through a firm’s employer brand influence application decisions. Additionally, the dissertation seeks to establish how the attractiveness
and perceived accuracy of a company’s employer brand impact on graduating millennials’ intention to apply for a job in that organisation.

In order to do so, the following research questions have been formulated with support from a review of relevant existing literature:

**Research Question 1:** How are graduating millennials’ intentions to apply for a job impacted by the value propositions made by an organisation through their employer brand?

- **H1a:** There is a statistically significant difference between participants’ intention to apply being impacted by both the characteristics of the role and the firm-level attributes of the organisation they are applying to and whether it is important to them that the firm stands out from other employers
- **H1b:** There is a statistically significant difference between participants’ intention to apply being impacted by both the characteristics of the role and the firm-level attributes of the organisation they are applying to and whether they are more likely to apply for a job in an organisation that clearly communicates what they are able to offer their employees

**Research Question 2:** What role does the attractiveness of a firm’s employer brand play in influencing graduating millennials’ intention to apply for a role in that organisation?

- **H2a:** There is a statistically significant difference between participants’ increased likelihood of applying for a job which is offered by an organisation that comes across as a good place to work and whether it is important to them that the organisation they are applying to has a positive reputation as an employer
- **H2b:** There is a statistically significant difference between participants’ increased likelihood of applying for a job which is offered by an organisation that comes across as a good place to work and whether it is important to them that the organisation they are applying to values corporate social responsibility

**Research Question 3:** How does the perceived accuracy of an organisation’s employer brand impact on graduating millennials’ intention to apply for a job in that company?

- **H3a:** There is a statistically significant difference between whether participants typically research what a company is like as an employer before applying for a job there
and whether they would be less likely to apply for a job in a firm that has received negative coverage in the media as an employer

- **H3b:** There is a statistically significant difference between whether participants typically research what a company is like as an employer before applying for a job there and whether they would be less likely to apply for a job if people have told them negative things about the organisation as an employer

Prior to conducting research into how employer branding impacts on graduating millennials’ intention to apply at entry level, a review of existing literature was carried out to identify the key themes and research gaps in this area. For that reason, a literature review of the core aspects of employer branding and the characteristics of Generation Y will now be presented to provide a rationale for this research project.

### 2. Literature review

This chapter aims to present the key concepts from existing literature relating to the research problems of this dissertation. First, an introduction will be given to the theory of employer branding and the labour market trends behind its growing popularity. Then, attention will be turned to the perceived benefits of employer branding in areas such as recruitment, retention and organisational efficiency. In relation to the two final research questions, this chapter will move on to discuss attractiveness and accuracy as the key measures of the successfulness of a firm’s employer brand. Finally, the role and characteristics of Generation Y and university graduates in the labour market will be explored in order to provide a full rationale for this study.

#### 2.1 An introduction to employer branding

As highlighted by Ewing et al (2002), employer branding aims to build and enhance the image of a company as an employer and present it as a “great place to work” (p. 12) by shaping the perceptions potential applicants have about the organisation. Similarly, Srivastava & Bhatnagar (2010) describe an employer brand as “giving an identity, image and distinctiveness to the organisation […] to attract its prospective employees” (p. 26) as it involves applying the foundations of marketing to a human resources context (Alniacik et al, 2014). The main reason for the growing utilisation of employer branding principles is found to lie in the increasing competitiveness of employment markets (Saini et al, 2015; Sivertzen et al, 2013; Wilden et al, 2010), where a tight labour market scenario has meant that organisations are engaged in a “war for talent” (Moroko & Uncles, 2008, p. 164). Furthermore, the growing costs associated with
recruitment, training and high turnover (Ready et al, 2008) mean that employer branding has also been recognised as a method for becoming “an employer of choice” (Rampl, 2014, p. 1496) that not only successfully attracts but also retains the best talent. As highlighted by Terjesen et al (2007), effective recruitment in a competitive labour market must establish a pool of applicants “who are both attractive to the organisation and attracted to the organisation” (p. 504-505). For that reason, it has become evident that companies must dedicate appropriate resources to marketing themselves to prospective applicants. Additionally, given that the job-related attributes of roles in different companies can often be similar, particularly in the same industry, employer branding is also often seen as a way to differentiate one employer from another (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Supporting this, Franca & Pahor (2012) argue that candidates’ application decisions are no longer solely affected by the characteristics of the job they are interested in, but also depend on the organisational attributes of the employing company, providing the key rationale for the growing focus on employer branding.

2.2 The perceived benefits of employer branding

Employer branding is considered to deliver benefits to companies in many areas from recruitment and retention to organisational performance. For example, low staff turnover, high job satisfaction, reduced staff acquisition costs and improved employee relations are widely regarded as some of the main perks of effective employer branding (Berthon et al, 2005; Srivastava & Bhatnagar, 2010; Starineca, 2015). Bellou et al (2015) also consider a strong employer brand to be highly beneficial for creating recognised corporate and product brands as staff are often regarded integral in the consumer-brand relationship building process. Additionally, employer branding has been found to positively impact on intention to apply by facilitating the perceived person-organisation fit held by a candidate as they begin to identify with the company and its values (Xie et al, 2015). As argued by Terjesen et al (2007), “individuals who perceive a strong fit with an organisation will be attracted to apply and join that organisation” (p. 508). For that reason, simplified talent attraction is often considered to be one of the main benefits of successful employer branding as it allows organisations to enhance their perceived value as an employer, engage a wider range of suitable applicants and ultimately improve overall organisational performance (Alniacik et al, 2014). Crucially, Davies (2008) recognises that a strong employer brand can even be considered to be the key to winning today’s “war for talent” (p. 336).
However, for those benefits to be maximised, employer branding must be strategically managed and clearly communicated to produce an outcome that is not only attractive for the target audience, but makes an organisation stand out in the eyes of potential applicants (Heilmann et al, 2013; Moroko & Uncles, 2008). In order to do so, Saini et al (2014) recognise that all employer branding messages need to be clear and understandable to prospective candidates in order to be effective, particularly as “adequate organizational information reduces reliance on prior notions about the firm” (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 507). However, the present conditions of the highly competitive tight UK labour market mean that alongside clearly communicating their employer brand, it is also increasingly important for companies to distinguish themselves from competitors in the race for attracting the best talent (Leekha Chhabra & Sharma, 2014). This is further supported by Srivastava & Bhatnagar (2010) who note that employer branding “requires an employer to identify what is unique and distinct about the organisation relative to the competitors” (p. 27) and market it to the target audience. Bellou et al (2015) even argue that the concept of employer branding is to an extent defined by how a firm’s characteristics as an employer are differentiated from its competitors. For that reason, a central part of any firm’s employer branding strategy needs to be about ensuring differentiation from key competitors (Alniacik et al, 2014; Davies, 2008; Ergun & Tatar, 2016), particularly as having the right staff is considered to be crucial for achieving a sustainable competitive advantage (Ambler & Barrow, 1996).

### 2.3 Employer brand attractiveness

As highlighted by Wilden et al (2010), one of the central aims of an employer brand is to position an organisation in the minds of prospective applicants as a great place to work and as an employer of choice. Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) argue that the first step to building an employer brand that can do so is creating an employee value proposition that clearly and accurately encompasses the value that a company can offer its employees. However, the extent to which such employer branding impacts on intention to apply depends on whether the recruitment messages conveyed by a company lead prospective candidates to consider the organisation to be an attractive employer that offers the benefits they value in employment (Gomes & Neves, 2011; Lemmink et al, 2003; Wei et al, 2016). Supporting this view, Saini et al (2015) highlight the need for firms to “design and communicate an appropriate employee value proposition to develop an employer brand which reverberates well with the targeted talent pool” (p. 47). This has led to the concept of employer attractiveness, which has been
defined by Berthon et al (2005) as “the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organisation” (p. 156). The authors argue that firms must first recognise the expected benefits contributing to employer attractiveness amongst their target audience in order to effectively execute employer branding strategies and successfully compete in an increasingly tight labour market. Therefore, should a company offer a benefit that is highly valued by a candidate in their application decisions, the organisation’s employer brand would be more attractive to the jobseeker and ultimately positively impact on their intention to apply (Saini et al, 2014).

However, Moroko & Uncles (2008) highlight that the attractive benefits offered by a company through their employer brand might be completely dismissed if the firm has a negative reputation as an employer. On the contrary, a strong and widely recognised employer reputation can even further enhance the attractiveness of an organisation’s employer brand (Lemmink et al, 2003). For that reason, Leekha Chhabra & Sharma (2014) argue that a company’s reputation as an employer is key to the application-related decision-making process as it acts as a useful source of information about the working conditions within a firm. This has resulted in the growing influence of Best Employer Surveys, which recognise the most attractive employers in a given industry or amongst a certain target audience and are often considered to generate a positive employer reputation for an organisation (Love & Singh, 2011; Saini et al, 2014). Presence in such lists is thus widely strategically communicated by firms with the aim of obtaining an employer of choice status amongst prospective candidates and consequently attracting the best and most motivated applicants (Bellou et al, 2015; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). Therefore, employer reputation can evidently be considered to be a key factor in shaping the relationship between an organisation’s employer brand and potential candidates’ intention to apply.

2.4 Employer brand accuracy

As highlighted by Moroko & Uncles (2008), attracting and recruiting employees based on false promises and misleading images of the organisation as an employer can have a direct negative impact on staff retention and turnover. Furthermore, Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) argue that a competitive advantage is only sustainable if it derives from a stable source, meaning misleading employer brand images that typically result in high turnover are unlikely to produce a long-term competitive advantage. As impressions of inaccuracy in a firm’s employer brand can “undermine the credibility of advertised messages” (Berthon et al, 2005, p. 153), any analysis
on the effects of employer branding must evidently consider applicants’ perceptions of the accuracy of the recruitment messages conveyed by an organisation. Ergun & Tatar (2016) describe the accuracy of an employer brand as referring to the fit between the promises and images communicated through employer branding and the real everyday work environment experienced by existing staff in the organisation. While recruitment messages typically present information that reflects positively on a company as an employer (Wei et al, 2016), it is crucial for firms to give appropriate consideration to the potential consequences of attracting and recruiting staff based on inaccurate depictions of the organisation.

Many authors (Bellou et al, 2015; Ergun & Tatar, 2016; Kultalahti & Viitala, 2015) consider employer branding to set up a psychological contract between the organisation and an applicant as it communicates the promises of a company to its employees and establishes the expectations and obligations concerning the employment agreement. When broken, the psychological contract can negatively impact on job satisfaction, organisational trust and staff turnover (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004), but also holds greater significance for the wider employer brand of an organisation (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). As highlighted by Srivastava & Bhatnagar (2010), candidates often experience a lack of readily available information about a prospective employer in the early stages of the recruitment process. For that reason, the messages communicated through informal sources such as word of mouth can be considered particularly influential on jobseekers’ intention to apply. Despite being one of the earliest academic writers on employer branding, Ambler and Barrow (1996) already recognised the importance of word of mouth in employer brand creation. The authors, supported by more recent writers such as Heilmann et al (2013) and Jaidi et al (2011), argue that positive word of mouth allows organisations to attract and engage with the best applicants, who in turn share their experiences with others if the psychological contract between the applicant and the firm is fulfilled. Similarly, Holliday (1997) highlights that constantly delivering on their brand promises leads employers to build a trustworthy and loyal image, which consequently allows them to attract the best applicants. However, should the psychological contract not be met, it is likely to result in the organisation’s staff being less prone to recommend working for the company to others and lead to general negative word of mouth about the firm (Miles & Mangold, 2004). Thus, as Wilden et al (2010) found that prospective candidates consider the information received through personal connections to be the most credible and trustworthy, it is evident that word of mouth about an employer can significantly impact on jobseekers’ application decisions.
Additionally, Franca & Pahor (2012) recognise the crucial role of the media in shaping prospective candidates’ intention to apply for a role with a company. The brand familiarity and associations created as a result of large-scale media coverage are widely considered to be beneficial for the employer brand of an organisation as “exposure to a greater amount of information […] positively influences application intentions” (Lemmink et al, 2003, p. 6). However, this evidently means that should a company receive unfavourable media coverage as an employer, applicants will develop negative associations with the firm and thus be more prone to pursue a role with a more attractive employer (Davies, 2008; Leekha Chhabra & Sharma, 2014). The information available in the media can also lead prospective candidates to uncover inconsistent messages about a firm, which negatively impacts on their intention to apply as such discrepancies can raise doubts about the accuracy of the employer brand presented by the organisation (Wilden et al, 2010). For that reason, the media is widely considered to significantly impact on jobseekers’ perceptions of the accuracy of a company’s recruitment messages, which consequently influences the relationship between a firm’s employer brand and prospective candidates’ intention to apply.

2.5 The characteristics of Generation Y in the labour market

Given that “when looking for employment, applicants are looking not only for positions, but also for organisations” (Lemmink et al, 2003, p. 5), it is crucial for employers to understand and adapt to the shifts brought on by demographic changes in the labour market in order to successfully recruit a new generation of talent (McCrindle, 2006). Saini et al (2014) recognise that employer branding strategies, like many other HR and marketing practices, must be responsive to and aligned with the constantly changing labour market expectations. For that reason, given the growing number and influence of millennial workers in the employment market (Barbuto & Gottfredson, 2016), it is evidently critical for organisations to develop a good understanding of the needs and expectations shaping Generation Y’s application decisions. The uniqueness of millennials in comparison to previous generations has been recognised by many authors (Clarke, 2015; Kultalahti & Viitala, 2015; Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009) with Perlik (2001) even stating that Generation Y is “rewriting the book on workplace wishes and demands” (p. 65). Some of the key characteristics of millennials’ behaviour in the labour market appear to be the significantly greater emphasis they place on organisational corporate social responsibility (CSR) and on the reputation of a company as an employer (Celikdemir & Tukel, 2015; Ohlrich, 2015; Starineca, 2015). Therefore, recognising such
values held by prospective candidates will allow organisations to re-shape their employee value proposition to ultimately present a better perceived person-organisation fit to millennial jobseekers, which will consequently positively influence their intention to apply (Bissola & Imperatori, 2014; Xie et al, 2015). This evidently illustrates the crucial importance of understanding the employer brand attributes shaping the application decisions of Generation Y as organisations will have to adjust their strategic approach to the needs and expectations of a new generation of talent dominating an increasingly competitive labour market.

2.6 The role of graduates in the labour market

As highlighted by Terjesen et al (2007), firms typically invest a lot of time and money into attracting applications from the best soon-to-be university graduates in order to ensure a strong and capable future talent pipeline for the organisation. With university students spending a great deal of time, energy and other resources on obtaining a higher education degree, they are often found to have high expectations for the role they take up post-graduation (Hurst & Good, 2009; Jerome et al, 2014). For that reason, “if companies want to attract young graduates, they need to develop a better understanding of the expectations of these graduates and to know what job and organizational characteristics influence them during their job searches” (Guillot-Soulez & Soulez, 2014, p. 319). Similarly, Maxwell et al (2010) recognise Generation Y graduates in particular as being exceptionally career-oriented with an aim of joining an organisation that can meet their needs and matches the expectations they hold for a prospective employer. Thus, with many graduates receiving multiple job offers and having the opportunity to choose their preferred employer (Jaidi et al, 2011), it is essential for companies to distinguish themselves from other firms and develop an employee value proposition that attracts the best and most motivated graduates.

2.7 Summary

This literature review has discussed the topic of employer branding by introducing its purpose and perceived benefits as well as exploring the labour market trends underpinning the increasing focus on employer branding strategies. Attention was also dedicated to understanding concepts such as employer brand attractiveness and accuracy, which have been found to significantly impact on application decisions. The review also brought attention to the role and characteristics of graduating millennials in the labour market, where employers must be attractive and differentiated to win today’s war for talent. Therefore, having considered the
rationale for the need to further study the factors influencing the application decisions of Generation Y and university graduates, this dissertation aims to develop an improved understanding of the relationship between a firm’s employer brand and graduating millennials’ intention to apply at entry level.

3. Methodology

To ensure that the aforementioned purpose is met, sufficient consideration must be given to selecting the most appropriate methodology for carrying out primary research. In order to do so, this chapter will draw upon research methods literature to outline and analyse how the research approach was developed, designed and carried out to indicate the validity and reliability of the chosen methods. Specifically, attention will be turned to the selected research approach, sampling style and methods of data collection and analysis that were utilised to gather and interpret the findings. Appropriate consideration will also be given to the ethical matters underpinning this research project to ensure all key guidelines have been recognised and followed throughout the dissertation.

3.1 Research approach

As highlighted by Saunders et al (2015), the three key approaches to carrying out research are quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods, which encompass different styles of data collection including surveys, focus groups and experiments. This study adopted a mixed methods approach, which draws from quantitative and qualitative methods to address the research questions of a project (Creswell, 2015). This style was selected because it allows for more generalisable quantitative results to be collected while still giving sufficient consideration to understanding the sample’s perceptions of the surrounding world (Denscombe, 2007; Newby, 2014), which fits with the purpose and research questions of this dissertation.

3.2 Methods of data collection

3.2.1 Quantitative

Quantitative data was collected through 103 online questionnaires because they are increasingly common in social research as a method for gathering good quality data from a range of respondents and consequently developing appropriate theories (Crowther & Lancaster, 2009). While a clear drawback of carrying out online questionnaires is considered to be their relatively low response rate, they are still widely found to be the most popular
method for gathering data in the leisure industry (Veal, 2006). The design of the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) followed a deductive approach as key hypotheses had already been developed based on existing theories in relevant literature (Matthews & Ross, 2010). In designing the questionnaire, consideration was given to the exact wording of questions as ambiguity and leading sentences can make respondents unintentionally provide answers that do not represent their opinions (Bell & Waters, 2014). The questionnaire was then distributed through personal connections and social media and programme leaders at selected universities were also contacted in order to spread the survey amongst final year undergraduate students in different locations. The exact response rate for this project is unclear as it is not possible to ascertain the number of people that the questionnaire reached through social media and various universities.

### 3.2.2 Qualitative

The study then turned to semi-structured interviews because they allow for a clear list of research matters to be discussed while still leaving space for follow-up questions, which show interest and engagement on behalf of the interviewer (Denscombe, 2007). The interview schedule (see Appendix 3) also allowed probing questions and a ‘tell me’ technique to be exercised, which can “be used to explore responses further that are of significance to the research topic” (Saunders et al, 2015, p. 408). The final interview design was based on questionnaire findings in order to further understand the trends that occurred in the quantitative data collection process, thus taking a sequential explanatory approach (Creswell, 2003). This ultimately allowed interviews to be used to discuss the most crucial topics for graduating millennials. Individual interviews were chosen because while their analysis often involves a level of subjectivity and bias (Bell & Waters, 2014), they enable a better connection to be built up with the participant, “allowing respondents the opportunity to express what they see as being most significant” (Long, 2007, p. 76). Interviews were conducted face-to-face and via Skype with 5 graduating milfs who had already completed the research questionnaire and were chosen through personal connections. It was decided to interview people that had already completed a questionnaire because this allowed for similar themes to be discussed throughout data collection while moving from theoretical survey questions to sharing personal experiences.
3.3 Sampling

This study adopted a convenience sampling approach as it is only possible to include people who are willing to participate and have the time to do so (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Additionally, all questionnaire and interview participants had to meet the inclusion criteria of belonging into the millennial generation, which for the purposes of this research project was defined as anyone born between 1980 and 2003 (Hurst & Good, 2009). Respondents also had to be an undergraduate student in the final year of their degree. To ensure participants met the inclusion criteria and thus increase the validity of the collected data, the questionnaire design featured two preliminary questions to only allow access to suitable respondents (see Appendix 1). While the chosen sample does not represent the whole group of graduating millennials, it certainly offers insights into the wider trends in millennials’ application-related decision-making and is indicative of the potential impacts of employer branding on Generation Y. However, it is crucial to note that one of the key limitations of selecting a convenience sampling method is that it does not involve a random selection and thus only includes people that are relatively easy to reach (Cohen et al, 2007).

3.4 Methods of data analysis

3.4.1 Quantitative

The data from questionnaires was first input, coded and evaluated through a descriptive analysis, which describes and compares variables in a numerical form and highlights key themes from findings (Crowther & Lancaster, 2009; Long, 2007). While inputting and coding lengthy data can be susceptible to human error, appropriate data checks were carried out to ensure that the possibility of human error was minimised. Statistical analysis was then carried out on Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) through T-tests, which are utilised in the case of two distinct groups of data to uncover any statistically significant differences in the responses of various groups and make generalisable conclusions (Saunders et al, 2015). This allowed for the hypotheses of this research project to be tested and the null hypotheses to either be accepted or rejected.

3.4.2 Qualitative

Word-for-word content transcription was first carried out based on audio recordings of interviews as this allowed the collected data to be scrutinised and appropriate codes and themes
to be identified (Denscombe, 2007). In preparing the data for analysis, all interview transcripts were read over thoroughly, enabling the researcher to re-familiarise themselves with the data collected (Long, 2007). Following this, transcripts were analysed thematically by looking for, highlighting and colour coding patterns to support or refute the questionnaire findings (see Appendix 4). This means a deductive style was adopted as the main theories had been developed in advance and the analysis was consciously looking for themes that had arisen from the research questions and previous findings, thus following a sequential approach (Veal, 2006). Thematic analysis required the data relating to the research area to be appropriately coded, consisting of open, axial and selective coding, where themes are identified, related to each other and used to develop a core pattern or category (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

3.5 Ethical considerations

As highlighted by Veal (2006), this study can be considered a low-risk project as it does not address any sensitive issues that might cause harm or distress. However, the researcher still gave the utmost consideration to ethical issues and ensured all respondents were comfortable with and aware of how their data was going to be used. In order to do so, ethics was a central matter in this dissertation as ethical behaviour is a crucial aspect of any study, particularly one that involves human participants (Saunders et al, 2015). Thus, the author aimed to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants throughout the study, received ethical approval before conducting any research (see Appendix 7) and familiarised all respondents with the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form (see Appendix 5 and Appendix 6). Participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity by assigning code names to interviewees and safely storing and managing all collected data, including questionnaires, interview recordings and transcripts (Bell & Waters, 2014). Withdrawal from the research project was also allowed at any time.

4. Results

This chapter aims to introduce both the quantitative and qualitative data collected through 103 online questionnaires and 5 semi-structured interviews by utilising descriptive statistics and presenting codes and emerging themes from interview transcripts.
4.1 Results from quantitative data collection

To ensure all participants met the required inclusion criteria and were aware of the ways their data would be used in this dissertation, they were required to answer two preliminary questions to improve the validity of the collected data. As such, a person was not able to continue filling out the questionnaire if they did not respond affirmatively to the first two questions (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).

**Figure 1:** Do you agree to your data being used in the ways stated in the Participant Information Sheet above?

**Figure 2:** Do you meet the following criteria: born between 1980 and 2003 and in the final year of your undergraduate degree?
4.1.1 Is your intention to apply for a job impacted by both the characteristics of the role (e.g. your tasks) and the firm-level attributes of the organisation that you are applying to (e.g. their reputation)?

The aim of the first question was to understand whether participants’ intention to apply for a job is impacted by both the characteristics of the role and the firm-level attributes of the organisation they are applying to. The majority of participants (n=90) stated that they are influenced by both of those factors, while only 12.6% (n=13) did not (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3**: Intention to apply impacted by both the characteristics of the role and the firm-level attributes of the organisation

4.1.2 When applying for a job in an organisation, it is important to me that the firm stands out from other employers

The second question set out to understand whether graduating millennials consider employer differentiation significant in their application decisions. As can be seen from Figure 4, 17.5% (n=18) of the respondents strongly agree and 47.6% (n=49) agree that when applying for a job, it is important to them that the firm stands out from other employers. Meanwhile, 28.2% (n=29) feel neutral, 5.8% (n=6) disagree and 1% (n=1) strongly disagree with this statement. The mean for the responses to this question is 3.75 (on a scale of 1-5, from strongly disagree to strongly agree), suggesting relatively strong agreement.
4.1.3 I am more likely to apply for a role in an organisation that clearly communicates what they are able to offer me as an employee in their company

Figure 5 shows that 33% (n=34) of the participants strongly agree and 44.7% (n=46) agree that they are more likely to apply for a role in an organisation that clearly communicates what they are able to offer to employees in their company. Additionally, the mean for these responses was 4.02, which shows even stronger agreement with the statement than in the case of the previous question.
Figure 5: More likely to apply if organisation clearly communicates what they are able to offer

4.1.4 Are you more likely to apply for a job which is offered by an organisation that comes across as a good place to work?

This question aimed to understand whether graduating millennials consider their application decisions to be impacted by their perceptions of a company being a good place to work, which is often considered to be the desired result of firms’ employer branding efforts. 90.3% (n=93) of the respondents claimed to be more likely to apply to such an organisation, while only 9.7% (n=10) did not (see Figure 6).
4.1.5 It is important to me that the organisation I am applying to has a positive reputation as an employer

As can be seen from Figure 7, graduating millennials place a great deal of emphasis on an employer’s reputation with 51.5% (n=53) of respondents strongly agreeing and 43.7% (n=45) agreeing that it is important to them that the organisation they are applying to has a positive reputation as an employer. Therefore, only 3.9% (n=4) felt neutral and 1% (n=1) disagreed with the statement, with no participants expressing strong disagreement. For that reason, the mean for the responses to this question was 4.46, highlighting the extremely high importance millennial graduates place on an organisation’s reputation as an employer.
Figure 7: Important that the organisation has a positive reputation as an employer

4.1.6 My intention to apply for a job is impacted by the extent to which the benefits offered to me by the organisation match what I am looking for in an employer

Figure 8 shows the extent to which graduating millennials consider the benefits deriving from employment with a certain company to influence their application decisions. Only 14.6% (n=15) of respondents strongly agree, while 45.6% agree that their intention to apply for a job is impacted by the extent to which the benefits offered to them by the organisation match what they are looking for in an employer. However, 31.1% (n=32) of participants felt neutral about this statement and 8.7% (n=9) either disagreed or strongly disagreed, resulting in a mean of 3.64 for these responses, which is noticeably lower than was the case for the previous question.
4.1.7 **It is important to me that the organisation I am applying to values corporate social responsibility (i.e. does good and contributes to society)**

Relying on previous literature on the characteristics and priorities of Generation Y in the labour market, this question aimed to understand the extent to which graduating millennials’ application decisions are impacted by an organisation’s emphasis on corporate social responsibility. Thus, respondents were asked whether it was important to them that the organisation they are applying to values corporate social responsibility, meaning it does good and contributes to society. Surprisingly, the responses to this question were relatively split, with 20.4% (n=21) of participants strongly agreeing, 34% (n=35) agreeing, 22.3% (n=23) feeling neutral, 18.4% (n=19) disagreeing and 4.9% (n=5) strongly disagreeing with the given statement (see Figure 9). For that reason, the mean for these findings was 3.47, expressing the relatively even split in the responses.

**Figure 8**: Intention to apply impacted by benefits matching expectations
Figure 9: Important that organisation values corporate social responsibility

In comparison to previous questions about the different aspects of an employer’s attractiveness, corporate social responsibility appears to be the least significant to graduating millennials in their application decisions, as it had the lowest mean as well as the lowest overall Likert scale agreement with the statement provided (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Importance of positive reputation, benefits matching expectations and corporate social responsibility
4.1.8 Do you typically research what a company is like as an employer before applying for a job there?

This question aimed to develop an understanding of whether graduating millennials’ application decisions might be impacted by the information they find about an employer prior to applying to work with them. In order to do so, participants were asked whether they typically research what a company is like as an employer before applying for a job there, to which 68.9% (n=71) of respondents said they did and 31.1% (n=32) stated they did not.

Figure 11: Research a company as an employer before applying

4.1.9 I would be less likely to apply for a job in a firm that has received negative coverage in the media as an employer

Figure 12 shows the extent to which graduating millennials’ application decisions are impacted by an employer’s image in the media. 23.3% (n=24) of participants strongly agree and 63.1% (n=65) agree that they would be less likely to apply for a job in a firm that has received negative coverage in the media as an employer, while only 10.7% (n=11) feel neutral, 2.9% (n=3) disagree and no respondents strongly disagree. Additionally, the mean for these responses is 4.07, illustrating graduating millennials’ strong agreement with this statement.
Figure 12: Less likely to apply if firm has received negative coverage in the media as an employer

4.1.10 I would be less likely to apply for a job if people have told me negative things about the organisation as an employer

As highlighted in Figure 13, graduating millennials’ application decisions are also influenced by the people around them, as 32% (n=33) of respondents strongly agree and 49.5% (n=51) agree that they would be less likely to apply for a job if people have told them negative things about the organisation as an employer. Meanwhile, only 15.5% (n=16) feel neutral, 1.9% (n=2) disagree and 1% (n=1) strongly disagree with this statement. Additionally, the mean for these responses is 4.10, showing the significant extent of other people’s influence on graduating millennials’ intention to apply.
Figure 13: Less likely to apply if people have said negative things about the organisation as an employer

In comparison to the previous question, it appears that graduating millennials’ application decisions are slightly more likely to be impacted by the people around them than what they find out about an employer in the media, as the means for these questions were 4.10 and 4.07 respectively. This small difference also comes across in the Likert scale agreements with the two statements (see Figure 14).

Figure 14: Less likely to apply because of negative media coverage or word of mouth
Consequently, these quantitative results shaped the final interview design (see Appendix 3). For example, all interviews included a question based on the final two questions of the questionnaire to find out whether graduating millennials consider themselves to be influenced more by the media or word of mouth as the means for the aforementioned questionnaire responses were relatively equal.

4.2 Results from qualitative data collection

As a result of the diary availability of the participants, interviews were conducted over the course of 2 days on the 5th and 6th of April. All five participants belonged into the millennial generation and were about to graduate from university, which was in accordance with the sample selected for this dissertation. In order to guarantee anonymity to all respondents, each participant has been assigned a code name to refer to the answers provided by them during their interview while still maintaining the low-risk nature of this project.

4.2.1 Interview participants

Table 1 below provides information about the date of the interview, where the interview took place and the code name assigned to each participant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of interview</th>
<th>Location of interview</th>
<th>Code name of participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>05/04/2018</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>PTCP1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/04/2018</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>PTCP2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/04/2018</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>PTCP3</td>
</tr>
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<td>PTCP4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06/04/2018</td>
<td>Café</td>
<td>PTCP5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.2 Codes and themes

As previously described in the methodology chapter, the qualitative data collected through interviews was transcribed and coded in order to develop clear themes and provide a basis for further analysis. Therefore, the 4 themes that were identified based on relevant codes in
participants’ answers were reputation, corporate social responsibility, accuracy and the broader concept of attractiveness, which focused on the characteristics that make graduating millennials deem an organisation to be a good place to work. This allowed the qualitative findings to be directly linked to the quantitative results of the questionnaires and be consequently discussed in relation to each of the 3 research questions. Table 2 below gives an example of how the appropriate codes and themes were developed in the thematic analysis process while an example of a thematic analysis conducted on a full interview transcript can be found in Appendix 4. These codes and themes as well as direct quotes from interviews will now be analysed and discussed in relation to questionnaire findings and key literature on the topic in the following chapter.

Table 2: Example of thematic analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview question: When you’re applying for a job, would you say it’s important to you that the firm stands out from other organisations or does something differently?</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PTCP1:</strong> Depends if I like the thing that they do differently. First of all, I would say that I don’t think prestige adds value. If it’s a multinational company then I don’t think I would choose that one over a small organisation with just 10 employees purely because of that. Because maybe that little place is much friendlier and that’s what I would value more; But it depends on what the organisation stands out for. If it stands out because it’s famous, then no, I wouldn’t really value that. If it stands out for its positive corporate governance or if they have work ethics that match my beliefs then yes, I consider that important.</td>
<td>Prestige</td>
<td>Reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>Attractiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prestige</td>
<td>Reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Corporate governance</td>
<td>CSR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PTCP2:</strong> I don’t think reputation is the only thing that makes a company stand out from all the others but it definitely helps. [...] But it isn’t the only thing that would make me apply for a job there. I think, obviously it has to be an organisation with a good reputation but I think it also definitely helps if people that I know have gone and worked there so I can ask about it.</td>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td>Reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Word of mouth</td>
<td>Accuracy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Analysis and discussion

This chapter aims to analyse and discuss the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data collection processes in relation to the research questions and hypotheses of this dissertation that were set in Chapter 1. In order to do so, relevant T-Tests will first be conducted for each research question to either confirm or disprove the set hypotheses. This will be further supported by direct quotes from interviews and the results of the thematic analysis that was carried out on interview transcripts. All findings will then be linked and discussed in relation to existing literature that was previously reviewed in Chapter 2 (see Appendix 2).

5.1 Research Question 1: How are graduating millennials’ intentions to apply for a job impacted by the value propositions made by an organisation through their employer brand?

5.1.1 Hypothesis 1a

$H_0:1a$: There is no statistically significant difference between participants’ intention to apply being impacted by both the characteristics of the role and the firm-level attributes of the organisation they are applying to and whether it is important to them that the firm stands out from other employers

$H_{1a}$: There is a statistically significant difference between participants’ intention to apply being impacted by both the characteristics of the role and the firm-level attributes of the organisation they are applying to and whether it is important to them that the firm stands out from other employers

An independent T-Test was carried out between questions 1 and 2 in the questionnaire to either accept or reject the null hypothesis. This also allows a partial response to be offered to RQ1 by developing an improved understanding of how graduating millennials’ intentions to apply for a job are impacted by the differentiated value propositions made by an organisation through their employer brand. As can be seen in Table 4 below, a significant difference was found between the responses of the participants who are impacted by the characteristics of the role as well as the firm-level attributes of the employing company and those who are not (sig. = 0.006). This means that there is a notable contrast between the two groups in whether it is important to them that a firm stands out from other employers when they are applying for a job, thus rejecting the null hypothesis. From the means in Table 3, it can be seen that those who admit
to their application decisions being impacted by the characteristics of the role as well as firm-level attributes place greater importance on an organisation standing out from other employers (M1=3.8333; M2=3.1538). This finding is further supported by qualitative data as PTCP4, who said they did not focus on the firm-level characteristics of the company they are applying to, also stated that differentiation was not highly important to them. In contrast, PTCP5, who considers the characteristics of the role as well as firm-level attributes in their application decisions, stated that differentiation is “absolutely” important and can “show a lot about an organisation and their attitude and reflects their way of being”. Consequently, it might be argued that if the value propositions communicated by an organisation’s employer brand are differentiated from competitors, it can increase the company’s firm-level attractiveness amongst graduating millennials. These findings thus support and slightly expand on the research of Lievens & Highhouse (2003) who recognise that a differentiated employer brand can offer organisations the opportunity to stand out from their competitors in a labour market scenario where the job-related attributes of different roles are often very similar.

However, given that the means for the responses of both groups were relatively high, it can be argued that most graduating millennials consider differentiation to be quite important in their application decisions. This also comes across in Figure 4, where 65.1% (n=67) of participants either agree or strongly agree with the statement that when they are applying for a job, it is important to them that an organisation stands out from other employers. These findings fall in line with those of Leekha Chhabra & Sharma (2014) who argue that differentiation is crucial in today’s tight and extremely competitive labour market as it can be considered to be a key strategy for attracting the best talent. The results of this dissertation also support the research of Franca & Pahor (2012), who argue that candidates’ intention to apply is no longer only dependent on the job they are interested in, but is also impacted by the organisational attributes of the employing company. Specifically, this research project found 87.4% (n=90) of graduating millennials to be influenced by job-level as well as organisational characteristics in their application decisions (see Figure 3). As can be seen from the means in Table 3 and the significant difference in Table 4, this group of respondents also places much greater emphasis on differentiation than those who solely focus on the job they are applying for. For that reason, it is evident that companies must follow the advice of Srivastava & Bhatnagar (2010) and ensure they stand out from competitors if they wish to engage with this new generation of talent. Therefore, these results carry particular significance for organisations aiming to attract
Generation Y graduates who are evidently highly sensitive to the firm-level characteristics of their employing company.

**Table 3: Group Statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Statistics</th>
<th>BothChar</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
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**Table 4: Independent Samples Test**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>StandsOut Equal variances assumed</td>
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<td>.198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>2.373</td>
<td>14.348</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1.2 **Hypothesis 1b**

**H_01b:** There is no statistically significant difference between participants’ intention to apply being impacted by both the characteristics of the role and the firm-level attributes of the organisation they are applying to and whether they are more likely to apply for a job in an organisation that clearly communicates what they are able to offer their employees.

**H_11b:** There is a statistically significant difference between participants’ intention to apply being impacted by both the characteristics of the role and the firm-level attributes of the organisation they are applying to and whether they are more likely to apply for a job in an organisation that clearly communicates what they are able to offer their employees.
An independent T-Test was carried out between questions 1 and 3 in the questionnaire to either accept or reject the null hypothesis. As with the previous hypothesis, this analysis also allows a partial response to be provided to RQ1 as it offers an understanding into how graduating millennials’ intentions to apply are impacted by the clear communication of the value propositions of an organisation’s employer brand. As highlighted in Table 6 below, no significant difference (sig.= 0.090) was found between the responses of the participants who are impacted by both the characteristics of the role and the firm-level attributes of the organisation they are applying to and those who are not. Therefore, there is no notable contrast between the two groups in whether they are more likely to apply for a role in an organisation that clearly communicates what they are able to offer employees in their company, confirming the null hypothesis. Based on the means in Table 5, it can be said that the participants whose application decisions are impacted by the characteristics of the role as well as firm-level attributes place greater emphasis on the clear communication of the company’s value propositions (M1=4.0778; M2=3.6154). Thus, it might be argued that when evaluating the characteristics of the employing company, graduating millennials aim to develop a clear understanding of what the firm could offer them as an employee inside the organisation.

However, given the relatively high nature of the two means in Table 5, both groups of respondents evidently place great importance on organisations clearly communicating the value they can offer their employees. This also comes across in qualitative data, where PTCP2 stated: “If I was applying for loads of jobs at the same time then the one that didn't tell me all the things that they could offer would kind of be less of a priority for me than the ones that do”.

Additionally, as can be seen from Figure 5, 77.7% (n=80) of respondents state that they would be more likely to apply for a job in an organisation that clearly communicates what they are able to offer employees in their company. Therefore, this provides further evidence of the need for organisations to formulate understandable and coherent employer branding messages in order to attract graduating millennials. These findings also support the research of Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) and Saini et al (2014) who recognise that the clear and understandable communication of employer branding messages is crucial for effectively shaping application decisions and attracting the best talent. More critically, in comparison to Hypothesis 1a, the mean for all participants’ answers was higher for question 3 than for question 2 (see Table 7). This means that while it is important to graduating millennials that their prospective employer stands out amongst other organisations, their differentiated value propositions also need to be clearly communicated in order to maximise the efficiency of their employer branding efforts.
Therefore, while great focus has been placed on the need for an organisation’s employer brand to be differentiated from competitors (Leekha Chhabra & Sharma, 2014; Srivastava & Bhatnagar, 2010), the results of this dissertation suggest that clarity in communication is in fact more influential on the actual application decisions of graduating millennials.

**Table 5: Group Statistics**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Group Statistics</th>
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**Table 6: Independent Samples Test**

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**Table 7: Descriptive Statistics**

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</table>
5.1.3 Conclusion

Therefore, in response to Research Question 1, graduating millennials’ intentions to apply for a job are certainly strongly influenced by the value propositions made by an organisation through their employer brand as differentiation and the clear communication of brand messages have been found to greatly impact on application decisions. Taking into account the means in Table 3 and Table 5, it might be concluded that the applicants who are impacted by the characteristics of the role as well as firm-level attributes appear to have greater expectations for the company offering the role they are interested in. In particular, it is important to note the significant difference found for Hypothesis 1a as the respondents influenced by job-level as well as organisational characteristics place notably greater emphasis on the differentiation of the employing company from other competitors. However, it appears that while differentiation evidently plays an important role in influencing the research sample’s application decisions, the value propositions made by an organisation through their employer brand also need to be clearly communicated in order to attract graduating millennials to the company.

5.2 Research Question 2: What role does the attractiveness of a firm’s employer brand play in influencing graduating millennials’ intention to apply for a role in that organisation?

5.2.1 Hypothesis 2a

$H_0^{2a}$: There is no statistically significant difference between participants’ increased likelihood of applying for a job which is offered by an organisation that comes across as a good place to work and whether it is important to them that the organisation they are applying to has a positive reputation as an employer.

$H_1^{2a}$: There is a statistically significant difference between participants’ increased likelihood of applying for a job which is offered by an organisation that comes across as a good place to work and whether it is important to them that the organisation they are applying to has a positive reputation as an employer.

An independent T-Test was carried out between questions 4 and 5 in the questionnaire to either accept or reject the null hypothesis. This also allows a partial response to be offered to RQ2 as a company’s reputation has been recognised to be one of the key determinants of employer attractiveness. As can be seen from Table 9 below, a significant difference (sig.= 0.000) was
found between the responses of the participants that are more likely to apply for a job offered by an organisation that comes across as a good place to work and those who are not. Thus, a strong contrast has been noted between the two groups in whether it is important to them that the organisation they are applying to has a positive reputation as an employer, rejecting the null hypothesis. The means in Table 8 show that those who are more likely to apply for a job offered by an organisation that comes across as a good place to work actually place significantly lesser importance on a firm’s reputation as an employer (M1=4.3978; M2=5.0000). Therefore, a company having a positive reputation as an employer does not appear to be directly linked to the organisation coming across as a good place to work for the research sample. However, it is crucial to note that only 10 participants responded that they would not be more likely to apply for a job offered by a company that comes across as a good place to work (see Figure 6), which might to some extent reduce the representative nature of the significant difference found for this hypothesis.

Despite this, given the extremely high nature of the means in Table 8, it can evidently be argued that employer reputation has a very strong influence on the application decisions of graduating millennials. This is further supported by the results in Figure 7, where 95.2% of respondents (n= 98) state that they agree or strongly agree with the statement that it is important to them that the organisation they are applying to has a positive reputation as an employer. These findings confirm the research of Leekha Chhabra & Sharma (2014) and Lemmink et al (2003) who argue that an organisation’s reputation as an employer is key in the application-related decision-making process and can even further enhance the attractiveness of a firm in the eyes of prospective candidates. Furthermore, when asked about the key criteria they look for in an organisation when searching for a job, the first thing PTCP2 noted was: “I think, obviously, it has to be an organisation with a good reputation”. Similarly, PTCP3 stated: “I think the more people know the firm, the bigger its trustworthiness, which then means that if I go somewhere else and tell them where I used to work then people will want to hire me. So in a way I would benefit from them because of their reputation”. The data collected through interviews also supports the findings of Moroko & Uncles (2008) who highlight that having a negative employer reputation can also crucially shape candidates’ application decisions. In their interview, PTCP1 stated: “I think the good side of reputation so the prestige I don’t really care for. […] When it comes to a bad reputation then I’m definitely sensitive to how that relates to the treatment of workers” and PTCP5 agreed by saying: “If I come across an organisation with a bad reputation as an employer […] then it does reduce their attractiveness, definitely”.

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Similarly, PTCP4 said: “I don’t really place great emphasis on reputation in terms of prestige. If they’re known for not treating their staff well then that’s obviously important for me and I’d rather work for a firm that does but prestige is not something I chase after”. Therefore, while the code ‘prestige’ was not highly valued in the broader theme of reputation in the analysis of interview transcripts, a negative reputation certainly came across as being more influential on application decisions than a positive one.

Table 8: Group Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GoodPlace</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>4.3978</td>
<td>.62797</td>
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<tr>
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<td>10</td>
<td>5.0000</td>
<td>.00000</td>
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</table>

Table 9: Independent Samples Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PosReputation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>PosReputation</td>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.2 Hypothesis 2b

H₀2b: There is no statistically significant difference between participants’ increased likelihood of applying for a job which is offered by an organisation that comes across as a good place to work and whether it is important to them that the organisation they are applying to values corporate social responsibility
\( H_{2b}: \) There is a statistically significant difference between participants’ increased likelihood of applying for a job which is offered by an organisation that comes across as a good place to work and whether it is important to them that the organisation they are applying to values corporate social responsibility

An independent T-Test was carried out between questions 4 and 7 in the questionnaire to either accept or reject the null hypothesis. As with the previous hypothesis, this analysis also allows a partial response to be provided to RQ2 as corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been widely considered to be a crucial factor shaping the application decisions of the millennial generation. As highlighted in Table 11 below, a significant difference (sig. = 0.002) was found between the responses of the participants who are more likely to apply for a job offered by an organisation that comes across as a good place to work and those who are not. Thus, a strong contrast has been noted between the two groups in whether it is important to them that the organisation they are applying to values CSR, rejecting the null hypothesis. As can be seen from the means in Table 10, those more likely to apply for a job offered by an organisation that comes across as a good place to work also place significantly greater emphasis on CSR (\( M_1 = 3.5806; M_2 = 2.4000 \)). Therefore, it can be assumed that corporate social responsibility is an important factor in making an organisation come across as a good place to work for the sample of this research project. However, as with the previous hypothesis, it is crucial to note that only 10 participants responded that they would not be more likely to apply for a job offered by an organisation that comes across as a good place to work (see Figure 6), which might once again reduce the representative nature of the results found for this hypothesis.

Given the relatively low means in Table 10, particularly in comparison to the means for employer reputation in Table 8, CSR does not appear to play a highly significant role in the application-related decision-making process of graduating millennials. This is further illustrated in Figure 9 as just over half of the participants (\( n = 56 \)) consider it important that the company they are applying to values corporate social responsibility. In relation to existing literature, such findings appear to contrast those of Celikdemir & Tukel (2015) and Ohlrich (2015) who argue that members of Generation Y place great emphasis on CSR and highly appreciate employers who also recognise its value. While the importance respondents assign to CSR is not insignificant, Figure 10 clearly illustrates the greater application-related influence of other factors shaping employer attractiveness for graduating millennials. Similarly, PTCP2 highlighted: “It’s not one of the main things that would have an influence over my job applications” and PTCP4 said: “I don’t really pay much attention to it in the sense that I don’t
set out to really find out what a company does in the community. [...] It’s not something that I deliberately search for or always keep in mind when I’m applying somewhere”. Therefore, while codes such as ‘environmentally friendly’ and ‘corporate governance’ were featured in the thematic analysis of interview transcripts, their influence was not recognised to be as significant as that of other factors such as employer reputation. For that reason, the role of CSR in shaping the application decisions of graduating millennials appears to be summarised by the following quote from PTCP5: “If I’m choosing between two identical jobs then that can be something that makes me choose one organisation over another but in general if I’m looking at many different jobs then I don’t consider it to be one of the main things I look for”.

**Table 10: Group Statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CSRValue</th>
<th>GoodPlace</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>3.5806</td>
<td>1.11631</td>
<td>.11576</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.4000</td>
<td>.96609</td>
<td>.30551</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

**Table 11: Independent Samples Test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CSRValue</th>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>.600</td>
<td>.440</td>
<td>3.214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>3.614</td>
<td>11.746</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.2.3 Conclusion

In response to Research Question 2, for graduating millennials, employer attractiveness appears to be closely related to an organisation’s reputation, which was found to significantly
impact on the research sample’s application decisions (see Table 8). It was also noted that a negative reputation can strongly influence intention to apply as interview participants did not place high value on positive factors such as prestige but stated that they would be much less likely to apply for a job in an organisation that is known for not treating their staff well. In comparison to the significance of organisational reputation, corporate social responsibility was not recognised as being highly influential on application decisions, however, it appears to be the potentially differentiating factor between two job offers that candidates deem to be equally attractive.

5.3 Research Question 3: How does the perceived accuracy of an organisation’s employer brand impact on graduating millennials’ intention to apply for a job in that company?

5.3.1 Hypothesis 3a

\[ H_{03a} \]: There is no statistically significant difference between whether participants typically research what a company is like as an employer before applying for a job there and whether they would be less likely to apply for a job in a firm that has received negative coverage in the media as an employer

\[ H_{13a} \]: There is a statistically significant difference between whether participants typically research what a company is like as an employer before applying for a job there and whether they would be less likely to apply for a job in a firm that has received negative coverage in the media as an employer

An independent T-Test was carried out between questions 8 and 9 in the questionnaire to either accept or reject the null hypothesis. By analysing the findings, a partial response can be provided to RQ3 as the media will be evaluated as a potential source of information for understanding the accuracy of an organisation’s employer branding messages. As can be seen from Table 13, no significant difference (sig.= 0.190) was found between the responses of the participants that typically research a company as an employer before applying for a job there and those that do not. Thus, there is no notable contrast between the two groups in whether they would be less likely to apply for a job in a firm that has received negative coverage in the media as an employer, meaning the null hypothesis can be accepted. As illustrated by Table 12, those who typically research what a company is like as an employer before applying for a job there were found to be more likely to be impacted by negative media coverage (M1=4.1268;
M2=3.9375). For that reason, it appears that graduating millennials consider the media to be a useful source for collecting information about a prospective employer, which can consequently strongly influence their intention to apply. However, while just 68.9% (n=71) of respondents research a company as an employer before applying there (see Figure 11), the high means in Table 12 illustrate the significant role the media plays in shaping the application decisions of both groups of the research sample. In particular, it is crucial to note that the mean for the responses of those that do not research a company as an employer before applying there is not highly different from the mean of those that do. These findings evidently agree with the research of Franca & Pahor (2012) who highlight that the media is crucial in shaping the application-related decision-making process of prospective candidates. This is further supported by qualitative data from interviews as PTCP2 argued that negative media coverage “would make me less likely to apply there because if they’re treating some of their employees really badly then you don’t know how they treat all the other people in and around the organisation”. Similarly, PTCP3 noted: “If somewhere in the media I find information that the company does not treat their employees well then I would obviously not apply to work there”. Overall, the findings of Davies (2008) and Wilden et al (2010) were certainly confirmed as unfavourable media coverage was found to strongly influence the research sample’s application decisions and make them question the employer branding messages communicated by an organisation.

**Table 12: Group Statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Statistics</th>
<th>Research</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>MediaNeg</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>4.1268</td>
<td>.69549</td>
<td>.08254</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3.9375</td>
<td>.61892</td>
<td>.10941</td>
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Table 13: Independent Samples Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
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<td>.196</td>
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<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>1.381</td>
<td>66.751</td>
<td>.172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.2 Hypothesis 3b

**H03b:** There is no statistically significant difference between whether participants typically research what a company is like as an employer before applying for a job there and whether they would be less likely to apply for a job if people have told them negative things about the organisation as an employer

**H13b:** There is a statistically significant difference between whether participants typically research what a company is like as an employer before applying for a job there and whether they would be less likely to apply for a job if people have told them negative things about the organisation as an employer

An independent T-Test was carried out between questions 8 and 10 in the questionnaire to either accept or reject the null hypothesis. As was the case with the previous hypothesis, the following analysis will allow a partial response to be provided to RQ3 as word of mouth will be discussed as a potential source of information for evaluating the accuracy of an organisation’s employer branding messages. Table 15 below shows that no significant difference (sig.= 0.193) was found between the responses of the participants that typically research a company as an employer before applying for a job there and those that do not. Thus, there is no notable contrast between the two groups in whether they would be less likely to apply for a job if people have told them negative things about the company as an employer,
confirming the null hypothesis. The means in Table 14 show that those who do not typically research a firm as an employer before applying there are more likely to be impacted by word of mouth about an organisation (M1=4.0282; M2=4.2500). This suggests that while prospective applicants do not directly make an effort to research a company as an employer, the information they find out through personal connections is still sufficient to influence their application decisions. Supporting this view, PTCP5, who does not typically research an organisation as an employer before applying there, noted: “I’ve had a scenario before where a friend of mine carried out an internship in a company and did not have a good experience at all so when I was looking for a job and spotted an ad by that company then I couldn’t help but think of what my friend had told me and I decided to not apply at all”.

However, PTCP1 noted: “I don’t think you can really have a great big picture of what is happening inside […] before you apply, you can’t really tell as there isn’t much information”. Similarly, PTCP5 said: “I think information about an organisation as an employer is quite difficult to find and there isn’t much of it that’s accessible to the public”. These responses link to the findings of Srivastava & Bhatnagar (2010) who highlight that there is often a lack of adequate information available to candidates about a prospective employer in the early stages of the recruitment process. This further explains the questionnaire results as even if candidates research what an organisation is like as an employer before applying there, they often experience a lack of readily available information and are thus more likely to be strongly influenced by the experiences of those that have had previous encounters with the employing company. Consequently, as was previously highlighted by Wilden et al (2010), prospective applicants become reliant on word of mouth as information received through personal connections is typically considered to be the most credible and trustworthy. This further explains the high means in Table 14 and supports the research of Ambler & Barrow (1996) and Jaidi et al (2011) who argue that word of mouth is crucial in shaping application decisions.

Furthermore, in comparison to Hypothesis 3a, the mean for all participants’ answers to question 10 is slightly higher than for question 9, suggesting that word of mouth is more influential on graduating millennials’ application decisions than the media (see Table 16). Such findings are particularly applicable to those who do not research an organisation as an employer before applying there as this group of respondents was found to be much more likely to be impacted by word of mouth than by the media (see means in Table 12 and Table 14). This is also supported by PTCP2 who said: “I think if another person told me that it was a rubbish place to work then it would have more of an impact than the media. In the media […] you don’t know
what to believe. But if someone you know really well is telling you that it’s not a good place to work, I would find it easier to believe”.

**Table 14: Group Statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Statistics</th>
<th>Research</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
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<td>.09822</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>4.2500</td>
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<td>.12700</td>
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**Table 15: Independent Samples Test**

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<th>Independent Samples Test</th>
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<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
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</thead>
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<td></td>
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<td>Sig.</td>
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<td>PeopleNeg</td>
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**Table 16: Descriptive statistics for questions 9 and 10**

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<td>.67537</td>
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<td>.79846</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

5.3.3 Conclusion

Therefore, in response to Research Question 3, it is evident that both the media and word of mouth play a highly significant role in shaping prospective candidates’ perceptions of the accuracy of an organisation’s employer brand and consequently impact on their intention to
apply. Taking into account the means in Table 16, it can be said that the information communicated to graduating millennials by the people they know is slightly more influential on their application decisions than what they find out through the media. While no significant difference was found between the responses of the participants that typically research an organisation as an employer before applying there and those who do not, it is evident that the majority of the research sample place great emphasis on perceptions of accuracy. This is clearly illustrated by the high means in Table 12 and Table 14, which show graduating millennials’ unwillingness to apply for a job in an organisation whose positive employer branding messages might be questioned by negative media coverage or word of mouth.

6. Conclusions
This chapter aims to summarise the research project by discussing the key findings related to each of the three research questions and evaluating the implications of these conclusions for organisations, industry professionals and the wider field of employer branding. Recommendations for future research will also be made to suggest additional ways for developing greater knowledge of the increasingly utilised concept of employer branding.

6.1 Research Question 1: How are graduating millennials’ intentions to apply for a job impacted by the value propositions made by an organisation through their employer brand?

The value propositions made by an organisation through their employer brand were recognised to significantly impact graduating millennials’ intentions to apply in many different ways. First, 87.4% of participants were found to consider job-related attributes as well as firm-level characteristics in their application decisions, which appears to epitomise the changing dynamic in the application-related decision-making process. This group of respondents was consequently found to place significantly greater emphasis on differentiation than the 12.6% of respondents who only focused on the role they were applying for, clearly illustrating the growing need for firms to ensure their branding messages stand out from other employers. However, the research sample was found to give even greater importance to clear communication, which means that an organisation’s messages about their differentiated value propositions also need to be presented in an understandable manner in order to attract graduating millennials to the company.
6.2 Research Question 2: What role does the attractiveness of a firm’s employer brand play in influencing graduating millennials’ intention to apply for a role in that organisation?

Reputation and corporate social responsibility were both found to act as characteristics of employer attractiveness significantly shaping graduating millennials’ intention to apply. In particular, employer reputation was recognised as a highly influential factor impacting on the application decisions of the majority of the research sample. Furthermore, interview data showed that negative perceptions of an organisation’s reputation are often more likely to shape graduating millennials’ intention to apply than positive associations with characteristics such as prestige. Finally, while corporate social responsibility was not recognised to be as crucial in shaping graduating millennials’ intention to apply as employer reputation, it appeared to be the potentially differentiating factor between job offers by two organisations that candidates consider to be equally attractive.

6.3 Research Question 3: How does the perceived accuracy of an organisation’s employer brand impact on graduating millennials’ intention to apply for a job in that company?

In order to understand how the perceived accuracy of an organisation’s employer brand might impact on graduating millennials’ intention to apply, the media and word of mouth were analysed as sources of information about the conditions of working for a certain organisation. While both were found to be very important in shaping the application decisions of the research sample, word of mouth about a company was recognised as being more influential on graduating millennials than the information they receive through the media. In particular, the respondents who did not research an organisation as an employer before applying for a job with them were found to be much more likely to be influenced by both the media and word of mouth in their application decisions.

6.4 Research implications

These findings carry great significance for the wider field of employer branding, particularly given the relatively under-researched nature of the topic of this dissertation. The new demographic structure of the labour market brought on by large numbers of the millennial generation entering the workforce has evidently meant that past employer branding practices
are no longer sufficient for attracting the best candidates to an organisation. With new priorities and different measures of employer attractiveness, the dominance of Generation Y in the labour market has resulted in an increasing need to understand the changing dynamic in the application-related decision-making process. Therefore, the results of this dissertation evidently provide a useful insight into the factors shaping the application decisions of graduating millennials, from differentiation and corporate social responsibility to employer reputation and word of mouth. For that reason, this research can assist firms in adapting their employer branding strategies to attract a new generation of talent into their organisation in an increasingly competitive tight labour market. These results might also act as a guide for organisations who are yet to actively engage with the concept of employer branding as the findings of this research project clearly illustrate the emphasis graduating millennials place on evaluating the firm-level characteristics of their prospective employer in their application decisions. Finally, as was highlighted at the beginning of this research project, the topic of utilising employer branding for attracting applications from graduating millennials has not received much attention in academic literature. Thus, these findings can successfully fill this research gap and provide a basis for further research in this area to develop an even greater understanding of the relationship between employer branding and the application decisions of the millennial generation.

6.5 Suggestions for further research

Given the relatively under-researched nature of employer branding and its relationship to graduating millennials’ intention to apply, this dissertation has only been able to fill a small gap in wider academic literature. Thus, there are many areas that might benefit from further future research in order to better comprehend the shifts brought on by Generation Y entering an increasingly competitive labour market. For example, a larger sample size might be beneficial for developing conclusions that are even more representative of the characteristics of the millennial generation. This was particularly relevant for Hypothesis 2a and Hypothesis 2b, where the research findings for one group of respondents were only limited to the answers of 10 participants. Additionally, while both questionnaires and interviews provided useful information for this dissertation, an even greater emphasis might be placed on qualitative data collection as some of the patterns developed through thematic analysis proved to be highly insightful for the broader interpretation of the research findings. Furthermore, while this study was only conducted on graduating millennials in the UK, the field of employer branding might
benefit from a similar project being carried out in different countries to understand whether these findings might provide a basis for a global approach to employer branding or whether national characteristics also play a significant role in talent attraction.

7. References


8. Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1: Quantitative design

Introductory questions prior to accessing the questionnaire

- Do you agree to your data being used in the ways stated in the Participant Information Sheet below?
- Do you meet the following criteria: born between 1980-2003 and in the final year of your undergraduate degree?

1. Is your intention to apply for a job impacted by both the characteristics of the role (e.g. your tasks) and the firm-level attributes of the organisation that you are applying to (e.g. their reputation)?

   Yes - No

2. When applying for a job in an organisation, it is important to me that the firm stands out from other employers

   Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neutral – Agree – Strongly Agree

3. I am more likely to apply for a role in an organisation that clearly communicates what they are able to offer me as an employee in their company

   Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neutral – Agree – Strongly Agree

4. Are you more likely to apply for a job which is offered by an organisation that comes across as a good place to work?

   Yes - No

5. It is important to me that the organisation I am applying to has a positive reputation as an employer

   Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neutral – Agree – Strongly Agree

6. My intention to apply for a job is impacted by the extent to which the benefits offered to me by the organisation match what I am looking for in an employer

   Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neutral – Agree – Strongly Agree

7. It is important to me that the organisation I am applying to values corporate social responsibility (i.e. does good and contributes to society)

   Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neutral – Agree – Strongly Agree

8. Do you typically research what a company is like as an employer before applying for a job there?

   Yes – No
9. I would be less likely to apply for a job in a firm that has received negative coverage in the media as an employer

Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neutral – Agree – Strongly Agree

10. I would be less likely to apply for a job if people have told me negative things about the organisation as an employer

Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neutral – Agree – Strongly Agree

8.2 Appendix 2: Questionnaire analysis plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q</th>
<th>Literature</th>
<th>Critical Point</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Analysis method and response to research question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Wilden et al (2010)</td>
<td>Developing an attractive and differentiated employer brand can facilitate the attraction of suitable candidates</td>
<td>Is your intention to apply for a job impacted by both the characteristics of the role (e.g. your tasks) and the firm-level attributes of the organisation that you are applying to (e.g. their reputation)?</td>
<td>T-Tests with Questions 2 and 3, which will provide an answer to RQ1 – “How are graduating millennials’ intentions to apply for a job impacted by the value propositions made by an organisation through their employer brand?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Leekha Chhabra &amp; Sharma (2014)</td>
<td>It is increasingly important for organisations to distinguish themselves from competitors in the race for attracting the best talent</td>
<td>“When applying for a job in an organisation, it is important to me that the firm stands out from other employers”</td>
<td>T-Test with Question 1 Likert Scales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ambler &amp; Barrow (1996)</td>
<td>The brand of an organisation as an employer is impacted and to an extent defined by the benefits offered to their employees</td>
<td>“I am more likely to apply for a role in an organisation that clearly communicates what they are able to offer me as an employee in their company”</td>
<td>T-Test with Question 1 Likert Scales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Alniacik et al (2014)</td>
<td>Candidates are impacted by an organisation’s employer brand as they come to consider it to be a good place to work and are more likely to apply for a role there</td>
<td>Are you more likely to apply for a job which is offered by an organisation that comes across as a good place to work?</td>
<td>T-Tests with Questions 5-7, which will provide an answer to RQ2 – “What role does the attractiveness of a firm’s employer brand play in influencing graduating millennials’ intention to apply for a role in that organisation?”</td>
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<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Lemmink et al (2003)</td>
<td>Applicants evaluating a company are highly interested in what the organisation stands for as an employer</td>
<td>“It is important to me that the organisation I am applying to has a positive reputation as an employer”</td>
<td>T-Test with Question 4 Likert Scales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gomes &amp; Neves (2011)</td>
<td>An employer brand is impacted by how the benefits offered by the organisation are perceived both inside and outside the firm.</td>
<td>“My intention to apply for a job is impacted by the extent to which the benefits offered to me by the organisation match what I am looking for in an employer”</td>
<td>T-Test with Question 4 Likert Scales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Celikdemir &amp; Tukel (2015)</td>
<td>Members of Generation Y give much greater importance to ethics in business decisions.</td>
<td>“It is important to me that the organisation I am applying to values corporate social responsibility (i.e. does good and contributes to society)”</td>
<td>T-Test with Question 4 Likert Scales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Moroko &amp; Uncles (2008)</td>
<td>Perceptions of accuracy are key to defining a successful and attractive employer brand.</td>
<td>Do you typically research what a company is like as an employer before applying for a job there?</td>
<td>T-Tests with Questions 9 and 10, which will provide an answer to RQ3 – “How does the perceived accuracy of an organisation’s employer brand impact on graduating millennials’ intention to apply for a job in that company?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Franca &amp; Pahor (2012)</td>
<td>The image of a business and the opinions people hold about a company are impacted by the media coverage an organisation receives.</td>
<td>“I would be less likely to apply for a job in a firm that has received negative coverage in the media as an employer”</td>
<td>T-Test with Question 8 Likert Scales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Van Hoye (2008)</td>
<td>The opinions communicated about an organisation as an employer by their staff influence the perceived employer attractiveness of a company</td>
<td>“I would be less likely to apply for a job if people have told me negative things about the organisation as an employer”</td>
<td>T-Test with Question 8 Likert Scales</td>
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8.3 Appendix 3: Qualitative design

*Introduction:* Hi, thank you for agreeing to take part in this research project. As you probably know, I am looking to investigate the relationship between the employer brand of an organisation and graduating millennials’ intention to apply for a role in that company. The interview should last no more than 25-30 minutes. Please feel free to ask clarifying questions throughout the conversation if necessary.

Now that you have familiarised yourself with the Consent Form and the Participant Information Sheet, there are a few more things I would like to go over before we start the interview. First of all, as stated in the Participant Information Sheet, you are free to withdraw from the study at any point and all of your answers will remain anonymous. Having said that, is it suitable to you if I record this interview? The recording will only be used to transcribe our conversation later on and will not be shared anywhere else.

Do you have any questions for me before we start the interview?

1. Let’s say you’re starting to apply for a job after graduation, what are the key criteria you would be looking for in terms of the role as well as the organisation in which the role is?
   Questions for further probing where required:
   - What if the job itself seems really interesting and something you would enjoy but the organisation really doesn’t come across as a good place to work?
   - Would you say you are more job-focused or organisation-focused? Which is more influential on your final application decision?

2. Hypothetical scenario: imagine you are in a situation where you have found two job advertisements for roles with identical responsibilities in two different organisations but can only apply for one.
   Questions for further probing where required:
   - How will you make a decision?
   - What would make you choose one organisation over the other?

3. Is it important to you that the organisation you are applying to stands out from other employers?

4. When you are applying for a job, do you generally pay attention to what the organisation says they can offer you? E.g. flexible working hours
   Questions for further probing where required:
   - Is it important to you that those benefits are clearly communicated to you in the job advertisement for the role that you’re applying for?
   - Would you say they influence your application decisions?

5. How would you describe your ideal employer? i.e. What are the characteristics of an attractive employer?
   Questions for further probing where required:
   - What makes an organisation come across as a good place to work?
   - What should they offer you? What should they value?

6. Do you think your application decisions are influenced by the reputation that the organisation has as an employer? If so, how?

7. Would you say corporate social responsibility is something that influences whether you wish to apply for a job at an organisation or not?
   Questions for further probing where required:
   - Is it important to you that the organisation does good in society by for example contributing to charity or setting a focus on tackling environmental issues?
8. Do you typically research what a company is like as an employer before applying for a job there?

Questions for further probing where required:
- If you do, what channels do you use to develop an understanding of the organisation as an employer (e.g. online reviews, the media, opinions and experiences of the people you know)?

9. Are your application decisions impacted by what you read or have read about the organisation in the media?

Questions for further probing where required:
- Would you be less likely to apply for a role in a company that has received negative media coverage as an employer?

10. Are your application decisions impacted by the people you know and what they tell you about their experiences with the organisation you are thinking of applying to?

- If so, would you say your application decisions are more likely to be impacted by what you read in the media or what the people you know tell you about their experiences with an organisation as an employer?

8.4 Appendix 4: Interview data analysis

THEMES AND COLOUR CODES:
- Reputation
- Corporate social responsibility (CSR)
- Attractiveness
- Accuracy

PTCP1 interview:

Interviewer: So let’s say you’re starting to apply for a job after you graduate. What would be the key criteria that you’re looking for in terms of the role you’re applying for as well as the organisation you’re going to join?

PTCP1: It’s complicated because there are so many factors. I guess if it’s just the first job I get after graduating I’m not aiming for the perfect job first. So there are a lot of things because I would also like a job that I’m happy in, that I’m doing what I like, that I’m also advancing, not just staying in a position and not learning anything new. I also want to be in a nice environment like the people I work with, that they’re nice. The kind of people that actually make you want to get up and go to work. I’m the type of person that really likes people and that thinks that people are key. So even if there is a job that you practically love, if the people around you are not nice or not fulfilling, there is a tough choice there. I don’t know what I would choose.

Interviewer: Great, that actually leads me into my next questions which is what if the job that you’re thinking of applying for seems amazing and exactly what you want to do, but what if the organisation really seems like a bad place to work? Like you mentioned that people are important to you, what if the people in the firm don’t seem nice and that you think you wouldn’t get on well with them? How would that impact your application decisions like would you still be focused on the job aspect of what you want to do or would you be influenced by what the organisation comes across as?

PTCP1: It could be that the job would be fulfilling but if the people are not, then I don’t think it would work. I think the people around you are so important. And also nowadays I doubt there are many jobs where you don’t socialise or do things with other people. So if
your work is based on those kinds of relationships then it’s important to get that right. If I don’t get on with the people then I could only do that job for a certain amount of time. I wouldn’t enjoy it and I wouldn’t stick to it.

**Interviewer:** But would you even apply for that job in the first place if you already have a perception that the organisation does not come across as a good place to work?

**PTCP1:** I don’t think you can really have a great big picture of what is happening inside. You get access to limited information. Eventually in terms of your daily tasks or the people that will be next to you, I don’t think you can tell until you’re in that job. So probably I would still apply. I don’t know what it would take for me to completely say no and not apply at all but it has to be something big with a massive impact.

**Interviewer:** So let’s say you’re in a scenario where you’ve found job advertisements for two jobs with the same title and identical responsibilities but you can only apply for one, how do you make up your mind? How do you choose which one to apply for?

**PTCP1:** I will probably choose by something that I also consider really important and didn’t actually mention before and that’s what the company actually does and what it represents. I don’t think I would work in a place where I know that there are some really big ethical contradictions, I don’t think I would feel okay. I haven’t worked like that yet but I think if I had those two options I think what I would do is look for information about the two organisations and have a look for which one is more friendly in general, like not necessarily environmentally friendly but let’s say world friendly maybe. Something that shows they’re more engaged with the world around them and that they are determined to do good things. I think that would be the factor that would make me decide which one to choose.

**Interviewer:** When you’re applying for a job, would you say it’s important to you that the firm stands out from other organisations? Do you think you’d be more likely to apply for a job that’s offered by a company that maybe does something differently or do you not consider that highly important?

**PTCP1:** Depends if I like the thing that they do differently. First of all, I would say that I don’t think prestige adds value. If it’s a multinational company then I don’t think I would choose that one over a small organisation with just 10 employees purely because of that. Because maybe that little place is much friendlier and that’s what I would value more. But it depends on what the organisation stands out for. If it stands out because it’s famous, then no, I wouldn’t really value that. If it stands out for its positive corporate governance or if they have work ethics that match my beliefs then yes, I consider that important. I think nowadays flexibility and benefits are something that need to be considered. For example, if a company is able to offer me flexible working benefits that match what I’m looking for because of my family or health situation, I would be much more attracted to that organisation.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, I guess a lot of the time it’s also about the benefits that an organisation can offer you. In that sense if a company can offer you benefits that better fit what you need, then are you saying that you would be much more likely to want to work there?

**PTCP1:** Yes, absolutely. I don’t think it’s necessarily about the financial benefits but I guess it’s the social and wellbeing benefits side of thing that I value.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Do you think that the job advertisement that you see and more precisely how it’s designed and built up directly impacts on whether you apply for that job or not? Do certain things in that make you more drawn to an organisation?

**PTCP1:** Maybe, not necessarily because of what they try to represent visually but because of the words they communicate and the way the information is written as it shows engagement with you as the applicant. And that’s only hypothetically because they don’t actually know you and that you’re planning to apply but they already show some engagement and motivation. It’s a different type of attitude I would say to show in your advertisement that you’ve already considered the applicant too.
Interviewer: Moving on to a slightly different topic now, which is about the attractiveness of
an employer and what makes an employer attractive for you. Obviously you’ve already
described that flexibility, certain benefits and the people are very important to you, but is
there anything else that you would say to describe an ideal employer for you?
PTCP1: Yes, I think those things are the main factors I consider. I think in general if they
show understanding and recognise you just as a person and consideration for you even when
It comes to your working schedule and holidays and things like that, then that’s important. I
also really appreciate when someone is able to create a nice environment where you feel
happy and like you want to be there. I think I would be really sensitive to that if someone is
not like that. Also, they need to see you as more of an employee, you’re a person. So in that
sense the hierarchy maybe should be quite flat, especially when it comes to personal
relations.
Interviewer: You already mentioned that you don’t really care for the prestigious places as
such, but in terms of reputation in general, would you say that your application decisions are
impacted by the reputation that an organisation has at all or is that not something that you
pay much attention to? I guess there’s also an aspect of having a bad reputation as an
employer.
PTCP1: Yeah, exactly. I think the good side of reputation so the prestige I don’t really care
for. There’s definitely also a bad side to a reputation so that’s true. I think when it comes to a
bad reputation then I’m definitely sensitive to how that relates to the treatment of workers. So
companies might have scandals with things like tax evasion or financial issues like that which
I obviously don’t agree with but I think it would impact me more if it’s something related to
workers. Like the recent scandal with Amazon, which tells you everything.
Interviewer: So would you not want to work at Amazon now because of the negative
reputation they have built as an employer?
PTCP1: No.
Interviewer: You already briefly mentioned things about corporate governance and doing
good in society so do you think you are more drawn to these kinds of organisations that place
a strong emphasis on corporate social responsibility? Would you like to work in an
organisation more if they do contribute to society etc over an organisation that doesn’t?
PTCP1: I mean if I had two exact options and one gives to charity and the other doesn’t then
obviously why would I not choose the one that does. But yes, I think more and more
organisations are engaging with those kinds of practices. And I do consider it pretty
important. Mostly I think it’s environmental matters that would influence me more, if a
company works in that area.
Interviewer: Ok, great, well the final bigger topic that we’re just going to touch on now is
about accuracy and how you perceive employers and whether their employer brand is
representing them in an accurate manner. Would you normally research what an organisation
is like as an employer before you apply for a job there?
PTCP1: I don’t specifically set out to find information about them as an employer but I think
if you look for information about an organisation then you eventually end up finding
something related to employment. Good or bad. Normally yes it’s pretty difficult to develop a
good understanding before you apply, you can’t really tell as there isn’t much information.
So unless you have the contact details of past employees then I don’t see how you can get
that type of information about an organisation as an employer.
Interviewer: Yes, I guess it’s quite difficult to get an understanding of what an organisation
is like as an employer in comparison to finding out what they do and things like that.
PTCP1: And also it depends on how you are as a person, so you might click with the people
there while person X does not and that’s why he had a bad experience so it can be quite
difficult to separate the information to consider.
Interviewer: Yeah well since you mentioned past employees, let’s say you know someone that used to work in an organisation that you’re planning to apply to and they tell you that they had a really bad experience with that organisation as an employer. Would you be impacted by what that person says and then be less likely to apply?

PTCP1: Yes I would be impacted. Well first of all, I would like to know what went wrong and what you didn’t like. I think if I wanted a job for a short period of time then I wouldn’t mind that much because I know I wouldn’t stay there long. But it would have to be something terrible and something big that you tell me that would make me not apply there at all. Something that would put me off completely. I would definitely take the information on board and keep that in mind but use that in a way that can eventually help me during the job. For a job that I want to do more long term, I would definitely have to consider what has been said a lot more.

Interviewer: What about the media though, if you see negative things said in the media about an organisation that you’re planning to apply to and it’s direct criticism about them as an employer, would you still apply? And how does that stand in relation to the negative things that you might hear from the people you know, which would influence you more?

PTCP1: I don’t really know. I can’t say exactly yes or no. If I really want to work there, I guess I have my own personal reasons as well that are very strong so I might want to also try it myself and see how it goes. If I’m really sure that I want to work there then I would probably still try it even if what I heard is off-putting.

Interviewer: But if it’s an organisation that you’re not desperately looking to work for but more of an everyday advertisement by an organisation that you might just be familiar with?

PTCP1: Then yes, I would definitely prefer working for a company that comes across as a better place to work. I guess it also depends on how much you need work and how much you want to work for that organisation. If I really love an organisation and want to work there then it’s more difficult. If the organisation represents something that I love and I’m kind of buying into that then it would be very hard to change my mind like I would have a very strong personal conflict between what I want and what I’ve heard. Ethically I wouldn’t want to be a part of an organisation that doesn’t treat its staff well but I would really struggle.
8.5 Appendix 5: Participant Information Sheet

The relationship between employer brand and intention to apply: a study of the perceptions of graduating millennials at entry level

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research study being conducted by an undergraduate student completing their dissertation at The University of Manchester. The study aims to understand the link between the employer brand of an organisation and graduating millennials’ intentions to apply for a role in that company and establish how different aspects of a firm’s employer branding efforts influence application decisions.

Before you decide to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for taking the time to reading this.

Who will conduct the research?
The research will be conducted by Karolin Pihlak, who is studying for a BA in Management, Leadership and Leisure at the School of Environment, Education and Development at the University of Manchester.

What is the purpose of the research?
The aim of the research is to gather information about the link between the employer brand of an organisation and graduating millennials’ intentions to apply for a role in that company. The study will also aim to understand how attractiveness and accuracy as the two key aspects of a firm’s employer brand influence application decisions.

Why have I been chosen?
You have been chosen to take part in the study because you belong into the millennial generation, which for the purposes of this dissertation has been defined as anyone born between 1980 and 2003. You have also been chosen because you are an undergraduate student in the final year of their degree. This study will involve around 100 other participants.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?
You would be asked to take complete a questionnaire, which will take about 5-10 minutes and will involve questions about how you make your application decisions and what you value in an employer.

You would be asked to participate in an interview, which will last around 25-30 minutes and will cover similar topics to the questionnaire and will also include opportunities for you to share your personal experiences from the application decisions you have had to make.
What happens to the data collected?
The data collected will only be used for the purposes of this research project. The information will be analysed to recognise any patterns that would allow a conclusion to be made in regards to the link between an organisation’s employer brand and graduating millennials’ intention to apply.

How is confidentiality maintained?
Confidentiality is maintained by ensuring the applicants’ responses remain anonymous and by storing the data securely so that only the individual(s) directly related to the research project in question have access to the information collected. Interviews will be recorded for transcription purposes only and will be destroyed as soon as that has been done.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?
It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself.

Will I be paid for participating in the research?
No payment will be made for taking part in the research.

What is the duration of the research?
Questionnaires should take around 5-10 minutes to complete. Interviews will last no longer than 25-30 minutes.

Where will the research be conducted?
Interviews will be arranged at a mutually convenient time and place or will be carried out on Skype.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?
The outcomes of the research will not be published.

Who has reviewed the research project?
The project has been reviewed by the University of Manchester School of Environment, Education and Development School Panel UGT/PGT.

What if something goes wrong?
Should a participant feel uncomfortable with continuing to take part in the research project and wish to withdraw or subsequently want help or advice, they are able to do so in person or alternatively contact the researcher at karolin.pihlak@student.manchester.ac.uk.

What if I want to complain?
If there are any issues regarding this research you should contact the researcher in the first instance at karolin.pihlak@student.manchester.ac.uk. However, if you would prefer not to discuss with members of the research team, please contact the supervisor for this dissertation at lesley.warr@manchester.ac.uk
If you wish to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the research you can contact a Research Governance and Integrity Manager, Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL, by emailing: research.complaints@manchester.ac.uk or by telephoning 0161 275 2674 or 275 8093
How can I contact you?
The researcher can be contacted at karolin.pihlak@student.manchester.ac.uk.

This Project Has Been Approved by the University of Manchester’s School of Environment, Education and Development School Panel UGT/PGT [2018-3884-5229].

8.6 Appendix 6: Consent Form

The relationship between employer brand and intention to apply: a study of the perceptions of graduating millennials at entry level

CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below.

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<tr>
<td>1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to my treatment/service/self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I understand that my data will remain confidential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I understand that the interviews will be audio-recorded.</td>
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<td>5. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.</td>
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</table>

I agree to take part in the above project

_________________________  ____________  _______________________
Name of participant             Date                  Signature

_________________________  ____________  _______________________
Name of researcher             Date                  Signature

This Project Has Been Approved by the University of Manchester’s School of Environment, Education and Development School Panel UGT/PGT [2018-3884-5229].
8.7 Appendix 7: Ethical approval

Dear Karolin Pihlak, Ms Lesley Warr

Thank you for submitting your low risk ethics application for your project entitled: The relationship between employer brand and intention to apply. Ref: 2018-3884-5229 which has now been approved by your supervisor and logged by the Ethics Administrator.

For those undertaking research requiring a DBS Certificate: As you have now completed your ethical application if required a colleague at the University of Manchester will be in touch for you to undertake a DBS check. Please note that you do not have DBS approval until you have received a DBS Certificate completed by the University of Manchester; or you are an MA Teach First student who holds a DBS certificate for your current teaching role.

If anything untoward happens during your research or any changes take place then please inform your supervisor immediately. This approval is confirmation only for the low risk Ethical Approval application.

Please let us know if you have any additional queries by emailing: Taught.ethics.seed@manchester.ac.uk.

Best wishes,

Miss Georgia Irving

Environment, Education and Development School Panel UG/PGT