

# DO CULTURAL DIFFERENCES MATTER IN EXPECTATION OF PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYEES FROM IDEAL EMPLOYER?

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## ABSTRACT

*The present study aims to explore how employer branding perception differs among different cultures. Data were collected from Turkey and Germany in a field study (N= 366). Results from Independent T-Test Analysis have revealed that Turkish and German sample values different factors of instrumental and symbolic dimensions. Furthermore, results revealed that Turkish prospective employees attribute more importance to employer brand attractiveness comparing to German sample. Limitations of the study were considered and implications of the results for the promotion of employer branding were discussed.*

**Keywords:** Employer brand, Employer attractiveness, Organizational attractiveness

## INTRODUCTION

For almost the last two decades, organizations are dealing with severe competition, high levels of risk causing uncertainty, and abrupt technological improvements and changes. Organizations are positioning themselves to deal with competition and survive in long run on the purpose of reaching their desired organizational goals. Moreover, skill, knowledge, and talent requirements for organizations are changing and organizations are seeking ways to string along with changes in the environment where they are operating to gain a competitive advantage over their competitors.

At the present time, organizations are aware that the most precious capital is human capital and attracting higher-skilled human capital –as well as retaining existing ones – will lead organizations to differentiate themselves, adapt to change, and compete in the market. On the other hand, demand for intellectual capital is increasing rapidly all over the world. From this point of view, the “Employer Branding” concept has received much attention of both academicians and practitioners during the last decades.

Although employer branding has become an interesting topic in academia, prior studies have paid little attention to its cultural perspective. Previous studies have been done either in western dominated culture or eastern dominated culture. Within the instrumental and symbolic framework proposed by Lievens and Highhouse (2003), this study aims to fill the gap in the cultural perspective of employer branding concept with comparing the perceptual differences of Turkish prospective employees and German prospective employees. Conceptually, this is a crucial endeavour for employer branding intellection and the present study aims to add value to the context.

The present study begins with a literature review of employer branding concept, instrumental-symbolic framework, and employer attractiveness. Research methodology, sample and data collection, instruments of the research, and analysis will be shown in the second section. Findings section comprises independent t-test analyses results. Conclusion and recommendations will be discussed in the last section of the study.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Employer Branding*

Of all organizational capital, investing in human capital will end up with higher levels of competitive advantage for the organization comparing to its competitors existing in the market (Barney, 1991) especially with movement from the industrial age to the information age (Alniacik and Alniacik, 2012). Organizations competing in the same market have limited availability of strategic resources and the

competition for these scarce resources are fierce, because organizations serving similar goods and services might have more similarities rather than the differences they have. The resource-based view is actually a management device in order to assess the organizations' available strategic assets which might bring competitive advantage with it. It is also based on the idea of using all useful resources in an efficient and effective manner to differentiate the organization from its existing rivals. It aims to create a synergy among the organization with its existing resources. Also, the resources must not be easily duplicated or imitated by the competitors. As the hardest thing to duplicate and precious resource in an organization is human, it is essential to have well-established organizational attractiveness to attract potential human capital and sustain the existing employees who have the potential to bring value to the organization. With highly attracted, satisfied and committed employees, organizations have a better chance to gain competitive advantage easily comparing to their existing competitors who don't have a good recognition in terms of employer branding.

The employer Branding concept has first been mentioned by Ambler and Barrow (1996), defined as “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company.” It is necessary to examine these three dimensions stated in the definition. Functional benefits that Employer Brand offers are defined as developmental, career-enhancing and useful activities. Economic benefits represent the monetarily and material rewards. And last, psychological benefits are the feelings such as belonging, direction and purpose (Ambler and Barrow, 1996). The authors continue to suggest that just like a traditional brand, employer brand also has personality and positioning. “Employer branding is therefore concerned with building an image in the minds of the potential labour market that the company, above all others, is a 'great place to work’” (Ewing et al., 2002).

According to Sullivan (2004), employer branding is “a targeted, long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm” (Sullivan, 2004). From this point of view, it seems to be quite obvious that in order to differentiate themselves, organizations must create a highly regarded employer brand to create a desirable and attractive image in the eyes of both existing and potential employees. For example, Berthon et al. 2005 noted that “Competition for the best employees became almost as fierce as competition for customers”. “Organizations have to differentiate themselves from their competitors and to be seen as attractive employers for prospective applicants and current employees.” (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003). According to Sullivan (2002) “employer branding is a possible way to position the organization as a unique and differentiated employer in the eyes of potential employees, striving towards differentiating the organization from its competitors, and creating their own uniqueness as an organization.”

In this respect, organizations must have the following eight dimensions in order to create a successful and differentiated employer brand which are; “(i) a culture of sharing and continuous improvement, (ii) a balance between good management and high productivity, (iii) obtaining public recognition (iv) employees “proactively” telling stories, (v) getting talked about, (vi) becoming a benchmark firm, (vii) increasing candidate awareness of your best practices, (viii) branding assessment metrics.” These eight elements are core dimensions for establishing a successful employer branding image in order to differentiate the organization from its competitors (Sullivan, 2004).

The employer brand concept has benefits for both individuals and organizations. From an individuals' point of view, belonging to an organization that has a strong employer brand increases employees' self-esteem, identification (Lievens, Van Hoyer, and Anseel, 2007), motivation, and their commitment to the organization (Ito, Brotheridge and McFarland, 2013). From the organizations' point of view, it has a key impact on organizational attractiveness, productivity, intellectual capital, retention, and lower turnover rates of existing employees. Developing a well-recognized employer brand image will lead organizations to lower their recruitment costs. The required time and effort for hiring, training, and adapting new employees to the organization is quite a lot. Due to this fact, organizations are trying to find ways to lower their turnover rates to avoid the cost of recruitment. Also, lower turnover means higher retention for the organization. According to Mosley (2007) employer brand consists of activities that are applied by organizations in order to attract potential employees and retain the existing workforce for the organization. The increase in motivation levels of both employees and managers, increased organizational commitment (Sullivan, 2004), higher levels of job satisfaction (Schlager et al., 2011), organizational performance (Feron, 2008), higher loyalty among existing employees Wahba and Elmanadily (2015), gaining competitive advantage (Schlager et al., 2011; Knox and Freeman, 2006) through differentiation (Mosley, 2007) are some other benefits of establishing qualified employer brand image. The rising importance of intangible resources rather than

tangible assets, such as intellectual capital and knowledge, forces organizations to improve their organizational skills in terms of their perception of employer branding.

## ***Employer Attractiveness***

With increasing talent competition, many organizations have determined the need to create a well-respected, unique, and differentiated corporate image that will serve to attract and retain more talented and qualified job applicants to the organization (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003). With creating attractiveness among prospective applicants, organizations will have a chance to select the highest skilled employees which will lead the organization to increase its intellectual capital.

Literature has garnered a vast number of perspectives for the dimensional structure of employer brand attractiveness (e.g. Ambler and Barrow, 1996; Barrow and Mosley, 2011; Lievens and Highhouse, 2003; Berthon et al., 2005). Berthon et al. (2005) have defined organizational attractiveness as “the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization.” and accentuated five main dimensions of attractiveness including economic value referring to the payment and remuneration opportunities, interest value with producing high quality and innovative products; social value provided by the organizations with interaction, communication, and collaboration among members; development value contributing the personal and career development of employees and application value through the ability to use the professional knowledge.

Cable and Turban (2001) proved that organizations having a positive reputation and creating familiarity perception for candidates have been seen as more successful in attracting job seekers due to its direction towards creating honor and self-esteem for the prospective employees (Cable and Turban, 2001; Joo and Mclean, 2006). Wahba and Elmanadily (2015) have been put forward the importance of differentiation for the employer brand and mainly enterprising, chic and ruthlessness are predictors of distinctive employer brand affecting positively employee behavior and attitudes.

As pointed out by Rampl (2014), work content and work culture are the best predictors of attractiveness. Additionally, consistent with Van Hoyer et al. (2013) executed that good working conditions and competency and differentiation of organization have made important contributions to the attractiveness while Gungordu, Ekmekcioglu, and Simsek (2014) proved that attractiveness has been determined by the working environment, economic value and image and development value provided by the organizations. Sokro (2012) studied the relationship of employer branding on employer attraction and retention. According to his study, employer branding directly influences organizational attraction as an employer in terms of the physical conditions of the organization. Organizations with a great working environment have greater levels of employer branding image and retention. On the other hand, Bevan and Wilmott (2002) revealed that 16% of respondents choose corporate social responsibility as the most or second most urgent factor affecting their job choice decision. In other words, managing diversity, giving value to differences, considering the work-life balance for employees as well as working environment has attracted the target employee market (Barrow and Mosley, 2011).

Extensive evidence indicates that a variety of employer brand ingredients has been a predictor of employer brand attractiveness by creating the perception of a great place to work. Herein, comprehension of the target labour market's expectations from employers in correct way has facilitated the achieving organizations' core aim of attracting and retaining the best-talented workforce.

## ***Instrumental and Symbolic Framework***

Lievens and Highhouse (2003) introduced the “instrumental-symbolic framework” that emphasizes the main components of organizations' image as an employer. According to this framework, the image of the organization comprises both instrumental and symbolic dimensions. Instrumental dimensions are on behalf of job and organizational characteristics which are more visible and monetary-based factors comparing to symbolic factors, such as pay, benefits, job security, educational opportunities (or career development), and task diversity. Symbolic dimensions, in other words trait inferences, are more about intangible, subjective factors which employees associate them with the organization. These symbolic image dimensions are sincerity, innovativeness, competence, prestige, and robustness.

Instrumental and symbolic image dimensions are significant precursors of employer attractiveness (Lievens, Van Hoyer, and Anseel, 2007). Lievens (2007) stated that symbolic attributes are the best

predictors of the attraction of potential, actual applicants, and current employees. These results have provided the basis for the requirement of focusing on symbolic dimensions rather than instrumental dimensions for organizational attractiveness. Ito, Brotheridge, and McFarland ((2013) stated that symbolic and instrumental benefits within the scope of employer brand have subscribed the achievement of mutual agreement between employees and employers on the basis of psychological contract theory and attraction and retention of the workforce, job satisfaction, and commitment. According to Van Hoyer et al. (2013), symbolic dimensions as good working conditions, competency, and differentiation of organizations have a crucial role in attracting the Turkish students and these potential employees have attributed more importance to symbolic framework rather than the instrumental framework.

Briefly, in terms of symbolic and instrumental image, a vast number of studies exerted that symbolic framework is the better driver of differentiation rather than instrumental framework (Lievens, 2007; Lievens and Highhouse, 2003; Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Hypotheses Development***

Nowadays organizations cope with the war for talent because of shortages in the talented workforce and changes in the profile and expectations of the workforce have complicated the survival of organizations in the highly competitive business environment. Understanding the expectation of current employees as well as the job seekers through employer branding strategies have contributed to attraction and retention of the workforce for an extended period of time. In this context, organizations have to consider the importance attributed to each dimension of employer brand due to differences in personal characteristics of both potential and current workforce.

According to the study of Gungordu, Ekmekcioglu, and Simsek (2014), female candidates give more importance to social, economic, and application value aspects of employer brand in comparison to males. Alniacik and Alniacik (2012) revealed that the perceived importance level of social value, market value, application value, and cooperation value is higher for females students. In terms of age, only the market value has statistically significant correlations with the age of the respondent (Alniacik and Alniacik, 2012) while the study of Ito, Brotheridge, and McFarland (2013) revealed that criteria of the older people being predictive in the job choice decision have not differed from younger employees' criteria.

In the study emphasizing the role of work experience, Gungordu, Ekmekcioglu, and Simsek (2014) stated that candidates who previously worked in a job tend to attract with economic value and image, socialization, and work environment compared with inexperienced candidates. Wilden, Gudergan, and Lings (2010) found that more experienced candidates tend to be more fragile in the decision stage of the application and they consider the contribution of the employers to their career, work culture, and promotion activities in the organization while less experienced candidates consider the salary, being a part of the company with strong corporate brand and other short term benefits provided by organizations and also study showed that clarity and credibility of employer brand is the crucial predictor of the attraction of more experienced workforce. On the other hand, Arachchige and Robertson (2013) revealed the strong similarity in terms of perceived attractive dimensions of employer brand for both graduate students and experienced employees.

In a similar vein, Berthon, Ewing and Hah (2005) have predicated the necessity of considering job seekers' nationality due to the likelihood of creating perceptual variation with respect to the decisiveness of employer brand factors in their job choice decision. In other words, authors have recommended the examination of whether organizations are able to develop solitary employer brand concept for potential and current employees having different cultural background or not.

In this context, Arachchige and Robertson (2011) revealed that Sri Lankan graduating students attribute greater importance to gaining experience to help a career, future opportunities for better jobs, and promoting self-esteem while Australian graduating students pay more attention to the happy working environment, above-average salary and attractive compensation package when considering potential employers. Alniacik, Alniacik, Erat, and Akcin (2014) compared ideal employer attributes of Latvian and Turkish respondents and results showed that Turkish respondents attach more importance to employer brand dimensions as recognition/appreciation from management, happy work environment, and gaining career-enhancing experience while an above-average basic salary, good promotion opportunities and having a good relationship with colleagues are the factors affecting the job-choice decision of the Latvian respondents. In

another study; Sivertzen, Nilsen, and Olafsen (2013) proved that producing innovation-based and high-quality products, psychological value creating a feeling of confidence, and application value have an important role in attracting the Norwegian students rather than monetary factors and social environment in the organizations. Roy (2008) analyzed the determinants of employer brand attractiveness for Indian companies in terms of potential employees and findings showed that mainly social environment, application value, career opportunities, and interest value provided by these companies from different sectors have been decisive in the attraction of respondents. Analyzing the employer brand attractiveness concept for collectivistic culture, Van Hoyer et al. (2013) revealed that differentiation of the organizations should be based on symbolic dimensions as sincerity and innovativeness rather than instrumental dimensions in order to lure the best possible talent to the company. In a nutshell, studies conducted in this context has been exhibited in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Previous Study about Employer Brand Dimensions for Different Cultural Context

Author	Sample	Scale	Results
Arachchige and Robertson (2011)	Sri Lankan and Australian graduating students	32 items scale of Berthon et al. (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sri Lankan                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gaining experience to help career*</li> <li>• Future opportunities</li> <li>• Promotes self-esteem</li> </ul> </li> <li>Australian                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Happy environment</li> <li>• Above average salary</li> <li>• Attractive compensation package</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Alniacik et al. (2014)	Latvian and Turkish respondents	Berthon et al. (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Turkish respondents                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition/appreciation from management</li> <li>• Happy work environment</li> <li>• Gaining career-enhancing experience</li> </ul> </li> <li>Latvian respondents                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An above average basic salary</li> <li>• Good promotion opportunities within the organization</li> <li>• Having a good relationship with your colleagues</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Sivertzen, Nilsen, and Olafsen, (2013)	Norwegian students	Berthon et al. (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• innovation value</li> <li>• psychological value</li> <li>• application value</li> </ul>
Roy (2008)	Indian MBA students	Berthon et al. (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• social environment</li> <li>• application value</li> <li>• career opportunities</li> <li>• interest value</li> </ul>
Van Hoyer et al. (2013)	Turkish students	Lievens and Highhouse (2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sincerity</li> <li>• innovativeness</li> </ul>

Drawing on the above discussion, organizations supposed to consider differences in expectation of current and prospective employees having different nationality to overcome possible challenges in global business environment arising the barrier behind of different labour market all around the world. In the light of these arguments, this study aims to contribute literature with analyzing the perception differences of German and Turkish students in terms of their expectations from ideal employers. Accordingly, we construct the following hypothesis:

*H<sub>1</sub>: Turkish and German students give importance to different attributes of employer brand attractiveness*

*H<sub>2</sub>: Turkish and German students give importance to different attributes of symbolic and instrumental framework*

## Sample, Data Collection and Instruments of the Research

This research is designed to be a quantitative research and required data is collected through surveys. Close ended questions were asked to respondents with 5-point Likert scale which is reaching out from ‘Strongly Disagree’ to ‘Strongly Agree’. To measure Turkish perception of employer branding, questionnaires are conducted to 289 Turkish students who are studying in various universities in Turkey in the field of business administration. The sample is chosen from senior and post graduate students. The logic is that these senior, master and Ph.D. students are prospective employees for organizations. For measuring German prospective perception, questionnaires are conducted on 77 German students who are studying in Universitat Bremen. The sample is chosen from senior, master and PhD students in business administration field. Data gathered from 366 questionnaires were analysed through SPSS program.

Survey is formed with 3 sections and 49 questions. The first part is consisting of 10 demographic questions to determine the demographic features of respondents. Second part comprise of questions related to employer brand attractiveness to measure the perceptions, attitudes and expectations of prospective employees from an organization. EmpAt scale, which was proposed by Berthon, Ewing and Hah (2005) is used to measure employer attractiveness. The third section contains 14 item questions related with symbolic image dimensions which describes the job and the organization in terms of subjective and intangible attributes aligned as sincerity, innovativeness, competence, prestige and robustness which is also adopted from Lievens and Highhouse (2003)

## FINDINGS

### Independent T-Test Results for Employer Attractiveness

In order to compare the differences in expectations of Turkish and German prospective employees from their ideal employer through employer attractiveness and symbolic and instrumental framework, Independent T-Test has been applied data gathered from 366 respondents and results of analysis have shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Independent T-Test Analysis Results for Employer Attractiveness

	Nationality	N	Mean	S.D.	Mean dif.	T	Sig.																																																																																																																
A1. Recognition/appreciation from management is important.	Turkish	289	4.32	.959	.309	2.560	.011																																																																																																																
	German	77	4.01	.866				A2. A fun working environment is important.	Turkish	289	4.45	.820	.424	4.008	.000	German	77	4.03	.843	A3. A springboard for future employment is important.	Turkish	289	4.27	.960	.559	4.599	.000	German	77	3.71	.901	A4. Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organisation is important.	Turkish	289	4.57	.839	.626	6.518	.000	German	77	3.95	.724	A5. Feeling more self-confident as a result of working for a particular organisation is important.	Turkish	289	4.00	1.015	.321	2.985	.003	German	77	3.68	.785	A6. Gaining career-enhancing experience is important.	Turkish	289	4.61	.770	.557	5.738	.000	German	77	4.05	.705	A7. Having a good relationship with your superiors is important.	Turkish	289	4.32	.815	.231	2.503	.013	German	77	4.09	.692	A8. Having a good relationship with your colleagues is important.	Turkish	289	4.45	.772	-.044	-4.37	.662	German	77	4.49	.805	A9. Supportive and encouraging colleagues is important.	Turkish	289	4.33	.777	.355	3.687	.000	German	77	3.97	.743	A1. Working in an exciting environment is a must.	Turkish	289	4.11	.921	.734	6.321	.000	German	77	3.38	.844		Turkish	289	4.33
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A11. Having an innovative employer (novel work practices/forward-thinking) is important.	German	77	3.45	.911			
A12. Ideal/current organisation should value and make use of your creativity.	Turkish	289	4.41	.812	.824	8.073	.000
	German	77	3.58	.732			
A13. Ideal/current organization should produce high-quality products and services.	Turkish	289	4.23	.873	5.806	.660	.000
	German	77	3.57	.938			
A14. Ideal/current organization should produce innovative products and services.	Turkish	289	4.21	.845	5.911	.636	.000
	German	77	3.57	.818			
A15. Good promotion opportunities within the organisation is important.	Turkish	289	4.41	.862	6.343	.681	.000
	German	77	3.73	.737			
A16. Having a humanitarian organisation (which gives back to society) to work is important for me.	Turkish	289	3.98	1.012	5.371	.697	.000
	German	77	3.29	1.011			
A17. Opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution is important.	Turkish	289	4.48	.769	1.984	1.082	.000
	German	77	3.40	.765			
A18. Opportunity to teach others what you have learned is important.	Turkish	289	4.12	.957	7.714	.975	.000
	German	77	3.14	1.085			
A19. Acceptance and belonging within the organization is important.	Turkish	289	4.35	.803	1.385	.116	.168
	German	77	4.23	.605			
A2. Ideal/current organisation should be customer-orientated.	Turkish	289	3.78	1.059	1.580	.172	.116
	German	77	3.61	.781			
A21. Job security within the organisation is important.	Turkish	289	4.57	.775	4.672	.645	.000
	German	77	3.92	1.144			
A22. Hands-on inter-departmental experience is important.	Turkish	289	4.12	.878	4.832	.546	.000
	German	77	3.57	.895			
A23. Happy working environment is important.	Turkish	289	4.64	.751	4.885	.462	.000
	German	77	4.18	.683			
A24. An above average basic salary is important for me.	Turkish	289	4.23	.852	2.964	.332	.003
	German	77	3.90	.954			
A25. An attractive overall compensation package (stemming benefits) is important.	Turkish	289	4.48	.846	.770	6.873	.000
	German	77	3.71	.971			

Analysis results have shown that Turkish students attribute more importance to employer brand attractiveness's dimensions except attributes of employers as "having a good relationship with your colleagues" ( $p=.662$ ), "acceptance and belonging within the organization" ( $p=.168$ ) and "being customer-oriented" ( $p= 0.116$ ). Besides, highest difference in expectancy of two groups appear in attributes focusing on "opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution" and "providing opportunity to teach others what employees have learned". On the basis of mean scores of each dimension, most decisive factors in employer choice of two groups has been exhibited in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Comparison of Most Preferred Employer Attributes

	Turkish	Mean	S.D.		German	Mean	S.D.
1	A23. Happy working environment is important.	4.64	.751	1	A8. Having a good relationship with your colleagues is important.	4.494	.805
2	A6. Gaining career-enhancing experience is important.	4.61	.770	2	A19. Acceptance and belonging within the organization is important.	4.234	.605
3	A4. Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organisation is important.	4.57	.839	3	A23. Happy working environment is important.	4.182	.683
4	A21. Job security within the organisation is important.	4.57	.775	4	A7. Having a good relationship with your superiors is important.	4.091	.692
5	A17. Opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution is important.	4.48	.769	5	A6. Gaining career-enhancing experience is important.	4.052	.705
6	A25. An attractive overall compensation package (stemming benefits) is important.	4.48	.846	6	A2. A fun working environment is important.	4.026	.843
7	A2. A fun working environment is important.	4.45	.820	7	A1. Recognition / appreciation from management is important.	4.013	.866
8	A8. Having a good relationship with your colleagues is important.	4.45	.772	8	A9. Supportive and encouraging colleagues is important.	3.974	.743
9	A12. İdeal/current organisation should value and make use of your creativity.	4.41	.812	9	A4. Feeling good about yourself as a result of working for a particular organisation is important.	3.948	.724
10	A15. Good promotion opportunities within the organisation is important.	4.41	.862	10	A21. Job security within the organisation is important.	3.922	1.144
11	A19. Acceptance and belonging within the organization is important.	4.35	.803	11	A24. An above average basic salary is important for me.	3.896	.954
12	A9. Supportive and encouraging colleagues is important.	4.33	.777	12	A15. Good promotion opportunities within the organization is important.	3.727	.737
13	A11. Having an innovative employer (novel work practices/forward-thinking) is important.	4.33	.870	13	A3. A springboard for future employment is important.	3.714	.901
14	A1. Recognition / appreciation from management is important.	4.32	.959	14	A25. An attractive overall compensation package (stemming benefits) is important.	3.714	.971
15	A7. Having a good relationship with your superiors is important.	4.32	.815	15	A5. Feeling more self-confident as a result of working for a particular organisation is important.	3.675	.785
16	A3. A springboard for future employment is important.	4.27	.960	16	A2. İdeal/current organization should be customer-orientated.	3.610	.781
17	A13. İdeal/current organization should produce high-quality products and services.	4.23	.873	17	A12. İdeal/current organisation should value and make use of your creativity.	3.584	.732
18	A24. An above average basic salary is important for me.	4.23	.852	18	A13. İdeal/current organization should produce high-quality products and services.	3.571	.938



19	A14. Ideal/current organization should produce innovative products and services.	4.21	.845	19	A14. Ideal/current organization should produce innovative products and services.	3.571	.818
20	A18. Opportunity to teach others what you have learned is important.	4.12	.957	20	A22. Hands-on inter-departmental experience is important.	3.571	.895
21	A22. Hands-on inter-departmental experience is important.	4.12	.878	21	A11. Having an innovative employer (novel work practices/forward-thinking) is important.	3.455	.911
22	A1. Working in an exciting environment is a must.	4.11	.921	22	A17. Opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution is important.	3.403	.765
23	A5. Feeling more self-confident as a result of working for a particular organisation is important.	4.00	1.015	23	A1. Working in an exciting environment is a must.	3.377	.844
24	A16. Having a humanitarian organisation (which gives back to society) to work is important for me.	3.98	1.012	24	A16. Having a humanitarian organisation (which gives back to society) to work is important for me.	3.286	1.011
25	A2. Ideal/current organisation should be customer-orientated.	3.78	1.059	25	A18. Opportunity to teach others what you have learned is important.	3.143	1.085

In this context, for employment decision Turkish respondents consider respectively to “having happy working environment”(Mean score=4.64), “gaining career enhancing experience” (Mean score=4.61) and “feeling good as a results of being a member of organizations” (Mean score=4.57) while German students reflect from “having a good relationship with colleagues”( Mean score=4.49), “acceptance and belonging within the organization”( Mean score=4.23) and “happy working environment” Mean score=4.18).

In terms of least preferred attributes, Turkish students give less importance to “working in exciting environment” (Mean score=4.11), “feeling more self-confident as a result of working for an organization”(Mean score=4.00) and “being customer-oriented” (Mean score=3.78) as an employer while “opportunity to apply what was learned at a tertiary institution”( Mean score=3.40), “working in an exciting environment” (Mean score=3.37 and “providing opportunity to teach others what employees have learned”( Mean score=3.14) in their employment decision.

Examined the most and least preferred employer brand dimensions, it is seen that importance level and order of attributes differentiates though similar characteristics have appeared in first five most decisive attributes of ideal employer. On the other hand, “having a humanitarian organization (which gives back to society)” as an employer has less effect on wish of two groups’ respondents for employment in same degree. As a result, H<sub>1</sub> is supported.

## Independent T-Test Results for Instrumental and Symbolic Framework

Employer brand attributes have also been analyzed on the basis of symbolic and instrumental framework to better differentiate basis of employer brand attributes whether focusing on more social environment and psychological benefits and opportunities or physical working environment and monetary benefits (see Table 4).

**Table 4.** Independent T-Test Results for Instrumental & Symbolic Image Dimensions

I1. The possibility to work together with different people is important.	Turkish	289	4.01	.880	.374	2.991	.03																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																				
	German	77	3.64	.999				I2. The possibility to feel part of a group and enjoying the group atmosphere is important.	Turkish	289	3.86	1.046	.118	.864	.388	German	77	3.74	1.129	I3. The possibility to work in team is important.	Turkish	289	4.11	.938	.582	4.343	.00	German	77	3.53	1.071	I4. Prospects for promotion is important	Turkish	289	4.53	.773	1.179	9.981	.00	German	77	3.35	.957	I5. Opportunities for advancement and building a career is important for me.	Turkish	289	4.56	.752	.551	5.629	.00	German	77	4.01	.803	I6. The possibility to make a lot of money is important.	Turkish	289	4.20	.930	.321	2.633	.009	German	77	3.88	1.026	I7. The wages in the sector where the organization is operating is an important indicator for me when making the decision to work.	Turkish	289	4.14	.929	.749	6.402	.00	German	77	3.39	.845	I8. Job security is an important feature in ideal organization.	Turkish	289	4.58	.723	.760	6.194	.00	German	77	3.82	1.010	I9. Ideal organization should provide a lot of variety and task diversification.	Turkish	289	4.18	.933	.427	3.588	.00	German	77	3.75	.905	S1. Ideal organization should be honest.	Turkish	289	4.68	.728	.552	4.926	.00	German	77	4.13	.908	S2. It should be sincere.	Turkish	289	4.63	.754	.834	8.556	.00	German	77	3.79	.784	S3. It should be down-to-earth.	Turkish	289	4.63	.725	1.006	9.028	.00	German	77	3.62	.904	S4. It should be trendy.	Turkish	289	3.62	1.103	.619	5.151	.00	German	77	3.00	.889	S5. It should be contemporary, up to date.	Turkish	289	4.20	.806	.308	2.995	.003	German	77	3.90	.788	S6. It should be exciting.	Turkish	289	4.10	.913	.191	1.641	.102	German	77	3.91	.891	S7. It should be corporate.	Turkish	289	4.07	1.043	.384	3.551	.001	German	77	3.69	.782	S8. It should be successful.	Turkish	289	4.46	.740	.178	1.883	.060	German	77	4.29	.723	S9. It should be a leader.	Turkish	289	4.04	.983	.344	2.829	.005	German	77	3.70	.796	S1. It should be well respected and highly regarded.	Turkish	289	4.47	.736	.513	5.438	.00	German	77	3.96	.733	S11. It should be prestigious.	Turkish	289	4.35	.894	.950	8.266	.00	German	77	3.40	.907	S12. It should have high status.	Turkish	289	4.18	.933	.855	7.118	.00	German	77	3.32	.952	S13. It should be rugged.	Turkish	289	4.32	.864	1.218	13.999	.00	German	77	3.10	.620	S14. It should be tough and steady.	Turkish	289	3.94	1.091	.340	2.572	.011
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Table 3 has illustrated the effect of nationality on the employer choice decision of the potential workforce. Examined the effect of the nationality on ideal employer preferences, it has been determined that the statements given in Table 3 were significantly different in terms nationality of respondents. According to findings, Turkish students give more importance to all symbolic and instrumental framework dimensions compared to the German respondents except “having possibility to feel part of a group” ( $p=.338$ ), “being successful in business market” ( $p=.06$ ) and “having exciting working environment” ( $p=.102$ ).

On the other hand, increasing the comprehension of differences between two groups in terms of their expectancy from employers as a brand, most and least preferred symbolic and instrumental attributes of ideal employers for both German and Turkish students have been presented in Table 5 on the basis of mean scores comparisons for each dimension.

**Table 5.** Comparison of Employers' Most Preferred Symbolic and Instrumental Attributes Regarding Culture

	Turkish	Mean	S.D.		German	Mean	S.D.
1	S1. Ideal organization should be honest.	4.68	.728	1	S8. It should be successful.	4.29	.723
2	S2. It should be sincere.	4.63	.754	2	S1. Ideal organization should be honest.	4.13	.908
3	S3. It should be down-to-earth.	4.63	.725	3	I5. Opportunities for advancement and building a career is important for me.	4.01	.803
4	I8. Job security is an important feature in ideal organization.	4.58	.723	4	S1. It should be well respected and highly regarded.	3.96	.733
5	I5. Opportunities for advancement and building a career is important for me.	4.56	.752	5	S6. It should be exciting.	3.91	.891
6	I4. Prospects for promotion is important	4.53	.773	6	S5. It should be contemporary. up to date.	3.90	.788
7	S1. It should be well respected and highly regarded.	4.47	.736	7	I6. The possibility to make a lot of money is important.	3.88	1.026
8	S8. It should be successful.	4.46	.740	8	I8. Job security is an important feature in ideal organization.	3.82	1.010
9	S11. It should be prestigious.	4.35	.894	9	S2. It should be sincere.	3.79	.784
10	S13. It should be rugged.	4.32	.864	10	I9. Ideal organization should provide a lot of variety and task diversification.	3.75	.905
11	I6. The possibility to make a lot of money is important.	4.20	.930	11	I2. The possibility to feel part of a group and enjoying the group atmosphere is important.	3.74	1.129
12	S5. It should be contemporary. up to date.	4.20	.806	12	S9. It should be a leader.	3.70	.796
13	S12. It should have high status.	4.18	.933	13	S7. It should be corporate.	3.69	.782
14	I9. Ideal organization should provide a lot of variety and task diversification.	4.18	.933	14	I1. The possibility to work together with different people is important.	3.64	.999
15	I7. The wages in the sector where the organization is operating is an important indicator for me when making the decision to work.	4.14	.929	15	S3. It should be down-to-earth.	3.62	.904
16	I3. The possibility to work in team is important.	4.11	.938	16	S14. It should be tough and steady.	3.60	.765
17	S6. It should be exciting.	4.10	.913	17	I3. The possibility to work in team is important.	3.53	1.071
18	S7. It should be corporate.	4.07	1.043	18	S11. It should be prestigious.	3.40	.907
19	S9. It should be a leader.	4.04	.983	19	I7. The wages in the sector where the organization is operating is an important indicator for me when making the decision to work.	3.39	.845
20	I1. The possibility to work together with different people is important.	4.01	.880	20	I4. Prospects for promotion is important	3.35	.957
21	S14. It should be tough and steady.	3.94	1.091	21	S12. It should have high status.	3.32	.952
22	I2. The possibility to feel part of a group and enjoying the group atmosphere is important.	3.86	1.046	22	S13. It should be rugged.	3.10	.620
23	S4. It should be trendy.	3.62	1.103	23	S4. It should be trendy.	3.00	.889

On the basis of attributes' mean score, it is seen that the Turkish students give grate importance to "honesty of ideal organization" (Mean score=4.68) and for the German students, on the other hand, same attribute has taken place on the second order (Mean score =4.13). "Being successful" is most crucial attributes for German students (Mean score =4.29) while same attribute is the eighth most important factor (Mean score=4.46) affecting their employer choice decision. In other respect, the least important feature as "being trendy" is the same for the two groups of respondents. In light of these findings, H<sub>2</sub> is supported.

## DISCUSSION

The concept of employer branding has recently become an important coping strategy with the talent shortages in today's business world. With the employer brand, organizations retain current employees and attract potential employees to the organization. However, there are many factors (age, gender, individual differences, etc.) that shape employer brand expectations of current and potential employees. In this case, organizations should consider these factors in process of building their employer brands. In this context, this study has focused on cultural differences, which is one of these factors, and has broadened our understanding of the employer branding concept by investigating the role of cultural differences. Specifically, this study empirically demonstrated that organizations need different employer branding strategies for employees having a different cultural background, which supports Berthon, Ewing, and Hah (2005).

Additionally, this study extended past studies by focusing on the role of cultural differences in Turkish and German students' expectations from employer branding. For instance, previous studies identified the most significant employer brand attributes in attracting Norwegian students (Sivertzen, Nilsen, and Olafsen, 2013), Sri Lankan and Australian graduating students (Arachchige and Robertson, 2011), Latvian and Turkish respondents (Alniacik et al., 2014). Here, we specifically compared the expectations of Turkish and German students and demonstrated that Turkish respondents attribute importance to "having happy working environment" and "gaining career-enhancing experience" whereas German students give importance to "having a good relationship with colleagues" and "acceptance and belonging within the organization". Besides, this finding also shows that both Turkish and German students attribute more importance to social value in terms of employer brand attractiveness.

In terms of symbolic and instrumental attributes, "honesty of ideal organization" has an influence on employer choice decision of Turkish students whereas "Being successful" is the most important attributes for the German students. On the other hand, although the Turkish and German students attach importance to different employer brand attributes, this study empirically showed that the most preferred employer attributes are involved in the symbolic framework of employer branding. In this context, we demonstrated that symbolic attributes are decisive in employer brand preferences for both Turkish and German students.

Based on this research, we demonstrated that personal differences influence the employment preferences of individuals in terms of the employer brand. In this regard, managers should create and manage their employer brand by taking into consideration the cultural differences of potential and existing employees. Managers should develop customized employer branding strategies rather than standardized employer brand to attract the target applicant group. We also suggest that, in line with the notion that most preferred employer attributes for respondents are symbolic, managers should create their employer brand strategies mainly based on symbolic attributes of the employer brand. On the other hand, this study revealed that respondents attach importance to social value, unlike the factors such as wages and compensation packages. In this context, managers should make an attractive social environment and develop practices increasing social interaction to attract the talented workforce.

## Limitations and Future Research

The present study has limitations in the following aspects. First, the sample is drawn from last year graduate and postgraduate students which lacks in diversity. Further research may focus on a more diversified sample in order to increase generalizability of findings. Also, further research may focus on existing employees rather than prospective in order to disentangle the difference between ideal organization and the actual one. Second, data gathered from the sample was bound to self-report. Perhaps, extending the time interval between measurements with longitudinal design could yield increased reliability. Thus, further research done with non- self-reporting measurement techniques may add value for more definite results. Last, research in various sample from understudied cultures would increase our understanding about how the concept differs among cultures.

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