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MASTER'S THESIS

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**THE ROLE OF EMPLOYER BRANDING FOR ATTRACTING
AND RETAINING THE BEST EMPLOYEES: THE CASE OF
THE INTERNATIONAL IT FIRMS IN BIH**

Ljubljana, November 2023

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AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT

The undersigned Ena Radak, a student at the University of Ljubljana, School of Economics and Business, (hereinafter: SEB LU), author of this written final work of studies with the title "The role of employer branding for retaining the best employees: The case of the international IT firms in BiH", prepared under supervision of Associate Professor Maja Arslanagić – Kalajdžić, PhD.

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Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Methodology.....	4
1.2. Structure of the thesis	4
2. INTERNAL MARKETING	5
2.1. Defining Internal Marketing and its Elements	5
2.2. Internal Marketing Practices That Influence Job Satisfaction	8
2.3. Employer Branding in Internal Marketing	9
2.3.1. Definition and Main Forms of Employer Branding	10
2.3.2. The Role of Employer Branding	11
2.3.3. Process of Employer Branding	12
3. EMPLOYER BRANDING IN BUSINESS	14
3.1. Employer Branding Strategies	14
3.1.1. Employer Branding Strategies in the Service Sector	14
3.1.2. Employer Branding Communication.....	15
3.2. Talent Attraction and Retention through Employer Branding	15
3.2.1. Employee Attraction Strategies	16
3.2.2. Employee Retention Strategies	17
3.3. The Role of Employer Branding in Talent Management	18
3.3.1. From Employee to Talent	18
3.3.2. Attracting the Best Employees in the IT Sector.....	19
3.3.3. Retaining Employees in the IT sector	20
3.3.4. Rewards and Employee Benefits	22
3.3.5. Defining/Communicating the Company's Culture/Values.....	23
3.4. IT sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina	24
4. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS	27
4.1. Methodology.....	27
4.2. Results	30
5. CONCLUSION	40
REFERENCE LIST	49
APPENDICES	54

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 - A Framework of Internal Marketing	7
Figure 2 - Employee Brand Commitment Pyramid.....	10
Figure 3 - Employer Brand Commitment Ladder	12
Figure 4 - Employer Branding Framework.....	13
Figure 5 - Global Talent Portfolio	19
Figure 6 - Value-Satisfaction-Profit Cycle	21

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 - Description of the Sample	28
Table 2 - Frequently Mentioned Terms in Interviews	30
Table 3 - Interview Summary: Concepts of Interest	32
Table 4 - Meta Matrix for Research Questions	38

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Povzetek.....	55
Appendix 2: Interview Guide	56

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IT	Information technology
EB	Employee branding
GEN Z	Generation Z
HR	Human resources
B&H	Bosnia and Herzegovina
IM	Internal marketing
IFC	Inter-functional coordination
EBCP	Employee brand commitment pyramid
EVP	Employee value proposition
TM	Talent management
IMF	International Monetary Fund
FDI	Foreign direct investment
UK	United Kingdom

1. INTRODUCTION

Massive technological advancements over the last few decades have changed the world as we know it. The exponential expansion of information technology (hereinafter referred to as IT), has been one of the most significant developments in recent years. The changes in the sphere of IT technologies are so significant that they have formed a powerful trend, which is the digitalization of the world of people and the world of things, and the creation of a 'smart' economy that represents new technology trends (Matyushok & Krasavina, 2017). These times are not only exciting for technological development, but also for technology policy, as our knowledge of how to best use, protect, and restrict these technologies has grown alongside their increased complexity (Wolf, 2021). How technological systems are structured, largely determined by government and institutional policies, has significant implications for social organization and agency, from highly distributed and decentralized open-source systems to tightly controlled and closed structures that follow stricter and more hierarchical models (Wolf, 2021).

Significant advancements in technology in recent decades have brought about profound changes globally. The rapid expansion of information technology (referred to as IT) stands out as a major development, leading to a powerful trend known as the "digitalization" of both human and object-oriented worlds. This has given rise to the creation of a 'smart' economy, embodying emerging technology trends (Matyushok & Krasavina, 2017). These times are not only exciting for technological development but also for technology policy, as our understanding of how to best utilize, protect, and regulate these technologies has grown alongside their increasing complexity (Wolf, 2021). The structuring of technological systems, largely influenced by government and institutional policies, holds significant implications for social organization and agency, ranging from highly distributed and decentralized open-source systems to tightly controlled and closed structures following stricter and more hierarchical models (Wolf, 2021). Advancements in areas such as computing power, connectivity, and data analytics have facilitated numerous innovations and improvements across various industries. Cloud computing, artificial intelligence, smartphones, and social media are among the constantly evolving products and services shaping global lifestyles and work habits. For instance, Microsoft's data centers represent highly instrumented and monitored cloud computing infrastructures globally (Yang, 2013). Microsoft's substantial investment in cutting-edge cloud computing infrastructure ensures efficient and reliable operation through real-time monitoring and management technologies. Azure Monitor, a key component, provides a unified view of performance metrics and logs for all Azure resources, employing advanced analytics for proactive issue detection and diagnosis, enabling effective data center infrastructure management (Yang, 2013).

The surge in tech-related startups is attributed to the high demand for their products and services, driving innovation across various industries. Biotechnology, medical devices, computer hardware, and software have experienced transformation due to these firms. The growing demand for technology-driven solutions has created extensive market opportunities for startups, with funding from venture capitalists and other investors supporting their development and success (Baron & Hannan, 2002).

As the number of tech-related startups and companies continues to rise, competition intensifies, leading organizations to seek a competitive edge (Cherukur, 2020). As Wolf (2021, p. 2) notes, the IT sector, like any other industry, faces its share of risks and rewards. While technological advancements offer remarkable benefits, such as new vaccines, sustainable energy sources, and innovative education methods, they also pose unexpected risks if not properly managed by IT company employees. Striking a balance between managing risks and maximizing benefits requires careful consideration and a nuanced understanding of new technologies' potential impacts on various societal aspects.

Employees are deemed a company's greatest asset, influencing its ability to compete effectively. The concept of branding, with roots traced back to medieval theologians, identifies three fundamental properties: virtuosities (function), raitas (scarcity or market price), and compatibilities (psychological benefits), shaping consumer benefits. In the context of employment, the 'Employer Brand' (hereinafter, EB) encompasses functional, economic, and psychological benefits associated with working for a particular company, forming an integral part of the company-employee relationship (Ambler & Barrow, 1996).

According to Ambler and Barrow (1996), the benefits offered by the EB to the employees mirror those provided by conventional product brands to consumers, including developmental activities, material rewards, and feelings of belonging and purpose. The EB, similar to a product brand, has a distinct personality. Traditional marketing techniques, including research, can be applied, with consistency in personality crucial for establishing trust. Employer branding's value lies in the importance employees assign to the benefits and the company's ability to differentiate itself, especially in the context of rapid growth in IT companies seeking highly skilled employees (James & Mathew, 2012).

As Ambler and Barrow (1996, p. 185) emphasize, "Many annual reports highlight the value of people and brands as essential resources." By investing in both areas, a company can enhance its overall performance and financial success, exploring the connection between employee and corporate performance for optimization (James & Mathew, 2012).

Younger generations, particularly Generation Z (hereinafter, Gen Z), express a growing interest in remote work and flexible schedules, seeking work environments that value work-life balance and offer positive social interactions. The competitive job market has led companies to offer various benefits, such as remote work options, team-building events, and support for working parents, to attract and retain top talent (Sangeetha, 2020).

While a comprehensive benefits package is essential, employer branding emerges as a crucial strategy to attract and retain top talent in the competitive job market. In the digital age, with a focus on agility and employee engagement, companies need to concentrate on their brand image as an employer. This involves identifying and communicating the unique value proposition offered to employees, both in tangible benefits and intangible values (Geke & Eisele, 2003).

Beyond its internal benefits, employer branding can impact customer experience management by aligning employees' brand experience with the desired customer brand experience. This alignment creates a brand-led culture change that resonates with both employees and customers. From a human resources (hereinafter, HR) perspective, employer branding involves identifying and promoting the unique employment experience a company provides, covering everything from compensation and benefits to organizational culture and values. By emphasizing the positive aspects of working for the company, employer branding helps potential employees understand what sets the company apart from its competitors. Employer branding is a multifaceted strategy requiring careful planning and execution, necessitating an understanding of strengths and values to develop a compelling brand promise reflecting the promise made to customers.

In-depth interviewing will be the method used to get the required data for the qualitative research methodology. An important study on talent management was carried out by Morton and Ashton (2005, p. 28–31), and it offers insightful information about the tactics and methods used in the IT industry to manage talent for competitive advantage. Based on the description of the problem, the objectives of this master's thesis are the following:

- to identify the major drivers of growth in the IT sector, such as new technologies, changing consumer demands, and emerging markets;
- to explore the impact of changing work styles, such as remote work and the increasing use of laptops and mobile devices, on the IT industry and its workforce, and to identify the key challenges and opportunities that arise from these changes;
- to provide recommendations for IT companies on how to stay competitive in the changing and rapidly growing IT market
- to evaluate and assess the current research perspectives on employer branding in the IT industry;
- to investigate the most effective employer branding strategies and techniques used by successful IT companies;
- to develop a deeper understanding of the importance of employer branding in the IT industry and its role in ensuring long-term success for companies.

Concerning the aforementioned objectives, the following research questions are defined:

- RQ1: How can an IT company differentiate itself from competitors and attract and retain the best talent in a highly competitive job market through branding?
- RQ2: How does a company's employer branding impact the recruitment and retention of top talent in the IT industry?
- RQ3: What role do employee benefits and perks play in shaping a company's employer branding in the IT industry?
- RQ4: How can companies design and implement these programs to attract and retain top talent?
- RQ5: What are the key factors related to the EB success in the IT industry?

1.1. Methodology

To collect the necessary data within the qualitative research methodology, the approach of conducting in-depth interviews will be employed. Morton and Ashton (2005, p. 28-31) conducted a notable study on talent management, which provides valuable insights into the strategies and practices of managing talent for competitive advantage in the IT industry. Ten employees from different departments occupying higher positions in various international IT companies will be selected for the interviews. These interviews will serve as a valuable source of information for understanding the strategies and practices of managing talent for competitive advantage in the IT industry.

The interview guide will be developed around the five research questions posed and related subtopics. The guide will be divided into four sections, examining:

- general questions related to the respondent's biography and business position (study and work background, current business position, and the company where the respondent works);
- work and organization of the company where the respondent works (respondent's current role, other positions, and departments in the company, work, management, and organization of business in the company);
- current implementation of employer branding in the respondent's company, and what perks are offered by employer branding there;
- working benefits of the respondent's company (types of packages and benefits that the company offers to new employees and employees in the company, which work for retention and attraction to IT talents);
- respondents' general comments and recommendations for improvement.

The obtained theoretical framework, along with the data gathered from the interviews, will be analyzed and logically arranged to provide further policy recommendations. Utilizing qualitative research techniques including vignettes, cross-case matrices, the meta-matrix approach, counting, etc., the analysis will be conducted. Additionally, the best-case scenarios will serve as a guide for the final policy suggestions. Policy recommendations will be made to present the theoretical and conceptual framework, analyze the main research problems, and ultimately extend knowledge of the significance of employer branding in attracting and retaining the best employees in the IT sector.

1.2. Structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of four main chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of technological advancements and the expansion of the IT sector globally and in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereinafter, B&H). It delves into the historical development of the IT sector, defines its key challenges in the present day, and explores its implications on employee attraction and retention. This chapter sets the foundation for understanding the context of the study, leading to the exploration of internal marketing and employer branding.

The second chapter focuses on internal marketing, offering definitions, elements, and practices that influence job satisfaction. It provides a detailed examination of the role of employer branding within the realm of internal marketing. This chapter elucidates the processes involved in employer branding and its relationship with internal marketing strategies.

The third chapter synthesizes the concepts from the preceding chapters, offering a comprehensive analysis of employer branding in the business context. It delves deeply into strategies and communication methods used for talent attraction and retention in the global IT sector specifically in B&H. This chapter also evaluates the impact of company benefits and packages on employee job satisfaction, encompassing talent management, its purpose, impacts, and specific applications.

The fourth chapter presents the data analysis. It focuses on five main concepts: roles, responsibilities, and career development of the respondents; company culture, work organization, and benefits packages offered by the company. This chapter interprets the research results and discusses them comprehensively. It concludes with appropriate recommendations and suggestions for improvements, drawing from the analyzed data and research findings.

2. INTERNAL MARKETING

2.1. Defining Internal Marketing and its Elements

"Employee interest from a marketing perspective within the company is the fundamental principle on which the idea of internal marketing is based (Smith, 2005)." According to this perspective, employees are viewed as internal customers in an internal market, represented in this case by the IT sector. Internal marketing is founded on the idea that employees within a company should work to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of that firm's external marketing. Their needs and desires are addressed, satisfied, and resolved through programs that help them grow as individuals, inspire them, and then the tools they need to participate more thoroughly and actively in exchange activities with their coworkers. As a result, the team will experience a boost in morale, strengthen work ethics, improve operational effectiveness, and most importantly, remain with the company for a long time and bring in new talent. As a result, the management must see the employees as the organization's primary market to fully appreciate the significance of their involvement in the service's marketing. To raise the degree of satisfaction, the business must design and develop its internal products its employees, and their jobs according to their needs and preferences (Chaston, 2000).

Employee performance and quality are intimately related in the service sector. As a result, the management's ability to enhance employee performance as well as the employees' attitude toward their jobs both have a big impact on the standard of the goods and services offered to clients and also on retention and the attraction of new talents. The strategic necessity of maintaining and acquiring top-tier talent has taken on crucial significance in today's intensely competitive environment, which is defined by an increasing number of IT businesses and a shortage of experienced individuals (Smith, 2005). The establishment of an environment where employees are happy and motivated is one of the biggest obstacles that organizations have in

this field, which highlights the significance of internal marketing in doing so. Internal marketing is a crucial component of effective external marketing, and employees must be viewed as internal customers (Eric, 1997, p.354). On the other hand, for customers, it is important to form relationships with businesses, not just their services. As a result, satisfied employees, whose motivation the management bases on the demands and needs of customers, will determine which factors lead to the satisfaction of external customers and the company will be able to effectively continue to work and hire new employees (Hampton, 1992, p.57).

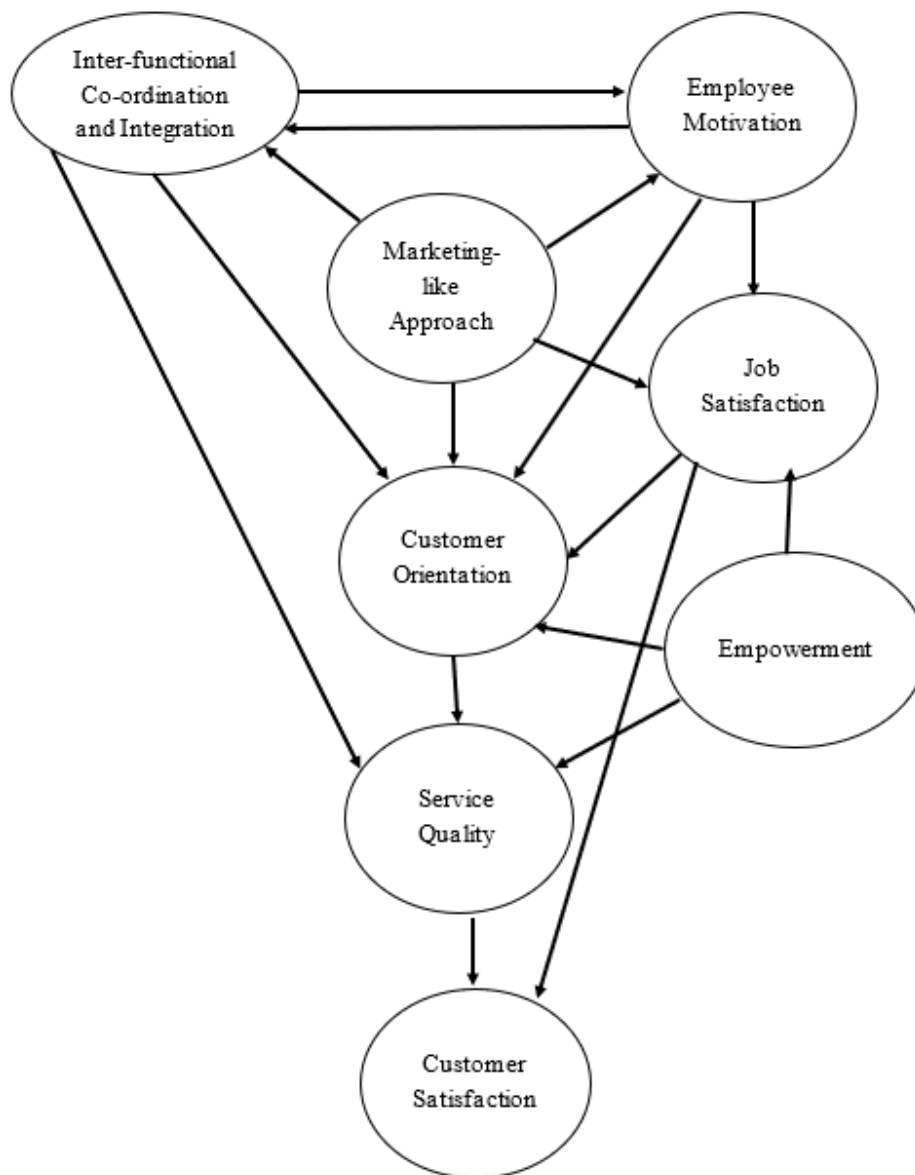
To have qualified employees by considering them internal customers, it is crucial to build and implement a good internal marketing plan (Smith, 2005). The company is going to be better prepared to identify and address the difficulties it will face in the future, both strategically and tactically. The organization will get a new, trained staff with a wealth of expertise, as well as employees who now understand how the framework is organized and feel like integral parts of their team. Given that the market for the IT profession is on the rise and developing, and there are still not many senior positions, the company should keep in mind to retain its workers in the best way possible and bring in new ones. As a result, when employees in an organization deliver a high-quality service, this will show in the positive behavior of the clients who receive the service and ultimately leave the business feeling completely satisfied (Paul, 1986, p.21).

According to the literature survey, there are a variety of surpassing definitions and strategies that all claim to deal with internal marketing. A set of standards is needed to measure each definition against each other to determine the truth of these conflicting assertions. The primary components of internal marketing were identified by Rafiq and Ahmed in 2000, based on a review of the relevant literature which are:

1. motivation and satisfaction among employees,
2. focusing on and satisfying the needs of the consumer,
3. coordination and integration amongst different responsibilities,
4. marketing-like approach to the above,
5. putting certain corporate or functional strategies into action.

These are the foundations upon which they define internal marketing as a planned effort using a marketing-like approach to overcome organizational resistance to change and to align, motivate, and inter-functionally coordinate and integrate employees toward the effective implementation of corporate and functional strategies to deliver customer satisfaction through a process of creating motivated and customer-oriented employees. Internal information, employee training, fostering a sense of community, and inspiration are just a few examples of basic internal marketing operations. These methods incorporate aspects of personnel management.

Figure 1 - A Framework of Internal Marketing



Source 1: Rafiq and Ahmed (2000)

Figure 1 depicts the interactions between the internal marketing (hereinafter, IM) criteria and the use of one specific organizational strategy, namely, service quality, which is at the core of service organizations. The core of this framework is client orientation, which is attained through inter-functional coordination and a marketing-like approach to staff motivation. The importance of customer orientation is reflected in the literature on marketing as well as its central position in achieving customer satisfaction and, by extension, organizational objectives. Of course, for the work to be organized, successfully done, and the client satisfied, the company must invest in its workers and hire new ones. Currently, in the IT sector, this is quite demanding and demoralizing considering the lack of qualified workers. Rafiq and Ahmed (2000) emphasized the crucial part that training plays in encouraging the company's employees and customers to be loyal and satisfied. They clarified that for employees to execute their tasks, they must have the proper kind and level of training. This can make their function less ambiguous and make it easier for employees to better serve consumers' demands and for the company not to experience a lack of working staff.

2.2. Internal Marketing Practices That Influence Job Satisfaction

IM, according to Che Ha, Abu Bakar, and Jaffar (2007, p.134-145), is "a crucial concept where businesses use marketing tools to recruit and retain the best employees, which improves business performance. "They identified 12 constructs of internal marketing: inter-functional coordination and integration, customer orientation, marketing-like approach, empowerment, employee motivation, quality of service, employee development, vision of the organization, and strategic reward, in addition to others.

The market orientation concept contends that marketing is not only the responsibility of the marketing department (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990) but also requires the coordinated efforts of various departments to produce superior value for customers (Narver & Slater, 1990). The aforementioned concept contributed to the birth of inter-functional coordination and integration (hereinafter IFC) as a notion. IFC, developed from the external marketing concept, also directs the researcher's attention to the literature on internal marketing. It is listed as one of the twelve internal marketing criteria in Che Ha, Abu Bakar, and Jaffar's (2007) study. All employees are viewed as internal customers by internal marketing, which implies that internal customers can be satisfied with both the organization's human resource management procedures and the internal services and coordination they receive from coworkers (Kusluvan, 2010).

Kotler (2000) defined customer orientation as "a set of actions performed by a corporation to support its sales and service team in evaluating client demands and satisfying their top priority." Creating a high-quality product that consumers like might be one business strategy that represents customer orientation. Other tactics might include handling community concerns delicately and responding swiftly to customer complaints and inquiries. To accomplish these goals, the internal marketing-like strategy treats employees as internal customers, applying marketing-like tools and activities as a result of understanding this mindset.

Empowerment, according to Wagner (1994), is "a participation process by which influence is shared among individuals who are otherwise hierarchically unequal." Empowerment is a setting where employees are allowed to make decisions and take ownership of their activities. Employee development, as per Naude (2002), is "a joint initiative of the employee and the employer to upgrade the existing skills and knowledge of an individual." To survive severe competition, staff must be up-to-date with the latest advances in the sector. There is no upper age limit for education. Learning new information is necessary if you want to keep up with the times. Training, skill-sharpening, and improving an employee's current knowledge and abilities all benefit from employee development.

According to Naude (2002), "Communication is an essential requirement for a well-functioning internal marketing-oriented culture, as there will be no inter-departmental or inter-functional coordination without people being able or prepared to communicate with each other." Dwyer (2005) defined communication as the exchange of messages among individuals inside a group or organization. Since employees have a significant impact on organizational performance (Gray & Laidlaw, 2002) and can affect many aspects of the general operation and competency

of the organization, effective internal communication is one of the most important organizational components, including job satisfaction. Higher employee satisfaction can arise from effective internal communication, providing the company with a competitive edge.

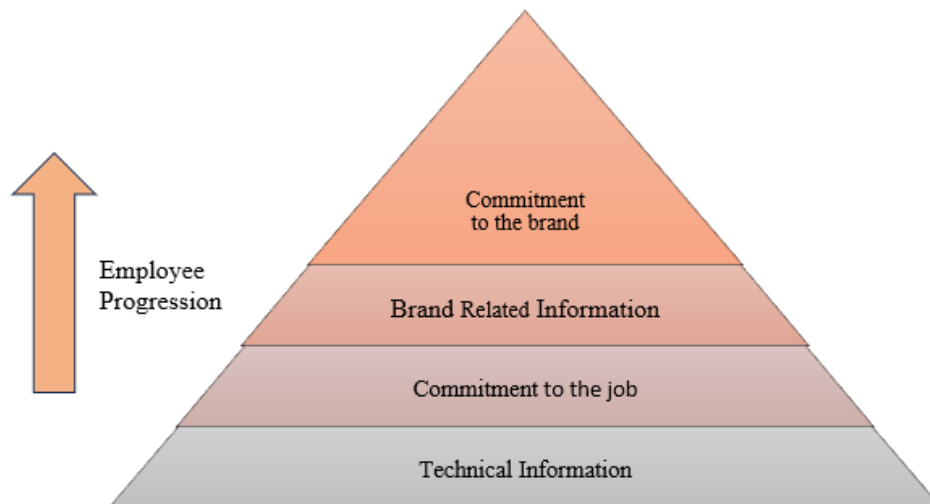
Motivation is defined as "the attribute that moves us to do or not to do something" by Broussard and Garrison (2004, p. 106). The idea of job satisfaction was introduced in the mid-1930s (Hoppock, 1935), so it is not recent in marketing literature. The emotional and physical satisfaction that employees experience at work and from their actual labor are the two main sources of their job satisfaction (Gray & Laidlaw, 2002). Employees' attitudes and actions determine the caliber of the services offered to consumers (Gray & Laidlaw, 2002). The thesis will examine how internal marketing strategies impact employee empowerment, employee engagement, and internal communication in Bosnia and Herzegovina's IT sector.

2.3. Employer Branding in Internal Marketing

The internal branding analysis has shown that whenever the corporate branding concept must be converted into how it is possible to communicate and then recruit valuable human capital, a change toward employer branding is required. Recently, there has been an increase in interest in the literature to comprehend the organizational culture and employee behaviors as seen in corporate branding. In reality, current employees and potential hires are essential to forging bonds and adding value to all the company's stakeholders (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). As a result, the study of productive human capital through employer branding is an efficient organizational strategy to acquire a competitive edge in the market (Theurer et al., 2018). The key to a company running a successful branding campaign lies in how prospective workers view the brand, which in turn affects how they approach their jobs and customers. The combination of knowledge and abilities in the workplace that inspires and spreads the business brand to the staff can have financial value for firms (King & Grace, 2008). The Employee Brand Commitment Pyramid (hereinafter, EBCP), developed by King (2008), illustrates how an employee develops a commitment to the brand by committing to brand-related information, job-related information, and eventually to the brand itself as can be seen in Figure 2 below.

Internal marketing plays a crucial role in enhancing and solidifying the elements described in the figure. The employee brand commitment pyramid, which outlines the stages of an employee's commitment and engagement with a company, can be effectively nurtured through strategic internal marketing efforts. The employee brand commitment pyramid demonstrates how a company can influence an employee's career path. Therefore, developing an employer brand serves the specific objective of influencing how the company is perceived by the external labor market so that it becomes a desirable place to work. Because of this, it is accurate to define employer brand as "the collection of functional, financial, and psychological benefits provided by employment and associated with the employing company." (Foster et al., 2010, p.403).

Figure 2 - Employee Brand Commitment Pyramid



Source 2: King and Grace (2008)

2.3.1. Definition and Main Forms of Employer Branding

Although Hetrick and Martin's (2006) definition of employer branding already gave readers a basic knowledge of the term, other definitions of the term are contrasted in the next part, from which a unique interpretation of the term will be derived. The real purpose of employer branding, however, frequently amounts to little more than motivating employees to stay with the company. Employer branding is described as the organization's perception as seen by its employees and prospective employees, and it includes both tangibles like compensation and intangibles like company culture and values.

The Conference Board offers a more thorough explanation of the idea, stating that "the employer brand establishes the identification of the organization as an employer. To attract, motivate, and retain the firm's present and potential employees, it includes the firm's value system, policies, and behaviors. Additionally, Sullivan (2004) claims that the idea is a strategy and outlines various target audiences. An employer brand is a focused, long-term plan to control how employees, future employees, and related stakeholders feel about a specific company. When all definitions are taken into account, it is clear that employer branding has a psychological component (identity or image) and has advantages for both the employee and the employer. According to this principle, employer branding is the process of creating a distinctive identity to draw in and hire candidates as well as to inspire and keep employees, all to improve a company's performance.

As existing employee perceptions are the starting point for the concept, it is crucial to remember that employer branding begins within rather than identifying current perceptions of the organization among outsiders. Although it has previously been suggested that EB shares many similarities with marketing concepts, it is important to point out any current variances. It focuses more on its fundamental principles than undertaking market research to determine what the labor market needs. The idea behind employer branding may be summed up in one sentence: If a product cannot be changed, modify how present employees view it.

2.3.2. The Role of Employer Branding

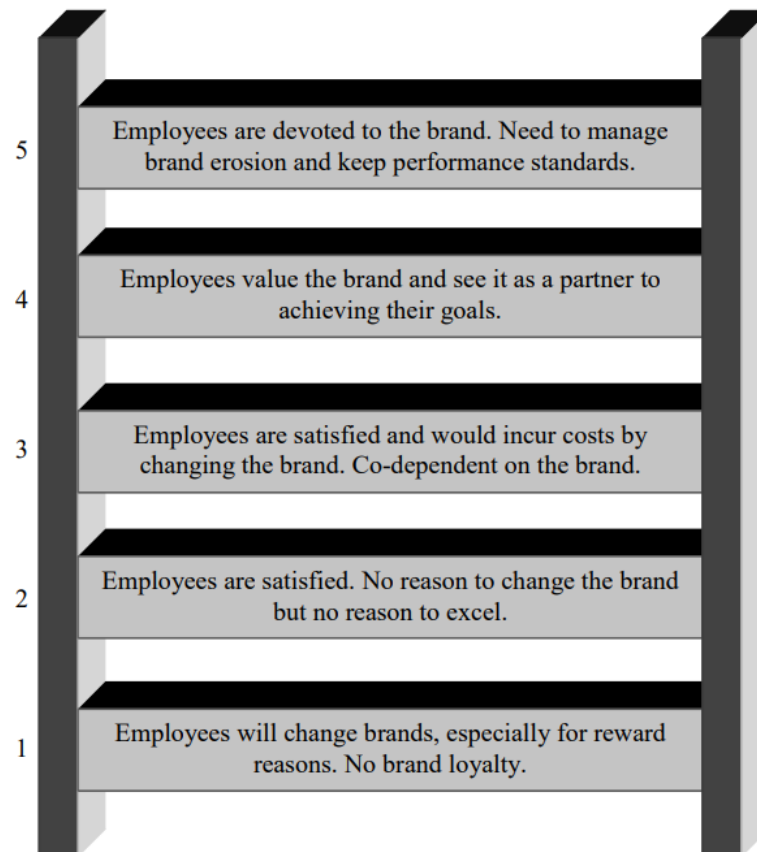
These two sections will now be connected to get a deeper knowledge and provide a strong foundation for the roles and advantages that will be deduced in the end after the identification process has become evident and the idea of employer branding has been defined. Making sure that employees have values that align with the brands of the company is one of the challenges of brand management. Individual employee identification, integration, psychological ownership, and commitment are crucial factors to take into account in this regard. Who am I, what do I believe in, and will I stay within this company are related questions? Researchers have more recently grouped these various issues under the umbrella of employee engagement. In addition to the questions mentioned above, this concept also addresses attitudes related to a belief in the organization and its mission, a desire to work to improve things, an understanding of the business context and the strategic drivers of the organization, respect for colleagues and a willingness to assist, a willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty, and staying current with developments in their field (Barrow & Mosley, 2006, p.46).

It's crucial to note that brand loyalty, a marketing phrase, and employee commitment are intertwined. Even if, for example, there are things that give a better value for the price, a customer who is loyal to a brand is less inclined to switch to another brand. To do this, Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) separate brand loyalty into two categories. One aspect of behavior is the likelihood that a buyer will buy a particular brand/product/service again. A consumer's level of loyalty to a brand is represented by an attitudinal dimension, on the other hand. This is similar to the idea of employer branding, where the behavioral component has to do with organizational culture and the attitudinal component has to do with organizational commitment. Brand-loyal employees stick with the company even when there are factors that might lead them to consider another employer, unlike customers who continue to buy a given product despite the availability of alternatives.

The definition of brand equity is similar to that of brand loyalty: "A set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand that add to or detract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers." In other words, brand equity shows that a consumer is devoted to a single brand and does not swap between them. The willingness of employees to remain working for their existing company is referred to as brand equity in the context of employer branding. It also motivates candidates to apply for a particular job. Employer brand equity is comparable to a high barrier to exit for employees when it comes to the retention of highly trained workers. According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), one goal of employer branding efforts is to build equity in the company brand. Because employer brand equity differs from company to company, current employees and applicants may respond differently to comparable recruitment and retention initiatives of organizations.

Ambler (1996) has divided employer brand commitment into five stages that Jeffery and Macioschek (2007) visualized as a ladder, as seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3 - Employer Brand Commitment Ladder



Source 3: Jeffery and Macioschek (2007)

2.3.3. Process of Employer Branding

Three phases are used to describe the EB process by different writers (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; and Lievens, 2007), through the consideration of the employee value proposition (hereinafter, EVP).

1. Establishing the EVP and distinctive requirements, such as the organization's offer, to create the employer brand.
- 1 Choosing how the EVP will be communicated outside of the business (to potential candidates, the general public, and recruiting agencies) to define the external marketing of EB.
- 2 Establishing the internal marketing of EB by deciding how the EVP will be communicated within the company and how the promises of the offer will be carried out.

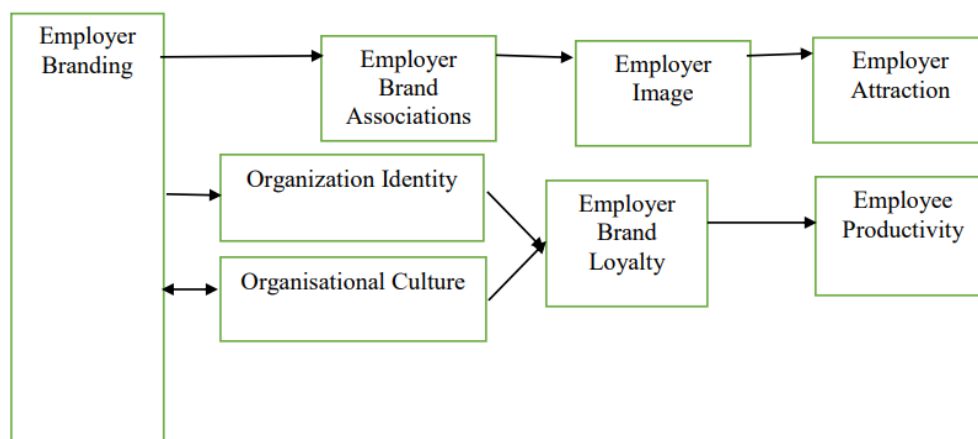
If the promises made in the EVP are kept, the authors (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Lievens, 2007) contend that the EB process is complete. However, according to Deb (2006), the process of EB begins before the creation of an employer brand. To determine how an organization is seen from the views of all relevant stakeholders, a diagnostic of its current perception must first be conducted. Finding out what the current employee profiles, EVPs, values, personalities, and differentiators are while analyzing the employer brand at a specific time is necessary (Miles & Mangold, 2005). Gaining information from target groups on the following factors might help researchers conclude how the company is positioned in the market (Barrow & Mosley, 2006):

Saliency: Would people consider the organization as a new employer and what are their perceptions of it as an employer? Name recognition: Are people likely to know the organization? Awareness: Do people know what the organization does, and what are their successes and practices? Trial: What are the reasons for applying for a job? What impression is passed through recruitment materials and activities? Brand experience: What are the first impressions of joining?

An organization can only establish the brand strategy and development to go beyond the current brand reality and achieve the desired brand vision after doing this analysis (Miles & Mangold, 2005). An organization needs the following when defining a strategy: a team of people from different departments (HR, marketing, quality, and production), expertise in the target market with knowledge of employee needs, deliverability, and confirmation of the image the organization is projecting.

The definition and segmentation of the organization's target markets and target groups are emphasized by several authors (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Mosley, 2009). They recommend segmenting the market based on the particular qualities the business needs in new hires (degree of experience, abilities, and competencies), as well as outlining the values, attitudes, and diversity it values in its workforce. These provide the perfect employees for the role and, as a result, streamline the search for a particular talent subgroup (for instance, engineering graduates). Similarly, an organization might identify the broad and narrow ambitions that guide choices for this particular profile by carrying out research.

Figure 4 - Employer Branding Framework



Source 4: Backhaus and Tikoo (2004)

An organization may, for instance, seek input from the general public (labor market mapping and external image research), current employees (employee engagement surveys and engagement drivers), candidates, or people who were rejected for the position (attraction analysis, best practice benchmarking, and segmentation), as well as the general public, candidates, and individuals who were rejected for the job. Following the development of the strategy, the EB process moves on to communicating the message by utilizing the appropriate channels and creating EB metrics to assess its effectiveness.

3. EMPLOYER BRANDING IN BUSINESS

3.1. Employer Branding Strategies

EB is a tactical strategy used to promote employee retention and attract top talent (Amelia & Nasutionb, 2016). EB positively affects the two, according to numerous studies (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Berthon et al., 2005, etc); however, the factors that cause employees to be hired or fired might vary greatly. In terms of the IT industry and employer branding, the main emphasis is on retaining current employees and attracting new ones because the field is in the process of developing and is understaffed.

3.1.1. Employer Branding Strategies in the Service Sector

In many organizations, HR is seen as an administrative cost center rather than as a crucial element in the creation and delivery of commercial value, making people management the poor relation of marketing management. This is evolving quickly. The majority of firms now recognize the critical value of finding, keeping, and developing the appropriate people. Particularly in the service sector, people have realized the critical role that staff commitment plays in generating customer loyalty and happiness. As these activities become more commercially focused, HR and internal communication practices will increasingly resemble those that are more frequently used to create and provide external value, such as marketing and brand management. (Barrow & Mosley, 2005, p.164).

As Barrow and Ambler (1996, p.197) state, the necessity to meet ever-higher quality standards for their goods and/or services confronts numerous United Kingdom (hereinafter, UK) technology-oriented businesses. They compete with one another for the greatest talent and depend on their staff to provide these advances. The level of skills is not rising to that of, say, Germany at the same time. The dedication of employees can vary and may even be lower than that of customers. It's unlikely that all businesses will be equally concerned about these problems. Businesses with a high level of customer interaction and employee contribution, like consulting, are more likely to be impacted by culture and employee morale than those where work mostly consists of manual dexterity. We see these principles as becoming increasingly significant as industrialized economies inexorably migrate from the production of products to services and greater value-added services.

3.1.2. Employer Branding Communication

Employees are the most important source of influence for customers and serve as their main point for communicating with businesses. As a result, the management must give specific information about any new services that the company intends to market as well as any changes to the way services are currently or will be marketed, such as campaigns or unique techniques that aim to deliver services at the appropriate time and location. This makes it easier for the service provider to persuade clients since they have quick access to the information they need, which leads to benefits that are obvious to clients at the moment of service. An interactive conversation between management and employees necessitates the creation of a mechanism that disseminates information to employees without altering its nature and gets around communication barriers like poor performance and poor coordination between marketing initiatives. The majority of these challenges can be readily overcome by giving employees the knowledge and training they need to improve their ability to communicate with external clients and by enrolling employees who have direct customer interaction in intensive training programs in this area. (Schneider et al.,1980, p.425).

The most important aspect of internal marketing is the communication tools with employees. Most businesses spend money on internal communication initiatives to inform employees about their duties and to explain the organization's past and history. Information can be communicated to employees using a variety of channels, including newscasts of annual reports, Inter-Agency Response Systems, meetings, conferences, emails, and more (Ballantyne, 2000, p.2). A two-way conversation with an employee involves both parties. Due to obstacles to communication in one direction or miscommunication throughout the communication process, communication might be unsuccessful in some businesses. Therefore, businesses must prioritize strengthening two-way lines of communication in addition to synchronizing first-line employees with clients and the rest of the company. Employees face the risk of failing to communicate with one another, which could hurt first-line employees who deal with clients directly. To address the lack of cooperation and communication among employees, many firms might redesign their internal communication channels and delegate many of the current communications activities. Internal communications need to be managed and reformed to serve as a channel for workers to voice their desires and issues rather than only receive directives (Ballantyne, 2000:2).

3.2. Talent Attraction and Retention through Employer Branding

Companies have transformed their approach to human resource management in light of the growing recognition of the value of human capital in the industrial age. No longer perceived merely as a resource for delivering products and services, the workforce is now acknowledged as essential to the capacity of service-based businesses. Firms have come to realize that engaged and responsive employees lead to satisfied and loyal customers. Drawing from insights in internal marketing, particularly within the realm of services marketing, and the field of organizational behavior, businesses have developed a nuanced understanding of theirs. According to Smith (2010), a prominent expert in organizational behavior, the synergy between

internal marketing strategies and organizational behavior principles has revolutionized human resource management. Many modern businesses regard their most valuable asset as their satisfied customer base. This perspective, intertwined with the understanding that employee organizational commitment significantly influences customer satisfaction, has reshaped recruitment and retention strategies.

In the competitive landscape of today, attracting and retaining skilled employees is a formidable challenge. Committed employees enhance customer satisfaction and contribute substantially to cost savings through reduced recruitment and training expenses. The loyalty of employees is fundamental to the ability of service organizations to adeptly respond to the demands of external customers. Moreover, maintaining a stable workforce and fostering long-term relationships, coupled with unwavering organizational commitment, bestows multifaceted advantages. It not only ensures operational efficiency by relying on a cadre of experienced employees but also curtails the need for extensive and costly external marketing efforts. This strategic approach not only safeguards the company's market position but also acts as a barrier, preventing competitors from gaining substantial market share.

In this intricate interplay between internal marketing strategies, organizational behavior insights, and the expertise of thought leaders like Smith (2010), businesses find a holistic and sustainable model for human resource management. Embracing this comprehensive perspective allows companies to navigate the complexities of the modern business landscape, fostering enduring success and growth.

3.2.1. Employee Attraction Strategies

The talent war has its focus on the IT industry nowadays. It has become more challenging to fill new roles due to the shortage of skilled employees. While attractive compensation is frequently used to attract top employees, employer branding is a superior and more efficient strategy. There is a significant rate of employee turnover and a still greater number of employees who are not satisfied with their work. Another explanation is that people don't think their jobs are interesting or difficult enough to warrant sticking around at their companies for a while. By offering them an exceptional workplace, competitive pay and benefits, and a solid leadership team, businesses must continually work to keep their employees satisfied. The pandemic's widespread resignation also had an impact on efforts made in all areas to retain employees (Napoleon, 2020, p.2).

For example, remote work is one of the most requested conditions in IT organizations. Working remotely encourages employees to extend their workday beyond the confines of the traditional office environment. This is based mostly on the idea that there is no need for work to be done in a particular location. Remote work, in which employees complete their jobs and fulfill their desires wherever they choose, results in far higher productivity than working from a fixed workstation and going to an office every day. Employees who work remotely find it easier to balance work and personal obligations, and the pauses between workdays provide them time to engage in domestic and outdoor activities (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020).

When all definitions are taken into consideration, it is clear that employer branding has a psychological component (identity or image) and has advantages for both the employee and the employer. Within this thesis, employer branding is defined as the process of creating a distinctive identity to draw in and hire candidates as well as to inspire and keep employees, all to improve a company's performance.

3.2.2. Employee Retention Strategies

A successful employee retention plan can give an organization an edge over others and be the difference between success and failure. To fully understand the subject, the core of the issue is still not sufficiently explored. James and Mathew (2012) state that "employee retention is a process in which the employees are encouraged to remain with the organization for the maximum period of time" (p. 80). However, keeping employees on board benefits both the company and the individual employee. It is advised that businesses keep their top personnel in order to operate effectively (James & Mathew, 2012).

According to Ongori (2010), the most crucial characteristics of employee retention are "job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment" (p. 52). These characteristics are closely connected, although they are still distinct (Ongori, 2010). "The feelings, beliefs, and thoughts about the work" are covered by job satisfaction. An employee contains both positive and negative traits. Job satisfaction is closely connected with employee retention and turnover. Increased job satisfaction results in lower turnover and more retention, and vice versa. Additionally, productivity and creativity are increased when a worker is satisfied with their position. Employment involvement refers to how much an individual identifies with their employment and how committed they are to the work they are doing. The likelihood that an employee will stay with the company increases with increased job involvement. Job engagement, sometimes referred to as job involvement, has a favorable impact on organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

The relationship an employee has with the organization and the degree of his or her loyalty and attachment to the business is described as organizational commitment (Ongori, 2010). Organizational commitment, according to Meyer and Allen (1991), can be divided into three distinct attributes: affective, normative, and continuing commitment. The bond an employee has with the company is known as affective commitment. With effective commitment, the worker determines for themselves whether continuing with the company is advantageous. The employee only remains with the company because of their obligations, according to normative commitment. The employee thinks that quitting will let the company down since they feel obligated to the company. Continuous commitment, the third quality, refers to the belief held by the employee that they require the organization in their lives. Due to the high cost of leaving the company, the employee continues to work there (Bilgin & Demirer, 2012).

3.3. The Role of Employer Branding in Talent Management

One of the most difficult tasks faced by organizations in today's highly competitive global labor market is talent acquisition. According to research, organizations may differentiate themselves, attract, and retain skilled employees by implementing talent management techniques and putting resources into employer branding. To create good talent management in the organization, a variety of HR services, including recruitment, performance management, competency mapping, career development, training and development, and pay systems, are used. In order to meet a company's business goals, talent management primarily entails attracting, acquiring, managing, and measuring the talent required. These are the principles of employer branding, according to Botha, Bussin, and De Sward (2011) in the project "Employer Brand Predictive Model for Talent Attraction and Retention," to attract, manage, and develop talent successfully for attaining their organizational goal:

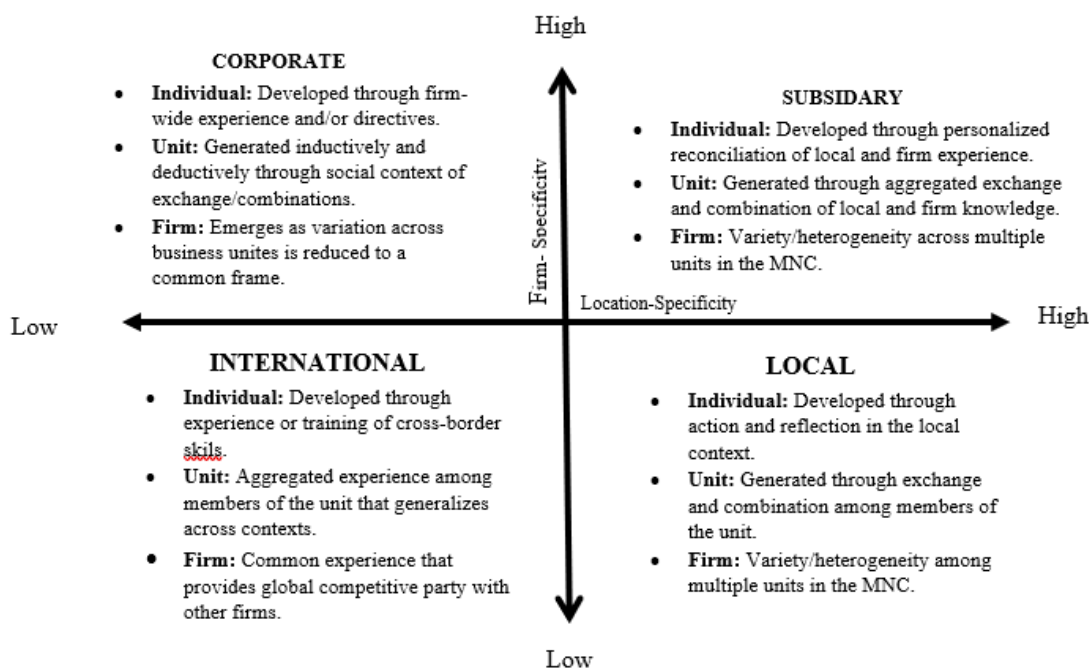
1. **Assisting with recruitment:** Talent management makes it easier to evaluate candidates effectively; top performers are frequently thought to identify their defining traits and match them to the needs of the organization.
2. **Allows an organization to fill positions internally:** Through performance management and employee development, talent management aids in an effective assessment of the manpower to fill an internal vacancy.
3. **Transparency:** Organizations are uncertain whether or not to inform employees that they are considered talented. It may appear that if an organization adopts an open-minded perspective and believes that everyone has skill, then it is safe to inform everyone, but if only a small group is recognized as having talent, then it is truly advantageous to inform them. As a result, organizations with effective talent management systems are transparent.
4. **Developing High Potentials:** Developing competence inside the organization is essential to creating a talent management system, regardless of whether the main aim is individual competence or organizational competence.
5. **Managing Diversity within a Talent Management System:** For certain organizations, the challenge is not only managing talent but also managing different types of talent, such as skilled women. Female executives are leaving their jobs at a rate that is twice that of men due to dissatisfaction with their work environment. administration system and career path development.

3.3.1. From Employee to Talent

The most important thing to keep in mind is that talent is not a generic concept (Alziari, 2017). This means that various environments should not define talent the same way; what is considered talent in one environment could not be in another. Instead, the organization's objectives, strategies, and needs for particular skills determine talent. Instead, talent management (hereinafter, TM) should concentrate on hiring and developing employees who excel in the areas in which the company requires them to excel (Alziari, 2017).

Four global talent factors are examined in the Global Talent Portfolio Figure 5. By illustrating how location and internationality affect what the term "talent" actually means, this image aids in the explanation of what talent inside an organization might entail. Depending on whether the environment is local or global and if the business in question is the corporate headquarters of a larger company, a smaller company, or a regional office. Corporate, subsidiary, international, and local are the four dimensions that the model offers (Morris et al., 2016). Particularly in local and subsidiary industries, talent management appears to be more individualized and talent-focused. However, in corporate and international settings, larger groups and organizational-wide initiatives appear to have a greater influence on talent. It is relatively simple to conclude local companies in terms of their operations based on this model, even though companies differ significantly depending on whether they are national or international and despite the fact that the majority of the organizations studied here are national companies (Morris et al., 2016).

Figure 5 - Global Talent Portfolio



Source 5: Morris et al. (2016)

The concept of "human capital" should be taken into consideration when discussing talent and human resource management. According to Morris et al. (2016), this phrase is viewed as anything that is inextricably linked to the people or environment in which it is developed. According to Becker (1993), an organization itself is responsible for the development and maintenance of its human capital, taking into account its own cultures, practices, and organizational structures – factors that are not always transferable to other businesses.

3.3.2. Attracting the Best Employees in the IT Sector

Given the decreasing youth population in numerous industrialized countries, firms compete hard to attract young talent, especially in the IT sector. Businesses must therefore take into account the unique circumstances, interests, values, motivations,

and goals of this younger generation in order to appeal to the Generation Y (born after 1982) market. Therefore, to meet expectations, organizations should implement differentiated TM activities (McCracken et al., 2015). As defined by job searchers' opinions of how other people see the organization as an employer, employer reputation, also known as the public evaluation of an organization, affects application behaviors (Kashive & Khanna, 2017).

In addition to the advantages of hiring talent in an IT company, it is crucial to look further into how a good reputation in the field of human resources may considerably improve the company's capacity to recruit potential employees. According to Ferris et al. (2007), a company's reputation in the human resources sector acts as a powerful magnet, attracting a pool of highly qualified and driven people who have the necessary skills to succeed in the rapid IT industry. When a company consistently offers its employees fair treatment, opportunities for advancement, a great work environment, flexible work arrangements, a supportive work culture, and work-life balance initiatives, these qualities are recognized across the sector. This has a cascading effect that affects stakeholders, including clients, partners, and investors, in addition to prospective candidates.

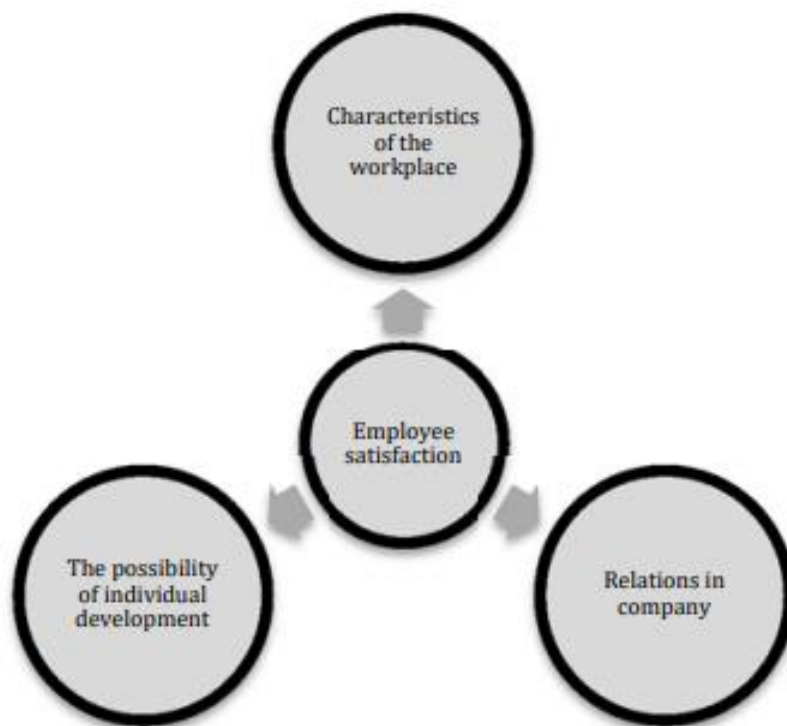
3.3.3. Retaining Employees in the IT sector

By examining the literature, it was disclosed that the elements influencing employee retention may be divided into three categories related to the workplace, interpersonal relationships within the organization, and the potential for employee development. According to Hill (2006), not all categories of characteristics or specific elements within each category have an equal impact on employee satisfaction (Figure 6). Therefore, it is crucial for businesses to comprehend the variables and their interactions that have the greatest positive effects on employee satisfaction and to work to improve these variables. The following categories apply to these factors:

1. Factors affecting the workplace include making sure that working conditions are met and designing an organization that is tailored to the requirements of particular employees or groups of employees to allow them to demonstrate their potential and exploit and develop it in order to advance business operations. Factors affecting the workplace dynamics in IT companies and influencing employee retention encompass competitive salary packages, opportunities for professional growth, a supportive work environment, and the integration of remote work options to meet evolving preferences.
2. Creating a happy workplace environment and relations, taking an interest in employees' personal lives, and having a favorable managerial attitude are all factors that contribute to the company's favorable atmosphere. It is essential to start making adjustments in this area in order to increase employee satisfaction because some components of this aspect can be modified and adjusted quite rapidly. Therefore, employees' behavior reflects the relationships and pleasure in the workplace.

Factors related to employee development process and clear career path are starting to understand the importance of education and the development and improvement of their own skills for one's survival on the job market and one's advancement within the organization. As a result, the business whose management promotes the aforementioned values will have satisfied, well-coordinated, and motivated employees.

Figure 6 - Value-Satisfaction-Profit Cycle



Source 6: Hill (2006)

The satisfaction of employees with university degrees is significantly less correlated with performance than that of employees with lower qualifications, and there are differences between administrative and production employees when it comes to measuring work satisfaction. In order to better manage their human resources, businesses now occasionally conduct workplace satisfaction surveys. These are typically major businesses or businesses that collaborate with overseas organizations. One of these surveys is chosen to receive the highest level of participation. An employee who is happy with what they do is more motivated, less likely to make mistakes, and better able to handle stress one of the main issues in the modern workplace. The economic performance of the organization is impacted by these psychological elements, such as satisfaction and stress. When it comes to working with clients, underperforming employees often fail to meet expectations, which can result in a significant loss of clients who switch to the competition and use their services. Along with rating swings, the company's negative effects include dissatisfied employees' propensity to depart, which necessitates the hiring of more staff and incurs additional expenses for recruiting, hiring, training, and deploying new staff.

Businesses can lower turnover rates by doing activities such as:

- A realistic perspective on employment search
- The impact of work enrichment on employee satisfaction
- Numerous award schemes
- Frequent and close interactions between managers and new employees.

People are only willing to leave a higher-paying job to work in a structured office environment because relationships between coworkers and between coworkers and managers are so crucial. These involve a financial scenario where maintaining a job is not the main goal (Hill 2006).

3.3.4. Rewards and Employee Benefits

According to (Armstrong, 2002, p.143), an organization's integrated policies, processes, and practices targeted at rewarding its employees based on their ability, competence, and value to the market make up an employee incentive system. The organization's reward philosophy and policies, which consider the proper types and amounts of salary, benefits, and other forms of compensation, form the foundation of the employee reward system. It is regulated by the necessity to recognize excellent performance and effectively communicate what is crucial to the organization. One specific objective of employee rewards is to support efforts to attract, keep, and inspire talented employees.

Rewarding employees in the organization fairly and consistently is one of reward management's goals. According to Aksakal and Dagdeviren (2014), the purpose of a compensation system in an organization is to encourage employees to contribute to attaining the company's strategic goals. But earnings are simply one aspect of incentive management. In order to boost the organization's profitability and flexibility, it is concerned with employee perks and non-financial rewards (training, development, and environment). The term "employee benefits" refers to a wage that is not a salary or hourly rate. Meal vouchers, paid time off, medical insurance, retirement plans, net allowances, educational support, childcare, financial planning, and employee assistance programs are a few examples of particular employee benefits. Benefits programs within businesses play three key roles: protection, paid time off, and accommodation and enhancement. Employee benefits come from two main sources: the government, which has rules governing benefits that are legally mandated, like Social Security, and businesses, which may provide additional benefits at their discretion (Armstrong, 2007).

Protection programs offer benefits to families, advance health, and protect against income loss caused by extreme circumstances like serious sickness, unemployment, or disability. By providing protections to employees and their families due to loss of income or illness, protection programs most closely resemble the benefits that are legally required to be provided. Due to both their perceived worth and the staggering financial impact of escalating healthcare costs, healthcare plans are seen as the primary component of employee benefit packages. A wide range of services that support good physical and mental health are covered by health insurance, including physical examinations, diagnostic tests, surgery, hospitalization, psychotherapy,

dental care, and corrective prescription lenses for vision problems. Also, family assistance programs, employee educational benefits, and support services for everyday living are examples of benefits that aim to promote the mental and physical health of employees and their families (Martocchio, 2009, p.136). Since the workforce is becoming more diverse in terms of age, gender, and culture, flexible benefit plans have become most popular in the IT sector. A flexible benefits program gives individuals the option of selecting from a variety of components or levels (Bakacsi, 2003). In the evolving landscape of modern work arrangements, the concept of remote working and the ability to work from anywhere has introduced new dimensions to flexible benefit plans. In addition to the conventional array of benefits, such as pension plans and life insurance coverage, forward-thinking companies are now extending flexibility to encompass remote work privileges and location independence. The employees' daily schedules are managed so that they can live their professional and personal lives to the utmost extent possible with pride and harmony. Employees who work remotely find it easier to balance work and personal obligations, and the pauses between workdays provide them time to engage in domestic and recreational pursuits (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020).

Employees have the opportunity to tailor their benefits by choosing options like extra vacation days, increased compensation, or even the allocation of bonuses in various forms, reflecting the dynamic nature of contemporary work preferences and the growing importance of remote work in shaping the modern employment experience. The structure of flexible benefit plans varies significantly. Flexible systems occasionally only cover a tiny fraction of the benefits covered by the plan, which limits their reach. For instance, some companies allow their workers to trade off overtime for more money or additional vacation days. The size and characteristics of their leasing automobile, the value of their pension plan, their life insurance coverage, and other options are all available to employees at other firms. They can also choose the payout form of their bonus (cash, a pension plan contribution, or shares, for example) (Baeten & Verwaeren, 2012).

But are all IT companies prepared to introduce this level of flexibility in employee benefits? Different levels of HR maturity can be seen in organizations, and some of these HR attitudes are more open to cutting-edge HR practices, including the implementation of a flexible benefit plan. Before implementing a flexible compensation scheme, a firm must reach a specific level of HR "maturity." To begin using incentives for flexibility, a company must be at least in the stage of controlled expansion, which is marked by an increase in managerial professionalism (Baeten & Verwaeren, 2012).

3.3.5. Defining/Communicating the Company's Culture/Values

Employer branding should be developed and put into practice, but first, the organization needs to understand its culture. No strategy, no matter how good it may be, will be effective if it is not embraced by the organizational culture and values. Organizational identification is more likely to be attracted by an employer branding that is well-known and trustworthy. Employees' shared comprehension of organizational concepts aids in the development of organizational identity. Managers should take informal relationships and corporate culture into consideration when changing or developing factors that affect motivation and/or

coordination. These changes can be made without the consent of the workforce, but if the culture is not considered, the new structure may disrupt a highly advantageous but unofficial aspect, which in turn may upset the entire organization (Edwards, 2010).

Talented individuals are increasingly drawn to organizations that exhibit a congruence between their own deeply held values and the prevailing culture within the company, a factor that significantly impacts long-term retention. The symbiotic alignment of personal values with the company's underlying ethos not only fosters a sense of belonging but also shapes the strategic approach to talent management. Moreover, the communication of culture and values extends beyond the realm of employees. It extends to the external landscape, permeating marketing campaigns, client interactions, and partnerships. The company's cultural authenticity becomes a hallmark of its brand, resonating with clients who share similar values and establishing a foundation of trust. Effective communication of the established culture and values is equally pivotal. Clear, consistent, and transparent communication strategies serve as conduits through which the essence of the company's identity is disseminated. Through various channels such as internal meetings, written materials, and digital platforms, employees are continually reminded of the cultural tenets that underpin their professional journey. This reinforcement not only bolsters alignment with organizational goals but also boosts morale and engenders a strong sense of camaraderie. In essence, developing and communicating a company's culture and values is a dynamic process that affects the reputation and personality of the company. It is a dynamic tapestry that interweaves the goals, beliefs, and deeds of its participants, ultimately affecting not only employee retention but also the course of the business's growth and effect (Jones, 2007).

3.4. IT sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country with a small population, which means it is a small developing country. According to that, Kuznets (1960) says that small countries are those with less than 10 million inhabitants, while the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (hereinafter, IMF) hold small countries to be those with less than 1.5 million inhabitants. In 2017, there were 144 small countries (World Meters, 2017). The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Srpska make up Bosnia and Herzegovina's complex constitutional-legal structure, which is another factor contributing to the transition's unfinished status. As Popović (2019) states, the economic growth of this country could not always keep up with the progress of its western neighbors. On the other hand, due to more complicated life circumstances, the inhabitants of this country had to be innovative and focused to compensate for the objective shortcomings of the system that they could not influence. Being small and still underdeveloped, B&H did not manage to create its own trading companies that were able to participate equally in international trade with global giants. These services were limited in the past by the fact that buyers and sellers had to be close to each other to reduce transportation costs. Although goods could be transported between countries, most of the services in international trade were provided by foreign firms, while domestic traveling salesmen performed a smaller part of the work, and their number was also limited. Thanks to the use of

new telecommunication and information technologies, borders are being erased and people are becoming closer to each other. New technologies greatly improve the exchange of goods and services and offer the possibility of conducting trade at a distance, which has developed electronic commerce. This is likely to have a significant impact on both foreign direct investments in services and the role of transnational corporations in the service sector. The development of the IT sector is especially important for developing countries that are interested in taking advantage of new opportunities and increasing the offer of their services on the world market. In this way, less developed countries will increase their service capacities over time, build a strong autochthonous service industry, strengthen their competitiveness, and increase their exports.

Information technology has proven to be a key technology in the past decade all over the world. The widespread diffusion of the Internet, mobile telephony, and broadband networks shows how globally important this technology has become. Statistics have shown that developing countries with a strong national IT industry tend to perform better at attracting foreign direct investment (hereinafter, FDI). At the beginning of this century, many IT companies were founded in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Several of them were founded by B&H citizens who live abroad and who had the opportunity to acquire the latest knowledge in the field of informatics. These firms have had a positive impact on the growth of domestic gross income, not only through the software engineers who work for them but also through many other services that these companies need, such as accounting, legal services, education, banking, etc. It has been shown that the IT industry has significant potential to drive economic growth by creating new jobs and generating new income. The positive effect of the IT industry on the creation of new jobs is reinforced by the fact that IT is a labor-intensive industry. As a comprehensive technology, the IT industry is a driver of innovation, products, and processes in other sectors of the economy. Currently, this sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina generates about 500,000,000 BAM of income per year, and the average salary of the employees is much higher than the average in the country. At the moment, there is the potential to employ an additional 6,000 people in an industry that is environmentally friendly and has excellent working conditions. By joining companies from this sector, several organizations were founded that work to improve the status and conditions of the IT industry in the country. In addition to the necessary professional education, the education is reinforced with additional internal training (Popović & Erić, 2018).

Times are changing rapidly, and new market conditions along with a strong IT industry bring opportunities that have never been presented before. The difference in the level of development between countries was dictated by the natural resources, mobility, trade, tourism, and other sectors that a country possessed. Unlike previous times, the IT sector has moved and erased borders, creating more opportunities for each country to overcome its shortcomings. Bosnia and Herzegovina can accelerate its overall development thanks to a solid base in the IT industry, whose capacities are not sufficiently utilized. Additional cooperation between the government and the IT sector would open up enormous opportunities, create many jobs, and bring Bosnia and Herzegovina to the level of developed countries.

The challenges facing Bosnia and Herzegovina when it comes to the promotion of the IT sector can only be effectively solved by a joint approach that includes all relevant stakeholders, from the government and other institutions through donors, industrial associations, the academic community, all the way to clusters and companies. One of the biggest challenges facing the IT sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the lack of educational staff who want to work and transfer knowledge to younger generations. By increasing salaries, Bosnia and Herzegovina companies try to keep their staff in demand abroad. Due to the high contributions to wages and business burden, they are losing not only the market but also the employees. Adding to the problem is the fact that young people are increasingly leaving the country in search of better business opportunities, and among those who are leaving are a large number of IT experts. IT experts from the countries of Central Europe and the Balkans are open to attractive business opportunities and express a relatively high willingness to travel abroad for work. In addition to having a negative effect on the operational business of the IT industry, the departure of professional IT personnel from Bosnia and Herzegovina also results in potentially large economic losses.

The significance of employer branding cannot be overstated, particularly within the context of the challenges faced by Bosnia and Herzegovina's IT sector. The intricate web of obstacles encompassing educational shortages, talent outflow, and market competitiveness demands a unified effort from all relevant stakeholders. Through this thesis, we aim to illuminate the enormous importance of employer branding in IT companies. By strategically enhancing the attractiveness of IT companies as employers, we can motivate skilled professionals to remain and contribute to the growth of Bosnia and Herzegovina's technological landscape. This involves not only addressing compensation concerns but also cultivating an environment that nurtures talent, fosters innovation, and creates meaningful opportunities for career development. A comprehensive strategy involving government initiatives, academic collaboration, industrial organizations, and organizational endeavors is necessary for preventing talent outflow. Additionally, such initiatives could ignite a massive wave of constructive change that spreads throughout the IT industry and the broader economy.

In summary, the goal of this master's thesis is to shed light on the critical role that employer branding plays in the creation of the IT industry in Bosnia and Herzegovina. By emphasizing the mutually beneficial relationship between successful employer branding and long-term industry growth, we are hoping to unlock the door for a time when IT professionals in the nation not only choose to stay but are also given the tools they need to succeed. As a new era, approaches, the hope is that this research will spark a widespread commitment to strengthen the foundations of the IT sector and, consequently, the entire country. By engaging in the forthcoming qualitative research segments, we aim to show vital insights and consequential outcomes of this issue. These insights will be garnered through interviews with IT industry professionals actively operating in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

4. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

4.1. Methodology

To gain a better understanding of the role and contribution of employer branding in the IT sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina, additional primary research was conducted in the form of qualitative research. The definition of qualitative research given by Hammersley (2013, p. 12) is "a form of social inquiry that tends to adopt a flexible and data-driven research design, to use relatively unstructured data, to emphasize the essential role of subjectivity in the research process, to study a small number of naturally occurring cases in detail, and to use verbal rather than statistical forms of analysis." The study's methodology was content analysis, which Mayring (2000, p. 1) claims retains the benefits of quantitative content analysis while transferring and expanding them into qualitative-interpretive processes of analysis.

Five research problems were experimentally addressed through the case of information technology companies located in Bosnia and Herzegovina based on the identified research topic:

- RQ1: How can an IT company differentiate itself from competitors and attract and retain the best talent in a highly competitive job market through branding?
- RQ2: How does a company's employer branding impact the recruitment and retention of top talent in the IT industry?
- RQ3: What role do employee benefits and perks play in shaping a company's employer branding in the IT industry?
- RQ4: How can companies design and implement these programs to attract and retain top talent?
- RQ5: What are the key factors that are related to employer branding success in the IT industry?

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were done, with the questions focused on five key concerns (see Appendix 2) (Granot, Brashear & Motta, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Those are (1) general questions related to the respondent's biography and business position (study and work background, current business position and company where the respondent works), (2) questions related to the work and organization of the company where the respondent works (respondent's current role, other positions and departments in the company, work, management, and organization of business in the company), (3) questions related to the current implementation of employer branding in the respondent's company, and what perks are offered by employer branding there, (4) questions related to the working benefits of the respondent's company (types of packages and benefits that the company offers to new employees and employees in the company, which work for retention and attraction to IT talents); (5) questions related to respondents' general comments and recommendations for improvement in the IT sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The respondents were not familiar with the aforementioned concepts and interview questions, i.e., the interview started with general questions regarding their current business position and the company where they work, the structure of the respondent's career path development, and the organization of the entire company, which further guided respondents to reveal more detailed insights related to benefits and activities

that attract and retain employees, and finally their experience with employer branding in the company, their opinion, and advice for further improvement. The interviewing process was not interrupted by the interviewer, even when it diverged from the original interview framework. The interviews conducted revealed the recurring determinants in different companies and helped us answer the five main research questions. To examine the role of employer branding and its contribution to the IT sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the research was conducted with eight different companies that provide information technology services and are headquartered in Sarajevo. Furthermore, in order to compare findings and draw insightful conclusions, we sought to explore the use of employer branding in as many different settings as possible, so we purposefully included ten respondents from various IT departments in those mentioned companies. The sample consisted of respondents from the Hardware and Software Department, Quality Assurance Department, Development Department, IT Support Department, Marketing Department, and HR Department.

The study was carried out in Bosnia and Herzegovina between July and August of 2023. Respondents' personal information was gathered for the first time using semi-structured interviews. All ten of the contacted respondents agreed to take part in the study. Depending on the respondents' availability and desire to provide more or less informative responses, the data collection intervals ranged from 15 to 30 minutes. Eight company executives were interviewed for a total of ten interviews. All ten interviews proceeded well, and transcripts were created for additional study. Additionally, we were able to reach "theoretical saturation" for the previously identified themes of interest thanks to the recurring patterns that the interviews showed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 203). Some respondents requested confidentiality throughout the data collection process, so each interview was given a code in the form of an alphabet letter, which will be used in the following text as a reference to the discussions and elaborations related to the interviews (shown in Table 1). A description of each company is also included in Table 1 to provide a better understanding of the environments in which the institutions function.

Table 1 - Description of the Sample

Participant's Code	Gender	Participant's position	Company's Characteristics
A	Male	Quality Assurance Engineer	A global international company that is a leader in UEM, ITAM, and MDM software for business and education. They simplify device management by offering management solutions for apps, devices, and configurations across Mac, Windows, Chrome, and Android.
B	Male	Unity Developer	A technology company developing innovative entertainment apps that empower digital content creators to distribute and monetize their content to millions of users worldwide.

Table 1 contd.			
C	Male	Software Developer	An information technology company that helps clients thrive in change with solutions that build momentum with their people and drive impact within their organization.
D	Male	Test Engineer	A global quality assurance company specializing in advanced quality monitoring and analytics based on AI, which is the fastest-growing trend within Quality Assurance.
E	Female	Senior Software Engineer	A technology company developing innovative entertainment apps that empower digital content creators to distribute and monetize their content to millions of users worldwide.
F	Female	Frontend Developer	A global information technology company with a team of e-commerce experts specializing in small customization solutions for Shopify.
G	Male	Quality Assurance Engineer	An agile software development company that puts integrity and craftsmanship at the heart of everything they do, where they make software development simpler, smarter, transparent, and more efficient.
H	Female	IT Specialist	Is the modern IT recruitment company for fast-growing IT companies across Europe?
I	Female	Test Engineer	A global quality assurance company specializing in advanced quality monitoring and analytics based on AI, which is the fastest-growing trend within Quality Assurance.
J	Female	Social Media Manager	A technology company developing innovative entertainment apps that empower digital content creators to distribute and monetize their content to millions of users worldwide.

Source 7: Own Work

4.2. Results

After evaluating the interview questions' material, the phrases that were brought up most frequently were identified. The resulting terms were organized into meaningful groups and connected to the five most prevalent linking terms, i.e., the terms that were changed into labels for each group, once the threshold of ten times and above was set for the overall word count, as seen in Table 2. A few terms that were repeated fewer than ten times were incorporated into the matrix to compare related terms.

Table 2 - Frequently Mentioned Terms in Interviews

Label: Employer Branding (95)	Label: Departments/services (51)
Company (155) Development (59) Brand (48) Benefits (37) Marketing (25) Learn (21) Projects (16) Paid (16) Office (15) Experience (14) Sector (14) Position (13) Technology (13) Home (13) Possibility (12) Startup (11) Beginning (10) Communication (10) Career Path (10) Long-term (10) After (10) Salary (9) International (9) Flexibility (8) Vacation (8) Culture (8) Mentor (7) Internship (7) Opportunity (7) Health (5)	HR (37) Employees (24) Department (16) Developer (16) Software (14) Quality Assurance (10) IT sector (10) Senior (9) Marketing Team (8) Organization (5)

Source 8: Own Work

For the ultimate examination, the group labels were aligned with the prevailing terms used in the interviews, juxtaposing them with the subjects pertinent to the research inquiries. The term "Company" corresponds with the initial subject, denoting the technology-based companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition to being the most often used term in the interviews, this label also belongs to the greatest group of commonly used terms. The second most dominant term is "Development",

indicating the high presence of the development process today, which is produced by technology-based companies. Compared to all other subjects, "Development" emerged a remarkable fifty-nine percent more frequently. Conversely, the term "Brand" emerged in the interviews forty-eight times, indicative of the branding endeavors within the companies. Moreover, the term "Benefits" garners attention, suggesting the intrinsic advantages and perks within these companies. In comparison, "Marketing" takes a central stage with twenty-five mentions, highlighting the pivotal role of promotional employer branding strategies. Learning and expanding knowledge surface as pertinent, with "Learn" making an appearance twenty-one times. "Projects" and "Paid" align with sixteen references each, reflecting the focus on impactful endeavors and compensation aspects, which are among the benefits of attracting and retaining IT talent. Additionally, we see the importance of the term "office" space as a recurring theme, appearing fifteen times. "Experience" bears significance in fourteen instances, paralleling the emphasis on garnering expertise.

"Sector" denotes the sectoral diversification within these entities, aligning with the term "position," both noted thirteen times. Finally, the frequency of the terms "Technology" and "Home" tie at thirteen mentions each, implying the integration of technological advancements and work-life balance, which is also one of the benefits that technology-based companies offer to employees." Departments (services)" was the second group label and the third most used term, highlighting the variety and significance of several departments within the municipality that deal with issues like HR, marketing, IT, quality assurance, software development, etc. We aligned this label with the second and third research topics, related to departments responsible for employer branding and the existence and content of efficient work in an information technology company.

The most dominant term within this group was "HR", indicating the main role in the implementation of employer branding activities and the retention and attraction of talents in the IT industry. Furthermore, the term "Employees" is one of the ten most dominant terms mentioned in the interviews; nevertheless, it was mentioned almost two times less than "HR", indicating its importance but not a crucial role in the respondents' employer branding. As indicated in interviews, the role of departments is also an important factor that should be considered because it was mentioned 16 times and indicates the division of different types of work in information technology companies that are divided by departments. In addition to "Department", the term "Developer" is also mentioned with the same meaning, which indicates business positions in information technology companies that are focused on the development of a specific product, project, or work. Different types of businesses and departments in the IT industry were often mentioned by respondents, who gave us a better view of departments and the division of work into different business positions within companies. The content of the mentioned strategies, guidelines, and instructions was related to some of the following topics: software development, quality assurance, marketing, and the HR department. Finally, we see the importance of the term "senior", which we aligned to the level of business positions in technology companies. Three out of 10 respondents mentioned the importance of mentoring at the beginning of their careers, who were in senior positions and properly taught and guided them in which direction they should work and develop as juniors. Also, two of them stated that they see themselves in senior positions in the long term because

their career development path is well explained and supported by the company, while one person stated that he is already in a senior position. Table 3 provides an overview of the key findings concerning the three research objectives and the related sub-concepts. The statements made during the interviews serve as evidence for the insights.

Table 3 - Interview Summary: Concepts of Interest

Construct	RQ1: How can an IT company differentiate itself from competitors and attract and retain the best talent in a highly competitive job market through branding?	RQ2: How does a company's employer branding impact the recruitment and retention of top talent in the IT industry?	RQ3: What role do employee benefits and perks play in shaping a company's employer branding in the IT industry?
A	UEM, ITAM, & MDM software services, Quality Assurance Department	Through improving the knowledge of old and new employees in the company and through a clearly presented career development path for employees.	In my company, there is always something new to learn with the mentoring of colleagues; I always have new challenges; I do not stagnate in my career, and working hours are flexible, which is a really important thing for me; and my career path is well organized and presented. These benefits distinguished my current company from others.
B	Entertainment apps that empower digital content creators to distribute and monetize their content to millions of users worldwide, Unity Development Department	Through the possibility of fast and clear career advancement because my company is a startup and through new challenging projects that attract me, even more, to work on them.	In my company, there is the possibility of work flexibility, where I don't have to come to the office every day, and unlimited vacation days, where I can take a vacation at any moment and have an unlimited number of days a year to use.
C	Helping clients thrive in change with solutions that build momentum with their people and drive impact within their organization, the Software Development Department	Mentored and explained career advancement paths for employees, and new employees through internship programs where they have the best mentorship program with seniors.	They play a huge role in the retention of employees, for example, the salary standard is excellent for both junior and senior positions so that the financial benefits are fulfilled, as the possibility of working from home or any other location gives us flexibility in work.
D	Quality assurance company specializing in advanced quality monitoring and analytics based on AI, Quality Assurance Department	Through a clear path of development for all employees, from a financial point of view, with a salary of European standards because it is a company that operates on an international level, and through health benefits such as paid medical leave and annual health examinations in private clinics.	They play a big role in looking for new and retaining old employees; for example, salary standards are above Bosnia and Herzegovina salary standards, and the possibility of working from any location in the world and transferring to any of the offices we have around the world allows us to travel where all our travel expenses are paid and insured, which shows the flexibility of working and nurturing work-life balance culture.

Table 3 contd.			
E	Customer Partner Management, Product Catalog, Order Management, Trading and Routing, Billing, and Revenue Management solutions, streamlining the full lead-to-cash process for retail and wholesale businesses in the telecommunication and media industries, Development Department	Through the presentable stability and integrity of the company, where the same vision, mission, and culture remain the same.	It's the first impression and the impression that will last, so employer branding plays a big role in each company. For example, in my company, it's unlimited vacation days that start from the moment of employment, which immediately motivates new employees and gives them the same rights as older employees.
F	Small customization solutions for Shopify, Development Department	Through improving the knowledge of old and new employees in the company and through a clearly presented career development path for employees from the very beginning, I had a clear development path and the constant support of my colleagues, which is why I stayed here.	I believe that the development path should be monitored on a minimum annual basis, which our company provides to both new and old employees. Also, understanding and good mentorship are extremely necessary for people without background experience if they plan to hire quality employees. Flexibility in work, such as working from home or going to other offices around the world where all travel expenses are paid, also motivates the employee to stay with the company.
G	Top quality and the most cost-effective web and mobile solutions, Quality Assurance Department	Through a clearly presented career development path for employees because from the very beginning, I had a clear development path and the constant support of my colleagues, and mentors which encouraged me to work even harder, progress, and stay in the company.	Understanding and good mentorship are extremely necessary for people without background experience if they plan to train young people without a working background for work and to keep them after training them, of course, the salary level at the international level is also one of the key factors for long-term employee retention.
H	International IT recruitment services, HR Department	Through a representative approach to new employees, for example, what is expected of them, what they can get in return, and earnings expectations, I believe that it supports employees for employment and staying in a certain company.	Employer branding benefits play a very important role; for example, through a company's benefits, we can clearly see the company's culture and its behavior towards current employees.
I	Quality assurance company in advanced quality monitoring and analytics based on AI, Quality Assurance Department	In the IT sector, I think that salary bonuses and work flexibility can attract and retain employees.	Benefits play a big role in retaining and attracting new employees, such as the clear development path, which is monitored on a semi-annual basis and is clear and precise from the beginning.

Table 3 contd.			
J	Startup IT company with innovative entertainment apps that empower digital content creators to distribute and monetize their content to millions of users worldwide, Marketing Department	Through the possibility of fast and clear career advancement because my company is a startup and the more challenges and new projects I have, the more I learn. The more interesting the product is and has a good idea, the more motivating the employee is to work.	They play a big role, especially with the flexibility of work that my company offers. We don't have to come to the office every day; we come twice per week, and we have unlimited paid vacation days, which means that the work just needs to be done efficiently in order to go on vacation, which I think gives employees freedom, strength, and motivation.
Construct	RQ4: How can companies design and implement these programs to attract and retain top talent?		RQ5: What are the key factors that are related to employer branding success in the IT industry?
A	My company has shown this in different spheres, first of all through the flexibility of work, where we can work for 2-3 days from any location in the world; after that, with monitoring and payment of my health, where they pay for my health insurance; and once a month, with the possibility of taking "sick-off days" without any doctor's prescriptions.	Work flexibility is the biggest thing that IT companies should offer because I believe that the greatest success would definitely be with the provision of a work-life balance culture.	
B	My company has shown this in different examples, such as unlimited vacation days, which gives us the flexibility to take a vacation whenever and however much we want. As far as health is concerned, our insurance is paid for, and if we are sick and take sick leave, nothing is deducted from our salary.	I think that career growth is a very important part that companies need to monitor for every employee, and this is exactly why I chose this company because personal growth and learning are rapid and the environment and projects change often. In addition to learning, I would also highlight the flexibility of work, which in our case is the hybrid work model.	
C	My company has shown this through different spectrums of business, such as financial, where our salaries are really at a satisfactory level and above the standard of living in Bosnia and Herzegovina, through the support and learning of young people without experience through paid internship programs with seniors, and through work flexibility.	I think that investing in the quality learning of young people without experience can bring excellent new employees to the company, and also through the flexibility of working from any location, which allows us freedom and a better atmosphere in the office as well.	
D	My company has demonstrated this through various things, such as financial, where our salary standards are like European Swedish standards because we have an office in Sweden as well; on the health side, we have paid annual examinations in private clinics and always supported sick leave where nothing is deducted from our salary; and also, business flexibility, where we can work from any location and even travel to our offices around the world where everything is paid for.	I believe that when new employees arrive, a huge role is played by the excellent instruction and support of seniors that our company offers, as well as financial benefits such as salary standards and flexibility of work.	

Table 3 contd.		
E	My company, even if it is a startup, has shown this through different spheres of business, for example, through support for health services and financial support for sick leave, where if we are sick and take sick leave, nothing is deducted from our salary. And also unlimited vacation days, which gives us the flexibility to take a vacation whenever and however much we want if the job is done.	I believe that sharing of the same benefits immediately upon new employment plays a big role in the motivation and position of a new person in the company, which does not distinguish him from others and gives him the possibility of a sense of belonging from the beginning.
F	I believe that my company has shown this through the career development path of the employees, the flexibility of work, the constant learning of new things, and the good demonstration of knowledge to employees.	I think that career growth is a very important part that companies need to monitor for every employee, and this is exactly why I chose this company because, from the beginning, they showed me my development, which continues to this day, and that's why I didn't change the company. Also, the possibility of flexibility in my work gives me a good work-life balance.
G	My company has shown this through different spectrums of business, such as financial, where our salaries are at the level of international salaries, not at the level of Bosnia and Herzegovina. When it comes to health, we have paid private health insurance and the possibility to work from home.	In my opinion, one of the key factors that was most important at the beginning of my career was good mentoring and a clear career development path that my company provided. Those are key factors that a company should offer to new employees, with or without experience.
H	My company has shown benefits through different spectrums, such as free lunches, so that employees who work from the office always have a free lunch, free drinks, and entertainment on Fridays after work, and language courses if someone wants to improve in it.	I believe that the most important thing for me is a good presentation of the company's culture before employment so that the candidate can see whether he fits into a certain company or not. It helped me a lot in applying for jobs and looking for the best fit for me when my company had a clear vision of my work and the company's culture right from the start.
I	My company offers this through different spectrums, such as financial ones, where we have salary levels according to the European Swedish standards, or, on the other hand, health benefits, where our leave is always paid and the amount is not deducted from our salary.	I believe that my company offers excellent paid internships and opportunities for newly graduated students of the IT professions, where from the very beginning they have excellent mentorship from seniors who teach them real-life projects, which helped me from the very beginning to better understand the job market and work.
J	I believe that my company has covered that through different spectrums of work, such as the work-from-home model, which gives us the freedom from where we want, and unlimited vacation days and paid sick leave, which gives us the right to take a vacation or sick leave whenever we need, which in turn creates a good working atmosphere at work.	What was a key motivational factor for me was that as soon as I started working, I received unlimited vacation days, which shows their trust in me, and paid sick leave, which attracted me as a new employee. In addition, I think that in general work flexibility is one of the most important factors that an IT company should offer.

Source 9: Own Work

“The results suggest that companies, in the IT industry primarily engage in services with an emphasis on software development and quality assurance. This pattern was affirmed by six, out of ten participants when discussing the variety of services provided by their organizations. The other four participants mentioned that their institutions primarily concentrate on the gaming sector involving app development and recruitment services.”

“My company is related to helping clients thrive in change with solutions that build momentum with their people and drive impact within their organization through the Software Development Department” - Participant C (Software Developer).

The second important conclusion that came from nine out of ten participants is that the correspondence of a clear career path for new and current employees is the most important thing when it comes to employee attraction and retention. In most cases, clear career path development is presented in companies from the very beginning of employment, where it is later monitored on a semi-annual or annual basis. Employees can see all the progress and future steps in the company, which gives them a feeling of security and motivation. For one out of ten respondents, salary bonuses and work flexibility played a role in the attraction and retention of employees. Furthermore, the findings show that only one participant allocates more financial benefits than others. Regarding the importance of employer branding benefits, all ten respondents agreed that benefits play an important role in the attraction and retention of employees. Six out of ten respondents singled out flexibility in working from any location as the main working benefit. Four out of ten participants highlighted the possibility of unlimited vacation days, a salary on an international level, a clearly explained and presented career path, and the company's culture as benefits.

“I think that benefits play a big role in seeking new employees and retaining existing ones. For example, salary standards are above the standards in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the possibility of working from any location in the world and transferring to any of our offices worldwide allows us to travel, with all our travel expenses paid and insured, which shows the flexibility of working and nurtures a work-life balance culture.” - Participant D (Test Engineer).

“I strongly believe it's the first impression and the impression that will last, so employer branding plays a significant role in every company. For example, in my company, there are unlimited vacation days that start from the moment of employment, which immediately motivates new employees and gives them the same rights as older employees.” - Participant E (Senior Software Engineer).

When it comes to advice on how companies should design and implement these programs to attract and retain top talent, eight out of ten participants highlighted the importance of mental health and rest. They emphasized work flexibility, such as working from home, which provides them with freedom and better efficiency in performing work and the possibility of free time when they finish their work efficiently. Also, six out of ten respondents mentioned the importance of supporting mental and physical health, including paid sick leave without deducting the amount from the salary and paid annual health examinations. In addition to advice related to health benefits, five respondents highlighted the importance of salary benefits in the form of bonuses and salaries that meet international standards.

“My company has shown this in different ways, first of all, through work flexibility, where we can work for 2-3 days from any location in the world. After that, with monitoring and payment of my health insurance, they pay for my health insurance. We also have the option of taking "sick leave days" once a month without any doctor's prescriptions.” - Participant A (Quality Assurance Engineer).

“My company has demonstrated this through various initiatives, such as financial support. Our salary standards are equivalent to European Swedish standards because we have an office in Sweden as well. On the health side, we have paid annual examinations in private clinics and always support sick leave without any deductions from our salary. We also have business flexibility, where we can work from any location and even travel to our offices around the world, and all expenses are covered.” - Participant D (Test Engineer).

Finally, the fifth important conclusion is related to key factors in employer branding for retention and attraction of employees, which, from eight out of ten participants, represent support during employment in the form of good mentoring, a clear career development path explained, and constant improvement of learning through educational activities and real-life projects. The other two respondents stated, as a key factor, presentation of the company's culture before employment, so that the candidate can see whether he fits into a certain company or not, and the possibility of giving the same benefits to new employees as old employees, which shows new employees equality and trust in them at the very beginning of employment.

“I believe that my company offers excellent paid internships and opportunities for newly graduated students of the IT professions, where from the very beginning they have excellent mentorship from seniors who teach them on real-life projects, which helped me from the very beginning to better understand the job market and work.”- Participant I (Test Engineer).

“What was a key motivational factor for me was that as soon as I started working, I received unlimited vacation days, which showed their trust in me, and paid sick leave, which attracted me as a new employee. In addition, I think that, in general, work flexibility is one of the most important factors that an IT company should offer.”- Participant J (Social Media Manager).

The cross-case analysis for the research topics has been established (see Table 4) in order to create a general illustration of the concept (Lee & Cadogan, 2009). We were able to assess the perspectives of each of the ten respondents in relation to the five research areas by creating the meta-matrix in the table. The meta-matrix, seen in Table 4, has been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct with the following dimensions based on the previously provided research questions and accompanying sub-topics that have been covered in the qualitative study:

- RQ1: How can an IT company differentiate itself from competitors and attract and retain the best talent in a highly competitive job market through branding (dimension: respondent's company history)?
- RQ2: How does a company's employer branding impact the recruitment and retention of top talent in the IT industry (dimension: company's employer branding strategies)?
- RQ3: What role do employee benefits and perks play in shaping a company's employer branding in the IT industry (dimension: company's benefits and perks)?
- RQ4: How can companies design and implement these programs to attract and retain top talent (dimension: types of employer branding)?

- RQ5: What are the key factors that are related to employer branding success in the IT industry (dimension: factors of attraction and retention of respondents)?

Table 4 - Meta Matrix for Research Questions

Description	Comments
RQ1: How can an IT company differentiate itself from competitors and attract and retain the best talent in a highly competitive job market through branding?	
Proposition: respondent's company history	“My company specializes in developing entertainment apps that empower digital content creators to distribute and monetize their content to millions of users worldwide.” - Participant B “This is a global quality assurance company specializing in advanced quality monitoring and analytics based on AI, which is the fastest-growing trend within Quality Assurance.” - Participant D “My company represents an agile software development company that puts integrity and craftsmanship at the heart of everything they do, where they make software development simpler, smarter, transparent, and more efficient.” - Participant G
RQ2: How does a company's employer branding impact the recruitment and retention of top talent in the IT industry?	
Dimension: company's employer branding strategies	“My company implements strategies Through improving the knowledge of old and new employees in the company and through a clearly presented career development path for employees.” - Participant A “Strategies such as presenting stability and integrity of the company, where the same vision, mission, and culture remain the same.” - Participant E “In the IT sector, I think that through salary bonus and work, flexibility can attract and retain employees.” - Participant I
RQ3: What role do employee benefits and perks play in shaping a company's employer branding in the IT industry	
Dimension: company's benefits and perks	“It's the first impression and the impression that will last, so employer branding is playing a big role in each company. For example, in my company it's unlimited vacation days that start from the of employment, which immediately motivates new employees and gives them the same right as older employees.” - Participant E “Employer branding benefits play a very important role; for example, through a company's benefits, we can see the company's culture and their behavior towards the current.” - Participant H “They play a big role, especially with the flexibility of work that my company offers. We don't have to come to the office every day; we come twice per week, and we have unlimited paid vacation days, which means that the work just needs to be done efficiently in order to go on vacation, which I think gives employees freedom, strength, and motivation.” - Participant J

Table 4 contd.	
RQ4: How can companies design and implement these programs to attract and retain top talent?	
Dimension: types of employer branding	“My company has shown this through different spectrums of business, such as financial, where our salaries are really at a satisfactory level and above the standard of living in Bosnia and Herzegovina, through the support and learning of young people without experience through paid internship programs with seniors, and through work flexibility.”- Participant C “My company has shown benefits through different spectrums, such as free lunches, so that employees who work from the office always have a free lunch, free drinks, and entertainment on Fridays after work, and language courses if someone wants to improve in it.”-Participant H “I believe that my company has covered that through different spectrums of work, such as the work-from-home model, which gives us the freedom to work from where we want, and unlimited vacation days and paid sick leave, which gives us the right to take a vacation or sick leave whenever we need, which in turn creates a good working atmosphere at work.”- Participant J
RQ5: What are the key factors that are related to employer branding success in the IT industry?	
Dimension: factors of attraction and retention of respondents	“Work flexibility is the biggest thing that IT companies should offer because I believe that the greatest success would definitely be with the provision of a work-life balance culture.”-Participant A “I believe that when new employees arrive, a huge role is played by the excellent instruction and support of seniors our company offers, as well as financial benefits such as salary standards and flexibility of work.”- Participant D “Sharing of the same benefits immediately upon new employment plays a big role in the motivation and position of a new person in the company, does not distinguish him from others and gives him the possibility of a sense of belonging from the beginning “- Participant E

Source 10: Own Work

The interviews also showed that, when it comes to benefits related to retention and the attraction of new employers, there is no big difference between new and old employees. Some of the participants claim that new employees even immediately receive the same benefits and rights as existing employees, which instills a sense of belonging and trust in new employees. On the other side, four out of ten respondents said that their first work experience began through an internship and that with proper mentoring from seniors, they stayed in the company and trained for efficient work.

“I believe that sharing of the same benefits immediately upon new employment plays a big role in the motivation and position of a new person in the company, which does not distinguish him from others and gives him the possibility of a sense of belonging from the beginning.” - Participant E (Senior Software Engineer).

“I believe that my company offers excellent paid internships and opportunities for newly graduated students of the IT professions, where from the very beginning they have excellent mentorship from seniors who teach them on real-life projects, which helped me from the very beginning to better understand the job market and work.”- Participant I (Test Engineer).

“What was a key motivational factor for me was that as soon as I started working, I received unlimited vacation days, which shows their trust in me, and paid sick leave, which attracted me as a new employee.”- Participant J (Social Media Manager).

When we delved further into participants' perspectives on the reasons behind this strong consensus regarding the importance of a clear career path, some of the comments were as follows:

“Through a mentored and explained career advancement path for employees, and for new employees through internship programs where they have the best mentorship program with seniors.” - Participant C (Software Developer).

“Through improving the knowledge of old and new employees in the company and through a presented career development path for employees because, from the very beginning, I had a clear development path and the constant support of my colleagues, which is why I stayed here.”- Participant F (Frontend Developer).

“We are having a representative approach to new employees, for example, what is expected of them, what they can get in return, and earnings expectations. I believe that this supports employees for employment and staying in a certain company.” - Participant H (IT Specialist).

“Through the possibility of fast and clear career advancement because my company is a startup and the more challenges and new projects I have, the more I learn.” - Participant J (Social Media Manager).

5. CONCLUSION

The main motive of this master's thesis focuses on the importance of the landscape of employee benefits within the IT industry and its profound impact on the ability of IT companies to attract and retain top talent in today's fiercely competitive job market. It underscores the critical role of employer branding as a strategic imperative for IT firms to differentiate themselves and craft a compelling value proposition for both existing and potential IT professionals. More specifically, our goal was to respond to the following five research questions by using the case of international informational technology firms in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

- RQ1: How can an IT company differentiate itself from competitors and attract and retain the best talent in a highly competitive job market through branding?
- RQ2: How does a company's employer branding impact the recruitment and retention of top talent in the IT industry?
- RQ3: What role do employee benefits and perks play in shaping a company's employer branding in the IT industry?
- RQ4: How can companies design and implement these programs to attract and retain top talent?
- RQ5: What are the key factors that are related to employer branding success in the IT industry?

The first objective entails a thorough analysis of the services offered by IT companies operating in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This examination seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the range and quality of services provided by IT firms, which forms a critical aspect of their employer branding.

The second objective is to meticulously review and analyze the relevant theoretical and conceptual framework concerning employer branding within the IT sector of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This involves delving into the existing body of knowledge regarding how IT companies in this region can strategically shape their brand image as employers.

The third objective is to identify the specific departments or units within IT companies and organizations responsible for employer branding activities. This objective also aims to assess the operational effectiveness and competence levels of these departments in implementing and executing effective employer branding strategies.

The fourth objective emphasizes the significance of employer branding within IT companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina, shedding light on the key benefits and factors that contribute to the retention and attraction of employees. It explores how a well-crafted employer brand can enhance employee satisfaction, loyalty, and overall organizational success.

The last objective focuses on providing practical recommendations for the continued development and enhancement of employer branding efforts within IT companies operating in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These recommendations will be tailored to strengthen the organization's employer brand, thereby assisting in attracting and retaining top talent in the competitive IT landscape.

From a theoretical standpoint, this master thesis makes a substantial contribution by establishing a comprehensive framework that delves into the realm of employer branding within the IT sector of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The framework encompasses an in-depth examination of the role of employer branding in IT companies and assesses the effectiveness as well as the limitations of these companies' efforts in this domain. While extensive literature exists on employer branding in global contexts and various industries, there is a notable research gap concerning the specific case of Bosnia and Herzegovina's IT sector. This master thesis endeavors to address this gap by offering valuable insights tailored to the regional IT landscape. The suggested framework has been carefully created using a combination of qualitative research techniques and literature reviews. The research synthesis includes a thorough literature evaluation, a study of bibliographic co-citations, and qualitative surveys based on relevant research topics and related ideas. With this comprehensive strategy, it is possible to gain a deep understanding of how employer branding functions in the particular environment of Bosnian and Herzegovina IT companies.

Regarding the utilization of employer branding in IT companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a thorough examination of the existing literature has brought to light certain gaps and areas in need of enhancement. The literature review has underscored a deficiency in well-defined employer branding strategies and

guidelines tailored for employees within IT companies in Bosnia. This absence can hinder the effective dissemination of the desired employer brand message. Another critical aspect identified is the need to bolster the professional competencies of employees involved in employer branding efforts within IT firms. This involves enhancing their skills and knowledge to effectively represent the company's employer brand. The literature also reveals a lack of clarity in the interpretation of two-way communication with potential and existing employees. Successful employer branding requires a transparent and engaging dialogue with the target audience, which may necessitate improvements in this regard.

These limitations and gaps identified in the literature are further corroborated by findings from qualitative research conducted within the international IT companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The subsequent sections of this thesis delve into the outcomes of this qualitative research, shedding light on the specific challenges and opportunities faced by IT companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina in their pursuit of effective employer branding strategies.

The qualitative research findings illuminated that nine out of ten participants highlighted the paramount significance of offering a well-defined career path to both prospective and existing employees as a pivotal factor for employee attraction and retention within IT companies. In the majority of cases, the provision of a clear career path is integrated into the employee's journey right from the outset of their employment. Subsequently, it is closely monitored on a semi-annual or annual basis. This strategic approach enables employees to have a comprehensive view of their progression and future trajectories within the company, thereby instilling a profound sense of security and motivation among the workforce.

Based on the experiences shared by the participants it is clear that having a defined career path is crucial, for attracting and retaining employees. Mentorship programs and a transparent vision of career growth right from the start create a sense of security and motivation. Additionally, support from colleagues, opportunities for learning, and chances for advancement are also important. Moreover, being transparent, about expectations, opportunities, and earnings combined with a career progression path (in startup environments) helps employees feel valued and motivated to stay with a company. This conclusion emphasizes how important it is to have guided career paths, peer support, transparency, and continuous professional development to maintain employee satisfaction and loyalty.

When it comes to recommendations for how companies should strategize and implement programs to effectively attract and retain top talent, the insights from the participants are illuminating. Eight out of ten respondents emphasized the paramount importance of prioritizing mental health and rest. They expressed a strong inclination towards work flexibility, including options like remote work, which not only affords them freedom but also enhances their efficiency in performing their duties. Moreover, it grants them the precious gift of free time once they efficiently complete their work. Additionally, six out of ten participants who were keen on both mental and physical health underscored the significance of offering support for paid sick leave without any deductions from the employees' salaries. Moreover, they highlighted the importance of providing paid annual health examinations as part of the company's benefits package. In parallel with advice about health benefits, five

respondents accentuated the importance of salary benefits, such as performance-based bonuses and salaries that align with international standards.

This holistic approach to employee benefits is instrumental in not only attracting top talent but also in retaining and nurturing a motivated and satisfied workforce. By analyzing these responses, it becomes evident that prioritizing employee health and well-being, as well as offering opportunities for relaxation and work-life balance, is crucial for enhancing employee attraction and retention. However, even in this context, there remains room for further development and increased engagement of employees in shaping long-term strategies that directly impact the theme of employer branding in IT industries.

Drawing from the insights provided by our respondents within the IT sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is evident that employer branding practices are primarily centered around several key areas. Respondents emphasized the importance of factors such as mental health, work flexibility, support for employee well-being, a clear career path, and mentoring. In parallel with these findings, we can conclude that IT companies have begun to take significant steps toward addressing the evolving needs of their workforce. They have recognized the value of promoting employee benefits such as mental health by offering work flexibility, including remote work options. This shift represents a move away from traditional work approaches towards more accommodating and efficient work arrangements. Moreover, the emphasis on providing a clear career path and mentorship programs demonstrates that IT companies are not only concerned with the present well-being of their employees but are also committed to their long-term growth and development. A well-defined career path and mentoring opportunities not only attract top talent but also contribute to their job satisfaction and retention. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that there is room for further development in optimizing the full potential of employer branding strategies within IT companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This can be accomplished by incorporating these strategies into the work of the marketing and HR departments, which are in charge of developing and promoting the employer brand. IT companies can firmly establish themselves as the preferred employers in the fiercely competitive IT landscape by actively involving employees in decision-making processes that go beyond their daily tasks and include the formulation of long-term strategies that directly shape their professional growth and job satisfaction. This approach would enable them to engage employees more actively, seek their input on various aspects of the company, and foster a sense of inclusivity and empowerment.

Such an approach would not only facilitate full two-way communication with employees but also contribute to the democratization of decision-making processes within IT companies, ultimately strengthening their employer brand. Furthermore, our research has underscored the significant role that employer branding plays in IT companies, particularly when it comes to the attraction and retention of employees. As mentioned by Ambler and Barrow (1996), the parallels between the benefits offered by an employer brand (EB) to its employees and those provided by conventional product brands to consumers are striking. These advantages encompass developmental opportunities, tangible rewards, as well as emotional aspects such as a sense of belonging, purpose, and direction. Importantly, just like a product brand, an employer brand possesses its distinctive personality and can be positioned

strategically in the market. However, our research has also shed light on the current state of employer branding practices in IT companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Despite the clear importance of this aspect, it appears that these companies are still in the process of developing dedicated employer branding positions within their organizational structures. Our qualitative research has indicated that employer branding activities are often dispersed between marketing and HR departments, rather than being under the purview of a designated individual or team. In light of these findings, it becomes evident that there is room for improvement in the field of employer branding in Bosnian and Herzegovinian IT companies. Recognizing the unique significance of employer branding and establishing specialized roles or departments dedicated to its cultivation and management could help these companies enhance their attractiveness to potential employees and increase employee retention in a competitive industry. In addition to our findings, it is noteworthy that a significant number of the surveyed respondents shed light on the current distribution of responsibilities within their IT companies. Out of the respondents, six out of ten indicated that the marketing department is primarily responsible for employer branding activities. Two respondents highlighted a collaborative approach, with both HR and marketing departments jointly overseeing employer branding initiatives. Meanwhile, two other respondents stated that the HR department takes the lead in employer branding efforts, operating independently. These responses highlight a varied landscape in terms of organizational structures and strategies for employer branding within IT companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Such diversity in approaches further emphasizes the potential benefits of establishing more specialized roles or dedicated departments for employer branding to ensure a cohesive and effective approach to attracting and retaining top talent in this competitive industry.

“For the employer branding is usually the job of our marketing team, so it’s not a designated one person but rather multiple people working on it.”- Participant B.

“We do have a person who deals with employer branding. We have people in the marketing department, which also deals with employer branding among other activities.”- Participant G.

“We have an HR and marketing department that deals with that branch and employee branding. The HR and marketing department are responsible for everything in our firm.” - Participant I.

Taken together, our research has led us to a clear and significant conclusion. While the importance of employer branding in IT companies for attracting and retaining employees is well-established, our findings indicate that there is still considerable room for improvement in the way this crucial aspect is managed in Bosnia and Herzegovina's IT sector. This has led us to a compelling conclusion: relying solely on the marketing or HR department to handle employer branding alongside their other activities is suboptimal. This approach risks underutilizing the potential of employer branding within IT companies. The multifaceted nature of marketing and human resources demands significant time and resources, and when employer branding is bundled with these responsibilities, it may not receive the dedicated attention it requires. As a result, the full scope of benefits that employer branding can bring, as highlighted by Ambler and Barrow (1996), such as fostering employee

engagement and retention, may not be realized. Therefore, our findings strongly advocate for the appointment of a dedicated individual or team to spearhead employer branding efforts. Having a specialized person or department devoted to employer branding can ensure that this critical aspect receives the focus, strategy, and resources necessary to make a meaningful impact on attracting and retaining employees within the competitive IT industry. Additionally, it's worth noting that some companies have opted for a collaborative approach, with both the marketing and HR teams sharing responsibility for employer branding. While this approach may seem like a step in the right direction, our research suggests that it may not necessarily represent the most effective solution. Combining the efforts of both departments can lead to overlapping responsibilities and potential conflicts, ultimately diluting the focused attention that employer branding demands. In such cases, the strategic direction and consistency in messaging may be compromised, hindering the realization of the full potential of employer branding. Therefore, while collaboration between marketing and HR is important, our conclusion still leans towards the establishment of dedicated roles or departments specifically responsible for employer branding. This approach can provide the necessary clarity, expertise, and focus required to optimize employer branding efforts and achieve the desired outcomes in attracting and retaining employees in the IT industry.

It's noteworthy to emphasize that, despite the variations in their views on the current management of employer branding activities, all respondents expressed a unanimous consensus on the importance of employer branding. They shared the belief that this aspect should continue to be nurtured and developed within companies, particularly within the dynamic IT sector of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This broad agreement highlights the understanding of employer branding as a crucial element in attracting and retaining top talent. Additionally, it demonstrates a common commitment to maximizing its potential to improve workplace attractiveness and competitiveness in the Bosnian and Herzegovinian IT sector. Consequently, regardless of their opinions on the current organizational structures, the significance of maximizing employer branding techniques continues to be a theme among our respondents.

The participants emphasize the critical significance of employer branding, particularly in the IT industry, due to its distinctiveness from traditional sectors. They stress the need for continuous development and alignment with industry advancements. In the ever-changing landscape, IT companies are pioneering innovative work practices, such as the introduction of 40 work weeks a year. To maintain this pioneering spirit, participants assert the necessity for robust employer branding. They recognize that in the IT sector, employees not only represent the company but also actively contribute to product development and client interactions. Consequently, a well-developed employer branding strategy becomes pivotal, ensuring the provision of optimal services, top-notch products, and favorable working conditions. These insights underscore the imperative role of dynamic and forward-thinking employer branding initiatives in the IT industry, facilitating both employee satisfaction and business success.

Through these answers, it becomes evident that investing in a dedicated department or individual specifically responsible for employer branding can yield substantial long-term benefits for a company, particularly in the competitive landscape of the IT industry. This investment is likely to lead to positive outcomes for several

compelling reasons. First and foremost, a specialized employer branding role or department can focus exclusively on the intricacies of this vital aspect. Such a dedicated entity can comprehensively analyze the current benefits offered to employees, recognize opportunities for improvement, and tailor strategies to meet the evolving needs and expectations of both existing and potential employees. This level of attention to detail is often difficult to achieve when employer branding responsibilities are dispersed among different departments or individuals with diverse priorities. Secondly, a specialized role can consistently monitor market trends and best practices in employer branding, ensuring that the company remains agile and responsive to industry developments. This proactive approach can result in a more dynamic and competitive employer brand, which is crucial for attracting and retaining top talent in the ever-evolving IT sector. Furthermore, a dedicated employer branding professional can develop a deep understanding of the company's unique culture, values, and objectives, aligning these elements with the employer brand's messaging and positioning. This alignment fosters a sense of authenticity and coherence, which resonates positively with employees and potential recruits. Lastly, a specialized focus on employer branding allows for the implementation of targeted initiatives that can enhance employee motivation, engagement, and job satisfaction. These efforts can contribute significantly to reducing turnover rates and saving recruitment and onboarding costs in the long run.

Finally, the qualitative research conducted for this master's thesis helped us to examine and gain valuable insights into the current state of employer branding practices within IT companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Our findings have illuminated the importance of employer branding as a crucial determinant for attracting and retaining employees in this dynamic industry. Drawing from the insights provided by our respondents within the IT sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is evident that employer branding practices are primarily centered around several key areas. Respondents emphasized the importance of factors such as mental health, work flexibility, support for employee well-being, a clear career path, and mentoring. In parallel with these findings, we can conclude that IT companies have begun to take significant steps toward addressing the evolving needs of their workforce. They have recognized the value of promoting employee benefits such as mental health by offering work flexibility, including remote work options, which can enhance work-life balance and overall job satisfaction. This shift represents a move away from traditional work approaches towards more accommodating and efficient work arrangements. Moreover, the emphasis on providing a clear career path and mentorship programs demonstrates that IT companies are not only concerned with the present well-being of their employees but are also committed to their long-term growth and development. A well-defined career path and mentoring opportunities not only attract top talent but also contribute to their job satisfaction and retention.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that there is room for further development in optimizing the full potential of employer branding strategies within IT companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This can be accomplished by incorporating these strategies into the work of the marketing and HR departments, which are in charge of developing and promoting the employer brand. IT companies can firmly establish themselves as the preferred employers in the fiercely competitive IT landscape by actively involving employees in decision-making processes that go beyond their

daily tasks and include the formulation of long-term strategies that directly shape their professional growth and job satisfaction. This approach would enable them to engage employees more actively, seek their input on various aspects of the company, including mental health and work flexibility, and foster a sense of inclusivity and empowerment. Such an approach would not only facilitate full two-way communication with employees but also contribute to the democratization of decision-making processes within IT companies, ultimately strengthening their employer brand.

Therefore, at a time when employer branding has shown enormous importance in the attraction and retention of employees, we firmly believe that every organization must have a specially developed strategy that would define the following:

- Describe the unique benefits and values that the company provides to its employees. This should encompass factors like work culture, career growth opportunities, and overall well-being support.
- Identify and describe the ideal employees the organization aims to attract. This should include their skills, aspirations, and preferences.
- Define the organization's employer brand identity, including its personality, values, and mission.
- Create programs and activities that foster employee engagement, such as team-building events, recognition programs, and open communication channels.
- Establish regular feedback mechanisms, such as surveys and focus groups, to gather insights from employees about their experiences and suggestions for improvement.
- Evaluate and enhance the range of benefits offered to employees, encompassing healthcare, retirement plans, wellness programs, and other perks that contribute to job satisfaction.
- Encourage employees to participate in shaping the organization's policies, values, and strategic direction, fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment.
- Uphold ethical and responsible practices in all aspects of employer branding, reinforcing trust and integrity with both current and prospective employees.

Furthermore, given the fast-changing nature of the new generations entering the workforce, organizations must remain agile in their approach to employer branding. The dynamics of the workplace are changing as Generation Z and millennials, who represent the ages of all of our research participants, gain greater influence in the employment market. Therefore, a forward-looking employer branding strategy should also incorporate considerations for these evolving demographics. In this digital age, a strong online presence is paramount. Younger generations are digitally connected and rely heavily on online platforms for job searches and employer research. A well-maintained website, active social media profiles, and positive online reviews are essential components of a modern employer branding strategy. Additionally, younger employees often seek employers that align with their values and contribute to social and environmental causes. An employer branding strategy should highlight the organization's commitment to corporate social responsibility, sustainability, and purpose-driven initiatives to attract socially conscious talent. Flexibility in work arrangements, including remote work options, has become an

expectation, particularly in light of recent global events. Incorporating these elements into the employer branding strategy demonstrates an organization's adaptability and responsiveness to changing work norms. Furthermore, millennials and Gen Z employees value continuous learning and development opportunities. Employers should emphasize their commitment to professional growth, training programs, and opportunities for skill acquisition to attract those seeking self-improvement. Transparent and open communication within the workplace is highly valued by younger generations. Employers should foster an environment where employees feel comfortable expressing their ideas and concerns, and where leadership is accessible and communicative. Diversity and inclusion initiatives are of paramount importance. Organizations should actively promote inclusivity, equal opportunities, and diverse representation in their employer branding efforts, reflecting a commitment to fairness and equity. Lastly, personalization in employer branding is key. Tailoring messages and offerings to meet the individual preferences and expectations of younger employees can significantly enhance the appeal of the organization as an employer of choice. Our research revealed a significant insight into the career development preferences of participants belonging to Generation Z and millennials. A notable finding was that many of these individuals secured their first jobs through practical experience and good mentoring. Interestingly, a substantial proportion of them remained loyal to their first employers, precisely because of the benefits that the company offers. This suggests that a well-structured mentorship program and a focus on offering valuable hands-on experience can not only attract young talent but also contribute to long-term employee retention.

“I became a junior front-end developer through a paid internship and stayed in the company through excellent senior mentoring and the clear career path explained.” - Participant F.

“I became a software developer through a paid internship here. After the internship ended, they offered me a job, and I have remained here to this day.” - Participant C.

In conclusion, our comprehensive examination of employer branding highlights its crucial importance, particularly in an environment where attracting and retaining top talent has emerged as a crucial organizational goal. Employer branding strategies need to change strategically as a result of the changing nature of the workforce, which is characterized by the growing influence of Generation Z and millennials. Our research revealed that a well-crafted employer branding strategy should encompass a multifaceted approach, addressing not only the traditional aspects such as the Employer Value Proposition (EVP), target employee personas, and brand identity but also adapting to the changing expectations of younger generations. Notably, our research highlights the career preferences of millennials as well as members of Generation Z, showing that good mentoring and real-world experience were crucial factors in their initial employment opportunities. Equally important was the finding that many of these people remained committed to their initial employers, demonstrating the long-lasting effects of early career support and mentoring. Furthermore, digital presence, flexibility in work arrangements, continuous learning and development, transparent communication, diversity and inclusion, and a commitment to corporate social responsibility are vital components of a contemporary employer branding strategy.

These elements collectively contribute to the attraction of young, dynamic talent and the cultivation of a workplace culture that promotes both employee well-being and organizational growth. In a world where employer branding is no longer an option but a necessity, organizations must adapt, refine, and continually innovate their strategies to remain competitive. By recognizing the evolving needs and values of the emerging workforce generations and aligning their employer branding efforts accordingly, organizations can not only secure their status as employers of choice but also build a resilient foundation for long-term success. Our research underscores that the journey toward an effective employer branding strategy is not a one-time endeavor; it is an ongoing commitment to creating a workplace that inspires, supports, and retains the talent of tomorrow.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Povzetek

Namen magistrskega dela je bil na primerih mednarodnih IT podjetij s sedežem v BiH preučiti vlogo blagovne znamke delodajalca in njihov prispevek k privabljanju in ohranjanju zaposlenih v IT sektorju. Glavni cilj naloge je bil predlagati učinkovite rešitve in načine za izboljšanje strategij blagovne znamke delodajalca v tem sektorju, ki bi vodila k izboljšanju njihovega dela, storitev in izdelkov, ki jih ponujajo, z ohranjanjem starih in privabljanjem novih zaposlenih. Na podlagi opisa problema smo zastavili naslednja raziskovalna vprašanja:

RQ1: Kako se lahko IT-podjetje loči od konkurentov ter z blagovno znamko pritegne in obdrži najboljše talente na zelo konkurenčnem trgu dela?

RQ2: Kako blagovna znamka delodajalca podjetja vpliva na zaposlovanje in ohranjanje vrhunskih talentov v industriji IT?

RQ3: Kakšno vlogo imajo ugodnosti in ugodnosti za zaposlene pri oblikovanju blagovne znamke delodajalca podjetja v industriji IT?

RQ4: Kako lahko podjetja oblikujejo in izvajajo te programe, da privabijo in zadržijo vrhunske talente?

RQ5: Kateri so ključni dejavniki, ki so povezani z uspehom blagovne znamke delodajalca v industriji IT?

Raziskovalna vprašanja smo empirično preverili z obširnim pregledom literature na to temo, skupaj s kvalitativno raziskavo, ki je vključevala polstrukturirane poglobljene intervjuje z 10 anketiranci, ki so zaposleni v mednarodnih IT podjetjih v Bosni in Hercegovini. Na podlagi zastavljenih ciljev in raziskovalnih vprašanj so oblikovani naslednji splošni zaključki:

- Blagovna znamka delodajalca igra ključno vlogo pri privabljanju in ohranjanju talentov na današnjem konkurenčnem trgu dela.
- Prilagajanje vrednotam in pričakovanjem mlajših generacij, kot so Gen Z in milenijci, je ključnega pomena za uspešno strategijo blagovne znamke delodajalca.
- Praktične izkušnje in učinkovito mentorstvo pomembno vplivajo na izbiro kariere in dolgoročno zvestobo mladim strokovnjakom.
- Sodobna strategija blagovne znamke delodajalca naj bi vključevala digitalno prisotnost, fleksibilnost, učenje in razvoj, transparentno komunikacijo, raznolikost in vključenost ter zavezanost družbeni odgovornosti.
- Blagovna znamka delodajalca je razvijajoč se proces, ki zahteva nenehno izpopolnjevanje za izgradnjo prožne podlage za organizacijski uspeh in zadovoljstvo zaposlenih.

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

PART 1 (related to RQ1: How can an IT company differentiate itself from competitors and attract and retain the best talent in a highly competitive job market through branding?)

- Can you introduce yourself (who you are, how old you are, where you live, what you do professionally, and where you currently work)?
- How long have you been in the profession and why did you choose your work and development in the IT sector?
- In which company do you currently work, what position do you hold, and what does your company do?
- Why did you choose that particular company to work for, and not the others?
- Do you have a clearly explained and visible development path for your work in the current company?
- Do you see yourself here for the long term? Where do you see yourself in your career in the next 5 years?

For example:

Gaming IT Companies (Focused on the gaming industry, those types of companies specialize in game development, quality assurance, and user experience design tailored to gaming applications.)

Quality Assurance Companies (Focused on software quality, those types of companies specialize in comprehensive testing, test automation, quality control, and ensuring software compliance with industry standards)

Web Solutions Provider Companies (Focused on delivering excellence, those types of companies specialize in custom web development, web3 technologies integration, responsive design, and digital marketing services for a wide range of clients.).

5. Do you have a clearly explained and visible development path for your work in the current company? (*e.g., does your company offer any benefits and factors that qualify as employer branding?*)

6. Do you see yourself here for the long term? Where do you see yourself in your career in the next 5 years? (*e.g., did any employer branding factors influence your retention at the company?*)

PART 2 (related to RQ2: How does a company's employer branding impact the recruitment and retention of top talent in the IT industry?)

Do you have a designated person in charge of employer branding?

If the answer to Q1 is YES:

1a. Is this person a part of the HR or marketing team? (Or acting separately)?

1b. How do you coordinate activities within the firm which are related to employer branding?

If the answer to Q1 is NO:

1c. How do you communicate your brand as a “good employer”? Do “reputation building” activities help here?

What advice would you give to other Managers and HR Recruiters in other IT companies to retain and attract IT talent?

PART 3 (related to RQ3: What role do employee benefits and perks play in shaping a company's employer branding in the IT industry?)

With what benefits does your company stand out from the others, and which ones would you highlight the most? Please rank the top 3 in your opinion.

What employment benefits does your company offer for new employees? Please rank the top 3 in your opinion.

For example:

Benefits Related to Flexibility of Working (Flexibility of working represents an adaptable approach that accommodates various work arrangements, promoting work-life balance and individual preferences.)

Benefits Related to Mental Health (Mental health support represents a commitment to employee well-being, fostering a positive and open workplace culture that prioritizes emotional and psychological health.)

Financial Benefits (Financial benefits represent a tangible investment in employees' financial security and growth, including competitive compensation, valuable benefits, and opportunities for financial advancement and recognition.).

PART 4 (related to RQ4: How can companies design and implement these programs to attract and retain top talent?)

What conditions would you agree to if another company offered you a job, and what conditions would you not agree to?

How did you look for a job and what were your criteria when you were looking for a job?

PART 5 (related to RQ5: What are the key factors that are related to employer branding success in the IT industry?)

What is the primary factor that contributes to your retention and motivation for further development within the current company in the IT industry?

Can you use an example and tell me how you achieved what you did about this factor? Can you give me an example?

Do you, all in all, believe that employer branding as an area should be further built and developed, in particular for the IT industry?

For example:

Primary factors that contribute to employee retention (Those factors refer to the key elements or conditions within an organization that have the most significant influence on the ability to retain employees over time.)

Primary factors that contribute to employee attraction (Those factors refer to the key elements or conditions within an organization that have the most significant influence on attracting new employees to join the company).