International Employer Brand Management

Lena Christiaans

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A Multilevel Analysis and Segmentation of Students' Preferences

Foreword by Prof. Dr. Marion Büttgen

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Foreword

The increasing globalization of business activities forces companies to recruit highly skilled employees in many countries around the globe in order to remain competitive. At the same time, demographic and social parameters lead to shortages of qualified staff, especially in industrialized nations. To win the resulting global competition for the best talents, it is essential for companies to differentiate themselves from their competitors through a unique and attractive employer image. Just like marketing managers have to handle the worldwide differences in consumers' values, attitudes and behavior, employer brand managers have to develop an understanding of what drives the employer choice of potential employees in different markets and which similarities might exist.

This challenge raises two important questions: Which factors determine employer attractiveness for diverse target groups? And: To which degree is the importance of these factors influenced by potential applicants' nationality? The analysis of potential employees' evaluation of employer attractiveness attributes, especially in the case graduates as companies' main recruiting target group, therefore constitutes a relevant, prevailing and promising field of research.

However, this topic has rarely been taken up by previous scientific research. The few existing studies have approached employer brand management almost exclusively from a domestic perspective and do not incorporate any international comparisons. In her doctoral thesis, Lena Christiaans addresses this problem by analyzing if and to which degree the subjective importance of employer attractiveness attributes differs between countries. The extent of country-specific differences regarding graduates' preferences for selected attributes serves as a basis for the important decision on the degree of standardization vs. adaption of employer branding strategies. In order to further examine the potential for standardization, Lena Christiaans considers the question of segmenting the European graduate market based on preference patterns with regard to employer attractiveness attributes.

First of all, she outlines the increasing importance of international employer branding approaches in a differentiated and comprehensible way, both from a scientific and practitioner's perspective. Based on a solid conceptual and theoretical foundation, she then develops a number of research models incorporating a micro- as well as a macro-level. While the micro-level takes account of individual characteristics (gender,

course of study, academic achievement, age) as potential influences on attribute evaluations, the macro-level allows for a parallel analysis of country-specific predictors (cultural and economic indicators such as Performance Orientation, Future Orientation, Humane Orientation, Uncertainty Avoidance, and GNI/capita). The testing of a total of six research models is based on a large-scale, multi-country data set, provided by a cooperating research institute. By including 153,657 respondents (all students close to graduation) from 24 countries, the data set constitutes a remarkable sample for the analysis of the underlying research questions, which the author would not have been able to collect herself. The previously deducted hypotheses are tested by means of analysis of variance, T-tests, correlations, and especially multilevel analysis and cluster analysis.

The multilevel analyses show that all of the individual predictors on the micro-level have a significant, though not very strong effect on students' evaluations of employer attractiveness attributes, except for the attribute starting salary. With regard to the macro-level influences, the results are more ambiguous: While the national cultural values only show a partial effect, economic development is largely of significant impact on attribute evaluations. Students from economically less prosperous nations attach a higher importance to attributes that concern their financial standing and their promotion opportunities in a future job than do students from wealthier societies. The results of the multilevel analyses are subsequently verified and complemented through cluster analyses with the objective of determining the potential for cross-national target segments of students sharing similar preferences vs. country-based clusters. The results of the benefit segmentation show mainly pan-European segments, thus reinforcing the finding of relatively minor between-country differences, which had been identified in the course of the multilevel analyses.

Summarizing, the work of Lena Christiaans makes a strong contribution to the amplification of scientific research regarding the importance of individual and country-specific characteristics on the evaluation of employer attractiveness attributes. Moreover, her thesis provides employer branding and HR managers with valuable advice for the development of international employer branding strategies, especially with regard to the decision on standardization vs. adaption. I therefore wish her work to be of high resonance and attention in the scientific community just as in the corporate world.

Prof. Dr. Marion Büttgen

Preface

“How can I help multinational companies to develop suitable strategies for their worldwide employer brand management?” – This question had sparked my interest long before I started working on my doctoral dissertation. After obtaining my university degree in International Business and Cultural Studies, I joined a market research institute and consultancy specialized in the fields of employer branding and employer attractiveness. During my two years of consulting experience, I learned that many of my clients were facing similar challenges: How local or how global should employer brands be positioned? Are students’ preferences similar enough for a standardized positioning across multiple countries? Which approach is most suitable to identify global target groups? These and similar questions fostered my desire to dive deeper into the topic of international employer brand management and to analyze international students’ view on employer attractiveness from a scientific perspective.

At this point, the publication of my thesis allows me to look back on this challenging project and I wish to thank all those who contributed to its successful completion.

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor Prof. Dr. Marion Büttgen for her wise and optimistic support and guidance. With her passion for research she often challenged me to bring the best out of my analyses. At the same time she was always available for inspiring discussions. In addition, I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Karsten Hadwich for providing his valuable comments on my work. A word of appreciation must also go out to all of my fellow PhD students and the chair’s research associates for their helpful feedback and support during our doctoral seminars and conferences. Furthermore, my former colleagues from the trendence Institute, especially Oliver Viel, Caroline Dépierre and Anne Herzog, deserve special gratitude for giving me the opportunity to work with a data set from their European graduate survey and for the inspiring exchange of ideas.

Finally, without the loving support of my family and friends this thesis would not have been made possible. My special appreciation goes to my husband Lars for his encouragement, understanding and patience, as well as to my parents for their continuous backing, on which I could always count. Therefore, this book is dedicated to the three of them.

Lena Christiaans

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List of Abbreviations

ANOVA	Analysis of variance
B2B	Business-to-Business
B2C	Business-to-Customer
cf.	Confer
coeff.	Coefficient
Corr.	Correlation
CV	Curriculum Vitae
df	Degree of freedom
DVI	Direct Values Inference
EC	Employer characteristic
ED	Ethnological Description
e.g.	exempli gratia (= for instance)
ERS	Extreme response style
et al.	et alii
etc.	et cetera
EU	European Union
EVP	Employer value proposition
f.	following
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GNI	Gross national income
HLM	Hierarchical linear modeling
HR	Human resource
ICC	Intra-class correlation coefficient
ICT	Information communication technology
i.e.	id est (= that is)
IVI	Indirect Values Inference
M	Mean
Max	Maximum
MBA	Master of business administration
Min	Minimum

MNC	Multinational corporation
n.s.	Not significant
p	Probability
p.	Page
pp.	Pages
RBV	Resource-based view
RI	Random intercept
RS	Random slope
SD	Standard deviation
S.E.	Standard error
Sig.	Significant
SME	Small and medium enterprises
U.S.	United States
VIF	Variance inflation factor
vs.	Versus

1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Topic of International Employer Branding

"International economic development since the Second World War has been characterized by increasing international linkages and cross-border business activity of firms" (Backhaus, Büschken, & Voeth, 2005, p. 3). This increased global activity of multinational corporations (MNCs) seems to be driven by a growing competition, which might originate from changes in consumer expectations, technological change, deregulation, and regional forces (Doole & Lowe, 2008). The globalization of business activities in turn forces companies to recruit highly skilled employees in countries all over the world. Therefore, attracting and retaining qualified, independent, mobile and internationally marketable individuals, is claimed to be a critical feature of globalization (Sutherland, Torricelli, & Karg, 2002). However, demographic and social factors continuously reduce the supply of these individuals. OECD projections claim that by the year 2050, ten active workers will support an average of more than seven older, inactive people, in comparison with a ratio of ten to four in 2000. If unaddressed, this skill shortage might cause a 30 per cent decrease in productivity compared with the years 1997-2000 (Taylor, 2005). While a growing number of MNCs realize that they need to manage talent on a global basis in order to remain competitive (Ready & Conger, 2007), they are confronted with increased shortages of managerial and professional staff (Björkman & Lervik, 2007).

Especially in the fields of natural science, engineering and management, the number of qualified employees is steadily declining (Collins & Stevens, 2002; Lievens, Decaesteker, Coetsier, & Geirnaert, 2001; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Moroko & Uncles, 2008). In Germany, for example, experts predict a severe lack of qualified personnel in the coming years, especially from the year 2015 onwards (BLK, 2001; Kirchgeorg & Lorbeer, 2002; Reinberg & Hummel, 2004). At the same time, the worldwide demand for skilled employees is likely to increase further because of the emergence and growth of new industry sectors, such as biotechnology, nanotechnology or digital communications, and the rise of new economies, such as China or India, which show a growing demand for skilled labor (Chambers, Foulton, Handfield-Jones, Hankin, & Michaels, 1998; Mahroum, 2000). The resulting growing competition for the best talents has been widely discussed for several years now and has been referred to as the 'war for talent' (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2007; Chambers et al., 1998; CIPD, 2007; Michaels, Handfield-Jones, & Axelrod, 2001). Despite short-term fluctuations in the labor market, which can be caused by economic crises or rationali-

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zation procedures in terms of globalization, there is little doubt that in the long run, the labor market can be characterized as a buyers' market, in which employers compete for the scarce good of qualified, motivated employees (Grobe, 2008; Lubitsh & Smith, 2007). Especially young and talented employees tend to be loyal to their employers only as long as their work tasks and challenges in the company are attractive and contribute to their knowledge, career development and future employability (Ritz & Sinelli, 2010).

Another factor contributing to the skill shortage is the growing migration of knowledge (Ritz & Sinelli, 2010; Tarique & Schuler, 2010). Since knowledge is always attached to people, a country loses its knowledge if highly qualified people migrate to other countries. Germany is an example for a nation in which an above-average proportion of highly qualified people leave the country. The proportion of German emigrants with a PhD degree is ten times higher than in the average population. Emigration is also particularly popular for medicine students: Out of 11,000 students, more than 4,000 emigrate. With this 'brain drain' Germany loses valuable knowledge, and the training and education costs are absorbed for other countries (Ritz & Sinelli, 2010). Additionally, there is a general trend towards increasing job mobility, also within countries. Companies are constantly threatened by the fact that their best employees might be lured away by headhunters or directly by competitors (Anslinger & Dickel, 2008). Chambers et al. (1998, p. 48) describe this competitive situation quite precisely: "A war once conducted as a sequence of set piece recruiting battles is transforming itself into an endless series of skirmishes as companies find their best people, and in particular their future senior executives, under constant attack."

A further challenge for recruiting and retaining employees is the growing ethnic diversity of the workforce due to globalization (Ritz & Sinelli, 2010). This challenge forces companies to develop strategies how to cope with intercultural differences and different applicant profiles. In addition, women are of growing importance in the labor market and play a key role for filling the demographic gap (Calo, 2008; Thomas & Wise, 1999). Therefore, employers have to find ways to attract and retain very diverse talents with heterogeneous preferences and expectations towards their employers of choice. Organizations which are able to effectively recruit from a diverse applicant pool will have significant competitive advantages (Thomas & Wise, 1999). With regard to companies' recruiting strategies, this increasing desire for diversity often leads to more formal international recruiting processes and away from a headquarter mindset (Sparrow, Brewster, & Harris, 2004). In the light of these challenges in at-

tracting and recruiting the right employees, it is essential for knowledge-based companies to differentiate themselves from the global competition through a unique and attractive employer image (Knox & Freeman, 2006). A strong employer image has been found to have a positive influence on perceived employer attractiveness and job seekers' application intentions (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005; Gatewood, Gowan, & Lautenschlager, 1993; Knox & Freeman, 2006; Lemmink, Schuijf, & Steukens, 2003; Lievens, van Hoye, & Schreurs, 2005; Slaughter, Zickar, Highhouse, & Mohr, 2004; Turban, 2001).

Employer image and employer branding have become important topics for most employers in recent years, as more and more companies realize that the demographic and social changes outlined above are a real strategic and competitive threat to their future (Björkman & Lervik, 2007; Calo, 2008). According to a survey by Hewitt Associates (2010), in which 76 international and global companies from the German speaking region took part, more than 70 per cent of these companies see themselves challenged by a talent shortage even after the recent economic crisis. Technical specialists, IT- and e-Business-specialists as well as management staff are regarded as particularly scarce. 46 per cent of the surveyed companies state that their organization is not familiar enough or not considered an attractive employer (Hewitt Associates, 2010). Scientific research additionally highlights that shortages of international management talent, and especially of leadership talent, prevent many companies from implementing their global strategies successfully (Cohn, Khurana, & Reeves, 2005; Sparrow et al., 2004). Especially companies in less attractive regions or industries increasingly face the problem of having to be content with employees who do not match their requirements in every aspect (Ritz & Sinelli, 2010). Even though the scientific discussion of the topic has just begun in recent years, employer branding has already become an important part of management activity, as an increasing number of managers realize that economic success heavily depends upon the performance and commitment of their employees. The growing significance of employer branding is also emphasized in a recent survey by Kienbaum Communications (2009), in which 140 German companies of all sizes and industries were asked about their employer branding strategies and activities. 74 per cent of those companies claim to have developed or to be in the process of developing an employer branding strategy. Despite the 2009 economic crisis, 40 per cent state that their employer branding budget has not changed or has even been increased compared to the previous year. With regard to the objectives of employer branding, an increase of employer attractiveness (94 per cent), employee retention (85 per cent) and increased

familiarity as an employer (78 per cent) are seen as most important by the surveyed organizations (Kienbaum Communications, 2009). As multinational companies have to attract employees in many markets worldwide and also recruit staff for their headquarters from all over the world, they have to develop international employer branding strategies. Therefore, the demand for market research and information on international employer branding topics has strongly increased. According to *trendence*, one of the main commercial research institutes in the field of employer branding, their clients' demand for international studies has grown significantly during the last three years. Due to the great interest, additional annual surveys have been introduced in China, Malaysia, and Singapore. Many companies also order custom research projects in European countries, North and South America, and the Middle East (Ledderhos, 2011).

In comparison to nationally operating firms, international companies have to face the even greater challenge of differentiating themselves from the global competition and attracting their often very diverse target groups (Cappelli, 2008a, 2008b; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Lewis & Heckman, 2006). They have to understand the impact of different nationalities and demographic characteristics on the perceptions of potential employees with regard to their employer brands (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). In other words, they need to find out what makes the right talents want to join them and stay with them globally. The key messages they send out through employer branding should make sense to potential employees in all of the organization's markets worldwide, since each market has cultural differences and similarities. Just like marketing managers have to handle the worldwide differences in consumers' values and attitudes as well as the subsequent behavioral patterns that determine human interaction (Czinkota & Ronkainen, 2010), employer brand managers have to develop an understanding of what drives the employer choice of potential employees in different markets and which similarities might exist. In terms of employer branding strategy, companies are thus confronted with the classic challenge of international marketing strategy: How global and how local should the branding strategy be designed? Can the employer branding principles and practices developed domestically be transferred to different national labor markets? On the one hand, the importance of economies of scale recommends building an international network for transferring best practices from the most capable countries instead of building talent pipeline processes for each country (Sparrow et al., 2004). On the other hand, the development of a global strategy might neglect the fact that potential employees of different nationalities have quite diverse preferences with regard to what constitutes a desirable em-

ployer. Referring to this challenge, Schultz and Hatch (2006, p. 28) speak of a "paradox of integrating": Strongly adapting the strategy to local requirements might lead to a fragmentation of the brand and of the company's internal structures, whereas a mainly global branding strategy might endanger the brand to neglect local differences in expectations and values of the target groups. In line with the increasing global business activity of MNCs, "[…] an increasing number of brands want to control their global image" (Kapferer, 2008, p. 495). In a survey of Austrian top managers in 2003 and 2004, for example, 41 per cent reported that their companies had plans to standardize their brands internationally. 69 per cent believed that the country subsidiaries of their company would have less freedom and scope with regard to brand management (Strebinger & Schweiger, 2006; Treiblmaier & Strebinger, 2006). Thus, a major concern for international employer brand management is the degree to which employer brands can be standardized across countries, or as Brewster et al. (2005, p. 966) point out: "A key challenge for international organizations is the extent to which it is possible to create global employee value propositions."[1]

Despite the growing interest in the topic and the large amount of unanswered questions with regard to employer brand standardization, scientific research has largely neglected the field of international employer branding to this date. Employer branding in general is a relatively new field in scientific research. Although several studies on employer brand management and applicant attraction do exist,[2] these studies are mainly situated in a domestic context, while research on employer attractiveness in a cross-cultural context is still scarce (Tarique & Schuler, 2010). Thus, we lack any information on whether international companies should adapt their employer branding strategies to different cultural environments or whether a global employer brand positioning might be feasible (Caligiuri, 2010). While some theoretical foundations have been developed for employer branding in general, these foundations are still missing in the international context. In addition, the whole field of employer branding is characterized by a lack of quantitative empirical research. The present thesis picks up on this research gap by developing theoretical foundations for international employer brand management and by empirically investigating influences that determine the appropriate degree of employer brand standardization. Through the analysis of data from a large-scale European student survey, this project contributes to a deeper understanding of the preferences of diverse target groups with regard to the attractive-

[1] The term 'employee value proposition' refers to the positioning content an employer uses to address and attract different target audiences. The concept will be explained in more detail in Chapter 2.1.1.
[2] A detailed overview of previous research on employer branding will be given in Chapter 2.3.

ness of employer brands. This understanding is necessary to decide on the degree of brand standardization in the process of international employer branding. The overall objective of this thesis and the chosen methodology will be outlined in more detail in the following section.

1.2 Research Objective and Methodology

The overall objective of this thesis is to develop theoretical foundations which contribute to international employer branding, and to provide empirical evidence with regard to the determinants of employer attractiveness evaluations in a multi-national context. This empirical evidence is strongly needed to shed more light onto the question of employer brand standardization. In order to reach this objective, several issues have to be addressed. A first concern is the lack of structure regarding definitions and theoretical foundations that still exists in the field of employer branding. The core concepts and theories related to the term of employer branding need to be straightened out before a deeper understanding of the topic in an international setting can be achieved. A further aim is to investigate what drives the employer choice of different target audiences in multiple countries. Thus, key elements of employer attractiveness have to be identified from previous research. In order to uncover potential differences between individuals' judgments of what constitutes an attractive employer, a framework of determinants of individual preferences has to be developed. Within this framework, potential factors of influence can be differentiated with regard to their level: Differences can either be caused by individual-level determinants, such as job seekers' demographics, or by country-level determinants, such as national culture. After the identification of potential influences, a major concern is to empirically analyze their impact on the evaluation of employer attractiveness items, in other words to test potential differences between individual target groups and countries. The objective of the analyses is to draw implications concerning the feasibility of standardized positioning content for different European countries. The multiple aims of this project can be broken down into the following research questions:

1. Which elements have to be taken into account for an effective employer brand management and which theories are adequate to explain the core concept of employer attractiveness?
2. Which are the key constituents that build employer attractiveness?
3. Which determinants of job seekers' importance evaluation of employer attractiveness constituents can be identified?

4. Which elements of international marketing can be effectively used for the development of international employer branding strategies?
5. Do job seekers' individual differences, such as gender, course of study, age, or academic achievement, influence their preferences for certain employer attractiveness attributes?
6. Is there a significant influence of country characteristics, such as cultural values or economic development, on job seekers' evaluation of employer attractiveness determinants?

In order to address these questions, theory and research from different fields will be used to develop a conceptual framework. Besides studies from the fields of employer branding, recruiting, and organizational attractiveness, related fields have to be explored, as research specifically focused on employer branding is still scarce. Consumer behavior research, cross-cultural research and the international marketing literature seem particularly suited to develop a sound theoretical basis for the following empirical analysis. The empirical part is based on data from a large-scale European student survey provided by a cooperating research institute. As the data is hierarchical in nature, i.e. individual respondents are nested within countries, the most appropriate statistical technique for the hypothesis tests is multilevel analysis, or hierarchical linear modeling (HLM). This technique allows for the integration of micro-level and macro-level predictor variables in a single model and has been deemed a promising tool for cross-cultural analyses by many researchers (e.g., House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; Ralston, 2008). In addition, cluster analysis will be carried out in the second stage of the empirical part. By means of this technique, a segmentation of the data basis will be performed in order to assess the existence of transnational clusters of graduates sharing similar preferences with regard to their ratings of employer attractiveness attributes. The results of both empirical stages will shed more light onto a suitable strategic employer brand positioning in the European context.

1.3 Thesis Structure

The structure of this thesis reflects the main research questions outlined above. As depicted in Figure 1, the research project can be divided into six main parts. Subsequent to the first, introductory chapter, the second chapter is dedicated to a clarification of the main termini and concepts related to employer branding, employer attractiveness, and employer image. As a basis for the following development of a concep-

tual framework, the most important theories underlying the concept of employer branding will be introduced. The main aim of this chapter is to provide a deeper understanding of the concept of employer attractiveness and its role in the overall process of employer branding, which is essential for the remaining part of this thesis. The first research question will hence be treated in the second chapter. In addition, an overview of previous research on domestic as well as international employer branding will be given, leading to a detailed identification of research gaps.

Chapter 3 addresses research questions 2, 3, and 4, and is aimed at the development of a conceptual framework as well as the deduction of hypotheses. This chapter is divided into three main subsections: The first subsection is focused on the identification of the most important constituents of employer attractiveness as well as on individual characteristics that might influence job seekers' evaluation of these constituents. Findings from research in recruitment, organizational attractiveness, and consumer behavior will be employed to develop the first hypotheses. In the second main subsection, cross-cultural research and literature will be incorporated to discuss the influence of nationality, national culture and further country-based characteristics, such as economic development, on individuals' preferences for employer attractiveness attributes. Against the backdrop of the globalization debate and the question of marketing standardization versus adaption, the influence of culture as well as its conceptualization will be examined in more detail, leading to the deduction of additional hypotheses. The hypotheses of both main subsections will be summarized in an overview of the research models that serve as a basis for the empirical part. Chapter 3 closes with the last main subsection, in which the previous reflections are incorporated into the context of international employer branding strategy. International marketing literature will be consulted to provide a framework for the development of international employer branding strategies. A central focus within this framework will be international market segmentation. Theoretical illustrations on this topic will be outlined in preparation for the segmentation of the European graduate market by means of cluster analysis in the empirical part of this thesis.

Chapter 4 is aimed at a closer examination of the provided data basis with regard to conceptual and methodological aspects. As the survey from which the data was retrieved has been conducted in 24 countries, it is cross-cultural in nature. In view of the peculiarities of cross-cultural research, a sound validation of the data basis will be conducted with regard to specific methodological prerequisites. The chapter will also

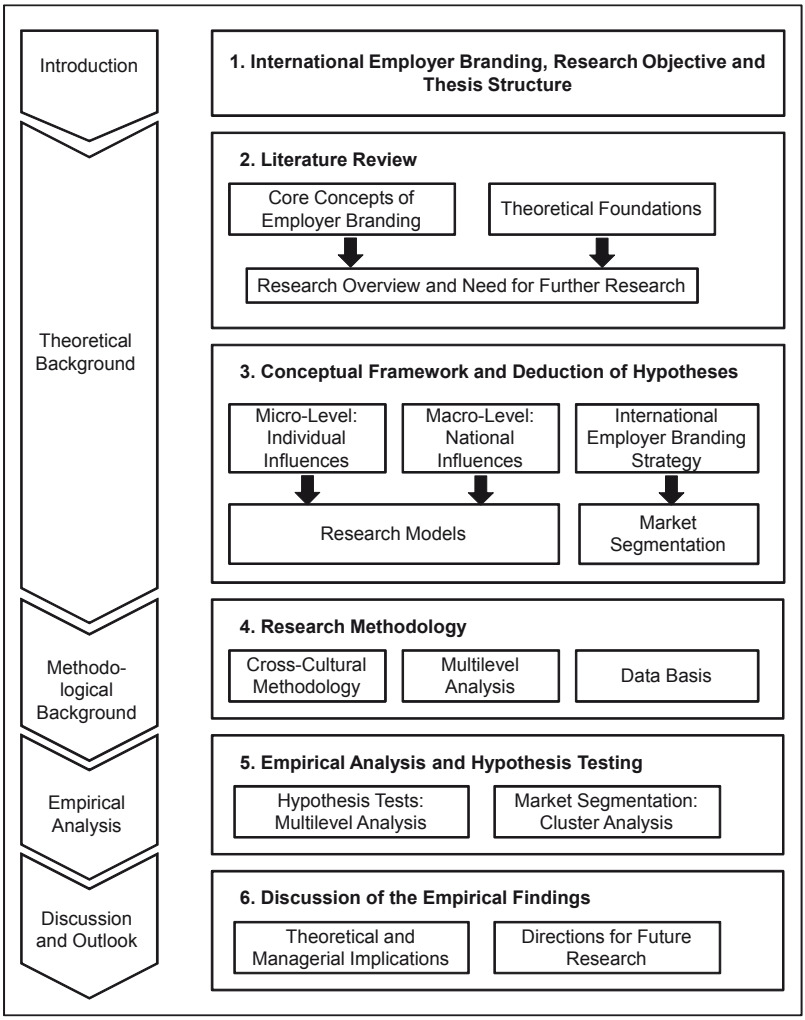

Figure 1: Thesis Structure

take a closer look at the technique of multilevel analysis, being the main statistical method applied in this thesis. To end the chapter, details of the data set and questionnaire as well as of the applied variables will be outlined, which leads to the empirical analyses of the next chapter. Chapter 5 consists of two main stages of empirical analyses. Before entering the main stages, selected descriptive and comparative re-

sults will be presented. This preliminary analysis allows for a first examination of the hypotheses and of a potential national influence on students' preference structures. The first and most extensive main section will then cover the hypotheses tests by means of multilevel analysis. Each research model will be analyzed separately. This stage is followed by the second main section, in which the data will be segmented by means of cluster analysis in order to reconsider the multilevel analysis results with regard to national influence. Research questions 5 and 6 will thus be clarified through the results of this empirical chapter. The findings of the empirical part will then be discussed in Chapter 6, with the aim of drawing theoretical as well as managerial implications. The managerial implications will be focused on the consequences of the results for international employer brand management, especially with regard to the possibility of brand standardization. The thesis will be closed with directions for future research and a short summary of the results.

2 Theoretical Background and Literature Review

2.1 Core Concepts of Employer Branding

Employer branding is a relatively new field in research and management. Scientific literature on the topic is still scarce whereas quite a few management handbooks have evolved in recent years (cf. Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010; Sutherland et al., 2002). Employer branding and its related concepts, such as employer attractiveness, are characterized by a lack of structure and some confusion with regard to definitions and termini (Sponheuer, 2009). One reason is the plurality of research fields involved, including the different perspectives from which the topic is being approached. The research streams of organizational identity, corporate reputation, organizational image, corporate culture, corporate branding and corporate communications provide a lot of related concepts and definitions which are relevant to employer branding (Balmer & Greyser, 2003, 2006). Especially corporate reputation and organizational image have to be considered when approaching the topics of employer branding and employer attractiveness. These concepts will therefore be discussed in more detail in Sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2. To complete the discussion of the core concepts of employer branding, functions and objectives will be outlined in Sections 2.1.3 and 2.1.4 respectively. Before turning to each concept in detail, the development and definitional background of employer branding as well as the integration into the organizational architecture should be outlined at this point.

The authors Ambler and Barrow (1996) claim having been the first to unite the disciplines of HR-management and brand management in order to create a conceptual framework which they call the 'employer brand'.[3] They describe it as "[…] the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company" (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p.187). Barrow also claims having written the first book on employer branding, in which he and his co-author describe the development of the concept (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). While the employer brand can be regarded as the final outcome of all brand-related activities, employer branding can be described as the process to reach this outcome. Thus, employer branding includes all decisions concerning the planning, creation, management and controlling of employer brands and the corresponding activities to positively influence the employer preferences of the desired target groups (Petkovic, 2009). In a conceptual paper, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004, p. 502) summarize em-

[3] Other authors respectively use the term 'employment brand' (e.g., Ewing et al., 2002).

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ployer branding as "[…] the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity" and the employer brand as "[…] a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors." Despite various definitions and differing approaches to employer branding, there is common agreement on the fact that employer branding includes selected concepts from brand management which are transferred to HR management and recruitment (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Cable & Turban, 2003). According to Branham (2000, p.18), employer branding is "applying traditional marketing principles to achieving the status of Employer of Choice[4] […], the process of placing an image of being a great place to work in the mind of the targeted candidate pool." This image of being a great place to work is generally referred to as employer image.[5] The term is often used interchangeably with the concept of employer attractiveness in scientific and practitioner literature. Therefore, both terms will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

From an organizational architecture point of view, employer branding is generally situated between marketing and HR management. Ideally, both functions should cooperate in the development and implementation of an employer branding strategy (Edwards, 2010). When classifying HR management according to levels into strategic, tactical and operational management, employer branding can be attributed to the category of strategic HR management, since it is focused on the strategic goals of the company as a whole. In comparison, tactical elements are focused on groups of employees and jobs while operational elements are aimed at single employees and jobs (Sponheuer, 2009). The concept of personnel marketing, which is often mistakenly used interchangeably with employer branding, is located at the tactical level since it involves the implementation of general measures to attract the target group of future employees and motivate the target group of current employees (Krauss, 2002; Sponheuer, 2009).

[4] Sutherland et al. (2002, p. 14) define employers of choice as "[…] those organizations that outperform their competition to attract, develop, and retain people with business-required talent. […] An employer of choice is therefore an organization which top talent aspires to work for as a result of its reputation and employer brand message, both of which are tailored to appeal to the target audience."

[5] Some authors also refer to the term as ‚employer *brand* image' (e.g., von Walter et al., 2009), others speak of 'recruitment image' or '(company) employment image' (Highhouse et al., 1999; Lemmink et al., 2003). With regard to the term 'image' itself, there is no generally accepted single definition in the academic literature. The conceptualization of 'image' strongly depends on the relevant research problem (Lemmink et al., 2003). In the context of this thesis, image will be treated against the backdrop of organizational and employer attractiveness and will be defined respectively.

2.1.1 Employer Attractiveness and Related Concepts

Berthon et al. (2005, p. 156) define employer attractiveness as "the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization", regarding it as an antecedent of the more general concept of employer brand equity.[6] By including the term 'benefits' the author refers to the benefit-oriented view of the employer brand, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.2.1, in view of different measurement approaches of employer attractiveness. In addition, employer attractiveness is often described in relation to the concept of organizational attractiveness, since initial application decisions are often strongly based on general impressions of organizational attractiveness, due to the fact that applicants only have a very small amount of information about an employer early in their decision process (Rynes, 1991). Therefore, they use the perceived image of the organization to decide whether it might be attractive as an employer. The topic of organizational attractiveness has been approached by different research streams, such as applied psychology (Collins & Stevens, 2002; Jurgensen, 1978), vocational behavior (Soutar & Clarke, 1983), management (Gatewood et al., 1993), marketing (Ambler, 2000; Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Ewing, Pitt, de Bussy, & Berthon, 2002; Gilly & Wolfinbarger, 1998) and communication (Bergstrom, Blumenthal, & Crothers, 2002).

The term employer image is used in a very similar way as employer attractiveness and can be explained by turning to brand equity theory. Customer-based brand equity research (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993) indicates that creating a unique, favorable brand image in consumers' minds might help to increase the likelihood that a company's products or services will be chosen over similar ones from other companies. Thus, brand equity refers to individual beliefs about product or service brands that affect preferences and purchasing decisions. It can influence consumers' decision-making by creating points of differentiation and reasons to prefer the brand over its competitors, as well as generating positive affect towards the branded product or service. As a result, chances might increase that the branded product or service will be in the considered set for an upcoming purchase (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1998). By using the brand equity approach in a study on early recruitment-related activities, Collins and Stevens (2002) confirm that the customer-based brand equity concept can be adapted to the recruitment context in order to better understand application

[6] Employer brand equity is based on the concept of customer-based brand equity (Aaker, 1991) and will be further discussed in the course of this chapter. Ewing et al. (2002, p. 14 f.) define employer brand equity as "a set of employment brand assets and liabilities linked to an employment brand, its name and symbol that add to (or subtract from) the value provided by an organization to that organization's employees."

decisions of highly skilled but inexperienced job seekers in a tight labor market. They propose that application decisions are affected by employer brand image, which they define as "[…] potential applicants' attitudes and perceived attributes about the job or organization" (Collins & Stevens, 2002, p. 1122). Attitudes refer to general affective responses associated with the brand, whereas attributes refer to beliefs about specific features which are relevant for the application decision. This definition is similar to definitions of organizational image in the recruitment literature, since the latter has also been described as both general reactions towards a company (Gatewood et al., 1993) and beliefs about a specific set of attributes of an organization (Belt & Paolillo, 1982). In the employer branding context, attitudes and attributes have also been expressed as brand associations: Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) propose that employer brand associations affect employer image and that employer image mediates the relationship between employer brand associations and employer attractiveness. Several other studies point out the strong influence of employer image on perceived employer attractiveness and application intentions (Chapman et al., 2005; Gatewood et al., 1993; Knox & Freeman, 2006; Lemmink et al., 2003; Lievens et al., 2005; Slaughter et al., 2004; Turban, 2001).

A central question is the one of which framework to use in order to depict employer attractiveness attributes and brand associations. Most of the current employer branding research is based on the instrumental-symbolic[7] framework, which is taken from brand management literature (e.g., Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Lievens, van Hoye, & Anseel, 2007; Martin & Hetrick, 2009). Park et al. (1986) divide brands into three categories according to the consumer needs they fulfill: functional needs, symbolic needs and experiential needs. Functional or so-called instrumental brand benefits describe the objective, tangible and physical attributes of a product. According to Katz (1960), instrumental attributes are linked to people's need to maximize rewards and minimize punishments. Hence, instrumental attributes help consumers to maximize benefits and minimize costs (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Symbolic benefits relate to the subjective, abstract and intangible attributes and are linked to people's need to maintain their self-identity, to express themselves, or to enhance their self-image (Aaker, 1997, 1999; Katz, 1960; Shavitt, 1990; Solomon, 1983). Experiential aspects describe the brand's effect on sensory satisfaction or

[7] Instrumental attributes are also referred to as functional attributes (e.g., Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Park et al., 1986) or objective factors (e.g., Behling et al., 1968). Symbolic attributes are also referred to as emotional attributes (e.g., Sponheuer, 2009), psychological benefits (e.g., Ambler & Barrow, 1996) or subjective factors (e.g., Behling et al., 1968). In the following, the terms instrumental and symbolic will be used to describe the concepts.

cognitive stimulation (Lievens et al., 2007). Yet, the experiential dimension has not been transferred into the employer branding context since it is difficult to translate from a product perspective to the employment and organizational context, whereas the instrumental-symbolic categories are well suited. As mentioned in the beginning of Section 2.1, Ambler and Barrow (1996, p. 187) defined the employer brand as "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits", which is consistent with the instrumental-symbolic framework. In the employer branding context, instrumental attributes refer to the job or the organization in terms of objective and concrete attributes, such as salary or leave allowances, whereas symbolic attributes describe the subjective, intangible, and abstract aspects of an organization or job, and are often related to perceptions about the prestige of a firm (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). In the organizational context, they convey symbolic company or job information via imagery and trait inferences assigned to the organization by current or potential employees (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003).

These trait inferences are often conceptualized through corporate or brand personality, since consumers tend to associate human traits with brands (Aaker, 1997; Davies, 2008; Davies, Chun, Da Silva, & Roper, 2002; Davies, Chun, Da Silva, & Roper, 2004; Lievens et al., 2001; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Slaughter et al., 2004). By applying the equivalent of a personality test on a brand, it is possible to obtain a holistic picture of a brand's associations (Davies, 2008). The Corporate Character Scale by Davies et al. (2004), for example, includes the dimensions of agreeableness, enterprise, chic, competence and ruthlessness. By applying the scale in a survey of 854 commercial managers, Davies (2008) found that perceived employer differentiation, employee loyalty, affinity and satisfaction were all predicted by some aspects of brand personality. Lievens et al. (2005) developed a scale for symbolic attributes in the recruitment context by adapting Aaker's (1997) original brand personality scale, including the dimensions of sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. This scale was reused in the study of Lievens et al. (2007), in which they confirmed that the instrumental-symbolic framework is a useful conceptualization of employer image among outsiders. Since employer image consists of employer brand associations, these associations can be divided into those concerning the functional or instrumental attributes of a brand and those relating to the symbolic attributes (Burmann, Schaefer, & Maloney, 2008).

Table 1: Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition	Context/Relations
Employer brand	Package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company (Ambler & Barrow, 1996)	Final outcome of all brand-related activities
Employer branding	All decisions concerning the planning, creation, management and controlling of employer brands and the corresponding activities to positively influence the employer preferences of the desired target groups (Petkovic, 2009); Process of placing an image of being a great place to work in the mind of the targeted candidate pool (Branham, 2000)	Process to reach the desired outcome of being an attractive employer
Employer brand equity	Set of employment brand assets and liabilities linked to an employment brand, its name and symbol that add to (or subtract from) the value provided by an organization to that organization's employees (Ewing, Pitt, de Bussy & Berthon, 2002)	Influences the likelihood that a given employer will be chosen over a competitor due to its unique, favorable employer image that is conveyed through the employer brand; brand equity generates positive affect towards the branded organization
Employer image	Potential applicants' attitudes and perceived attributes about the job or organization (Collins & Stevens, 2002)	Associations towards the employing company that are conveyed through its employer brand, which can be further specified by means of instrumental and symbolic image facets/ attributes; unlike attractiveness attributes, image facets do not necessarily have to reflect favorable associations
Employer attractiveness	Envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization (Berthon, Ewing & Hah, 2005)	Antecedent of employer brand equity; influenced by employer image; the envisioned benefits can be conceptualized, just as employer image attributes, through instrumental and symbolic features, which have to convey favorable associations in order to contribute to attractiveness
Employer value proposition	Application of a customer value proposition – why should you buy my product or service – to the individual – why should a highly talented person work in my organization? It differs from one organization to another, has to be as distinctive as a fingerprint, and is tailored to the specific type of people the organization is trying to attract and retain (Sparrow & Cooper, 2003)	Aims at inducing positive brand associations and hence a favorable employer image; encompasses the most important employment benefits (instrumental attributes) as well as key organizational values (symbolic attributes), which reflect the organization's identity

In order to induce positive associations and hence a favorable employer image, employer branding involves the creation of a unique employer value proposition (EVP)[8], which encompasses the employment advantages and benefits (instrumental attributes) as well as key organizational values (symbolic attributes) (Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Edwards, 2010; Knox, Maklan, & Thompson, 2000). Sparrow and Cooper (2003, p. 160) define the EVP as being "[…] a human resource management policy influenced very much by marketing thinking that cuts across the whole of the employment experience and applies to all individuals in the organization. It is the application of a customer value proposition – why should you buy my product or service – to the individual – why should a highly talented person work in my organization? It differs from one organization to another, has to be as distinctive as a fingerprint, and is tailored to the specific type of people the organization is trying to attract and retain." By including key organizational values, the role of organizational identity for employer branding is being reinforced, since these values reflect important information about an organization's identity and summarize it for potential applicants (Edwards, 2010). To close this section, Table 1 summarizes and delineates the most important terms introduced in this part and describes their interrelations in the context of employer branding.

2.1.2 Employer Branding and Corporate Branding

With regard to a company's brand architecture, three brand levels can be distinguished: corporate brands, strategic business unit brands and product or service brands (Bierwirth, 2003; Keller, 1998; Strebinger, 2008). Corporate brands are of particular importance, since they are designed to support other brands within the brand portfolio, such as the employer brand, and to ensure a consistent brand presence (Burmann et al., 2008; Petkovic, 2008). In scientific discourse, it has become widely accepted that employer branding is a part of corporate branding, since the branded object of reference in the labor market is the corporation itself (Ewing et al., 2002; Kirchgeorg & Günther, 2006; Petkovic, 2008; Sponheuer, 2009).

Whereas employer branding is targeted at the needs and expectations of current employees (internal employer branding) and potential employees (external employer

[8] The employer value proposition is also referred to as 'employee value proposition' (e.g., Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Brewster et al., 2005; Ritz & Sinelli, 2010), 'unique organization value proposition' (e.g., Knox et al., 2000) or just 'value proposition' (e.g., Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Martin & Hetrick, 2009).

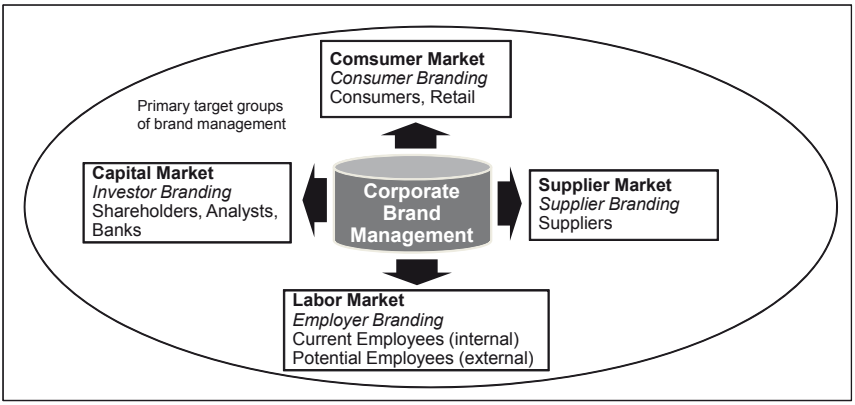

Figure 2: Primary Target Groups of Corporate Brand Management. Source: Adapted from Grobe, 2008, p. 127

branding) corporate branding needs to take into account all stakeholder[9] groups of a company, as depicted in Figure 2.

Taking into account these multiple stakeholder groups of a corporation, Riel (2001, p. 12) defines corporate branding as a "systematically planned and implemented process of creating and maintaining a favorable reputation[10] of the company with its constituent elements, by sending signals to stakeholders using the corporate brand."[11] Sponheuer (2009) developed an integrated framework uniting employer branding and consumer branding under the umbrella of corporate branding. The objective of this framework is to overcome the two contradictory challenges of employer branding: On the one hand, the employer brand has to be specifically designed in order to fulfill the needs of the target groups in the labor market. On the other hand, the employer brand should be in line with the overall corporate brand and the consumer brand(s) in order to maintain a consistent brand image (Sponheuer, 2009). The employer brand of a company often cannot be separated from its product or service brands, since potential employees can be, for example, (potential) customers at the same time and receive various impressions of a company through the media as

[9] Stakeholders of a company are "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievements of the organization's objective" (Freeman, 1984, p. 46).
[10] The term 'reputation' will be discussed in more detail against the backdrop of corporate image in the course of this chapter.
[11] For overviews and further definitions of corporate branding or corporate brand management, see Bierwirth (2003), Fiedler & Kirchgeorg (2007), Giersch (2008), Ind (1997), Kranz (2004), Meffert & Bierwirth (2002), Riel (2001); Tomczak et al. (2001).

well as through interpersonal communication. It has to be taken into account that employees can be members of all other stakeholder groups of a company at the same time (Grobe, 2008). Targeting specific messages at employees and only employees is almost impossible, especially in the era of the internet and fast mobile communication (Ewing et al., 2002). Therefore, the employer brand should be designed to support and enhance the product or service brands (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Forster, Erz, & Jenewein, 2009). The corporate brand should function as an integrative umbrella of a company's brands, representing the overall identity of a company and providing input for the strategic and operative implementation of the employer brand (Grobe, 2008; Schultz & Hatch, 2006; Sponheuer, 2009).

Just as the employer brand is closely linked to the corporate brand, so is employer image contingent upon corporate image, so that both images should not be discussed in isolation from each other (Petkovic, 2008). However, there is no agreement concerning the degree to which employer image depends on corporate image. Closely related to the term of corporate image is the concept of corporate reputation, which has been introduced in the context of employer attractiveness in the previous section. Research from the field of personnel psychology states that potential recruits are more likely to apply for a job at a company which has an existing positive reputation[12] (Edwards, 2010). Corporate reputation can be described as multidimensional construct and emerges from multiple constituents or stakeholder groups (e.g., employees, investors, customers, the general public) and their interaction with one another. Different stakeholders use various criteria to form an overall assessment of the firm (Flatt & Kowalczyk, 2008). Fombrun (1996, p. 72), a key contributor to research on corporate reputation, defines reputation as "[…] a perceptual representation of a company's past actions and future prospects that describes the firm's overall appeal to all of its key constituents when compared with leading rivals." In comparison with corporate image, reputation typically evolves over time as a result of a company's consistent performance, whereas the image can be influenced more quickly through communication programs (Gray & Balmer, 1998). In their review of literature on corporate image and corporate reputation, Gotsi and Wilson (2001) come to the conclusion that both concepts are dynamically related; however, corporate reputation implies a more conscious assessment of the characteristics and attributes of an organization. Profitability seems to be an important factor for causing job seekers' positive

[12] For a detailed discussion on reputation building and the role of reputation in corporate strategy see Fombrun & Shanley (1990) and Fombrun (1996). The reputation paradigm and the different schools of thought involved in the concept are discussed by Chun (2005).

perceptions of a company's reputation, as found by several researchers (Cable & Graham, 2000; McGuire, Sundgren, & Schneeweis, 1988; Preston & O'Bannon, 1997; Turban & Greening, 1996). Besides financial performance as a predictor of reputation, a positive evaluation of a company's social responsibility features, such as community and employee relations, environmental policies, product quality, and treatment of social minorities has been found to influence an employer's reputation (Turban & Greening, 1996). The importance of company reputation was asserted in a study by Cable and Turban (2003), who determined two additional key factors that predicted positive reputation perceptions: the degree of familiarity with the organization and external ratings of corporate reputation. The more positive an organization's reputation was perceived by potential employees, the more positive were their evaluations of job attributes and the more they expected to feel a sense of pride from working in the particular company. Other research confirms these findings, adding that general corporate advertising might be important in increasing employer attractiveness, especially when combined with recruitment advertising (Collins & Han, 2004; Collins & Stevens, 2002).

Besides the influence of corporate reputation on employer attractiveness, which is often analyzed in the Anglo-American literature, there are also studies on the influence of corporate image, mostly in the German context. Petkovic (2008) compares the 2004 results of a graduate survey and a corporate image survey,[13] finding that those companies with the best images are also more likely to be voted best employers by graduates. The author claims that due to the missing knowledge on employment details of a particular employer, the corporate image is transferred to equal the employer image. If employer image is affected by corporate image, other sub-images of the corporate image have to be considered when analyzing employer image. In particular, employer image can be affected by a) *industry image*, b) *location image* and c) *product image* of a company (Petkovic, 2008, p. 79 f.).

a) Industry image

Industry image can be defined as "a set of associations that is firmly anchored, condensed, and evaluated in the minds of people concerning a group of companies, which, from the point of view of an individual, supplies the same customer groups with the same technologies for the fulfillment of the same customer needs" (Burmann et al., 2008, p. 159). Industry image might have a strong influence on individuals'

[13] The surveys are the German access Absolventenstudie 2004 and the Imageprofile 2004 by manager magazin.

perceptions of a company and its function as employer (Petkovic, 2008; Simon, Wiltinger, Sebastian, & Tacke, 1995; Vollmer, 1993). Vollmer (1993, p. 1991 f.) refers to the industry as a normative filter, which affects the company-related perceptions and preferences and might even prevent potential applicants from getting into contact with the company. Research by Süß (1996) identified several reasons for graduates' preference or rejection of a branch of industry. Reasons for rejection might be a lack of interest in the industry, ethical reasons, lack of identification, negative prospects, and bureaucracy. Reasons for preference of an economic sector might be general interest, versatility, good growth prospects, selected major fields of study, and practical experience gained. In general, in can be supposed that potential applicants' preferences for certain industries particularly depend on the industry's economic power and future growth prospects, since employment conditions, such as salary and job security, are often connected to industry performance (Petkovic, 2008; Teufer, 1999). Based on the evaluation of a certain industry, the employer image can be affected by industry effects. Especially less known companies tend to be judged by industry characteristics rather than their qualities as employers (Simon et al., 1995). These arguments are supported by research from Burmann et al. (2008): In an empirical investigation with potential employees, they found that corporate brand image is indeed determined by industry image and that the degree of determination is negatively moderated by involvement and knowledge about a specific company.[14] In addition, the studies of Kirchgeorg and Lorbeer (2002) and Grobe (2003) show that 'industry sustainability' is of medium to high importance to potential applicants when choosing an employer. Summarizing, it can be stated that employer image and attractiveness often depend on being in the right industries, especially if potential applicants have little knowledge of the company. Therefore, industry collaboration in order to positively influence industry image is of particular importance for employers in industries with rather negative images (Burmann et al., 2008).[15]

b) Location image

The growing importance of location with regard to employer choice might be explained by the increasing significance of leisure time activities in the course of a generational value change (Süß, 1996; Knoblauch, 2001). Cities and regions that provide

[14] According to Burmann et al. (2008), corporate brand image should be analyzed as a prerequisite of employer attractiveness.

[15] Industry collaboration can involve e.g., contributions to voluntary industry self-commitments or strengthening of public relations work carried out by industry associations. A company could further alter its membership of a certain industry or the perception of its membership, for example through the alteration of its strategic business unit portfolio, co-branding or emphasizing certain industries within the business unit portfolio (Burmann et al., 2008, p. 172)

a lot of opportunities for recreational activities are often preferred by job seekers. Graduates also tend to choose larger cities rather than small towns or rural areas, whereas young professionals might prefer the latter due to a growing family orientation (Petkovic, 2008). In a study concerning location attractiveness, Seyfried (1993, p. 213) identified the following criteria as relevant for the selection process, in order of importance: opportunities for sports and recreation, environmental quality, opportunities for cultural activities, availability of apartments, public transportation, labor market, availability of schools and kindergartens, mentality of the residents, salary levels and advancement opportunities, opportunities for further development, cost of living, gastronomy, climate, friends and family in the same region, shopping possibilities, road network and economic power of a region.

c) Product image

In scientific discourse, there is agreement on the fact that product image is of particularly strong influence on corporate image (Knoblauch, 2001; Petkovic, 2008). Hence, companies with strong products benefit from their charismatic effects on potential applicants. The real employment conditions often remain out of consideration and the product image is transferred to equal the employer image, especially if the products are well known and present in the media (Petkovic, 2008). Various studies on employer attractiveness show that companies with attractive products are continuously voted for as best employers. Notably, companies from the automobile industry, such as *Audi*, *Porsche* and *BMW*, profit from the prestige of their products (trendence, 2011; Universum, 2011).

These examples of sub-images show that the employer image held by potential and current employees is shaped by different dimensions, which constrain the scope of action when trying to build a positive employer image. Nevertheless, there are also findings that dispute a connection between corporate and employer image. Gatewood et al. (1993) found that employer image and corporate image are both related to potential job applicants' intentions to pursue further contact with the firm. However, they also claimed that both images would not have to be related. Different groups of applicants may have different images of a firm and there even may be multiple images within one group. These findings indicate that an organization might be able to influence its employer image independent of its corporate image, which would especially be of advantage for firms with a negative corporate image (Gatewood et al., 1993). In contrast, a more recent study by Lemmink et al. (2003) shows that corporate image builds the foundation for a positive employer image and that organizations

are apparently not capable of developing an employer image without a sound basis of corporate image. This is supported by the finding that corporate image has a stronger relationship with graduates' application intentions than employer image (Lemmink et al., 2003).

However, research also reveals that the development of a distinct employer brand besides the corporate brand is important for attracting the right talent. Teufer (1999) analyzed the importance of different image dimensions when it comes to employer selection. Although he confirmed the strong influence of corporate image on employer choice, the most important factors of influence were those related to the personnel policy of a company (including e.g., interesting work tasks, team work, further development, salary, or working hours) and the so-called 'feel-good-factor', which summarizes the experiences and perceptions gained in the application process. This leads to the conclusion that the distinct personnel policy of a company and its communication by means of employer branding are crucial in order to induce employer preferences and attract future employees (Teufer, 1999). Thus, it can be summarized that both images are related to employer attractiveness and to application intentions. In addition, both images can be positively influenced by exposure to company information and subsequent familiarity (Cable & Turban, 2003; Gatewood et al., 1993; Highhouse, Zickar, Thorsteinson, Stierwalt, & Slaughter, 1999; Lemmink et al., 2003).

2.1.3 Functions of Employer Brands

From the perspective of potential, current and former employees, the functions of an employer brand are similar to the functions of brands in general and include three main aspects: risk reduction, information efficiency and symbolic benefit[16] (Sponheuer, 2009). Potential employees often cannot entirely assess a future employer prior to their employment experience because they suffer from an information deficit (Petkovic, 2008). Of course they might obtain information through informal sources, such as recommendations or best employer rankings, or formal sources, such as recruitment brochures, websites, fairs etc., but they cannot compare employers like a consumer can compare product brands. Furthermore, the risk of choosing the wrong employer is likely to be greater than making a poor product choice. An early termination of the employment relationship might add a negative touch to people's CVs that might lead to disadvantages regarding further applications. In addition, a negative

[16] For a definition and discussion of symbolic benefits, see Section 2.1.1.

experience with the first employer might shape an individual's future professional life (Petkovic, 2008). In order to better understand and evaluate a prospective employer, employees are likely to use corporate or product brands of a firm as a proxy, as outlined in the previous section. If the consumer-based promise of the corporate or product brands is aligned with the benefits being promised to employees, the employer brand can be strengthened by this alignment. However, if the consumer-based expectations are not supported by the employment experience, problems may occur and the employee may be disappointed by the employer (Sponheuer, 2009).[17] Therefore, it is especially important to create a well articulated and communicated employer brand and to align it with the firm's full brand portfolio (Forster et al., 2009; Moroko & Uncles, 2008).

Kranz (2004) developed an approach to further classify functions of corporate brands for potential employees. As described in the previous section, the functions of corporate brands with regard to the labor market can be transferred to the employer branding context. Within the decision process of applicants, Kranz (2004) differentiates between pre-selection and selection phase. During the pre-selection phase potential applicants look for alternatives and decide which companies they will apply to. This decision is influenced by the degree to which the applicant is familiar with a company, considers it to be attractive and includes it in his relevant set. All decisions in this phase underlie an information deficit, since details about every aspect of a company's employment experience are often not available or not transparent to the potential applicant. Therefore, the functions of risk reduction and information efficiency are highly important during the pre-selection phase (cf. Petkovic, 2009). The employer brand reduces the perceived risk of making a wrong decision and, in addition, reduces searching costs, which arise in the process of considering all available employer alternatives, by providing information to ease the pre-selection (Kranz, 2004). By providing the relevant information, the employer brand can help to shorten the selection process and reduce transaction costs,[18] making the whole process more efficient (Petkovic, 2008). The employer brand function during this search and selection process can also be described as orientation function.[19] The orientation function

[17] The misalignment of employer brand associations and the employment experience touches upon the notion of the psychological contract, which will be discussed in Chapter 2.2.2.
[18] In the employer branding context, transaction costs include time, energy and resources provided by a candidate when searching for jobs (Petkovic, 2008). The concepts of transaction costs and information asymmetry are theoretically grounded in new institutional econo-mics, which will be discussed in more detail in Section 2.2.3.
[19] The function of a brand as orientation anchor is described by e.g., Meffert (1992, p. 130), Sander (1994, p. 17 f.) and Bruhn (2001a, p. 24 f.).

contributes to the rapid identification of relevant employers when entering the searching process, e.g., when looking for internships, and eases the recognition of employers when reentering the process, e.g., when making the final selection decisions (Petkovic, 2008).

During the selection phase, after participating in interviews with employers and considering various job offers, the perceived risk can be further reduced by the experience the candidate has gained with the relevant companies. Thus, the importance of the function of risk reduction declines slightly in this phase, whereas the function of information efficiency becomes even slightly more important. Due to the concretization of expectations on both sides, the information basis grows and becomes more complex. With regard to the growing complexity of the available information, the employer brand can be used to fulfill the need for key information to complete the overall impression of an employer before making a decision (Kranz, 2004). Furthermore, the function of symbolic benefit gains in importance as the decision for a certain employer becomes more definite and the potential candidate now also considers the company's communicated values. The candidate can now relate the employer brand to the employees he has met and can attribute certain personality characteristics to the company. As will be discussed in more detail in Section 2.2.1 in the context of social identity theory, the candidate compares his or her own personality and values to the ones of the employer and decides if he or she can identify with the company. The function of symbolic benefit is further supported by the fact that candidates are trying to evaluate their own 'market value'. Through the reception of a job offer from an employer with a well-known and attractive image, the candidate's self-image is supposed to be strengthened, since his or her personality is perceived to match the employer's brand personality (Kranz, 2004). Kranz (2004) supported his arguments through an empirical analysis with 338 potential applicants surveyed during three career fairs for graduates and young professionals. The analysis shows that, depending on the stage of selection process, the corporate brand significantly reduces the perceived risk, and provides information efficiency and symbolic benefit.[20]

Considering current employees, the symbolic benefits of the employer brand gain in importance (compared to potential employees). Employees have already made their decision for a certain employer and have collected information through their experience with the company, so that they are able to form a valid impression. The func-

[20] For the detailed analysis, see Kranz (2004, p. 114 f.).

tions of risk reduction and information efficiency tend to be less important (Sponheuer, 2009), but they still play a role. Through the function of information efficiency, for example, employer branding provides employees with details about desired behaviors, work norms and other facts necessary for a successful career in the company (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). However, symbolic benefits play a more important role, since the identification of employees with their employer is essential. As mentioned before, belonging to a company may serve as a means for employees' self-definition and self-expression. The function of symbolic benefit is also of importance to former employees, since identification with the company and a feeling of prestige still play a role as motivators for positive references. As brand ambassadors, former employees serve as information sources for other target groups, and the higher their identification with their former employers, the more positive references they might distribute (Sponheuer, 2009).

In addition to the employee or applicant perspective, employer branding also fulfills certain functions for the employing company. However, these functions of employer branding from the employer perspective will not be discussed at this point, since they will be covered in the next section with regard to the objectives that companies aim to reach by means of employer branding.

2.1.4 Objectives of Employer Branding

The overall objective of employer branding from the employer perspective can be described as the development and implementation of a definite and favorable profile as an employer, which induces current, future, and former employees to develop preferences towards the given employer (Sponheuer, 2009). Petkovic (2008, p. 61) summarizes the final objective as the status as "First-Choice-Employer" for the right graduates and young professionals of the relevant target groups, which guarantees the filling of job vacancies within the organization. The objectives of employer branding can also be further classified according to the three target groups introduced in the previous chapter: future, current, and former employees. As far as HR management with regard to these target groups is concerned, employer branding covers and integrates the fields of acquisition and placement, development, motivation, and dispensation. Thus, the objectives of employer branding can be structured along the whole professional life of employees. According to the different stages of professional life, employer branding also needs to be integrated into every single HR management task (Sponheuer, 2009), as illustrated in Figure 3.

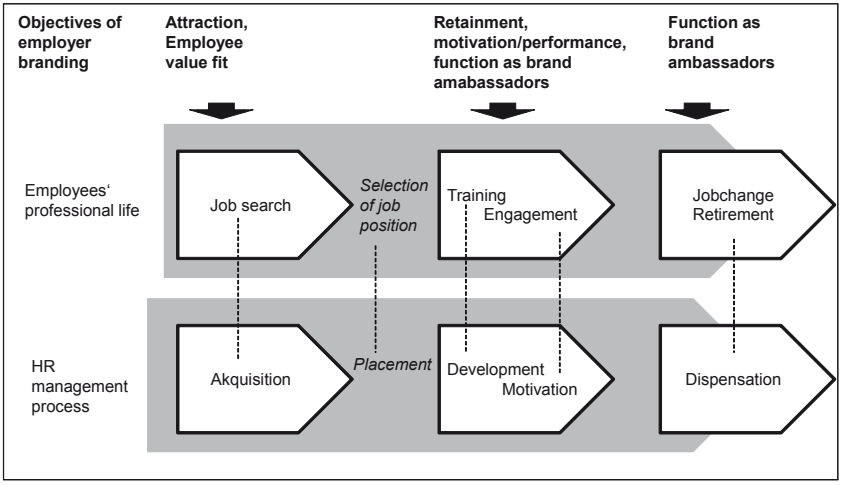

Figure 3: Objectives of Employer Branding
Source: Adapted from Krauss (2002), p.8

With regard to future employees, the main objective of employer branding is to position the company as employer of choice in order to attract the best talents (Sutherland et al., 2002). Ideally, the employer brand attracts those candidates which are best suited to fit into the company and share its values. From an economic perspective, employer branding likely leads to lower acquisition costs by making the hiring process more efficient (Sponheuer, 2009). It might even be possible to offer lower salaries compared to firms with weaker employer brands (Ritson, 2002). It is essential that an employer creates perceived differentiation from the competing companies by means of a certain positioning, since potential candidates might not be able to differentiate between similar employers (Lievens & Highhouse 2003; Moroko & Uncles, 2008).

Larger corporations are often alike with regard to their employment offers. There are hardly any perceived differences in the offered work tasks within similar organizational units, the possibilities for further training and development, or flexible working hours, making these employers seem to be rather exchangeable (Petkovic, 2008; Scholz, 2000; Thomas & Wise, 1999). Through differentiation, the employer brand fulfills one of the main functions of a brand in general (Kapferer, 2009; Esch, 2002, 2003; Simon, 1994). By distinguishing the employer and its employment offer from comparable offers, the employer brand contributes to the improvement or securing of

the employer's market position (Petkovic, 2008). The ideal objective of differentiation is to create a monopoly position within the minds of the target groups (Fantapié Altobelli & Sander, 2001; Meffert, 2002). Since the tangible employment benefits offered by employers are often similar, differentiation is only achievable through emotional appeal (Meffert, 2000; Petkovic, 2008; Scholz, 2000). An emotional positioning is aimed at creating a feeling of sympathy towards the employer within the relevant target groups and thus improving satisfaction as well as attraction and retaining of current and potential employees (Petkovic, 2008).[21] Further prerequisites to become an employer of choice are familiarity and attractiveness, since a company first has to enter into the 'relevant set' of a potential applicant. Moroko and Uncles (2008, p. 163 f.), who identified characteristics of successful employer brands in a conceptual paper, claim that it is important for employers to first be "known and noticeable" by creating brand awareness, and then be "relevant and resonant" by providing the relevant key benefits. Empirical research supports the notion that more familiar firms are often seen as more attractive employers than less familiar firms (Gatewood et al., 1993; Turban, Lau, Ngo, Chow, & Si, 2001). Creating awareness can be quite difficult for smaller and less known companies, such as B2B-firms or small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which often seem less attractive to qualified graduates (Anslinger & Dickel, 2008). This might be one of the reasons why small and medium enterprises hardly ever appear in any of the favorite employer rankings.

With regard to current employees, an emotional bond between employee and employer should be established through employer branding (Petkovic, 2008). This is supposed to lead to a feeling of pride and growing commitment, which in turn helps to retain the employee. A longer retaining of employees helps to reduce costs for hiring and training new employees (Berthon et al., 2005; Petkovic, 2008; Sponheuer, 2009). Research has also shown that a strong employer brand can reduce the rate of sickness leaves in companies by fostering a strong commitment and identification with the employer (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). Furthermore, employer branding should encourage employees to live the brand values and promote the brand to company outsiders such as potential employees or customers (Petkovic, 2008; Sponheuer, 2009).

Former employees have not been discussed much under the topic of employer branding, however, they are an important target group as well, since there are se-

[21] Emotional positioning is also discussed in the context of symbolic employer attributes in Chapters 2.1.1 and 3.1.1.

veral reasons to address them by employer branding. They can, for example, become customers of their former employer and influence business relationships through positive recommendations. Furthermore, they can foster the reputation of an employer through recommendations in the labor market (cf. Section 2.1.3). In addition, against the backdrop of the growing skill shortage there seems to be a recent trend towards 'boomerang hiring', which is the re-recruiting of former employees (Kienbaum Communications, 2009).

2.2 Theoretical Foundations of Employer Branding

After introducing the core concepts as well as the main termini in Chapter 2.1, this chapter is aimed at further exploring some of the theoretical foundations of employer branding. In order to gain a deeper understanding of how and why employer branding works, foundations from social identity theory, psychological contract theory and new institutional economics will be discussed. These three theories will be included because they contribute to building a basis for the key concept of employer attractiveness, which is central to the analyses carried out in this thesis. Details on the choice of theories will additionally be provided within each section. Some notions have already been touched upon in the previous sections in order to explain the basic principles of employer branding. However, in view of the lack of a sound theoretical framework in the employer branding literature to date, a more detailed discussion of the foundations seems appropriate.

2.2.1 Social Identity Theory and Person-Organization Fit

The concepts of employer image and employer attractiveness are often studied in combination with organizational or employer identity. In general, an image can be described as the result of the external perception of an identity (Burmann et al., 2008), so employer image can be interpreted as the result of the external perception of employer identity. Companies try to attract talents by creating a desirable employer image while at the same time they should ensure that this image is in line with their employees' perceived identity of the organization, which is the insiders' perception of what the organization stands for (Lievens et al., 2007). Thus, it is also a central part of employer branding to identify elements of the organizational character itself, such as key values or guiding principles. Employer branding should involve managing the organization's image not only from an outsider's perspective but also through the eyes of its current employees (Edwards, 2010; Martin & Beaumont,

2003b). Or as Dell and Ainspan (2001, p. 10) summarize: “Employer branding establishes the identity of the firm as an employer. It encompasses the firm’s values, systems, policies, and behaviors toward the objectives of attracting, motivating and retaining the firm’s current and potential employees.”

Organizational identity research has been heavily shaped by the work of Albert and Whetten (1985), who described organizational identity as that which is central, enduring and distinctive about an organization. Various recent studies focus on the importance of a strong organizational identity as well as on the alignment of organizational identity and external image, and its expected positive influence on organizational member identification (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Lievens et al. 2007). From a theoretical perspective, research on organizational identity and identification has been strongly influenced by social identity theory.[22] According to this theory, members of social organizations develop their identity and self-esteem from their organizational membership. Research by Dukerich et al. (2002) and Riordan et al. (1997) yields empirical evidence that people’s identification with the organization is influenced by perceived organizational identity and construed external image, which is “the insiders’ perception of what outsiders think the organization stands for” (Lievens et al., 2007, p. 46). Lievens et al. (2007) further studied how perceived organizational identity and construed external image relate to the external organizational image of outsiders. Research on identification is important for understanding why employees might identify more with organizations that have good reputations and positive employer images. A key argument for this circumstance is that people have to ensure a positive self-regard in connection with their identity, so they are likely to choose an organization from which they can transfer a positive image to their own personality (Edwards, 2010). Dutton et al. (1994, p. 239) define organizational identification as “the degree to which a member defines him or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes define the organization.” Thus, an important part of the identification process involves congruence of attributes and values between the employer and the employee (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; von Walter, Henkel, & Heidig, 2009).

Congruence of values between employees and employers has also been discussed under the label of ‘person-organization fit’. Several researchers have found evidence that applicants are attracted to an employer if their own personalities, needs and val-

[22] For overviews see Ashforth & Mael (1989), Dutton & Dukerich (1991), Haslam (2001), or van Dick (2004).

ues match the ones of the company (Cable & Judge, 1996; Judge & Cable, 1997; Schneider, 1987; Turban et al., 2001). Extending these findings, Devendorf and Highhouse (2008) have found support for the notion that congruence of values and personality between applicants and current employees of a company (applicant-employee similarity) increases employer attractiveness. In addition, applicants seem to be more likely to accept a job offer if they feel that their own values match the ones attributed to the company (Judge & Bretz, 1992). Furthermore, research shows that value congruence is also of high importance for *current* employees of a company. New employees with a matching value system seem to fit in more quickly with their employer and manage to get along better (Carless, 2005). Employees who feel designated to their employer through sharing the same values show a greater degree of identification with the company and seem to perform better (O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991). Additionally, employees seem to remain longer within the same company if they feel that their values are supported by their employer. This might be caused by the fact that employees try to keep their self-image consistent and wish to act according to this self-image. Thus, they will only leave their employer if they perceive relatively strong differences between their expectations and the company's value system (Dutton et al., 1994; Herriot, 2002). As far as the overall brand management of a company is concerned, value fit also seems to be beneficial, since employees who share a strong emotional bond with their employer tend to transfer the brand's promise to other target groups more authentically than employees who do not identify as much with their employer (de Chernatony, 2001; Mitchell, 2002).

By including a short overview on organizational identity and identification in this chapter, it should be emphasized that the internal dimension of employer branding is equally essential when planning and executing an employer branding strategy. As presented in Section 2.1.1, many authors point to the importance of aligning employer image and employer identity and to the interrelationship between employer branding and employer identity. However, as the focus of this thesis lies on the external elements of employer branding, employer attractiveness attributes will only be analyzed from an external perspective.

2.2.2 Psychological Contract Theory

As discussed in Section 2.1.1, employer branding involves presenting those unique employment benefits of a company that are most likely to be the target group's desired job or organizational attributes in order to enhance employer attractiveness.

However, an accurate picture of these benefits should be presented to prevent potential applicants from developing unrealistic expectations which later cannot be fulfilled by the employer (Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey, & Edwards, 2000; Forster et al., 2009). Several authors show that creating unrealistic expectations in the recruitment process might lead to problems in the future, since there is a reliable positive relationship between unfulfilled expectations and employees' intentions to leave the company (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986; Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000).

In order to develop a better understanding for the central role of realistic employment previews in the employer branding context, literature on the psychological contract can be used as theoretical background.[23] The traditional psychological contract is based on early work from social exchange theory (Argyris, 1960; Levinson, Price, Munden, & Solley, 1962; Schein, 1965, 1978) and describes the exchange relationship and mutual obligations between workers and employers. Despite this early interest in work-related social exchange, a more expansive discussion of the concept and its application to management theory did not take place until the 1990s (Cullinane & Dundon, 2006). The further theoretical development from this point on has been strongly influenced by the work of Rousseau (1989, 1995, 2001), who defines the psychological contract as "an individual's beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between the focal person and another party (Rousseau, 1989, p. 123). Rousseau (1989, 1995, 2001) also introduced a distinction into 'transactional' and 'relational' psychological contracts. Within a transactional contract, employees perceive their employment as a transaction in which long working hours are provided by the employee in exchange for high contingent pay and training. In contrast to the relational contract, employees do not expect a long lasting relationship with their employer based on loyalty and job security (Cullinane & Dundon, 2006). However, many of the traditional employment relation systems had to be called into question during the recent development of psychological contract theory due to changing contextual influences. According to Guest (2004), workplaces become more and more fragmented because of newer and increasingly flexible forms of employment. In addition, managers tend to be intolerant to the often time-consuming negotiation processes of the conventional employment relation systems. This leads to a situation in which promises and deals are often made in good faith and are more quickly broken than in former times. At the same time, the increasing importance of individualist values at the workplace and the parallel decline in collec-

[23] For an overview of the development of psychological contract theory and a critical review of the concept, see Cullinane & Dundon (2006).

tive bargaining cause a growing significance of informal arrangements in the workplace. These circumstances call for a new form of the psychological contract which emphasizes the influence of informal interactions next to the economic and formal aspects of employment. It recognizes that implicit and unspecified expectations are an integral part of employment, providing the relationship with a strong element of indeterminacy (Cullinane & Dundon, 2006).

Despite the growing interest and amount of literature, there is still no universally accepted definition of the psychological contract. In their review on the psychological contract literature, Cullinane and Dundon (2006, p. 115) state that different authors take various perspectives and measure different aspects of the construct depending on their own definitions: Some authors stress the significance of implicit obligations in psychological contracts; others emphasize the importance of understanding people's expectations from employment; and another school of thought claims that reciprocal mutuality is a core determinant of the contract (Cullinane & Dundon, 2006). In the employer branding context, the concept has been used to refer to a mutual relationship in which employers provide employees with necessary skills through training and development while employees provide effort and flexibility. Through employer branding, companies advertise the benefits they offer, such as training and development, career opportunities or personal growth. By means of these branding activities, the employer creates expectations with regard to the functional benefits offered to employees. The communicated messages, which are aimed at attracting suitable candidates, signal the firm's intentions and can be interpreted as promises by potential employees at the same time (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). According to Rousseau (2001), the formation of a psychological contract may start with recruitment messages being distributed through employer branding activities. Thus, it is of crucial importance that the employer brand messages provide an accurate picture of the firm's employment benefits. If this is the case, employer branding might help to create accurate perceptions of the organization for potential recruits (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). If the communicated benefits cannot be fulfilled by the company, employees may develop perceptions of violation or breach of the psychological contract, which means that employees believe that the organization reneged on its obligations (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Research has shown that violation of the psychological contract correlates positively with turnover, intentions to quit, reduced job satisfaction and organizational trust, as well as decreased job performance (Robinson, Kraatz, & Rousseau, 1994; Robinson & Morrison, 1995; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). Therefore, employer branding should contribute to the creation of a realistic job preview by

providing positive as well as negative information about the employment opportunity (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Moroko and Uncles (2008) identify the fulfillment of a psychological contract as one of the most important characteristics of successful employer brands. Industry experts, who were interviewed by the authors, all saw successful employer brands as being accurately portrayed through marketing communications and consistently delivering on the inherent promise of the brand.

In summary, the psychological contract can be a useful framework for assessing what makes up a company's employer brand and what processes are involved in the creation of a successful brand (Edwards, 2010). Based on Rousseau's (1989, 1995, 2001) distinction between relational and transactional contracts, the instrumental and symbolic aspects of an employer brand may be structured. The instrumental attributes of an employer brand can be considered transactional, since they encompass economic exchange features such as pay for performance. As the relational contract involves socio-emotional oriented content, such as subjective perceptions of trust and fairness, it can be related to the symbolic attributes of a brand (Edwards, 2010). With regard to current and potential employees, there might be different perceptions of a company's employer brand and hence differing expectations regarding the psychological contract. Whereas current employees have a lived experience of employment with a particular firm and of the promises made and delivered, potential employees are only able to form expectations based of the firm's employer branding communications (Edwards, 2010). By investigating the instrumental attributes of employer brands, the empirical part of this thesis will involve only transactional features which might become content of psychological contracts for potential employees. As these features make up a significant part of the employer brand, employers should know which instrumental attributes are preferred by certain target groups. However, only those attributes which can truly be offered by the employer should be used as features of the employer brand in order to create a realistic job preview. The relational features, which are covered by the symbolic attributes of employer brands, will not be investigated in this thesis, as they do not fit into the abstract context of the empirical analysis. Symbolic attributes that are included in the creation of an employer value proposition should represent key organizational values of the given company (cf. Chapter 2.1.1). Since the empirical analysis does not involve concrete employers, it does not seem reasonable to select random symbolic attributes.

2.2.3 New Institutional Economics

As discussed in Chapter 2.1.3, a main function of the employer brand is to reduce perceived risk and transaction costs in the employer selection process. This notion draws upon foundations from transaction cost theory and information economics, which are part of new institutional economics. Both theories focus on the relationship between market players in the forefront of a market transaction (Hax, 1991; Picot, 1991; Weiber & Adler, 1995a). According to information economics, information is distributed in an asymmetric way between market players resulting in uncertainty (Adler, 1996; Bayón, 1997; Dörtelmann, 1997; Homburg & Krohmer, 2003). The removal of asymmetric information and uncertainty leads to transaction costs.[24]

In the context of the labor market, asymmetric distribution of information can be found between employers and (potential) employees (Andratschke, Regier, & Huber, 2009; Stritzke, 2010). The decision to apply for or to stay with an employer is based on the individual's information and knowledge about the given employer, and the resulting impression formed by the individual. This knowledge is gained through the collection of data (e.g., company size, employer success in the market, reputation), which is interpreted in the context of the labor market to form decision-relevant information (e.g., salary level, career perspectives). In the job search or career planning process, the information chunks are then connected in order to form an overall decision (Stritzke, 2010). Thus, the knowledge about an employer forms the basis for any activity and is expressed through expectations, plans and evaluations concerning the employer-employee relationship (Dewe & Weber, 2007). However, not all of the information on job and employer characteristics is directly accessible, but can only be obtained through a certain effort. Especially external applicants might have difficulties to collect the relevant information, e.g., information on career perspectives or further training, but even current employees often do not have complete knowledge of all employer characteristics (Petkovic, 2008). The resulting information asymmetry between applicants, or employees, and employer leads to the problem that the former might not be able to form optimal decisions or to form decisions at all. In turn, this might cause negative consequences for the employer, e.g., in the form of a lack of applications, rejection of employment offers or employees leaving the company (Stritzke, 2010).[25]

[24] For detailed information on transaction cost theory, see Coase (1960).

[25] Both market players, employee as well as employer, are affected by asymmetric information and resulting insecurity. For example, the employer might not have complete information on the employees' or applicants' preferences and needs. However, the focus of the following illustrations lies on information deficits and insecurity of (potential) employees, which might be reduced through employer branding.

According to information economics, the degree of uncertainty resulting from asymmetric information depends on the type of good that is evaluated during a transaction process with regard to its perceived quality. Goods or qualities can be classified by whether the quality variation is ascertained predominantly by search, by experience or by credence (Darby & Karni, 1973; Kaas & Busch, 1996; Kapferer, 2009; Nelson, 1970, 1974; Schneider, 1997). Search goods can be properly evaluated regarding their quality before making a purchase decision (Adler, 1996; Nelson, 1970; Schneider, 1997), whereas experience goods can only be evaluated after consuming or applying them (Kaas & Busch, 1996; Tolle, 1994; Weiber & Adler, 1995a). Credence qualities or goods cannot be evaluated either before or after purchase, so that their suitability cannot be judged at all or only by exceeding the given time and resources (Darby & Karni, 1973; Schneider, 1997; Weiber & Adler, 1995a). Every good has search, experience, and credence qualities at the same time and to varying degrees (Weiber & Adler, 1995b).

This typology of goods can be transferred to the employment context. Search qualities of an employer are relevant to employees' or applicants' decisions and can be readily observed even from outside of the company, e.g., job profiles, internationality of the company, company size and industry, products, etc. In addition, qualities guaranteed through work contracts are regarded as search qualities, e.g., salary, leave entitlement, or further training (Stritzke, 2010). However, the actual fulfillment of the promises regarding further training or foreign assignments cannot always be assessed in advance, so that these aspects have to be regarded as experience qualities, which can only be evaluated after joining a company (Teufer, 1999). In addition, applicants are often uncertain about the real quality of their work tasks or work atmosphere before they start working. The information asymmetries between applicant and employer as well as the information costs arising to reduce the perceived risk are significantly higher for experience qualities than for search characteristics (Adler, 1996; Irmscher, 1997) Credence qualities are, for example, job security, a company's future prospects, or career perspectives, since they depend on the employee's development within the company (Stritzke, 2010). Credence qualities are those elements of an employer's personnel policy which cannot be assessed even if an employee has been with a company for a longer period of time (Petkovic, 2008). As credence qualities are basically excluded from evaluation, the information costs are even higher than for experience qualities (Irmscher, 1997; Weiber & Adler, 1995a, 1995b). Not all employer qualities can be classified into these three categories in a distinct way. Teufer (1999) remarks that jobs are mainly characterized by experience

and trust qualities, as new employees have only limited experiences with the companies affected by their decision-making (e.g., prior work experience, experience in the industry or internships). Thus, the decisions regarding job and employment are characterized by a high degree of uncertainty.

As mentioned before, uncertainty in market transactions leads to costs resulting from information search and distribution (Williamson, 1990). In order to reduce uncertainty, activities to balance information asymmetries are proposed within the framework of information economics. An important strategy is to build up trust and credence (Kaas, 1990; Kemper, 2000).[26] The supplier side, in this case the employer, has to face the challenge of demonstrating a high employer quality[27] and to prove its credibility through uncertainty reducing information (Kemper, 2000). Therefore, an important function of the employer brand is to demonstrate this quality, integrating the sum of search, experience and credence characteristics (Petkovic, 2008). If the quality is not directly observable, the employer brand has to function as a substitute for this information, which conveys the products' and employers' characteristics (Stritzke, 2010).

Within information economics, uncertainty reduction through the application of credible quality signals is known as *signaling* (Alewell, 1994; Spence, 1973; Teufer, 1999). *Signaling* encompasses any information activities executed by the more informed market player, which lead to an active transfer of information to the less informed market player (Kaas, 1990; Spence, 1976; Stiglitz, 1975). The less informed market player makes use of directly accessible indicators or *signals*, which are indicative of non-observable qualities, before making a transaction. *Signals* can be defined as "activities or attributes of individuals in a market which, by design or accident, alter the beliefs of, or convey information to, other individuals in the market" (Spence, 1974, p. 1). By reasoning real qualities from these signals, the less informed market player is able to reduce his uncertainty (Adler, 1996; Schneider, 1997). Employer branding can be seen as a *signaling* activity conducted by the employer. The employer brand conveys information about the employer and the jobs being offered. If, for example,

[26] From the perspective of information economics, building up trust serves as a form of self-commitment. The danger of losing trust in the labor market, which would have a negative influence on potential employees' preferences for a given employer, ensures the employer's self-commitment (Kaas, 1990).

[27] Research on consumer behavior has shown that quality signals are important in situations with high perceived risk. Brands function as indirect signals of quality, just as price and advertising expenses. Only an offer with high quality characteristics is worth an expensive placement in the market. Thus, the effort and resources invested in product or service branding represent a credible quality signal within brand management (cf. Tolle, 1994; Baumgarth, 2008).

search qualities of jobs are communicated in this process, applicants can verify whether these qualities really exist after the transaction. Thus, the employer brand directly transfers credible information to the less informed market player, since false information would be discovered after the transaction and would therefore be inefficient for the employer (Stritzke, 2010).[28] Having entered into a psychological contract with the employee (cf. Section 2.2.2), it would be damaging to the employer if he conveyed information which proved to be untrue after the applicant joined the company.

With regard to experience and credence qualities, the employer brand replaces these qualities in the form of the brand name, i.e. corporate name.[29] The name functions like a search quality, which replaces the qualities that cannot be readily evaluated (Kaas & Busch, 1996). Thus, applicants can judge an employer on the basis of its brand only, without questioning every single employer or job characteristic (Petkovic, 2008). In other words, the employer brand functions as *information chunk* by symbolizing quality and bundling any relevant information about the employer (Andratschke et al., 2009; Stritzke, 2010).[30] Summarizing, the employer brand hence represents a credible surrogate of an employer's characteristics, and facilitates transactions in the labor market by reducing uncertainty about an employer's qualities and by building up trust in the brand (Petkovic, 2008; Stritzke, 2010). If uncertainty is reduced, the need for additional information and resources for information search can be reduced as well, leading to a decrease in transaction costs (Gemünden, 1985; Koppelmann, 1994). These illustrations demonstrate that new institutional economics provide a valuable framework to understand how and why employer branding works.[31] Nevertheless, only a small part of the theoretical foundation of employer branding has been covered by scientific research yet, as will be discussed in the following chapter on current research.

[28] Every applicant who leaves a company due to unfulfilled promises made by the employer will communicate and multiply his disappointment, so that the employer might suffer from reputation damage and lose potential applicants in the future. The employer branding investments to date would then be sunk costs (cf. Petkovic, 2008).
[29] Brand names are known as one of the most important surrogates for information (cf. Freter & Baumgarth, 2001; Kaas, 1995; Tolle, 1994).
[30] For more details on *information chunking* in the context of consumer marketing, see Miller (1956) and Felser (2001).
[31] For a detailed discussion of employer branding in the context of information economics, see Petkovic, 2008, pp. 114-131 and Stritzke, 2010, pp. 89-102.

2.3 Overview of Domestic and International Research on Employer Branding

Scientific research on employer branding is still in its infancy. Due to its interface with the disciplines of marketing and HR management, there are multiple approaches to the topic, and theory from different backgrounds is used to explain why and how employer branding works. There is no universally accepted theoretical framework yet, however some conceptual and empirical work treating different aspects of employer branding does exist. Table 2 presents a selection of international scientific research on aspects of employer branding, published between the years 2000 and 2010. As shown in the key findings of Table 2, the focus of most of the current research on employer branding lies on organizational or employer attractiveness attributes, the employer brand in the recruiting process or the consequences of employer branding.

Table 2: Scientific Research on Employer Branding (2000-2010)

Author(s)	Type of study	Key findings
Lievens et al. (2001)	Experimental study involving 359 final year students	Investigation of the effect of four organizational characteristics (organization size, level of internationalization, pay mix, level of centralization) on employer attractiveness and of the degree to which personality factors moderate the effect of organizational characteristics. Prospective applicants are more attracted to large-sized, medium-sized, decentralized and multinational organizations. Several personality characteristics moderate the effects.
Collins & Stevens (2002)	Quantitative study on 1,955 engineering students	Recruitment-related activities (publicity, sponsorships, word-of-mouth endorsements, advertising) are indirectly related to application decisions through 2 dimensions of employer brand image: general attitudes towards a company and perceived job attributes.
Ewing et al. (2002)	Conceptual paper	Introduction of stakeholder theory into a marketing framework for employer branding. Classification of employer branding approaches into three types of employment advertising strategies ('Status & Mobility', 'Excitement' and 'Identification').
Kirchgeorg & Lorbeer (2002)	Quantitative study on 1,020 highly qualified students and 72 HR managers from German companies	Students can be clustered into target segments according to their psychographic profiles. Friendly work environment, advancement and development opportunities, and challenging work tasks are the most important expectations of high potentials towards an employer. Companies often perceive these expectations in a different way than expressed by the students.

Author(s)	Type of study	Key findings
Sutherland et al. (2002)	Quantitative study involving 274 knowledge workers	Identification of 11 important organizational attributes for employer choice, with career growth and challenging work opportunities being the most desired. Word of mouth and current employees are most used communication channels.
Trank et al. (2002)	Quantitative study on 378 business and liberal arts students	Students with high cognitive ability and all types of high achievement, such as high academic and social achievement, place greater importance on interesting and challenging work than do other students. For other work attributes, students with high cognitive ability and high academic achievement show different preference patterns than do those with high social achievement.
Grobe (2003)	Quantitative study on 2,821 highly qualified students from different disciplines	Friendly work environment, advancement and development opportunities, and challenging work tasks are the most important expectations of high potentials towards an employer. Clustering of 55 companies along students' ratings of cognitive and affective aspects.
Lemmink et al. (2003)	Quantitative study involving 54 graduate business students	Corporate image and company employment image have independent, significant positive effects on application intentions and are valuable tools in the labor market. In addition, familiarity with a company directly influences intentions to apply, which stresses the importance of information in graduates' decision-making process.
Lievens & Highhouse (2003)	Quantitative study on 275 final-year students and 124 bank employees	Applicants were asked to rate randomly assigned banks based on the instrumental-symbolic framework. In both samples, trait inferences about the organization accounted for incremental variance over job and organizational attributes in predicting perceived employer attractiveness. Trait inferences were also preferred for differentiating among organizations in the banking industry.
Backhaus & Tikoo (2004)	Conceptual paper	Development of a framework to study employer branding based on brand equity theory and resource-based view.
Berthon et al. (2005)	Focus groups with final-year graduate and undergraduate students; literature review	Identification and operationalization of the components of employer attractiveness; development of a scale to measure employer attractiveness (5-factor attractiveness model with 25 items)
Kirchgeorg & Günther (2006)	Quantitative study involving 2,188 highly qualified students from various disciplines	Further development of the studies by Kirchgeorg & Lorbeer (2002) and Grobe (2003). Friendly work environment, honest/authentic work environment, and challenging work tasks are the most important expectations of high potentials.
Knox & Freeman (2006)	Quantitative study involving 862 final-year undergraduate students and 593 part-time recruiters	Comparison of students' and recruiters' ratings of attributes of employer brand image. Perceptions of recruiters and students vary by attribute and overall results show significant differences between the two groups. External and internal image can be perceived differently.

Author(s)	Type of study	Key findings
Lievens et al. (2007)	Quantitative study on 258 Army applicants and 179 military employees	Use of the instrumental-symbolic framework to study factors relating to employer image and organizational identity of the Belgian Army. Both instrumental and symbolic image dimensions predict attraction to the Army in both groups. Employees also consider outsiders' assessment of the organization to be important.
Burmann et al. (2008)	Quantitative study on 3,368 highly qualified undergraduate and postgraduate students	Corporate brand image of potential employees is determined by industry image. The determination is moderated by potential employees' involvement and knowledge about the specific organization.
Davies (2008)	Quantitative study on 854 commercial managers	Employer brand associations are measured using a multidimensional brand personality scale. Satisfaction is predicted by agreeableness; affinity by agreeableness and ruthlessness; perceived loyalty and differentiation by a combination of enterprise and chic.
Devendorf & Highhouse (2008)	Experimental study with 296 female undergraduate students	Applicant similarity to prospective co-workers enhances attraction to the potential employer (person-to-person fit).
Harold & Ployhart (2008)	Longitudinal quantitative study on doctoral applicants for a graduate program	There are individual differences in the weighting of organizational attractiveness attributes over time. Weighting of fit and funding (pay) attributes increases over time. Changes over time are partially explained by individual differences in applicant marketability.
Moroko & Uncles (2008)	Interviews with senior industry experts from the fields of internal marketing, HR, communications, branding, and recruitment	Identification of characteristics of successful employer brands. The two key dimensions are attractiveness, which is underpinned by awareness, differentiation and relevance, and accuracy, which is determined by the consistency between the employer brand and the employment experience, company culture and values.
Moroko & Uncles (2009)	Conceptual paper including interviews with managers and employees from different industries	A combination of classic market segmentation approaches can be used for employer branding and can help firms to attract, retain and motivate current and potential employees more effectively and efficiently. In practice, most companies only use basic segmentation for employer branding and could profit from the leverage of applying various segmentation bases in concert.
Edwards (2010)	Literature review	Research and theory from a range of fields can be used to gain a better understanding of employer branding. These include research on organizational attractiveness to potential employees, research linked to the psychological contract literature, and work that examines organizational identity, organizational identification and organizational personality characteristics.

In addition to these studies, Petkovic (2008), Sponheuer (2009) and Stritzke (2010) further add to the theoretical foundation of employer branding; however, they do not provide any quantitative empirical evidence.

Besides scientific research, there are several commercial research institutes which provide companies with studies on employer preferences, desired employer attributes and communication behavior of various target groups. An overview of the largest and most established studies available in Germany is depicted in Table 3. Whereas the scientific research listed above is mostly limited to a domestic context and does not take into account national or cultural differences, the two main commercial institutes, *trendence* and *Universum*, conduct their surveys on a worldwide basis. The surveys are targeted at international companies and often serve as a basis for their employer branding activities in different countries around the globe.

Even though the academic literature (e.g., Boudreau & Ramstad, 2007; Cappelli, 2008a, 2008b; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Lewis & Heckman, 2006; Strack, Baier, & Fahlander, 2008) suggests a growing competition for talents worldwide and predicts major challenges in attracting and retaining qualified employees, there has been surprisingly little to no scientific research on international employer branding topics. Only a few studies have discussed the development of effective recruitment brands or HR reputation with the objective of attracting potential employees from diverse target groups (Ferris, Perrewé, Ranft, Zinko, Stoner, & Brouer, 2007; Hannon & Milkovich, 1996; Koys, 1997; Martin & Hetrick, 2009).

Since literature on international employer branding is so scarce, the only available scientific approach that seems to provide information relevant to this thesis, will be discussed in more detail in the following. In a conceptual article, Martin and Hetrick (2009) have developed a model of the employer branding process in an international context. Their work, however, is rather focused on HR management practices, i.e. on the alignment of a multinational company's organizational identity, corporate identity,[32] and employer brand image, which are all influenced by different national back-

[32] In comparison with organizational identity, which they define as the collective answer by employees and managers to the 'who are we?' question and as the organization's shared knowledge, beliefs, language, and behaviors, Martin and Hetrick (2009) use the term 'corporate identity' to refer to the organization's projected image of 'who we want to be'. Corporate identity is expressed in the form of tangible logos, architecture and public pronouncements as well as in the communication of mission, strategies and values (Martin & Hetrick, 2009, p. 296).

Table 3: Commercial Employer Branding Research Institutes

Institute	Target group(s)	Survey description	International scope (yes/no)
Corporate Research Foundation	Companies	Yearly competition to become 'Top Employer', based on employer profiles which are developed from information provided by the participating companies.	yes; 14 countries worldwide
Great Place to Work Institute	Employees of the participating companies	Mandatory competition for companies to be selected as 'great place to work': Employer attractiveness is evaluated through employee questionnaires and a personnel-culture audit. Ranking of employers according to the overall judgment.	yes; 38 countries worldwide
Trendence Institute	Pupils, undergraduate and graduate students, young professionals	Yearly barometer surveys targeted at pupils, students, and young professionals in order to gain insight into their expectations towards potential employers, their lifestyle preferences, preferred communication channels, and evaluations of companies. Rankings of top employers for different countries and groups of students (business, engineering, IT, law).	yes; Surveys are conducted in 27 countries, worldwide bespoke research projects
Universum Communications	Undergraduate and graduate students, young professionals	Yearly worldwide graduate survey which can be broken down into different country analyses. Evaluation of graduates' expectations and preferences with regard to their career and of their favorite employers. Ranking of 'employers of choice'.	yes; Worldwide surveys

grounds. Emphasizing an internal approach, they regard employer branding as an important tool for creating a sense of 'corporateness'[33] among often decentralized multinational corporations. Nevertheless, some general issues of international employer branding are discussed as well and should be mentioned at this point. After reviewing current theory on employer branding and developing their process model, they conclude that there are several arguments for and against creating a global employer brand image. Technology companies, such as HP, Microsoft, Google, Cisco, and IBM, serve as examples for globally successful employer brands. According to Martin and Hetrick (2009), they manage to appeal to employees in different countries

[33] The term 'corporateness' was originally introduced by Balmer and Greyser (2003) to describe the tendency among companies to achieve a greater sense of corporate identity, corporate leadership, corporate governance and corporate social responsibility.

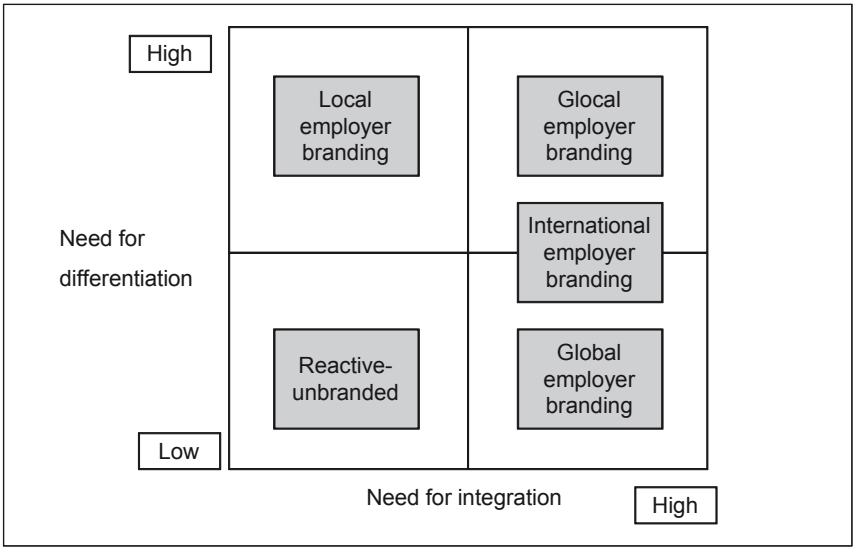

Figure 4: Strategic Choices in International Employer Branding
Source: Martin & Hetrick, 2009, p. 306

worldwide by representing globally attractive identity myths,[34] emotional links and symbolism. On the other hand, they find support for the argument that employer brands should be locally authored or co-created in order to be authentic in different cultural contexts. Local strategies might particularly concern firms operating in certain industries, such as retailing, or in experience goods markets, such as tourism, personal services, financial services, healthcare, and education, which are arguably more culture-bound than technology. The authors adapt the classic Perlmutter (1969) model to propose four choices for international employer branding, which can be contrasted with a 'reactive' weakly branded position that is adopted by many organizations in the early stages of internationalization. The different options for international employer branding strategies are depicted in Figure 4.

[34] In addition to instrumental and symbolic needs which should be fulfilled by employer brands, Martin and Hetrick (2009, p. 299) introduce the category of 'cultural needs'. Global corporate brands or so-called 'cultural brands' (Holt, 2004) can achieve an iconic status through the satisfaction of strong, culturally influenced needs. This satisfaction is caused by the creation of identity myths that are authentic and charismatically aesthetic. For a detailed discussion of iconic brands and the creation of identity myths see Holt (2004).

Not taking into account the option of 'local employer branding', as it is only suited for organizations operating in domestic markets, three positions are proposed for multinational corporations, depending on how strong the needs for local authenticity and global leverage are in the context of the product-market environment and the organization's stage in the internationalization process (Martin & Hetrick, 2009, p. 307):

- If organizations perceive advantages from leveraging their global brand, culture and HR practices and technologies, they would opt for a 'global employer brand'. This strategy would be centrally determined and implemented, whereas local HR teams would have little influence.
- If organizations wish to benefit from a global brand culture but also seek or are required (by local labor law) to be locally authentic and relevant, they would choose an 'international employer brand'. The local brand would be used to endorse the global brand in order to promote its authenticity in local labor markets. This strategy would be developed by headquarters teams in cooperation with local functions.
- If organizations strive to optimize global branding in combination with local authenticity and relevance, they might opt for a 'glocal employer brand'. This strategy is different from the other two in terms of development. In order to maximize authenticity, employee voice and the views of local HR teams are emphasized; however, they would have to be balanced with the transnational corporate story.

The authors suggest the third strategy to be most promising for multinational corporations, but they admit that the question of practical implementation is still unanswered. Even though Martin and Hetrick (2009) develop a first theoretical approach to international employer branding, specific contextual factors of international labor markets (e.g., different cultural values and, accordingly, different expectations towards an employer) are not taken into account, and empirical evidence (except from a case study) is missing. With regard to the limited literature base on international employer branding, other fields of research have to be taken into account in order to develop conceptual foundations for the topic.

In particular, research on international brand management and international consumer marketing might be helpful to gain insight into possible international employer branding strategies. However, even research on international branding has been found to be relatively scarce compared to other topics (Alashban, Hayes, Zinkhan, & Balazs, 2002; Guzmán & Paswan, 2009; Strebinger, 2008; Whitelock & Fastoso, 2007). In a recent literature review, Whitelock and Fastoso (2007) examine the most

important marketing journals[35] with regard to keywords from the field of international branding (i.e. 'international', 'global', 'European', 'cross-cultural', 'cultural', in combination with 'branding' or 'brand'). They identify a total of 40 articles, which cover the period between 1975 and 2005. Almost two-thirds of these studies have been published since 1995, which shows that this field of research has just recently gained importance. As far as the selection of countries is concerned, the attention has concentrated on France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Belgium and UK in Europe, and the USA, China and South Korea in the rest of the world. Over half of the studies are based on managers' views towards international branding, 27 per cent use customers as information source. With regard to the subject, a dominant issue has been international brand standardization/adaption (38 per cent of all articles), especially brand name standardization/adaption (25 per cent). The second most frequent topic is international brand strategies (23 per cent), including general issues such as brand strategies available at an international level (15 per cent), and specific issues such as brand image strategies (five per cent) and brand architecture (three per cent) (Whitelock & Fastoso, 2007). In terms of future research relevant to this thesis, the authors remark that brand image strategies have only been analyzed from the manager point of view, so that alternative perspectives would be desirable (Whitelock & Fastoso, 2007, p. 266). The present thesis picks up on this remark by discussing international employer branding strategies in the light of the target group's point of view. The conceptual foundations of the analyses will draw primarily on three streams of literature, namely the recruitment literature, the marketing standardization versus adaption debate, and the international marketing strategy literature.

2.4 Conclusion and Need for Further Research

The literature review in this chapter revealed that employer branding is still a relatively new and under-researched topic in marketing and HR sciences. With regard to the theoretical foundations, some progress has been made to date. Research and theory from a range of fields have been used to contribute to these foundations, such as research on organizational attractiveness and corporate branding, work that examines person-organization fit and organizational identification, social identity theory, literature from new institutional economics, or theory related to the psychological contract. However, despite their important contributions to the topic, these different approaches have also led to divergent understandings and definitions of relevant termini, such as employer attractiveness, organizational attractiveness, employer (brand)

[35] For a table of the 20 examined journals, see Whitelock & Fastoso, 2007, p. 255.

image, employer identity, or employer value proposition. As far as empirical work is concerned, more qualitative as well as quantitative research is needed in order to validate the conceptual approaches made until now. The majority of empirical studies are focused on factors or attributes which constitute or influence employer attractiveness, since this question is clearly of major interest to employers. Yet, to the best of the author's knowledge, almost all scientific empirical work on employer branding is situated in a domestic context and does not take into account the growing importance of international employer branding strategies (Martin & Hetrick, 2009).

Given the fact that an increasing number of companies coordinate their talent management on a global basis (Ready & Conger, 2007; Sparrow et al., 2004) and have to attract and retain highly talented individuals worldwide, there is a strong need to develop an understanding of what drives the employer choice of potential employees in different national markets. As talent has become more mobile (Sparrow et al., 2004) and the global competition for the best graduates and young professionals is increasing (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2007; CIPD, 2007; Michaels et al., 2001), international organizations are confronted with the challenge of creating unique employer branding strategies that appeal to their target groups around the globe. Thus, it can be stated that there is a clear contradiction between the growing importance of international employer branding for managers and the lack of scientific research in this field.

Several authors have already identified the need for further research with regard to the international dimension of employer branding. Martin and Hetrick (2009, p. 293 f.), for example, state that "there has been little research into […] the effectiveness of employer branding, especially as a means for reconciling a key tension faced by international organizations – balancing the needs for corporate integration, control, and legitimacy on the one hand with local differentiation, autonomy and initiative on the other." They also point out that market segmentation approaches would be needed in the employer branding context in order to create specific employer value propositions for different groups of (potential) employees. In their research suggestions, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004, p. 512) claim: "In the global economy should the employer brand be standardized across the different subsidiaries of the firm or should it be adapted to the specific environments of different countries? What are the relative advantages and disadvantages of these two approaches?" Also including the topic in his research suggestions, Petkovic (2008, p. 246 f.) states that large corporations are confronted with the challenge of attracting talents worldwide and are in need of positioning stra-

tegies which take into account intercultural differences. Thus, as the approach to employer branding should be taken and controlled on a country-specific basis, recommendations for roll-out and management of global employer brands are of great interest. Sponheuer (2009, p. 291) reinforces this statement, pointing out that future research should shed more light on the international aspects of employer branding in terms of development and implementation. Based on information from the expert interviews the author conducted, she suggests that many companies in fact try to develop global employer brands with only implementation aspects left to decide on a national basis.

The present work picks up on these research suggestions and on the identified research gaps by addressing the following issues empirically:

1) *Drivers of employer choice in different countries*: Which attributes of employer attractiveness are most important to graduates when making their decision for an employer? Does the evaluation of these attributes differ between countries?

2) *Standardization vs. adaption of the employer brand*: To which degree is it possible to create a standardized employer brand? Which factors influence the evaluation of employer attractiveness attributes? Does the employer brand have to be adapted to individual differences, such as gender, course of study, age, or academic achievement? Is there a significant influence of national country characteristics, such as cultural values or economic development, on the evaluation of employer characteristics? How strong is the influence exerted by all factors?

3) *International positioning strategies:* To which degree should the employer brand positioning be adapted to different target segments? Do classic market segmentation techniques add to the identification of international target segments? Is it possible to identify transnational segments of graduates based on their evaluation of employer attractiveness attributes?

This thesis aims to answer these questions by analyzing data from a large-scale European graduate survey, implementing techniques of multivariate statistics, such as multilevel analysis and cluster analysis. Especially multilevel analysis is regarded as a promising tool for future research in the context of cross-cultural studies (e.g., House et al., 2004; Ralston, 2008). Thus, this project contributes to the scientific consolidation of employer branding through a quantitative approach and addresses

important managerial questions with regard to international employer branding strategy. By incorporating survey data from a commercial research institute, this thesis also picks up on the call for the use of complementary sources in order to promote an increased collaboration between academics and practitioners (Tarique & Schuler, 2010). In order to shed more light onto the questions stated above, the next step consists of the development of a conceptual framework and deduction of hypotheses.

3 Conceptual Framework and Deduction of Hypotheses

3.1 Micro-Level: Contributions from Research in Recruitment, Employer Branding, Organizational Attractiveness, and Consumer Behavior

A key to identifying and attracting highly skilled employees is the understanding of which attributes of employer attractiveness are most or least attractive to the target population (Harold & Ployhart, 2008). A variety of researchers have examined different characteristics important to individuals when evaluating jobs. This research stream on job/organization choice can be traced back into the 1970s and is still of major importance in the recruiting and employer branding literature. Researchers have applied various ways of categorizing factors important for job/organization choice, such as 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' job factors (O'Reilly & Caldwell, 1980), 'job' and 'organization' characteristics (Barber & Roehling, 1993; Feldman & Arnold, 1978), 'work values' (Judge & Bretz, 1992), 'employment process' categories (Barber & Roehling, 1993), 'existence', 'relatedness' and 'growth' factors (Shamir & Arthur, 1989), 'motivation' and 'hygiene' factors (Misra & Kalro, 1972) or 'recruiter characteristics' and 'evaluative issues' (Rynes, 1991; Rynes, Heneman, & Schwab, 1980; Rynes & Miller, 1983). Some researchers have just evaluated factors of interest without a further categorization (e.g., Jurgensen, 1978; Rowe, 1976). All of these early studies have attempted to find out which attributes are of greatest significance to individuals when it comes to employer choice.

However, most of these studies have not yet taken into account individual difference variables. In order to specifically target a variety of desired applicants, employer brand managers need to understand whether certain characteristics are of differential importance to male or female students, business or engineering students, high potential or average students, etc. In order to shed more light onto this question, the next section will first discuss recent conceptualizations of employer attractiveness, which seem to be most suitable to categorize attributes of employer choice for the purpose of this thesis. This will be followed by a more detailed examination of individual factors which might be of impact on assessments of the relative importance of selected attractiveness attributes.

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3.1.1 The Benefit-Oriented View of the Employer Brand

As discussed in Chapter 2.1.3, one of the functions of employer branding is to provide symbolic benefits to former, potential and current employees. This explanation can be further consolidated by contemplating the benefit-oriented view of the employer brand, which will be further explored in this section. Analogous to the functions of brands in general, the employer brand is aimed at maximizing the benefits sought by employees (Andratschke et al., 2009; Stritzke, 2010). In order to do so, the brand has to capture and fulfill the expectations of relevant target groups (Petkovic, 2008).[36] As an individual always decides in favor of the object with the highest perceived benefit, this benefit determines an employer's likelihood to become 'employer of choice' (Lange, 1975). The benefit construct encompasses the degrees of expected and fulfilled need satisfaction, which are difficult to compare inter-subjectively (Huber, Hermann, & Weiss, 2001, Teichert, 2001). Thus, benefits are always related to an individual's needs. In order to overcome the perspective of classic benefit theory, which is focused on purely physical benefits whereas the employer brand is based on perceptions, a differentiation into basic benefits and additional benefits of the employer brand can be used (Meffert, 2000). Basic benefits refer to the functional or instrumental components of employer attractiveness, whereas additional benefits refer to the symbolic, non-material components (Burmann, Meffert, & Feddersen, 2007; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). As already introduced in Chapter 2.1.1, the instrumental-symbolic perspective of employer attractiveness captures the objective, functional attributes of a job (e.g., location, salary) as well as the emotional attributes, which convey an additional brand benefit (self-image enhancement, prestige, etc.). As an employer's attractiveness is based on both of these components (Andratschke et al., 2009), their conceptualization in terms of the instrumental-symbolic framework, as well as related concepts, will be discussed in the following.

3.1.1.1 The Instrumental-Symbolic Framework

Most of the recent studies on employer attractiveness and its component factors have analyzed applicants' expectations concerning instrumental attributes. They support the argument that organizational attraction is influenced by applicants' perceptions of job and organizational characteristics (Cable & Graham, 2000; Highhouse et al., 1999; Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997; Lievens et al., 2001; Turban & Keon, 1993). Apart from its grounding in marketing, the instrumental-symbolic framework is also

[36] Petkovic (2008) bases his arguments on the expectancy theory by Vroom (1964). According to Vroom (1964), employees select their jobs following a benefit maximization strategy.

rooted in the recruitment literature. Behling et al. (1968) initiated a similar framework by proposing three theories of job choice: objective factors, subjective factors and critical contact theory. Since objective factors theory suggests that applicants' decisions are based on tangible job and organization attributes (Harold & Ployhart, 2008; Tom, 1971), this approach can be directly related to the conceptualization as instrumental attributes. According to Behling et al. (1968), potential employees assess the organization and job offer with regard to how important each attribute (e.g., pay, advancement opportunities, location, etc.) is to the individual in order to develop an overall judgment about the company. Job-related decisions are driven by the information gained on objective attributes (Harold & Ployhart, 2008). Subjective factors theory suggests that applicants assess how well they fit with an organization with regard to needs, personality, and values (Behling, Labovitz, & Gainer, 1968). Hence, this theory can be related to the conceptualization as symbolic attributes. It claims that if applicants perceive higher levels of congruence in terms of psychological needs, personality, and values, they are more likely to join an organization and to find it attractive (Harold & Ployhart, 2008). According to critical contact theory, neither objective nor subjective features of an employer are of influence on the process of employer choice, since individuals do not possess the necessary information or experience to evaluate these features. Information is gained only through the interaction with recruiters during the application process. Hence, the perception based on this recruiter contact will be relevant to the applicants' decision for an employer (Süß, 1996; Tom, 1971).

Some authors claim that the instrumental attributes of an employer brand are less suited for differentiating an employment offer from the ones of competitors, since they are easier to copy and most of the bigger companies offer almost every desired attribute anyway. Symbolic attributes, which are aimed at the emotions and the underlying value system of potential applicants, seem to be better suited for differentiation (Forster et al., 2009; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Sponheuer, 2009). However, Andratschke et al. (2009) remark that a combination of instrumental and symbolic attributes is essential to gain complete insight into an employing company and contribute to differentiation. In addition, the authors conducted a conjoint analysis, in which they did not find empirical proof for the greater significance of symbolic attributes over instrumental attributes when it comes to employer selection. Both types of attributes, symbolic as well as instrumental, have been found to be significant in influencing employment-related outcomes, such as application intentions, job choice and organizational attractiveness (e.g., Bretz & Judge, 1994; Cable & Judge, 1994,

1996; Carless, 2005; Chapman et al., 2005; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Lievens et al., 2007). Yet, there are empirical findings which further support the high relevance of instrumental attributes in job choice decisions. Teufer (1999), Grobe (2003) and Petkovic (2008) each have discussed graduates' requirements concerning potential employers in terms of cognitive and affective choices. This classification is based on a general understanding from consumer behavior research, which claims that cognition and emotion interact when a consumer develops an attitude leading towards decision-making (Trommsdorff, 1998). In this context, Shiv and Fredorikhin (1999) suggest that every decision situation causes affective as well as cognitive processes within a person. The affective process starts rather automatically and is independent of a person's capacity to acquire, process, and save information. In contrast, the cognitive process is dependent on the capacity to handle information and takes place in a rather controlled way. According to the authors, the question of whether affective or cognitive processes are more important can only be answered with regard to existent capacities. If they are limited, the affective, automated process will determine the decision-making while if they are not limited, the cognitive process will be dominant. Limited capacities can consist of, for example, lack of information, lack of knowledge on information sources, or time pressure, and typically lead to low-involvement-decisions.

Grobe (2003) points out that the decision situation of choosing the right employer is probably not influenced by a lack of capacities: Potential applicants are normally characterized by a high degree of involvement and they have acquired a certain amount of information about potential employers before making a decision. The decision for an employer is of high significance for an applicant's future, so it can be assumed that the decision will not be made under time pressure. Most applicants already search for information on employers during their time at university and try to get to know different employers, for example through internships. These circumstances point to an emphasis of the cognitive processes in the decision-making regarding potential employers. Indeed, Grobe (2003) found empirical proof for the greater importance of cognitive influences on the decisions regarding graduates' expectations in terms of employer attractiveness attributes. In a regression analysis she measured the influence of the variables 'global attractiveness', 'cognitive attractiveness' and 'affective attractiveness' on the intention to apply at a certain company, with the result of 'cognitive attractiveness' being the most important independent variable (in terms of beta-coefficients). In addition, Teufer (1999) suggests that the decision-making for a potential employer is a highly cognitive process, in which several

employer alternatives are rated in terms of various decision criteria and then classified into a ranking of preferred employers. Choosing the first employer is a new, far-reaching decision which is difficult to reverse and characterized by a high degree of personal involvement and perceived risk. Even if emotions and affects sometimes distort the decision-making process, this process is mainly cognitive in nature. Although on a purely theoretical basis, Petkovic (2008) also found support for the highly cognitive nature of graduates' and young professionals' decision-making process. He states that the degree of affective versus cognitive elements depends on the degree of involvement of the potential target group. As pupils, for example, do not have highly specified requirements towards employers yet, and are still relatively far away from their points of decision-making, they are characterized by a lower degree of involvement and a higher degree of affective considerations. Hence, they might be better targeted with emotional content. Graduates and young professionals, however, have distinct benefit requirements towards potential employers and are highly interested in any available information. Therefore, they are characterized by a high degree of involvement as well as rather cognitive considerations, and should be targeted with rational, instrumental content.

Thus, the importance of cognitive decision-making in the employer branding context, especially in the case of graduates, underlines the importance of attributes that can be judged in a cognitive way, such as instrumental attributes. Even though the emotional, symbolic attributes are undoubtedly of importance when it comes to the question of employer attributes and employer choice, this thesis will focus on the instrumental attributes and their evaluation, especially with regard to the nature of the analyzed target group of students and because of their importance and suitability for measurement and comparison in the international context. Hence, in the following part, the instrumental attributes determining employer attractiveness will be discussed in more detail.

3.1.1.2 Empirical Research on Instrumental Attractiveness Attributes

Scientific and commercial studies on instrumental attractiveness attributes sometimes come to different conclusions with regard to the importance of each attractiveness attribute. However, most studies are similar in their final assortment of key attributes that determine employer attractiveness.

Table 4: Research Overview of Employer Attractiveness Attributes

Author(s)	Target group	Key attributes of employer attractiveness
Thomas & Wise (1999)	MBA candidates	Salary Opportunity to use one's abilities Challenging and interesting work Corporate image and reputation Location Training opportunities Selection procedures Opportunity for rapid advancement Work environment Job security
Sutherland et al. (2002)	Knowledge workers	Career growth and challenging work Personal training and development Pay, being linked to performance Global, innovative company based on good products Large organization offering job rotation and diversity Successful company based on strong products Challenging work in a non-hierarchical company Like the work and the industry Value-based organization valuing employees, cultural diversity, social responsibility, access to resources Benefits such as fringe benefits, status and work experience Comfort in knowing existing staff, small organization, casual dress, comfortable working environment
Trank et al. (2002)	Business and liberal arts students	Work itself (meaningful, interesting, challenging, not trivial or boring, work that makes a difference) Job flexibility Broad career path Training opportunities Individual pay Contingent pay Opportunities for promotion Fast-track promotions Pay level Hiring selectivity Praise and recognition
Lievens & Highhouse (2003)	Final-year students and bank employees	Pay Advancement and development Job security Task demands Benefits (employee questionnaire only) Flexible working hours (employee questionnaire only) Location (student questionnaire only) Working with customers (student questionnaire only)

Author(s)	Target group	Key attributes of employer attractiveness
Lievens et al. (2007)	Army applicants and military employees	Opportunity for social/team activities Opportunity for sports Provision of good salaries Advancement opportunities Job security Task diversity Opportunity to work in a structured environment Travel opportunities
van Hoye & Lievens (2007)	Graduate students	Location Industry Organization size Salary and benefits Career opportunities Educational prospects Job content

Table 4 depicts a selection of recent scientific studies investigating potential employees' assessment of instrumental attributes. The resulting attributes outlined in the table provide a basis for the compilation of instrumental attributes in commercial studies. Thus, they are to a large extent in line with the instrumental attributes that are part of the survey that will be employed for the empirical part of this thesis (cf. Chapter 4.3.2).

Scientific studies on employment attributes are often 'analytical' in nature, which means that they analyze the composure of a maximum employment benefit out of several single benefits in order to determine how various benefits in terms of attributes are added up to form a preference for a certain employer (Petkovic, 2008). Several authors, such as Grobe (2003), use conjoint analysis methods to determine how an overall employment benefit changes if any of its attributes are modified. Thus, conjoint analysis can evaluate which attributes contribute to which degree to the formation of a global employer preference.[37] Another analytical method would be preference matching through choice–modeling (Erlenkaemper, Hinzdorf, Priemuth, & von Thaden, 2006; Hinzdorf, Priemuth, & Erlenkaemper, 2003). In this approach, potential employees are asked to evaluate different fictive employer profiles in terms of attractiveness and to make a choice for one employer. The employer profiles are composed out of a certain set of attributes (e.g., leadership style, work tasks, pay, degree of internationalization, location, etc.) with each profile emphasizing the attri-

[37] For a detailed description of conjoint analysis, see Grobe (2003, p. 28 f.), Kotler & Bliemel (2001, p. 265), Meffert (2000, p. 401 f.) or Nieschlag et al. (2002, p. 530 f.).

butes differently. This way, the most relevant attributes with regard to the decision for a certain employer can be determined.

In contrast, the available commercial studies rely on preference evaluations in terms of rankings without further analyzing which elements have led to a certain employer preference. Unlike analytical studies, they do not investigate the composure of the overall preference in terms of single benefits and can therefore be called 'additive' in nature (cf. Petkovic, 2008). The majority of these studies determine employer preferences through the evaluation of a set of companies with regard to familiarity, attractiveness and application intentions. The resulting rankings summarize the employers of choice of the relevant target groups by percentages. Surveyed target groups can be graduates, young professionals or even pupils. They can be further differentiated into subsets according to academic performance (high potentials), fields of study, specialization or gender. In contrast to analytical studies, they are based on a direct question design in order to minimize questionnaire length and maximize response rates. Comparing analytical and direct, additive studies, Petkovic (2008) remarks that analytical studies contribute to the professionalization of personnel research by providing a lot of detailed data and the possibility to compare company profiles. However, these studies are also very time and cost-consuming compared to additive, direct studies, so that they usually do not lead to large-scale data sets (i.e. many respondents) and are often restricted to domestic contexts. As a cross-cultural data set with a sufficient number of respondents from multiple countries is a prerequisite for the intended investigations of this thesis, an additive, direct study will be used.

3.1.2 Individual Determinants of Attribute Evaluation

Most of the studies on instrumental attractiveness attributes are similar in terms of structure and amount of the underlying criteria, but results vary according to which subgroup of potential employees has been surveyed. However, this variation according to subgroups has exclusively been investigated in a domestic context before. Until now, we lack information on whether individual difference variables still show a significant impact on students' preferences when national difference variables are considered at the same time. Before adding national difference variables to the research models in order to combine influences on both levels (i.e. the individual and the national level), hypotheses related to promising individual difference variables have to be deducted. Therefore, the following issues need to be addressed when regarding employer attractiveness attribute evaluations:

1) Which individual characteristics might be of influence on the relative evaluation of attribute importance ratings?
2) Do attribute evaluations differ significantly according to which subgroup has been surveyed?

Kirchgeorg (Kirchgeorg & Lorbeer, 2002; Kirchgeorg & Günther, 2006), who has conducted several studies on high potentials' requirements concerning employer attractiveness attributes, suggests that results might be influenced by the categories 'Values', 'Socio-demography', 'Field of study' and 'Mobility' (Kirchgeorg & Lorbeer, 2002). With regard to field of study, Kichgeorg and Lorbeer (2002) compare business students, engineering students, and natural science students, and find that business students attach significantly higher priorities to several employer attributes, including 'promotion opportunities and professional development', 'high salary', 'high level of responsibility', 'good reputation of the employer' and 'possibility of working abroad'. In contrast, they value the criteria 'stable working conditions' and 'ethic behavior comes before profit orientation' less than do engineering and natural science students. Thus, according to Kirchgeorg and Lorbeer (2002), field of study is of significant influence on the formulation of requirements towards the ideal employer. As far as socio-demography is concerned, the authors analyze the influence of gender, age, and current semester of study. They find significant differences between male and female respondents, with males rating 'high salary' as more important than do females and with females attaching higher value to 'opportunities for further training', 'many vacation days', 'friendly work atmosphere', 'possibility of working abroad', 'varied job work tasks', 'stable working conditions', 'high social security', 'balance between work and private life', and 'ethic behavior comes before profit orientation'. Hence, gender is of significant overall influence. This is not the case for age and semester of study, which are hardly of any influence on the evaluation of attributes. Only the attribute 'attractive location' is valued significantly stronger by students of higher semesters than by students of lower semesters.

Since Kirchgeorg and Lorbeer (2002) include only high potentials in their study, a fifth influencing category of 'Performance orientation' can be suggested (Sponheuer, 2009). Additional research supports this argument by demonstrating that applicants with higher abilities value different job and organizational attributes than applicants with lower abilities (Trank, Rynes, & Bretz, 2002). High ability individuals seem to place greater value on interesting and challenging work and seem to be more discriminating in their job choice decisions (Rynes, Bretz, & Gerhart, 1991; Trank et al.,

2002). There is also evidence that high ability students attach more importance to opportunities for promotion and additional training than do average students (Trank et al., 2002). Several reasons can be mentioned to explain why high achievers place greater value on challenging work. Motivational research has demonstrated that individuals, who have already reached high accomplishments, try to seek new challenges in order to further broaden their competence (e.g., Kanfer & Heggestad, 1997; Spence & Helmreich, 1983). In addition, individuals with a high cognitive ability are more likely to have higher expectations of success and lower expectations of failure at challenging tasks than average achievers (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953). Challenging situations are often provided by organizations by means of opportunities for further training, which might be a reason why high achievers also value those training opportunities higher than the average group (Trank et al., 2002). Opportunities for promotion might be especially valued by high achievers since they can be a way to reach more challenging work assignments. Additionally, they are a public form of recognition that is of particular importance to those motivated by competitive excellence and the desire to differentiate themselves from others (Frank & Cook, 1995; Kanfer & Heggestad, 1997; Spence & Helmreich, 1983).

With regard to socio-demography, Sutherland et al. (2002) find that the rating of important employer attributes varies according to gender (significant differences in the rating of four attributes: 'Pay/performance' being more important for males, 'pay' being more important for males, job diversity/Job rotation' being more important for females, and 'training opportunities' being more important for females) and race group (significant differences between four race groups in the rating of ten attributes: 'cultural diversity of staff', 'non-hierarchical structure', 'access to resources', 'physical work environment', 'vocation', 'socially responsible company', 'company reputation', 'training opportunities', 'personal development, and 'fringe benefits').[38] Age group also had only little influence with one attribute ('employer is a global player') being rated the more important the younger the age group. The authors hence suggest segmenting the market of knowledge workers along demographic race categories and state that differences in cultural values and lifestyle preferences should be taken into account when seeking employee retention. Harold and Ployhart (2008) also investigate whether race, gender, or age group influence the weighting of attributes (in the case of postgraduate students). They come to the conclusion that only gender is

[38] As race groups will not be considered for the hypotheses deducted at this point, the directions of differences are not outlined in detail. However, the fact that significant differences between race groups have been found provides a first hint at potential differences between nationalities that might exist as well. These will be covered in the further course of this thesis.

of influence in terms of using fit information on a company, which is in line with other research detecting gender differences in the way information is used in influencing applicant decision making (Thomas & Wise, 1999). In addition, they find that the individual weighting of organizational attractiveness attributes, i.e. 'location', 'prestige', 'fit', and 'funding', changes over time, as the weighting of 'fit' and 'funding' increases in the recruitment process.

Another study analyzing race and gender influences is the one of Thomas and Wise (1999). They surveyed 93 MBA candidates with regard to job factors, organizational factors, and diversity and recruiter factors. Their results show that job attributes are perceived as most important when it comes to employer choice, followed by organizational attributes. The rating of job factors (i.e. 'salary', 'opportunity to use my abilities', and 'challenging/interesting work') is influenced by gender with females valuing them more than do males. However, gender and race are not of significant influence on organizational factors (i.e. 'corporate image and reputation', 'location', 'training opportunities', 'selection procedures', 'opportunities for rapid advancement', 'work environment', and 'job security'). Race does not have a significant influence on the rating of job factors either, but it has to be remarked that race was only represented through African-American participants, not through samples from other countries (Thomas & Wise, 1999). Gender differences have also been found in the studies of Murrell et al. (1991) and Sallop and Kirby (2007), indicating that men and women tend to focus on different factors when choosing an employer. While women tend to choose jobs based on their ability to work with other people, men are more interested in economic conditions (Murrell, Frieze, & Frost, 1991). In addition, women value work-life-balance more than do men (Sallop & Kirby, 2007).

An investigation of the commercial studies reveals differences in the choice of instrumental attributes according to field of study, gender, and academic performance (Petkovic, 2008). With regard to field of study, business students prefer 'pay', 'working atmosphere', 'interesting work tasks', 'advancement opportunities' and 'opportunities for further training and development'. In comparison, engineering students rate 'flexible working hours' and 'job security' much higher than business students. When male and female students are compared, females tend to prefer a 'good working atmosphere', 'interesting work tasks', 'job security' and 'environment-friendly company behavior', whereas for males, a 'high salary' and 'career opportunities' are more important. As far as academic performance is concerned, high potentials tend to value

'challenging work tasks' and 'internationality of the company' more than do average performers, while 'job security' seems to be less important to high potentials.[39]

Summarizing, it can be stated that, despite some contradictory results, previous studies have detected significant influences of (1) course of study, (2) gender, and (3) academic achievement. However, as the results have not been straightforward in every case, additional testing with a large-scale cross-cultural data set would contribute to a further clarification of the relations between the proposed variables. In addition, the influence of individual difference variables has never been investigated in combination with macro-level influences to illuminate the relative impact of these micro-level characteristics. Thus, the previous findings and theory outlined above will serve as a basis on which to predict the following hypotheses for testing in a multilevel model:

H1a: Business students attach more value to promotion opportunities than do engineering students.

H1b: Business students attach more value to professional development/training than do engineering students.

H1c: Business students attach more value to starting salary than do engineering students.

H1d: Engineering students attach more value to job security than do business students.

As Kirchgeorg and Lorbeer (2002) also detect the influence of field of study with regard to the employer's reputation, it can be assumed that the evaluation of an employer's success in the market might be influenced by field of study. Hence, it can be predicted:

H1e: Business students attach more value to employer success in the market than do engineering students.

With regard to gender, the following predictions can be made:

H2a: Male students attach more value to starting salary than do female students.

H2b: Female students attach more value to professional development/training than do male students.

H2c: Female students attach more value to friendly colleagues than do male students.

[39] A list of the reviewed studies can be found in Petkovic (2008, pp. 33-35).

H2d: Female students attach more value to job security than do male students.
H2e: Male students attach more value to promotion opportunities than do female students.
H2f: Male students attach more value to employer success in the market than do female students.

With regard to academic achievement, it can be predicted:
H3a: High achievers attach more value to promotion opportunities than do average students.
H3b: High achievers attach more value to professional development/training than do average students.
H3c: Average students attach more value to job security than do high achievers.

Since high achievers are likely to be motivated by competitive excellence and wish to differentiate themselves from others (e.g., Kanfer & Heggestad, 1997), it can be additionally assumed that they value an employer's success in the market more than do average achievers, while the necessity of friendly colleagues seems less important. Hence, it can be predicted:
H3d: High achievers attach more value to employer success in the market than do average students.
H3e: Average students attach more value to friendly colleagues than do high achievers.

With regard to students' age, there is only limited support for any potential influence on attribute evaluation. The results of Kirchgeorg and Lorbeer (2002) and Harold and Ployhart (2008) indicate that students' progress in the recruitment process or in employer-related decision-making could be of influence on their evaluation of attractiveness attributes. As younger students are often less involved in recruiting processes and employer-related decision-making, they could show different evaluations than older students. Indeed, Sutherland et al. (2002) identify differences in the attribute rankings of four different age groups. Accordingly, the attribute 'career growth opportunities' is very important for younger and average aged students while its importance decreases for older students. Furthermore, the attribute 'pay' belongs to the five most important attributes only for young students, whereas the attribute 'employees valued' is ranked as very important only by older students. The attribute 'personal development' increases in importance for the age group 31 to 35 in comparison to the two younger groups. In addition to these findings, research from con-

sumer marketing indicates that younger people focus more on hedonic pleasures when making their product choices (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988), and pay more attention to symbolic product aspects (Creusen, 2010). This leads to the assumption that younger students might be more likely to value attributes that contribute to the employer's external reputation and, consistent with reasoning from social identity theory (cf. Chapter 2.2.1), to their own positive standing. In combination with the findings of Sutherland et al. (2002), it can be assumed that younger students might attach a higher importance to the attributes of employer success in the market, promotion opportunities, and starting salary, while older students focus on more functional aspects, such as friendly colleagues and professional development. Thus, it can be predicted:

H4a: Younger students attach more value to promotion opportunities than do older students.

H4b: Older students attach more value to professional development than do younger students.

H4c: Younger students attach more value to employer success in the market than do older students.

H4d: Older students attach more value to friendly colleagues than do younger students.

H4e: Younger students attach more value to starting salary than do older students.

3.2 Macro-Level: Contributions from Cross-Cultural Research

This section will start with a short outline of the reasoning which leads to assume that students' evaluation of attractiveness attributes differs between countries. Because of its central role in the field of international marketing, this subsection will be followed by a discussion of the globalization debate and the related decision of standardization versus adaption in international marketing. Since the debate is almost always focused on consumers and products, the topic has to be further analyzed in the context of employer branding and potential employees. Therefore, an approach to transfer it into the employer branding perspective will be taken. As a multitude of influencing factors on consumer behavior and values is discussed within the standardization debate, a suitable framework to structure these influences is needed. Therefore, the convergence – divergence – crossvergence framework will be included into the conceptual foundations outlined in this chapter. Culture has been identified as one of the major influences on individuals' values and behavior and has to be considered a potential influence on students' evaluation of employer attractiveness attributes. In or-

der to determine if national boundaries are a dominant factor of influence, a further helpful approach is international market segmentation based on individual preferences. Thus, this topic will be discussed as an important part of international marketing strategy that should be broadened to the employer branding context.

3.2.1 Country-Based Differences in Attribute Evaluation

As outlined in the previous section, individual differences in students' field of study, academic achievement, gender or age could be of influence on the evaluation of employer characteristics. These influences are already important when developing employer branding strategies at the domestic level. When it comes to international employer branding, additional differences arising from students' country of living might have to be taken into account. Potential differences at the macro level might be caused by various factors, e.g., by the economic situation or the situation in the labor market of a particular country (Erlinghagen, 2008). Over and above these 'hard' factors, it can be assumed that 'soft' factors, arising from cultural differences, also influence individuals' subjective assessment of employer characteristics. A major question arising from this assumption is how cultural characteristics can be operationalized and measured. Cultural characteristics do not necessarily have to coincide with the borders of nations. Even though nations have been called into question as units of analysis in international marketing and branding research (Cayla & Arnould, 2008), they remain a useful structuring framework constructing people as citizens (Hannerz, 1997). There are strong arguments for the influence of national boundaries on the development of the cultural peculiarities of their populations. As national boundaries often date back to the middle Ages, there is a long tradition of national institutions, such as education and welfare systems, which might have shaped a particular national culture (Erlinghagen, 2008). Empirical research has discovered proof of between-country differences (e.g., Hofstede, 1980; Steenkamp, 2001), which supports the use of nation as a proxy for culture. Members of a nation often share the same language, history, religion and sense of identity (Dawar & Parker, 1994; Hofstede, 1980). There is also research suggesting that national myths are powerful tools for creating iconic brands (Holt, 2004; Lewi, 2003). However, it has to be verified if the national framework is equally appropriate when analyzing the country influence on graduates' employer benefit preferences. As Cayla and Arnould (2008, p. 92) point out: "[…] the challenge involves determining which spatial-geographic units of analysis are appropriate for which type of social phenomenon or social problem […]." With regard to employer branding, it has not been analyzed if

nations or countries have any impact on students' preferences for certain employers or employer characteristics. Neither has been verified if culture plays a role when contemplating potential differences. Various authors have proposed that there are likely to be cross-cultural differences in employer attractiveness (e.g., Berthon et al., 2005); however they have not further investigated them. In order to shed more light onto this question, three issues should be examined in particular:

1) How much of the variance in students' evaluation of employer attractiveness attributes can be attributed to the country-level?

2) Even if the influence of individual-level factors is taken into account; do significant differences in attribute evaluations between countries remain?

3) If there remain any differences that can be attributed to students' country of living, where do they arise from?

As there is hardly any previous literature on the international aspect of employer branding, contributions from international marketing and business research have to be taken into account in order to develop hypotheses. Therefore, the next chapter is aimed at examining potential foundations and explanations for cross-national differences that can be drawn from theory and research on international and intercultural issues and might be transferred to the employer branding context.

3.2.2 The Globalization Debate

A central topic in the international marketing literature is the question of whether world markets and consumers are getting increasingly homogenous, resulting in the adoption of standardized, global marketing approaches by international companies. Whereas some scholars argue for a convergence of consumer markets (Levitt, 1983; Ohmae, 1989; Yip, 1989), others believe that culture remains an important influence on buying behavior and that supposed homogeneity of preferences might hide significant differences among consumers in international markets (Belk, 1996; Manrai & Manrai, 1996; Usunier, 1996; Walters, 1986). Consequently, potential cross-cultural differences in consumer behavior have received growing scientific attention in empirical (e.g., Alden, Hoyer, & Lee, 1993; Dawar & Parker, 1994; Lee & Green, 1991; Steenkamp, Ter Hofstede, & Wedel, 1999) as well as theoretical research (e.g., Clark, 1990; Costa & Bamossy, 1995; Douglas & Craig, 1997; McCracken, 1986; McCort & Malhotra, 1993; Manrai & Manrai, 1996; Parker & Tavassoli, 2000; Steenkamp, 2001; Wills, Samli, & Jacobs, 1991). The question of whether to adopt a global, standardized approach is also particularly relevant in the context of employer

branding. Therefore, the discussion on the potential convergence of consumer preferences seems interesting with regard to its consequences for employer selection behavior. Before turning to the context of employer choice, the globalization debate in the consumer behavior context will be outlined briefly.

In 1983, a controversial article by Levitt (1983) constituted a landmark in the globalization debate (Soares, 2004). Levitt (1983, p. 93) refers to the term globalization as a "new commercial reality", in which differences in national or regional consumer preferences are obsolete as a result of technological innovation. Thus, consumers' needs and desires are increasingly homogenized and companies can profit from the use of globally standardized marketing programs, achieving synergies across markets, economies of scale, economies of scope, and message consistency (Backhaus et al., 2005; Melewar & Vemmervik, 2004; Hill, 2001). Since 1983, Levitt's article has been cited in almost every contribution on the question of standardization of international marketing, and the concept of globalization has been widely diffused (Soares, 2004). According to the new vision of world markets, the term 'international marketing' has been increasingly replaced by 'global marketing' (Quelch & Hoff, 1986; Douglas & Craig, 1989; Yip, 1989) and the related terms of 'global markets', 'global competition' and 'global strategy'. Whereas 'international' marketing acknow-ledges the existence of country differences and suggests adaption and localization, 'global' marketing pursues standardization (van Heerden & Barter, 2008). The idea that differences among consumers are fading has received support from theorists (Ohmae, 1989; Yip, 1989) and further empirical research (Hill & James, 1991). In a study of marketers of consumer nondurables, Hill and James (1991), for example, conclude that basic similarities among countries are a primary force in international product strategies and they suggest that researchers should focus more on these similarities. In general, several factors have been claimed to influence the trend towards globalization and homogenization of consumer tastes (Dailey & Carley, 2003): First, the growth of interconnectivity increases the pace of globalization with each communications innovation. The introduction of the Internet has resulted in a faster and further spread of cultural memes (i.e. individual cultural elements) than previously possible. Second, demographic trends are contributing to globalization. Migration leads to cross-cultural exchange between consumers from widely-ranging backgrounds, and increasing rates of marriage outside of traditional ethnic, cultural, and religious groupings further enhance this exchange. Third, the homogenization of consumer preferences and behavior might also be attributed to the historical spread of market capitalism trade practices: Capital markets increasingly seek foreign investment opportuni-

ties as well as cheap labor (Dailey & Carley, 2003). If these trends contribute to a homogenization of consumer tastes, they might also stimulate a convergence of graduates' preferences with regard to important criteria that should be fulfilled by an ideal employer.

The European market is particularly interesting with regard to the question of homogenization. The European Union (EU) is aimed at harmonization and integration of its member countries in terms of many economic and legal aspects. Nevertheless, the member countries also have their own, deep-rooted cultural identities (Soares, 2004). As far as consumer marketing is concerned, there have been several studies investigating a potential convergence of European consumers.[40] Standardization has been promoted against the backdrop of political and economic integration, cross-border information flow and increasing consumer mobility (Chadraba & Czepiec, 1988; Reichel, 1989; Quelch & Buzzell, 1989; Guido, 1991). In addition, trading blocs are assumed to increase consumer similarity (Vandermerwe & L'Huillier, 1989; Quelch & Buzzell, 1989). However, even though it was acknowledged that European consumers are becoming more similar, the unique aspects of national consumer behavior could not be ignored. Vandermerwe and L'Huillier (1989, p. 35 f.) concluded that "instead of one homogenous mass market or a collection of small specialized markets, the most likely outcome is that new Euro-consumer clusters will emerge." These clusters would be characterized by similar needs, lifestyles, psychographics and purchase behavior in certain geographical areas but across national boundaries (Soares, 2004). Other authors were also doubtful of the existence of a homogenous European culture (Reichel, 1989; Vincze & McNeill, 1994; Kale, 1995). As Caudron (1994, p. 28) stated: "Europeans don't consider themselves to be European. They are Italian, German, Greek."

In addition, there are other countertrends that can be mentioned against the arguments in favor of globalization. Despite the fact that interconnectivity is facilitating the access to information from anywhere in the world, a common knowledge base does not automatically lead to a common set of values and common, social, political and economic structures. Instead, a broader access to information is also driving the countertrend of fragmentation, which is the breaking down of existing social and consumer groupings (Dailey & Carley, 2003). In a countervailing trend, new social and consumer groupings are formed along different axes. This so-called countertrend of

[40] For a review of EU-related standardization contributions, see Soares et al. (2003).

tribalization is also driven by increasing interconnectivity. Individuals with similar interests or shared goals and perspectives can connect via the Internet from anywhere on the globe. For example, friendships or even partnerships between geographically separated people might be formed through websites, chatrooms or electronic bulletin boards. Thus, "fragmentation gives rise to new social groupings based on common purpose or interests, rather than geographical proximity" (Dailey & Carley, 2003, p. 325). Thus, research is needed in order to explore the magnitude of converging versus diverging factors which influence the formation of preferences regarding employer attractiveness.

3.2.3 Standardization versus Adaption

The debate on globalization of consumer markets is directly related to the debate on how to react to globalization tendencies in terms of marketing strategy and implementation. The discussion of standardization of marketing activities across countries versus adaption is still one of the main strategic aspects of international marketing (Berndt, Fantapié Altobelli, & Sander, 2005), and is therefore directly relevant for international employer branding strategy. Proponents of the globalization idea see the world as a single market (Albaum & Duerr, 2005) and argue that international firms should adopt global, standardized marketing strategies across different countries (e.g., Elinder, 1965; Buzzell, 1968; Levitt, 1983; Walters, 1986; Douglas & Craig, 1989; Yip, 1989; Ohmae, 1989; Jain, 1989; Hill & James, 1991; Baalbaki & Malhotra, 1995; de Chernatony, Halliburton, & Bernath, 1995; Wang, 1996; Papavassiliou & Stathakopoulos, 1997; Melewar & Vemmervik, 2004). They believe that all cultures are converging to one global culture and that marketers should therefore address common global needs instead of focusing on trivial country differences (Herbig, 1998; Toyne & Walters, 1993). A company adopting a global marketing strategy seeks to serve an essentially identical market appearing in many countries worldwide to exploit global market opportunities (Doole & Lowe, 2008).

In contrast to this view, opponents believe that marketing strategies should be adapted to national and local markets, since there are significant differences between cultures (Quelch & Hoff, 1986; Douglas & Wind, 1987; Littler & Schlieper, 1995).[41] They argue that the dissimilarities from different languages alone outweigh any similarities (Ekwulugo, 2003) and that standardization would result in lost competitive ad-

[41] The strategy of adaption to national markets is also referred to as localization or customization strategy.

vantage and lower sales (Melewar & Vemmervik, 2004). As far as global brands are concerned, there is no agreement as to whether they truly exist at all. Even famous so-called global brands, such as *Coca Cola, Sony* or *Nike,* have been adapted in some way to suit local conditions (Mead, 1993). Several authors have discussed the advantages and disadvantages of standardization (e.g., Jain, 1989; Yip, 1997; Schiele, 1999; Sander, 2001; Douglas & Craig, 2001; Kapferer, 2002; Vollert, 2002; Steenkamp, Batra, & Alden, 2003; Lange, 2004; Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004; Schuh, 2007; Keller, 2008). The following selection of identified advantages seems likely to be transferrable into the context of international employer brand standardization; however, this has not yet been assessed empirically:

- A higher quality of advertising due to a centralized communication system and concentration of resources
- Lower communication costs due to a degression of overhead costs in the production of advertising material, media overflow, use of global communication channels and a lower price per contact in the target group through the use of efficient transnational media
- Advantages of a consistent brand image and worldwide recognition of the brand
- Better straightforwardness and controllability for management
- Possibility of enhanced knowledge transfer
- Possibility to use standardized systems of information, planning and control, especially consistent marketing controlling, which results in an improved internal communication
- Higher motivation of employees through a stronger identification with the brand and the organization.

Disadvantages related to employer brand standardization might include:

- A suboptimal local recruiting performance due to insufficient adaption to local needs of potential employees and local competition
- Fewer possibilities to react to changes in local needs or competition
- Relatively high coordination efforts and high demands towards the quality of the team responsible for a global positioning and implementation
- Loss of time in the planning stage
- Danger of authority allocation at the headquarter
- Negative influence on the motivation of local management staff
- Loss of internal, company-wide competition and creativity.

Although Levitt (1983) probably made the most known contribution to this discussion, the debate itself can be traced back to 1965, when Elinder (1965) introduced the

question in the context of advertising in the European countries. He argued that consumer industries should take into account trends in European consumption habits rather than national traits and traditional characteristics when creating messages to European consumers (Elinder, 1965). The scope of the debate was subsequently broadened by an article by Buzzell (1968), which emphasized that neither complete standardization nor complete adaption would be feasible strategies (Soares, 2004). As such, the standardization versus adaption debate was criticized as too polarized (Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, & Du Preez, 1995; Wills et al., 1991). Instead, the question of which elements could be standardized to which degree was brought into focus, resulting in many conceptual (e.g., Walters, 1986; Quelch & Hoff, 1986; Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987; Douglas & Wind, 1987; Douglas & Craig, 1989; Yip, 1989; Ohmae, 1989; Jain, 1989) and empirical contributions (e.g., Boote, 1982; Boddewyn, Soehl, & Picard, 1986; Whitelock, 1987; Picard, Boddewyn, & Soehl, 1988; Kashani, 1989; Akaah, 1991; Yip, 1991; Hill & James, 1991; Samiee & Roth, 1992; Szymanski, Sundar, & Varadarajan, 1993; Baalbaki & Malhotra, 1995; Shoham, 1995; Whitelock & Pimblett, 1997). With regard to organizational decisions, standardization can refer to two different elements, which can be pursued individually or in combination: standardization of marketing content and/or standardization of marketing processes (Kreutzer, 1985; Jain, 1989). Whereas the standardization of content involves the overall marketing strategy and the individual marketing instruments (e.g., price, product, place, promotion), standardization of processes refers to the homogenization of structures and procedures of marketing decisions (e.g., marketing information systems, controlling systems) (Bolz, 1992).

In addition to the company-internal perspective, other factors of influence were included into the debate. A contingency approach was adopted and several frameworks were developed to determine the right degree of standardization based on a set of dimensions (e.g., Quelch & Hoff, 1986; Rau & Preble, 1987; Yip, 1989; Jain, 1989; Shoham, 1995; Wang, 1996; Lages, 2000; Theodosiou & Katsikeas, 2001). Quelch and Hoff (1986) developed a framework based on four dimensions to evaluate a company's level of standardization: business functions, products, marketing mix elements, and countries. They especially highlighted the need for flexibility at the implementation stage of international marketing. Douglas and Wind (1987) also concluded that the degree of standardization depends on the type of product market, market environment conditions, and the company's objectives and structure. Yip (1989) suggested the dimensions of market participation, product offering, location of value-added activities, marketing approach, and competitive moves to be relevant for

global marketing strategies. Within these dimensions, a company could adopt a pure multi-domestic strategy, a pure global strategy, or several intermediate positions. Jain (1989) identified five relevant factors, which have been widely cited: target market, market position, nature of the product, marketing environment, and organization factors. Standardization might be more suitable in target markets which are economically similar or in similar market segments across countries. In addition, the degree of standardization might be higher in markets which share a similar customer behavior and lifestyle and for products with higher cultural compatibility. With regard to the environment, differences in physical, legal, political and marketing infrastructure environments could lead to a greater need for adaption. The contingency approach by Wang (1996) also included product, country and consumer characteristics, which influence the degree of standardization. Lages (2000) added internal (e.g., competencies) and external factors (e.g., industry characteristics) as well as previous year's performance to the framework for determining the level of adaption (cf. Soares, 2004). With regard to country characteristics, a study by Hsieh (2002) supports the notion that brand image perceptions generalize across national markets that are similar in terms of national characteristics (Morrison & Roth, 1992; Roth 1995b), including level of economic development, cultural dimensions, and geographic-based trading blocs. In a study in the European context, Halliburton and Hünerberg (1993, p. 91) concluded: "It is not 'whether' to go pan-European, but for which product/market, at what time, with which aspect of the marketing operation, and to which extent."

All of the research approaches mentioned above point out that "the scope for standardization is dependent on a multitude of factors, including nature of the product, target market as well as environmental and firm-specific values" (Diamantopoulos et al., 1995, p. 38). In order to structure this multitude of factors for the development of an international brand architecture, Strebinger (2008) introduces a classification into a) *company-specific factors* and b) *country-specific factors*.[42] As the company-specific factors depend on the individual organization and influence its employer branding strategy on a case-by-case basis, they will not be treated in the further analyses conducted in this thesis. However, they should be taken into account and will therefore be described briefly before turning to the country-specific factors.

a) Company-specific factors

According to qualitative research, the international brand architecture and marketing strategy of a company depend heavily on the historical development of the com-

[42] This classification is based on a review of previous literature and empirical findings on international brand architecture (cf. Strebinger, 2008, p. 283 f.).

pany's internationalization (de Chernatony, Halliburton, & Bernath, 1995; Douglas, Craig, & Nijssen, 2001; Douglas & Craig, 2001). A company's internationalization can be a result of historical opportunities and coincidences, but more often it is the result of an explicitly formulated internationalization strategy (Strebinger, 2008). A standardization of marketing content is often pursued by companies that follow an ethnocentric orientation at an early stage of internationalization. The company's activities are concentrated on the domestic market, and international engagement is pursued mainly through an export strategy. The marketing approach is then transferred without any changes to foreign countries which are often similar to the home market. In addition, standardization is also adopted by companies following a global strategy, in which a marketing concept is developed for the world market from the beginning. The objective of this strategy is to improve international competitiveness through integration and coordination of all of the company's activities in an overall, interconnected system (Berndt et al., 2005). A differentiation or adaption of marketing content is often pursued by companies following a multinational strategy with a polycentric orientation of management. This strategy seeks to achieve nationally optimal strategies instead of one globally ideal strategy and the market is often heavily segmented inter- and intra-nationally (Berndt et al., 2005). As employer branding strategies are often connected to the overall marketing strategies, the decision for a global or a multinational marketing strategy also affects a firm's employer branding strategy.

Another closely related factor is the international organizational structure (de Chernatony et al., 1995; Douglas et al., 2001; Douglas & Craig, 2001), which can be linked to a specific brand philosophy. This brand philosophy is based on the company's general philosophy concerning the degree of autonomy of the local national subsidiaries in relation to the company's headquarter. Whereas some headquarters leave a lot of freedom to their subsidiaries with regard to their branding activities (i.e. those companies following a multinational strategy), other companies highly centralize their brand management (i.e. those companies following a global strategy) (Berndt et al., 2005; Strebinger, 2008). Companies with a centralized brand management are most likely to pursue a rather standardized employer branding strategy. An additional factor that influences a company's international branding strategy is resources, especially the organization's financial and human resources (Schiele, 1999). Without sufficient resources a company cannot afford a highly differentiated international brand architecture strategy. On the other hand, a large amount of resources could mislead a firm to adopt an overly differentiated strategy in the beginning. In both cases, the strategies might have to be restructured in the long run

(Strebinger, 2008). The question of standardization also depends on which elements of the international marketing process are being regarded. In general, marketing objectives and strategies are more readily standardized than operational marketing decisions. The more operational the decision, the more likely it has to be differentiated (Doole & Lowe, 2008). Thus, operational employer branding activities, such as advertising or on campus activities, can hardly be standardized and should be adapted to local preferences.

b) Country-specific factors

Country-specific factors concern differences between the countries in which a company is active. They can be divided into factors from the company's direct environment, such as the competition, and factors concerning the broad environment, i.e. general country characteristics, such as economic factors (Douglas et al., 2001; Strebinger, 2008). In a company's direct environment, differences in target market sizes might influence the choice of brand architecture (Strebinger, 2008). If two country markets are isolated from one another and one is significantly smaller than the other, it might be unprofitable to create a specific national employer brand for the small market, since every additional national brand causes overhead costs. With regard to the implementation of the branding strategy, there might be differences concerning the quantity and quality of the countries' available media and communication channels. The cost structure of marketing communications and hence the international brand strategy can be influenced by the variety of media, its technical advance and concentration within a country, and media overflow and integration between different countries. On the market side, the media landscape also influences the international interconnectedness of target groups (Strebinger, 2008). Another factor from a company's direct environment is, for example, the degree of competition, which influences the possibility of standardization across different countries (Cavusgil, Zou, & Naidu, 1993; de Chernatony et al., 1995; Roth, 1992, 1995a). The strength and positioning of the competition's employer brands in each country might limit the scope, since the ideal positioning for a certain target market might already be taken. If this is the case, a company might have to focus on alternative positioning statements according to the individual strengths and weaknesses of the company and the target groups' preferences (Strebinger, 2008).

As far as an organization's broad environment is concerned, the following factors have been identified in qualitative studies (de Chernatony et al., 1995; Douglas et al., 2001; Douglas & Craig, 2001) and additional literature (Jain, 1989; Gregory &

Wiechmann, 2001; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2001; Cateora, Graham, & Bruning, 2006; Schuh, 2007):

- Geographic distances between countries as well as climatic and topographic differences, however, Sheth and Parvatiyar (2001) claim that these differences are becoming less significant due to the use of Internet technology
- Differences in the political and legal environment
- Cultural and language differences
- Differences in the technological and economic development
- Demographic differences, such as in the age distribution or student population within a country

Doole and Lowe (2008) propose similar environmental influences on international marketing. However, as they include some additional factors, their approach should be added at this point. Differences in the environmental influences shown in Figure 5 are claimed to affect consumers' perceptions and buying behavior. Thus, they likely determine the degree to which consumers across the globe are similar and, as a result, determine the potential for standardization (Doole & Lowe, 2008). In the context of employer branding, the country-specific differences and environmental influences might also affect graduates' preferences with regard to employer choice and desired employer benefits. The more homogenous graduates' preferences and behavior, the greater is the potential for a standardized employer branding strategy.

All of the factors might influence the possible degree of standardization; however, their influence depends on the question of what should be standardized. Strebinger (2008) notes that a lot of research approaches (e.g., Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 1999; de Chernatony et al., 1995; Holt, Quelch, & Taylor, 2004; Kapferer, 2005) mix up a variety of marketing decisions under the term 'international branding strategy'.

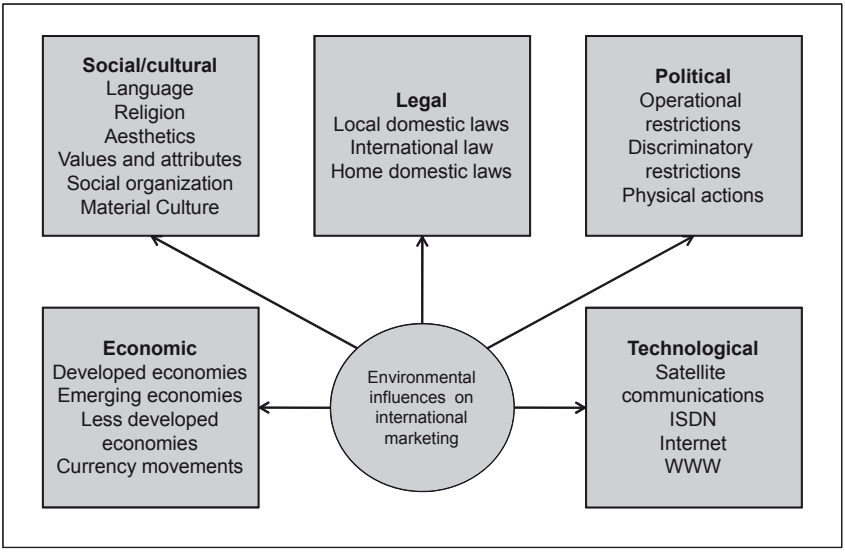

Figure 5: Environmental Influences on International Marketing
Source: Adapted from Doole & Lowe, 2008, p. 7

Especially in the discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of international standardization, they do not specify whether standardization refers to the branding itself, i.e. brand name and logo, the strategic positioning, or the implementation in terms of communication. Within the course of this thesis, the feasibility of standardization in the employer branding context will only be discussed with regard to positioning strategy.

The question that arises out of these illustrations from international consumer marketing is the one of whether country factors also influence the perceptions and preferences of potential employees. Against the backdrop of the multiple findings on differences in consumer behavior, it seems likely that individuals in different European countries do not always share the same preferences or behavior. Several factors have been identified as sources of influence and many of them can be attributed to the national level. Translated to the context of recruiting and employer branding, these differences in individuals' behavior and preferences could also lead to differing preferences in terms of important employer attractiveness attributes. Not all of the determinants of behavior and preferences can be analyzed in the empirical part of this project. However, two major factors, which have been introduced in this section,

should be examined in detail as they seem likely to impact graduates' attribute evaluations, namely socio-cultural influences and economic development. These factors also play a central role in the convergence – divergence – crossvergence framework, which seems particularly suited for this project as it is focused on work-related values and will therefore be introduced in the next section.

3.2.4 Convergence - Divergence - Crossvergence

The convergence versus divergence debate can be directly related to the globalization debate and the subsequent question of standardization versus adaption (cf. Sections 3.2.2 and 3.2.3), although focusing on work values and behavior rather than consumer behavior. Both convergence and divergence theories attempt to explain how value systems and behavior are formed and how they develop over time. For several decades the debate has been aimed at understanding whether the cross-societal values of their workforces are becoming more similar or not (Abegglen, 1957; Cole, 1973; Dunphy, 1987; Eisenstadt, 1973; England & Lee, 1974; Kelley & Reeser, 1973; Kelley, Whatley, & Worthley, 1987; Negandhi, 1975; Ottaway, Bhatnagar, & 1989; Pascale & Maguire, 1980; Prahalad & Doz, 1987; Ralston, Gustafson, Cheung, & Terpstra, 1993; Ralston, 2008; Ralston, Holt, Terpstra, & Kai-Cheng, 2008; Ricks, Toyne, & Martinez, 1990; Webber, 1969). This question is particularly interesting with regard to the context of employer branding. First, it can be assumed that the influences that drive the development of work values also drive the formation of employer preferences and related benefit preferences in terms of the ideal employer. As the evaluation of employer attractiveness attributes is based on an individual's value system (cf. the discussion of person-organization fit and organizational identification in Chapters 2.1.1 and 2.2.1), potential cross-national differences in the evaluation should be caused by the same factors that influence variations in work values. Second, the convergence of work value systems could facilitate the formation of a universal corporate culture, which is often desired by global organizations and underlined by their global employer brands. In a universal corporate culture, all members share similar views and beliefs that guide their behavior, regardless of the country they come from (Ralston et al., 2008).

Proponents of convergence theory argue that technological influence motivates individuals to develop a value system which is consistent with the technology of their society, regardless of any socio-cultural influences (Eisenstadt, 1973; England & Lee, 1974; Pascale & Maguire, 1980; Webber, 1969). Educational demands and business

structures are supposed to be shaped by a given technology, so that they generate values that are common to the technology concerned. Thus, when societies industrialize, they adopt the technologies of existing industrialized nations, thereby also adopting their values (Webber, 1969). Advocates of convergence theory also claim that technological advances, such as satellite communications, integration of the telephone networks, or electronic mail, lead to facilitated communication across broad geographic distances and, as a result, to an increase in the flow of people, goods and services across national boundaries. This in turn stimulates the cross-fertilization of ideas and experience, and reduces the significance of physical proximity (Douglas & Craig, 1991). Due to these increased cross-border flows and technological advances, industrialized countries are held to become more similar (Craig, Douglas, & Grein, 1992). Following this line of argumentation, cross-national differences in students' evaluations of attractiveness attributes would likely be small in countries which are similar with regard to their technological and economic development.

Divergence theory takes the opposite view to convergence theory, claiming that socio-cultural influence is the driving force that causes individuals of a given societal culture to retain their specific value system through time, regardless of other influences, such as technological, economic, or political change (Cole, 1973; Evans, 1970; Webber, 1969). For example, if a country adopted capitalism instead of socialism, the values of the workforce would remain largely unchanged (Lincoln, Olson, & Hanada, 1978; Ricks et al., 1990). In a relatively early study examining sixteen European countries over the time period from 1960 to 1988, Craig et al. (1992) found that those countries were diverging rather than converging, and that socio-cultural characteristics were key drivers of macro-environmental change. As outlined in the previous section, studies in the context of consumer behavior indorse this view (Caudron, 1994; Diamantopoulos et al., 1995; Kale, 1995; Reichel, 1989; Vincze & McNeill, 1994; Wierenga, Pruyn, & Waarts, 1996). Accordingly, cross-national differences in students' evaluations of employer attractiveness attributes would likely be caused by cultural differences between countries.

In the process of finding an integrated alternative between convergence and divergence, the more recent perspective of 'crossvergence' emerged (Ralston et al., 1993; Ralston et al., 2008; Ralston 2008). The term 'crossvergence' was introduced by Ralston and colleagues in 1993 (Ralston et al., 1993) and the concept has been in-

tensively discussed by many researchers since then.[43] According to the proponents of crossvergence, neither convergence nor divergence are adequate theories to explain the dynamic interaction of economic ideology and national culture. Crossvergence acknowledges this interaction which results in a unique value system that incorporates national culture as well as economic ideology (Ralston et al., 1993). Thus, "crossvergence occurs when an individual incorporates both national culture influences and economic ideology influences synergistically to form a unique value system that is different from the value set supported by either national culture or economic ideology" (Ralston, Holt, Terpstra, & Kai-Cheng, 1997, p. 183). Ralston (2008) later replaced the term 'economic ideology' by the concept of 'business ideology' in order to create a more holistic view of the relevant influences. Business ideology incorporates three macro-level influencing factors, which can also be found in many of the approaches in the international marketing literature outlined in the previous sections: economic, political, and technological influences. While economic influences are related to the economic system, the economic well-being and economic growth of a society, political influences encompass the political and legal system as well as the integrity of a society.

Technological influences refer to the level of technological sophistication and the rate of technological change (Ralston, 2008). All three of these influences are connected to business activity in a given society, whereas socio-cultural influences are more closely related to a society's core social values. In addition, economic, political, and technological influences share a common time horizon which is shorter than the time horizon for cultural change. Crossvergence theorists argue that a combination of socio-cultural and business ideology influences is the driving force that shapes individual-level values and behavior and results in a unique values system owing to the dynamic interaction of these influences (Ralston et al., 1993; Ralston, 2008). In a total of six studies with large multi-country samples, Ralston and colleagues find evidence for crossvergence as the favored explanation for values evolution in different settings, such as in China, Hong Kong and the United States or in China, Japan, Russia and the United States as well as in Vietnam (Ralston et al., 1993; Ralston, Yu, Wang, Terpstra, H., & He, 1996; Ralston, Holt, Terpstra, & Kai-Cheng, 1997; Ralston, Nguyen, & Napier, 1999; Egri & Ralston, 2004; Ralston, Pounder, Lo, Wong, Egri, & Stauffer, 2006).[44] Their results are further supported by additional research on this topic (e.g., Andrews & Chompusri, 2005; Kelley, MacNab, & Worthley, 2006).

[43] For an overview of selected articles on crossvergence, see Witt (2008, p. 48).
[44] A brief description of the six studies can be found in Ralston (2008).

Against the backdrop of the multiple findings in favor of a combination of socio-cultural and business ideology influences, it seems sensible to consider the crossvergence framework for the purpose of this project. The aim is not to find evidence for a crossvergence of values in the participating countries, since the setting and objective of this project is different with regard to the dependent variables and time focus. Crossvergence implies change over time (Witt, 2008), which ideally should be measured in longitudinal studies. Crossvergence researchers mostly use individual-level value measures, such as the Schwartz Value Survey dimensions (Schwartz, 1992), as dependent variables, whereas in this project the individual evaluations of attractiveness attributes serve this function. However, since the individual value system underlies and determines the associations and expectations towards an employer (cf. Chapter 2.1.1), it can be assumed that the evaluation of attractiveness attributes is influenced in the same way as work values are. Therefore, it seems worth investigating the relative influence of national culture and business ideology on attribute evaluations. If a significant amount of variance in attribute evaluations can be attributed to the country level, it can be tested if national culture indicators or business ideology indicators have a significant effect on attribute evaluations. The subsequent findings on which of these factors influence attribute evaluations have important implications for multi-domestic international companies, not only for the possible creation of a global corporate culture (Ohmae, 1990; Yip, 1995) but also for the development of a 'global', standardized employer value proposition. A finding indicating only a small amount of country-level variance and no significant cultural influences would support the notion that a single set of attractiveness attributes for all participating European countries might be possible. On the contrary, a finding indicating cultural influences and a large country-level variance would speak most clearly against this possibility. A finding in between, indicating cultural as well as business ideology influence would be less conclusive and a common set of attributes would depend on the degree of each influence.

Since a major part of the recent literature provides stronger support for a dominant influence of cultural factors (Ralston et al., 1997), as also outlined in the previous section, cultural indicators can be expected to have stronger effects than business ideology indicators. The conceptualization of culture and its implementation in the subsequent analysis will be discussed in greater detail in the following section. As far as business ideology indicators are concerned, Ralston and colleagues have identified a set of macro-predictor variables, based on recent work by their research group *UFIRC* (Ralston, 2008). These include *GNI per capita* for economic influence, the

technology index for technological influence and *polity* for political influence. However, they also found that those three business ideology predictors hold together as a group to the point that they might be too highly correlated to be used together in the same study. Therefore, only one indicator, namely economic influence, will be used. *GNI/capita* should be particularly relevant in the employer branding context, since the labor market is assumed to be influenced by economic development (Kats, van Emmerik, Blenkinsopp, & Khapova, 2010). Thus, including an economic indicator in the analysis seems important, as countries that are similar in cultural characteristics might have quite different labor markets and vice versa (Kats et al., 2010). Furthermore, research in the context of consumer behavior has discovered that differences in consumers' brand image perceptions reflect differences in national levels of economic development (Hsieh, 2002). Hence, individuals' perceptions of brand images and of image facets accordingly, might depend on a nation's economic development. In addition, economic influence, or national wealth, seems to be closely intertwined with cultural values. The cultural dimensions introduced by Hofstede (2001) as well as the majority of the GLOBE dimensions of national culture (House et al., 2004) correlate with national GNP/capita, which has led to discussions among cross-cultural researchers. While Hofstede (2001) separates national wealth from his cultural dimensions and recommends including GNP/capita as moderating variable in order to rule out the effect of hard factors besides culture, the GLOBE researchers (Javidan, House, Dorfman, Hanges, & Sully de Luque, 2006) suggest a reciprocal relationship between cultural values and national wealth. Thus, economic wealth might influence cultural values and cultural values might also drive economic wealth, or as Javidan (2004, p. 117) states: "The relationships among wealth, national culture, and other archival variables are so intertwined that they cannot be easily isolated, and cause and effect relationships, although intuitively appealing, are hard to verify empirically." Therefore, ignoring national wealth in the analysis of potential cultural influence might lead to a loss of important explanatory information.

Javidan and Hauser (2004) reassessed Hofstede's (2001) approach of including an interaction effect between GNP/capita and the cultural dimensions and found that, in more than 300 regressions, only nine cases showed significant interaction effects. Hence, a moderating effect of national wealth is not very likely. Against this backdrop, national wealth will be included in the multilevel analyses in order to test its direct effect, but not a potential moderating effect with regard to the cultural dimensions. As economic development is believed to influence the labor market (Kats et al., 2010) as well as brand image perception (Hsieh, 2002), it seems likely that a

country's economic condition and background will have an impact on students' preferences for specific employer attractiveness attributes. It can be assumed that students from economically less prosperous countries strive to secure their income, status and job security more than students from more prosperous societies. In order to improve and secure their financial situation in an economically less fortuned society, they might attach a particularly high importance to aspects of salary as well as career growth and development. In addition, the existence of these aspects in companies from less prosperous societies seems less self-evident than in richer countries. Therefore, it can be predicted:

H5a: Students in economically less prosperous countries value promotion opportunities more than do students in economically more prosperous nations.

H5b: Students in economically less prosperous countries value professional development/ training more than do students in economically more prosperous nations.

H5c: Students in economically less prosperous countries value starting salary more than do students in economically more prosperous nations.

H5d: Students in economically less prosperous countries value job security more than do students in economically more prosperous nations.

As a final important point in the context of crossvergence research, Ralston (2008) additionally emphasized that the use of multilevel (i.e. macro and micro) predictor variables would be a promising avenue for future research. In a study by Egri and Ralston (2004), the micro-level predictor *age* proved to be important for the values evolution process besides macro-level predictors. Thus, Ralston (2008) recommends the integration of micro-level predictors, particularly demographic variables, such as age and gender, and macro-level predictors in the same study. This recommendation will be followed in this project, since individual-level variables, i.e. age, gender, course of study, and academic achievement, and macro-level variables, such as cultural and economic predictors, will be combined in a multilevel model.

3.2.5 Conceptualizations of Culture and Findings on Cultural Influence

The concept of culture is complex and characterized by a multitude of definitions.[45] Peng et al. (2000) point out that researchers highlight different aspects of culture and adopt workable assumptions about what culture is. One of the most cited definitions is the one by Hofstede (1991, p. 5), who described culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of the group or category of

[45] For a comprehensive review of over 160 definitions of culture, see Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1985).

people from another." The definition is complicated by the problem of distinguishing strictly cultural factors from other macro-level influences (Soares, Farhangmehr, & Shoham, 2007). Intrinsically, culture differs from other macro-environmental factors, as stated by Sekaran (1983, p. 68): "Culturally patterned behaviors are thus distinct from the economic, political, legal, religious, linguistic, educational, technological and industrial environment in which people find themselves." However, isolating purely cultural from other influences is practically unfeasible, since there are no clear-cut boundaries, and behavioral patterns are often formed by a mix of influencing factors (Sekaran, 1983; Soares et al., 2007). Thus, all definitions of culture commonly highlight the all-encompassing nature of culture, implying that it is not limited to certain aspects of human behavior. For the purpose of this project, the definition by House et al. (2001, p. 494 f.) will be followed, according to which culture is defined as "shared motives values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives and are transmitted across age generations." The authors adopt Schein's (1990) perspective of culture as the product of a collective's attempts to address two sets of group issues, which are internal integration and external adaption. As diverse as the definitions and distinctions of culture are the different conceptualizations that can be found in literature. Lenartowitcz and Roth (1999) have developed a widely accepted typology which provides a comprehensive overview of approaches to operationalizing culture: *Ethnological Description* (ED); *Use of Proxies - Regional Affiliation*, *Direct Values Inference* (DVI), and *Indirect Values Inference* (IVI). In order to categorize the research conducted in this thesis, the four approaches will be reviewed briefly.

Ethnological Description refers to qualitative approaches, which are often used in sociology, psychology or anthropology, to compare or identify culture. It begins with "observations of social structures, artifacts and collective behavior, which are then used to develop conclusions about groups" (Lenartowicz & Roth, 1999, p. 783). A detailed descriptive appraisal is also provided to study intensively a single culture, as done in emic approaches. The aim is to understand a culture's specific, indigenous phenomena. This approach has rarely been used in international business research (Lenartowitcz & Roth, 1999). Some examples can be found in international marketing studies, which have used Hall's classification of high and low context cultures as secondary data (e.g., Mattila, 1999; Samli, 1995; Wills et al., 1991).

Use of Proxies – Regional Affiliation pertains to the definition of cultural groupings based on characteristics that reflect or resemble culture (e.g., nationality, place of

birth, or country of residence), which is common in the business literature (e.g., Dawar & Parker, 1994; Steenkamp et al.). According to Lenartowicz and Roth (1999, p. 784), "these proxies have the following theoretical foundations: the concept of national character (Clark, 1990), the premise that core cultural values are learned during childhood (Hofstede, 1980) and the notion that cultures and regions are intertwined (Franklin and Steiner, 1992). In essence, these proxies connect cultural groupings to geographic locations." The authors deem this approach acceptable if a) socio-demographic variability is controlled through sample design or the use of covariates, and b) individual subjects should be asked where they spent their childhood, as this location is important for the formation of individual values. When using proxies, it is not possible to test relationships between culture and dependent variables, since the necessary measures are missing. The proxies are meant to classify cultures, serving as a nominal measure only (Lenartowicz & Roth, 1999). Critics argue that nation would be a poor proxy for culture, as there are significant regional cultural differences and other cultural variation within nations (e.g., Cayla & Arnauld, 2008; Koch & Koch, 2007; Naumov & Puffer, 2000). A solution to shed more light onto this issue has been to measure individuals' cultural orientations directly. Adopting this approach, Park et al. (2008) measure culture both in terms of nationality and individuals' self-reported cultural orientation. They found that, compared to cultural orientation, nationality was the better predictor of differences. In addition, as outlined in Section 3.2.1, other researchers found empirical proof of between-country differences supporting the use of nation as a proxy (Dawar & Parker, 1994; Erlinghagen, 2008; Hannerz, 1997; Hofstede, 1980; Steenkamp, 2001). Apart from the use of country or nation as a proxy, other proxies have been applied at different levels of culture, for example at group level and organization level (Erez & Early, 1993), and at the level of a group of nations, such as the EU (Steenkamp, 2001) or Asian and Western cultures (Mattila, 1999).

Direct Values Inference "measures the values of subjects in a sample, and infers cultural characteristics based on the aggregation of these values" (Lenartowitcz & Roth, 1999, p. 784). This approach draws upon a value-based conceptualization of culture, reflecting the idea that culture is a set of learned characteristics shared by a group of individuals (e.g., Adler, 1984; Haviland, 1990; Hofstede, 1980; Kluckhohn, 1954). These characteristics are embedded in symbols, rituals or practices while the core is formed by culture (Hofstede, 1991). In contrast to personality, which is specific to the individual, learned cultural values are systematically shared by the group (Lenar-

towicz & Roth, 1999). According *to* Lenartowicz and Roth (1999, p. 785), the basic mechanisms by which value models assess culture are as follows:
1) "The hierarchy of individuals' values shapes the process of satisfaction of human needs (Maslow, 1954),
2) the process of satisfaction of human needs influences human behavior common to social groups, and
3) culture is characterized by the human behavior common to these groups."

Different value models exist in scientific literature, while the most common and widely used model is probably the one developed by Hofstede (1980, 1991, 2001), who derived four, and later five work value dimensions of culture: uncertainty avoidance, individualism, masculinity, power distance, and Confucian dynamism (i.e. long term orientation). Hofstede's work has become one of the most cited in international marketing and business literature; however it has also been heavily criticized (e.g., Baskerville, 2003; Cayla & Arnould, 2008; Gerhart & Fang, 2005; McSweeney, 2002; Sivakumar & Nakata, 2001; Spector, Cooper, & Sparks, 2001).[46] Several authors have replicated Hofstede's approach using different scales (e.g., Donthu & Yoo, 1998; Fernandez, Carlson, & Nicholson, 1997; Furrer, Liu, & Sudharshan, 2000) or his values survey module (e.g., Hoppe, 1990; Merritt, 2000; Pheng & Yuquan, 2002). A more recent approach that extends Hofstede's dimensions of culture has been developed by House and colleagues (e.g., House, Javidan, & Dorfman, 2001; House et al., 2004) in their *Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness* research program (GLOBE). Other prominent examples of value models include the *Rokeach Value Survey* (RVS) (Rokeach, 1973), the *Schwartz Value System* (SVS) (Schwartz, 1992), *Inglehart and Associates' World Values Survey* (Inglehart, 1997) and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997). The conceptualization of culture through cultural dimensions has anthropological roots and can be traced back into the 1950s (Parsons & Shils, 1951; Inkeles & Levinson, 1969). Some authors refer to cultural dimensions as 'cultural distance dimensions', as they relate to "operational parameters that can be used as proxies for these dimensions and allow estimating scores […] to gauge the extent to which countries differ on cultural dimensions" (Tung & Verbeke, 2010, p. 1260).

[46] Some of the criticism of Hofstede's work generally applies to the use of cultural dimensions for the conceptualization of culture and will therefore be discussed in more detail in the limitations of this thesis. This includes the arguments on over-simplifying culture through the use of a limited number of dimensions, failing to capture the dynamics of culture over time, and ignoring within-country cultural heterogeneity (e.g., Sivakumar & Nakata, 2001).

As with all approaches to the construct of culture, using cultural dimensions has not been without criticism. One of the main arguments against the use of dimensions has been the assumption that they would not fully capture all relevant aspects of culture (Briley, Morris, & Simonson, 2000). In addition, using a single dimension score for each country would ignore within-country variance, which has been found to be even greater than between-country variation on certain cultural variables (Au, 1999). With regard to intra-cultural variance, country scores also seem less suitable for countries composed of two or more subcultures, as there might be significant cultural differences between these subcultures or regions of a nation (e.g., McSweeney, 2002; Punnett & Withane, 1990; Selmer & DeLeon, 1996; Tung & Baumann, 2009). However, the concept of culture can only contribute to the explanation of cultural differences if its components are identified (Bagozzi, 1994; Leung, 1989; Samiee & Jeong, 1994; Schwartz, 1994), as stated by van de Vijver and Leung (1997, p. 3): “Culture is too global a concept to be meaningful as an explanatory variable.” Thus, the benefits of the cultural dimension approach for international and cross-cultural research outweigh its limitations (Soares et al., 2007). “The identification of reliable dimensions of cultural variation should help create a nomological framework that is capable of integrating diverse attitudinal and behavioral empirical phenomena and providing a basis for hypothesis generation” (Smith, Dugan & Trompenaars, 1996, p. 232).

The fourth approach to the conceptualization of culture, *Indirect Values Inference*, is based on the use of secondary data obtained through the DVI approach. Thus, it ascribes cultural characteristics to groups without directly surveying members of these groups. After classifying culture by one of the proxies mentioned above, the cultural characteristics of this unit are extrapolated from another study to the given subjects (Lenartowicz & Roth, 1999). The approach draws upon the assumption that “the sample studied corresponds directly to the sample from which the benchmarks are taken” (Lenartowicz & Roth, 1999, p. 786). This assumption can lead to potential measurement error if the characteristics of the subjects in both studies differ from one another, e.g., in terms of demography or geography. In addition, the directly measured values are often related to the workplace and not necessarily to the belief systems beyond this environment. To overcome this sampling problem, Lenartowicz and Roth (1999) propose two possibilities of validating secondary data for culture assessment: The first option requires that the samples of the benchmark study and the undertaken study are sufficiently large enough to randomize the effects of variables which potentially influence the values. A second way is to ensure that the characteristics of the research sample correspond to the ones of the benchmark sample. De-

spite some criticism, the IVI approach has been extensively used in international business (Sondergaard, 1994) and marketing research (Steenkamp, 2001), mostly incorporating the Hofstede (1980) cultural dimension scores. More recently, an increasing number of studies incorporate the cultural dimension scores from project GLOBE (e.g., House et al., 2004). An advantage of using secondary country scores for cultural dimensions is that, according to Morosini et al. (1998), they avoid common method variance, retrospective evaluations and rationalizations that might affect direct measures.

Summarizing the strengths and weaknesses of the four approaches, Lenartowicz and Roth (1999) recommend the use of a combination of two or three approaches, as “no single methodology is able to address the inclusive set of criteria relevant to culture assessment in business studies" (Lenartowicz & Roth, 1999, p. 787). Following this recommendation, the analysis conducted in this thesis will be based on the approaches of the *Use of Proxies* and *Indirect Values Inference*. Students’ country of living will be used as a proxy for the cultural unit of analysis. In order to explain the relationship between culture and the evaluation of attractiveness attributes, the *Indirect Values Inference* approach will be employed, assigning cultural dimension scores to each country. The use of secondary data does not permit to follow the *Direct Values Inference* approach. With regard to the sampling problem mentioned above (Lenartowicz & Roth, 1999), validation can be ensured through large sample sizes in both studies. Thus, potential effects of variables which influence the values should be randomized. In addition, the focus of the benchmark study on workplace values is less likely to bias results, as the evaluation of attractiveness attributes will be conducted in the light of future employers and workplaces. The decision for the benchmark study that will be incorporated fell on the GLOBE study of 62 societies (House et al., 2004). Reasons for this decision and detailed information on the study will be outlined in the following section.

Before turning to the GLOBE study, a brief summary and overview of previous findings and theory on cultural influence and cultural differences will be provided. As empirical studies on cultural influence in the context of employer branding do not exist to date, the hypotheses have to be deducted from findings and theory in related fields. With regard to theoretical foundations that suggest the influence of a society’s culture on individual behavior and preferences, two theoretical models seem particularly suited to draw explanations from: cultural immersion theory and social network theory. Cultural immersion theory is based on research from the field of cognitive psy-

chology (e.g., Erez & Earley, 1993; Lord & Maher, 1991; Smith & Peterson, 1988; Smith, Dugan, & Trompenaars, 1996), claiming that people who live in a certain societal culture become immersed in that culture and develop shared patterns of thinking and acting. Thus, individual behavior is likely to reflect common schemas of the respective society. According to cognitive psychologists, socio-cultural events activate certain cultural meaning systems within a cognitive network. Within a particular culture, certain ways of thinking as well as behavioral patterns in response to stimuli are enabled more often than others due to the given cultural expectations. As time passes, these shared schemas become readily available and easier to activate than alternatives, so that people neglect the existence of other ways of responding to certain situations (Dickson, Dickson, BeShears, & Gupta, 2004; Hanges, Lord, & Dickson, 2000). This way, shared societal expectations have a direct effect on patterns of behavior practices that characterize individuals living in the respective society (Dickson et al., 2004). Following this line of thinking, shared societal schemas should have a direct effect on graduates behavior, and thus on the way they evaluate desired employer characteristics. If this held to be true, different societies would be characterized by different patterns of students' attribute evaluations.

Social network theory complements this assumption by reasoning that individuals are influenced by the social networks in which they are embedded. The underlying cohesion of these social networks restrains the behaviors and choices of individuals within a given network (Burt, 1987). Through dense and multiple interactions within a cohesive network, shared perceptions and cues are constructed and transmitted (Ibarra & Andrews, 1993). Thus, social culture can be transmitted to various members of a network. In a cohesive group, actors tend to be characterized by strong behavioral conformity and shared patterns of behavior (Levine & Moreland, 1990). The cohesive relationship determines the group boundaries, which are likely to be stronger within a distinct social geographic unit than across geographical boundaries (Dickson et al., 2004). Thus, societies can be seen as distinct social networks, within which bounded information and contact generate shared values and practices among individuals.

The theoretical assumptions on societal culture effects are further supported by empirical findings in the fields of international business, marketing and consumer behavior. These findings can be classified according to the conceptualization of culture that has been applied: Most findings are based on using society or nation as a proxy for culture; hence they provide evidence for differences in behavior or values between countries. Another large group of findings is based on using Hofstede's cul-

tural dimensions, either as primary or as secondary data. With regard to studies that empirically assess the Hofstede dimensions, Kirkman et al. (2006) have conducted a comprehensive review of 181 articles published in top-tier management and applied psychology journals between 1980 and 2002. They examined articles that assessed any of the five cultural dimensions and classified them into articles concerning main associations between values and outcomes and articles concerning cultural values as moderators. In addition, they classified them according to level of analysis into individual level, group/organizational level, and country level studies. With regard to a direct effect of national culture on individual outcomes, the authors identified 61 studies that found significant effects. The influenced individual outcomes include change management behavior, conflict management, negotiation behavior, reward allocation, decision-making, human resource management, leadership, individual behavior relating to group processes and personality, and work-related attitudes (Kirkman, Lowe, & Gibson, 2006). There are also multiple findings from consumer behavior research, which support the influence of culture on various individual outcomes. A major part of these findings just highlights cultural differences in terms of differing outcomes between nations, e.g., differences in consumers' attribute preferences (e.g., Diamantopoulos et al., 1995). Yet, many researchers have also been able to attribute national differences to cultural dimensions. The affected outcomes include consumer decision making (Tse, Lee, Vertinsky, & Wehrung, 1988), behavioral intentions (Lee & Green, 1991), persuasion (Han & Shavitt, 1994), advertising content (Albers-Miller & Gelb, 1996), perceived service performance and service level (Donthu & Yoo, 1998), perceived service quality (Furrer et al., 2000), marketing ethics perception (Singhapakdi, Rawwas, Marta, & Ahmed, 1999), satisfaction (van Birgelen, de Ruyter, de Jeong, & Wetzels, 2002), information exchange behavior (Dawar, Parker, & Price, 1996), product perceptions (Lee, Garbarino, & Lerman, 2007), and con-sumer innovativeness (Lynn & Gelb, 1996; Steenkamp et al., 1999; van Everdingen & Waarts, 2003; Singh, 2006; Yaveroglu & Donthu, 2002; Yeniyurt & Townsend, 2003). Additional studies by international business researchers have, for example, identified effects of cultural dimensions on expatriate assignment (Brock, Shenkar, Shoham, & Siscovick, 2008), managers' gender role attitudes (Parboteeah, Hoegl, & Cullen, 2008), employees' preferences for activity standardization (Newburry & Yakova, 2006), life insurance consumption (Chui & Kwok, 2008), and ICT adoption (Erumban & de Jong, 2006).

Given these findings, especially those indicating cultural influence on consumer decision making and service and marketing perceptions, it can be assumed that students'

perceptions and evaluations of employer attractiveness attributes are influenced by societal cultural characteristics as well. A study by Malach-Pines and Kaspi-Baruch (2008) supports this assumption by revealing significant cross-cultural differences in the context of career choice. Analyzing 747 MBA students in seven countries, the authors find large between-country differences in the influences and aspirations related to a career choice in management, such as the sense of meaning derived from work or the expectations from an MBA degree (Malach-Pines & Kaspi-Baruch, 2008). Although these differences are not attributed to any cultural dimensions, the findings highlight the importance of national culture in the context of career choice. Summarizing theoretical assumptions and empirical evidence, a direct effect of societal culture on individual students' behavior and thinking, and thus on their evaluations of employer attractiveness attributes, is likely to exist.

Yet, despite the findings on cultural influences, there is also evidence from research and practice showing that the impact of culture can be overshadowed by unique personalities, strong leadership, or uniformity of practices (Earley & Gibson, 2002; Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000; Wetlaufer, 1999). In addition, several researchers claim that in many studies which demonstrated a significant relationship between culture and individual outcomes, the strength of this relationship is relatively weak in practical terms, implying that culture only explains a small amount of the total variance (Kirkman et al., 2006; Leung, Bhagat, Buchan, Erez, & Gibson, 2005). Thus, other variables should be included as predictors of individuals' behavior and attitudes alongside culture (Brett & Okumura, 1998; Clungston, Howell, & Dorfman, 2000; Kirkman & Shapiro, 2001; Mitchell, Smith, Seawright, & Morse, 2000), calling for a contingency view of the impact of cultural values as a fruitful area for further research (Kirkman et al., 2006). These recommendations further support the approach taken in this thesis, which will integrate individual-level variables and other macro-level variables besides cultural factors in a multilevel model examining individuals' evaluations of attractiveness attributes.

3.2.6 The Conceptualization of Culture in Project GLOBE

Project GLOBE is a worldwide survey of 62 societies focusing on cultural influences on leadership and organizational practices. The objective of the project was to examine the interrelationships between societal culture, organizational culture, and organizational leadership. House and his colleagues (House et al., 2001, 2004) adopted a theory-based approach and formulated a priori dimensions of culture which are main-

ly based on Hofstede's dimensions as well as on values described by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) and McClelland (1961, 1985), and on the interpersonal communication literature (Sarros & Woodman, 1993). As a result, nine cultural dimensions were identified: Performance Orientation, Assertiveness, Future Orientation, Humane Orientation, Societal Collectivism, In-Group Collectivism, Gender Egalitarianism, Power Distance, and Uncertainty Avoidance (House et al., 2001). Most of these dimensions are related conceptually and correlated empirically with Hofstede's dimensions. Societal Collectivism and In-Group Collectivism are related to Hofstede's Individualism; Assertiveness and Gender Egalitarianism are related to Hofstede's Masculinity, and Uncertainty Avoidance and Power Distance to the Hofstede dimensions labeled accordingly. Future Orientation is related to Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's (1961) Past, Present, Future Orientation dimension, focusing on a society's temporal mode. However, Hofstede and Bond (1988) had introduced a similar dimension labeled Confucian Dynamism and later relabeled Long-term Orientation. Performance Orientation is derived from McClelland's (1961) concept of need for achievement, while Humane Orientation is based on the Human Nature is Good vs. Bad dimension of Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) as well as Putnam's (1993) work on the Civic Society and McClelland's (1985) conceptualization of the affiliative motive (House et al., 2001). Items for the nine GLOBE dimensions were written for the societal level as well as the organizational level. In addition, different items for each dimension reflect two manifestations of culture: institutional practices reported "As Is" and values in terms of what "Should Be". Thus, the items were designed as quartets with isomorphic structures across the two levels of analysis (societal and organizational) and across the two cultural manifestations (As Is and Should Be). According to House et al. (2001), all questionnaire scales have sound psychometric properties with an intraclass correlation ICC-KK exceeding 0.85. The within-culture respondent agreement, between-culture differences in aggregated means of individual responses, as well as inter-item consistency within scales are all reported to be high.[47] The sound methodology was one of the reasons the GLOBE data was chosen for this thesis.

Another alternative would have been to use Hofstede's country scores, as has been done by a multitude of researchers to date. While some of the criticism on Hofstede's work also applies to the GLOBE study, such as the doubted validity of operationalizing culture through a limited number of numerically measured dimensions (Earley, 2006) or the question of regarding culture as a national-level phenomenon

[47] For a detailed discussion of the GLOBE methodology, see House et al. (2004) as well as Chhokar et al. (2008).

(McSweeney, 2002), the GLOBE researchers have managed to overcome several limitations affecting Hofstede's data.[48] First, the generalizability of the GLOBE study seems to be more credible as it is not as US-centric and IBM-centric as Hofstede's survey (Javidan et al., 2006). GLOBE survey questionnaires were collected from more than 17,000 middle managers in 951 different organizations across three industries. More than 170 investigators in 62 countries or regions were involved (House et al., 2004). In addition, the data is more recent (data collection began after 1994) than Hofstede's data and has been less criticized by researchers to date (Venaik & Brewer, 2010). As it takes into account the work of a large number of cross-cultural researchers, another advantage of the GLOBE framework is that it aims to provide a broader theoretical foundation (Terlutter, Mueller, & Diehl, 2005). Moreover, the distinction between societal values and societal practices, which GLOBE introduces in contrast to Hofstede, is regarded as important in cross-cultural research (de Mooij, 2005; Schein, 2004).

With regard to the two levels of analysis applied in the GLOBE study, only the data of the societal level will be used, as the respondents of the applied survey in this project are immersed in their own societal culture and not yet incorporated in any organizational culture. Thus, they are likely to enact behavioral patterns that are favored in their particular societal culture. In terms of the two cultural manifestations, only the scores for modal practices reported "As Is" will be used. This measure of culture, assessing *what is* or *what are* common behaviors, institutional practices, proscriptions and prescriptions in a society, derives from a psychological/behavioral tradition, which assumes that shared values are enacted in behaviors, practices, and policies (House et al., 2001). In comparison, the measurement of culture as values in terms of *what should be* is based on an anthropological tradition (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961). Values and practices are each related to distinct phenomena. Only cultural practices seem to be associated with diverse societal phenomena such as economic health, national competitiveness or societal health (Javidan et al., 2006). Hence, practices seem to be better suited in the context of the analyses conducted in this thesis, which also incorporate measures of economic health to test influences of *societal* phenomena on employer attractiveness attributes.

[48] The GLOBE researchers and Hofstede criticize each other's work and defend their own methodology in a detailed discussion within the *Journal of International Business Studies*, which provides further insight for the interested reader (see Javidan et al., 2006; Hofstede, 2006).

Another reason to use practices scores only is the fact that there is no agreement on what was really measured by the GLOBE values items. In line with the traditional view of culture as a multilayered construct, often represented through the 'onion metaphor', it has been assumed that cultural values, which lie at the core of the construct, drive other forms of cultural expression, including cultural practices. In accordance with this assumption, values and practices should be consistent with one another (Taras, Steel, & Kirkman, 2010). However, the GLOBE data produced significant negative correlations between values and practices for seven dimensions (cf. House et al., 2004). Several researchers have attempted to explain these negative correlations and find different reasoning, including the possibility that instead of values, marginal preferences were measured (Maseland & van Hoorn, 2009), or negative correlations might be caused by societies' deprivation (Javidan et al., 2006) or a form of buyers' post-purchase dissonance (Taras et al., 2010). Since the value-practice correlations are not the focus of the subsequent analyses, the possible explanations will not be treated in further detail at this point. Yet, the possibility that "much of the observed differences in values surveys scores are not […] cultural in nature, but simply reflect differences in circumstances between groups of people" (Maseland & van Hoorn, 2010, p. 1326) is another strong argument against the further use of the values scores in this thesis.

As the analyses within this thesis are intended to be based on a solid theoretical grounding, not all of the nine dimensions will be included into the research model. Kirkman et al. (2006, p. 310) point out that "before including cultural values in any study, the most important decision criterion is whether or not a particular value has theoretical relevance to the research question at a particular level of analysis." Thus, based on theoretical foundations and previous empirical findings, it has to be assessed which cultural dimensions might be of influence on the evaluation of which of the attractiveness attributes. The identified dimensions of expected influence will be outlined in detail in the next sections, including the deduction of hypotheses with regard to each dimension.

3.2.6.1 Uncertainty Avoidance

According to House et al. (2001, p. 495), Uncertainty Avoidance is defined as "the extent to which members of an organization or society strive to avoid uncertainty by reliance on social norms, rituals, and bureaucratic practices to alleviate the unpredictability of future events." Societies scoring high on this cultural practice value or-

derliness, consistency, structured lifestyles and rules and laws, while societies scoring low on Uncertainty Avoidance are more tolerant of ambiguity and uncertainty and less concerned about following rules (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009). The cultural dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance was brought to prominence by Hofstede (1980), who also discussed the concept's relation to a nation's level of anxiety, stress and neuroticism. At the societal level, he used the concept in order to describe how people accept uncertainty in everyday life, defining it as "the extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 161). Thus, he shifted the concept from its original interpretation as organization-level variable in Cyert and March's (1963) theory to the national-level context (Sully de Luque & Javidan, 2004). According to Hofstede (2001), all individuals in a society are affected by anxiety in different ways, depending on their psychological, physical, spiritual and philosophical dispositions. In order to cope with this anxiety, they create certain mechanisms which are primarily based on technology, law and religion. These mechanisms are translated into distinct societal practices, which differ strongly between societies and reflect the cultural heritage that is passed on and retained by societal institutions. Uncertainty reducing technologies, for example, can take the forms of product warranties, investment plans, insurance policies or security systems. Laws may reduce uncertainty by providing informal and formal rules to guide individuals' behavior within a society. The legal system functions as a framework for managing the consequences when rules and regulations are not followed (Sully de Luque & Javidan, 2004). Other forms of anxiety, which cannot be managed by law or technology, are often coped with through religion, taking the form of rites and rituals (Hofstede, 2001). However, this mechanism is of less relevance with regard to the main focus of this thesis.

In contrast, the uncertainty reducing function of laws might be particularly relevant in the context of work environments. In this context, high Uncertainty Avoidance might cause the establishment of many formal rules or informal norms of controlling employees, as individuals try to avoid ambiguous situations (Chang, Chi, & Miao, 2007; Kats et al., 2010). Rules and regulations promote a more predictable behavior of employees (Sully de Luque & Javidan, 2004). In addition, employees in cultures with high Uncertainty Avoidance scores might be better motivated by leadership styles that support career stability, planning, the development of expertise and formal rules (Dickson, Den Hartog, & Mitchelson, 2003). Given the fact that those employees are motivated by certainty and security (Chiang, 2005), they are likely to be attracted to secure jobs (Chhokar, Brodbeck, & House, 2007). Sully de Luque and Javidan

(2004) suggest that the concept of Uncertainty Avoidance is closely related to the construct of *tight* and *loose* cultures (Pelto, 1968), which also incorporates the idea of rules and norms. Tight societies are characterized by many rules that govern human interaction, and deviation from rules is discouraged. Instead, durability, permanence, and solidarity-norms are encouraged (Sully de Luque & Javidan, 2004). Societies with a loose culture, in contrast, do not promote values of stability and duration (Earley, 1997).

Another interesting relation of Uncertainty Avoidance with regard to the context of work environments is its implication for time orientation in organizational and societal behavior (Sully de Luque & Javidan, 2004). The national culture dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance is associated with organizational long-term orientation (Zhao, 2000). Thus, organizations in societies characterized by high Uncertainty Avoidance rather have a long-term focus instead of promoting short-run results. The relation between Uncertainty Avoidance and time orientation is supported by the fact that the GLOBE researchers found a significant correlation of Uncertainty Avoidance practices and Future Orientation practices (Sully de Luque & Javidan, 2004). However, the dimension of Future Orientation and its implications for employer attractiveness will be further discussed in the following section.

The theoretical considerations outlined above give reason to expect the influence of societies' degree of Uncertainty Avoidance on students' evaluations of important employer characteristics. It can be supposed that students from high Uncertainty Avoidance cultures value structured lifestyles and consistency while trying to avoid ambiguous situations. When looking for an employer, they are likely to be attracted by career stability, certainty and security. Predictability of future events might be more important to them than to students from low Uncertainty Avoidance cultures. Thus, the employer attractiveness attributes of job security and employer success in the market are likely to be valued more by students from high Uncertainty Avoidance cultures. A successful employer automatically conveys a sense of secure jobs while an unsuccessful company is often associated with employee dismissals. Hence, a promising way of reducing ambiguity and uncertainty in the context of employer choice may be to look for an employer that promotes market success and career stability, as well as secure jobs. Therefore, it can be predicted:
H6a: Students in nations with high scores on the Uncertainty Avoidance scale value job security more than do students in low Uncertainty Avoidance nations.

H6b: Students in nations with high scores on the Uncertainty Avoidance scale value employer success in the market more than do students in low Uncertainty Avoidance nations.

3.2.6.2 Future Orientation

Future Orientation is defined as "the degree to which individuals in organizations or societies engage in future-oriented behaviors such as planning, investing in the future, and delaying gratification" (House et al., 2001, p. 495). Future Orientation draws upon the concept of time as a process of differentiating personal and social experiences into temporal frames, which allows the individual to assign meaning, order and coherence to these experiences (Fraisse, 1963; Lewin, 1942). Temporal frames include the three broad categories of past, present, and future (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961). These three categories facilitate encoding, storing and recalling experienced, targeted, expected, contingent, and imagined scenarios and events (Keough, Zimbardo, & Boyd, 1999). Collectives and individuals are characterized by a differing use of temporal frames: While certain groups or people tend to make an extensive use of specific temporal frames, others use them sparingly (Ashkanasy, Gupta, Mayfield, & Trevor-Roberts, 2004). Therefore, societies can be differentiated according to their way of using temporal frames. According to Keough et al. (1999), cultures with high Future Orientation are very capable and willing to imagine future events, formulate future objectives, and develop strategies in order to meet future goals. Yet, they might neglect their present personal and social relationships. In contrast, societies with low Future Orientation tend to enjoy the moment and are free of future anxieties. However, they might also seek hedonistic pleasures and may be incapable of planning or realizing their desired objectives.

As far as cross-cultural studies on Future Orientation are concerned, one of the major works includes the study by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961), in which they found support of the fact that cultures can be differentiated by their time orientation. They were able to classify five communities in the United States into distinct groups along the dimensions past-present orientation, past-future orientation and present-future orientation. Thus, the way societies handle conceptions of past, present, and future has proven to be an important basic value orientation. Whereas past-oriented cultures make use of the past to anticipate the future, present-oriented cultures neglect the long-term implications of their actions when resolving current problems. Future-oriented cultures take into account the long-term implications of past and pre-

sent actions (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961). Another crucial cross-cultural study is the one by Hall (1960), which demonstrated that a society's time orientation determines standards of temporal precision. If a society tends to view time as linear and monochronic, as for example Northern European or North American societies do, it is regarded as a commodity or resource to be saved, spent or wasted. Hence, a sense of urgency accompanies the concept of time. This sense of urgency is reduced if time is seen as expansive, ongoing, and unlimited, as is common in the Middle East or Latin America (Hall, 1960). Summarizing these findings, it can be stated that societies scoring high on Future Orientation tend to achieve economic success, and consist of individuals who are more intrinsically motivated and value the deferment of gratification while emphasizing long-term success (Ashkanasy et al., 2004). They tend to have a longer time horizon for decision-making and more systematic planning processes (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009). On the other hand, societies with lower scores on Future Orientation tend to spend immediately instead of saving for the future, and place higher priorities on instant gratification as well as immediate rewards (Ashkanasy et al., 2004).

According to Kats et al. (2010), there is an intuitive link between orientation to future and careers, since careers can be regarded as an exercise in deferred gratification. A major part of the reward to present job performance is expected to come in the future through career development and achieving more central positions within the organization (Schein, 1971). Thus, skills development and competence are likely to be more important than immediate rewards in cultures characterized by high long-term orientation, i.e. high future orientation (Zhang, Song, Hackett, & Bycio, 2006). However, ample empirical evidence on this link is missing. Kats et al. (2010) propose that cultures scoring high on long-term orientation will tend to emphasize HR practices that promote career and skill development more than short-term oriented cultures, but they do not investigate this proposition empirically. Thus, as far as desired employer characteristics are concerned, this leads to the assumption that in cultures scoring high on Future Orientation, students looking for their ideal employer are likely to be more strongly motivated by measures of professional development and training than students in countries with low Future Orientation. In addition, the former should be more attracted by promotion opportunities, as they imply the advancement to more central positions within the firm in the future. In contrast, immediate rewards, such as a high starting salary, should be less important to them. As outlined in the previous section, Future Orientation is related to the dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance. Since cultures with a long-term focus, i.e. a high Future Orientation, are likely

to be characterized by a high Uncertainty Avoidance, the aspect of job security should also be more relevant to future-oriented societies. The same should apply to the attribute 'employer success in the market', as this characteristic implies an emphasis on long-term success and a long-term planning horizon for future career development. In order to be more relevant for highly future-oriented students, the criterion of employer success should be given in the long run. However, as the long-term duration of this success can hardly be judged by students at the point of application, the employer's success in the present might function as an indicator for future prospects. In addition, a successful employer is more likely to contribute to avoidance of uncertainty, e.g. in form of guaranteed salary. Against the backdrop of these reflections, it can be predicted:

H7a: Students in nations with high scores on the Future Orientation scale value professional development and training more than do students in low Future Orientation nations.

H7b: Students in nations with high scores on the Future Orientation scale value promotion opportunities more than do students in low Future Orientation nations.

H7c: Students in nations with high scores on the Future Orientation scale value starting salary less than do students in low Future Orientation nations.

H7d: Students in nations with high scores on the Future Orientation scale value job security more than do students in low Future Orientation nations.

H7e: Students in nations with high scores on the Future Orientation scale value employer success in the market more than do students in low Future Orientation nations.

3.2.6.3 Performance Orientation

"Performance Orientation refers to the extent to which an organization or society encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence" (House et al., 2001, p. 495). Performance Orientation is related to the issues of internal integration and external adaption of a community or society, impacting on how a society defines success in adapting to external challenges and manages interrelationships among individuals (Javidan, 2004). Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) also examined societies' variation in external adaption but labeled it 'internal or external locus of control'. With regard to external locus of control, they found that individuals in several Arab countries see no reason to control natural forces. In terms of internal locus of control, they discovered that a majority of the people from the United States, Norway, and Israel believe that it is the individual that determines what

happens, while people from China, Nepal, and Venezuela are convinced that the individual has no influence on what happens to himself. The internal locus of control and belief in individual responsibility has been found to be related to a society's collective self-confidence, thirst for learning, high standards of performance, and ambition (Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Javidan, 2004; McClelland, 1961). Individuals from societies which believe in individual responsibility are characterized by valuing knowledge and a strong will to pursue improvement (Fyans, Salili, Maehr, & Desai, 1983). This implicates that societies' practices are manifested in the form of high competitiveness (Javidan, 2004).

With regard to internal integration, highly performance-oriented societies are likely to value those individuals that accomplish their assignments and produce results (Parsons & Shils, 1951; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997). Since they focus on achievement, they are likely to value tasks more than relationships. As a consequence of this rationale, the GLOBE researchers summarize that societies scoring high on Performance Orientation tend to value training and development, reward performance, emphasize results more than people, and value materialism and financial rewards. In contrast, people from societies with low scores on Performance Orientation tend to value societal and family relationships, emphasize loyalty and belongingness, have performance appraisal systems that promote loyalty and cooperativeness, and regard being motivated by money as inappropriate (Javidan, 2004). Translated to the context of work environments, this implies that in countries with high scores on this cultural practice, organizations are likely to promote training and development, whereas in countries scoring low on this dimension, family connections and background might be more important (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009). Accordingly, graduating students in highly performance-oriented countries are likely to value the employer characteristic of training and professional development more than do students from less performance-oriented nations. In addition, the former should be motivated by a high starting salary, as their national culture values materialism and financial rewards. Since tasks are emphasized more than relationships in countries with a high Performance Orientation, the fact that the employer promotes friendly colleagues is likely to be less important to students from these societies. Instead, promotion opportunities should be considered more important than in less performance-oriented societies, as promotions generally serve as reward for high performance and task accomplishment. The fact that performance-oriented societies emphasize high standards of performance, ambition and success, additionally leads to the assumption that an employer's success in the market might be more important to stu-

dents from those countries. Summarizing the considerations outlined above, the following predictions can be made:

H8a: Students in nations with high scores on the Performance Orientation scale value professional development and training more than do students in low Performance Orientation nations.

H8b: Students in nations with high scores on the Performance Orientation scale value starting salary more than do students in low Performance Orientation nations.

H8c: Students in nations with high scores on the Performance Orientation scale value friendly colleagues less than do students in low Performance Orientation nations.

H8d: Students in nations with high scores on the Performance Orientation scale value promotion opportunities more than do students in low Performance Orientation nations.

H8e: Students in nations with high scores on the Performance Orientation scale value employer success in the market more than do students in low Performance Orientation nations.

3.2.6.4 Humane Orientation

Humane Orientation is defined by House et al. (2001, p. 496) as "the degree to which individuals in organizations or societies encourage and reward individuals for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring, and kind to others." The concept is rooted in culture theory (Triandis, 1995), according to which values of altruism, kindness, love, benevolence, and generosity serve as motives guiding individuals' behavior in societies characterized by a strong Humane Orientation (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004). Accordingly, people are rather motivated by a need for belongingness and affiliation than by self-fulfillment, material possessions, or power. Schwartz (1992) describes these polar norms that characterize societies as the dimensions of self-transcendence and self-enhancement. The concept of self-enhancement is further characterized by two facets: universalism and benevolence. Whereas universalism encompasses the values of tolerance, understanding, and protection of all people, benevolence is described by the preservation and enhancement of people in a close relationship, including the provision of social and financial support, problem solving or sharing of time. These attributes are also strongly associated with Humane Orientation. In contrast, self-enhancement enforces the promotion of self-interest and self-gratification, which are values characterizing less humane-oriented societies. Thus, the duality between self-enhancement and self-transcendence reflects the opposition of Humane Orientation and task concerns (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004).

The concept of Humane Orientation is also included in a similar way in Hofstede's (1980, 2001) masculinity dimension, which includes the values of toughness versus tenderness. It is comparable to the Humane Orientation dimension in as far as cultures that score low on the masculinity dimension are described as similarly relationship-oriented as societies scoring high on Humane Orientation (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004). Other important cross-cultural studies on the concept include, for example, Schwartz and Bilsky (1987) who identified seven motivational domains of universal values, one of them labeled the *prosocial domain*. This domain encompasses the values of altruism, kindness, benevolence, and love. The researchers tested the structure of the values empirically through an importance ranking of the 36 *Rokeach* values and found that the prosocial values, i.e. promoting other's welfare, contradict valuing personal success and one's own pleasure and comfort. The opposition, i.e. value conflict, between prosocial and achievement values was confirmed by Schwartz and Bilsky (1990) in a study with data from Australia, Finland, Hong Kong, Spain, and the United States. In another cross-cultural study, Bigoness and Blakely (1996) conducted factor analyses in twelve countries with data from 567 managers. One of the four factors they identified included the values of forgiving, loving, helpful, and cheerful, thus confirming the construct of Humane Orientation (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004).

The theoretical and empirical findings on the construct lead to the assumption that in societies scoring high on Humane Orientation, the well-being of others as well as human relations are important and the values of altruism, benevolence, kindness, and love are of high priority. People are generally motivated by a feeling of belongingness and affiliation. In contrast, countries with low scores on Humane Orientation tend to value pleasure, comfort, and self-enjoyment. They place greater emphasis on power, material possessions, self-enhancement and independence (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2009; Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004). Translated into the context of employer attractiveness, this suggests that students from countries scoring high on Humane Orientation should be more motivated and attracted by aspects of human relations and affiliation than by aspects of power, self-enhancement or material possessions. Employer characteristics that reflect these preferences are likely to be 'friendly colleagues' (human relations and affiliation), 'starting salary' (material possessions), and 'promotion opportunities' (self-enhancement). Thus, it can be predicted:
H9a: Students in nations with high scores on the Humane Orientation scale value friendly colleagues more than do students in low Humane Orientation nations.

H9b: Students in nations with high scores on the Humane Orientation scale value starting salary less than do students in low Humane Orientation nations.
H9c: Students in nations with high scores on the Humane Orientation scale value promotion opportunities less than do students in low Humane Orientation nations.

3.3 Research Models

The objective of the previous Sections 3.1 and 3.2 was to identify potential influences on students' importance valuations of selected employer attractiveness attributes, which lead to differing preferences between sub-groups of students. Measuring the strength and relative impact of these influences will contribute to a better understanding with regard to the strategic question of standardization versus adaption of the employer brand. As outlined in Section 3.2.3, there is a wide variety of influencing factors, either company-specific or country-specific, that determine the decision-making regarding the possibility of brand standardization. Within the context of this thesis, only a selection of potential influences can be analyzed. At the micro-level, the identified influences refer to characteristics of the students, namely their course of study, gender, academic achievement, and age. At the macro-level, an examination of the crossvergence framework as well as of cross-cultural literature led to the identification of national cultural influences and economic influence. Following a conceptualization of national culture through cultural dimensions, concrete hypotheses were deducted with regard to the influence of a country's socio-cultural environment. Four cultural dimensions of project GLOBE were employed for the hypotheses, whereas the remaining five did not lead to a solid theoretical grounding of potential relations with regard to the given employer attractiveness attributes. Through the analysis of the proposed macro-level influences, the question of a globalization of individuals' preference structures and behavior will be transferred from the consumer context into the context of students as employer branding target group. The hypothesis tests will shed more light onto the issue of whether students' preferences with regard to determinants of employer attractiveness are converging. The following research models (Figures 6 to 11) summarize the deducted hypotheses and reflections developed to this point:

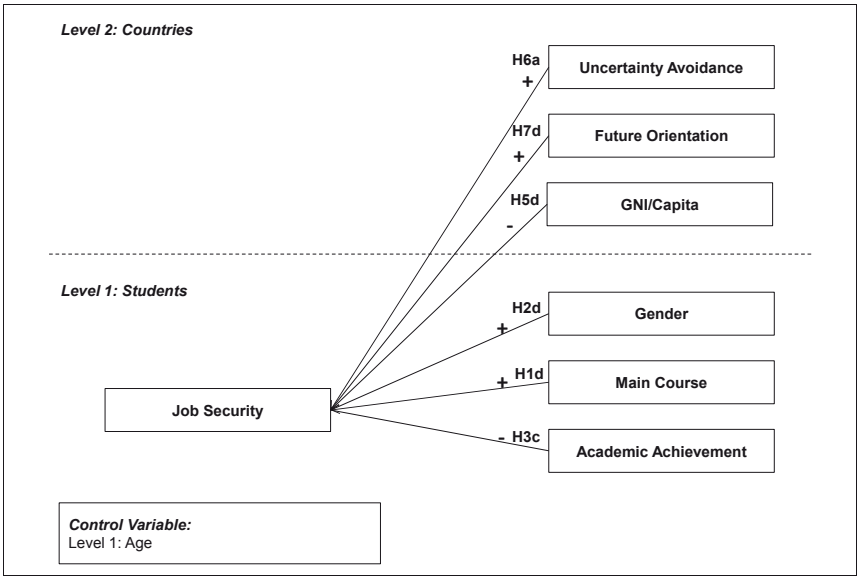

Figure 6: Research Model 1: Job Security

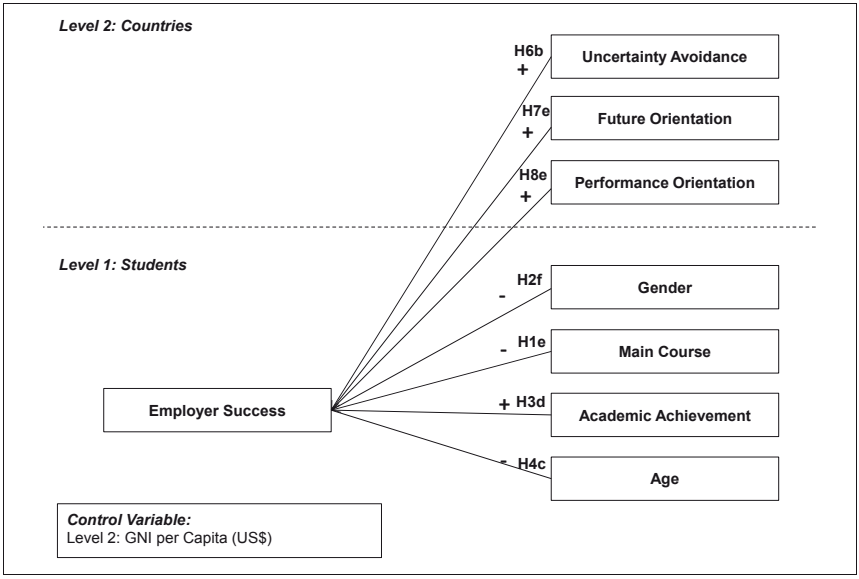

Figure 7: Research Model 2: Employer Success in the Market

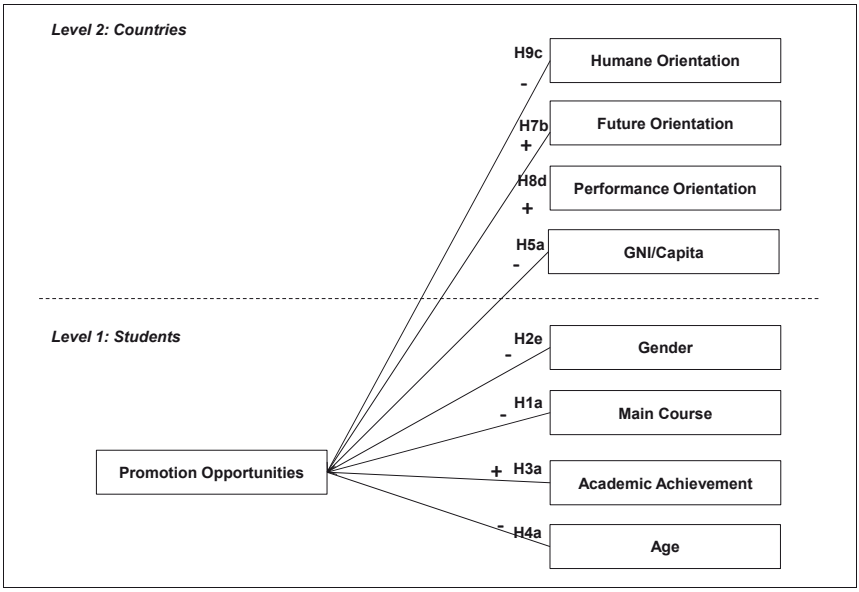

Figure 8: Research Model 3: Promotion Opportunities

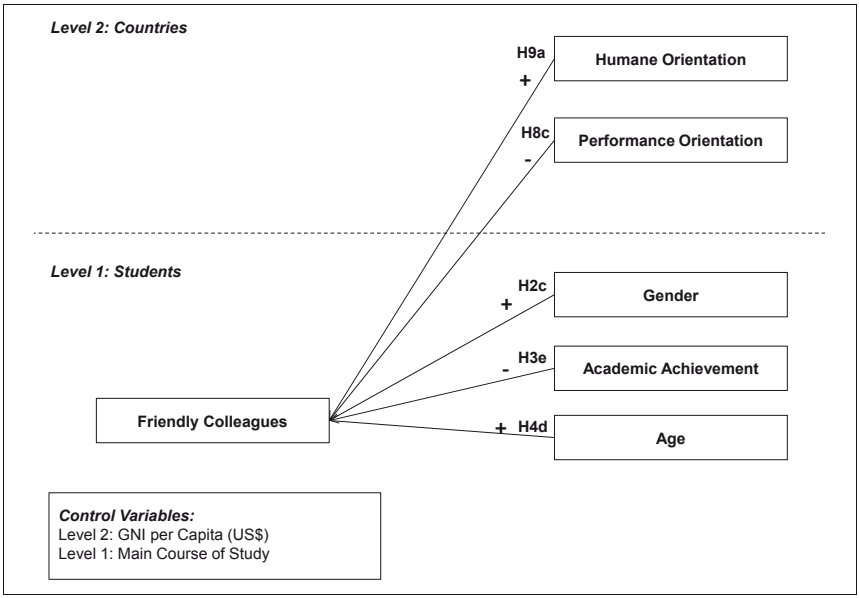

Figure 9: Research Model 4: Friendly Colleagues

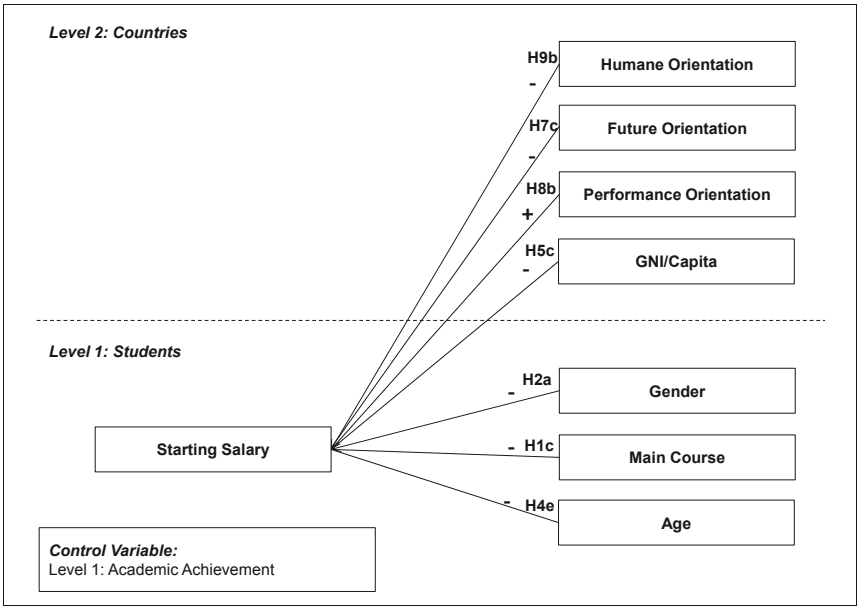

Figure 10: Research Model 5: Starting Salary

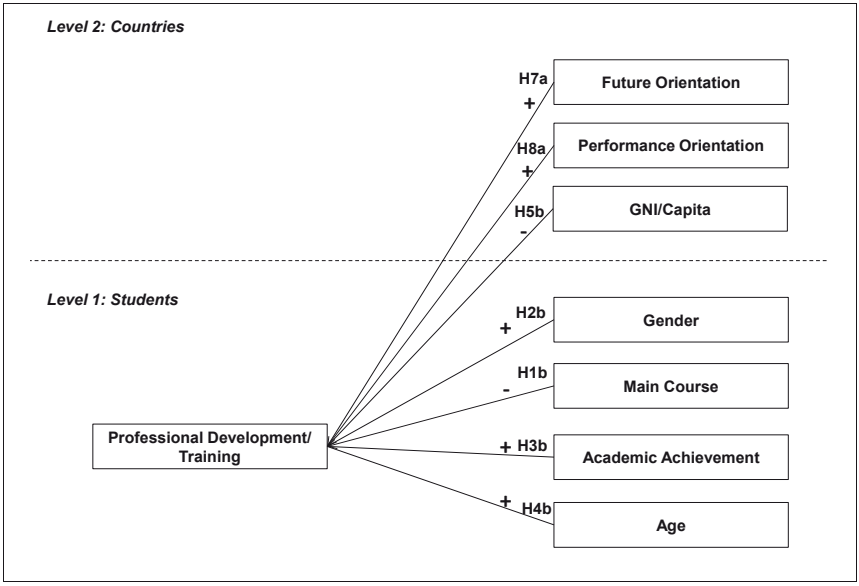

Figure 11: Research Model 6: Professional Development/Training

3.4 Employer Branding Strategy: Contributions from International Marketing

This chapter is aimed at placing the empirical investigations to be made in this thesis into the overall framework of international employer branding strategy. In order to understand the implications of the empirical results drawn from the hypotheses outlined in the previous sections, it is necessary to relate them to strategic decision-making. Therefore, theory from international marketing strategy will be transferred into the employer branding context. With regard to the degree of national culture influence on graduates' preferences for certain employer attractiveness attributes, an additional way of investigation will be introduced, which is international market segmentation. By means of international market segmentation, the question of which units of analysis are appropriate for structuring graduates' employer benefit preferences can be further analyzed. The results of the hypothesis testing as well as a closer examination of the graduate market through segmentation will yield implications regarding a possible standardized positioning of the employer brand. Therefore, this chapter will start with a closer examination of market segmentation, which is an integral part of the strategic marketing process, involving three phases (Kotler, 2003): market segmentation, market targeting, and market positioning. Companies have to discover different needs and groups in the market place, target those needs and groups that they can satisfy in a superior way, and position their offerings in a way that the target groups recognize the company's distinctive offering and image (Kotler, 2003). This segmentation-targeting-positioning (STP) framework is a key feature of marketing literature and practice (Dowling, 2004). Thus, its adaption to the employer branding context seems to be reasonable in order to structure international employer branding activities.

3.4.1 International Market Segmentation

Market segmentation in general can be described as the division of a certain target market into segments of decision makers, which can be separated through their behavior and reaction to instrumental variables of marketing. The different segments should be as homogenous as possible internally and heterogeneous externally (Meffert, 2000; Lindridge, 2003). In the consumer marketing context, market segments can be defined accordingly as "groups of actual or potential consumers who can be expected to respond in a similar way to a product or service offer. That is, they want the same types of benefits or solutions to problems from the product or service, or they are expected to respond in a similar way to a marketing program" (Dowling, 2004, p. 169 f.). Segmentation allows companies to fine-tune their messages and

concentrate their resources in order to attract or appeal to a certain target segment, while mass marketing only involves a single marketing message to target the whole market (Doole & Lowe, 2008; Sutherland et al., 2002). Segmentation must be done periodically because the different segments might change over time (Kotler, 2003). International market segmentation can be particularly helpful when it comes to identifying homogenous segments across countries. For companies adopting a pan-regional or global strategy, national borders are of minor importance as an organizing principle for international activities (Yip, 1995). Hence, these companies are confronted with the challenge of identifying segments beyond national boundaries. The results of the hypothesis tests in Chapter 5 could suggest a global strategy instead of a country-specific strategy in case of only minor country influence and cultural influence. In this case, the identification of global segments would support the notion of a minor importance of national boundaries in the context of employer attractiveness evaluations.

International consumer research has discussed various concepts to identify intermarket global segments of consumers who share a similar behavior and preferences across borders (Douglas & Wind, 1987; Jain, 1989; Hassan & Katsanis, 1991; Onkvisit & Shaw, 1994; Baalbaki & Malhotra, 1993; Unnava, Blackwell, Haugtvedt, & Mobley, 1994; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2001; Hassan, Craft, & Kortam, 2003). Even though these consumers might live in completely different areas of the world and have different backgrounds and value systems, they might share significant commonalities in association with a certain global brand (Hassan & Craft, 2005). The existence of these so-called transnational segments can be seen as a prerequisite for standardization (Douglas & Wind, 1987; Jain, 1989; Roth, 1995a). Baalbaki and Malhotra (1993) conclude that companies may reap the advantages of both standardization and customization by standardizing the marketing effort over similar worldwide segments and differentiating it across dissimilar segments. In contrast to using transnational criteria (i.e. individual decision-makers) as segmentation bases, the traditional approach of international market segmentation was to use macro bases, such as economic (e.g., Kotler, 1986), cultural (e.g., Hofstede, 1980; Sirota & Greenwood, 1971; Steenkamp, 2001; Whitelock, 1987), technological (e.g., Huszagh, Fox, & Day, 1986) or geographic criteria (e.g., Daniels, 1987) (Doole & Lowe, 2008; Hassan & Craft, 2005). However, if only country bases instead of micro bases, such as single consumers, are used, this might lead to the disadvantage that "within-country heterogeneity between consumers is totally ignored, and misleading national stereotyping is encouraged" (Kale & Sudharshan, 1987, p. 61). Due to this

disadvantage, country-by-country segmentation was considered inadequate by scholars in favor of globalization theory, and effective international segmentation was seen in the identification of global segments that transcend national boundaries (Hassan & Samli, 1994; Ter Hofstede, Steenkamp, Wedel, 1999; Hassan et al., 2003; Hassan & Craft, 2005; Steenkamp & Ter Hofstede, 2002).

However, the existence of country clusters has not been denied, since they can be a possible outcome if consumers share similar preferences and behaviors across and within those countries. The overall objective of international segmentation can thus be summarized as the identification of "specific segments, whether they be country groups or individual consumer groups, of potential customers with homogenous attributes who are likely to exhibit similar buying behavior" (Hassan & Katsanis, 1991, p. 138). Effective segmentation has to integrate country-based factors with individual-based variables (Hassan & Craft, 2005). This so-called 'integrated approach' to segment design (Hassan et al., 2003) proposes that global segmentation rests upon hybrid bases including macro-level factors, i.e. country variables, and micro-level variables, i.e. behavior patterns. Thus, the integrated approach assumes various degrees of heterogeneity and homogeneity in consumers' preferences, which can be attributed equally to macro-bases, micro-bases, and any combinations of interactions (Hassan & Craft, 2005). Accordingly, students' preferences and evaluation behavior could be equally determined by macro-level variables, such as nationality or shared cultural values, or by micro-level variables.

In general, a marketer has to decide which combination of factors should be used to build the individual segmentation scheme. According to Steenkamp and Ter Hofstede (2002, p. 196), "the choice of the segmentation basis is one of the most crucial factors in international segmentation." Common segmentation bases in B2C marketing are the following (Dowling, 2004, p. 186 f.; Kotler, 2003, p. 288):

- Geographic (region, climate, density (urban, suburban, rural), etc.)
- Demographic (age, family type, gender, income, occupation, education, religion, race, nationality, social class, etc.)
- Psychographic (lifestyle, personality, etc.)
- Behavioral (usage (heavy, medium, light), benefits sought, usage occasions, loyalty, price sensitivity, shopping frequency, media habits, learned experience, etc.).

Whereas geographic segmentation bases are often used in order to define country segments, demographic, psychographic and behavioral variables refer to the individual decision-maker. A further distinction can be made between general and domain-specific segmentation bases (Wedel & Kamakura, 2003). General bases are independent of the domain and can be divided into observable and unobservable bases. General observable bases include, for example, geographic locations (regions, countries), economic indicators, political characteristics or demographics. Consumer values and lifestyles are examples of general unobservable bases. Domain-specific bases depend on the particular domain or product and include penetration rates, attitudes or benefit importance evaluations (Steenkamp & Ter Hofstede, 2002). In order to evaluate possible segmentation bases, six criteria can be used (Steenkamp & Ter Hofstede, 2002; Wedel & Kamakura, 2003):

- Identifiability (extent to which distinct segments can be identified)
- Substantiality (related to segment size)
- Accessibility (degree to which segments can be reached with promotional and distributional efforts)
- Stability (temporal dynamics of segments)
- Actionability (extent to which the segments provide a basis for the formulation of effective marketing strategies)
- Responsiveness (whether segments respond uniquely to marketing efforts targeted at them).

With regard to transnational segmentation, benefit importance evaluations (or so-called attribute evaluations) have proven to be very suitable for identifying homogenous segments across countries (Doole & Lowe, 2008). Benefit segmentation as a strategic tool for market segmentation was introduced into the marketing literature by Haley (1968). Comparing benefit segmentation to geographic, demographic and volume segmentation, the author highlights the accuracy of benefit segmentation in terms of predicting consumer behavior. Whereas the other three segmentation approaches are based on ex post facto analysis of target consumers and rely on descriptive factors, benefit segmentation can identify market segments by causal factors, since the benefits sought by consumers through buying a certain product are the reason for the existence of these segments. After classifying people into segments according to the benefits they prefer, each segment can be further described by demographic factors, brand perceptions, media usage, personality and lifestyle factors etc. The segments are differentiated from one another through the total configuration of benefits sought rather than through one particular differing benefit be-

tween the segments (Haley, 1968). In the light of the advantages of benefit segmentation, benefits also seem to be promising as a suitable segmentation base in the employer branding context, which will be further explored in the following.

Just as in marketing in terms of consumers or clients, market segmentation can also be a very useful concept in the context of employer branding. As described in Chapter 3.1.1, employer attractiveness may be conceptualized by means of functional and symbolic attributes or benefits. These attributes are embodied by the employer brand and expressed through the firm's employer value proposition in the process of positioning (Moroko & Uncles, 2009). As discussed against the backdrop of person-organization fit and social identity theory, it is essential that the attributes of the EVP match the desired values and expectations of a company's target group. Segmentation into different target groups in order to create specific value propositions is especially important for employer branding, since an inaccurate alignment of communication messages can lead to a problematic composition of the applicant pool (Cable et al., 2000). Whereas it is generally less problematic if consumers who do not belong to a specific target group purchase the advertised product, employers have to face growing costs and workload if they receive too many invaluable applications. Therefore, segmentation of the applicant market and creation of specific value propositions for the different target markets can help to attract the right, matching talent.

Since it has been noted that particular bundles of attributes serve to pursue an employer of choice strategy in order to attract and retain employees (Martin & Beaumont, 2003a), it might be useful to employ preferences for bundles of benefits to segment the employee market similar to the procedure in which marketers use preferences for product or service benefits to segment consumer markets. Other segmentation bases, such as geo-demographic, socio-demographic, lifestyle or psychographic factors, might also be applicable and strategically useful to employer branding (Moroko & Uncles, 2009). Scientific literature on market segmentation in the employer branding context is very scarce. However, in one of the few available articles, Moroko and Uncles (2009) have empirically investigated which market segmentation approaches are (implicitly) used in employer branding practice, and they propose ways in which segmentation approaches might be (explicitly) applied to the employer branding context. In semi-structured interviews, employer branding experts of four companies stated that they were using some segmentation types for strategic purposes, predominantly as a financial tool. With regard to the segmentation bases, age was often used as a proxy to understand the financial implications arising from em-

ployees' profile. Young graduates, for example, were targeted by some firms as cost-effective sources in labor-intensive industries requiring skilled employees. However, most firms did not go further than using the observable age category and did not explore factors such as attitudinal data or desired career benefits of certain age groups (Moroko & Uncles, 2009). Two firms used profitability segmentation to identify job roles and staff that were profit drivers for the company. Nevertheless, only one firm used segmentation beyond the internal perspective of the firm, segmenting the target market from the employees' perspective. They applied product feature preference and consumer interaction type segmentation to attract and retain strategically important staff. Even though these three segmentation types were used by the firms being studied, they have not yet been fully leveraged. A greater leverage can be accomplished by using multiple types of segmentation in combination when executing an employer branding strategy. Moroko and Uncles (2009) especially recommend moving away from the single use of observable segmentation bases commonly applied at the entry level (e.g., age, degree, university, grade point average). Instead, the use of unobservable bases, although harder to assess, helps to understand and strategically exploit desired employment benefits or career features. Examples of both types of segmentation bases are shown in Table 5.

Moroko and Uncles (2009, p. 193 f.) group the generic types of segmentation in terms of 'Who to attract/retain' (profitability segmentation), 'How to attract/retain' (product features and interaction effects segmentation) and 'Disrupters' (bargaining power and choice barriers segmentation), as shown in Figure 12. The arrow between profitability segmentation and product feature segmentation highlights the interaction between these two bases. First, it needs to be determined which employees to target in order to make better resource allocations concerning the range of product benefits in terms of employment experience which the company offers. Since almost every benefit comes at a cost to the company, it is important to offer only the desired benefits of the chosen target group (instead of, for example, focusing on international work assignments when targeting rather introverted engineering students who prefer a secure job without much traveling).

Table 5: Bases of Employer Branding Segmentation
Source: Moroko & Uncles, 2009, p. 191

Segmentation base	Segmentation level
Observable factors	*Examples*
Age	Baby boomers; Generation X; Generation Y
Seniority	Graduate; junior manager; senior manager; board member
Job type	Technical (eg engineer, client tax specialist); client facing (eg customer service, sales, call center); central / support services (eg human resources, accounting / finance, marketing); blue collar (eg factory, maintenance, production line, packaging, cleaning)
Permanence	Permanent; contract; casual
Employee lifecycle	Applicant; new starter; current staff; alumni
Tenure	Short / medium / long term (eg less than 12 months, 1 – 5 years, 5 – 10 years 10 years plus)
Physical location	Head office / subsidiaries; city / country / region
Unobservable Factors	*Examples*
Career Focus	Industry (ie want to apply their specialization in a particular industry); vocation (ie want to pursue specialization in any industry); company (ie want to pursue opportunities associated with the employing company, eg travel, remuneration, professional development, flexibility in relation to industry / specialization)
Outlook on life stage	Young single; working family member; empty nester; pre-retiree; semi-retiree
Desired career benefits	Security / stability / predictability; change / growth / opportunity; education / professional development, remuneration, flexibility (eg job roles, work hours)

In order to provide employer brand managers with a holistic picture of international market segmentation in the employer branding context, the remainder of this chapter will present a short overview of a possible segmentation process. Dowling (2004) identifies six different steps, which can be transferred into the employer branding context.

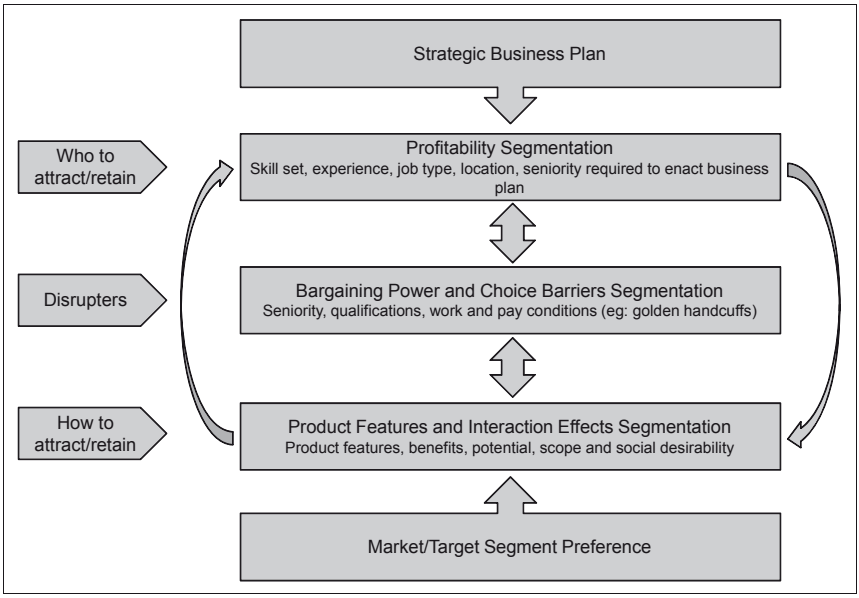

Figure 12: Employer Branding Segmentation as a Strategic Lever
Source: Moroko & Uncles, 2009, p. 193

As shown in Figure 13, the first step consists of defining the segmentation problem. The employer brand manager needs to understand which questions will be asked of the segmentation scheme and which markets to target. This step also involves the selection of countries in which employees need to be recruited and employer branding activities should be implemented. In the following step, the difficult decision of which segmentation bases to use has to be made. As discussed in the beginning of this chapter in the context of consumer marketing, it has been recommended to use reason for purchase, and customer needs and benefits as primary segmentation bases (Dowling, 2004; Kotler, 2003). Accordingly, needs and benefits are likely to be suited as primary base in the employer branding context, since the decision for a certain employer is based on benefit preferences (as described in Chapter 2). By using these segmentation bases, opportunities to create employee value are exposed, which is why the created segments may be called ‘employee value segments’. Analogous to the definition of customer value, which is “a person’s estimate of a product’s or service’s overall capacity to satisfy his or her needs” (Dowling, 2004, p. 194), employee value might be defined as ‘a person’s estimate of an employer’s overall capacity to satisfy his or her needs’.

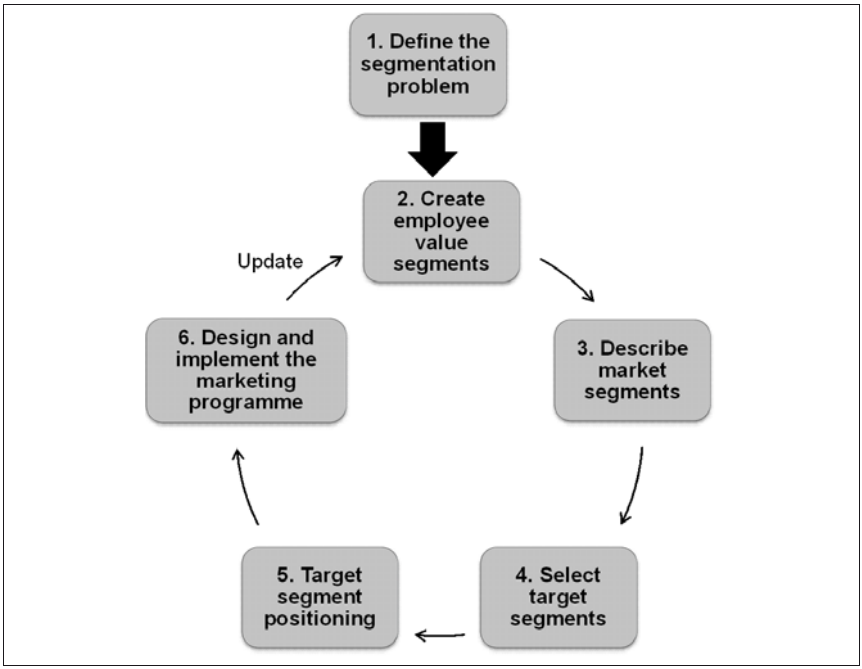

Figure 13: The Process of Tactical Market Segmentation
Source: Adapted from Dowling, 2004, p. 189

After defining segments, each segment has to be described in order to identify individuals for target marketing. Therefore, geographic, demographic, psychographic, and behavioral information has to be collected, and measures of these variables have to be correlated with measures of employee value for each segment (Dowling, 2004; Kotler, 2003). A critical issue in the second and third segmentation steps is that potential employees are segmented by needs and benefits first and then described by information that is relevant for identifying them. Many organizations use backwards segmentation instead. For example, they first select the nationality of those students they wish to target. This procedure might be easier, since demographic variables are more straightforward to measure than needs and benefits. In addition, the media mostly profile their audiences according to demographics (Dowling, 2004). However, it might be risky to assume that e.g., all British students value the same employer characteristics. By segmenting the European student market, this thesis is aimed at contributing to more insight into this question. Benefit segmentation will be applied in the first step, in order to assure that the emerging segments truly reflect

the target groups' preferences regardless of nationalities. After describing market segments, step four involves the selection of target segments. Step five of the segmentation process is concerned with the positioning strategy for the selected target segments. For each segment, a value proposition based on the segment's unique needs and benefits sought has to be created. As this process is discussed in the following section, there will not be given any further explanations at this point. As a final step, the employer branding program has to be designed and implemented. However, as the implementation involves the operative elements of employer branding and this thesis is focused on strategic aspects, this part will not be discussed in more detail.

3.4.2 Targeting and Positioning

After the selection of the relevant target segments, an employer has to develop a suitable positioning strategy in order to attract the target population. Positioning has been described as a key concept in brand management, which is based on the "fundamental principle that all choices are comparative" (Kapferer, 2008, p. 178). Hassan and Craft (2005) point out that the term is often used to refer to a company's decision to determine the place that its brand and corporate image occupy in a certain market, including the type of segments to be targeted and the types of benefits to be stressed (Douglas & Craig, 1995; Ries & Trout, 1986; Ries, 1996). Hence, the link between market segmentation and positioning decisions is of critical importance (Douglas & Craig, 1995; Hassan & Craft, 2005; Wind, 1986). Based on the integrated approach to global market segmentation, Hassan and Craft (2005, p. 82 f.) develop a framework which results in four different options for strategic positioning, shown in Figure 14: focused strategy, geo-centric strategy, optimization strategy and localization strategy.

The decision for one of these four strategies depends on the similarities and differences of the identified market segments. Figure 15 displays the positioning options in a two-by-two matrix according to market segments and strategic positions. A company can target either "same" or "different" segments across multiple markets and it might seek to achieve either a similar, i.e. same, or a differentiated, i.e. different, image in a certain market place.

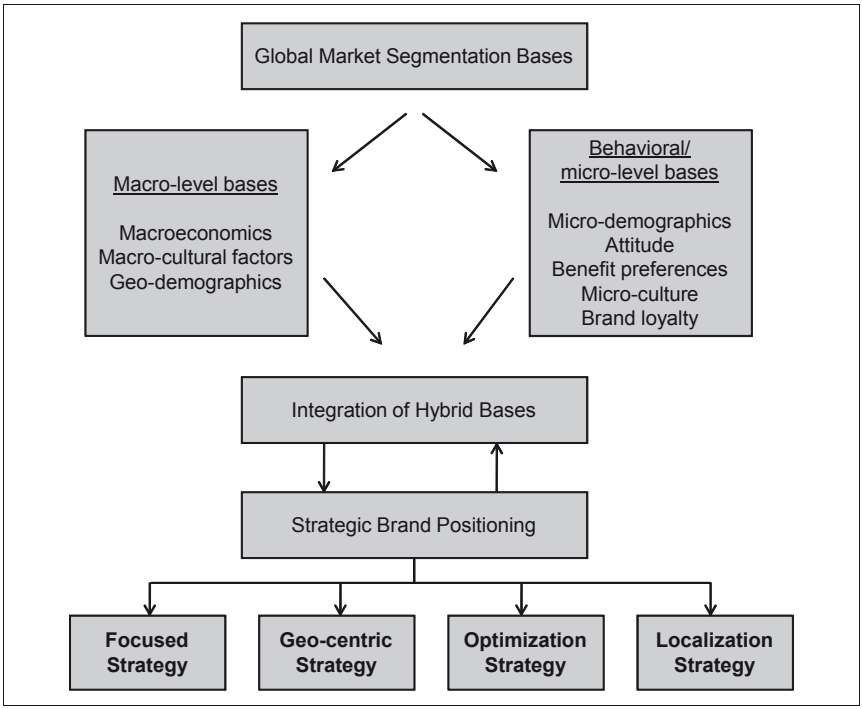

Figure 14: Framework for Global Segmentation and Strategic Positioning
Source: Adapted from Hassan & Craft, 2005, p. 82

1) When adopting a focused strategy, a company would seek a similar brand positioning in substantially similar global segments. This strategy helps firms to leverage their image internationally among decision-makers with similar attitudes and behavior patterns. In other words, companies following the focused strategy would develop a standardized positioning for transnational segments. In the employer branding context, a company would, for example, develop a universal employee value proposition for all high potential engineering students worldwide.
2) Following an optimization strategy means to develop a differentiated positioning for similar segments worldwide. An employer could, for example, realize that engineering high potentials in Germany value promotion opportunities more than do engineering high potentials in France. Thus, the employee value proposition for the German market would emphasize the company's promotion opportunities more than the one in the French market.

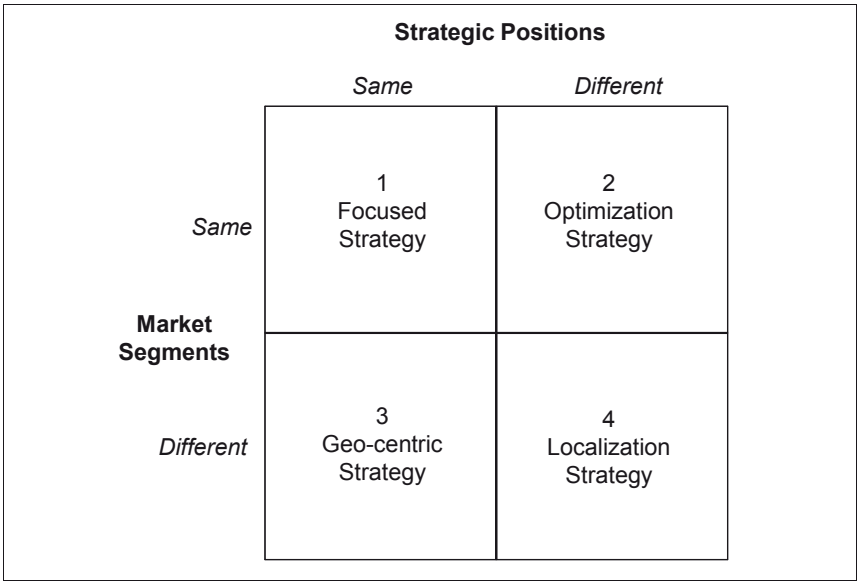

Figure 15: Global Strategic Segmentation and Positioning Matrix
Source: Adapted from Hassan & Craft, 2005, p. 83

3) A geo-centric strategy represents a similar positioning across different world segments. For example, an employer looking for business and engineering graduates could develop a single employee value proposition for both target segments based on a shared element in their preferences, even though they might differ in their expectations of other preferred employer benefits.
4) A differentiated positioning for different segments would be represented by the localization strategy. In the employer branding context, this strategy could lead to the development of different value propositions for business and engineering students in certain target markets, e.g., countries. However, this strategy would require a large amount of resources and would only be justified if there were significant differences in attitudes and benefits sought between the targeted populations in different countries.

The question of which positioning strategy to adopt can hence only be answered according to the results of a given market segmentation. The decision for a certain positioning strategy also involves the question of valuable content for this positioning. According to Kotler (2003, p. 308), “the end result of positioning is the successful

creation of a customer-focused value proposition, a cogent reason why the target market should buy the product." In employer branding, positioning results in the successful creation of an employee value proposition. Before the actual positioning can take place, an employer has to determine the core of the employer brand, which is represented by the employer's identity. The identity functions as a basis for the implementation and management of the brand as well as for further image-building activities (Esch, 2003; Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; Petkovic, 2008). The central elements of an employer's identity are the values that the company represents as an employer (de Chernatony, 2005; Linxweiler, 2001). They can be found in its brand's core, which serves as a foundation for the alignment of the brand's positioning. Next to the company's values, the central benefits of the employer brand are integrated into the brand's core (Clausnitzer, Heide & Nasner, 2002; Meffert, 1994; Sponheuer, 2009). These benefits should be the functional and emotional attributes which are perceived as important by relevant target groups. According to Petkovic (2008), the positioning of the employer brand is always closely related to the brand's identity, core, and image, as shown in Figure 16.

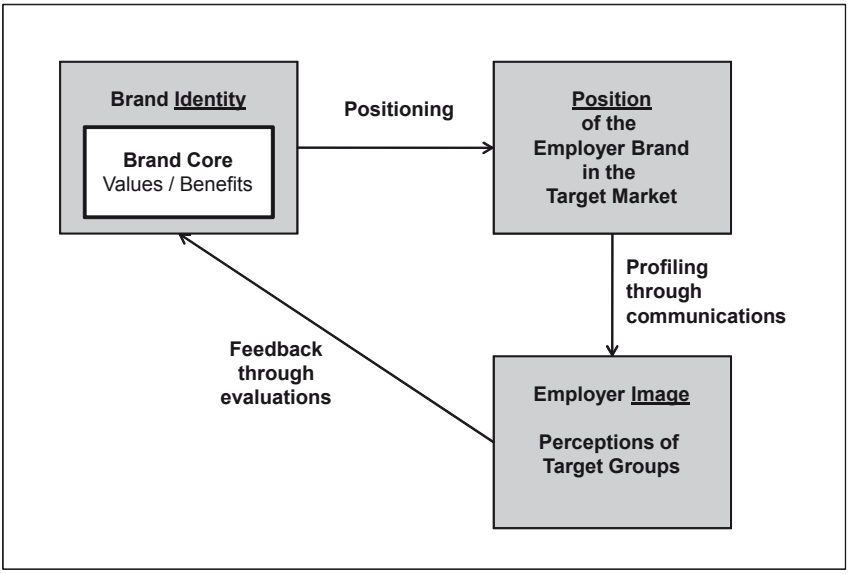

Figure 16: Relation of Positioning, Identity and Image
Source: Adapted from Petkovic, 2008, p. 145

A brand's identity and core determine the internal alignment and orientation of the employer brand, which is then substantiated for current and potential employees through the brand's positioning. In the course of positioning, the central ideas and benefits of the employer brand are conveyed to the target groups, which develop an individual perception of the employer, the employer image. The employer might obtain feedback about its image by means of empirical evaluation in order to control the degree of alignment between image and identity. As described in Chapter 2.1.1., the discrepancies between image and identity should be minimized as far as possible (Adjouri, 2002; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Dutton et al., 1994 Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Lievens et al. 2007). An additional important aspect is the determination of the degree to which the employer brand positioning may differ from the positioning of the corporate, company, or consumer brands (cf. Sponheuer, 2009). A company has to decide if the employer brand positioning should coincide as far as possible with the consumer-oriented positioning strategies, or if a more independent, target group-oriented positioning might be possible. Depending on the degree of required coordination between the brand management in labor and consumer markets, Sponheuer (2009, p. 215 f.) proposes three basic options: a) an independent positioning of the employer brand, b) consistent positioning dimensions but differing interpretations of instrumental and symbolic benefit propositions between labor and consumer market, c) a consistent positioning of all brands in the labor and consumer market.[49]

After determining the positioning alignment of all of the company's brands, a further significant decision to be made in the process of positioning is the one of how many ideas in terms of benefits or features to convey in the positioning. Many marketers believe that only one central idea should be promoted, since it is communicated to the target market more easily, conveys to the company's employees what really counts and makes it easier to align the organization with the positioning. In addition, if the company consistently repeats its central idea and delivers on it, it will be best known and recalled for this benefit (Kotler, 2003). In an international context, there has been research showing that brand images incorporating fewer needs, i.e. ideas, tend to outperform those incorporating multiple needs (Roth, 1995b). However, there is no agreement on how many ideas to promote. Double-benefit positioning might be more distinctive and there are also cases of successful triple-benefit positioning. If companies increase the number of benefits in their positioning, they have to be care-

[49] Since the strategic relation between employer brand and corporate, company or consumer brands is not the main focus of this thesis, the three positioning options will not be discussed in detail at this point. For detailed information on the feasibility of those options against the backdrop of required coordination between brands, see Sponheuer, 2009, pp. 213-224.

ful not to lose a clear positioning and cause disbelief in their target market (Esch, 2001; Kotler, 2003). Kotler (2003, p. 311) lists four general positioning errors which should be avoided:

- Underpositioning: There should be a clear idea of the brand's benefit(s) and the brand should not be seen as just another entry in a crowded market place.
- Overpositioning: Companies should avoid creating too narrow images by over-focusing on one aspect.
- Confused positioning: Companies should avoid confusing their target groups by making too many claims or changing the brand's positioning too frequently.
- Doubtful positioning: Unrealistic or hard to believe claims in the view of the brand's features should be avoided.

A successful positioning of the employer brand has to fulfill three important criteria (Esch, 2003; Huber, 1993; Levermann, 1995; Simon et al., 1995; Sponheuer, 2009; Süß, 1996): a) The positioning should be aligned with the company's identity, i.e. its values, b) it should fulfill the target groups' expectations in terms of employment benefits and c) it should be differentiated from the positioning of competitors. Since the positioning is of strategic character, it should be developed on a medium- to long-term basis and should therefore take into account potential changes and developments of values and expectations. In addition, it should integrate desired instrumental as well as emotional benefits to be differentiable from competing positioning strategies (Petkovic, 2008).[50] Although the empirical part of this thesis focuses on instrumental attributes, adding emotional appeal to the employer brand has been deemed important in order to create an emotional bond between brand and target groups (Petkovic, 2008; Sponheuer, 2009). In addition, positioning strategies which are solely based on instrumental attributes might not be as differentiating, since it can be difficult to distinguish between employers based on offered instrumental benefits only (Baumgarth, 2001). However, as discussed in Section 3.1.1, graduates' decision for a given employer is highly cognitive in nature and therefore, instrumental attributes should form a central part of the positioning for this target group.

[50] For an overview of emotional positioning content, see Petkovic, 2008, p. 196.

3.5 Conclusion

In order to decide on the degree to which an employer brand positioning should be adapted to the needs of selected subgroups of students, a variety of influencing factors has to be taken into account. In this chapter, the conceptual framework for the identification of potential influences at different levels was elaborated. A review of literature and empirical research from different backgrounds led to the deduction of hypotheses regarding the influence of individual-level and country-level characteristics on students' importance valuation of employer attractiveness attributes. A total of six attributes, namely job security, employer success in the market, promotion opportunities, friendly colleagues, starting salary, and professional development were selected for the analyses. These attributes were identified as important drivers of employer attractiveness in previous research (e.g., Lievens et al., 2007; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Sutherland et al., 2002; Trank et al., 2002). Each attribute serves as dependent variable in a multilevel research model, which will be analyzed by means of hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) in Chapter 5.

In addition to the six multilevel analyses, market segmentation might lead to further insight with regard to national influence on students' attribute preferences. As outlined in Section 3.4.1, international employer branding could benefit from the use of different market segmentation techniques. In order to gain more insight into the existence of transnational segments of students sharing the same preferences, the technique of benefit segmentation was identified as especially promising. Employer attractiveness attributes can be regarded as benefits, as they reflect the employer's characteristics just like product benefits do in the consumer context. Different bundles of attributes offered by the employer are incorporated into the employer value proposition and used to attract particular target groups. Thus, employer attractiveness attributes might serve as a suitable segmentation base in order to identify segments of students with similar attribute preferences across countries. Given this theoretical rationale, the second part of the empirical investigation of Chapter 5 will focus on a segmentation of the European student market on the basis of students' evaluations of attractiveness attributes. Based on the results of the multilevel analyses and the market segmentation, implications for the positioning of international employer brands, as outlined in Section 3.4.2, can be drawn for the European student market.

4 Research Methodology and Data Basis

In order to test the proposed hypotheses and allow for representative conclusions regarding international employer branding strategies, as many countries as possible had to be involved in this project. The large amount of resources necessary to obtain such a large-scale data set and the crucial importance of involving local researchers in the research process of a multinational study (Craig & Douglas, 2000; Cavusgil, 1998) would not have allowed the author to carry out the data collection herself. Since scientific research on international employer branding and employer attractiveness hardly exists to date, the only access to large-scale data sets from several countries is through commercial research institutes. Therefore, the author was provided with a data set from a large-scale European survey on employer attractiveness by the *trendence Institute*, which has been introduced as one of the main commercial research institutes in Chapter 2.3. Thus, this project is also an attempt to unite the commercial and scientific approaches to employer branding through data analysis.

The use of secondary data calls for a detailed description of the underlying survey, including methodological aspects, as well as thorough information on the applied questionnaire and items. As the survey was conducted in 24 countries, it is cross-national and cross-cultural in nature, which implies special requirements with regard to methodological issues compared to domestic research. Therefore, definitional as well as methodological aspects of cross-cultural research will be discussed in detail in Section 4.1. This will be followed by a discussion of the choice of the main statistical technique applied in this project, which is hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) (Section 4.2). Section 4.3 is dedicated to a closer examination of the data basis, including a description of the underlying variables and the process of sample reduction. The chapter will be closed with a short description of additional secondary data besides the graduate survey, which has to be included in order to test the proposed hypotheses (Section 4.4).

4.1 Cross-Cultural Research

As this research was conducted across 24 different nations, it falls under the literature label of international research, comparative research, cross-national or cross-cultural research. This type of research is arguably more complex than domestic research (Boyacigiller & Adler, 1991; Malhotra, Peterson, & Kleiser, 1999; Craig &

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Douglas, 2001), due to theoretical, methodological and logistical challenges. Even though the different labels are often used interchangeably, fine distinctions can be made between the concepts (e.g., Terpstra & Sarathy, 1990). Especially when considering cross-national and cross-cultural research, it is not always possible to identify a clear distinction, as national boundaries are often used as surrogates for culture (Samiee & Jeong, 1994). However, cross-cultural research mostly refers to "research that has culture as its main independent or dependent variable but not as an extraneous and/or residual variable" (Nasif, Al-Daeaj, Ebrahimi, & Thibodeaux, 1991, p. 80), whereas cross-national studies often do not have the explicit concern of addressing the influence of culture (Douglas & Craig, 1997). As culture is included in the research design by means of the GLOBE dimensions, this research project can be considered cross-cultural in nature. However, if there are any country-based differences, i.e. national influences, they do not necessarily have to originate from cultural differences. Johnson (1991, p. 142) recommends to "avoid treating just any differences found as cultural in origin", as "differences across populations in different countries, ethnic groups, or organizations need not be culturally based." Therefore, a number of other variables, such as economic development, will be included into the analysis.

With regard to methodological issues, it is not necessary to make a distinction between cross-national and cross-cultural research, as the methodological prerequisites of cross-cultural research also apply in varying degrees to cross-national research (Malhotra, Agarwal, & Peterson, 1996). Some important aspects of cross-cultural methodology will be discussed in the following. Malhotra et al. (1996) propose to discuss methodological issues around a six-step framework describing the marketing research process: problem definition, developing an approach, research design formulation, field work, data analysis, and report preparation and presentation. As the data used in this research is not primary in nature but provided by a research institute, not all of these steps can be addressed. However, given the available information, the major aspects of the methodology applied in the process of the survey will be discussed, especially with regard to the issue of cross-cultural equivalence, which will be outlined in Section 4.1.3.

4.1.1 Problem Definition

Comparability has been recognized as a key issue in the design stage of a cross-cultural research project (Berry, 1980; Malhotra et al., 1996; Craig & Douglas, 2000;

Steenkamp & Ter Hofstede, 2002). In order to compare two phenomena, they have to share some features in common while also differing on some features (Malhotra et al., 1996). Comparability can be achieved by adopting universals to establish the dimensional identity of phenomena or by empirically proving cross-national equivalence of psychological concepts and data (Berry, 1980; Malhotra et al., 1996), which is also referred to as 'construct equivalence'.[51] The issue of construct equivalence will be further developed in Section 4.1.3 in the context of the research design formulation. With regard to the aspect of dimensional identity, it can be stated that the phenomena related to this project are not necessarily uni-dimensional. There has not been any previous research on the influence of national culture on the evaluation of employer characteristics. The influence of culture on students' preferences for employers has been assumed in previous literature (e.g., Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Martin & Hetrick, 2009; Petkovic, 2008); however, to the best of the author's knowledge, it has never been empirically investigated before. Thus, the main problem definition of this research with regard to cross-cultural analysis is the one of whether the evaluation of employer characteristics differs across nations and, if so, how strong the national influence really is when compared to other influencing factors. Furthermore, it has to be analyzed which influences (cultural or economic) might explain the potential variance at the country level. The hypotheses with regard to cultural influence were developed from literature across different marketing, international and cross-cultural business and HR disciplines.

4.1.2 Developing an Approach

When conducting cross-cultural research, different approaches including anthropological, sociological, and psychological perspectives might be taken (Malhotra et al., 1996). The anthropological and sociological perspectives are group-level approaches. While the anthropological approach assesses cultural processes and behaviors directly, the sociological approach analyzes behavior resulting from social forces. The psychological perspective focuses on the individual level and is concerned with "processes through which people personalize social influences in their own cognitive organization" (Malhotra et al., 1996, p. 11). This perspective has been deemed most adequate from a marketing research viewpoint, since it seems appropriate to regard culture as a knowledge system which is represented in cognitive processes and expressed in behaviors (Soares, 2004).

[51] Construct equivalence is also referred to as 'structural equivalence' (Cheung et al., 2006; van de Vijver & Leung, 1997).

Another important issue with regard to cross-cultural research approaches is the distinction between culture-specific and universal behaviors, generally referred to as the question of whether the research will be conducted from an *emic* or an *etic* perspective (Adler, 1983; Berry, 1980; Malhotra et al., 1996). The two perspectives have long been regarded as opposites; however, there has been a tendency towards integrating both approaches (Berry, 1999). An *emic* approach allows the researcher to study a problem from within a culture and in the context of local knowledge and interpretations, resulting in three advantages (Pike, 1967): a) It facilitates an understanding of the way in which a culture is configured as a working whole, b) it can shed more light on attitudes, motives and interests of people in their daily lives, and c) it allows for theory development by going beyond theory testing. An *etic* research approach implies the study of a phenomenon from outside of a given cultural system, relating variations in the cultural context to variations in individual behavior (Berry, 1999; Pike, 1967). This approach has four advantages (Pike, 1967): a) It adopts a broad perspective on differing behavior across cultures so that similarities and differences can be analyzed, b) it allows for the development of techniques for identifying and measuring differing phenomena, c) it functions as a starting point for research, given its rough, tentative nature of description, and d) it takes account of practical limitations, such as financial constraints or time pressure. The approach taken in this project is predominantly *etic* in nature, since phenomena are analyzed and compared across cultures from an outside perspective. However, the *emic* approach was included in the first stages of the survey used for the analyses in the course of this thesis. By involving native speakers from each country in the questionnaire design, it was at least partially taken into account that including the *emic* views of local partners, who are familiar with the given culture, is essential in the design stage of a cross-cultural project (Malhotra et al., 1996).

4.1.3 Research Design

A number of decisions have to be made at the design stage of a project, including the choice of secondary or primary data and the question of whether to pursue a qualitative vs. quantitative approach. As already mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the objective of this project requires a large amount of data from as many countries as possible. The only way of obtaining this kind of data set was to cooperate with a commercial research institute specialized in the topic of employer branding. The approach taken in this thesis is novel, since the issue has not been approached from an international perspective yet. Given the lack of quantitative research in the field of

employer branding and the dimensions of a cross-national analysis, a quantitative approach was selected. Another issue of particular importance when formulating a research design is to ensure the equivalence and comparability of data obtained from different cultures (Berry, 1980; Craig & Douglas, 2000; Malhotra et al., 1996; Mullen, 1995; Sekaran, 1983; Sin, Cheung, & Lee, 1999; Sin & Cheung 2001; van de Vijver, 2003a). Therefore, the issue of equivalence will be discussed in further detail in the course of this section. As scaling techniques and sampling considerations are especially important when collecting primary cross-cultural data (Malhotra et al., 1996), those issues will be treated as well, even though the secondary nature of the data used in this project only allows for an ex post discussion of selected aspects.

In order to prove cross-cultural equivalence, various aspects of construct equivalence have to be examined. “Construct equivalence deals with the question of whether marketing constructs have the same meaning and significance in different cultures” (Malhotra et al., 1996, p. 19) and is especially important when conducting international market segmentation, as will be done in Chapter 5.4 of this project. If segmentation bases are shared by consumers in different countries but have a different meaning or no meaning at all in some of the countries, segments might be based on these differences in meaning instead of the desired similarities in the segmentation basis (Steenkamp & Ter Hofstede, 2002). As the data applied in this study does not include any latent constructs, it is obvious that not every aspect of construct equivalence can be assessed. However, several aspects of demonstrating cross-cultural equivalence also apply to the survey and data used in this project, since they concern the questionnaire design and content, or the items themselves. Therefore, the approach of assessing construct equivalence will be described and relevant parts of it will be examined more closely.

Construct equivalence can be assessed with regard to different aspects: functional equivalence, conceptual equivalence, instrument equivalence, and measurement equivalence[52] (Berry & Dasen, 1972; Drasgow & Kanfer, 1985; Malhotra et al., 1996; Steenkamp & Ter Hofstede, 2002; van de Vijver & Leung, 1997; van de Vijver, 2003a). Functional equivalence deals with the question of whether a given concept or behavior serves the same purpose or is related to the same functional problem across countries (Sekaran, 1983; Steenkamp & Ter Hofstede, 2002). A certain behavior is functionally equivalent if it has developed in response to a problem shared

[52] Measurement equivalence is also referred to as ‘measure equivalence‘, while instrument equivalence is also referred to as ‘category equivalence’ (Steenkamp & Ter Hofstede, 2002).

by two or more cultures, although the behavior in one culture may be superficially different from the behavior in another culture (Malhotra et al., 1996). In general, the problem of employer choice and decision-making in terms of preferred employer characteristics is shared by graduates from the countries involved in the study. Even though there might be differences with regard to students' needs and requirements, the process of employer evaluation by means of symbolic and instrumental attributes is comparable across countries. As only European countries are involved, participants of the survey share a relatively similar environment, which might result in a rather similar understanding of the applied items. According to van de Vijver (2003, p. 145), "comparisons of closely related groups will be less susceptible to bias than comparisons of groups with a widely different cultural background." Through the cooperation with native speakers from all of the participating countries, the *trendence* researchers additionally ensured that the applied concepts, i.e. the employer characteristics, serve the same purpose cross-nationally. Furthermore, they assessed the general understanding through extensive pretests.

Conceptual equivalence refers to the question of whether research concepts, stimuli and materials are equivalent across cultures (Craig & Douglas, 2000; Malhotra et al., 1996; Steenkamp & Ter Hofstede, 2002). Whereas functional equivalence refers to objects and behavior in societies at the macro-level, conceptual equivalence pertains to individuals' interpretations placed on objects or behavior (Craig & Douglas, 2000). The question of whether these interpretations are expressed in similar ways across countries was also analyzed through pretests. Since the beginning of the annual survey in 2007, some of the items have been adapted in order to ensure the same meaning across countries. Nevertheless, some items remain critical, as it has not been verified if, for example, the term 'work-life balance' has the same meaning in all of the participating countries. Thus, the subjective interpretation individuals place on the item is not accessible to researchers. This is a general problem concerning the use of single items in the research design and has to be acknowledged when considering the limitations of the survey. As Alwin et al. (1994, p. 35) state: "If only one measure is used, it is important to realize that the assumption of uni-dimensionality may be invalid when comparisons are drawn across nations and time." Although the use of multi-item measures is recommended for cross-cultural comparative research, a literature review by Bollen et al. (1993) revealed that multiple indicators were used only in 18% of books and 26% of journal articles. In the case of the *trendence* survey, the commercial purpose, customer desires inflating questionnaire length, and the re-

quirement of a high number of participating countries as well as respondents have led to the decision for single item measures.

Instrument equivalence requires an identical interpretation of the scale items, response categories, and questionnaire stimuli across cultures (Malhotra et al., 1996; Singh, 1995). The selection of measures has to be taken according to the requirement that these measures have to capture the same phenomenon in each of the cultures involved. The problem of whether to apply *emic* or *etic* measures arises at this point. According to Green and White (1976), most data instruments may be considered *emic*, since they are developed based on the assumptions of a particular researcher's own country. A strictly *emic* approach would limit cross-cultural comparisons; however, developing 'culture-free' or at least 'culture-fair' instruments is accompanied by many difficulties (Green & White, 1976). In order to conduct cross-cultural comparisons, researchers "[…] will probably have to rely upon instruments which could not be considered *etic*, but which serve the purpose of identifying the similarities or differences in the phenomenon being investigated. One possible strategy in this regard is to employ "the same test in all nations … and to 'tease' out the reasons for differences that may be uncovered" (Green & White, 1976, p. 83), as will be done in this project. Another aspect which has to be considered with regard to equivalence is the way of collecting data. In order to achieve response equivalence, data collection procedures in all countries have to be identical, including methods of instruction to the study, task instructions and closing remarks (Sekaran, 1983). This requirement was fulfilled by the *trendence* survey.

Measurement equivalence refers to whether the measures used to operationalize scale items are comparable across countries (Malhotra et al., 1996). It can be subdivided into calibration equivalence, translation equivalence, and score equivalence (Craig & Douglas, 2000; Kumar, 2000). While score equivalence can only be assessed after the data has been collected, the other types of measure equivalence are of major importance in the design phase of a research project. Calibration equivalence refers to equivalence in measurement units, such as monetary units, measures of weight, distance, volume or socio-demographic units (Steenkamp & Ter Hofstede, 2002). Most units of the variables used in the *trendence* survey were straightforward, such as gender, age, or current course. The importance of the employer characteristics was measured on a four-point Likert-type scale (see Section 4.3.2) in order to ensure a straightforward interpretation across countries. The only problematic unit was *academic achievement,* as the units used to measure achievement differ across

countries. For example, whereas grade point averages ranging from 1.0 to 5.0 are used in Germany, the United Kingdom uses percentages to measure achievement. Therefore, the researchers decided to introduce five self-reported relative categories ranging from 'top 20%' to 'bottom 20%' of students (see Section 4.3.1).

Translation equivalence examines whether the measurement instrument is equally understood and interpreted by respondents in different countries (Steenkamp & Ter Hofstede, 2002). According to Smith (2003, p. 70), wording and translation of survey questions is the weakest link in achieving cross-cultural equivalence. In order to convey the intended meaning of items, careful back-translation and extensive pretesting of translations should be deployed (Kumar, 2000). Since the questionnaire of the *trendence* survey was developed in English, the research team adopted the technique of forward-backward translation, which has been deemed adequate to ensure translation equivalence (Cavusgil & Das, 1997; Craig & Douglas, 2000; Mullen, 1995; Sekaran, 1983). Native speakers from each of the participating countries translated the questionnaire into their respective native language. A second bilingual researcher back-translated it into English and it was compared with the original version. In case of major discrepancies, the translated version was revised until it coincided with the original. In addition, exhaustive pretests were conducted in the target countries. However, the problem of using single indicators for the employer characteristics remains. Through the use of only one measure per characteristic, it is impossible to determine whether any measured differences between countries are societal or merely linguistic. To overcome this problem, the use of at least three measures is recommended (Smith, 2003). Even with the most careful translation, it is difficult to compare the distributions of two questions that contain subjective response categories (Grunert & Muller, 1996).

Another question concerning measurement and translation issues is the one of identity: Researchers might use the same, partly the same (adapted), or entirely different but functionally equivalent scales across countries in order to achieve comparability (van de Vijver, 2003b). Alwin et al. (1994) regard this issue as a question of conceptual or literal replication, which are seen as "prototypes" for meeting the criterion of comparability. According to the conceptual approach, the researcher's attention lies on "a) the precise definition of concepts in the development of procedures and measures (such as survey questions), b) evaluating the extent to which these concepts are applicable to each national context, and c) designing appropriate within-nation procedures and measurement strategies" (Alwin, Braun, Harkness, & Scott,

1994, p. 26 f.). The literal approach emphasizes a literal replication of procedures and questions and focuses on sameness. This approach can also lead to conceptually equivalent replications, but it might not necessarily be the case. Both literal and conceptual replications are valid approaches to establishing functional equivalence (Alwin et al., 1994). However, the suggestion for analyses that explore national differences is to emphasize the literal replication of measures (Alwin et al., 1994, p. 29). In addition, using identical instruments, i.e. a literal replication, offers the widest scope for statistical analysis, whereas only few analysis techniques can be used with entirely different instruments (van de Vijver, 2003b). As the original emphasis of the *trendence* survey was placed on conducting descriptive comparisons between countries, the literal approach was chosen and all items were replicated as identically as possible across countries, taking into account the requirement of functional equivalence. The advantage of this approach for the present project is the possibility of conducting statistical analyses which require identical items, such as multilevel or cluster analysis.

Score equivalence indicates the equivalence of the observed scores on the measures and can be further divided into metric and scalar equivalence.[53] While metric equivalence refers to equal measurement units, scalar equivalence indicates equal measure intercepts across countries (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). The absence of multi-item constructs in the utilized survey does not allow for a measurement of score equivalence. The same applies to the measurement of construct validity and reliability. However, with regard to the question of whether the scores obtained from respondents in different cultures have the same meaning and interpretation, some critical remarks have to be made in the context of the applied scales. In the course of the analysis, caution should be taken as far as the scores on the employer characteristics scale are concerned, since they might not be free from cultural bias. They might be influenced by different response styles of the participants of each country.

Response styles can be defined as tendencies to respond systematically to questionnaire items on some basis other than what the items were designed to measure (Paulhus, 1991). Thus, “differences observed across countries may represent differences in response effects rather than in substance” (Smith, 2003, p. 80). If this is the case, the validity of empirical findings is threatened by the contamination of respond-

[53] Some authors consider metric and scalar equivalence to be identical concepts (e.g., Malhotra et al., 1996).

ents' answers to substantive questions (Craig & Douglas, 2000; Greenleaf, 1992a; van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). Taras et al. (2010, p. 1335) state that "cross-cultural differences in response styles are especially pronounced in items that ask for evaluative and prescriptive responses", as in the attractiveness evaluations incorporated in this thesis. Different response styles can be caused by acquiescence, extreme responding, use of middle response category, and socially desirable responding (also called courtesy bias) (Baumgartner & Steenkamp, 2001; Keillor, Owens, & Pettijohn, 2001; Smith, 2003). As a majority of the questions used in the *trendence* survey do not concern socially sensitive issues, and strict confidentiality was ensured during data collection, the threat of socially desirable responding has been minimized. The use of the middle response category was prevented by using a scale without a midpoint, which also further minimizes social desirability bias (Garland, 1991). Acquiescence should not be a problem either, since there is no possibility that respondents would like to please an interviewer by leaning towards over-compliance. Acquiescence is likely to occur on agree/disagree items and other items which offer clear affirm/reject responses (Smith, 2003). This is not the case with regard to the survey questions in this project. However, problems could result from extreme response style (ERS), which is "the tendency of a group to endorse extreme categories of responses in multiple response items" (Malhotra et al., 1996, p. 21). Therefore, this issue will be further discussed in the course of the analysis in Chapter 5.

Summarizing, it can be stated in advance that the *trendence* survey cannot be deemed completely flawless with regard to the issue of equivalence. One factor contributing to difficulties is mentioned by Steenkamp and Ter Hofstede (2002, p. 198), who claim that the various types of construct equivalence might be relatively less easy to achieve for domain-specific segmentation bases, such as the attribute importances applied in the survey, since "they reflect a more direct response to the consumer's socio-cultural environment." In the case of this project, the socio-cultural environment might influence graduates' expectations towards employers. However, referring to the paradox discussed by Sechrest and Zaidi (1972), Malhotra et al. (1996) recommend caution when assessing construct equivalence in general, as important cultural differences may be obscured by the attempts to achieve equivalence. Therefore, "[…] we should not be so obsessed by the various types of equivalence that we prelude the cultural uniqueness of responses from surfacing" (Malhotra et al., 1996, p. 21). As the *trendence* survey has been conducted since 2007, it has been possible to constantly compare results and review the questionnaire design in order to improve aspects of equivalence. This circumstance also affects the reliability of the da-

ta, as cross-cultural reliability can be examined through consistency over time (Craig & Douglas, 2000).[54] By demonstrating test-retest reliability, which examines if results obtained on different occasions are comparable, consistency over time can be proven. According to *trendence*, a high comparability of the results obtained in the survey since 2007 can be asserted and could be approved by the author.

With regard to sampling, students close to graduation, either bachelor or master, were selected, as they constitute the primary target groups for employer branding activities. The focus was set on business and engineering students, as most companies especially search for these graduates and direct their branding activities accordingly. However, students from other fields of study were also included in the survey, since they are sometimes of special interest for certain firms (e.g., natural science or law students). Business and engineering students constitute a well-defined target group, which remains homogenous and highly comparable across countries (Erdem, Swait, & Valenzuela, 2006). Thus, subject pool equivalence is ensured (Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra, 1999) and the influence of other potential factors, such as social status, education, wealth or family status is minimized (Bearden, Money, & Nevins, 2006). In each of the participating countries, major universities were selected for cooperation and links to the online questionnaire were sent out to students of the desired fields from each participating university. In each country and university, a maximization of returned questionnaires was intended. There were no a priori determined response quotas. Therefore, final response rates cannot be accounted for.

4.1.4 Data Preparation and Analysis

An important question in the process of data preparation is the one of whether to standardize the data (Malhotra & Peterson, 2001; van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). Some scholars argue in favor of standardization based on presumed advantages in interpretability, common metric, or *emic* comparison (Singh, 1995). Standardization can also reduce or eliminate cultural bias due to different response styles (Malhotra et al., 1999). Yet, many researchers prefer statistics based on unstandardized data, founded on arguments of comparability across cultures, structural invariance, and an *etic* comparison standard. Arguably, valid comparisons of statistics across cultures

[54] Two other possibilities of assessing cross-cultural reliability are consistency across individuals and internal consistency of scales (Craig & Douglas, 2000). Due to the fact that the *trendence* survey does not include latent constructs, the internal consistency of scales cannot be measured. Consistency across individuals refers to whether different individuals evaluate items or objects similarly and is mainly used in early stages of scale construction.

can only be made if based on unstandardized data. Following the recommendation of Malhotra et al. (1996) that general *etic* comparisons across cultures should be conducted on the basis of unstandardized data, the data used in this project has not been standardized.

In cross-cultural research, two types of studies can be distinguished: structure-oriented and level-oriented studies (van de Vijver & Leung, 1997; van de Vijver, 2003a). Structure-oriented studies examine whether an instrument measures the same construct across cultures, while level-oriented studies address cross-cultural differences in average scores (e.g. differences between means). Since comparisons of levels require cross-national equivalence of measures, possible bias has to be assessed and all factors that threaten comparability have to be classified (van de Vijver, 2003a). As this project contains level-oriented analyses, potential bias will be discussed whenever it is likely to have influenced results. Yet, most bias detecting techniques require the presence of multiple indicators of a construct (van de Vijver, 2003b), which is not the case in the present survey. Therefore, potential bias might be assumed but cannot explicitly be verified or controlled for. In addition, there is often a lack of hard criteria for deciding whether an item is biased overall (van de Vijver, 2003b). Hence, the focus of the analyses conducted in this project rather lies on substantive issues than on issues of bias and equivalence, while a discussion of potential bias will be integrated in the substantive analyses whenever necessary.

With regard to the level of analysis, there are three possible choices based on the level of data aggregation: individual, within-country or cultural unit, and across-countries or cultural units (Craig & Douglas, 2000; Malhotra et al., 1996; Malhotra & Peterson, 2001; Triandis, 1995). In individual analysis, data from each respondent has to be analyzed separately, which is recommended to gain a sound knowledge of e.g., the individual consumer in each culture (Tan, McCullough, & Teoh, 1987). Within-country analysis requires that the data has to be analyzed separately for each country or cultural unit.[55] This type of analysis is conducted in order to gain an understanding of the patterns and relationships of variables existing in each country or unit. In across-country analysis, the data of all countries is analyzed simultaneously, which can be done either with pooled data from all respondents (pan-cultural analysis) or with aggregated data for each country (cross-cultural analysis) (Malhotra et al., 1996). Pan-cultural analysis allows for the extraction of universal factors which un-

[55] Also referred to as ‘intracultural analysis‘ (Malhotra et al., 1996, p. 34).

derlie the data (Triandis, 1995). Cross-cultural analysis is aimed at assessing the comparability of findings from one country to another (Netemeyer, Durvasula, & Lichtenstein, 1991) and can be done, for example, by computing means of variables for each country and correlating these means, or by assessing differences in variance and distribution (Malhotra et al., 1996). Both types of across-country analysis will be applied in this project. Cross-cultural analysis is used to gain insight into the differences of findings between countries, e.g., by comparing means of employer characteristics per country (see Chapter 5.2.2). Pan-cultural analysis will be carried out when conducting the analysis of individual factors of influence as well as the multilevel and cluster analyses (see Chapters 5.2.1, 5.3 and 5.4), since both require the use of a pooled data set. In addition, multilevel analysis allows for a simultaneous examination of the different data levels. As multilevel analysis constitutes the main stage of the empirical part of this project, the next section is dedicated to methodological aspects of this technique.

4.2 Multilevel Analysis

The nature of the given data set allows for the use of multilevel analysis, as it contains a large number of countries and a nested data structure with two levels of aggregation. Individual students are nested within nations, and determinants on both levels, 1) the individual characteristics of students and 2) characteristics of the national context to which they belong, might influence evaluations of employer attractiveness attributes. With regard to the given data set, it is not possible to use all of the 24 countries for analysis, as the GLOBE cultural dimension scores are only available for 18 countries. Thus, the analysis will be based on 90,944 students on the individual level, nested in 18 countries at the macro level. The objective of the analysis will be to examine the potential effect of shared cultural values and a shared economic environment in the given countries on the evaluations of employer attractiveness attributes of individual students. This type of research design is known as hierarchical or cross-level design (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992; Steenkamp et al., 1999). Multilevel analysis is considered to be the most appropriate method of analyzing individual- and culture-level data simultaneously (e.g., Cheung, Leung, & Au, 2006; Klein, Tosi, & Cannella, 1999; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002), capturing dynamic processes at different levels (Klein, Dansereau, & Hall, 1994; Klein et al., 1999). [56] In contrast to standard multiple regression, multilevel models use two random variables

[56] Multilevel models are also referred to as random coefficient models or mixed-effect models (Bliese, 2000; Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992). These terms will be used interchangeably.

(one individual-level and one country-level random variable) for modeling the unexplained variance in multiple models (Browne & Rasbash, 2004). In case of a multilevel, i.e. nested, data structure the assumption of independence of observations, which is given in ordinary linear models, is violated (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992). Hence, if the presence of a multilevel data structure is ignored, the statistical inferences drawn from analysis may be incorrect, even if they concern the individual level only. A typical example is the underestimation of standard errors, as data within the same country or culture are likely to be more similar than data across cultures. This may result in a higher Type I error compared to the predefined one, leading to spuriously 'significant' results (Hox, 2002; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002; Wieseke, Lee, Broderick, Dawson, & van Dick, 2008). A correct way to handle multilevel data is the technique of *hierarchical linear modeling* (HLM), which explicitly takes into account the nesting of micro- and macro-level phenomena (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). Thus, HLM has the advantage of linking multiple levels simultaneously in a single regression equation (Goldstein, 1995) while acknowledging that individuals within a given group might be more similar than individuals between groups (Hofman, 1997).

Several assumptions have to be fulfilled in order to perform HLM, which are similar to the assumptions for ordinary least squares regression analysis (Hox, 1998; Snijders & Bosker, 1999; Wieseke et al., 2008). First, the relationship between predictor and criterion variables is supposed to be linear. Second, the residual variances at the individual level should be normally distributed, with a mean of zero and a common variance in all groups. At the macro-level, residuals should also be normally distributed, with a mean of zero, and should be unrelated to micro-level errors. A final prerequisite, which is heavily discussed by researchers, concerns the sample size required for HLM. Especially the sample size requirements of the macro-level are discussed in the context of multilevel modeling (Hox, 1998). The required sample sizes recommended by researchers vary. Some suggest a minimum of n = 50 at the macro-level (Hox & Maas, 2002), while others follow the '30/30 rule', requiring a sample of at least 30 groups with at least 30 individuals per group (e.g., Kreft, 1996; Langer, 2004). On the other hand, Hox (1995) suggests that a sample size of n = 20 at the group-level would be sufficient to achieve stable results. Snijders and Bosker (1999) recommend a sample size of at least n = 10 on level 2. Recent empirical studies have demonstrated that a sample size of n = 20 (Lyness & Kropf, 2007) or even smaller sample sizes at the macro-level, such as n = 17 (Erlinghagen, 2008), lead to stable results. Some researchers argue that there is a trade-off between sample sizes at different levels (Cohen, 1998; Raudenbush & Liu, 2000; Snijders & Bosker,

1993), suggesting that increasing the individual-level sample size might reduce sample size requirements at the macro-level. If this were the case, the large sample size of the data set applied in this project would be beneficial. In addition, Cheung and Au (2009, p. 604) claim that “the effects of sample sizes on real data are hardly known”, since most recommendations regarding minimum sample sizes are based on simulation studies with artificial data (e.g., Hox & Maas, 2002). Hence, the macro-level sample size of 18 countries in this project will contribute to the evaluation of the stability of results in multilevel research.

A classical way of examining multilevel models consists of a stepwise approach, which will also be followed in the empirical part of this project (Hox, 2002; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002; Wieseke et al., 2008). The first step involves the calculation of an intercept-only model which consists of a constant only and does not include any predictor variables. The constant may vary across both levels, so that the variance at each level can be calculated (Wieseke et al., 2008). In the next step, predictors at the micro-level and macro-level are included as fixed variables (random intercept model). The added parameters are each tested for significance in order to determine the contribution of each variable. In addition, it can be examined whether the group-level variables explain any between-group variation in the dependent variable (Hox, 2002). The random intercept model calculated at this stage is also referred to as ‘variance component model’, as it decomposes the intercept variance into different variance components for each level. The regression intercept is assumed to vary across groups, whereas the regression slopes are assumed fixed (Hox, 2002). In a next step, the regression slopes are allowed to vary (random slope model). This way, it can be assessed if any of the slopes of any of the explanatory variables have a significant variance component between groups (Hox, 2002; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). In other words, it can be determined if the contribution of any of the individual-level predictors varies across countries. It is possible to include yet another step in order to examine potential cross-level interactions between group-level predictor variables and individual-level variables. However, this step is not intended in this project, as hypotheses regarding cross-level interactions have not been deducted. The interest mainly lies in the fixed part of the models as well as in the level 2 variance and the explained variance accounted for by level 2 variables. More information on the technical details of the performed steps will be given in the context of the multilevel analysis itself in Chapter 5. All multilevel analyses conducted in this thesis will be performed with HLM7 (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

4.3 Data Basis: The European Graduate Barometer 2010

The survey *The European Graduate Barometer* has been conducted annually by the *trendence Institute* since 2007 and has grown to be the largest European survey on graduates' employer preferences and career expectations. Data collection of the *European Graduate Barometer 2010* took place from September 2009 to January 2010. A total of 219,790 graduate students from 24 countries answered the online questionnaire. A price draw was used as incentive to increase the number of respondents. However, any personal data which was revealed by the respondents in order to take part in the price draw was strictly separated from questionnaire responses. Thus, absolute anonymity of the respondents was ensured. The questionnaire was developed by *trendence* and was then reviewed and translated by native speakers from each of the participating countries. After back-translation it was reviewed again by *trendence* before being distributed to students from the selected universities[57] in each country via a password-protected online platform. Participants had to select their country of study at the beginning of the questionnaire. After having made this selection, the questionnaire continued in the according native language of the chosen country. The participating 24 countries, represented by the variable COUNTRY, are: 1 Austria, 2 Belgium, 3 Bulgaria, 4 Czech Republic, 5 Denmark, 6 Finland, 7 France, 8 Germany, 9 Greece, 10 Hungary, 11 Ireland (Republic), 12 Italy, 13 Netherlands, 14 Norway, 15 Poland, 16 Portugal, 17 Romania, 18 Russia, 19 Slovakia, 20 Spain, 21 Sweden, 22 Switzerland, 23 Turkey, and 24 United Kingdom. Even though the participants indicated their country of study instead of their nationality, it can be assumed that most of them are nationals or are at least studying full-time in the country they have selected. Short time as well as exchange students, e.g., ERASMUS students, were excluded from sampling.[58]

4.3.1 The Independent Variables

The influence of four level 1 independent variables from the survey will be measured in the course of the multilevel analyses. All of the information contained in these variables is self-reported by the participants. In addition, the influence of level 2 independent variables taken from secondary data sources will be tested, namely the cul-

[57] Universities were selected with the aim of providing a representative picture of each country's university landscape, based on the focused courses of study. All major universities were included and the number of participants from each university reflects the relative size of the given university.

[58] Each university contact received an official invitation to the survey with instructions on which students (e.g. relevant courses of study, no exchange or ERASMUS students) should receive a personalized link to be able to participate. The eligible students were then invited to take part by the university contact (via email or letter).

tural dimension scores taken from project GLOBE (House et al., 2004) as well as the economic development of each country. In the following, all variables that are incorporated in any of the models will be described briefly.

Gender

Gender is represented by the variable GENDER coded as '0' (male) or '1' (female).

Age

The variable AGE is used to measure participants' age, which was done by an open text field.

Main Course of Study

Each participant had to select a main course of study from the following options: engineering, business/economics, computer science, mathematics/statistics, natural science, law, health science, social sciences/humanities, and arts. The main courses were then grouped into three categories, represented by the variable BEO BUS_ENG_STD: Business/economics students were coded as '1' (business); engineering, computer science, mathematics/statistics and natural science students were coded as '2' (engineering),[59] and law, health science, social sciences/humanities and arts students were coded as '3' (other). The reason why the students were grouped into these categories is that the recruiting efforts of companies are mostly focused on business and engineering students. Employer branding activities are then directed at the whole group of engineering (or business) students instead of students from single types of courses. Due to the importance of business and engineering students for employers, only these two groups will be used for the purpose of multilevel analysis. Apart from the aspect of importance, the group 'other' is very heterogeneous, so that any influence of this variable is difficult to interpret. Multilevel analysis requires that a value of '0' is of meaning for any explanatory variable (Hox, 2002), so that business students were then re-coded as '0' and engineering students as '1'.

[59] Even though computer science, mathematics/statistics, and natural science students were included besides engineering students, the according group of students will be labeled 'engineering' in the course of this thesis. In the German-speaking region, the term 'MINT' students would be appropriate for this group; however, this term is not familiar on international level. As the largest proportion of students in this group has an engineering background (62.5%), the label was chosen accordingly to reflect this focus.

Academic Achievement

Participants were asked to rate their academic achievement by choosing from five options: outstanding achievement (top 20% of students), above average achievement (between the top 20% and 40% of students), average achievement, below average achievement (between the bottom 20% and 40% of students) or poor achievement (bottom 20% of students). These categories were chosen since it is not possible to measure grades or points of students (see 'measure equivalence' in chapter 4.1.3). The measurement system for academic achievement often differs between countries, so that the only way of comparing results is the introduction of a relative measure. Even though the accuracy of the self-reported achievement could not be verified, there is previous research reporting high correlations (r = .85 or higher) between self-reported data and objective measures (Gully, Payne, Keichel-Koles, & Whiteman, 2002). Nevertheless, the results have to be interpreted with caution, bearing in mind a possible bias due to self-reported information. For the purpose of multilevel analysis, the variable ACHIEVEMENT was dichotomized into the categories '0' (average achievers) and '1' (self-reported high potentials), with only the top 20% of the students represented by '1' and the rest of the students represented by '0'. The transformed variable was labeled ACHIEVEMENT2. This transformation takes into account that high potential students are of special interest to many employers and have been found to differ from average students in terms of their preferences (cf. Chapter 3.1.2). The group of 'average achievers' includes all students except the self-reported high potentials, because companies' employer branding and recruiting efforts do not explicitly exclude any students. While certain employer branding activities directed especially at high potentials do exist, there usually are no targeted activities for 'average' students. Bearing in mind the practical application, it therefore seems more sensible to group all remaining students into one category.

The independent variables on the macro-level will be introduced separately in Chapter 4.4, as they are not part of the *trendence* survey but taken from other secondary data sources.

4.3.2 The Dependent Variables

The dependent variables of the analysis are the instrumental attributes of employer attractiveness introduced in Chapter 3. A list of attributes for the survey was originally developed following an examination of scientific recruitment literature. Thus, all of the employed attributes are represented in the same way or in a similar way within the

selection of key attributes of employer attractiveness, which have been identified in previous employer branding research (cf. Chapter 3.1.1.2). The list was then validated through extensive pre-tests, which are repeated annually by researchers of the cooperating institute. In those pre-tests, an open text field is used to ask students to name and rate the most important employer characteristics (i.e. instrumental attributes) which affect their individual employer choice. The answers are then analyzed, resulting in a list of the most important employer characteristics. In the questionnaire of the 2010 survey, participants were presented with this list of fifteen single items. They were asked to rate the importance of each item for their individual employer choice on a four-point Likert-type response scale ranging from “not important” to “very important”. The data was originally coded as -2 (not important), -1 (less important), 1 (important) and 2 (very important). In the questionnaire, only the item anchors had verbal labels. The degree of importance was symbolized in a bipolar way by negative and positive numbers, since this type of non-verbal labeling is less susceptible to cultural differences in interpretation and clearly indicates more or less importance. As mentioned in Chapter 4.1.3, a scale without a mid-point was used. This four-point type of scale is applied by researchers as a forced choice method, since the middle option, in this case “neither important nor unimportant”, is not available to respondents (e.g., Bortz & Döring, 2006; Garland, 1991). In order to obtain a scale with the intended equal numeric intervals, the data was recoded as 1, 2, 3, and 4.
The items and according variables are as follows:

- Products/services [EC01]
- Job work tasks [EC02]
- Friendly colleagues [EC03]
- Innovation [EC04]
- Job security [EC05]
- Employer leadership style [EC06]
- Location [EC07]
- Employer success in the market [EC08]
- Level of responsibility given to staff [EC09]
- Possibility of working abroad [EC10]
- Professional development/training [EC11]
- Promotion opportunities [EC12]
- Corporate social responsibility [EC13]
- Starting salary [EC14]
- Work-life balance [EC15]

For the purpose of the multilevel analyses, not all of these items will be used. Six items (friendly colleagues, job security, employer success in the market, professional development/training, promotion opportunities, starting salary) will be included as dependent variables, as the relevant theory for the approach taken in this thesis permitted the deduction of hypotheses related to precisely these items. However, in order to explore country-based versus individual-based differences in attribute evaluations and the role of students' country of study more in detail, all fifteen items will be used for comparative analyses as well as for market segmentation by means of cluster analysis.

4.3.3 Sample Reduction

In order to obtain a consistent sample for the projected analyses of this thesis, the original sample had to be reduced, especially with regard to missing data. Allowing missing data for any of the independent or dependent variables would have led to a varying size of the data basis depending on the step of analysis being conducted and could have affected the accuracy and reliability of the results. The stepwise reduction will be described in the following.

From the original data set of 219,790 participants, all cases without a university number were excluded. In addition, all participants studying at universities with less than a total of 30 participants were excluded, since these universities are considered to be non-representative. This step led to a sample of 208,145. Furthermore, cases with missing data regarding the main course of study were removed (resulting in 207,024 cases). With regard to the current course, all participants studying in a PhD course were excluded, since the focus of the analysis lies on bachelor and master students, and PhD candidates might have rather different preferences compared to undergraduate and graduate students. This step led to a sample size of 191,766 cases. Furthermore, participants with missing data on academic achievement (resulting in 176,453 cases) and gender were taken out, resulting in 172,708 cases. Participants with missing data on age as well as participants older than 35 years were also excluded since they, just as the PhD candidates, are not representative of the target group of this project. The resulting sample of 164,552 participants was further reduced by excluding cases with missing values in one of the fifteen employer characteristics. Only participants that answered all fifteen questions related to the employer characteristics were left in the sample, which led to 155,365 cases.

Table 6: Sample Sizes per Country

	Frequency	Percent
1 Austria	2871	1.9
2 Belgium	6631	4.3
3 Bulgaria	4953	3.2
4 Czech Republic	10480	6.8
5 Denmark	2136	1.4
6 Finland	6948	4.5
7 France	17200	11.2
8 Germany	1663	1.1
9 Greece	1069	.7
10 Hungary	21461	14.0
11 Ireland (Republic)	1591	1.0
12 Italy	10699	7.0
13 Netherlands	3475	2.3
14 Norway	1376	.9
15 Poland	7003	4.6
16 Portugal	9860	6.4
17 Romania	4476	2.9
18 Russia	1454	.9
19 Slovakia	4701	3.1
20 Spain	18761	12.2
21 Sweden	2141	1.4
22 Switzerland	5483	3.6
23 Turkey	3289	2.1
24 United Kingdom	3936	2.6
Total	153657	100.0

Finally, the sample was again checked with regard to the minimum of 30 cases per university and was further reduced to a final sample of 153,657 cases from 611 universities in 24 countries. This final sample will again be reduced only for the purpose of the multilevel analyses, since secondary data on the cultural dimensions is solely available for 18 countries. As the further reduction is relevant for the multilevel models only, this process will be described separately in Chapter 5.3. Now focusing on the sample of students from 24 countries, Table 6 shows that sample sizes per country differ considerably, ranging from 1,069 in Greece to 21,461 in Hungary. These differences between countries are largely due to differing access to cooperating uni-

versities and students' differing participation. However, they do not affect the analyses conducted in Chapter 5.

4.4 Additional Secondary Data: National Culture and National Wealth

In order to measure the impact of national culture on students' evaluation of employer attractiveness attributes, the Indirect Values Inference approach was chosen (Lenartowicz & Roth, 1999), as introduced in Chapter 3.2.5. By extrapolating data from project GLOBE (House et al., 2004), each country was assigned an aggregated score for each of the chosen cultural dimensions, namely Uncertainty Avoidance, Humane Orientation, Future Orientation, and Performance Orientation. As discussed in Chapter 3.2.6, only the practices scores were used. The items for each societal practice were measured on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 7.

With regard to the aggregated scores, a problem arises from the fact that Germany and Switzerland each have been divided into two regional parts by the GLOBE researchers. Therefore, both countries have two practices scores for each cultural dimension: Germany has a score for former West Germany and one for the former GDR, while Switzerland has a score for German speaking Switzerland and one for French speaking Switzerland. The only solution for this project is to add up both scores for each country and use the mean of the combined score, as it is not possible to monitor which region of Germany or Switzerland participants are from. Using the mean of both scores does not seem to be critical in the case of Germany, since the former West and the former East have been found to be culturally close to each other: On most of the GLOBE dimensions, former East and West Germany score highly similar, so that they are both centrally positioned within the Germanic cultural cluster identified by GLOBE (Brodbeck, Chhokar, & House, 2008). In contrast, cultural practices and values of German speaking Switzerland and French speaking Switzerland differ to a larger extent, so that the two corresponding subcultures were positioned in two different cultural clusters (the French speaking region in the Latin European cluster and the German speaking part in the Germanic cluster) (Brodbeck et al., 2008). Therefore, using the mean of both practices scores for Switzerland is more critical and has to be accepted bearing in mind this limitation.

In addition to the cultural dimensions, each country's national wealth was measured by the indicator GNI per capita (in U.S. dollars), as proposed by crossvergence theo-

rists (e.g., Ralston, 2008). The country values were taken from the most recent *World Bank Key Development Data and Statistics* (World Bank, 2009). Table 7 presents an overview of each country's GNI per capita as well as cultural practices score for the four selected GLOBE dimensions.

Table 7: Cultural Practices Scores and National Wealth per Country

	Country	Performance Orientation	Future Orientation	Humane Orientation	Uncertainty Avoidance	GNI/capita ($ US)
1	Austria	6.1	5.11	5.76	3.66	46,850
5	Denmark	5.61	4.33	5.45	3.82	58,930
6	Finland	6.11	5.07	5.81	3.85	45,680
7	France	5.65	4.96	5.67	4.26	42,680
8	Germany	6.05	5.04	5.45	3.63	42,560
9	Greece	5.81	5.19	5.23	5.09	28,630
10	Hungary	5.96	5.7	5.48	4.66	12,980
11	Ireland (Republic)	5.98	5.22	5.47	4.02	44,310
12	Italy	6.07	5.91	5.58	4.47	35,080
13	Netherlands	5.49	5.07	5.2	3.24	49,350
15	Poland	6.12	5.2	5.3	4.71	12,260
16	Portugal	6.4	5.43	5.31	4.43	20,940
18	Russia	5.54	5.48	5.59	5.07	9,370
20	Spain	5.8	5.63	5.69	5.76	31,870
21	Sweden	5.8	4.89	5.65	3.6	48,930
22	Switzerland	5.9	4.79	5.58	3.49	56,370
23	Turkey	5.39	5.83	5.52	4.67	8,730
24	United Kingdom	5.9	5.06	5.43	4.11	41,520

5 Empirical Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

In this chapter, data analysis will be carried out in two stages, leading to the discussion of the results of the empirical part of this project. Before conducting the main analyses, some descriptive as well as comparative results will be presented. After the description of the respondent profile, the sample will be analyzed with regard to individual differences between subgroups of students. Potential differences allow for a preliminary observation of the hypotheses concerning the individual level. Afterwards, students' evaluation of employer attractiveness attributes will be compared cross-nationally in order to gain a first insight into potential differences between countries. The first stage of the main analyses is directed at hypothesis testing with regard to the influencing factors on employer attractiveness evaluations. In total, six models will be analyzed by means of multilevel analysis techniques. The second, less extensive stage is aimed at verifying some of the multilevel analysis results by segmenting the European student market on the basis of benefit segmentation. A cluster analysis will be carried out in order to test the influence of national boundaries on individuals' attractiveness attribute evaluations. If the clusters, which are based on micro segmentation bases, reflect countries or country groups, a relatively strong national influence can be assumed. However, if independent transnational segments are identified, a significant national influence on students' attribute preferences is less likely.

5.1 Preliminary Data Analysis

The preliminary data analysis is aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the respondent profile as well as of attractiveness attribute evaluations of the pooled sample. The first part of this section is dedicated to the specific characteristics of the cases that constitute the sample. The sample in this part as well as in the cluster analysis in Chapter 5.4 is the full sample of students from 24 countries. The reduced sample for the purpose of the multilevel analyses will be introduced in the according Chapter 5.3. With regard to respondents' gender (Table 8), the overall percentages of male and female students are almost balanced (47.6% males and 52.4% females). However, the within-country percentages are characterized by a more imbalanced distribution in some cases, such as e.g., in Bulgaria with 64.8% females, Finland with 61% females, Romania with 63.8% females, and Slovakia with 60.5% females, or France with 60.2% males, Switzerland with 65.2% males and Turkey with 60.7% males. Table 9 presents an overview of respondents' mean age per country, showing

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that the mean age does not differ considerably between countries. On the average, participants from Russia are youngest (M = 19.72) whereas the German students are oldest (M = 24.78). In order to judge the representativeness of the sample, the author compared the data to official data on tertiary education obtained from Eurostat (2009).[60] As far as students' age is concerned, the sample can be considered representative of the tertiary student population in Europe. With regard to gender, the European total equals 44.7% male students and 55.3% female students. Thus, the sample almost fits the population data in terms of overall gender distribution. However, some countries deviate slightly from the distribution shown in the population data. These are mainly the countries with a relatively imbalanced gender distribution, such as Bulgaria, Finland, and Romania, which are characterized by a slightly too high percentage of females in the sample. In contrast, France, Germany, Greece, Sweden, and Switzerland are characterized by a slightly too high percentage of males in the sample. Overall, the sample seems to fit the population data rather well, and minor differences in gender distribution should be evened out due to the large sample size. Thus, the sample can be considered representative in terms of tertiary students' gender. The proportions of business, engineering and 'other' students are presented in Table 10.[61]

Overall, the engineering group is largest with 40.6% of the students belonging to this group, followed by business students with 34.7% and 'other' students with 24.7%. As can be seen from the table, the within-country percentages sometimes differ considerably. France, for example, has no 'other' students and Germany only 3%. This circumstance does not constitute a problem, since the focus of this project lies on business and engineering students as primary target groups of employer branding activities. Again, the sample data was compared to student population data from Eurostat (2009) in order to determine if the proportion of business and engineering students in the given sample fits the proportion in the real student population.

[60] Note that Russia is the only country not included in the Eurostat (2009) data and therefore cannot be compared with regard to its representativeness.
[61] At this point, only the group percentages will be presented, as these three groups will be applied in the following analyses.

Table 8: Male and Female Respondents per Country (Percentages)

COUNTRY	GENDER 0 Male	1 Female
1 Austria	40.5%	59.5%
2 Belgium	49.7%	50.3%
3 Bulgaria	35.2%	64.8%
4 Czech Republic	44.7%	55.3%
5 Denmark	47.5%	52.5%
6 Finland	39.0%	61.0%
7 France	60.2%	39.8%
8 Germany	63.2%	36.8%
9 Greece	56.6%	43.4%
10 Hungary	43.9%	56.1%
11 Ireland (Republic)	46.7%	53.3%
12 Italy	49.9%	50.1%
13 Netherlands	51.9%	48.1%
14 Norway	54.8%	45.2%
15 Poland	41.7%	58.3%
16 Portugal	50.4%	49.6%
17 Romania	36.2%	63.8%
18 Russia	48.2%	51.8%
19 Slovakia	39.5%	60.5%
20 Spain	42.8%	57.2%
21 Sweden	52.2%	47.8%
22 Switzerland	65.2%	34.8%
23 Turkey	60.7%	39.3%
24 United Kingdom	42.2%	57.8%
Total	47.6%	52.4%

Table 9: Respondents' Mean Age per Country

COUNTRY	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
1 Austria	23.56	2871	3.523
2 Belgium	20.65	6631	2.293
3 Bulgaria	23.04	4953	3.192
4 Czech Republic	22.90	10480	3.221
5 Denmark	23.59	2136	2.997
6 Finland	23.72	6948	3.570
7 France	21.55	17200	1.703
8 Germany	24.78	1663	2.665
9 Greece	22.33	1069	2.915
10 Hungary	22.49	21461	3.583
11 Ireland (Republic)	22.03	1591	3.379
12 Italy	22.69	10699	2.865
13 Netherlands	21.22	3475	2.737
14 Norway	23.52	1376	3.482
15 Poland	22.26	7003	2.507
16 Portugal	22.59	9860	3.909
17 Romania	21.97	4476	2.962
18 Russia	19.72	1454	2.319
19 Slovakia	22.34	4701	3.012
20 Spain	22.32	18761	3.376
21 Sweden	23.28	2141	3.341
22 Switzerland	23.22	5483	3.072
23 Turkey	21.46	3289	2.268
24 United Kingdom	21.59	3936	2.688
Total	22.38	153657	3.174

To match the engineering group of the *trendence* survey, the Eurostat (2009) engineering goup is based on the absolute numbers of students in the categories life science, physical science, mathematics/statistics, computing, and engineering/ engineering trades.

In general, the proportions match comparatively well, except for a few countries in the sample in which either the business or the engineering percentages do not represent the proportions of the real business and engineering student population: In Germany, for example, business students constitute 8.1% of the total business student population across all considered countries, while engineering students constitute 12.1% of all engineering students in the respective countries. The proportions represented by the German sample, however, are 1.7% business students and 1.2% engineering students. Another example is Hungary, where the student population quota is 2.8% business students and 1.1% engineering students. Sample percentages represent 12.7% business students and 14.2% engineering students. Thus, the sample data is not in every case representative of the real overall distribution of business and engineering students in the according countries. Yet, the large sample size should offset the extreme cases of the sample. If the analysis requires strictly representative samples with regard to students' field of study, such as in international market segmentation (Steenkamp & Ter Hofstede, 2002), the samples will have to be weighted.[62]

To complete the respondent profile, Table 11 depicts an overview of students' self-reported achievement.[63] Overall, 13.3% of the participants claim to be high potentials (top 20% of students), with Romania and the United Kingdom having the highest percentages (28.9% and 28% respectively). The smallest percentages of high potentials can be found in Portugal (6.2%) and Finland (7%). As students' academic achievement is self-reported (cf. remarks in Chapter 4.3.1), its accuracy cannot be verfified and the relatively large percental differences between countries might also reflect different tendencies in individuals' self-rating behavior. The diverging self-rating behavior might be a result of cross-cultural differences in individuals' self-concept, which have been identified by a research stream of cross-cultural psychology (Bochner, 1994; Carpenter & Karakitapoglu-Aygün, 2005; Santamaría, de la Mata, Hansen, & Ruiz, 2010; Tafarodi, Lang, & Smith, 1999; Wästlund, Norlander, & Archer, 2001).

[62] An overview of the according population and sample data as well as the calculation of weighting factors can be found in Appendix 2.
[63] The table presents the dichotomized version of the variable achievement, since this version will be used in the analyses.

Table 10: Students' Main Course of Study per Country (Percentages)

		BEO BUS_ENG_STD		
		1 Business	2 Engineering	3 Other
COUNTRY	1 Austria	43.7%	24.6%	31.7%
	2 Belgium	34.5%	37.0%	28.5%
	3 Bulgaria	53.6%	26.6%	19.8%
	4 Czech Republic	46.7%	36.9%	16.4%
	5 Denmark	45.1%	35.0%	19.9%
	6 Finland	31.0%	35.4%	33.6%
	7 France	43.5%	56.5%	
	8 Germany	52.9%	44.1%	3.0%
	9 Greece	24.8%	61.8%	13.4%
	10 Hungary	32.3%	40.8%	26.8%
	11 Ireland (Republic)	32.6%	40.5%	27.0%
	12 Italy	31.2%	43.4%	25.5%
	13 Netherlands	55.1%	25.3%	19.6%
	14 Norway	43.3%	31.8%	24.9%
	15 Poland	39.4%	33.4%	27.2%
	16 Portugal	20.6%	48.5%	30.9%
	17 Romania	45.8%	24.5%	29.7%
	18 Russia	42.4%	43.2%	14.4%
	19 Slovakia	37.2%	30.0%	32.8%
	20 Spain	22.5%	36.3%	41.2%
	21 Sweden	23.9%	53.6%	22.5%
	22 Switzerland	33.9%	55.2%	10.8%
	23 Turkey	17.5%	61.4%	21.2%
	24 United Kingdom	20.2%	29.4%	50.4%
Total		34.7%	40.6%	24.7%

For example, a study comparing the self-concept of schoolchildren from Africa, Asia and the United States/Australia revealed significant cross-cultural differences in academic and non-academic subareas, with children from the United States/Australia having the least positive self-concept in academic subareas (Wästlund et al., 2001). Other researchers have connected differences in self-esteem with societies' degree of individualism or collectivism, arguing that individualism promotes the development of self-competence (Tafarodi et al., 1999). These findings raise the assumption that students' self-reporting of their academic achievement might be related to their self-

concept, particularly their self-esteem and self-competence, and that the latter have been influenced by cultural characteristics. However, a further investigation of this assumption remains beyond the focus of this thesis. Nevertheless, as already mentioned in Chapter 4.3.1, a potential bias with regard to students' self-reported achievement should be borne in mind when contemplating the results of the upcoming analyses.

Table 11: Students' Academic Achievement per Country (Percentages)

		Academic Achievement	
		0 average achievers	**1 self-reported high potentials**
COUNTRY	1 Austria	85.5%	14.5%
	2 Belgium	89.5%	10.5%
	3 Bulgaria	75.8%	24.2%
	4 Czech Republic	92.1%	7.9%
	5 Denmark	83.0%	17.0%
	6 Finland	93.0%	7.0%
	7 France	84.5%	15.5%
	8 Germany	84.5%	15.5%
	9 Greece	81.3%	18.7%
	10 Hungary	89.0%	11.0%
	11 Ireland (Republic)	75.0%	25.0%
	12 Italy	87.2%	12.8%
	13 Netherlands	88.7%	11.3%
	14 Norway	79.5%	20.5%
	15 Poland	85.3%	14.7%
	16 Portugal	93.8%	6.2%
	17 Romania	71.1%	28.9%
	18 Russia	73.6%	26.4%
	19 Slovakia	85.3%	14.7%
	20 Spain	89.0%	11.0%
	21 Sweden	83.8%	16.2%
	22 Switzerland	87.8%	12.2%
	23 Turkey	89.2%	10.8%
	24 United Kingdom	72.0%	28.0%
Total		86.7%	13.3%

Table 12: Importance Rank Order of Employer Attractiveness Attributes (Pooled Sample)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
EC03 Friendly colleagues	153657	3.51	0.623
EC12 Promotion opportunities	153657	3.51	0.638
EC02 Job work tasks	153657	3.48	0.617
EC05 Job security	153657	3.45	0.709
EC11 Professional development/training	153657	3.42	0.668
EC15 Work-life balance	153657	3.41	0.712
EC09 Level of responsibility given to staff	153657	3.20	0.683
EC06 Employer leadership style	153657	3.16	0.739
EC04 Innovation	153657	3.10	0.746
EC08 Employer success in the market	153657	3.04	0.781
EC14 Starting salary	153657	3.04	0.731
EC07 Location	153657	3.03	0.84
EC01 Products / services	153657	2.92	0.775
EC13 Corporate social responsibility	153657	2.89	0.812
EC10 Possibility of working abroad	153657	2.76	1.007
Valid N (listwise)	153657		

Before comparing means of the attractiveness attributes per country in Section 5.2.2, Table 12 shows the mean of each attribute in the pooled sample. Overall, the attributes ‘friendly colleagues’ and ‘promotion opportunities’ have the highest means (M = 3.51), followed by job work tasks (M = 3.48) and job security (M = 3.45). The least important attribute for the average of respondents is the ‘possibility of working abroad’ (M = 2.76), while this item also seems to cause most dissension among the students, indicated by the highest standard deviation (SD = 1.007). However, differences between the attribute means are often very small, so that a comparison of means does not necessarily yield practically relevant results.

5.2 Comparative Analysis of Influencing Factors

Before conducting the multilevel analysis, which integrates the potential influencing factors on two different levels simultaneously, each factor of influence will be analyzed separately on the bivariate level. This way, a first understanding of differences in the levels of variables between individuals and countries can be achieved. However, at this stage it has to be reminded that the tests concerning individual factors of

influence always concern the entire pool of students regardless of their country of study. As the nested data structure is not taken into account, the results of the tests performed in this section are less accurate. Hence, the final hypothesis tests regarding the influence of individual and country-level factors will not be conducted until the main stage, which is the multilevel analysis. However, the discovery of any individual and cross-national differences might serve as a preliminary examination regarding the hypotheses. In addition, it can be verified if the hypothesized country-level influence is approved on the bivariate level and if it seems reasonable to build a multilevel model. This section starts with the analysis of individual differences, followed by a closer look at the cross-national differences in attribute evaluations.

5.2.1 Tests for Individual Differences in Attribute Evaluations

The hypothesized determinants on the individual level include students' course of study, gender, age, and academic achievement. Hence, these subgroups of students will be examined more closely in the following.

Main course of study

Beginning with students' course of study, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted in order to determine potential differences in the evaluation of attractiveness attributes according to whether students belong to business, engineering or 'other' fields of study. Even though the hypotheses are only related to business and engineering students, the rest of the student sample was included because it provides more insight into the relative magnitude of the differences between business and engineering students as well as into the influence of the course of study in general. The results of the ANOVA are displayed in Table 13.

Overall, every employer characteristic is characterized by a highly significant F-value, indicating highly significant differences between the three groups of students. However, in order to examine more closely the hypothesized differences with regard to business and engineering students only, post-hoc multiple comparison tests had to be conducted in order to break down the differences according to the three groups of study. *Student-Newman-Keuls (S-N-K)* tests were applied, using harmonic mean sample sizes for unequal groups and testing significance at an Alpha-level of .05.

Table 13: Influence of Students' Course of Study: ANOVA Results

EC		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
EC01 Products / services	Between Groups	115.289	2	57.645	96.187***
	Within Groups	92084.603	153654	.599	
	Total	92199.892	153656		
EC02 Job work tasks	Between Groups	25.172	2	12.586	33.128***
	Within Groups	58376.373	153654	.380	
	Total	58401.546	153656		
EC03 Friendly colleagues	Between Groups	122.299	2	61.149	157.908***
	Within Groups	59502.133	153654	.387	
	Total	59624.432	153656		
EC04 Innovation	Between Groups	737.122	2	368.561	668.085***
	Within Groups	84765.875	153654	.552	
	Total	85502.996	153656		
EC05 Job security	Between Groups	926.090	2	463.045	931.602***
	Within Groups	76372.480	153654	.497	
	Total	77298.570	153656		
EC06 Employer leadership style	Between Groups	770.536	2	385.268	711.884***
	Within Groups	83156.818	153654	.541	
	Total	83927.354	153656		
EC07 Location	Between Groups	419.892	2	209.946	298.647***
	Within Groups	108017.370	153654	.703	
	Total	108437.262	153656		
EC08 Employer success in the market	Between Groups	617.598	2	308.799	510.100***
	Within Groups	93017.477	153654	.605	
	Total	93635.075	153656		
EC09 Level of responsibility given to staff	Between Groups	764.546	2	382.273	827.512***
	Within Groups	70981.201	153654	.462	
	Total	71745.747	153656		
EC10 Possibility of working abroad	Between Groups	246.251	2	123.126	121.534***
	Within Groups	155666.186	153654	1.013	
	Total	155912.438	153656		
EC11 Professional development/training	Between Groups	121.866	2	60.933	136.724***
	Within Groups	68477.965	153654	.446	
	Total	68599.830	153656		

EC		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
EC12 Promotion opportunities	Between Groups	1266.604	2	633.302	1589.086***
	Within Groups	61236.051	153654	.399	
	Total	62502.654	153656		
EC13 Corporate social responsibility	Between Groups	1679.526	2	839.763	1294.468***
	Within Groups	99680.311	153654	.649	
	Total	101359.837	153656		
EC14 Starting salary	Between Groups	109.627	2	54.814	102.672***
	Within Groups	82031.545	153654	.534	
	Total	82141.172	153656		
EC15 Work-life balance	Between Groups	630.659	2	315.329	626.250***
	Within Groups	77367.806	153654	.504	
	Total	77998.465	153656		

With regard to Hypothesis 1a, the test confirms that business students (M = 3.63, SD = .561) attach a significantly higher value to promotion opportunities than do engineering students (M = 3.48, SD = .646). However, due to the large sample size, the majority of results would be significant, and it has to be verified if results are of substantive, as opposed to statistical, significance. Measuring the effect size facilitates this interpretation as it indicates the magnitude of the relationship between variables (Brock, 2003; Ellis, 2010). According to Cohen (1988, 1992), the effect size *d* in t-tests can be defined as the difference between two means divided by the pooled standard deviation of the data, which is

$$d = \frac{\bar{x}_1 - \bar{x}_2}{s},$$

with

$$s = \sqrt{\frac{(n_1 - 1)s_1^2 + (n_2 - 1)s_2^2}{n_1 + n_2 - 2}},$$

and

$$s_1^2 = \frac{1}{n_1 - 1} \sum_{i=1}^{n_1} (x_{1,i} - \bar{x}_1)^2 .$$

Based on Cohen (1988), results of d = 0.2 indicate a 'small effect', d = 0.5 a 'medium effect' and d = 0.8 a 'large effect'. However, as the effect size always relates to mean scores, which are calculated from a four-point interval scale in this project, the effect sizes can be expected to be relatively small. However, they can provide an indication of the magnitude of relationships between variables. Thus, the effect size was calculated (Cohen, 1988, 1992), which indicates a small effect with regard to business students' higher preference for promotion opportunities (d = .248). As far as the attribute of professional development/training (Hypothesis 1b) is concerned, the S-N-K test also reveals a significant difference between business and engineering students, with business students attaching a higher value to this attribute (M = 3.44, SD = .655) than engineering students (M = 3.38, SD = .677). Yet, the effect size is less than small (d = .09). The test on starting salary (Hypothesis 1c) reveals that business students attach a significantly higher value (M = 3.07, SD = .723) to this attribute than engineering students (M = 3.01, SD = .739), but again with a very small effect size (d = .082). Furthermore, the results show that engineering students place a significantly higher weighting (M = 3.43, SD = .745) on job security (Hypothesis 1d) than business students (M = 3.38, SD = .714). Yet, the effect size is less than small (d = .068). Hypothesis 1e claims that business students place a higher weighting on employer success in the market than engineering students. The S-N-K test shows that the hypothesized difference is significant, with business students (M = 3.12, SD = .719) valuing employer success more than do engineering students (M = 3.03, SD = .779), but with a very small effect size (d = .120).

Gender

Potential differences between male and female students can be analyzed by means of t-tests for independent samples in order to gauge statistical significance. The results, displayed in Table 14, indicate highly significant (12) or significant (1) differences between male and female students for thirteen out of fifteen attributes. Only with regard to the possibility of working abroad and employer success in the market, males and females do not seem to differ significantly. Female students show significantly greater preferences for professional development (M = 3.47, SD = .643 for females, M = 3.36, SD = .690 for males, d = .165), friendly colleagues (M = 3.56, SD = .590 for females, M = 3.45, SD = .652 for males, d = .177), and job security (M = 3.55, SD = .637 for females, M = 3.34, SD = .765 for males, d = .298) than males. This lends preliminary support to Hypotheses 2b, 2c, and 2d. Yet, when effect sizes are considered, only the attribute of job security is characterized by a relevant, small

Table 14: Influence of Students' Gender: Results of the T-Test

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
										95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference		Lower	Upper
EC 01 Products / services	Equal variances assumed	697.439	.000	-20.507	153655	.000	-.081	.004		-.089	-.073
	Equal variances not assumed			-20.457	150388.0	.000	-.081	.004		-.089	-.073
EC 02 Job work tasks	Equal variances assumed	437.449	.000	-23.585	153655	.000	-.074	.003		-.080	-.068
	Equal variances not assumed			-23.505	149495.1	.000	-.074	.003		-.080	-.068
EC 03 Friendly colleagues	Equal variances assumed	1184.113	.000	-36.226	153655	.000	-.115	.003		-.121	-.109
	Equal variances not assumed			-36.054	148047.4	.000	-.115	.003		-.121	-.109
EC 04 Innovation	Equal variances assumed	270.129	.000	13.688	153655	.000	.052	.004		.045	.060
	Equal variances not assumed			13.673	151536.5	.000	.052	.004		.045	.060
EC 05 Job security	Equal variances assumed	3016.973	.000	-60.505	153655	.000	-.217	.004		-.224	-.210
	Equal variances not assumed			-59.977	142719.6	.000	-.217	.004		-.224	-.210
EC 06 Employer leadership style	Equal variances assumed	57.469	.000	-16.826	153655	.000	-.063	.004		-.071	-.056
	Equal variances not assumed			-16.811	151645.1	.000	-.063	.004		-.071	-.056
EC 07 Location	Equal variances assumed	179.710	.000	-38.971	153655	.000	-.166	.004		-.175	-.158
	Equal variances not assumed			-38.807	148638.1	.000	-.166	.004		-.175	-.158
EC 08 Employer success in the market	Equal variances assumed	1.416	.234	-1.000	153655	.317	-.004	.004		-.012	.004
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.000	152237.3	.317	-.004	.004		-.012	.004
EC 09 Level of responsibility given to staff	Equal variances assumed	22.155	.000	-25.835	153655	.000	-.090	.003		-.097	-.083
	Equal variances not assumed			-25.763	150090.2	.000	-.090	.003		-.097	-.083
EC 10 Possibility of working abroad	Equal variances assumed	12.163	.000	.168	153655	.866	.001	.005		-.009	.011
	Equal variances not assumed			.168	152433.4	.866	.001	.005		-.009	.011
EC 11 Professional development/training	Equal variances assumed	228.850	.000	-32.194	153655	.000	-.110	.003		-.116	-.103
	Equal variances not assumed			-32.085	149495.9	.000	-.110	.003		-.116	-.103
EC 12 Promotion opportunities	Equal variances assumed	1.620	.203	2.524	153655	.012	.008	.003		.002	.015
	Equal variances not assumed			2.524	152153.1	.012	.008	.003		.002	.015
EC 13 Corporate social responsibility	Equal variances assumed	3908.220	.000	-58.623	153655	.000	-.241	.004		-.249	-.232
	Equal variances not assumed			-58.309	147320.6	.000	-.241	.004		-.249	-.232
EC 14 Starting salary	Equal variances assumed	7.393	.007	-16.263	153655	.000	-.061	.004		-.068	-.053
	Equal variances not assumed			-16.219	150170.5	.000	-.061	.004		-.068	-.053
EC 15 Work-life balance	Equal variances assumed	775.434	.000	-40.264	153655	.000	-.146	.004		-.153	-.139
	Equal variances not assumed			-40.052	147446.7	.000	-.146	.004		-.153	-.139

effect. In comparison, male students place a significantly higher value on promotion opportunities (Hypothesis 2e) than female students; however the means only differ very slightly (M = 3.52, SD = .639 for males and M = 3.51, SD = .637 for females) and the effect size is less than small (d = .016). The results do not indicate preliminary support of Hypothesis 2a, which claims that male students attach greater value to starting salary than females. Female students even seem to show greater preferences for starting salary than males (with M = 3.07, SD = .711 for females and M = 3.01, SD = .752 for males, d = .082).

Academic achievement

Based upon their mean importance ratings, self-reported high potentials differ significantly from average achievers in thirteen out of fifteen attribute evaluations. Table 15 shows the results of the t-test, revealing that only with regard to employer success in the market and starting salary, no significant differences between the two groups can be found. As far as the detailed hypotheses are concerned, high potentials show significantly higher preferences for promotion opportunities (High pot.: M = 3.56, SD = .625, Average ach.: M = 3.51, SD = .639, d = .079) and professional development/training (High pot.: M = 3.49, SD = .659, Average ach.: M = 3.41, SD = .669, d = .120). However, both attributes only reveal very small effects, which cannot even be considered ‘small’ according to Cohen (1988, 1992). With regard to the preferences of average students, they attach a significantly higher value to job security (Average ach.: M = 3.47, SD = .696, High pot.: M = 3.31, SD = .777, d = .217), revealing a relevant, small effect. Average students also value friendly colleagues more than do high potentials (Average ach.: M = 3.51, SD = .618, High pot.: M = 3.46, SD = .652, d = .079), but with a more than small effect size.

Age

Table 16 depicts the correlations between age and the fifteen employer attributes, revealing highly significant correlations for all characteristics except ‘Innovation’. This lends preliminary support to the hypotheses regarding the influence of age. The correlation coefficient r can be directly interpreted as effect size (Bortz & Döring, 2006; Franke & Richey Jr., 2010). Consequently, the bivariate results suggest that the effect of students’ age on the evaluation of attractiveness attributes is less than small, not reaching 0.2 in any case.

Table 15: Influence of Students' Academic Achievement: Results of the T-Test

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
EC 01 Products / services	Equal variances assumed	135.919	.000	3.619	153655	.000	.021	.006	.010	.032
	Equal variances not assumed			3.493	26481.190	.000	.021	.006	.009	.033
EC 02 Job work tasks	Equal variances assumed	40.218	.000	-13.714	153655	.000	-.063	.005	-.073	-.054
	Equal variances not assumed			-13.813	27264.732	.000	-.063	.005	-.072	-.054
EC 03 Friendly colleagues	Equal variances assumed	144.687	.000	10.804	153655	.000	.051	.005	.041	.060
	Equal variances not assumed			10.383	26406.949	.000	.051	.005	.041	.060
EC 04 Innovation	Equal variances assumed	203.283	.000	-9.386	153655	.000	-.053	.006	-.064	-.042
	Equal variances not assumed			-9.152	26660.196	.000	-.053	.006	-.064	-.041
EC 05 Job security	Equal variances assumed	454.037	.000	30.423	153655	.000	.162	.005	.151	.172
	Equal variances not assumed			28.048	25739.677	.000	.162	.006	.150	.173
EC 06 Employer leadership style	Equal variances assumed	37.475	.000	-5.325	153655	.000	-.030	.006	-.040	-.019
	Equal variances not assumed			-5.272	26936.703	.000	-.030	.006	-.041	-.019
EC 07 Location	Equal variances assumed	8.884	.003	7.679	153655	.000	.048	.006	.036	.061
	Equal variances not assumed			7.501	26689.639	.000	.048	.006	.036	.061
EC 08 Employer success in the market	Equal variances assumed	15.114	.000	-.479	153655	.632	-.003	.006	-.014	.009
	Equal variances not assumed			-.472	26847.831	.637	-.003	.006	-.014	.009
EC 09 Level of responsibility given to staff	Equal variances assumed	103.061	.000	-14.281	153655	.000	-.073	.005	-.083	-.063
	Equal variances not assumed			-14.255	27089.889	.000	-.073	.005	-.083	-.063
EC 10 Possibility of working abroad	Equal variances assumed	22.894	.000	-12.988	153655	.000	-.098	.008	-.113	-.083
	Equal variances not assumed			-12.957	27080.676	.000	-.098	.008	-.113	-.083
EC 11 Professional development/training	Equal variances assumed	17.837	.000	-16.744	153655	.000	-.084	.005	-.094	-.074
	Equal variances not assumed			-16.919	27327.861	.000	-.084	.005	-.094	-.074
EC 12 Promotion opportunities	Equal variances assumed	100.442	.000	-11.992	153655	.000	-.057	.005	-.067	-.048
	Equal variances not assumed			-12.187	27441.954	.000	-.057	.005	-.067	-.048
EC 13 Corporate social responsibility	Equal variances assumed	299.133	.000	7.324	153655	.000	.045	.006	.033	.057
	Equal variances not assumed			6.988	26284.348	.000	.045	.006	.032	.057
EC 14 Starting salary	Equal variances assumed	29.266	.000	-1.527	153655	.127	-.008	.005	-.019	.002
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.500	26792.889	.134	-.008	.006	-.019	.003
EC 15 Work-life balance	Equal variances assumed	155.894	.000	12.786	153655	.000	.068	.005	.058	.079
	Equal variances not assumed			12.144	26209.680	.000	.068	.006	.057	.079

Table 16: Influence of Students' Age: Correlations

	Pearson Correlation (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)
EC01 Products / services	.012	.000
EC02 Job work tasks	.039	.000
EC03 Friendly colleagues	.024	.000
EC04 Innovation	.004	.139
EC05 Job security	-.038	.000
EC06 Employer leadership style	.061	.000
EC07 Location	.014	.000
EC08 Employer success in the market	-.052	.000
EC09 Level of responsibility given to staff	.038	.000
EC10 Possibility of working abroad	-.092	.000
EC11 Professional development/training	.038	.000
EC12 Promotion opportunities	-.041	.000
EC13 Corporate social responsibility	.007	.006
EC14 Starting salary	-.014	.000
EC15 Work-life balance	.015	.000

5.2.2 Tests for Country Differences

In order to determine whether the mean evaluations of the fifteen employer attractiveness attributes differ across countries, an ANOVA was conducted. The results show highly significant differences for every attribute (see Table 17). However, the attributes vary to a different degree across countries. For example, the attributes 'employer success in the market' ($s^2_{between}$ = 9536.55) and 'job security' ($s^2_{between}$ = 8738.572) vary relatively strongly while the attributes 'location' ($s^2_{between}$ = 1720.728), 'friendly colleagues' ($s^2_{between}$ = 2054.739), and 'level of responsibility given to staff' ($s^2_{between}$ = 2380.242) show relatively less variance across countries. In addition, 'location' is characterized by an especially high within-country variance (s^2_{within} = 106716.534).

As far as the means of the attractiveness attributes (see Table 18) are concerned, the participating countries can be characterized according to their rank order of preferred attributes. In Germany, for example, 'job work tasks' are averagely rated as most important (M = 3.55), followed by 'friendly colleagues' (M = 3.46) and 'profes-

Table 17: Between-Country Differences: ANOVA Results

EC		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
EC01 Products / services	Between Groups	3537.726	23	153.814	266.528***
	Within Groups	88662.166	153633	.577	
	Total	92199.892	153656		
EC02 Job work tasks	Between Groups	3594.766	23	156.294	438.120***
	Within Groups	54806.779	153633	.357	
	Total	58401.546	153656		
EC03 Friendly colleagues	Between Groups	2054.739	23	89.336	238.407***
	Within Groups	57569.693	153633	.375	
	Total	59624.432	153656		
EC04 Innovation	Between Groups	5511.955	23	239.650	460.279***
	Within Groups	79991.041	153633	.521	
	Total	85502.996	153656		
EC05 Job security	Between Groups	8738.572	23	379.938	851.386***
	Within Groups	68559.998	153633	.446	
	Total	77298.570	153656		
EC06 Employer leadership style	Between Groups	4616.141	23	200.702	388.778***
	Within Groups	79311.213	153633	.516	
	Total	83927.354	153656		
EC07 Location	Between Groups	1720.728	23	74.814	107.705***
	Within Groups	106716.534	153633	.695	
	Total	108437.262	153656		
EC08 Employer success in the market	Between Groups	9536.555	23	414.633	757.460***
	Within Groups	84098.521	153633	.547	
	Total	93635.075	153656		
EC09 Level of responsibility given to staff	Between Groups	2380.242	23	103.489	229.210***
	Within Groups	69365.505	153633	.452	
	Total	71745.747	153656		
EC10 Possibility of working abroad	Between Groups	6117.451	23	265.976	272.791***
	Within Groups	149794.986	153633	.975	
	Total	155912.438	153656		
EC11 Professional development/ training	Between Groups	5276.219	23	229.401	556.562***
	Within Groups	63323.612	153633	.412	
	Total	68599.830	153656		

EC		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
EC12 Promotion opportunities	Between Groups	3127.263	23	135.968	351.815***
	Within Groups	59375.391	153633	.386	
	Total	62502.654	153656		
EC13 Corporate social responsibility	Between Groups	4010.747	23	174.380	275.201***
	Within Groups	97349.090	153633	.634	
	Total	101359.837	153656		
EC14 Starting salary	Between Groups	4042.215	23	175.748	345.725***
	Within Groups	78098.958	153633	.508	
	Total	82141.172	153656		
EC15 Work-life balance	Between Groups	3634.071	23	158.003	326.426***
	Within Groups	74364.394	153633	.484	
	Total	77998.465	153656		

sional development/training' (M = 3.32). In comparison, Romanian students averagely value 'professional development/training' highest (M = 3.80), followed by 'promotion opportunities' (M = 3.72) and 'job security' (M = 3.59). Again, differences in means between countries are often relatively small, so that their practical relevance cannot be judged at this point.

However, a closer look at the attributes' means in Table 18 leads to the assumption that some countries might be more alike than others based on their average evaluation. For example, the item 'promotion opportunities' was averagely valued highest by Bulgaria (M = 3.75), Czech Republic (M = 3.60), Greece (M = 3.58), Slovakia (M = 3.69), and Turkey (M = 3.78), which are all eastern European countries. In contrast, the item 'job work tasks' was averagely valued highest by Austria (M = 3.70), Denmark (M = 3.59), Finland (M = 3.65), France (M = 3.69), Germany (M = 3.55), the Netherlands (M = 3.58), Sweden (M = 3.68), and Switzerland (M = 3.69), which are all western European countries.

Another interesting evaluation is the rank order of countries based on their mean evaluation of each attractiveness attribute. For example, the item 'products/services' was averagely valued highest in Turkey (M = 3.36) and Portugal (M = 3.15), and lowest in the Czech Republic (M = 2.67) and Denmark (M = 2.59). When examining all attractiveness attributes, it strikes that some countries, such as Turkey, Romania or

Table 18: Attribute Means per Country

COUNTRY	EC01 Products / services	EC02 Job work tasks	EC03 Friendly col-leagues	EC04 Innovation	EC05 Job secu-rity	EC06 Employer leader-ship style	EC07 Location	EC08 Employer success in the market	EC09 Level of responsi-bility given to staff	EC10 Possibility of working abroad	EC11 Profes-sional develop-ment/trai-ning	EC12 Promotion oppor-tunities	EC13 Corporate social responsi-bility	EC14 Starting salary	EC15 Work-life balance
1 Austria	2.97	3.70	3.58	2.96	3.24	3.28	2.95	2.78	3.33	2.87	3.49	3.45	2.87	2.84	3.43
2 Belgium	2.81	3.29	3.54	2.99	3.40	3.05	3.05	2.78	3.13	2.49	3.25	3.42	2.80	2.99	3.36
3 Bulgaria	3.05	3.31	3.61	3.22	3.70	3.42	2.98	3.40	3.36	2.72	3.71	3.75	3.10	3.30	3.25
4 Czech Republic	2.67	3.22	3.51	2.97	3.46	3.39	3.04	3.07	3.07	2.57	3.49	3.60	2.77	3.18	3.22
5 Denmark	2.59	3.59	3.20	3.05	3.31	3.24	2.83	2.62	3.32	2.58	3.14	3.19	2.92	2.74	3.19
6 Finland	2.75	3.65	3.58	2.77	3.40	3.20	3.14	2.37	2.98	2.42	2.88	3.24	2.72	2.87	3.46
7 France	2.79	3.69	3.53	2.91	2.95	2.99	2.91	2.91	3.20	2.97	3.28	3.67	2.73	2.93	3.20
8 Germany	2.90	3.55	3.46	2.90	3.20	3.12	2.92	2.81	3.10	2.58	3.32	3.28	2.61	2.83	3.31
9 Greece	2.89	3.35	3.30	3.08	3.21	3.15	2.94	3.26	3.22	2.73	3.57	3.58	2.93	3.06	3.45
10 Hungary	2.87	3.47	3.49	2.98	3.73	3.32	3.20	3.13	3.04	2.77	3.35	3.52	2.79	3.28	3.61
11 Ireland (Republic)	2.99	3.29	3.41	3.18	3.45	3.17	3.02	3.14	3.14	2.74	3.46	3.33	2.79	2.98	3.40
12 Italy	3.02	3.32	3.42	3.32	3.55	3.07	3.10	3.15	3.31	2.84	3.39	3.47	2.98	2.87	3.41
13 Netherlands	2.91	3.58	3.47	2.98	3.32	3.14	2.98	2.77	3.22	2.41	3.26	3.29	2.68	3.02	3.32
14 Norway	2.82	3.62	3.72	2.70	3.13	3.04	2.97	2.60	3.10	2.44	3.58	3.36	2.66	2.87	3.25
15 Poland	2.74	3.35	3.37	3.09	3.50	3.21	2.96	3.07	3.17	2.36	3.67	3.63	2.84	3.20	3.43
16 Portugal	3.15	3.56	3.49	3.45	3.60	3.06	2.98	3.48	3.40	2.80	3.48	3.50	3.13	3.05	3.55
17 Romania	3.11	3.47	3.53	3.41	3.59	3.20	2.91	3.24	3.39	3.22	3.80	3.72	3.02	3.17	3.51
18 Russia	2.85	3.10	3.43	3.12	3.35	3.10	2.63	3.19	3.25	2.97	3.84	3.76	2.90	3.10	3.09
19 Slovakia	2.96	3.30	3.41	3.14	3.61	3.41	3.09	3.22	3.21	2.86	3.43	3.68	2.96	3.27	3.42
20 Spain	3.03	3.54	3.69	3.22	3.60	2.90	3.10	3.10	3.27	2.84	3.50	3.48	3.10	2.94	3.60
21 Sweden	2.98	3.68	3.59	3.24	3.26	3.11	2.95	2.70	3.26	2.81	3.56	3.31	2.88	2.91	3.22
22 Switzerland	2.99	3.68	3.52	3.07	3.10	3.13	2.96	2.81	3.19	2.80	3.33	3.33	2.80	2.79	3.34
23 Turkey	3.36	3.48	3.09	3.53	3.66	3.60	2.93	3.46	3.49	3.16	3.65	3.78	3.35	3.05	3.40
24 United Kingdom	3.01	3.36	3.35	3.06	3.36	3.16	3.07	3.09	3.17	2.88	3.49	3.31	2.89	3.05	3.26
Total	2.92	3.48	3.51	3.10	3.45	3.16	3.03	3.04	3.20	2.76	3.42	3.51	2.89	3.04	3.41

Bulgaria, have noticeable high means for a majority of attributes compared to other countries. Turkey, for example, is among the top five countries with highest means for ten out of fifteen items. In contrast, other countries have comparatively low means for a majority of attributes, such as Denmark scoring among the bottom three countries for eight attributes. The question that arises out of this observation is if e.g., Turkish students really find all of the respective ten attributes that important and value them strongly or if they generally tend to use the extreme end of the scale. This leads to the question of potential extreme responding of participants, a facet of response style which has been introduced in Chapter 4.1.3.

In order to gain further insight into this question, each country's mean score across all attributes was analyzed, which should indicate if there is any systematic bias with regard to the mean propensity to extreme positive responding. Table 19 shows that the mean scores across all fifteen attributes range from 3.40 (Turkey) to 3.03 (Finland). The countries with relatively high means are mainly southern European countries, whereas the countries with comparatively lower means tend to be from northern or central Europe.

In order to verify if there are significant differences between the assumed country groups, the table was split up into two groups based on country means, the first one including mainly southern countries with higher means (i.e. Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Hungary, Italy, Austria, and Greece) and the second including the rest of the countries. Table 20 depicts the results of the performed t-test, which reveals a significant difference between the mainly northern and mainly southern countries.

As with all significance tests conducted in this project, due to the large sample size the effect size has to be taken into account. Calculating with the data of Table 20, the result is a *d* of 0.46, which indicates a medium effect. Thus, a country- or culture-based bias caused by extreme responding might have occurred.

Extreme response style (ERS) can be explained as the tendency of some people to use extreme categories (e.g., most important) while others avoid extremes and tend to favor less extreme choices (e.g., somewhat important). Respondents then follow the extreme or non-extreme pattern regardless of their real attitude strength towards given items (Greenleaf, 1992b; Smith, 2003). Hence, the category choice might re-

Table 19: Mean Scores per Country across all Attributes

	Mean (responses to EC01 ... EC15)
23 Turkey	3.40
17 Romania	3.35
03 Bulgaria	3.32
16 Portugal	3.31
19 Slovakia	3.26
20 Spain	3.26
10 Hungary	3.24
12 Italy	3.21
01 Austria	3.18
09 Greece	3.18
18 Russia	3.18
15 Poland	3.17
24 United Kingdom	3.17
11 Ireland (Republic)	3.17
21 Sweden	3.16
04 Czech Republic	3.15
22 Switzerland	3.12
07 France	3.11
13 Netherlands	3.09
02 Belgium	3.09
08 Germany	3.06
14 Norway	3.06
05 Denmark	3.03
06 Finland	3.03

present a response set instead of substantive gradation of opinion (Smith, 2003). For positive worded items, as in this project, extreme positive responding can inflate scale scores. If responses are at least partly based on content, as can be assumed in this case, extreme responding might bias scores in the direction of the deviation of the scale mean from the midpoint of the scale (Baumgartner & Steenkamp, 2001). As the scale mean of the employer attractiveness attributes is above the hypothetic midpoint (as there is no real midpoint) in most cases, extreme responding leads to even more positive scores because for most people the bias is upward (Baumgartner & Steenkamp, 2001).

Table 20: Difference between Mainly Northern and Southern Countries: T-Test

Group Statistics

	North vs. South	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
mean_response	1 mainly northern countries	71517	3.12	.316	.001
	2 mainly southern countries	82140	3.27	.330	.001

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
mean_response	Equal variances assumed	134.357	.000	-90.753	153655	.000	-.150	.002	-.154	-.147
	Equal variances not assumed			-91.015	152222.7	.000	-.150	.002	-.154	-.147

Previous cross-national research indicates that the tendency to extreme responding can vary across ethnic groups or national cultures (e.g., Bachmann & O'Malley, 1984; Chen & Lee, 1995; Chun, Campbell, & Yoo, 1974; Hayashi, 1992; Hui & Triandis, 1989; Lee & Green, 1991). For example, Asians in general, and Japanese in particular, tend to avoid extreme categories (Chen & Lee, 1995; Chun et al., 1974; Hayashi, 1992; Lee & Green, 1991). Hispanic respondents seem more likely to use extreme categories than non-Hispanics, and Southern Europeans also seem to prefer extreme and exaggerated statements (Hui & Triandis, 1989). However, it is often not clear if these differences in category selection are caused by cultural differences or by structural differences in other factors (e.g., education, age, or income) related to preference patterns (Greenleaf, 1992b; Greenfield, 1997). Some researchers have indeed found significant relationships between extreme responding and personality variables (Berg & Collier, 1953; Crandall, 1982; Norman, 1969; Zax, Gardiner, & Lowy, 1964).

There are several possible ways to compensate for extreme response style, most of them being ex ante methods associated with scale construction. Experts recommend the implementation of a multitrait, multimeasurement design, e.g., response scales can be varied, or ranking instead of rating may be used (Hui & Triandis, 1989; van Herk, 2000). However, ranking items forces respondents to complete a more difficult task, and measurement differentiation is lost (van Herk, 2000). Another possibility consists of achieving functional equivalence on the scale instead of matching translated terms. For example, as Japanese tend to avoid extreme scale ends with strong labels, these labels could be softened for Japanese respondents, e.g., 'strongly

agree' and 'agree' would be rendered into 'agree' and 'tend to agree' instead (Smith, 2003). When response styles are suspected of influencing results, the administration of a special questionnaire with items to assess response style is recommended as a valuable tool to interpret potential cross-cultural differences (van de Vijver, 2003a). A general problem in measuring response styles is not to confound stylistic variance with substantive variance, in other words to differentiate between treating ERS as a source of bias or as respondents' extreme true feelings (Greenleaf, 1992b). For example, as mentioned above, it is not clear if Turkish students really value the given items so strongly or if they generally prefer extreme statements. This issue can be dealt with through the assessment of stylistic responding across many different items with heterogeneous content (Baumgartner & Steenkamp, 2001). When extreme responding is defined as the number or proportion of heterogeneous items a respondent rated on the most extreme categories, several approaches to its measurement exist (Bachmann & O'Malley, 1984; Chen & Lee, 1995; Greenleaf, 1992b; Hui & Triandis, 1985; Marín, G., Gamba, & Marín, B. V., 1992; Stening & Everett, 1984).

If it is not possible to develop instruments that minimize opportunities for stylistic responding, as in this project, Baumgartner and Steenkamp (2001) recommend controlling for response style effects post hoc by purifying scale scores. However, this requires both positively and negatively worded items from the same scale, or items that are heterogeneous in content. After calculating suitable response style indices, respondents' scores on the substantive scales should be regressed on the response style indices. The substantive analyses can then be conducted on the residualized scores (cf. Baumgartner & Steenkamp, 2001). Yet, the method only works with multi-item measures developed for the assessment of ERS, which are not available for the survey used in this project. Hence, the results of the present t-test indicate that extreme responding could have inflated scores on some of the attractiveness items, but these effects cannot be controlled for. Nevertheless, a potential bias has to be taken into account when interpreting the results of the main analyses yet to come. Summarizing, significant differences in attribute evaluations between countries do exist. Yet, it still has to be assessed where these differences might arise from. In addition, it has to be further examined how much variance can be attributed to the country-level at all, and how much variance is determined by the individual level. This will be done by means of HLM in the following sections.

5.3 Hypothesis Tests: Multilevel Analysis

As introduced in the methodological discussion in Chapter 4.2, the multilevel analysis for each research model will be performed in three steps, calculating the intercept-only model, the random intercept (RI) model, and the random intercept and random slope (RS) model (Hox, 2002; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002; Wieseke et al., 2008). Each research model will be analyzed separately. At this stage, only the results of the final step, i.e. the RI and RS model, will be fully displayed in order to test the hypotheses. As the GLOBE data on cultural dimensions is not available for all 24 countries included in the survey, the multilevel analysis will be based on 90,944 students on the individual level nested in 18 countries at the macro level. The group sizes range from 926 respondents in Greece to 17,200 respondents in France, with an average of 5,052 per country.

This large group size per country is claimed to counteract the relatively small number of groups, leading to good power (Hofman, 1997). The descriptive statistics for the

Table 21: Descriptive Statistics (Multilevel Analysis)

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Main Course	90944	0	1	.57	.495
Gender	90944	0	1	.43	.496
Age	90944	17	35	22.37	3.053
EC03 Friendly colleagues	90944	1	4	3.48	.630
EC05 Job security	90944	1	4	3.39	.739
EC08 Employer success in the market	90944	1	4	3.06	.756
EC11 Professional development/training	90944	1	4	3.38	.676
EC12 Promotion opportunities	90944	1	4	3.53	.623
Academic Achievement	90944	0	1	.13	.336
Performance Orientation	90944	5.39	6.40	5.89	.239
Future Orientation	90944	4.33	5.91	5.33	.383
Humane Orientation	90944	5.20	5.81	5.55	.155
Uncertainty Avoidance	90944	3.24	5.76	4.45	.633
GNI/capita (US$)	90944	8730	58930	32268.67	14782.098
Valid N (listwise)	90944				

whole sample are displayed in Table 21.[64] As multilevel analysis is particularly sensitive to multicollinearity, this potential impact was checked for before performing the main analyses for each model. Through the calculation of an ordinary least square regression of the direct effects, the variance inflation factor (VIF) of each variable can be determined. For all of the six models, the VIF values range between 1.007 and 2.703, staying far below the recommended threshold of 10 (Chin, 1998). Thus, multicollinearity problems should not occur.

5.3.1 Job Security (Research Model 1)

In a first step, the intercept-only model was calculated in order to determine the variance at each of the two levels. Thus, the intra-class correlation coefficient (ICC) of the model was calculated, which indicates the amount of between-group variance of the dependent variable (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992). The ICC value for Model 1 equaled 0.076, indicating that 7.6% of the variance in the importance of job security resides between countries. According to van de Vijver and Poortinga (2002), the ICC should be larger than 0.05 for meaningful multilevel analysis. This suggested requirement is fulfilled in case of Model 1. In order to test the proposed hypotheses, the model has to include all control variables as well as the individual-level predictors main course, gender, and academic achievement, and the group-level predictors, namely Future Orientation and Uncertainty Avoidance. Following Hox (2002), the individual-level variable age and all group-level variables were grand-mean centered to make 'zero' a legitimate, observable value. After adding the predictor variables, the deviance, a measure of model misfit, went down from 190300.13 to 187834.78. The deviance is calculated from the Likelihood function (-2xLN (Likelihood), with *Likelihood* being the value of the Likelihood function at convergence and *LN* being the natural logarithm. Models with a lower deviance generally fit the data better than models with a higher deviance (Hox, 2002). Thus, the model with all predictor variables fits the data better than the intercept-only model. In the final step of model building, all regression slopes were allowed to vary in order to additionally assess if any of the slopes of any of the explanatory variables have significant variance components between groups (Hox, 2002; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). Again, the deviance dropped to 187282.20, indicating that the model with random slopes fits the data better than the random intercept model. The equations for the final Research Model 1 are:

[64] Means and standard deviations for dichotomous variables, such as main course or gender, are displayed although they cannot be interpreted like interval variables. The means indicate the percentage distribution of the two variable forms (e.g. academic achievement: M = .13, 13% of the students are represented by '1', i.e. high achievers).

Level-1 Model

$$EC05_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}*(BEO\_01_{ij}) + \beta_{2j}*(GENDER_{ij}) + \beta_{3j}*(AGE_{ij}) + \beta_{4j}*(ACHIVE2_{ij}) + r_{ij}$$

Level-2 Model

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}*(FUTURE_j) + \gamma_{02}*(UNCERT_j) + \gamma_{03}*(GNI_j) + u_{0j}$$
$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10} + u_{1j}$$
$$\beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20} + u_{2j}$$
$$\beta_{3j} = \gamma_{30} + u_{3j}$$
$$\beta_{4j} = \gamma_{40} + u_{4j}$$

Table 22 displays the results of this model.[65] First the hypotheses concerning the individual level were tested. Hypothesis 1d, which claims that engineering students place a higher weighting on job security than business students, is clearly supported by the results (coeff. = .084, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, the results indicate highly significant effects of gender and academic achievement on the importance evaluation of job security. Female students attach a higher importance to job security than males (coeff. = .175, $p < 0.001$), and the attribute is also considered significantly more important by average students than by high potentials (coeff. = -.158, $p < 0.001$). Thus, Hypothesis 2d and 3c are supported. In addition, the individual-level control variable age shows a highly significant negative relation to the importance of job security, indicating that averagely[66] younger students value job security more than do students older than the average respondent (coeff. = -.012, $p < 0.001$).

With regard to the country level, the results indicate significant to highly significant effects of Future Orientation and Uncertainty Avoidance. However, Hypothesis 6a is not supported, since the effect of Uncertainty Avoidance is in the opposite direction than the hypothesized one: Students in countries scoring lower on Uncertainty Avoidance value job security more than do students in countries scoring higher on this dimension (coeff. = -.085, $p < 0.01$). Hypothesis 7d, stating that students from countries scoring high on Future Orientation place a higher weighting on job security than students from countries with lower scores on this dimension, is supported (coeff.

[65] Note that all coefficients are the non-standardized regression coefficients. In case the value is displayed as .000, the true value does not equal zero but a very small number, such as .000007 . A comparison of the standardized coefficients will be included in Section 5.3.7.

[66] The term “averagely” is used because the variable age has been grand-mean centered. Thus, the positive or negative effect of a given determinant relates to either those students who are older than the average of all students or younger than the average.

Table 22: Job Security: Results of the RI and RS Model

Fixed Effect	**Coefficient (S.E.)**		**t-ratio**	**Hyp.**
Intercept	3.268	***	67.637	
	(.048)			
Group-Level Antecedents				
Future Orientation	.403	***	7.380	H7d
	(.055)			
Uncertainty Avoidance	-.085	**	-3.191	H6a
	(.027)			
GNI/capita	.000		1.080	H5d
	(.000)			
Individual-Level Antecedents				
Main Course	.084	**	3.146	H1d
	(.027)			
Gender	.175	***	9.518	H2d
	(.018)			
Academic Achievement	-.158	***	-10.041	H3c
	(.016)			
Individual-Level Control Variable				
Age	-.012	***	-4.520	
	(.003)			
Random Effect	Variance Component	χ^2		d.f.
Intercept, u_0	.041	3163.068	***	14
Level-1 *r*	.046			
Main Course slope, u_1	.012	353.218	***	17
Gender slope, u_2	.005	211.235	***	17
Ac. Achievement slope, u_4	.003	92.107	***	17
Age slope, u_3	.001	183.408	***	17
Explained Variance				
R^2 Level-1	.055			
R^2 Level-2	.392			

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

= .403, p < 0.001). Hypothesis 5d is not supported, as GNI/capita does not show any significant effect on the dependent variable.

As far as the random effects are concerned, the slopes of all individual-level variables show significant variance components between groups, indicating that the effects of course of study, gender, academic achievement, and age vary across countries. Furthermore, following the formula of Snijders and Bosker (1999), it can be stated that the variance explained at level 1 is 5.5% of the total variance between students studying in the same country and that the variance explained at level 2 is 39.2% of the total variance between countries.

5.3.2 Employer Success in the Market (Research Model 2)

For the second research model, the same approach as for the first model was adopted, again starting with the calculation of the ICC based on the intercept-only model. The ICC value equals 0.123, indicating that 12.3% of the variance in the importance valuation of employer success in the market lies between countries. Thus, the criterion of 0.05 for meaningful multilevel analysis (van de Vijver & Poortinga, 2002) is clearly exceeded. In the next step, a model was built which includes the individual-level predictor variables main course, gender, age, and academic achievement, as well as the group-level predictors Future Orientation, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Performance Orientation, and the control variable GNI/capita. The deviance went down from 198385.85 to 197605.55. Again, all regression slopes were allowed to vary. The deviance then dropped to 197259.72. All group-level variables as well as the individual-level variable age were grand-mean centered (Hox, 2002). The equations for the final model are:

Level-1 Model

$$EC08_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}*(BEO\_01_{ij}) + \beta_{2j}*(GENDER_{ij}) + \beta_{3j}*(AGE_{ij}) + \beta_{4j}*(ACHIVE2_{ij}) + r_{ij}$$

Level-2 Model

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}*(PERFORM_j) + \gamma_{02}*(FUTURE_j) + \gamma_{03}*(UNCERT_j) + \gamma_{04}*(GNI_j) + u_{0j}$$
$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10} + u_{1j}$$
$$\beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20} + u_{2j}$$
$$\beta_{3j} = \gamma_{30} + u_{3j}$$
$$\beta_{4j} = \gamma_{40} + u_{4j}$$

Table 23: Employer Success in the Market: Results of the RI and RS Model

Fixed Effect	**Coefficient (S.E.)**		**t-ratio**	**Hyp.**
Intercept	3.108	***	68.827	
	(.045)			
Group-Level Antecedents				
Future Orientation	.136		1.297	H7e
	(.105)			
Uncertainty Avoidance	.079		1.386	H6b
	(.057)			
Performance Orientation	-.196		-1.758	H8e
	(.112)			
Group-Level Control Variable				
GNI/capita	.000		.775	
	(.000)			
Individual-Level Antecedents				
Main Course	-.130	***	-6.823	H1e
	(.019)			
Gender	-.019		-1.169	H2f
	(.016)			
Academic Achievement	-.005		-.418	H3d
	(.012)			
Age	-.010	**	-3.716	H4c
	(.003)			
Random Effect	Variance Component	χ^2		d.f.
Intercept, u_0	.036	1230.192	***	13
Level-1 *r*	.511			
Main Course slope, u_1	.006	171.051	***	17
Gender slope, u_2	.004	155.922	***	17
Ac. Achievement slope, u_4	.001	48.119	***	17
Age slope, u_3	.000	134.493	***	17
Explained Variance				
R^2 Level-1	.070			
R^2 Level-2	.501			

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Results for Research Model 2 are depicted in Table 23. With regard to the hypotheses directed at the individual level, the data support Hypothesis 1e to a highly significant extent: Business students value employer success in the market more than do engineering students (coeff. = -.130, $p < 0.001$). Hypotheses 2f and 3d, suggesting a significant impact of gender and academic achievement, are not supported. However, Hypothesis 4c receives support, as age has a significant negative effect on the importance of employer success, indicating that this employer characteristic is more important to averagely younger students (coeff. = -.010, $p < 0.01$).

At the group level, none of the predictor variables has a significant effect on the dependent variable. Thus, the selected cultural values do not seem to influence students' importance ratings of an employer's success in the market in a meaningful way, and Hypotheses 6b, 7e, and 8e have to be rejected. Neither does the group-level control variable GNI/capita show a significant effect on the importance of employer success. The test of the random effects shows a significant variance component for the slopes of all four individual-level variables. Hence, it can be stated that the effects of main course, gender, academic achievement, and age vary between countries. Again adopting the formula of Snijders and Bosker (1999), the explained variance at both levels was calculated, which equals 7% at level 1 and 50.1% at level 2.[67]

5.3.3 Promotion Opportunities (Research Model 3)

For the research model incorporating the dependent variable promotion opportunities, the same stepwise approach described for the previous two models was followed. The calculation of the ICC results in a value of 0.069, indicating that 6.9% of the variance in the importance of promotion opportunities resides between countries. After building the random intercept model, the deviance went down from 168396.20 to 166966.02. When building the random intercept and random slope model, the individual-level variable age and all group-level variables were again grand-mean centered (Hox, 2002). The test of the random effects showed that the slope of the individual-level predictor academic achievement did not have a significant variance component between groups, which means that the degree of influence of this variable does not vary significantly between countries. Therefore, the slope was fixed, where-

[67] The explained variance of level 2 can be as high as 50.1% although none of the level 2 predictors has a significant effect. The explained variance refers to the percentage of the total level 2 variance explained by the model as a whole instead of by each single variable.

as the other slopes were allowed to vary, since they showed significant variance components. The deviance value then resulted in 166712.91. The equations for the final Research Model 3 are:

Level-1 Model

$$EC12_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}*(BEO\_01_{ij}) + \beta_{2j}*(GENDER_{ij}) + \beta_{3j}*(AGE_{ij}) + \beta_{4j}*(ACHIVE2_{ij}) + r_{ij}$$

Level-2 Model

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}*(PERFORM_j) + \gamma_{02}*(FUTURE_j) + \gamma_{03}*(HUMANE_j) + \gamma_{04}*(GNI_j) + u_{0j}$$
$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10} + u_{1j}$$
$$\beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20} + u_{2j}$$
$$\beta_{3j} = \gamma_{30} + u_{3j}$$
$$\beta_{4j} = \gamma_{40}$$

Results are displayed in Table 24. Hypothesis 1a, which states that business students value promotion opportunities more than do engineering students, is supported by the data (coeff. = -0.172, $p < 0.001$). Hypothesis 2e posits a negative relation of gender to the importance of promotion opportunities. Results support this hypothesis, indicating that male students attach a higher weighting to promotion opportunities than female students (coeff. = -0.029, $p < 0.05$). With regard to Hypothesis 3a, results strongly indicate that academic achievement is positively related to the importance of promotion opportunities, i.e. high-potential students value promotion opportunities more than do average students (coeff. = 0.039, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, Hypothesis 3a is supported. In addition, Hypothesis 4a receives support: Age shows a significant negative effect (coeff. = -0.008, $p < 0.01$), indicating that promotion opportunities are more important for students who are younger than the average respondent.

At the country level, the cultural dimension of Humane Orientation is positively related to the importance of promotion opportunities. However, Hypothesis 8c is not supported, since the influence of Humane Orientation is contrary to the hypothesized one: Students from countries with higher scores on Humane Orientation value promotion opportunities more than do students from countries with averagely lower scores (coeff. = 0.359, $p < 0.01$). The same applies to Hypothesis 8d, which states

Table 24: Promotion Opportunities: Results of the RI and RS Model

Fixed Effect	**Coefficient (S.E.)**		**t-ratio**	**Hyp.**
Intercept	3.586	***	174.868	
	(.020)			
Group-Level Antecedents				
Future Orientation	-.088		-1.347	H7b
	(.066)			
Humane Orientation	.359	**	3.377	H9c
	(.106)			
Performance Orientation	-.169	*	-2.561	H8d
	(.066)			
GNI/capita	-.000	***	-4.613	H5a
	(.000)			
Individual-Level Antecedents				
Main Course	-.172	***	-9.250	H1a
	(.019)			
Gender	-.029	*	-2.277	H2e
	(.013)			
Academic Achievement	.039	***	6.463	H3a
	(.006)			
Age	-.008	**	-3.497	H4a
	(.002)			
Random Effect	**Variance Component**	**χ^2**		**d.f.**
Intercept, u_0	.007	325.008	***	13
Level-1 *r*	.365			
Main Course slope, u_1	.006	226.757	***	17
Gender slope, u_2	.002	104.273	***	17
Age slope, u_3	.000	126.036	***	17
Explained Variance				
R^2 Level-1	.062			
R^2 Level-2	.674			

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

that students from countries scoring high on Performance Orientation attach a higher importance to promotion opportunities than students from countries scoring low on this dimension. Results indicate a significant contrary effect (coeff. = -0.169, $p < 0.05$). Hypothesis 7b, which assumes a direct effect of Future Orientation, receives no support. However, Hypothesis 5a is clearly supported: The results reveal that GNI/capita is significantly negatively related to the importance of promotion opportunities.

Thus, in countries with an averagely lower GNI/capita, promotion opportunities are relatively more important to students (coeff. = -0.000, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, following the formula of Snijders and Bosker (1999), the variance explained at level 1 is 6.2% of the total variance between students studying in the same country and the variance explained at level 2 is 67.4% of the total variance between countries.

5.3.4 Friendly Colleagues (Research Model 4)

Again starting with the intercept-only model, the ICC was calculated, which results in a value of 0.053, indicating that 5.3% of the variance in the importance of friendly colleagues resides between countries. This value just marginally exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.05 for meaningful multilevel analysis (van de Vijver & Poortinga, 2002). To test the direct effects, a model was built that includes the individual-level antecedents gender, age, and academic achievement as well as the group-level predictors Humane Orientation and Performance Orientation. The individual-level variable main course and the group-level variable GNI/capita serve as control variables. Again, all group-level variables as well as the individual-level variable age were grand-mean centered and the slopes of all individual-level variables were allowed to vary between groups. However, the slope of academic achievement did not show a significant variance component and had to be fixed. The deviance went down from 170661.85 (intercept-only model) to 170017.38 (random intercept model) and finally to 169879.77 (random intercept and random slope model). The following equations represent the final model:

Level-1 Model

$$EC03_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}*(BEO\_01_{ij}) + \beta_{2j}*(GENDER_{ij}) + \beta_{3j}*(AGE_{ij}) + \beta_{4j}*(ACHIVE2_{ij}) + r_{ij}$$

Level-2 Model

$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}*(PERFORM_j) + \gamma_{02}*(HUMANE_j) + \gamma_{03}*(GNI_j) + u_{0j}$

$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10} + u_{1j}$

$\beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20} + u_{2j}$

$\beta_{3j} = \gamma_{30} + u_{3j}$

$\beta_{4j} = \gamma_{40}$

Table 25 displays the results for Research Model 4. At the individual level, all three hypotheses, H2c, H3e, and 4d, are supported: Female students attach a significantly higher weighting to friendly colleagues than male students (coeff. = .118, $p < 0.001$), average students value friendly colleagues more than do high-potentials (coeff. = -.047, $p < 0.001$), and averagely older students value friendly colleagues more than do younger students (coeff. = .005, $p < 0.05$). The control variable main course shows a moderate impact on the importance valuation of friendly colleagues. The attribute is slightly more important to engineering students (coeff. = .026, $p < 0.05$).

On the country level, none of the hypotheses is supported, as neither Performance Orientation nor Humane Orientation show a significant relation to the evaluation of friendly colleagues. The group-level control variable GNI/capita does not show a significant effect either. The explained variance of the model equals only 1.9% at the individual level and 22.5% at the country level.

5.3.5 Starting Salary (Research Model 5)

The calculation of the ICC for the starting salary model results in a value of 0.034, which indicates that only 3.4% of the total variance in the importance of starting salary lies between countries. Although this value is below the recommended threshold of 0.05 (van de Vijver & Poortinga, 2002), the author decided to proceed with the multilevel analysis, since the variance component of the intercept (u_0) is still highly significant. In addition, Bliese (2000) suggests an ICC value of 0.01 as indicator for low non-independence, which still justifies the conduction of a multilevel analysis. Thus, the next step compromised a model including the individual-level predictor variables main course, age, and gender, as well as the group-level antecedents Future Orien tation, Humane Orientation, and Performance Orientation. Students' academic achievement was added as control variable. The deviance only went down slightly from 198191.18 for the intercept-only model to 198169.65 for the random intercept

Table 25: Friendly Colleagues: Results of the RI and RS Model

Fixed Effect	**Coefficient (S.E.)**		**t-ratio**	**Hyp.**
Intercept	3.369	***	110.658	
	(.030)			
Group-Level Antecedents				
Humane Orientation	.303		1.748	H9a
	(.173)			
Performance Orientation	.158		1.400	H8c
	(.113)			
Group-Level Control Variable				
GNI/capita	.000		.042	
	(.000)			
Individual-Level Antecedents				
Gender	.118	***	7.686	H2c
	(.015)			
Academic Achievement	-.047	***	-7.671	H3e
	(.006)			
Age	.005	*	2.290	H4d
	(.002)			
Individual-Level Control Variable				
Main Course	.026	*	2.578	
	(.010)			
Random Effect	Variance Component	χ^2		d.f.
Intercept, u_0	.016	797.609	***	14
Level-1 r	.378			
Main Course slope, u_1	.001	68.400	***	17
Gender slope, u_2	.004	128.115	***	17
Age slope, u_3	.000	77.253	***	17
Explained Variance				
R^2 Level-1	.019			
R^2 Level-2	.225			

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

model. Allowing all slopes to vary randomly between groups, the deviance then dropped to 197807.05. The equations for the final Research Model 5 are:

Level-1 Model

$$EC14_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}*(BEO\_01_{ij}) + \beta_{2j}*(GENDER_{ij}) + \beta_{3j}*(AGE_{ij}) + \beta_{4j}*(ACHIVE2_{ij}) + r_{ij}$$

Level-2 Model

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}*(PERFORM_j) + \gamma_{02}*(FUTURE_j) + \gamma_{03}*(HUMANE_j) + \gamma_{04}*(GNI_j) + u_{0j}$$
$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10} + u_{1j}$$
$$\beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20} + u_{2j}$$
$$\beta_{3j} = \gamma_{30} + u_{3j}$$
$$\beta_{4j} = \gamma_{40} + u_{4j}$$

Results of this model are depicted in Table 26. Only two of the proposed hypotheses, H4e and H5c, are supported by the data. The low ICC already indicated that differences between countries in students' evaluation of starting salary are very small. In line with this finding, none of the proposed cultural dimensions has a significant influence on the importance valuation of this attribute. The effects of the cultural dimensions are all in the hypothesized direction, but do not reach significance level. The same applies to the proposed individual-level effects of main course and gender. The only significant individual-level effect is the influence of age: As proposed, averagely younger students attach a higher importance to starting salary than older students (coeff. = -.005, $p < 0.05$). On the country-level, only economic development seems to have an impact on students' importance valuation of starting salary. As predicted, GNI/capita has a significant negative influence on the importance of starting salary, indicating that the attribute is valued more in averagely less wealthy nations (coeff. = -.000, $p < 0.01$).

The results of the random part imply that the effects of all four individual-level variables vary across countries, as each of them has a significant variance component between groups. The explained variance of the model reaches only 1.9% at level 1, but 52.7% at level 2.

Table 26: Starting Salary: Results of the RI and RS Model

Fixed Effect	**Coefficient (S.E.)**		**t-ratio**	**Hyp.**
Intercept	2.982	***	96.814	
	(.031)			
Group-Level Antecedents				
Future Orientation	-.037		-.453	H7c
	(.083)			
Humane Orientation	-.133		-.991	H9b
	(.134)			
Performance Orientation	.097		1.171	H8b
	(.083)			
GNI/capita	-.000	**	-3.794	H5c
	(.000)			
Individual-Level Antecedents				
Main Course	-.027		-1.625	H1c
	(.017)			
Gender	.001		.096	H2a
	(.015)			
Age	-.005	*	-2.525	H4e
	(.002)			
Individual-Level Control Variable				
Academic Achievement	.026		1.856	
	(.014)			
Random Effect	Variance Component	χ^2		d.f.
Intercept, u_0	.016	663.142	***	13
Level-1 r	.514			
Main Course slope, u_1	.004	206.783	***	17
Gender slope, u_2	.003	206.461	***	17
Ac. Achievement slope, u_4	.002	77.149	***	17
Age slope, u_3	.000	63.826	***	17
Explained Variance				
R^2 Level-1	.019			
R^2 Level-2	.527			

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

5.3.6 Professional Development and Training (Research Model 6)

For this research model, the ICC value equals 0.095, indicating that 9.5% of the variance in the importance of professional development and training exists between countries. The final model includes the individual-level predictor variables course of study, gender, age, and academic achievement, and the group-level antecedents Future Orientation, Performance Orientation, and GNI/capita. The latter were grand-mean centered, just like the individual-level variable age. During the three steps of model building, the deviance went down from 180894.71 (intercept-only model) to 180130.46 (random intercept model) and to 179880.79 (random intercept and random slopes model). The equations for the random intercept and random slopes model are:

Level-1 Model

$$EC11_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}*(BEO\_01_{ij}) + \beta_{2j}*(GENDER_{ij}) + \beta_{3j}*(AGE_{ij}) + \beta_{4j}*(ACHIVE2_{ij}) + r_{ij}$$

Level-2 Model

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}*(PERFORM_j) + \gamma_{02}*(FUTURE_j) + \gamma_{03}*(GNI_j) + u_{0j}$$
$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10} + u_{1j}$$
$$\beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20} + u_{2j}$$
$$\beta_{3j} = \gamma_{30} + u_{3j}$$
$$\beta_{4j} = \gamma_{40} + u_{4j}$$

Table 27 displays the results. Hypothesis 1b, which assumes that business students attach a higher importance to professional development than engineering students, clearly finds support (coeff. = -0.038, $p < 0.01$). Hypothesis 2b argues that female students value professional development and training more than do male students. Results support this hypothesis as well (coeff. = 0.090, $p < 0.001$). Hypothesis 3b, predicting that high-potential students value the opportunity for professional development and training more than do average students, is also supported by the data (coeff. = 0.044, $p < 0.01$).

In addition, age shows a significant positive relation to the dependent variable, indicating that averagely older students consider professional development more important than younger students (coeff. = 0.009, $p < 0.01$). Hence, Hypothesis 4b is also supported.

Table 27: Professional Development/Training: Results of the RI and RS Model

Fixed Effect	**Coefficient (S.E.)**		**t-ratio**	**Hyp.**
Intercept	3.403	***	60.702	
	(.056)			
Group-Level Antecedents				
Future Orientation	-.135		-1.405	H7a
	(.096)			
Performance Orientation	.257	*	2.281	H8a
	(.113)			
GNI/capita	-.000	***	-6.075	H5b
	(.000)			
Individual-Level Antecedents				
Main Course	-.038	**	-3.671	H1b
	(.010)			
Gender	.090	***	5.782	H2b
	(.015)			
Academic Achievement	.044	**	3.659	H3b
	(.012)			
Age	.009	**	3.619	H4b
	(.002)			
Random Effect	Variance Component	χ^2		d.f.
Intercept, u_0	.056	3118.489	***	14
Level-1 *r*	.422			
Main Course slope, u_1	.001	99.531	***	17
Gender slope, u_2	.004	132.842	***	17
Ac. Achievement slope, u_4	.002	42.147	***	17
Age slope, u_3	.000	175.325	***	17
Explained Variance				
R^2 Level-1	.035			
R^2 Level-2	.285			

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

With regard to the fixed effects at level 2, Hypothesis 5b and Hypothesis 8a receive support. Results indicate that students from countries scoring on average higher on Performance Orientation value the opportunity for professional development and training more than do their counterparts from less performance-oriented countries (coeff. = 0.257, $p < 0.05$). Furthermore, GNI/capita has a relatively strong, significant negative effect on the importance of professional development (coeff. = -0.000, $p < 0.001$). Hypothesis 7a, stating that students from countries scoring higher on Future Orientation value professional development more than do students from less future-oriented countries, is not supported by the data. Considering the random effects, the impact of all the applied individual-level predictor variables varies significantly across countries. Again adopting the formula suggested by Snijders and Bosker (1999), results reveal that the model explains 3.5% of the total variance of the dependent variable at the individual level. At the group level, the model explains 28.5% of the total variance between countries.

5.3.7 Summary and Overall Comparison of Effect Sizes

Table 28 and Table 29 summarize the results of the multilevel analyses with regard to individual-level and country-level influences on the six selected employer attractiveness attribute ratings.

The results of the multilevel analyses conducted for the six research models show that each model is characterized by different influences on the micro- and macro-level. In order to directly compare the effects of all incorporated variables, the regression coefficients have to be standardized. The HLM output only contains non-standardized regression coefficients, which cannot be compared to each other due to the different scales on which they were measured. Thus, following the formula quoted by Hox (2002, p. 21), the standardized regression coefficients were calculated and are depicted in Table 30.

Table 28: Hypotheses Overview – Individual Difference Variables

PREDICTORS **Hypotheses**	**Prelimin. Analysis**	**Multilevel Analysis**	**Assess-ment**
INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES			
COURSE OF STUDY	ANOVA		
H1a – Business students value *promotion opportunities* more than do engineering students.	Sig.	Sig.	Supp.
H1b – Business students value *prof. development* more than do engineering students.	Sig.	Sig.	Supp.
H1c – Business students value *starting salary* more than do engineering students.	Sig.	n. s.	Not supp.
H1d – Engineering students value *job security* more than do business students.	Sig.	Sig.	Supp.
H1e – Business students value *employer success in the market* more than do engineering students.	Sig.	Sig.	Supp.
GENDER	t-test		
H2a – Male students value *starting salary* more than do females.	n. s.	n. s.	Not supp.
H2b – Female students value *prof. development* more than do male students.	Sig.	Sig.	Supp.
H2c – Female students value *friendly colleagues* more than do male students.	Sig.	Sig.	Supp.
H2d – Female students value *job security* more than do males.	Sig.	Sig.	Supp.
H2e – Male students value *promotion opportunities* more than do female students.	Sig.	Sig.	Supp.
H2f – Male students value *employer success* more than do female students.	n. s.	n. s.	Not supp.
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT	t-test		
H3a – High achievers value *promotion opportunities* more than do average achievers.	Sig.	Sig.	Supp.
H3b – H. ach. value *prof. development* more than do av. achievers.	Sig.	Sig.	Supp.
H3c – Average achievers value *job security* more than do h. ach.	Sig.	Sig.	Supp.
H3d – H. ach. value *employer success* more than do av. achievers.	n. s.	n. s.	Not supp.
H3e – Av. achievers value *friendly colleagues* more than do h. ach.	Sig.	Sig.	Supp.

PREDICTORS **Hypotheses**	**Prelimin. Analysis**	**Multilevel Analysis**	**Assess-ment**
AGE	Corr.		
H4a – Younger students value *promotion opportunities* more than do older students.	Sig.	Sig.	Supp.
H4b – Older st. value *prof. development* more than do younger st.	Sig.	Sig.	Supp.
H4c – Younger st. value *employer success* more than do older st.	Sig.	Sig.	Supp.
H4d – Older st. value *friendly colleagues* more than do younger st.	Sig.	Sig.	Supp.
H4e – Younger st. value *starting salary* more than do older st.	Sig.	Sig.	Supp.

Sig. – Significant / n. s. – Not significant / Supp. – Supported / Not supp. – Not supported / Corr. = Correlations

Table 29: Hypotheses Overview – National Difference Variables

PREDICTORS **Hypotheses**	**Multilevel Analysis**	**Assess-ment**
NATIONAL DIFFERENCES		
GNI/Capita		
H5a – Students in economically less prosperous nations value *promotion opportunities* more than do students in more p. nations.	Sig.	Supp.
H5b – Students in economically less prosperous nations value *prof. development* more than do students in more p. nations.	Sig.	Supp.
H5c – Students in economically less prosperous nations value *starting salary* more than do students in more p. nations.	Sig.	Supp.
H5d – Students in economically less prosperous nations value *job security* more than do students in more p. nations.	n. s.	Not supp.
UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE		
H6a – Students in high UA nations value *job security* more than do students in low UA nations.	*	Not supp.
H6b – Students in high UA nations value *employer success* more than do students in low UA nations.	n. s.	Not supp.
FUTURE ORIENTATION		
H7a – Students in high FO nations value *prof. development* more than do students in low FO nations.	n. s.	Not supp.
H7b – Students in high FO nations value *promotion opportunities* more than do students in low FO nations.	n. s.	Not supp.
H7c – Students in high FO nations value *starting salary* more than do students in low FO nations.	n. s.	Not supp.

PREDICTORS **Hypotheses**	**Multilevel Analysis**	**Assess-ment**
H7d – Students in high FO nations value *job security* more than do students in low FO nations.	Sig.	Supp.
H7e – Students in high FO nations value *employer success* more than do students in low FO nations.	n. s.	Not supp.
PERFORMANCE ORIENTATION		
H8a – Students in high PO nations value *prof. development* more than do students in low PO nations.	Sig.	Supp.
H8b – Students in high PO nations value *starting salary* more than do students in low PO nations.	n. s.	Not supp.
H8c – Students in high PO nations value *friendly colleagues* less than do students in low PO nations.	n. s.	Not supp.
H8d – Students in high PO nations value *promotion opportunities* more than do students in low PO nations.	*	Not supp.
H8e – Students in high PO nations value *employer success* more than do students in low PO nations.	n. s.	Not supp.
HUMANE ORIENTATION		
H9a – Students in high HO nations value friendly colleagues more than do students in low HO nations.	n. s.	Not supp.
H9b – Students in high HO nations value starting salary less than do students in low HO nations.	n. s.	Not supp.
H9c – Students in high HO nations value promotion opportunities less than do students in low HO nations.	*	Not supp.

*Sig. – Significant / n. s. – Not significant / * - Significant contrary to the proposed hypothesis*
Supp. – Supported / Not supp. – Not supported
UA – Uncertainty Avoidance / FO – Future Orientation / PO – Performance Orientation
HO – Humane Orientation

The variable with the highest regression coefficient has the strongest effect on the dependent variable. With regard to Research Model 1, it can be stated that Future Orientation has the strongest effect on the importance of job security, followed by the individual-level predictor gender. In Research Model 2 the cultural dimensions show a moderate effect size, but the strongest effect on the importance rating of an employer's success in the market is caused by students' course of study.

Research Model 3 is characterized by a dominant effect of GNI/capita on the evaluation of promotion opportunities. Course of study also has a relatively strong impact on students' ratings of this attribute. In Research Model 4, which concerns the importance rating of friendly colleagues, the influence of students' gender is strongest,

Table 30: Standardized Regression Coefficients

Research Model 1		Research Model 2		Research Model 3	
FUTURE	.213	FUTURE	.069	FUTURE	-.056
UNCERT	-.076	UNCERT	.068	HUMANE	.104
		PERFORM	-.067	PERFORM	-.071
GNI	.022	GNI	.043	GNI	-.210
BEO_01	.057	BEO_01	-.086	BEO_01	-.139
GENDER	.118	GENDER	-.012	GENDER	-.023
AGE	-.052	AGE	-.041	AGE	-.038
ACHIVE2	-.073	ACHIVE2	-.002	ACHIVE2	.021

Research Model 4		Research Model 5		Research Model 6	
		FUTURE	-.020	FUTURE	-.077
HUMANE	.086	HUMANE	-.032		
PERFORM	.065	PERFORM	.034	PERFORM	.098
GNI	.000	GNI	-.176	GNI	-.360
BEO_01	.021	BEO_01	-.018	BEO_01	-.029
GENDER	.093	GENDER	.008	GENDER	.066
AGE	.024	AGE	-.021	AGE	.041
ACHIVE2	-.025	ACHIVE2	.012	ACHIVE2	.022

FUTURE = Future Orientation, UNCERT = Uncertainty Avoidance,
HUMANE = Humane Orientation, PERFORM = Performance Orientation,
BEO_01 = Main Course, ACHIVE2 = Academic Achievement

followed by the country's degree of Humane Orientation. However, the effect of Humane Orientation proved to be non-significant in the multilevel analysis. The standardized coefficients of Research Model 5 again indicate a dominant influence of GNI/capita on the importance ratings of starting salary. GNI/capita had also been the only significant influence at the macro level. This dominant influence of a country's national wealth is repeated in Research Model 6, indicating that the effect of GNI/capita on students' weighting of professional development is considerably stronger than all other influencing variables.

Summarizing, it can be stated that the effect sizes of the proposed influences on the individual and group level vary according to which dependent variable has been chosen. When comparing the research models, there is no dominant influence of a single predictor or a group of predictors, such as cultural dimensions or individual-

level antecedents. However, a nation's GNI/capita seems to have a relatively strong effect on three of the examined variables, namely promotion opportunities, starting salary and professional development/training. In contrast, other variables, such as friendly colleagues, are hardly influenced by national wealth at all.

5.4 Segmentation of the European Graduate Market: Cluster Analysis

As shown in the multilevel analyses, graduates' preferences and evaluation behavior are determined by micro-level variables, such as course of study or gender, and macro-level variables, such as GNI/capita. Variables of both levels are also used in the process of international market segmentation (see Chapter 3.4.1). However, the results of the multilevel analyses also suggest that differences in students' evaluation of the selected employer attractiveness attributes can be attributed to the country of study only to a relatively small extent. A major part of the variance in attribute evaluations resides at the individual level, indicating larger within-group differences. The purpose of the market segmentation to be conducted in the following is to reassess this finding of the relatively small impact of students' country of study. By applying benefit segmentation, students will be classified into segments according to the benefits, i.e. employer attractiveness attributes, they value most strongly. If students within the same country share highly similar preference structures with regard to their importance valuations, which differentiate them from students of other countries, a likely outcome of the segmentation process will be country clusters. If students share similar preferences regardless of their country of study, i.e. cross-nationally, the most likely outcome will be transnational segments.

One of the most frequently applied techniques for market segmentation is cluster analysis.[68] By means of cluster analysis, multivariate data can be classified in a limited set of non-overlapping categories. Each category shares a common characteristic that distinguishes it from members of another category (van de Vijver, 2003b). According to their similarity with regard to the selected segmentation base, individuals are grouped into these categories. The final categories, i.e. clusters, should be as

[68] Cluster analysis can be classified as heuristic method. Other heuristic methods for market segmentation include Q- or R-factor analysis. However, cluster analysis has been deemed methodologically more adequate for international market segmentation (for further details see Steenkamp & Ter Hofstede, 2002, p. 203). Besides heuristic methods, model-based methods provide an alternative way to identify segments, based on a particular representation of reality. For more information, see Steenkamp and Ter Hofstede (2002).

homogenous as possible internally and heterogeneous externally (Lindridge, 2003). For more detailed information on the technique of cluster analysis, see Everitt (2001). After reviewing the literature on market segmentation in Chapter 3.4.1, it seems to be promising to use benefits as segmentation base to investigate the potential for a standardized employer brand positioning in the European student market. The heterogeneity of benefit preferences and expectations of different target groups across countries makes benefit segmentation a valuable tool to achieve a benefit-oriented alignment of the employer branding strategy (Petkovic, 2008). In the employer branding context, benefit segmentation should lead to the identification of segments of students who seek the same types of benefits when looking for a potential employer (cf. Dowling, 2004). Thus, the fifteen employer attractiveness attributes from the *trendence* survey will be used as segmentation basis for the cluster analysis.

Within the classification of segmentation bases (Hassan et al., 2003; Steenkamp & Ter Hofstede, 2002; Wedel & Kamakura, 2003), they constitute an unobservable, domain-specific base at the micro-level. When selecting possible segmentation bases, a company might first choose macro-level bases, such as characteristics of its target countries (e.g. economic development), before selecting the micro-bases. This proceeding of selecting aggregate data bases as well as disaggregate bases is referred to as two-stage segmentation approach (Steenkamp & Ter Hofstede, 2002) or integrated approach (Hassan et al., 2003). Within the analysis in this thesis, the countries that participated in the survey represent a first geographic selection. Russia has to be excluded from the cluster analysis, since the data cannot be weighted in order to ensure representativeness.[69] Thus, 23 countries will be included in the cluster analysis. Furthermore, students' course of study is used to analyze two segments separately, namely business and engineering students. Due to the diverging preferences of these two subgroups, it seems reasonable to analyze them separately, since the focus of the analysis is to explore the impact of students' country of study. As suggested by Moroko and Uncles (2009), other segmentation bases besides benefits might be suitable in the employer branding context. However, for the purpose of this thesis, the use of benefits seems to be most promising if other bases are excluded. In addition, the selection of additional bases strongly depends on the individual recruitment strategy of each company. By focusing on benefits, i.e. employer attractiveness attributes, the identified segments can be differentiated from one an-

[69] As outlined in Chapter 5.1., Russia is not included in the Eurostat (2009) database. Therefore, weighting factors cannot be determined. The reasons for weighting the data as a prerequisite for international market segmentation will be further discussed in Section 5.4.1.

other solely through the total configuration of attractiveness attributes sought (cf. Haley, 1968).

5.4.1 Analysis Process

Following the selection of the segmentation basis and the level of aggregation, several prerequisites should be fulfilled for international market segmentation. An important conceptual issue is the assurance of construct equivalence (Steenkamp & Ter Hofstede, 2002). Construct equivalence of the employed segmentation basis has already been discussed in Chapter 4.1.3 of this thesis, acknowledging some limitations with regard to the *trendence* survey. In general, however, the degree of equivalence of domain-specific segmentation bases, such as the attribute evaluations, depends on the similarity of the socio-cultural environment among countries (Kamakura, Novak, Steenkamp, & Verhallen, 1993). Given the conditions that the sample is composed of mainly European countries with a similar socio-cultural environment, and that only small country-based differences have been identified with regard to the segmentation basis (see Chapter 5.3), equivalence should be relatively high. With regard to methodological prerequisites, Steenkamp and Ter Hofstede (2002) recommend the assurance of measure equivalence, which has equally been discussed in Chapter 4.1.3. Whereas calibration equivalence and translation equivalence should not cause any problems, score equivalence might be more critical. As outlined in Chapter 5.2.2 in the examination of country differences, a potential bias caused by extreme response style might have occurred. This has to be kept in mind when contemplating the market segmentation results. A final requirement with regard to international market segmentation on disaggregate level data regards the proportionality of sample size and population size. Steenkamp and Ter Hofstede (2002, p. 205) state that "if international samples are not proportional to population sizes, the pooled sample is not representative of the pooled population and some kind of reweighting should be applied at the estimation stage." The authors suggest that either reweighting is applied to disproportional samples or that proportional samples are drawn from the beginning. As the latter is not possible for this thesis, reweighting of the country samples has to be applied. Therefore, weighting factors were calculated for each country based on the Eurostat (2009) data on business and engineering student proportions within each country.[70]

[70] Tables containing the weighting factors for each country can be found in Appendix 2.

When performing cluster analysis, a choice has to be made between hierarchical and non-hierarchical techniques. Hierarchical techniques start with a single partitioning, in which every object forms a single cluster. Pairwise distances between objects are calculated and the two objects with the least distance are merged into the same cluster. Then, the most similar clusters are merged and so on until all objects are combined to a single cluster (Bortz, 2005). However, due to the large sample size of this project and the chosen individual-level segmentation basis, this hierarchical approach is not feasible, because the results would hardly be interpretable. Thus, a non-hierarchical approach seems to be more suited. In non-hierarchical cluster analyses, a starting partitioning has to be predetermined before running the analysis. One of the most recommended non-hierarchical techniques is the *k-means* method (MacQueen, 1967). This method is most useful for the purpose of classifying a large number (thousands) of cases. The analysis starts with a determined partitioning of *K* clusters. Beginning with the first object in the first cluster, the Euclidian distances to the cluster centroid are calculated for every object. If an object in a given cluster is characterized by a smaller distance to the centroid of a different cluster than its own, the object is moved to the other cluster. All objects are then merged into the clusters with which they share the smallest distance in comparison with the other clusters (cf. Bortz, 2005). So in statistical terms (cf. MacKay, 2003), the k-means algorithm puts *N* data points in an *I*-dimensional space into *K* clusters, each parameterized by a vector $\mathrm{m}^{(k)}$, which is its mean. The data points are denoted as $\{\mathrm{x}^{(n)}\}$ and the superscript *n* runs from 1 to the number of data points *N*. Each vector x has *I* components x_i. The metric that defines the distances between points is assumed to be

$$d(\mathbf{x},\mathbf{y}) = \frac{1}{2}\sum_i (x_i - y_i)^2.$$

To start the algorithm, the K means $\{\mathrm{m}^{(k)}\}$ is initialized to random values, which is followed by a two-step algorithm. In the assignment step, each data point *n* is assigned to the nearest mean:

$$\hat{k}^{(n)} = \underset{k}{\operatorname{argmin}}\{d(\mathbf{m}^{(k)},\mathbf{x}^{(n)})\}.$$

In the udate step, the means are adjusted to fit the sample means of the data points that they are responsible for:

$$\mathbf{m}^{(k)} = \frac{\sum_n r_k^{(n)} \mathbf{x}^{(n)}}{R^{(k)}}$$

With $R^{(k)}$ being the total responsibility of the mean *k*,

$$R^{(k)} = \sum_n r_k^{(n)}.$$

The assignment and update steps are repeated until the assignments do not change any longer (MacKay, 2003). Choosing the k-means method in SPSS 18, a cluster analysis was conducted with a starting partitioning of 4, 5, and 6 clusters. The results will be discussed in the following.

5.4.2 Results of the Cluster Analysis

Each cluster analysis was performed for business and engineering students separately. Results revealed a high similarity of the 4-, 5- and 6-cluster solutions, whereas the 4-cluster solution is more interpretable than the remaining two. Apparently, the more clusters are included, the less can they be clearly distinguished from one another, i.e. external heterogeneity suffers from a larger number of clusters. Therefore, only the 4-cluster solution will be discussed at this point.

Table 31 displays the results of the 4-cluster solution for business students. The first two clusters share a high preference for promotion opportunities and professional development/training. However, whereas the first cluster values the possibility of working abroad relatively strongly, this attribute is clearly of minor importance to the second cluster. Instead, job security is of high importance to this cluster, while the first cluster scores relatively low on job security. The third cluster equally values promotion opportunities and professional development/training rather strongly, indicating that these attributes might yield the potential for standardization when targeting European business students. However, the third cluster is additionally characterized by very high overall scores for each attribute. This leads to the assumption that the cluster might have been formed based on students' extreme response style.

When contemplating the student numbers per cluster broken down into countries (see Table 32), an interesting finding is that the countries with the highest overall re-

Table 31: Results of the Cluster Analysis for Business Students

	Cluster			
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
EC01 Products / services	2.78	2.98	3.35	2.39
EC02 Job work tasks	3.42	3.49	3.67	3.23
EC03 Friendly colleagues	3.19	3.55	3.62	3.29
EC04 Innovation	3.00	3.13	3.50	2.29
EC05 Job security	2.82	3.62	3.71	3.17
EC06 Employer leadership style	3.09	3.36	3.57	2.74
EC07 Location	2.41	3.19	3.26	3.12
EC08 Employer success in the market	3.06	3.22	3.51	2.53
EC09 Level of responsibility given to staff	3.30	3.30	3.58	2.81
EC10 Possibility of working abroad	3.38	1.61	3.48	2.31
EC11 Professional develop-ment/training	3.48	3.57	3.77	3.02
EC12 Promotion opportunities	3.65	3.66	3.80	3.17
EC13 Corporate social responsibility	2.57	2.90	3.35	2.32
EC14 Starting salary	2.84	3.11	3.25	2.86
EC15 Work-life balance	2.78	3.50	3.61	3.32

sponse scores, which have been identified in Section 5.2.2, are obviously characterized by the highest number of students in cluster 3.For example, cluster 3 is composed of 2,837 students from Turkey, the country with the highest overall mean over all attributes. Romania and Bulgaria, which had second and third highest overall attribute means, share equally high numbers of students in the third cluster. This also applies to Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Slovakia, and Spain, which have all been identified as ‘mainly southern countries’ with high overall response scores (cf. Section 5.2.2).

Thus, either extreme response style or simply a strong valuation of many attributes in the ‘mainly southern countries’ is likely to have influenced the segmentation. The fourth cluster is characterized by a different preference structure, valuing work-life-balance and friendly colleagues strongest.

The corresponding results for the sample of engineering students are displayed in Table 33. The first and the fourth cluster are similar in terms of their two most pre-

Table 32: Business Student Numbers per Country and Cluster

		Cluster_Nr Cluster Number of Case				Total
		1	2	3	4	
COUNTRY	1 Austria	150	85	164	79	478
	2 Belgium	139	158	151	138	586
	3 Bulgaria	197	371	567	109	1244
	4 Czech Republic	280	306	313	240	1139
	5 Denmark	157	109	108	153	527
	6 Finland	86	108	118	224	536
	7 France	3089	882	1722	1554	7247
	8 Germany	1197	794	814	1458	4263
	9 Greece	71	102	96	45	314
	10 Hungary	230	349	589	327	1495
	11 Ireland (Republic)	151	144	182	124	601
	12 Italy	958	862	1640	592	4052
	13 Netherlands	479	618	410	526	2033
	14 Norway	98	51	47	119	315
	15 Poland	1265	2255	1502	1142	6164
	16 Portugal	201	249	447	98	995
	17 Romania	1161	643	2848	385	5037
	19 Slovakia	134	122	245	97	598
	20 Spain	451	602	1042	386	2481
	21 Sweden	183	66	174	98	521
	22 Switzerland	192	113	179	119	603
	23 Turkey	814	758	2837	218	4627
	24 United Kingdom	2138	1194	2215	1279	6826
Total		13821	10941	18410	9510	52682

ferred attributes, which are again promotion opportunities and professional development/training. Yet, the first cluster is characterized by high overall response scores, just like the third business student cluster. In addition, this cluster values job security more strongly than the fourth cluster. Job security appears to be an important issue in the ‘mainly southern countries’ with high response scores, as this attribute was also rated third most important by the business student cluster number 3.

Table 33: Results of the Cluster Analysis for Engineering Students

	Cluster			
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
EC01 Products / services	3.43	2.97	2.25	2.78
EC02 Job work tasks	3.68	3.43	3.13	3.41
EC03 Friendly colleagues	3.63	3.55	3.10	3.30
EC04 Innovation	3.63	3.15	2.50	3.18
EC05 Job security	3.75	3.59	3.06	3.07
EC06 Employer leadership style	3.55	3.15	2.50	2.96
EC07 Location	3.25	3.23	2.82	2.50
EC08 Employer success in the market	3.58	3.02	2.37	2.88
EC09 Level of responsibility given to staff	3.55	3.09	2.60	3.11
EC10 Possibility of working abroad	3.36	1.69	1.98	3.37
EC11 Professional development/training	3.76	3.41	2.97	3.42
EC12 Promotion opportunities	3.78	3.38	3.02	3.45
EC13 Corporate social responsibility	3.37	2.86	2.09	2.72
EC14 Starting salary	3.31	2.99	2.81	2.79
EC15 Work-life balance	3.65	3.57	3.12	3.10

Again, examining the student numbers per cluster split down to countries (see Table 34), the ‘mainly southern countries’, such as Turkey, Romania, Italy, or Bulgaria, show outstandingly high numbers of students in cluster 1. The second cluster is characterized by the highest value placed upon job security, followed by work-life balance and friendly colleagues. The third cluster turns out similar to the second in terms of a high importance of work-life-balance and friendly colleagues; however, the highest importance is placed upon job work tasks. Both clusters seem to be focused on working atmosphere and security instead of e.g., international work, yet the third cluster is more task-oriented while the second values professional development more strongly than the third.

An important general finding in both samples concerns the allocation of students per country in each cluster. Except from the ‘extreme responding cluster’, students from each country are almost evenly distributed over the four clusters. This clearly indicates the existence of pan-European clusters of students. Students from different

Table 34: Engineering Student Numbers per Country and Cluster

		Cluster_Nr Cluster Number of Case				Total
		1	2	3	4	
COUNTRY	1 Austria	169	173	108	245	695
	2 Belgium	173	381	266	366	1186
	3 Bulgaria	341	182	69	148	740
	4 Czech Republic	277	422	244	324	1267
	5 Denmark	83	178	140	216	617
	6 Finland	131	315	335	249	1030
	7 France	1469	1532	1483	3645	8129
	8 Germany	1023	2354	1811	2313	7501
	9 Greece	212	187	99	256	754
	10 Hungary	232	207	106	157	702
	11 Ireland (Republic)	122	110	70	147	449
	12 Italy	1898	1410	734	1806	5848
	13 Netherlands	156	458	355	310	1279
	14 Norway	61	123	94	127	405
	15 Poland	1601	2655	1255	1403	6914
	16 Portugal	793	475	136	483	1887
	17 Romania	1603	362	304	1096	3365
	19 Slovakia	301	207	103	209	820
	20 Spain	1256	917	414	1110	3697
	21 Sweden	282	226	167	340	1015
	22 Switzerland	142	196	136	293	767
	23 Turkey	2013	400	135	848	3396
	24 United Kingdom	2511	2268	1377	3208	9364
Total		16849	15738	9941	19299	61827

countries seem to be more alike in their attribute evaluations than students from the same country. Thus, national influence on attribute evaluations has to be relatively small, supporting the findings of the multilevel analyses.

5.5 Conclusion

The empirical part of this thesis revealed several interesting findings with regard to between-country differences and individual differences in students' ratings of employer attractiveness attributes. Important influences on attribute evaluations originating from the individual level as well as from the country level were identified. At the individual level, the influence of students' course of study was first tested by means of analysis of variance (Section 5.2.1). The ANOVA revealed highly significant differences between business, engineering and 'other' students with regard to all fifteen applied employer attractiveness attributes. As far as the hypotheses regarding business and engineering students are concerned, the ANOVA indicated preliminary support to H1a, H1b, H1c, H1d and H1e. However, when effect sizes were taken into account, only H1a, stating that business students value promotion opportunities more than do engineering students, was characterized by a relevant, small effect. In Chapter 5.3, the influence of students' course of study was then tested by means of multilevel analysis. Results supported every hypothesis concerning the course of study, except H1c (starting salary). Thus, students' course of study has to be taken into account as a significant influencing factor for the majority of attribute evaluations. When comparing the results of the ANOVA and the multilevel analyses, it has to be noted that they differ with regard to Hypothesis 1c. This finding indicates that in case of a nested data structure, the use of multilevel analysis leads to more accurate results.

The influence of students' gender was first tested by means of t-tests (Section 5.2.1), revealing significant to highly significant differences between male and female students in twelve out of fifteen attribute valuations. The results lent preliminary support to hypotheses H2b, H2c, H2d, and H2e, but not to H2a and H2f. With regard to the effect sizes, only H2d, claiming that female students attach a higher importance to job security than do males, showed a relevant, small effect size. When tested by means of multilevel analyses (Chapter 5.3), hypotheses H2b, H2c, H2d, and H2e were supported by the data. Consistent with the results of the t-test, H2a and H2f were not supported. Summarizing, gender had a significant effect on all attribute evaluations, except starting salary and employer success in the market.

The influence of students' academic achievement was also analyzed through t-tests as preliminary examination. These tests revealed significant differences between (self-reported) high potentials and average achievers in thirteen out of fifteen attribute ratings. The results lent preliminary support to hypotheses H3a, H3b, H3c, and H3e, but not to H3d (employer success). Taken into account the effect sizes, a rele-

vant, small effect could only be measured regarding H3c, claiming that average achievers value job security more than do high potentials. When tested by means of multilevel analyses, the results supported hypotheses H3a, H3b, H3c, and H3e. Again consistent with the results of the t-tests, H3d was not supported.

The influence of students' age was also first examined on the bivariate level, testing its correlation with the employer attractiveness attribute scores. Results revealed significant correlations with regard to fourteen attributes, however, the effect sizes stayed below the threshold for a small effect. Yet, the multilevel analyses confirmed that age is a relevant factor of influence, showing significant effects on all tested attributes. Hypotheses H4a, H4b, H4c, H4d, and H4e were supported.

The preliminary test for country differences in Section 5.2.2 revealed highly significant differences between countries for all fifteen employer attractiveness attributes. Results additionally indicated that the importance ratings of the attributes vary to a different degree across countries. This finding was confirmed in the multilevel analyses (Chapter 5.3). The between-country variance of the six tested attributes varied between 3.4% for starting salary and 12.3% for employer success in the market. In general, the proportion of the total variance that could be attributed to the country level was relatively small, indicating that between-country differences in attribute valuation might not be as meaningful as the highly significant F-values of the ANOVA might suggest. Again, this shows the important contribution of multilevel analysis to a better understanding of between-country differences. As far as the influencing factors at the country level are concerned, results of the multilevel analyses supported three out of four hypotheses regarding the impact of a nation's GNI/capita, namely H5a, H5b, and H5c. Thus, a country's national wealth seems to be an important explaining factor for differences in students' evaluations of promotion opportunities, professional development, and starting salary. With regard to the influence of national culture, only hypotheses H7d and H8a were supported, revealing a significant effect of Future Orientation on job security and of Performance Orientation on professional development. Performance Orientation, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Humane Orientation also showed significant influences in two other research models, but in the opposite directions of the hypothesized ones. These findings lend general support to the assumption that between-country difference in students' ratings of employer attractiveness attributes can partly be explained by differences in national culture.

The empirical part closed with a segmentation of the European student market by means of cluster analysis. The analysis was carried out based on the micro-segmentation base of benefit preferences in the form of students' ratings of all fifteen employer attractiveness attributes. Results indicated the existence of transnational clusters of students sharing similar attribute preferences regardless of national boundaries. Thus, the relatively small impact of the country-level on the total variance in students' attribute valuations, which was found in the multilevel analyses, seems to be confirmed through the cluster analysis. In addition, the finding on a potential extreme response style in mainly southern countries (see Section 5.2.2) was reflected in the cluster analysis: A potential extreme responding cluster, which is composed of a noticeable high number of students from the mainly southern countries, was identified in both samples (business and engineering).

6 Discussion of Empirical Findings

6.1 Discussion of the Multilevel Analyses

One of the main objectives of this research was to assess to which extent students' importance ratings of employer attractiveness attributes differ across countries, and to identify influences which explain the variance in these ratings. A main goal was to enrich the research field of Employer Branding through the conduction of a cross-national multilevel analysis, incorporating individual difference variables as well as national culture and economic development characteristics with regard to their potential impact on attribute evaluations. It was argued that differences in students' importance ratings of key elements of employer attractiveness might be caused by the individual-level variables gender, course of study, academic achievement, or age, as well as by the country-level variables Uncertainty Avoidance, Humane Orientation, Performance Orientation, Future Orientation, or GNI/capita. This section provides an overall evaluation and discussion of the proposed hypotheses.

6.1.1 Individual-Level Effects

Assessing the impact of individual difference variables in an international context constituted the first main aim of this project. Previous research on employer branding and organizational attractiveness had addressed the question of important elements of employer attractiveness, but had rather neglected the analysis of differences in their importance according to subgroups of the target audience. The limited number of studies that assessed individual differences had been conducted in a domestic context only. This project began with an analysis of the impact of differences in students' course of study, i.e. business or engineering. While the preliminary analysis by means of ANOVA already indicated significant differences between students of different fields of study, the impact was confirmed in the multilevel analyses. Every hypothesis, except H1c, was supported by the data. The results indicate that business students have stronger preferences for attributes focused on competition and ambition, such as promotion opportunities, professional development and training, and employer success in the market. In contrast, engineering students are more interested in a safe job. The finding that business students attach a higher value to promotion opportunities and professional development, and less value to stable working conditions than engineering students is in line with the findings of Kirchgeorg and Lorbeer (2002) as well as findings of commercial research (cf. Petkovic, 2008) in a domestic context. However, their results with regard to business students' greater

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preference for a high (starting) salary are not confirmed, as students' course of study has not been found to have a significant effect on the evaluation of starting salary in the multilevel analysis.

Second, the impact of students' gender on attribute ratings was analyzed. The preliminary data analysis through t-tests already indicated significant differences between male and female students in twelve out of fifteen attribute valuations. The multilevel analyses confirmed these findings. The only two attributes in which male and female students do not seem to differ are starting salary and employer success in the market. This contradicts previous findings (Kirchgeorg & Lorbeer, 2002; Sutherland et al., 2002; Thomas & Wise, 1999) indicating significant differences between male and female students with regard to pay or salary. Thus, the claim that men are more interested in economic conditions than females (Murrell et al., 1991) has to be rejected, at least as far as starting salary is concerned. However, as male students value promotion opportunities significantly more than females, this might imply that they also have greater preferences for the increase in salary that usually comes along with promotions. Overall, female students tend to be more attracted by attributes focused on stable and pleasant working conditions, such as job security and friendly colleagues, supporting Murrell et al.'s (1991) claim that women are more likely to choose jobs based on their ability to work with other people.

Third, the influence of students' (self-reported) academic achievement on attribute valuations was tested in the international context. In line with the findings of the preliminary t-tests, results of the multilevel analyses lent support to a significant influence of this variable on five out of six attribute ratings. The only hypothesis that was not supported relates to a differing valuation of an employer's success in the market. Even though high achievers are said to be motivated by competitive excellence (e.g., Kanfer & Heggestad, 1997), they do not seem to be more attracted by a successful employer than average students. However, as hypothesized, they do not place as much value on the necessity of friendly colleagues as do average achievers. Instead, driven by their desire for new challenges and public recognition (e.g., Kanfer & Heggestad, 1997; Spence & Helmreich, 1983), they place a higher weighting on promotion opportunities (H3a) and professional development (H3b). As high achievers have also been found to have higher expectations of success and lower expectations of failure at challenging tasks than average achievers (McClelland et al., 1953), the attribute of job security is less important to them (H3c). Thus, the findings of this project

are in line with previous domestic research on high achievers (Rynes et al., 1991; Trank et al., 2002).

Despite previous findings indicating only little to no influence of students' age (Kirchgeorg & Lorbeer, 2002), this variable also proved to be an important differentiating characteristic which has to be taken into account when analyzing the impact of individual difference variables. While Kirchgeorg and Lorbeer (2002) did not find any significant differences except for the attribute 'location' and claimed that students' preferences remain relatively stable from the beginning to end of their studies, the results of the present research suggest otherwise. All five hypotheses concerning the influence of students' age were supported. Hence, at first appearance the results support the fact that younger students, who have not progressed as much in the employer selection and recruiting process, might value certain employer attractiveness attributes differently than older students, who have devoted themselves more to this topic. Thus, differences in attribute evaluations might be due to the individual's degree of involvement and experience gained in the job choice process, as proposed by Harold and Ployhart (2008). However, any conclusions drawn from these results have to be regarded with caution, because students' absolute age allows only limited inferences with regard to their study progress or stage in the recuiting process. As illustrated in Chapter 5.1 (Table 9), there are relatively large between-country differences in students' mean age, such that a 23-year old student would be considered relatively old in Russia but not very old in Germany. So the fact that younger students value selected employer attractiveness attributes differently than older students does not necessarily have to be related to their study or employer choice progress in this case.

Overall, the individual difference variables of course of study, gender, academic achievement, and age have proven to be important influences on job seekers' valuation of employer attractiveness attributes. The only attribute evaluation not affected significantly by a majority of the hypothesized variables is the one concerning starting salary. While only students' age had a significant impact on the rating of starting salary, this attribute seems to be suited to appeal to different groups of students equally.

6.1.2 Country-Level Effects

At the country level, the hypotheses relating to the effects of national culture were only partially supported, even though a significant influence of each cultural dimension on different attributes could be verified. The hypothesized effects were only con-

firmed in two cases, namely the positive effect of Future Orientation on the importance rating of job security (H7d) and the positive effect of Performance Orientation on students' valuation of professional development and training (H8a). In three cases, the selected cultural dimension showed a significant effect in the contrary direction than the hypothesized one. First, the results revealed that, contrary to Hypothesis 6a, students in countries scoring high on Uncertainty Avoidance value job security less than do students from less uncertainty-avoiding countries. This finding is truly surprising, as cross-cultural research and theory claim that employees in cultures with high Uncertainty Avoidance scores are likely to be motivated by leadership styles that support career stability, planning, and formal rules (Dickson et al., 2003). Thus, they should be attracted by certainty and security (Chiang, 2005; Chokkar, Brodbeck, & House, 2008). A possible explanation for the contrary result might be that students associate secure jobs with risk avoidance instead of ambiguity avoidance. When assessing the cultural dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance, caution has to be taken with regard to its interpretation: Hofstede (2001, p. 148) notes that "Uncertainty avoidance does not equal risk avoidance…More than escape from risk, uncertainty avoidance leads to an escape from ambiguity." With this clarification, he stresses that individuals from high uncertainty-avoiding cultures often engage in risky behavior to reduce ambiguities. Hence, as long as a situation is unambiguous, students from uncertainty-avoiding countries might be willing to accept the risk of a relatively unsecure job.

Second, contrary to Hypothesis 8d, the multilevel analysis revealed that students in highly performance-oriented countries attach less importance to promotion opportunities than do students from countries with lower scores on Performance Orientation. Surprisingly, promotion opportunities seem to be relatively more important in relatively less performance-oriented countries. A possible reason for this result might be the importance of traditional social hierarchies in cultures characterized by a low Performance Orientation. According to the GLOBE framework, seniority and experience are emphasized in these cultures, and who you are is more valued than what you do. Whereas in highly performance-oriented cultures success is believed to depend on individual achievement, individuals in less performance-oriented cultures do not have as much self-control of their fortune (Javidan, 2004). Thus, they might consider promotion opportunities as important prerequisite for achieving a higher status in their society.

Third, another surprising finding is that, contrary to Hypothesis 9c, results indicate that a society's degree of Humane Orientation is positively related to the importance of promotion opportunities. This means that students in countries scoring high on Humane Orientation value promotion opportunities more than their counterparts from less humane-oriented nations do. A possible explanation may be related to the importance of paternalistic norms and patronage relationships in highly humane-oriented societies (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004). As people are more dependent on them, promotions might be considered more important in countries with patronage systems than in countries in which formal welfare institutions replace paternalistic norms and patronage relationships, i.e. low Humane Orientation societies.

Summarizing the significant cultural effects, it can be stated that students' valuation of job security is influenced by a nation's degree of Uncertainty Avoidance and Future Orientation. Students' ratings of professional development are influenced by the degree of Performance Orientation, just as their preferences for friendly colleagues and promotion opportunities. The ratings of the latter are additionally affected by the country's degree of Humane Orientation. In two research models, namely Model 2 and Model 5, the cultural antecedents did not show any significant influence at all. Hence, the attribute evaluations of employer success in the market and starting salary do not seem to be influenced significantly by the assessed dimensions of national culture. This is not surprising in the case of starting salary, as the between-country variance is very low in general (3.4%). The relatively small amount of between-country variance is explained to a relatively large extent by the country's GNI per capita value. Thus, students' perceived importance of job security is mostly dependent on the economic conditions of their home country, which is intuitively appealing. However, students' importance valuation of an employer's success in the market is not significantly affected by any of the group-level variables, although the between-country variance is relatively large (12.3%).

As hypothesized, results further reveal a highly significant effect of GNI/capita on three attribute evaluations. This supports the notion that a country's economic development is likely to influence individuals' work values and preference patterns accordingly (e.g., Ralston, 2008). Three out of four hypotheses concerning economic influence were supported, indicating that students from economically less prosperous countries indeed attach a greater importance to attributes that concern their financial standing and career development. Surprisingly, Hypothesis 5d, which assumed that students from these countries also value job security more, was not supported by the

data. Instead, the society's degree of Future Orientation and Uncertainty Avoidance seems to play a greater role than economic development for students' ratings of job security. Overall, the findings on the influence of economic development lend support to the assumption that the perception of brand image facets might be related to economic development (Hsieh, 2002). However, when compared with the influence of cultural characteristics, the strong impact of GNI/capita might be partly due to larger differences in its value between the observed countries. The scores regarding the cultural dimensions are relatively homogeneous across countries, despite the fact that non-EU countries such as Turkey and Russia were included. In contrast, some of the observed nations are characterized by relatively strong differences in their GNI/capita, ranging from 8,730 US$ in Turkey and 9,370 US$ in Russia to 58,930 US$ in Denmark and 49,350 US$ in the Netherlands.

With regard to the question of convergence, divergence, or crossvergence of students' preferences, the results of the six research models rather suggest a crossvergence perspective. Neither national culture nor economic development has a dominant influence on students' importance valuations of employer attractiveness attributes. As crossvergence states that a combination of socio-cultural and business ideology influences is the driving force that shapes individual-level values and behavior (Ralston et al., 1993; Ralston, 2008), this perspective seems most adequate with regard to the empirical results. Ralston et al. (1997, p. 183) additionally highlighted that the combination of both influencing factors would result in "a unique value system that is different from the value set supported by either national culture or economic ideology." Partially, this seems to apply to students' evaluation of attractiveness attributes, as for example in the case of promotion opportunities. Economic development as well as the cultural dimensions of Humane Orientation and Performance Orientation influence students' ratings, resulting in effects that do not seem to be totally consistent with the value set supported by the dimensions of national culture. The effects of national culture proved to be contrary to the hypothesized relations, which were based on reasoning from literature on traditional societal values for each cultural dimension.

However, a finding more in favor of a possible convergence of students' preferences is the relatively small between-country variance in all of the models. This indicates that the observed countries do not differ to a large extent with regard to students' importance ratings of the six selected attributes. The relatively high homogeneity may be due to the homogeneity of the European student population in general. Students

tend to be exposed to different cultures even more than other populations due to their traveling and information gathering behavior (Douglas & Craig, 2006). Hence, their preference patterns are more likely to converge because of their adoption of different perceptions from other cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, the observed countries are rather similar in terms of their technological development, and often share a common media landscape (Strebinger, 2008). Students are most likely to use technological devices, such as internet technologies, and a broad range of media for information exchange. Thus, the increased cross-border flow of information through technological advances (cf. Craig et al., 1992; Dailey & Carley, 2003) might additionally lead to a convergence of students' preferences. Consequently, previously identified convergence of preferences in the context of consumer behavior (e.g., Baalbaki & Malhotra, 1995; de Chernatony et al., 1995; Melewar & Vemmervik, 2004; Papavassiliou & Stathakopoulos, 1997; Wang, 1996) might also apply to the context of employer choice; at least as far as the European student population is concerned. Even though the influence of cultural as well as economic indicators on the importance evaluations was identified, their practical impact might be relatively small, given the comparably small amount of between-country variance. Nevertheless, the results also indicate that the between-country variance varies according to which attribute is assessed. While the attribute of job security is characterized by a between-country variance of only 3.5%, the attribute of employer success in the market reveals a between-country variance of 12.3%. Thus, certain attractiveness attributes seem to be more suited for a standardized positioning across countries than others.

6.2 Discussion of the Cluster Analysis

In view of the relatively large degree of within-group variance found in the multilevel analyses, the choice of an individual-level segmentation basis instead of a country-based segmentation proved to be the correct approach. The results of the cluster analysis confirmed the relatively low impact of students' country of study on their attribute evaluations. For both of the samples, business as well as engineering students, transnational clusters were identified, indicating that students from different countries seem to be more alike in their preference patterns than students from the same country. These results reflect findings from consumer research that were equally based on data of individual consumers and identified cross-national segments of similar consumers from different countries (e.g., Moskowitz & Rabino, 1994; Ter Hofstede et al., 1999; Yavas & Green, 1992; Wedel, Ter Hofstede, & Steenkamp, 1998). The transnational clusters also point to a possible convergence of students'

preferences regarding desired employer characteristics, and offer potential for brand standardization across selected student segments. For example, the majority of student segments, regardless of their course of study, shares a strong preference for the attributes of professional development and training as well as promotion opportunities. Thus, these attributes could be promoted equally to all clusters. However, there are also clusters characterized by a differing total configuration of benefits sought, such as the fourth segment of business students, valuing work-life-balance and friendly colleagues most. Job security also seems to be an important differentiating employer characteristic. Some segments, especially the ones composed of students from the 'mainly southern countries', seem to place a high value on this attribute, whereas it is of minor importance to other clusters. These findings confirm that different clusters of students should be addressed with different positioning content. The results of the cluster analyses lead to the identification of four different segment profiles for each course of study group. For business students, they are as follows:

- Cluster 1 – The 'international ambitious cluster': Values promotion opportunities and professional development most, is task-oriented and interested in working abroad, whereas location and job security are negligible employer characteristics for this cluster.
- Cluster 2 – The 'local security-focused cluster': Values promotion opportunities and job security most while absolutely not interested in working abroad. Instead, professional development and friendly colleagues are of great importance as well.
- Cluster 3 – The 'extreme responding cluster': Values each attribute in a similarly strong way. Most interested in promotion opportunities, professional development, and job security.
- Cluster 4 – The 'work atmosphere-focused cluster': Values work-life-balance and friendly colleagues most. Products, innovation, and the possibility of working abroad are of relatively minor importance.

For engineering students, the following segments can be profiled:

- Cluster 1 – The 'extreme responding cluster': Values each attribute in a strong way, with none of the values below 3. Just like in the business student extreme responding cluster, promotion opportunities, professional development, and job security are valued most.
- Cluster 2 – The 'local security-focused cluster': Is strongly focused on job security, placing the highest priority on this characteristic. Work-life-balance and friendly colleagues are further important attributes, whereas the possibility of working abroad seems to be less attractive to this cluster.

- Cluster 3 – The 'comfort-seeking task-focused cluster': Is most focused on job work tasks. Work-life-balance and friendly colleagues are also valued strongly. In contrast to the other clusters, professional development is only of relatively minor importance. Just like cluster 2, this cluster is relatively less interested in working abroad.
- Cluster 4 – The 'ambitious task-focused cluster': Most interested in promotion opportunities, professional development, and job work tasks. Location, CSR, and starting salary are of relatively minor importance.

To be of practical use to employer brand managers, the clusters would have to be further described by means of demographic characteristics, media usage, lifestyle factors etc. While the practical implications of the segmentation will be discussed in more detail in Section 6.4, a detailed description of each cluster would go beyond the scope of this thesis and will therefore be neglected at this point. Instead, some methodological aspects deserve closer attention.

A first important aspect is the discovery of two clusters with overall high means for each of the attributes. The clusters clearly reflect the tendency of students from mainly southern European countries to use the extreme ends of the scales. The clusters have a distinct profile compared to the other clusters, but the question remains if the differences between clusters arise from cultural differences, the individuals' true strong preference for the items, or extreme response style. Previous research indicates that southern Europeans seem to prefer extreme and exaggerated statements (Hui & Triandis, 1989). Thus, the extreme positive responding reflected in the two clusters is likely to be a facet of the culture of the affected European countries. However, as outlined in Chapter 5.2.2, the question cannot truly be answered within this project. It has to be stated that the cluster analysis could have been influenced by students' tendency to use the positive extreme ends of the scales, and that this response style should be controlled for in future research in order to validate the results of the segmentation.

A second important aspect is the evaluation of the segmentation basis. It has to be noted that the employer attractiveness attributes, as a domain-specific basis, reflect a rather direct response to the socio-cultural environment, and might therefore lead to a low identifiability of segments (Kamakura et al., 1993). Indeed, the identifiablity of the four segments in both samples is not clearly decisive with regard to several attributes, which are rated similarly by two or more clusters. This might also be due to

the relatively low degree of variance in most of the attributes. External heterogeneity of the clusters suffers from this low degree of variance, since individual students often share a similar order of priority for the fifteen attributes. Thus, the identification of clusters that are as heterogeneous externally and as homogeneous internally as possible becomes more difficult. In addition, domain-specific segments are typically characterized by low accessibility due to the fact that they usually do not exhibit strong relations with media profiles and might be geographically dispersed across countries, which is also the case here. Furthermore, they tend to be less stable than segments based on other variables, since they are strongly influenced by changes in the socio-cultural environment. However, they can also provide marketers with the advantages of high actionability and responsiveness, since domain-specific variables are likely to be directly linked to marketing decisions of a firm (Steenkamp & Ter Hofstede, 2002). These advantages and disadvantages of using benefit segmentation in the context of employer branding should be carefully reflected when selecting segmentation bases. Despite some difficulties arising out of the data employed for this thesis, it can be stated that international segmentation based on benefit importance evaluations seems to be a valuable tool to identify segments of students sharing similar preference structures with regard to important employer characteristics.

6.3 Theoretical Implications

The present thesis offers insight into the role of culture and economic development as well as of individual-level characteristics in affecting students' preferences with regard to important employer characteristics, and contributes to the gradual, evolutionary process of theory building in the field of employer branding and employer attractiveness. This section is aimed at providing an outline of the general theoretical contributions and implications. First, this project shows that multilevel analysis is a meaningful technique for the analysis of potential influences on employer attractiveness attributes, as it allows for the combination of micro- as well as macro-level influences in a single model. It also demonstrates that influences on both levels should be incorporated into the research design, as individual as well as cultural and economic characteristics have significant impact on students' preference structures. The findings additionally suggest that the integration of single employer attractiveness attributes into an overall scale (e.g., Collins, 2007) might conceal the fact that the degree to which the importance of specific employer characteristics varies across countries depends on the attribute itself. As the results show, the between-country variance of the six selected attractiveness attributes differs considerably. Therefore,

future recruitment research could benefit from investigating effects on distinct employer attractiveness attributes instead of on employer attractiveness as a single construct.

This study also contributes to cross-cultural research by identifying cultural dimensions relevant to students' employer image perceptions. The impact of culture in the context of employer branding has never been investigated before. The finding of a significant impact of four cultural dimensions, namely Uncertainty Avoidance, Future Orientation, Performance Orientation, and Humane Orientation, lends support to the further investigation of national cultural influences in the context of employer branding. By including Performance Orientation and Humane Orientation, this research assessed two novel cultural dimensions that had not been identified in the work of Hofstede (1980, 1991, 2001). Thus, it contributes to a further unraveling of relatively recent and still under-researched facets of national culture (cf. Leung et al., 2005). In addition, some of the multilevel results suggest that the manifest values that characterize a given cultural dimension are not always indicative of its influence on students' preferences with regard to important employer characteristics. In three cases, the results yield contrary effects than hypothesized, which imply that each cultural dimension has many different facets that interact with existing societal traditions and institutions. A thorough interpretation of cultural dimensions and of their interaction with other societal phenomena is therefore essential to gain a deeper understanding of their role in the employer branding context.

Besides the analysis of cultural dimensions, this dissertation is the first to assess the influence of a nation's economic wealth on students' attribute preferences. The findings of a significant effect of GNI/capita on students' importance ratings of promotion opportunities, professional development, and starting salary show that a nation's economic development should not be neglected when assessing macro-level factors of influence of students' preferences with regard to their desired employers and employer characteristics. As the standardized regression coefficients demonstrate, the impact of GNI/capita is even stronger than the impact of national cultural dimensions. Thus, future cross-national research on employer attractiveness and organizational attractiveness in general could explore this influence more systematically. In addition to further empirical testing, the research field would benefit from a sound theoretical foundation that fully covers the role of national economic development. By incorporating the convergence – divergence – crossvergence framework, this thesis has accomplished a first step in this direction.

Through the assessment of individual-level influences, i.e. students' course of study, gender, age, and academic achievement, on students' evaluations of employer attractiveness attributes, this research project has extended previous findings (e.g., Kirchgeorg & Lorbeer, 2002; Sutherland et al., 2002; Thomas & Wise, 1999) to the international context. Contrary to findings in a domestic context, the variable age proved to be of significant impact on students' importance ratings and should be taken into account when analyzing individual difference variables. Another important novel aspect regarding the empirical work in the context of employer branding has been covered by the conduction of international market segmentation. As the results of the cluster analysis show, benefit segmentation is not only suited in terms of predicting consumer behavior (cf. Haley, 1968), but also in terms of predicting students' benefit preference evaluations with regard to their desired employer and career benefits. While international consumer research has tested various concepts to identify global segments of consumers who share similar preferences and behavior across borders (e.g., Hassan et al., 2003; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2001; Unnava et al., 1994), this approach had not yet been transferred into the field of employer branding. In their conceptual paper on international employer branding, Martin and Hetrick (2009, p. 305) had stated that "[customer-based] segmentation approaches are beginning to find their way into the HR literature and practice in the form of specific employer value propositions (EVPs) designed for different groups of employees, especially where organizations are able to use sophisticated data analysis to arrive at meaningful, evidence-based but changing segments." Accordingly, they regarded the introduction of market segmentation techniques into the field of employer branding as an important lesson for future work, which has been picked up on in this thesis. In order to understand and strategically exploit desired employment benefits, Moroko and Uncles (2009) had recommended the application of unobservable bases instead of only using observable segmentation bases (e.g., age, degree, university, grade point average). Through the example of benefit segmentation based on students' evaluations of employer attractiveness attributes, the present work has contributed to the empirical validation of such (conceptually reasoned) recommendations.

Apart from the empirical results, this thesis contributes to a further consolidation of the theoretical foundations of employer branding. In order to fully understand the concepts of employer attractiveness and employer image, they have been discussed in relation and in distinction to other core concepts of employer branding. In addition,

different theories have been outlined to provide necessary background information on why and how the concept is of central importance to employer branding. Based on the instrumental-symbolic framework and related approaches, the key elements of employer attractiveness have been identified and, for the first time, brought into a systematic classification. In view of the lack of scientific work on international employer branding, a novel conceptual framework had to be developed, for which research and literature from different related fields had to be consulted. Whereas research from the fields of organizational attractiveness and consumer behavior made a substantial contribution to the micro-level part of the framework, cross-cultural research heavily influenced the macro-level part. In particular, the GLOBE framework and the convergence – divergence – crossvergence framework have been shown to be transferrable into the context of international employer branding. Thus, the developed two-level framework of influencing factors on employer attractiveness evaluations might serve as a suitable basis for future research. In order to relate the framework to corresponding employer brand management processes, important aspects of international employer branding strategy were added. For this purpose, the international marketing literature turned out to be fruitful for the adaption of selected elements, such as market segmentation, targeting, and positioning. Other aspects of international marketing, such as international brand architecture, might be equally suited for a transfer into the employer branding context.

Another theoretical contribution accomplished in this thesis is related to the thorough discussion of methodological aspects (Chapter 4). As the survey is cross-cultural in nature, the requirements with regard to methodological issues are especially challenging compared to domestic research. Unlike domestic research, international marketing and business research have often been criticized for lack of methodological rigor (e.g., Douglas & Craig, 1997; Douglas, Morrin, & Craig, 1994; Malhotra et al., 1996; Tung & Verbeke, 2010). Therefore, the survey applied for this thesis was examined in detail with regard to problem definition, research approach, research design, and data preparation and analysis. Strengths and weaknesses related to these issues were explicitly addressed. In addition, as postulated by Tung and Verbeke (2010), the weaknesses of the use of cultural distance dimensions were acknowledged in the course of this project instead of allowing for an undifferentiated application in the empirical tests. Hence, a differentiated view of the empirical results and their contributions has been fostered through methodological discussion. In addition to their theoretical contributions, the results obtained in this dissertation lead to important managerial implications, which will be outlined in the next section.

6.4 Managerial Implications

As international companies have to attract and retain highly talented individuals worldwide, there is a strong need to develop an understanding of what drives the employer choice of potential employees in different national markets. The present thesis contributes to this understanding in multiple ways. Through the theoretical discussion of important core concepts and foundations, managers are provided with the necessary background knowledge of how and why employer branding works. A thorough understanding of the key elements of employer branding and their interrelations is crucial for the development of effective employer branding strategies. Furthermore, this thesis provides managers with a conceptual framework on the concept of employer attractiveness and on determinants of key drivers of employer attractiveness. Through the use of the instrumental-symbolic framework, employer attractiveness can be broken down into its objective and emotional components. Managers are further provided with a detailed overview of individual-level and country-level factors, which could be of influence on students' preference ratings of instrumental attributes of employer attractiveness. The decision on a feasible degree of employer brand standardization is heavily influenced by the actual impact of these factors. In particular, dimensions of national culture are presented with regard to their effects on students' attribute ratings. The conceptual framework is additionally enhanced by a strategic framework of international employer branding in order to contribute to the development of more systematic management processes in this context. Employer brand managers can profit from adapting the presented techniques of international market segmentation in order to effectively target selected key audiences. Furthermore, guidelines for employer brand positioning in an international context are discussed in view of the practical implementation of the provided empirical results.

In order to empirically test the impact of some of the presented factors of influence on employer attractiveness items, their effect on international students' evaluation of job security, employer success in the market, promotion opportunities, friendly colleagues, starting salary, and professional development was measured. Even though the empirical findings support the notion that national cultural and economic characteristics influence students' preferences for these drivers, their overall impact is not as large as expected against the backdrop of previous intercultural research (e.g., Hofstede, 1980; House et al., 2004). With regard to the managerial implications that can be drawn from these results, it has to be acknowledged that this dissertation faces one of the classic dilemmas of international management research: "On the one hand, researchers and managers need to understand patterns of individual-level out-

comes associated with different national cultures in the world. On the other hand, research examining relationships between culture and individual outcomes has not captured enough variance to make the specific recommendations that managers need with confidence" (Leung et al., 2005, p. 368). Thus, this thesis will follow the advice of several scholars who argue that instead of only investigating whether or not national culture has a practical impact, we should also address the question of how and when it makes a difference (Earley & Gibson, 2002; Kirkman et al., 2006; Leung, Su, & Morris, 2001; Leung et al., 2005).

The hypothesis tests revealed that students' evaluation of a majority of the chosen employer attractiveness attributes is not affected by a nation's cultural practices to a significant degree. However, the influence of national culture cannot be completely neglected. Two hypotheses were confirmed, indicating that the importance valuations of job security and professional development are affected by a dimension of national culture. These findings suggest that in nations characterized by a high degree of Future Orientation, the attribute of job security is of greater importance to students than in nations with lower degrees of Future Orientation. When comparing the multilevel results with the results of the cluster analysis, this finding seems to be confirmed. Job security is especially valued by the clusters highly composed of students from mainly southern countries. The mainly southern countries include Turkey, Hungary, Italy, Greece, and Portugal, which are all characterized by high scores of Future Orientation. Thus, employer brand managers could promote this attribute as a part of - or as endorsement to - their employer value propositions in highly future-oriented countries. Furthermore, the findings suggest that in countries with a high degree of Performance Orientation, the attribute of professional development/training is of even greater importance to students than to their counterparts in less performance-oriented societies. When comparing this finding to the results of the cluster analysis, it is confirmed that professional development is not equally important to all identified clusters, despite its generally high popularity. The between-country variance of 9.5% in students' attribute evaluations also indicates that there are differences between countries which should be taken into account by employer brand managers. Hence, managers could benefit from placing a greater emphasis on professional development in highly performance-oriented countries, such as Finland, Germany, Austria, Poland, and Portugal. Nevertheless, this positioning dimension could also be standardized across several segments of students, which share high preferences for the attribute (in this case business student clusters 1 and 3, as well as engineering student clusters 1 and 4). Overall however, the impact of national culture is relatively

weak, which is underlined by the relatively small standardized regression coefficients and between-country variance in all of the multilevel models.

In contrast, the effect of a country's economic development proved to be relatively strong in three cases. Students in economically less prosperous countries, such as Turkey, Russia, Poland, Hungary, Portugal, or Greece, value the attractiveness attributes of promotion opportunities, professional development, and starting salary even more than do students in economically more wealthy societies. Thus, these attributes provide suitable elements for employer value propositions directed at these countries. However, as outlined before in the case of professional development, the attribute of promotion opportunities also seems to be suited for a standardized positioning across several transnational segments of students. Despite its relatively large effect on the ratings of three employer characteristics, economic development is hardly of any influence on the remaining three selected attributes, namely job security, employer success in the market, and friendly colleagues.

Consequently, the question of a standardized employer brand positioning is a question of which employer characteristics are most suited to represent a standardized positioning content, and for which segments this positioning might seem feasible. A general recommendation regarding the influence of culture or economic development cannot be given. Instead, employer brand managers need to carefully select attributes that are suited for standardization across segments or countries and adapt other elements of the employer value proposition to cultural or economic differences between countries. Thus, "think globally, act locally", a lesson learned in international marketing, seems to apply to international employer branding strategy as well. The finding of the relatively low degree of between-country variance as well as the identification of transnational clusters in this thesis suggest that an employer branding strategy tailored for transnational segments might be more feasible than one directed at single countries, as the influence of national borders is relatively small and students across different nations seem to be more alike in their preferences than students within the same country. A first example of a segmentation of the European graduate market has been given in this project, which shows that this approach might be valuable when developing international employer branding strategies. In practical terms, managers should use the integrated approach to market segmentation (Hassan et al., 2003), combining macro-level and micro-level segmentation bases. This approach takes into account the identified cultural similarities as well as the intranational heterogeneity of students' preferences. For example, in a first step, mana-

gers could select only the economically less prosperous nations, or only the 'mainly southern countries', or only countries characterized by a high degree of Future Orientation. In the second step, they could select micro-level segmentation bases, such as the benefit importance evaluations used in this thesis. Other valuable individual-level segmentation bases were identified in the multilevel analyses: Students' course of study, age, gender, and academic achievement have an impact on attribute importance evaluations, and thus might serve as suitable bases.[71] When selecting segmentation bases, managers should focus on the questions of "Who to attract" and "How to attract" (Moroko & Uncles, 2009), which makes a combination of demographic variables and benefits sought seem most promising.

According to the process of tactical market segmentation (cf. Figure 13 in Chapter 3.4.1), the identification of segments should be followed by a description of each segment by means of demographic factors, media usage, lifestyle factors etc. After the selection of target segments, each segment can then be addressed with specific positioning content, i.e. employer value propositions, based on the benefits the cluster seeks most. Besides the proposition of benefits sought by the segment, however, a successful employer brand positioning should also be aligned with the company's identity and values, and should differentiate it from its competitors (cf. Esch, 2003; Huber, 1993; Levermann, 1995; Simon et al., 1995; Sponheuer, 2009; Süß, 1996). Thus, the relevant employer attractiveness attributes should be selected accordingly. Depending on the given segmentation results, the chosen segments can then be targeted with either the same, standardized positioning, with an incongruent positioning, or with an endorsed positioning (Strebinger, 2008). An incongruent positioning means that the positioning differs on at least one dimension between segments. This approach would be recommendable in case of, for example, a selection of the 'international ambitious cluster' and the 'work atmosphere-focused cluster' when targeting business students. An endorsed positioning would be suitable if a certain characteristic is of special importance only for one of the segments, such as job security for the 'extreme responding cluster', composed of students from the 'mainly southern countries'. While promotion opportunities and professional development are very important attributes for the 'international ambitious cluster' and the 'extreme responsing cluster', job security is only valued in a strong way by latter. Thus, for the 'extreme responding cluster', the EVP could be endorsed by a hint at the secure jobs the company is offering. Through a standardized or partially standardized positioning of the

[71] Additional suggestions for segmentation bases, which have not been tested in this project, can be found in Table 5 in Chapter 3.4.1.

employer brand across a number of selected segments, employers might reap the advantages of e.g., a higher quality of advertising due to a centralized communication system, lower communication costs due to a degression of overhead costs in the production of advertising material, a consistent brand image and worldwide recognition of the brand, and a higher motivation of employees through a stronger identification with the brand (cf. Chapter 3.2.3).

Summarizing, the conceptual framework and empirical results of this thesis provide managers with a strategic guideline for the development of international employer brands and suggest which determinants of job seekers' preference structures should be taken into account to which degree. Based on the demonstrated effects, employers will be able to form an assessment of the initial situation in the European graduate market and can start to build their branding strategies on this foundation. However, this project is also subject to a few limitations, which shall be discussed in the upcoming section.

6.5 Limitations

Some limitations have to be acknowledged with regard to this research project, which at the same time present opportunities for future work. These limitations concern a) the survey and data, b) the conceptualization and use of cultural dimensions, c) the multilevel models, d) the cluster analysis, and e) the scope of this thesis.

a) First, the questionnaire of the cooperating institute as well as the according conceptualization and measurement of some variables, especially the employer attractiveness attributes, yield some limitations. The facets of employer attractiveness were measured through single items. Although consistent with selected prior research, the ability to calculate reliability estimates was limited. Another consequence of using single item measures is the missing possibility of fully assessing construct equivalence, an important prerequisite for ensuring the equivalence and comparability of data obtained from different cultures (Craig & Douglas, 2000; Malhotra et al., 1996; van de Vijver, 2003). For example, the problem of response styles could not be completely ruled out. While acquiescence, use of middle response category, and socially desirable responding should not have affected the data, a potential bias resulting from extreme response style (Malhotra et al., 1996) could not be tested empirically, although several empirical results indicated the possibility of extreme responding by students from mainly southern countries. In addition, it could not be fully assessed if

an item such as 'employer success in the market' truly has the same meaning in each of the countries. According to Sackett and Larson (1991), the adoption of single item measures is recommended only if the concept to be assessed is sufficiently narrow and not ambiguous for the respondents. This might not have been the case for all employer attractiveness items used in the *trendence* survey. Furthermore, the choice of a four-point Likert-type scale for the items generally limited the variance in the applied dependent variables. Observing the mean of each dependent variable revealed that students tend to rate most of the attributes as 'important' or 'very important', hence there is only limited variance and variables are characterized by a non-normal distribution. Especially the cluster analysis would have profited from a greater degree of variance in individuals' benefit preference evaluations. Although scales without a mid-point are deemed adequate as a forced-choice method to avoid the use of middle response categories (Garland, 1991), the four-point scale leads to information loss. Future work should therefore apply more differentiated, multi-item measures. For example, a promising technique to measure the importance students attach to single employer attractiveness attributes is conjoint measurement (e.g., Backhaus, Erichson, Plinke, & Weiber, 2003; Müller & Gelbrich, 2004). By using conjoint measurement, the overall construct of employer attractiveness is split up in its' components, i.e. employer attractiveness attributes. Each attribute can take different forms or manifestations. Respondents are then presented with different combinations of attributes and forms, which they have to rank or rate according to their preferences. Resulting from respondents' choices, the contribution of each attribute to overall employer attractiveness can be determined. Respondents with similar preference structures can then be grouped by means of cluster analysis (Müller & Gelbrich, 2004).

Another point that the reader may wish to reflect upon is the assessment of students' country of study. In the survey questionnaire, students were asked for their country of study, not for their place of birth or their nationality. Even though ERASMUS students and other short-time exchange students were excluded from the sample (see Chapter 4.3), it cannot be guaranteed that each student has lived long enough in the according country to have adopted its particular cultural values. Following the recommendations made by Lenartowicz and Roth (1999), researchers should assess where respondents spent their childhood, since cultural values predominantly form during this period. Another possibility would be to assess the degree to which an individual identifies with a given national culture. As suggested by Leung et al. (2005), who base their arguments on social identity theory (cf. Chapter 2.2.1), national cul-

ture will have a strong impact on an individual's beliefs and behavior if this person sees him- or herself as a member of the national culture and if this culture is a significant component of his or her self-concept. However, in every culture there are people who hold different beliefs than the ones typical of their society. Instead, their definition of who they are and of which values they hold is much more influenced by other sources of self-identity, such as educational or professional culture. Consequently, "[…] culture matters more when a person identifies with the culture; for those who do not, culture is a less potent predictor of their values" (Leung et al., 2005, p. 369). Students might be particularly influenced by other sources of self-identity as they often live a different lifestyle and are more frequently exposed to international experience. Thus, measuring cultural identification might be a fruitful path for future research on cultural influence in this context.

With regard to the sample, it has to be acknowledged that the results can only be generalized for business and engineering students in mainly European countries. The conclusions cannot be drawn for non-student populations, such as young professionals or non-academic job seekers, who are further target groups for employer branding activities. These groups might differ in their preference structures, thus valuing certain employer image facets differently than students (Chapman et al., 2005). The same applies to existing employees, who constitute another important target group for internal employer branding activities. Moreover, it cannot be concluded that the same effects on students' evaluations would occur in culturally more heterogeneous countries outside the European context. Therefore, future research is well advised to investigate populations other than students and to include a broader range of countries, such as the emerging economies. Furthermore, the conclusions drawn from the multilevel analyses conducted in this project only apply to the six employer attractiveness attributes that were selected for the hypotheses. As outlined in Chapter 3.1, additional determinants of employer attractiveness have to be taken into account for the development of employer value propositions. The investigation of potential influences on students' evaluation of other important attributes, such as work-life-balance or international work assignments, remains another interesting task for further research.

b) The general criticism with regard to the use of cultural dimensions in cross-national research also partially applies to this study, as the GLOBE scores were used. As already outlined in Chapter 3.2.5, critics argue that cultural distance dimensions would not fully capture all relevant aspects of culture (Briley et al., 2000). In addition, using a single dimension score for each country would ignore within-country heterogeneity,

especially in countries composed of different sub-cultures (Au, 1999; McSweeney, 2002; Tung & Baumann, 2009; Tung & Verbeke, 2010). Countries might be composed of people representing both ends of any cultural dimension, which may skew the results of cross-cultural comparisons (Taras et al., 2010). Some critics doubt the symmetry in scores for distance measures between countries as well as the stability of cultural dimension scores over time (Kirkman et al., 2006; Ralston et al., 1999; Tung & Verbeke, 2010). In contrast, other researchers consider cultural dimensions as relatively stable over time (e.g., Hofstede, 1980, 1991, 2001; House et al., 2004). While bearing the critical arguments in mind, it has to be stated that the concept of culture, as mentioned before, can only contribute to the explanation of cultural differences if its components are identified (Bagozzi, 1994; Samiee & Jeong, 1994; Schwartz, 1994). Thus, the benefits of the cultural dimension approach for international and cross-cultural research still outweigh its limitations (Soares et al., 2007). Until now, the conceptualization and measurement of culture has been heavily discussed, but cross-cultural research has not yet discovered more suitable methods than the use of cultural dimensions. The GLOBE dimensions constitute the most recent and least criticized approach to the assessment of culture. Furthermore, within-country heterogeneity was taken account of through the incorporation of individual-level, demographic variables in the developed multilevel models. The use of an individual, micro-level segmentation basis in the cluster analysis also acknowledged that students in different countries might be more alike in their preference structures than students from the same country. Yet, as the Indirect Values Inference approach was used by extrapolating the GLOBE scores for the analyses (Lenartowicz & Roth, 1999), future work should verify the results through a direct, primary measurement of the target groups' cultural values.

c) A further limitation that has to be addressed is related to the explained variance of the six multilevel models. Whereas the explained variance on level 2 is relatively high, indicating that the chosen predictor variables explain the variance in students' ratings between countries to a relatively large extent, this is not quite the case for level 1. The explained variance on level 1 ranges between 1.9% (starting salary and friendly colleagues) and 7% (employer success). First, this might be due to the circumstance that, apart from academic achievement, only a limited number of demographic variables was included as individual-level predictors. The explained variance should be higher when additional, content-based, variables are included, which could not be done in this thesis due to the use of fixed secondary data. A further potential cause of variance that could not be assessed in the multilevel models, but might

have occurred, is individuals' tendency to use the extreme ends of the scales. Apart from potential measurement errors, additional substantive effects could be tested for. In particular, cross-level interaction effects might explain additional variance, as the impact of most individual-level predictors varied across countries. Hence, it appears more difficult to identify the impact of all potential individual-level variables and their interaction effects than to decipher the impact of national cultural differences. As Tung and Verbeke (2010, p. 1266) state: "In some ways, understanding intra-national diversity can be more nebulous and challenging when compared with deciphering cross-national distance in cultural dimensions because so many variables – such as ethnicity, age, gender, generational differences […], religion and so on – can come into play in affecting the values, behaviors, and practices of peoples within a given nation state." Thus, "[…] there is no short-cut approach to gauge the almost endless possibility of variations within a given nation-state that can arise from the diversity of background of its people" (Tung & Verbeke, 2010, p. 1266).

d) As far as the cluster analysis is concerned, a general limitation of the methodology has to be kept in mind. Until now, there is no cluster methodology available that guarantees the discovery of the best structure of objects (Bortz, 2005). Steenkamp and Ter Hofstede (2002, p. 203) note that even though cluster analysis is still the most frequently used international segmentation technique, "it generates deterministic classifications often based on subjective optimization criteria […]. It does not fit within the framework of standard statistical theory and does not provide reliability judgments of the results." Thus, the results of the market segmentation conducted in this thesis demonstrate only one possible solution that does not claim to be the ideal with respect to the number of clusters or their composition. It rather serves to underline and complement the results of the multilevel analyses. Furthermore, a potential extreme response style of students from 'mainly southern countries' is likely to have influenced results. Although this response style might be part of the culture of the affected countries and, in this case, should not be controlled for, future research could validate the results of the cluster analysis with different data. Another option would be to select the affected countries and perform benefit segmentation within these countries, following a two-step approach.

e) Due to the limited space and scope of this thesis, the analyses had to be focused on selected aspects of employer attractiveness and international employer branding strategy. For example, only instrumental attractiveness attributes have been analyzed. Future work could incorporate emotional, i.e. symbolic aspects of employer attractiveness, as they have been found to be important for employer differentiation

(e.g., Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). With regard to international employer branding strategy, recommendations could only be given as far as the positioning based on students' preferences for selected instrumental attractiveness attributes is concerned. Besides this target group-oriented influence on the employer value proposition, an employer's positioning is of course affected by a multitude of other factors, such as the company's overall internationalization strategy, its brand architecture, its resources and capabilities, the employer identity, or the competitive situation in a given market (cf. Chapter 3.2.3). These influences could not be taken account of in this project, as the analyses were not focused on specific employers. In addition, in order to avoid too much complexity or multicollinearity, other country-specific factors (cf. Chapter 3.2.3) besides national culture and economic development have not been incorporated, and provide opportunities for future research.

6.6 Directions for Future Research

Considering the more than limited research in the field of international employer branding, there is a major need and potential for additional research besides the propositions already made in the previous section. Some suggestions will be given at this point. With regard to the impact of national culture, the present research sheds light onto the influence of Uncertainty Avoidance, Future Orientation, Performance Orientation, and Humane Orientation on students' importance ratings of employer attractiveness attributes, and hence enriches the understanding of culture's influence on potential employees. However, it must be recognized that the theoretical and empirical foundations of the consequences culture has on job seekers' behavior in general and on their preference patterns in particular still require further investigation. Research might especially benefit from the analysis of additional cultural dimensions in a similar context. In the context of this thesis, the deduction of hypotheses was restricted to four cultural dimensions due to the necessity of adequate theoretical foundations related to each attractiveness attribute. Furthermore, due to the same reason, the multilevel analyses were restricted to six selected employer attractiveness items. Whereas the analyses conducted in this thesis had to be based on single attractiveness items, future work could test the effects of cultural differences on dimensions of employer attractiveness represented by multiple items. In this way, a multitude of items could be integrated into a single multilevel model.

As mentioned before, the explained level 1 variance in each of the tested research models was relatively low. A promising way to explain additional variance might be

the inclusion of interaction effects, as the slopes of the individual-level predictors varied between countries in most cases. However, before including any interaction effects into an empirical assessment, the moderating effects of macro-level variables on the influence of micro-level variables would have to be theoretically deducted in order to draw any systematic implications from the results instead of making random assumptions. Future research could therefore strongly benefit from a sound theoretical development and testing of interaction effects in the context of employer attractiveness.

Furthermore, other country-specific factors of influence, which have been introduced in Chapter 3.2.3, could be assessed with regard to their impact on students' benefit preferences in the employer branding context. In particular, a nation's technological development appears interesting in this context, as the findings of this project suggest that students' preferences are converging to a certain degree. Convergence theorists argue that individuals' work values are shaped by technological development. Accordingly, technological advances lead to facilitated communication across a broad geographic distance, which in turn stimulates the cross-fertilization of ideas and experience (Douglas & Craig, 1991). Due to the increased cross-border flows of goods, people, and information, industrialized countries are held to become more similar (Craig et al., 1992). As proposed before, students preferences might converge due to their special affinity to technological devices, which provide a fast and easy means to global information exchange. Thus, it would be interesting to assess if students from technologically less developed countries differ significantly in their preferences when compared with students from technologically well developed countries. A country's technology index could be used for measuring its technological influence, as suggested by previous research (e.g., Ralston, 2008). Another potentially interesting macro-level factor of influence could be a nation's political system, i.e. polity, as proposed by crossvergence theorists (Ralston et al., 1993; Ralston et al., 2008; Ralston 2008). Students' values and preferences in socialist or former socialist countries might differ from the preferences shared by students from capitalist countries. An analysis of these potential differences might be particularly insightful if countries with relatively opposing political systems, such as China or Russia, and the United States or western European countries are selected for the assessment. It would also be interesting to observe how students' preferences and values in former socialist nations develop over time in order to evaluate if they assimilate to capitalist values.

With regard to the time frame, the present analyses provide only a point-in-time, cross-sectional view of potential influences on students' evaluation of employer attractiveness attributes. In order to assess if students' preferences change over time, longitudinal studies would be needed. First, the impact of students' progress in their studies and in the process of employer choice could be tested for through repeated surveys within the same target group. This way, the identified impact of the variable *age* could be verified in an alternative way to gain more insight into the question if students who are closer to graduation value different attributes than students in earlier stages of their studies. Second, a potential crossvergence of students' preferences should be examined in longitudinal studies. The results of this thesis give reason to assume crossvergence or even convergence of preferences with regard to the selected attributes of employer attractiveness. However, these assumptions, especially the question of crossvergence with regard to the eastern European countries, can only be validated through a series of repeated analyses over a longer period of time. In addition, single countries that seem particularly interesting in the context of crossvergence, such as Hungary, Turkey, or Russia, could be selected for more detailed analyses. Third, longitudinal studies would be needed to validate the assumed stability of cultural values. As mentioned in the *Limitations*, some researchers claim that culture changes very slowly (e.g., Hofstede, 1980, 2001; House et al., 2004), whereas others doubt this stability (e.g., Kirkman et al., 2006; Ralston et al., 1999; Tung & Verbeke, 2010). Leung et al. (2005, p. 361) state: "The assumption of cultural stability is valid as long as there are no environmental changes that precipitate adaption and cultural change." In order to test cultural change, Inglehart and Baker (2000) analyzed changes in basic values in three waves of the *World Values Survey*. They discovered that economic development was related to shifts away from traditional values and norms towards more rational, tolerant, and participatory values. However, at the same time, they confirmed that a society's cultural heritage, such as its denomination as Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox etc., still has an enduring impact on traditional values despite the forces of modernization (Leung et al., 2005). In the light of recent political and economical changes, such as the integration of several eastern European countries into the European Union, or the financial crisis affecting some European countries more heavily than others, potential cultural changes going along with these developments should be further investigated.

Another suggestion for future research concerns the use of international market segmentation techniques in the employer branding context. This thesis has provided the example of an international benefit segmentation based on students attribute im-

portance ratings. Results show that this methodology is suited in order to identify transnational segments of students sharing similar preferences with regard to employer attractiveness attributes. Future segmentation studies could further explore the suitability of other segmentation bases, such as job seekers' skills sets or career focus, in combination with benefit segmentation. Case studies involving employers that have distinct requirements for their target groups would shed more light onto the feasibility of different segmentation techniques and combinations of segmentation bases.

The analyses conducted in this dissertation focused on international employer branding from a market-oriented perspective, implying that they were based on students' point of view on employer attractiveness. This perspective was chosen to provide employer brand managers with insight on the European student market and to draw implications for international employer branding strategy. The research field of international employer branding additionally offers many opportunities to approach the topic from a management perspective. In particular, the internal alignment of international employer brands and the coordination between the employer brand and the firm's international brand portfolio as well as brand architecture seem worth more scholarly attention. As suggested by Martin and Hetrick (2009), international employer brands may also serve as an important tool for creating a sense of 'corporateness' among often decentralized multinational corporations. In view of this identity-conveying role of the employer brand, the question of brand standardization versus adaption might yield different implications than the ones drawn from the present analyses. Thus, a closer examination of the necessary degree of alignment between organizational identity, corporate identity and employer brand image of multinational companies might add to a better understanding of international employer brand management. Furthermore, we lack scientific information on international employer brand controlling.

A last proposition to be made at this point concerns the operative implementation of international employer branding. Due to the limited scope, the present work was aimed solely at the investigation of strategic aspects of international employer brand management. Until now, there is no scientific research on operative elements of employer branding in an international context. As operative marketing aspects, such as communication campaigns, require a significantly greater degree of local adaption (Doole & Lowe, 2008), there is a strong need for information on national, regional, or local differences in job seekers' information behavior. For example, potential em-

ployees from different countries could be surveyed with regard to their preferences for certain types of media, technological devices, internet features, or events. This way, important implications related to international event marketing, university marketing, and media planning could be drawn.

6.7 Conclusion

In view of the increasing globalization of business activities and the demographic changes in industrialized countries, a global 'war' for highly qualified employees likely constitutes a major challenge for MNCs in the future. Hence, the difficult task of developing and sustaining a unique and attractive employer image is becoming more and more crucial to employers worldwide. In order to provide these employers with strategic guidelines related to international employer brand management, a scientific approach to the topic is urgently required. This thesis was aimed at making a first contribution to scientifically unravel the prerequisites and influencing factors that should be taken into account when developing international employer brands. However, the research field of international employer branding is complex in many ways. The answer to the question of whether international companies should adapt their employer branding strategies to different cultural environments or whether a global employer brand positioning is feasible depends on a multitude of circumstances. As outlined in the course of this project, a wide variety of company-specific factors as well as influences related to the target market determine the degree of standardization. By investigating a selection of target market-specific influences on important drivers of employer attractiveness in two different methodological ways, this thesis has contributed to a deeper understanding of what drives the employer choice of diverse target audiences in an international context. Following the trajectory of the research questions, it was first clarified how the fundamental concept of employer attractiveness, which leads to employer choice, is defined and theoretically grounded. By exploring the instrumental-symbolic framework, the key constituents of employer attractiveness were identified, leading to the classification of potential influencing factors on job seekers' preferences for these constituents. Before the impact of applicants' individual differences on the micro-level and country characteristics on the macro-level were empirically tested, elements of international marketing, including the segmentation-targeting-positioning framework, were transferred to the employer branding context to provide a strategic basis for the managerial implications of the empirical findings. The multilevel analyses and cluster analysis then allowed for the attainment of empirical evidence with regard to the influence of students' country of

study and of individual characteristics on their evaluation of six selected employer attractiveness determinants.

The present dissertation does not aim at delivering final conclusions with regard to the question of employer brand standardization. Nor does it claim to completely fathom how macro- or micro-level factors influence students' preferences for employer attractiveness attributes. It can be concluded, however, that in order to shed light onto this complex topic, a fruitful avenue for employer branding scholars could be to fully assess the impact of national culture and economic development on students' perceptions of employer attractiveness. The relevance of selected cultural dimensions as well as of nations' GNI per capita in this context was confirmed in the present research project, thereby providing an important starting point for the further investigation of cross-national differences in students' preferences when it comes to employer choice. Furthermore, the findings offer advice as to which influences should be considered at the macro- as well as micro-level when selecting suitable segmentation bases for a more efficient targeting of potential employees. In particular, economic development in terms of GNI per capita as well as national scores in Future Orientation and Performance Orientation have resulted as promising characteristics on the macro-level, with the restriction that the relevance of the cultural dimensions rather depends on the investigated attributes. On the micro-level, the influence of age, academic achievement, gender, and course of study should be taken into account when contemplating students' benefit preferences.

The journey undertaken in this thesis was inspired by the debate on convergence versus divergence of consumer tastes and preferences, implying a similar relevance in the context of job seekers' preferences and behavior. While there is growing evidence of emerging global cultures, we still need to understand the impact of cultural and business ideology indicators that might lead to cross-national differences. The finding of relatively small between-country differences in students' evaluations of employer attractiveness attributes even enhances the challenge of comprehending when and to which degree country-level characteristics have to be taken into account in the course of developing international employer branding strategies. This circumstance stresses the importance of further cross-cultural research in the fields of employer branding and employer attractiveness.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1: Questionnaire (Excerpt)

L. Christiaans, *International Employer Brand Management,*
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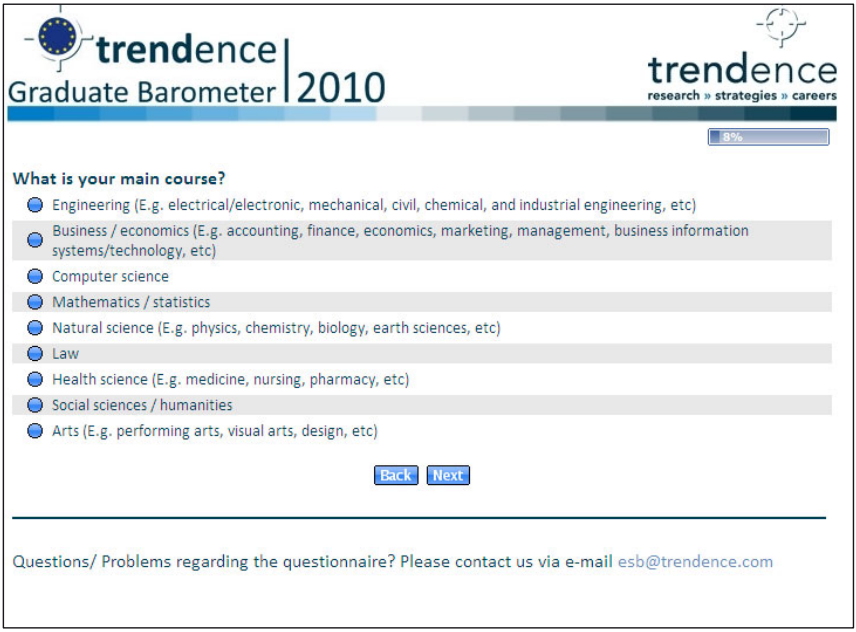
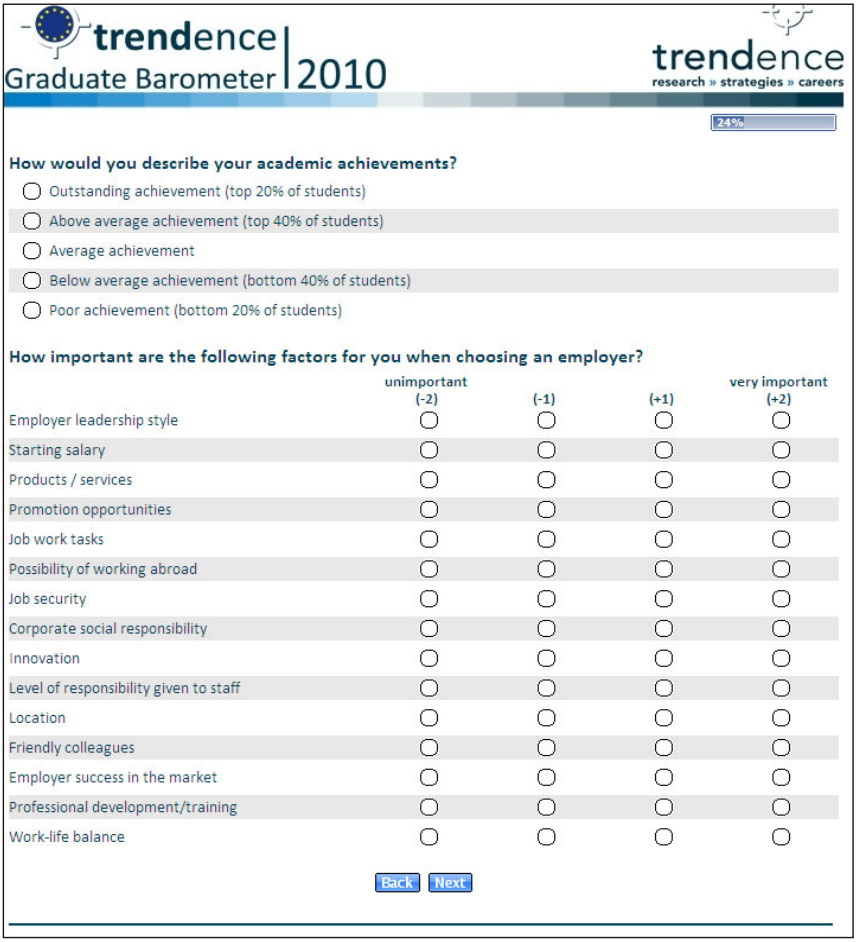

trendence
Graduate Barometer 2010
trendence
research » strategies » careers
8%
What is your main course?
Engineering (E.g. electrical/electronic, mechanical, civil, chemical, and industrial engineering, etc)
Business / economics (E.g. accounting, finance, economics, marketing, management, business information systems/technology, etc)
Computer science
Mathematics / statistics
Natural science (E.g. physics, chemistry, biology, earth sciences, etc)
Law
Health science (E.g. medicine, nursing, pharmacy, etc)
Social sciences / humanities
Arts (E.g. performing arts, visual arts, design, etc)
Back
Next
Questions/ Problems regarding the questionnaire? Please contact us via e-mail esb@trendence.com


trendence
Graduate Barometer 2010
trendence
research » strategies » careers
11%
Gender
Male
Female
Age
Years



trendence Graduate Barometer 2010

trendence research » strategies » careers

24%

How would you describe your academic achievements?

- ◯ Outstanding achievement (top 20% of students)
- ◯ Above average achievement (top 40% of students)
- ◯ Average achievement
- ◯ Below average achievement (bottom 40% of students)
- ◯ Poor achievement (bottom 20% of students)

How important are the following factors for you when choosing an employer?

	unimportant (-2)	(-1)	(+1)	very important (+2)
Employer leadership style	◯	◯	◯	◯
Starting salary	◯	◯	◯	◯
Products / services	◯	◯	◯	◯
Promotion opportunities	◯	◯	◯	◯
Job work tasks	◯	◯	◯	◯
Possibility of working abroad	◯	◯	◯	◯
Job security	◯	◯	◯	◯
Corporate social responsibility	◯	◯	◯	◯
Innovation	◯	◯	◯	◯
Level of responsibility given to staff	◯	◯	◯	◯
Location	◯	◯	◯	◯
Friendly colleagues	◯	◯	◯	◯
Employer success in the market	◯	◯	◯	◯
Professional development/training	◯	◯	◯	◯
Work-life balance	◯	◯	◯	◯

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Appendix 2: Weighting Factors

Table 44: Percentages of Business and Engineering Students in the Population and in the Sample

Population[72]		
	Business	Engineering
Austria	0.9%	1.1%
Belgium	1.1%	1.9%
Bulgaria	2.4%	1.2%
Czech Republic	2.2%	2.0%
Denmark	1.0%	1.0%
Finland	1.0%	1.7%
France	13.8%	13.1%
Germany	8.1%	12.1%
Greece	0.6%	1.2%
Hungary	2.8%	1.1%
Ireland	1.1%	0.7%
Italy	7.7%	9.5%
Netherlands	3.9%	2.1%
Norway	0.6%	0.7%
Poland	11.7%	11.2%
Portugal	1.9%	3.1%
Romania	9.6%	5.4%
Slovakia	1.1%	1.3%
Spain	4.7%	6.0%
Sweden	1.0%	1.6%
Switzerland	1.1%	1.2%
Turkey	8.8%	5.5%
United Kingdom	13.0%	15.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Sample		
	Business	Engineering
Austria	2.4%	1.1%
Belgium	4.3%	4.0%
Bulgaria	5.0%	2.1%
Czech Republic	9.3%	6.3%
Denmark	1.8%	1.2%
Finland	4.1%	4.0%
France	14.2%	15.7%
Germany	1.7%	1.2%
Greece	0.5%	1.1%
Hungary	13.2%	14.2%
Ireland	1.0%	1.0%
Italy	6.3%	7.5%
Netherlands	3.6%	1.4%
Norway	1.1%	0.7%
Poland	5.2%	3.8%
Portugal	3.9%	7.7%
Romania	3.9%	1.8%
Slovakia	3.3%	2.3%
Spain	8.0%	11.0%
Sweden	1.0%	1.9%
Switzerland	3.5%	4.9%
Turkey	1.1%	3.3%
United Kingdom	1.5%	1.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

[72] Calculated based on Eurostat (2009) data.

Table 45: Weighting Factors

Weighting factors		
	Business	Engineering
01 Austria	0.381289	0.985195
02 Belgium	0.256197	0.482955
03 Bulgaria	0.468967	0.561948
04 Czech Republic	0.232821	0.327384
05 Denmark	0.546371	0.825736
06 Finland	0.248893	0.419021
07 France	0.968398	0.836679
08 Germany	4.844469	10.233699
09 Greece	1.185190	1.141083
10 Hungary	0.215541	0.080071
11 Ireland	1.159229	0.696996
12 Italy	1.216025	1.259701
13 Netherlands	1.061694	1.453848
14 Norway	0.529258	0.927011
15 Poland	2.235237	2.953156
16 Portugal	0.488291	0.394562
17 Romania	2.455362	3.071329
18 Russia	1.000000	1.000000
19 Slovakia	0.342648	0.581814
20 Spain	0.587721	0.542377
21 Sweden	1.019000	0.884509
22 Switzerland	0.324450	0.252933
23 Turkey	8.060111	1.681854
24 United Kingdom	8.586337	8.100948