



**STUDY OF ATTRACTING AND RECRUITING TALENTS BASED
ON EMPLOYER BRANDING --- A CASE STUDY OF
VOLKSWAGEN**

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**AN INDEPENDENT STUDY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
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ON EMPLOYER BRANDING — A CASE STUDY OF
VOLKSWAGEN**

Thematic Certificate

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This Independent Study has been Approved as a Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement
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Business Management

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Declaration

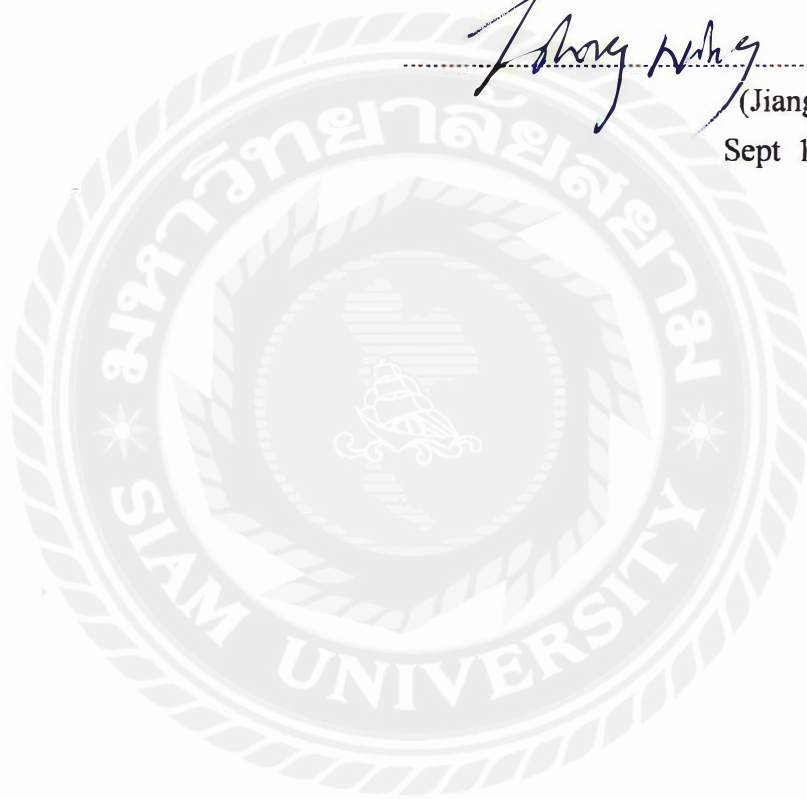
I, Jiang Ning, hereby certify that the work embodied in this independent study entitled "Study on attracting and recruiting talents based on employer branding --- A case study of Volkswagen" is result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.



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ABSTRACT

As China's economy enters a new normal and manufacturing enterprises transform, it has become an irreversible long-term trend for "cost leadership" to move to second and third-tier cities in China, where manufacturing costs are lower. The market competition demographic dividend is gradually disappearing and the talent competition pattern is intensifying. Exploring new ideas to solve the talent competition challenge, help enterprises attract and motivate and retain talents, and research and construction of employer brand has become an important issue in the practice of enterprise human resource management. It is also the basis for effective talent attraction and recruitment.

Based on the research and analysis of the literature on employer brands and their attractiveness factors, this paper selected popular companies in China as research subjects and conducted interviews with a sample of employees in different cities.

The results of the study showed that there was a difference in the perception of employer brand attractiveness factors between employees in third-tier cities and employees in first-tier cities in Shanghai. This difference is also due to the difference in certain characteristics and demands of the employee group. The employer brand is derived from the feedback of the employees and the market on the unique value and attractiveness of the company, so it is necessary to start from the perspective of employee identification and avoid local perception.

Keywords: employer branding, employer attractiveness, manufacturing companies, talent attraction

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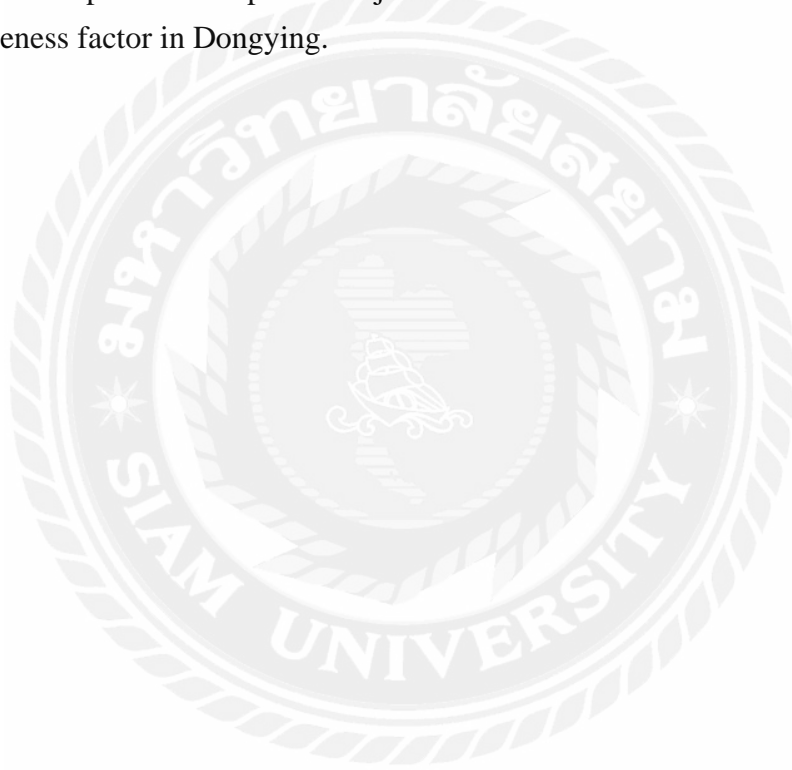
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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

The advent of the knowledge-based economy marks that society is entering an economic era that is mainly based on intellectual resources, and the competition among enterprises is shifting from the original competition for production factors of land, equipment, and product resources to the competition for intellectual resources of talents. With the change in economic and industrial patterns, the change in labor supply and demand patterns, the increase in employees' autonomy, and the diversification of values in the new era, the strong position of traditional employers are challenged (Huang, Liu, Zhao & Shi, 2012). Corporate talent scramble strategy from recruitment and selection to target talent attraction and development retention has become the trend of human resource management in contemporary organizations (Zhong, 2015).

The manufacturing industry is the mainstay of China's national economy and the foundation of economic development. The long and healthy development of the manufacturing industry is related to the people's livelihood in the country (Hou, 2010). Therefore, establishing the talent attraction advantage of manufacturing companies in the era of fierce competition for talents has become a forward-looking and strategic issue for the development of many companies.

1.2 Research Problems

The emphasis on talents and the need for retention of key talents, facing the emergence of new technologies and employment opportunities in the mobile Internet era has intensified the competition for talents in the traditional manufacturing industry (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). In the "China Employer Branding Research Report 2020-2021" released by the School of Labor Economics of Capital University of Economics and Business based on cross-industry surveys of China's manufacturing, information technology, real estate and social service industries, industry comparison data on the work experience scores of employees in the same job type in this industry shows that the work experience level of employees in all job types in manufacturing is not high (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). How the traditional manufacturing industry actively faces the competition for talents and builds the employer brand attractiveness of the industry is related to the healthy development of the whole

industry and has a far-reaching impact on the national economic development (Zhong, 2015).

On the other hand, the manufacturing industry characterized by "cost leadership" is facing transformation and breakthrough: the manufacturing industry is shifting to areas with cost advantages, and it is a general trend to move from first-tier cities with high manufacturing costs to second-and third-tier cities with lower manufacturing costs and national policy support (Zhu, Ding & Liu, 2008). Such as the HONGHAI Group Foxconn manufacturing base moved to Henan, Hunan, and other places, as well as in 2014 Lego Asia's factory site Jiaxing groundbreaking is a typical reflection of the trend of industrial transformation. However, the distribution of talents closely related to industrial development is not synchronized to match. For a long time, China's urban-rural dualistic structure and population flow trends have determined that many knowledge-based talents are concentrated in first-tier cities and relatively lacking in second and third-tier cities (Geng, 2012). Therefore, after the relocation of manufacturing enterprises, it becomes a new challenge to effectively attract and recruit talents in local areas, build employer brands, and meet the operational and development needs of enterprises to achieve competitive advantages.

1.3 Objective of the study

The new era and new situation have raised higher requirements for HR management strategies and practices. Companies need to be aware of and prepared for this to sustainably attract talent, create a better employee work experience, and maximize talent retention for long-term corporate development in the fierce talent competition. Building a differentiated employer brand to enhance the attraction of target talents will become a must to improve the core competitiveness of enterprises, and it is also the starting point and foundation of the future HR management strategy of manufacturing enterprises.

1. To build a differentiated employer brand and enhance the company's attraction to target talents.
2. To explore whether there is geographical variability in employer branding within the same company
3. To develop employer branding for manufacturing companies in second and third-tier cities.

1.4 Scope of the study

Employer branding includes internal employer branding and external employer branding: external branding is for external potential employees, which refers to the attractive brand image built by the company in the external market to make them willing to work for the company; while internal branding is for existing employees, which is the commitment and differentiated work experience provided by the company to its regular employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2014). Employer branding emphasizes "from the inside out", i.e., the attractiveness of the external employer brand comes from the internal employees' experience and communication. This study uses literature review and interviews to empirically analyze the internal employer brand attractiveness factors of Volkswagen, a foreign-funded automobile manufacturer in China, and to investigate whether there are regional differences in the internal employer brand of the same company and the main aspects of these differences (Edwards, 2010). At the same time, this paper proposes action plans for the construction and development of employer brands of manufacturing companies in second-and third-tier cities based on the analysis of the differences between the employer value factors of second and third-tier employees of Volkswagen and those of first-tier employees.

1.5 Research Significance

This study takes employees, the main subject of human resource management, as the research object, and draws on the customer-driven and interest-oriented approach of marketing to study branding, mainly exploring employer branding within the enterprise, which is new in terms of the research object and theoretical perspective (Branham, 2000). This inside-out research perspective is also in line with the need to develop target candidates into employees from the talent attraction of employer branding. The empirical findings of this paper can establish the foundation for future research and provide some new ideas and methods. Talent aggregation is the key to improving the market competitiveness of enterprises, and the research and construction of employer branding in manufacturing enterprises are of great practical significance to comply with the transformation of China's economic growth mode from sloppy to intensive and to improve the quality of China's economic growth (Hou, 2010). The findings and practical suggestions of this study have certain reference values for multinational automobile manufacturing companies to build employer brands to enhance competitiveness and have certain reference significance for other manufacturing companies.

1.6 Theoretical framework

Based on the literature review of employer brand and employer brand attraction factors, this thesis integrates economics, management, and psychology theories, such as value signal model theory, individual organizational fit theory, and motivation theory, to analyze the influencing factors of corporate employer brand attraction and construct a model, and propose hypothesis premises for testing the theory.

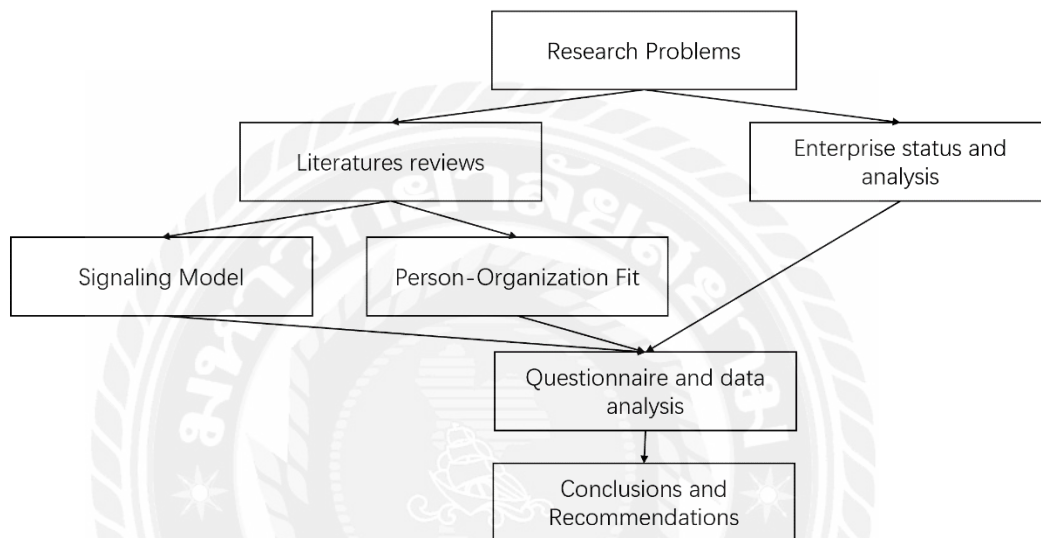


Figure 1 Theoretical framework

1.7 Hypotheses

H1: There is a positive correlation between the value factor of individual job search intention and their identification with the employer brand proposition.

H2: Employer brand is influenced by the regional economic level and cost of living, and the degree of salary attractiveness in employer value proposition in second and third-tier cities should be less than that in first-tier cities.

2. Literatures Review

2.1 Employer Branding

The study and practice of Employer Branding have their roots in the penetration and application of the disciplines of branding and marketing in the human resources field in the mid to late 1990s. A brand is "a name, term, logo, symbol or design, or a combination thereof. Branding aims to identify the goods and services of a seller or organization and to distinguish it from its competitors" (Schneider, 2000). In

contemporary society, branding has been widely used to distinguish people, places, and businesses.

Based on a branding theory perspective, Martin (2010) suggests that the differentiated employment experience between companies is expressed and communicated through employer branding, and that employer branding should not just be used as an advertisement or tool for recruitment. Based on the employment commitment perspective, Lefkou (2001), Rogers et al. (2003), and others argue that employer branding is a "commitment" to existing employees and potential job seekers and that the ability of a company to communicate this commitment as an employer determines the company's identity and status in the HR market and the eyes of employees. Existing employees will decide whether to stay or leave based on the consistency of "commitment-expectation-fulfillment", and potential employees will decide whether to join the company and become a member of the company based on the company's identity and status in the human resource market. Based on a strategic perspective, Edwards (2011) argues that employer branding is a symbol of employer image, which is reflected in a series of policies, behaviors, and value systems to motivate, retain, and attract employees.

According to Professor Guo, employer branding is a branch of corporate branding, which is not a product but a relationship; he also believes that employer branding is a manifestation of corporate culture, which can gain employees' recognition, support, and loyalty, and once the employer branding is completed, it will produce a brand effect, and the company's reputation will be automatically spread in the market. Professor Guo emphasized that in the process of building an employer brand, companies should continuously strengthen their branding process management, which is the only way to form a superior employer brand. This is the only way to create an excellent employer brand.

The definition of employer branding is very diverse, with scholars defining and studying it from different perspectives of employees and employers, including organizational identity, work experience, organizational image, corporate culture, corporate branding, and so on.

2.2 Classification of Employer Branding

Employer branding can be divided into internal employer branding and external employer branding according to different target groups inside and outside the company: internal employer branding, i.e., employer branding attraction for internal employees.

External branding, i.e., employer branding attraction for external potential employees, external customers, suppliers, and other partners.

Rogers (2003) argues that the internal and external marketing of employer branding is a closely interlinked entity that should start from within the company, with the recognition and support of the employees, before they internalize it into the corporate culture and incorporate it into the external branding and value communication, allowing the employer brand to develop. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argue that external marketing of employer branding is based on the premise that the company has an attractive and unique employer image, and job seekers are attracted by the employer's brand and will apply. The internal marketing of employer branding refers to the formation of a unique culture and talent pipeline within the company through the acceptance and reinforcement of the company's value proposition, policies, and behavioral norms by employees, thus gaining a competitive advantage. This shows that although the theoretical definition of employer branding varies, there is a strong consensus on the relationship between the internal and external employer brand heritage and the value transfer from the inside out.

2.3 Employer Brand Components

This study summarizes the components of branding theory, which is the origin of employer branding. Branding theory suggests that a brand reflects an organization's resources and competitive differentiation, and provides consumers with a value that meets or exceeds expectations. Keller (2003) divides brand values into three categories: functional benefits, experiential benefits, and symbolic benefits, based on the associations that constitute the brand image at the benefit level.

1. Functional value. Functional value mainly refers to the satisfaction of employees in the work of substantive benefits, such as wages and benefits, workplace, work for the convenience of personal life and quality of life to improve career development and personal growth, etc.

2. Experiential value. Experiential value emphasizes the satisfaction of the spiritual needs of the brand effect and is the intrinsic value experienced by employees. Experiential value is reflected in the employees' confidence in the company's market prospects, the sense of accomplishment from work, the realization of self-worth and satisfaction, etc.

3. Symbolic value. The symbolic value is the external value of the working harvest, that is, the value of social and external recognition of the organization's

employees outside the organizational identity from social respect and recognition and higher social status, etc.

2.4 Employer Branding Function

Many studies have shown that companies with good employer branding have lower employee referral and turnover rates and that a work experience that exceeds employees' expectations gains employee loyalty and enthusiasm in the following ways (Ritson, 2002).

1. Increase the sense of belonging and dedication of employees.
2. Reduce employee turnover rate and mutual fit risk.
3. Improve recruitment efficiency and reduce recruitment costs.
4. Create experience value for talent.
5. Improve the system capability of HR management.

2.5 Employer branding mechanism theory

Person-organization fit theory.

Person-organizational fit theory suggests that the interplay between an individual's choice of occupation and organization and his or her personality traits influences the choice of occupation and organization, that different individuals join different organizations, and that an individual's characteristics predict his or her choice of occupation and organization. Kristof (1996) believes that organizational employee matching is a state of compatibility between employees and the organization when at least one of them meets the needs of the other, when they both share the same basic characteristics, and when both share the same basic characteristics. Both situations occur. Schneider (2005) proposed the Attraction - Selection - Attrition model. This model believes that people in organizations are not randomly distributed by chance and that employees in organizations are attracted, selected, and retained by the organization. They will evaluate whether the organization's goal structure and culture are in line with their attitudes and values, etc. People always tend to choose organizations that match their characteristics in terms of organizational development goals to benefit their career development. The individual organizational fit theory focuses on the psychological aspects of individuals to explain the attractiveness of organizations and people's willingness to accept jobs.

Signaling model

The signaling theory was first proposed by Michael Spencer (1973), who argued that in some markets, sellers actively signal product quality information to buyers to obtain gains from transactions and that these market signals can counteract the information asymmetry problem in adverse selection. These market signals can address the information asymmetry problem in adverse selection. Employer brand is a kind of transmission and systemic force, based on Spencer's (1973) first use of signaling theory to model the impact of HR policies on employees outside the organization, HRM policies as a reflection of the organization's real HR system strength, will affect job applicants' intention to apply for jobs As a reflection of the strength of the organization's real HR system, HRM policies will influence job seekers' intention to seek employment.

3. Research Methodology

This study uses a quantitative research approach to formulate questions and hypotheses through a review of different theories and literature in this field. Based on Person-organization fit theory and the Signaling model, this study decides using a semi-structured interview questionnaire design that scores the attractiveness factors of employer branding, a five-level Likert scale design was adopted as the basis for employee ratings in the interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted with employees from different geographical areas of the same company, and their attractiveness and rating factors of employer branding were used as the original data and data samples, combined with the background characteristics of the interviewees and related factors for specific analysis, while the group perceptions of the interviewees were again traced to their causes and influences, and the correlation between the group commonality of geographical differences and the differences in employer brand attractiveness was investigated.

In this study, the Dongying factory, which is typical of the manufacturing base, is selected as a representative and differentiated from the first-tier city Shanghai headquarters. The Dongying factory fits the characteristics of a third-tier city location, lack of industrial base, and concentrated short-term talent demand, so its study is

The study has typical significance. In this survey, 150 questionnaires were distributed to a sample of 300 employees in Shanghai, a first-tier city where the head office is located, and a third-tier city in Dongying, a representative factory. The sample is as follows

	Shanghai	Dongying
Gender	Male:70%, female:30%	Male: 75%, female: 25%
Year of employment	2.6	2.5
Average age	29.8	30.2
Academic qualifications	Graduate: 29%, Undergraduate:71%	Graduate: 25%, Undergraduate:75%

Table 1 Sample Overview for Shanghai and D City

There are no significant differences in gender, years of service, age, and educational status between the two sample groups, and the results will be more informed by conducting interviews based on the comparability of the two employee samples.

4. Finding and Conclusion

In this study, the four factors of employer brand attractiveness were categorized and related according to the four major functional categories: "employer image and reputation", "culture", "compensation and development", and "work itself", and were coded as A, B, C, D. Within each factor, there are subdivisions, for example, 'Factor A contains 4 sub-items, coded A1-A4, corresponding to "attractive products", "innovation", "market success" and "prestige and fame"; Factor B has 5 sub-items, coded B1-B5, corresponding to "good working atmosphere", "respectful working environment", "balanced work-life" The C factor contains five sub-factors of attractiveness C1-C5, which are "salary and bonus", and "rich benefits". ", "Employee benefits", "Vacation", "Development opportunities " and "leadership opportunities"; Factor D contains sub-factors of attractiveness which are "challenging work""responsibility of work ", "opportunities for assignment", "job stability" and "teamwork", coded as D1-D5.

The mean values of the interview survey in the four major attractiveness factor factors are shown in the following table.

Factor Codes	Attractive Factor	Average Shanghai Employee Ratings	Average Dongying Employee Ratings
A	employer image and reputation	2.43	2.34
B	culture	1.89	2.04
C	compensation and development	2.50	1.82
D	work itself	2.40	2.36

Table 2 Employer Branding attractiveness 4 factors comparison

It can be found that there is little difference between the ratings of employees in the two regions in factors A and D, but there is regional variability in factors C and D.

As can be seen from Tables 3 and 4 below, among the 19 employer brand attractiveness factors, the importance of the ranking of the personal value factor of employees' job search is fully consistent with their rating of VOLKSWAGEN's attractiveness in this factor. Although there is a difference between the value factor ranked first in Table 3 and Table 4, the corresponding employer brand attractiveness score of VOLKSWAGEN also has a corresponding change in order, indicating that the employer brand attractiveness factor with a high personal value factor, the employee's rating of the attractiveness factor provided by the company is also high.

Factor Codes	Importance Ranking	Employer brand attractiveness score	Importance Ranking
B3	1	1.69	1
B4	2	2.17	2
C1	3	2.45	3

Table 3 Comparison of personal job search value factor and employer brand attractiveness factor in Shanghai.

Factor Codes	Importance Ranking	Employer brand attractiveness score	Importance Ranking
C1	1	1.68	1
B4	2	2.09	2
B3	3	2.26	3

Table 4 Comparison of personal job search value factor and employer brand attractiveness factor in Dongying.

These illustrate that individuals are attracted and selected before entering the organization because of the similarity between their values and the attractive elements of the organization's employer brand, and are again validated and honed in on the employer value brand after entering the organization, thus there is a positive correlation between the individual job search intention dimension and their identification with the employer brand proposition (H1).

Shanghai, as a representative of China's first-tier cities, has high prices and house prices, and the average salary of the city's working employees in 2021 is 11,396 RMB. As the main source of income to sustain the daily expenses of the working class, it is usually presumed to have a dominant influence on employees' job choice, however,

Table 3 of the survey results shows that employees' attractiveness rating of salary and bonus at VOLKSWAGEN is only the third among the top three local employers' value attractiveness factors, behind the highest rated "work-life balance" and the second highest rated "career path and development opportunities". Life balance" and "career path and development opportunities". In other words, employees do not consider their salary and benefits to be the most attractive when they work at VOLKSWAGEN, but mainly because the company provides a good work-life balance culture. In the third-tier city of Dongying, the average social wage of employees in 2021 is RMB 8,939, and the standard of living and housing prices are lower than those in Shanghai. The cost of living is not positively correlated with the cost of living in the area as hypothesis H2. As can be seen from Table 4, the mean value of "job income" is 1.68, which is much higher than the second-ranked "career path and development opportunities" with 2.09 and the third-ranked "work-life balance" with 2.26. This indicates that most employees have a high opinion of the company's compensation and benefits in the market. Satisfaction with compensation and benefits accounts for a significant portion of the attractiveness of the Dongbei plant to VOLKSWAGEN.

This indicates that there are geographical differences in the attractiveness factors of employer branding, with employees in Tier 1 cities and Tier 3 regions not fully agreeing on the attractiveness factors, and there is no correlation between the regional cost of living and their agreement on the attractiveness factors of compensation and benefits (H2).

To sum up, to build an employer brand in Dongying, Volkswagen must consider the regional specificity and the differentiation of talent groups' demands, and build a higher weight on the positive attraction factors to offset the innate negative hindrance factors, to form an attractive advantage of talent mobility across regions.

The study proves the following two conclusions: 1. Employer branding must be done from the perspective of employee recognition, not from the perspective of management and headquarters' perception. Even within the same company, there is a difference between the employer brand in Shanghai and the employer brand in second and third-tier cities. The employer value proposition should be free from local orientation and be tailored to local conditions. 2. Just as there are differences between corporate employer brands in second and third-tier cities and first-tier cities. It is related to the comparative advantages of employer value attraction elements in the local area and the demands of stakeholder subjects.

5. Recommendation

Dongying, a representative of the third-tier cities, has a shortage of talents in the local automotive industry cluster, so the recruitment of knowledgeable talents for manufacturing management needs to rely on talent mobility and the supply of foreign knowledgeable talents. The stability requirements and family characteristics of this group of people determine their high migration costs. With fewer development opportunities in second-and third-tier cities compared to first-tier cities such as North, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, compensation and benefits as the main source of income play a key role in attracting talent. If the company can focus more on the compensation and benefits offerings and publicity, it can effectively enhance the attractiveness of the target candidate group and form a differentiated employer brand in the competitive talent market, establishing its advantages. From the perspective of corporate development strategy, Dongying's manufacturing base is one of the important production bases of the company, with new factories, high construction standards, many jobs in demand, and a large career development space, which constitutes a great attraction for candidates aged 30-35 who have certain work experience and are in the process of career advancement and have demands for job development prospects.

To sum up, companies should combine their unique advantages in second and third-tier cities and the demands of target groups to establish employer brand awareness to better gain advantages in the competition for talents.

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