

The Impact of Internal Employer Branding on Employee Engagement and Retention

The goal of this research is to identify the impact of IEB on employee engagement and retention in IT companies. The quantitative research involved 203 IT professionals. The significant relationship between IEB, employee engagement, employee retention and social identity was revealed. The study showed that employee engagement is mostly affected by the following dimensions of IEB: organizational values, rewards and recognition, while in addition, internal communication has a positive effect on employee retention.

Keywords: employee retention, employee engagement, internal employer branding (IEB), social identity.

Šio tyrimo tikslas – nustatyti vidinio darbdavio įvaizdžio (VDĮ) poveikį darbuotojų įsitraukimui ir išlaikymui informacinių technologijų (IT) įmonėse. Kiekybiniame tyrime dalyvavo 203 IT specialistai. Buvo atskleistas reikšmingas ryšys tarp VDĮ, darbuotojų įsitraukimo, darbuotojų išlaikymo ir socialinio identiteto. Tyrimas parodė, kad darbuotojų įsitraukimui didžiausią įtaką daro šios VDĮ dimensijos: organizacijos vertybės, atlygis ir pripažinimas, o vidinė komunikacija daro papildomą teigiamą poveikį darbuotojų išlaikymui.

Raktiniai žodžiai: darbuotojų išlaikymas, darbuotojų įsitraukimas, vidinis darbdavio įvaizdis (VDĮ), socialinis identitetas.

Introduction

Nowadays, the rivalry between employers is highly increasing. Companies need to come up with different ways to stand out in the market and to be able to attract, retain and engage employees (Xie, Bagozzi & Meland, 2015). The retention of employees is relevant in all sectors, however, the significance of retention in IT companies is reported locally and globally (Alias, Noor & Hssan, 2014). According to P. N. da Costa (2019), the

global market is in a very fierce competition of IT professionals. The shortage of highly skilled workforce is increasing. By 2030 it is expected that the global market should lack around 85 million IT professionals: software engineers, programmers, cloud experts etc. (da Costa, 2019). J. Bersin (2013) claims that a lost employee may cost up to 1.5-2 annual salaries. Needless to say, employee retention is becoming crucial for IT companies.

There is a wide range of factors influencing employee retention and

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engagement. Engaged employees feel more involved in the company's activities, which increases overall retention. Currently organizations understand the need to develop and emphasize certain employer factors that distinguish them in the market (Younis & Hammad, 2020). High level of investments is being allocated towards building employer branding (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) and especially devoting the attention towards employee engagement and retention (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019).

This study also includes social identity. Some prior studies identified how social identity impacts potential employee's attraction (Celani & Singh, 2011). The others focus on the role of organizational identification in the area of employer branding and employee retention (Bharadwaj & Yameen, 2021; Bharadwaj, Khan, Yameen, 2022; Khan et al. 2021). However, there is little investigation done on the role of social identity and how it affects the relationship of IEB on employee engagement and retention.

The main goal of this research is to identify the impact of IEB on employee engagement and employee retention in IT companies.

The following research objectives are:

1. To analyze the impact of IEB on employee engagement and employee retention
2. To find the moderating role of social identity in the relationship between IEB and employee engagement and retention.

The paper begins with the literature review on employee retention, engagement, IEB and the role of social identity. Further quantitative empirical research

is described, and findings are presented, followed by the discussion section.

Literature review and development of hypothesis

This chapter presents the main concepts of the research, namely, IEB, employee engagement, retention, and social identity. Their relationships are defined in the hypothesis development section.

Employee retention

Employee retention is described as a company's ability to keep the skilled workforce within the organization (Fahim, 2018). D. Dechawatanapaisal (2018) emphasizes the importance of employee retention to the company since the increase in employee turnover leads to increased indirect and direct costs that result in lower level of employee productivity, number of lost clients and internal service processes disruption. R. L. Cardy & M. L. Lengnick-Hall's (2011) study agrees that employees are the main asset of the company that is considered as a core viable competitive advantage. With a growing shortage of IT professionals in the market globally, IT companies are focusing more than ever on retaining them.

Retention construct in most studies goes together with the employee turnover construct. They are analyzed as two sides of the same coin (WeiBo, Kaur & Zhi, 2010; Holtom et al., 2008). Here are several approaches to analyzing employee retention construct. Job

embeddedness approach focuses on why employees stay in the job (Holtom & Darabi, 2018). Decision making approach explains the turnover process starting with intention to quit, leading to withdrawal behaviors, and eventually withdrawal ends with turnover (Holtom et al., 2008). Approach on analyzing antecedents of employee retention lists the factors affecting employee intention to stay job-related, organization-related, person-related (Holtom et al., 2008), few to mention.

This paper follows the approach of analyzing the antecedents of employee retention, starting with employee engagement and IEB. Also including social identity construct as a less analyzed mediator. In research employee retention is typically measured by intention to stay or as reversed intention to quit as in D. Dechawatanapaisal (2018).

Employee engagement

According to J. Anitha (2014), a certain level of employee involvement and promise to accept the company's mutually acceptable ethics is known as employee engagement. W. A. Kahn (1990) also stated that employee engagement is a high level of employee involvement in the company's activities and a positive mental, physical and emotional connection of employees to the employer. The justification for this statement also comes from W. B. Schaufeli & A. B. Bakker's (2010) study, where it was mentioned that an emotionally and intellectually attached employees have a tendency to demonstrate a greater commitment to organizational values and

goals and show positive energy towards one's behavioral actions that are taken to perform a certain job. W. A. Kahn (1990) defines employee engagement by the level of physical, cognitive and emotional involvement in the work role.

Further W. A. Kahn (1990) operationalizes employee engagement by meaningfulness, safety and availability dimensions. W. B. Schaufeli and his colleagues define the following employee engagement dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption. They describe an engaged employee in terms of high energy and effort at work (vigor), involvement in work (dedication) and concentration on work (absorption). All the dimensions were operationalized into Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2002) and widely used in research on employee engagement. This study is not an exception.

Several studies have systemized the research on the antecedents and the consequences of employee engagement. Employee engagement is predicted by job-related factors (e.g., job characteristics), relationships and support (e.g., relationships with peers, perceived supervisor support), HRM-related practices (e.g., rewards and recognition, employee development), workplace-related factors (e.g., organizational climate, justice), even personality traits, etc. (Saks, 2006; Kaur, 2017; Young et al., 2018; Zhong, Wayne & Liden, 2016). The consequences of high/low employee engagement are employee turnover, organizational citizenship behavior, customer satisfaction, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, etc. (Saks, 2006; Kaur, 2017).

S. Kaur (2017) notices, that rewards/remuneration and recognition,

job characteristics, talent management, transformational leadership, training and development are found to be dominating employee engagement antecedents in IT industries. However, less research is done assessing the influence of IEB and social identity on employee engagement and retention. The current research in this field is covered in the next sections.

IEB

Employer branding is described as a set of company's actions and efforts to advertise and promote the company internally and externally that build an attractive image of the company as an employer (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). IEB is defined as an internal marketing that builds a unique workforce which cannot be duplicated due to company's value proposition which addresses exclusive work culture, goals and values (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Following D. Dechawatanapaisal (2018), C. P. Theurer et al. (2018), K. Tanwar & A. Prasad (2017), in this paper IEB is analyzed through the following elements: organizational values, training and career development program, reward and recognition program, and internal communication.

Organizational values are an inseparable part of internal branding (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006). Organizational values are an exclusive part of IEB that cannot be repeated by any other competitor (Melewar, Gotsi & Andriopoulos, 2012). The more employees associate themselves with organizational values the more enthusiastic they become towards IEB (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018).

R. Maxwell & S. Knox (2009) agree that employees who really "live the brand" and are aware of its values are more likely to be engaged. There is a positive impact of organizational values on employee engagement (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006; Sengupta, Bamel & Singh, 2015). We follow the notion of K. Backhaus & S. Tikoo (2004) who proposed that higher employee retention rates are achieved when there is a clear match between organizational and individual values.

Another element of IEB is employee *training and career development program* within the company (Saleem & Iglesias, 2016). It explains career progression, knowledge gain, competency and skill set improvement opportunities for current or future roles that are being offered by the company for employees (Fahim, 2018; Gilani & Cunningham, 2017).

Every employee has individual needs for professional development and every company has certain career opportunities to offer, so the alignment between two parties helps realistically manage careers (Saleem & Iglesias, 2016; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Without proper career management, employees lose their competitiveness in the labor market, they are not able to acquire new skills, grow together with organization, which leads to decreased employee retention (Fahim, 2018). K. Backhaus & S. Tikoo's (2004) study supports the relationship between training and career development programs as IEB element and employee willingness to stay and engage within the company.

Reward and recognition are noted as a package of intangible and tangible components that are part of IEB (Edwards,

2010). M. D. Hartline & O. C. Ferrell (1996) notice that employee recognition and reward programs have a positive outcome on transferring the company's promise made to employees. Furthermore, T. Ambler & S. Barrow (1996) stated that a set of financial and economic benefits that company offers is a good distinctive factor among other competitors in the market.

Internal communication is another element of IEB through which the company delivers "brand promise", informs and educates internal employees (Punjaisiri et al., 2009). R. Du Preez & M. T. Bendixen (2015) proposed that internal communication is the major "player" which has the greatest level of contribution to internal branding. As per K. Thomson et al., (1999) study, the tool that is used to connect the emotional and intellectual part of an employee towards a company's values and goals, is the internal communication that is directed towards every angle of the company (Burmann, Zeplin & Riley, 2008). Communication outside the organization also impacts company's identity (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). The strength of IEB is affected by how well internal and external communication are aligned and support each other (Saleem & Iglesias, 2016).

To sum up, alignment of personal and organizational values (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019) together with well-developed human resource management activities such as reward and recognition, training and career development strengthened by internal communication creates strong IEB (Crawford, 2015; Kucherov & Zavyalova, 2012).

Social identity

H. Tajfel (1978, p. 63) defined social identity as a person's self-perception or identification with a social group that one is aware of and stands as a member of it together with a joined emotional attachment and value to belonging to the group. It provides a common "lens" to people of social group through which they interpret and perceive the world (Liu et al., 2013) and lets the individual answer the questions of "who am I" by creating a greater meaning of one self's existence in this world (Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2008).

The construct of social identity is analyzed through the lens of social identity theory which describes the mental process of three stages how people act when they start evaluating others as in-group or out-group members: social categorization, social identification and social comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

In self-categorization stage people assign themselves to certain groups with the distinction between "us" (in-group) and "them" (out-group) S. McLeod (2019). Self-categorization assigns individuals to the group where one adopts and follows the internal group's norms, rules, values and beliefs by adjusting one's behavior that is acceptable to that group (Korte, 2007).

In social identification people adopt the identity of the group (McLeod, 2019) and the individual identity becomes less relevant and is less prioritized (Korte, 2007). Sometimes it can happen that social identity norms and behaviors may confront personal identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) and people tend to advocate

group's position rather than personal one (Korte, 2007).

In social comparison people compare themselves with others (McLeod, 2019). The comparison may happen between the in-groups and out-groups which are perceived as the most relevant competitors (Brown, 2000). This distinctiveness leads to greater levels of comparison between the groups where people consciously or subconsciously compete, start stereotyping and discriminating against others in favor of the group that they belong to (McLeod, 2019; Brown, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

In later years the social identity theory was complemented by the research of J. E. Cameron (2004) who proposed a multidimensional model to measure social identity. His scale consists of three elements: cognitive centrality, ingroup affect and ingroup ties. Centrality represents how often one thinks he/she belongs to a particular group. Ingroup affect emphasizes positive emotions due to being a member of the group. Ingroup ties represent psychological belongingness and closeness to the group members. Further in this research we follow the ideas of J. E. Cameron (2004).

Hypothesis development

Previous studies have identified a positive relationship between IEB and employee retention and engagement. However, different elements of IEB have been investigated. For instance, D. Dechawatanapaisal (2018) noted that employee engagement is boosted through IEB strategy that involves knowledge sharing, internal communication, and commonly shared

values. The importance of organizational values on employees' behaviors is noted by R. Maxwell & S. Knox (2009). Learning opportunities (Naim & Lenka, 2018), competency and skills development (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016) foster employee engagement. Also, employees who see further career opportunities within the organization and clearly understand their roles (Bhatnagar, 2007) are more engaged. Also, engagement increases when employees are rewarded and recognized (Anitha, 2014; Baqir et al., 2020).

H1: IEB has a positive impact on employee engagement.

J. Bhatnagar's (2007) research revealed that there is a strong connection between employee retention and the following factors of IEB: interesting and challenging work, growth opportunities, colleagues, fair compensation, and good leadership/management. In the study of Y. K. Lee, S. Kim & S. Y. Kim (2013) employee loyalty increases having a match between organizational values and personal values which leads to greater retention rates. J. A. Ross (2014) proves that increase in employee competence and career opportunities lead to longer employee tenure. R. du Preez & M. T. Bendixen (2015) claim internal communication to be the most important element of IEB. It encourages employees to "live the brand" and longer commit to the company. Overall, IEB forms the right perceptions and attitudes of the company in the minds of employees which positively impacts employee willingness to stay (Bharadwaj et al., 2022; Dechawatanapaisal, 2018; Khan et al., 2021; Sengupta et al., 2015; Rodrigues & Sousa, 2024).

H2: IEB has a positive impact on employee retention.

The construct of social identity is picked as the moderator of this study in order to understand if it strengthens or weakens the relationship between IEB, employee engagement and employee retention.

Based on previous studies social identity is related with employee engagement (Hu, Liu & Zhang, 2020) and employee retention (Avanzi et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2013). Also, indirect relationships with similar constructs have been identified. B. Hu et al. (2020) reveal a conditional linkage between CSR and work engagement as moderated by social identity. Liu et al. (2013) found a positive correlation between the leadership style and employee turnover where employees' organizational identification stands as a mediator between these two variables. This paper studies the mediating role of social identity in the relationship

between IEB and employee engagement and retention.

H3: Employee's social identity positively moderates the relation between the IEB and employee engagement.

H4: Employee's social identity positively moderates the relation between the IEB and employee retention.

Figure 1 summarizes all variables of the research and highlights the main developed hypotheses for this thesis. First of all, IEB (independent variable) has a positive and direct effect on employee engagement and employee retention (dependent variables). Secondly, the moderating role of social identity is known as having a positive and direct impact on the relationships between independent and dependent variables of the study by stating that the higher employee social identification with organization the stronger relationships between variables

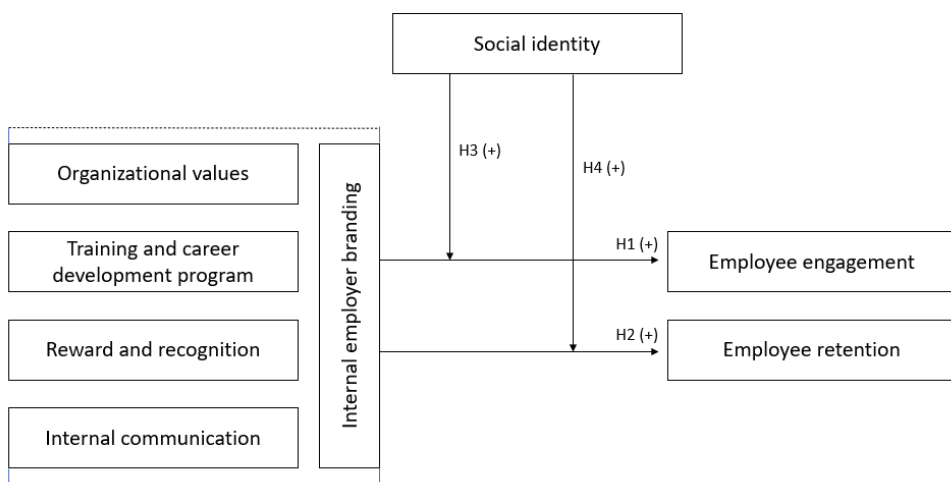


Fig. 1. The conceptual research model

are which leads to increased levels of employee engagement and retention.

Methodology

The methodology section presents the method of this research as well as statistical analysis methods used. It also presents the research design and the instrument.

This research focuses on employees working in IT companies in Lithuania. This sector is chosen due to its growing importance in Lithuanian market and lack of analysis made in this context. According to ICT (n. d.) Lithuania is recognized as a Baltic States country that has a largest information and communication technology sector (ICT) which typically generates ~ 5% of GDP. The country is rapidly expanding and becoming a cluster in the ICT industry. Many technology-based start-ups are being established in Lithuanian market due to its high-quality workforce and favorable conditions for further business development. Lithuania's labor market becomes very attractive to local and foreign technology companies that not only brings positive influence on the market but also creates many challenges for already established employers. The competitiveness between employers in the technology sector in Lithuania grows every year and statistics reveal that there is a way higher demand of specialists in the market rather than market supply (Lithuania's business services report, 2023). Also, the great shortage of workforce in the market transforms tendencies and increases competition between technology-based companies where there is a constant fight for employees which

leads to the to the greater employer selection for employees, meaning that companies are forced to invest more time, effort and money towards establishing a competitive employer branding in the market that has a unique employer value proposition which includes internal and external attractiveness.

Based on the prior studies on IEB, employee engagement and retention fields (Younis & Hammad, 2020; Dechawatana-paisal, 2018; Du Preez & Bendixen, 2015; Anitha, 2014), the quantitative research method is selected for this study. Convenience sampling technique was used to select respondents. Respondents were approached individually via LinkedIn and Facebook social media platforms. The filter question was used to eliminate the respondents who do not match the sampling criteria, who are not IT specialists. In total, 280 respondents opened the questionnaire and started the survey. Some of the responses were eliminated: the ones who did not give consent to use their data for research purposes, the ones who do not work in IT companies, the ones who did not fully complete the questionnaire. The final sample size consists of 203 respondents in total.

Structured online questionnaire is used for the study. The survey consists of the statements measured by 5-point Likert-scale. The development of the instrument is presented further.

Internal employer branding. This construct is measured by using four elements that are found in the prior studies: organizational values (Gilani & Cunningham, 2017; Sengupta et al., 2015; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006; Hu et al., 2020), training and career development (Fahim, 2018; M'zungu et al.,

2010), reward and recognition (Baqir et al., 2020; Crawford, 2015; Olkkonen & Lipponen, 2006; Tyler & Blader, 2003), and internal communication (Saleem & Iglesias, 2016; Du Preez & Bendixen, 2015; Huang & Rundle-Thiele, 2015):

- *Organizational values scale* includes 1 item based on the B. Hu et al. (2020): “My personal values align with organizational values”.
- *Training and career development program scale*. Three statements are adapted from M. G. A. Fahim (2018). Example of the items is “The company offers systematic training to develop new competencies and skills.”
- *Reward and recognition scale*, six items are adopted from M. Baqir et al. (2020). Examples are “I receive higher salary and pay raise on good performance” and “I feel satisfaction with recognition on good performance”.
- *Internal communication* is measured by six item scale based on Y. T. Huang & S. Rundle-Thiele (2015). Examples are “My organization communicates a clear brand image to me”, and “In my organization, communications are appropriate.”

- *Employee engagement*. This construct is assessed by using the nine item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) developed by W. B. Schaufeli & A. B. Bakker (2004). Example questions are “At my work, I feel that I am bursting with energy” (vigor), “I am enthusiastic about my job” (dedication) and “I am immersed at my work” (absorption).

Employee retention. This construct was measured by using two items adapted from P. F. McKay et al. (2007). The items are “I hardly ever think about leaving the company” and “It would take a lot to get me to leave the company”.

Social identity. The moderator of the study is measured by three items focusing on centrality dimension of social identity which analyses how the person identifies oneself as being a member of a specific social group. The statements are adapted from A. J. Benson, M. W. Bruner & M. Eys (2017). Example item is “Overall, being a member of this company has a lot to do with how I feel about myself”.

The data analysis is conducted by using SPSS software. Cronbach’s Alpha was calculated to assess reliability and internal

Table 1. Scales’ reliability

Construct	Variable	Number of items	Cronbach’s Alpha	Internal consistency
IEB dimensions	Organizational values	1	NA	
	Training and career development program	3	0.793	Acceptable
	Reward and recognition	6	0.853	Good
	Internal communication	6	0.839	Good
IEB		16	0.887	Good
Employee engagement		9	0.895	Good
Employee retention		2	0.859	Good
Social identity		3	0.839	Good

Table 2. Shapiro-Wilk test of normality

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Organizational values	0.946	203	0.000
Training and career development program	0.946	203	0.000
Reward and recognition	0.965	203	0.000
Internal communication	0.962	203	0.000
Employee engagement	0.982	203	0.012
Employee retention	0.947	203	0.000
Social identity	0.964	203	0.000

consistency of the scales. Table 1 shows that all the values of Cronbach's Alpha fall into acceptable range within 0.7–0.9.

Normality test is performed by using the Shapiro-Wilk method which showed that data is non-normally distributed and given values do not meet the rule of thumb – the significance value is greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$) (Table 2).

Furthermore, Spearman's correlation test is applied. The correlation test shows

that all values are significant ($\alpha = 0.01$). In most cases values meet weak or moderate correlation levels (Table 4 in the next chapter).

Finally, the multiple regression analysis is applied. Since the multicollinearity between the values is not found, ANOVA, t-test criteria and coefficient of determination are evaluated. Collinearity diagnostics were performed and evaluated by looking at Variance Inflation Factor

Table 3. Collinearity statistics

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
Employee engagement	Organizational values	.000	-
	Training and career development program	.746	1.340
	Reward and recognition	.745	1.343
	Internal communication	.730	1.370
	IEB	1.000	1.000
	Moderator_IEBxSI	.826	1.210
Employee retention	Organizational values	.000	-
	Training and career development program	.746	1.340
	Reward and recognition	.745	1.343
	Internal communication	.730	1.370
	IEB	1.000	1.000
	Moderator_IEBxSI	.826	1.210

Note. Coding meaning: IEB – internal employer branding; SI – Social Identity.

(VIF) values of each variable. Researchers suggest that multicollinearity is not detected if VIF value is less than 10 or not greater than 2.5 (Table 3).

Empirical research findings

Empirical research findings start with the correlation analysis, followed by a multiple regression modeling.

Spearman's correlation test results of all variables are presented in Table 4. All variables show weak to moderate levels of correlation. Surprisingly two variables *organizational values*, and *training and career development program* have the perfect correlation ($r(203) = 1$), meaning that a slight change in one variable

affects other variables in the same way. This result was tested several times and showed the same value.

Spearman's correlation analysis between aggregated IEB construct and employee engagement, retention and social identity is presented in Table 5. Results indicate that all four variables have a moderate correlation and are positively correlated.

For the hypothesis testing linear regression is applied. There are 2 conceptual models (Model A and Model B) that are analyzed and presented below. In order to evaluate models properly, the adjusted R square value is taken into consideration. Also, for further consideration, F statistics, t-test and β results are included as well.

Table 4. Spearman's correlation of all variables

		1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Organizational values						
2	Training and career development program	1.000**					
3	Reward and recognition	0.431**	0.431**				
4	Internal communication	0.500**	0.500**	0.415**			
5	Social identity	0.286**	0.286**	0.383**	0.337**		
6	Employee engagement	0.338**	0.338**	0.473**	0.360**	0.465**	
7	Employee retention	0.387**	0.387**	0.525**	0.400**	0.478**	0.568**

Note. **The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 5. Spearman's correlation including IEB construct

		1	2	3
1	IEB			
2	Social identity	.408**		
3	Employee engagement	.447**	.465**	
4	Employee retention	.517**	.478**	.568**

Note. **The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Model A Hypothesis Testing

Figure 2 represents Model A and tests IEB relation with employee engagement by also considering the moderating role of social identity.

Model A equation: *Employee engagement* = $C + b1 \text{ IEB} + b2 (\text{IEB} \times \text{Social identity})$.

IEB is taken as a separate independent variable that is created by taking all other independent variables and calculating the average of them. The IEB construct is tested by the same multiple linear regression and social identity is also considered as the other independent variable that is included in the test and is expected to moderate the relationship between IEB and employee engagement. As per test results, two models are received in Table 6, one takes into account only one variable and test H1 hypothesis and the second one investigates the impact of the moderator social identity by testing H3 hypothesis.

H1: IEB has a positive impact on employee engagement.

The results show (Table 6) that Model 1 takes into consideration only IEB as an independent variable and *employee engagement* as a dependent variable. The test results show that adjusted R square is .191 which is 19.1% of the variance in the dependent variable that can be explained by the Model 1 construct. The result is significant, $F(1, 201) = 48.549$ and p-value is less than .05, $\beta = .471$ and $t = 6.968$. To conclude, it is noted that IEB has a positive impact on employee engagement, meaning that H1 hypothesis is supported.

If taken separately, reward and recognition construct and organizational values have the biggest and most significant impact on employee engagement. The adjusted R square increases to .246, while the results of correlation analysis with employee engagement are the following: reward and recognition $\beta = .395$, $t = 6.334$, $p < .05$ and organizational values with $\beta = .116$, $t = 2.160$, $p < .05$.

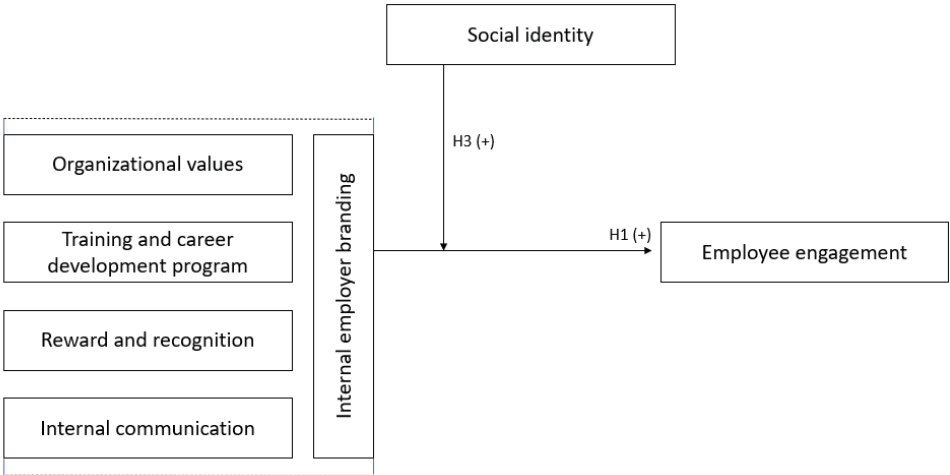


Fig. 2. The conceptual research Model A for hypothesis testing

Table 6. GLM results of IEB, employee engagement and moderator

Model		R square	Adjusted R square	Beta	t	Sig.
1	Constant	.195	.191	1.942	7.492	.000
	IEB			.471	6.968	.000
2	Constant	.281	.274	1.617	6.361	.000
	IEB			.327	4.640	.000
	Social identity			.242	4.909	.000

Note. Dependent variable: employee engagement.

H3: Employee's social identity positively moderates the relation between the IEB and employee engagement.

The results show (Table 6) that Model 2 takes into consideration *IEB* as independent variable, *employee engagement* as dependent variable and *social identity* as a moderator. The test results that the adjusted R square is .274 (Table 6) which is 27.4% of the variance in the employee

engagement, meaning that with the additional variable in this case – moderator, the R square value increases when comparing the result with Model 1. The result is statistically significant, $F(2, 200) = 39.115$ and p-value is less than .05 and with $\beta = .327$, $t = 4.640$, $p = .000$ for *IEB* and $\beta = .242$, $t = 4.909$, $p = .000$ for *social identity*. To conclude, results allow supporting H3 hypothesis.

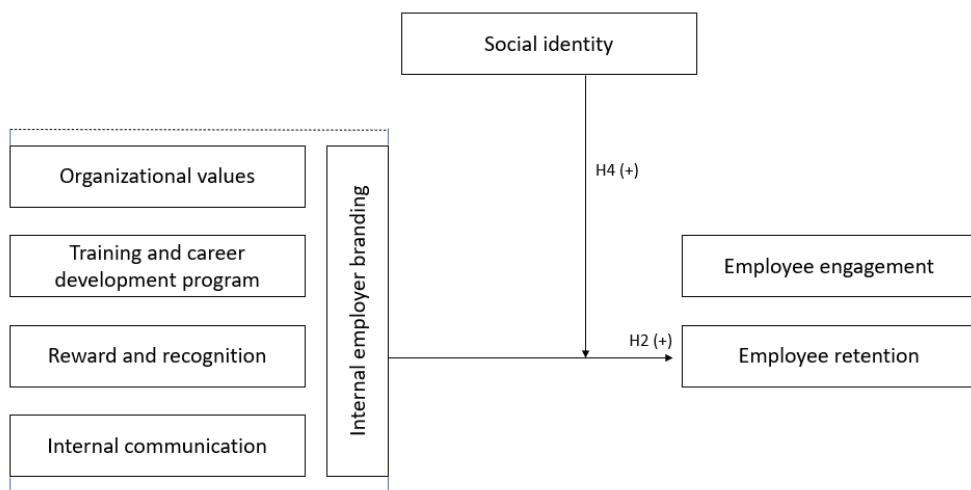


Fig. 3. The conceptual research Model B for hypothesis testing

Model B Hypothesis Testing

Figure 3 presents Model B, which represents and tests IEB relation with employee retention by also considering the moderating role of social identity.

Model B equation: *Employee retention* = $C + b1\text{ IEB} + b2\text{ (IEB} \times \text{Social identity)}$.

As per the test results presented in Table 7, two models are received, Model 1 takes into account only one variable and tests H2 hypothesis, while Model 2 investigates the impact of the additional variable - moderator social identity - by testing H4 hypothesis.

H2: IEB has a positive impact on employee retention.

The results show (Table 7) that Model 1 only takes into account *IEB* as an independent variable and *employee retention* as a dependent variable. The test results show that adjusted R square is .256 which is 25.6% of the variance in the employee retention that can be explained by the model construct. The result is significant, $F(1, 201) = 70.354$ and p-value is less than .05, $\beta = .915$ and $t = 8.388$. To conclude, the H2 hypothesis is supported.

Taking separate IEB elements into account, employee retention is mostly affected by organizational values, reward and recognition and internal communication. The adjusted R square increases to .319. The results of correlation analysis with employee retention are the following: reward and recognition $\beta = .652$, $t = 6.215$, $p < .05$, internal communication with $\beta = .231$, $t = 2.117$, $p < .05$, and organizational values $\beta = .179$, $t = 1.976$, $p \leq .05$.

H4: Employee's social identity positively moderates the relation between the IEB and employee retention.

Results show (Table 7), Model 1 takes into consideration only *IEB* as independent variable and *employee retention* as dependent variable. The test results show that adjusted R square is .256 which is 25.6% of the variance in the dependent variable that can be explained by the model construct. Although when the moderator is included in the model the adjusted R square increases to .333 which is 33.3% of the variance in *employee retention*. The result of the Model 2 is statistically significant,

Table 7. GLM of IEB, employee retention and moderator

Model		R square	Adjusted R square	Beta	t	Sig.
1	Constant	.259	.256	-.104	-.249	.804
	IEB			.915	8.388	.000
2	Constant	.339	.333	-.629	-1.534	.127
	IEB			.682	6.000	.000
	Social identity			.392	4.922	.000

Note. Dependent variable: employee retention.

$F(2, 200) = 51.356$ and p -value is less than .05 and with $\beta = .682$, $t = 6.000$, $p = .000$ for *IEB* and $\beta = .392$, $t = 4.922$, $p = .000$ for *social identity*. To conclude, results allow supporting H4 hypothesis.

Discussions

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of internal employee branding on employee engagement and employee retention while exploring the moderating role of social identity on these relationships as well. All the hypotheses were supported. As it was predicted based on the previous studies, the IEB has a positive and direct relationships with employee engagement and employee retention (Fahim, 2018; Naim & Lenka, 2018; Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2016; Anitha, 2014; Sengupta et al., 2015; Xu & Thomas, 2011; Bhatnagar, 2007; Khan et al., 2021). Thesis results supported both hypotheses H1 and H2 by noting that in order to engage and retain employees IEB plays an essential role here. These conclusions go in line with the previous studies and the importance of IEB is proved.

Separately organizational values, reward and recognition construct has a significant impact on employee engagement. This finding also aligned with prior studies of R. Du Preez & M. T. Bendixen (2015) and J. Bhatnagar (2007). Employee retention, however, is mostly affected by organizational values, reward and recognition and internal communication. This finding corresponds to the previous studies performed by M. G. A. Fahim (2018), R. Du Preez & M. T. Bendixen (2015), A. Sengupta et al. (2015), T. Melewar et al. (2012) and J. Bhatnagar (2007).

In addition to this, the novelty of the study comes from the moderator effect since little research is done including independent variable of social identity. Empirical research findings showed that employee social identity positively contributed and strengthened relations between IEB and employee engagement, as well as IEB and employee retention by supporting H3 and H4 hypotheses respectively. What is interesting to note is that social identity construct has not been deeply investigated yet and the definition of it varies from one study to another by creating the different views and perceptions of the variable. However, there is some research in the field identifying direct and positive effects of social identity on the relations between independent and dependent variables (Hu et al., 2020; Avanzi et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2013, Korte, 2007; Bharadwaj et al., 2022). The results showed that when an employee sees oneself as a part of an organization and assigns oneself to the specific group of people who belong to a particular organization, the relationships between IEB and employee engagement, and IEB and employee retention tend to strengthen and show positive impact.

Managerial implications

IEB is the significant tool for IT companies in order to engage and retain employees, especially nowadays in Lithuania where the competitiveness of labor market in IT industry is drastically increasing. IT companies should evaluate the reward and recognition factor of IEB and consider it as the most valued one from the employee's side. However,

for even greater employee retention and engagement purposes other IEB factors should be respectively covered as well. Organizational values and internal communication should be more addressed for the employee retention purposes. Furthermore, analysis showed that employee social identity also has a positive effect and strengthens employee engagement and retention. The practical implication shows that belongingness to a certain organization has lots of to do with how employees feel about themselves and how they perceive their self-image. These conclusions imply that if there is a positive perception of the company, employees tend to feel better and more confident about themselves that would also lead to greater employee willingness to stay within the organization and be involved in its activities more frequently. It is recommended for IT companies to use internal communication wisely, emphasizing the messages which are the most important for engaged IT specialists. As this research shows, the messages should be around identifying oneself with the colleagues, focusing on company values and staying recognized.

Limitations

There are several limitations of the study. First, lack of generalizability of the results in other sectors and geographies. Also, the limited sample size ($N = 203$) and convenience sampling approach does not ensure representative conclusions

for entire IT market in Lithuania. Additionally, as the operationalization of IEB differs in various studies, therefore it hinders comparability.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of the research was to discuss and analyze the impact of IEB on employee engagement and retention, by also exploring the moderating role of social identity in IT companies in Lithuania. Previous studies have shown that the employer branding has been tested in various backgrounds including employee attraction, engagement and retention. However, not much investigation has been done on IEB and its relationship with employee engagement and retention within the IT sector in Lithuania. The novelty of the research also comes from the moderator *social identity* which is quite poorly discussed in the literature and used for employee engagement and retention purposes.

Empirical research findings revealed a significant relationship between all constructs: IEB, employee engagement, employee retention and social identity. Social identity positively moderates the relation between IEB and two dependent variables - employee engagement and retention respectively. The study indicated that employee engagement is mostly affected by organizational values, rewards and recognition, while additionally internal communication has a positive effect on employee retention.

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The paper submitted: August 25, 2023

Prepared for publication: August 30, 2024

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VIDINIO DARBDAVIO ĮVAIZDŽIO POVEIKIS DARBUOTOJŲ ĮSITRAUKIMUI IR IŠLAIKYMIUI

Santrauka

Darbuotojų išlaikymas aktualus visiems sektoriams, tačiau apie jo svarbą IT įmonėse kalbama tiek Lietuvoje, tiek visame pasaulyje. Vis labiau jaučiamas aukštos kvalifikacijos darbuotojų trūkumas. Manoma, kad iki 2030 m. pasaulio rinkoje turėtų trūkti apie 85 mln. IT specialistų. Taigi, darbuotojų išlaikymas IT bendrovėms tampa itin svarbus.

Šiame straipsnyje analizuojami veiksniai, turintys įtakos darbuotojų išlaikymui IT įmonėse, įskaitant VDĮ, darbuotojų įsitraukimą ir modifikuojantį kintamąjį – socialinį identitetą. Pagrindinis šio tyrimo tikslas – nustatyti VDĮ poveikį darbuotojų įsitraukimui ir išlaikymui IT įmonėse.

Šio tyrimo uždaviniai:

1. Išanalizuoti VDĮ poveikį darbuotojų įsitraukimui ir išlaikymui.

2. Nustatyti moderuojantį socialinio identiteto vaidmenį, vertinant VDĮ ir darbuotojų įsitraukimo ir išlaikymo santykį.

Tyrimo metu taikytas kiekybinis tyrimo metodas, duomenys rinkti naudojant internetinę apklausą. Tyrimas atliktas Lietuvoje ir buvo skirtas IT įmonių darbuotojams. Apklausti 203 respondentai.

Duomenys išanalizuoti naudojant programinę įrangą SPSS. Skalių patikimumui ir vidiniam nuoseklumui įvertinti buvo apskaičiuota Cronbacho alfa. Visos Cronbacho alfa reikšmės patenka į priimtina intervalą nuo 0,7 iki 0,9. Normalumo testas atliktas taikant Shapiro–Wilko metodą, ir testas parodė nenormalų duomenų pasiskirstymą. Spearmano koreliacijos testas atskleidžia, kad visos reikšmės yra reikšmingos ($\alpha = 0,01$). Dažniausiai reikšmės atitinka silpną arba vidutinę koreliacijos lygį. Taikyta daugybinė regresinė analizė. Kadangi multikolinearumo tarp reikšmių nenustatyta, buvo vertinami ANOVA, t testo kriterijai ir determinacijos koeficientas. Kolinearumo analizė atlikta ir įvertinta nagrinėjant kiekvieno kintamojo variacijos infliacijos faktoriaus (VIF) reikšmes.

Buvo tikrinamos toliau išvardytos hipotezės.

H1: VDĮ turi teigiamą poveikį darbuotojų įsitraukimui.

Testo rezultatai rodo, kad pakoreguotas R kvadratas yra 0,191, t. y. 19,1 % priklausomo kintamojo dispersijos, kurią galima paaiškinti pirmo modelio konstruktu. Rezultatas yra reikšmingas, $F(1, 201) = 48,549$, p reikšmė mažesnė nei 0,05, $\beta = 0,471$ ir $t = 6,968$. Apibendrinant galima sakyti, kad VDĮ turi teigiamą poveikį darbuotojų įsitraukimui, o tai reiškia, kad H1 hipotezė yra patvirtinta. Vertinant atskirai, atlygio ir pripažinimo konstruktas bei organizacijos vertybės turi didžiausią ir reikšmingą poveikį darbuotojų įsitraukimui. Pakoreguotas R kvadratas padidėja iki ,246, o regresijos analizės rezultatai, susiję su darbuotojų įsitraukimu, yra tokie: atlygio ir pripažinimo $\beta = ,395$, $t = 6,334$, $p < ,05$; organizacinių vertybių $\beta = ,116$, $t = 2,160$, $p < ,05$.

H2: VDĮ turi teigiamą poveikį darbuotojų išlaikymui.

Testo rezultatai rodo, kad pakoreguotas R kvadratas yra 0,256, t. y. 25,6 % darbuotojų išlaikymo dispersijos, kurią galima paaiškinti modelio konstruktu. Rezultatas yra reikšmingas, $F(1, 201) = 70,354$, o p reikšmė mažesnė nei 0,05, $\beta = 0,915$ ir $t = 8,388$.

Apibendrinant galima teigti, kad H2 hipotezė yra patvirtinta. Atsižvelgiant į atskirus VDĮ elementus, darbuotojų išlaikymui didžiausią įtaką daro organizacijos vertybės, atlygis ir pripažinimas bei vidinė komunikacija. Pakoreguotas R kvadratas padidėja iki ,319. Regresijos analizės, susijusios su darbuotojų išlaikymu, rezultatai yra tokie: atlygis ir pripažinimas $\beta = ,652$, $t = 6,215$, $p < ,05$; vidinis bendravimas su $\beta = ,231$, $t = 2,117$, $p < ,05$; organizacinės vertybės $\beta = ,179$, $t = 1,976$, $p \leq ,05$.

H3: darbuotojo socialinis identitetas turi teigiamą moderuojantį poveikį VDĮ ir darbuotojų įsitraukimo ryši.

Testo rezultatai rodo, kad pakoreguotas R kvadratas yra ,274 (6 lentelė), o tai sudaro 27,4 % darbuotojų įsitraukimo dispersijos, t. y. šiuo atveju įvedus papildomą kintamąjį – moderatorių, R kvadrato reikšmė padidėja, lyginant rezultata su 1 modeliu. Rezultatas yra statistškai reikšmingas, $F(2, 200) = 39,115$ ir p reikšmė mažesnė nei ,05, o $\beta = ,327$, $t = 4,640$, $p = ,000$ IEB; socialinio identiteto atveju $\beta = ,242$, $t = 4,909$, $p = ,000$. Apibendrinant galima teigti, kad rezultatai leidžia patvirtinti H3 hipotezę.

H4: darbuotojo socialinis identitetas teigiamai veikia VDĮ ir darbuotojų išlaikymo ryšį.

Testo rezultatai rodo, kad pakoreguotas R kvadratas yra 0,256, t. y. 25,6 % priklausomo kintamojo dispersijos, kurią galima paaiškinti modelio konstruktu. Tačiau, į modelį įtraukus moderatorių, pakoreguotas R kvadratas padidėja iki 0,333, t. y. 33,3 % darbuotojų išlaikymo dispersijos. 2 modelio rezultatas yra statistškai reikšmingas, $F(2, 200) = 51,356$, o p reikšmė mažesnė nei ,05 ir $\beta = ,682$, $t = 6,000$, $p = ,000$ IEB; socialinio identiteto atveju $\beta = ,392$, $t = 4,922$, $p = ,000$. Taigi, rezultatai leidžia patvirtinti H4 hipotezę.

Apibendrinant galima teigti, kad empirinio tyrimo rezultatai atskleidė reikšmingą ryšį tarp VDĮ, darbuotojų įsitraukimo, darbuotojų išlaikymo ir socialinio identiteto. Socialinis identitetas turi teigiamą moderuojantį poveikį IEB ir dviejų priklausomų kintamųjų – atitinkamai darbuotojų įsitraukimo ir išlaikymo – ryši. Tyrimas parodė, kad darbuotojų įsitraukimui didžiausią įtaką daro organizacijos vertybės bei atlygis ir pripažinimas, o papildomai vidinė komunikacija teigiamai veikia darbuotojų išlaikymą.

Šis tyrimas paplėtė turimas žinias apie vidinį darbdavio įvaizdį ir jo poveikį darbuotojų įsitraukimui ir išlaikymui Lietuvos IT įmonėse.

