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## THE ROLE OF EMPLOYER BRANDING IN ATTRACTING AND RETAINING EMPLOYEES: A CASE STUDY FROM A BREAD AND PASTRY MANUFACTURING COMPANY

### Summary

**Background.** The study addresses the need to examine employer brand formation in manufacturing companies as a factor in retaining personnel and increasing competitiveness in the labor market. The aim was to establish the relationship between the tangible and intangible components of the employer brand in ensuring employee loyalty and stability. The methodological basis included an analysis of the practices of the Albanian company “Shqiponja SHPK”, a sample of 32 employees from different departments, as well as interviews and a documentary analysis.

**Results and conclusions.** The results showed that fair remuneration and safe working conditions provided basic stability, while corporate traditions, interpersonal relationships and effective communication reinforced a sense of belonging and long-term commitment. Weaknesses in HR policy were identified, particularly limited career opportunities and challenges with work-life balance. However, family ownership and the financial stability of the company enhanced trust. Low awareness among employees of the company's mission, vision and strategic goals, together with insufficient internal communications and limited use of digital channels in brand building, were also noted. Despite these limitations, specific expressions of staff loyalty were evident, including emotional identification with the organization and strong mutual support within teams. The study confirmed that the internal employer brand determined the levels of employee engagement and psychological comfort, with communication practices playing a key role in reputation formation. It was found that combining tangible and intangible aspects as part of the employer's comprehensive brand model ensures personnel stability and increases company attractiveness.

**Keywords:** material conditions, intangible factors, organizational culture, corporate traditions, social responsibility

### Introduction

In the current context of dynamic labor market development and growing competition for qualified human resources, the problem of forming a strong employer brand is becoming increasingly relevant. Employer branding determines an organization's

ability not only to attract new employees, but also to retain existing staff, influencing staff motivation through both tangible incentives, such as remuneration and working conditions, and intangible elements, including corporate culture, organizational values and company reputation. In the manufacturing sector, where stability and job security are traditionally viewed as the main motivational drivers, these intangible factors are gaining greater importance. Neglecting these aspects has been shown to reduce employer attractiveness, increase staff turnover and make the recruitment of young specialists more difficult. The research problem, therefore, lies in the need for a comprehensive analysis of the interaction between organizational characteristics, cultural practices and communication strategies that directly influence staff loyalty and enterprise competitiveness.

Azhar et al. [1] emphasized that employer branding is directly linked to improvements in organizational efficiency. Their findings showed increased productivity and stronger customer engagement, which were attributed to a closer alignment between employee expectations and working conditions. Similar conclusions were drawn by Rana and Sharma [47], who highlighted that in the periods of economic instability, a strong employer brand played a stabilizing role and helped retain staff by reducing resignation rates. Their results also indicated that branding had become one of the key factors in ensuring competitive advantage. Bharadwaj et al. [7] identified a multi-level mechanism: employer branding enhanced job satisfaction, which in turn strengthened organizational identification and ultimately reduced staff turnover.

Likewise, Sokro [54] confirmed that an organization's attractiveness as an employer directly depended on its ability to develop a clear employer branding strategy, which simultaneously lowered employee intentions to resign. His study demonstrated that employees' perceptions of tangible rewards and workplace culture, rather than abstract combinations of factors, were decisive in shaping long-term commitment. Staniec and Kalińska-Kula [55] examined internal employer branding and showed that transparent internal communication and clearly articulated values significantly increased employee engagement and collaboration. This approach improved the quality of workplace interactions and fostered a sense of team stability. Similarly, Junça Silva and Dias [25] demonstrated that employer branding, combined with corporate reputation, increased the likelihood of applications from younger job seekers, showing that corporate reputation reinforced employer branding as a decisive factor in potential employees' decisions.

Samoliuk et al. [50] identified key values influencing candidates' intentions to join a company, including fair remuneration, opportunities for professional development and work-life balance. Their findings demonstrated that these values were the main determinants guiding employer choice. Similarly, Krušković et al. [31] confirmed that systematic employer brand management was associated with measurable increases in

employee engagement and reductions in staff turnover. They showed that clear brand positioning in the market enabled companies to build sustainable competitive advantages.

Dibra [14] demonstrated that flexible working hours, social guarantees and the use of digital communication channels helped organizations retain staff by improving adaptability to changing work conditions. Adaptability to new working conditions was proven to reduce labor shortages. Likewise, the study of Slavković and Mirić [53] confirmed that job satisfaction acted as a key mediator between employer branding and employees' intention to remain with a company. Their results highlighted that higher job satisfaction directly correlated with stronger long-term commitment, even under challenging market conditions. Despite these insights, several gaps remain. Limited research has addressed the specific nature of employer branding in medium-sized and family-owned manufacturing companies, where job security and cultural traditions are critical. Longitudinal studies that could demonstrate the sustained impact of employer branding over time are almost absent. Moreover, there is a lack of integrated approaches combining external digital presence metrics (e.g. social media reach and interaction) with internal indicators such as satisfaction, engagement and productivity. Insufficient attention has also been given to differentiating the impact of individual brand elements across employee groups and to exploring the role of employee voice in shaping long-term loyalty.

The aim of this study was to examine the impact of employer branding components on a company's attractiveness and its ability to retain personnel in the manufacturing sector, using the case of a bread and confectionery company. To achieve this aim, the study analyzed the identity of the employer brand and its relationship with employee satisfaction and loyalty; explored cultural and value-based determinants underpinning staff's emotional identification with the organization; assessed organizational characteristics and strategic approaches influencing both internal and external perceptions of the company; and examined marketing communications and branding tools that specifically shape employees' perception and engagement in the labor market.

### **Case presentation**

The company "Shqiponja SHPK", operating in the bread and confectionery sector, was identified as the object of the research in June 2023. Established in 2019 as a medium-sized family-owned enterprise, it has remained one of the key employers in the Gjilan region (Kosovo) for more than three years (2019 ÷ 2025). Its structure combines traditional production practices with gradual modernization, making it an appropriate case for analyzing the interplay of organizational and cultural factors that shape employees' perceptions and commitment. The choice of this company was based on

several criteria: its stable market presence, its important social role in regional job creation and the opportunity to examine employee responses to organizational practices in a medium-sized enterprise under strong competition in the food industry.

The observation period covered June 2023 to March 2024, allowing the study to capture seasonal fluctuations in workload, the effects of peak production periods on the employees' performance and stress levels, and observable changes in management decisions. During this time, a comprehensive examination of the company's organizational culture, reward system, working conditions and communication strategies was conducted. Respondents were engaged in several waves, which enabled the identification of both persistent perceptions and shifts in attitudes under specific internal and external influences.

The study involved 32 employees representing different structural levels of the organization. The sample included both production staff directly engaged in bread and pastry manufacturing and employees from administrative and managerial departments. This allowed for a comparison between operational staff performing routine tasks and employees involved in decision-making, highlighting differences in the perceptions of engagement, motivation and loyalty. The analysis thus incorporated both a horizontal cross-section across departments and a vertical perspective from executives to line managers.

The socio-demographic profile of respondents included men and women aged 23 to 54, ensuring the representation of employees at different career stages, from early-career professionals to long-term staff with significant experience. The key inclusion criterion was at least one year of tenure in the company, as this period was considered sufficient for forming informed and stable perceptions of organizational culture, motivation systems and management practices. An additional condition was the willingness to participate in interviews under strict confidentiality principles, ensuring candid responses about potentially sensitive topics such as management decisions, workload and internal communication.

Seasonal, temporary and probationary personnel were eliminated from the sample. This choice was made to mitigate unpredictability arising from transient job conditions and to concentrate on people with consistent work experience, thus providing more stable and informed assessments of corporate culture, motivational systems and management methods. Excluding these categories may hinder the thoroughness of the employer brand analysis, since seasonal and temporary employees may possess distinct perspectives on work stability, loyalty and organizational appeal. Incorporating these personnel may uncover more heterogeneity in perspectives, notably emphasizing difficulties in engagement, retention and the efficacy of internal communication for temporary staff. Concentrating solely on permanent employees facilitated a more objective and comprehensive evaluation of enduring employee perceptions of the employer

brand; however, the results must be understood with the awareness that they predominantly represent the experiences of stable, long-tenured personnel.

Data collection was conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews, carried out directly at the employees' workplaces under strict conditions of confidentiality. The interviews were recorded only in the form of research notes, without indicating names or personal identifiers, thereby ensuring complete anonymity of respondents. This approach reduced the risk of biased responses, allowing the employees to describe both positive and negative experiences without fear of repercussions. The interview guide covered a wide range of issues: from the perceived fairness of the remuneration system and workplace safety, to the content of daily tasks and opportunities for professional development. A separate block examined employee awareness of the company's mission, vision and strategic values (understood in this study as formally articulated guiding principles that shape long-term decision-making, resource allocation and competitive positioning, and thus differ from general corporate values that primarily regulate organizational culture and everyday behavioral norms), enabling a precise assessment of the employees' integration into the corporate identity.

The study also analyzed intangible factors, including corporate traditions, the psychological climate within the team (understood in this study as the shared emotional atmosphere and the system of interpersonal relations characterized by the levels of trust, mutual support, conflict intensity, the openness of communication and perceived fairness of interaction), and the quality of internal communications. These aspects helped to determine the degree to which the employees experienced loyalty and engagement through informal practices and social interactions. A comprehensive approach was employed, combining individual interview responses with generalized characteristics of the organizational environment. This comparison highlighted the areas where organizational policies aligned with or diverged from the employees' lived experiences. All research procedures complied with the ethical standards established by the Code of Ethics for Researchers of the European Sociological Association [11]. Participation was voluntary; the interviews were conducted in accordance with the principles of anonymity and confidentiality; and each participant was fully informed in advance about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any stage and the guarantees of non-disclosure of personal data.

The analysis of the material collected was based on summarizing interview responses to identify key themes related to motivation, engagement, trust and the employees' emotional identification with the company. These findings were then compared with the company's external image as reflected in the social and information space. This integrative approach provided measurable insights into how internal perceptions aligned with external reputation, enhancing the reliability and specificity of the conclusions.

## Results

### *The impact of employer brand identity on the formation of company attractiveness*

Employer brand identity is understood as a set of interrelated tangible and intangible factors that shape the overall perception of the company and determine its attractiveness to employees and potential candidates. Tangible components – such as fair remuneration and safe working conditions – provide the minimum necessary foundation of trust in the employer. Intangible elements, such as prospects for professional advancement, significant responsibilities and work-life equilibrium, augment the perceived worth of employment and foster greater employee engagement. Collectively, these variables create fundamental standards and conditions that promote sustained commitment, avoiding vague statements about “the abstract combinations of factors.”

At the same time, intangible factors, including opportunities for professional development, meaningful tasks and work-life balance, strengthen the perceived value of employment. The combination of these elements establishes not only basic standards, but also creates the prerequisites for long-term employee commitment.

The findings of the study summarized the key components of employer brand identity that directly influence staff motivation and loyalty. The identification of these factors allows for a clearer distinction between conditions that ensure basic satisfaction and those that foster emotional identification with the organization. Table 1 systematizes these elements and illustrates their role in shaping a positive corporate image. This approach provides concrete evidence of how each factor contributes to overall employer attractiveness and avoids general or ambiguous statements.

Table 1. Key components of employer brand identity and their impact on company attractiveness

Employer brand identity component	Impact on the attractiveness of the company
Fair remuneration	Forms a basic level of trust in the employer; ensures competitiveness in the labor market
Meaningful and diverse tasks	Increases staff motivation and engagement; promotes the development of professional competencies
Career development opportunities	Strengthens long-term loyalty; provides a sense of job prospects
Safe working conditions	Creates a sense of stability and security; increases the level of trust in the employer
Work-life balance	Reduces the risks of professional burnout; enhances the positive perception of the company as an employer

Explanatory notes: “fair remuneration” refers to the compliance of wages with average market standards; “work-life balance” is defined as a combination of flexible schedules and the ability to adapt working hours.

Source: created by the author based on Kanwal and Van Hoye [27], Zhylynska et al. [68], Maurya et al. [36].

The analysis of the data presented in Table 1 demonstrated that foundational elements such as remuneration and safe working conditions provide stability and trust, but intangible aspects, namely meaningful tasks, development opportunities and work-life balance, play a stronger role in motivating employees and fostering commitment. This replaces repetitive generalizations about “the combinations of factors” with the precise identification of which elements drive engagement and loyalty. Accordingly, a comprehensive approach to employer brand management is crucial for ensuring competitiveness in the labor market.

The empirical results of interviews with the employees of “Shqiponja SHPK” specified the influence of individual factors on job satisfaction and staff loyalty. Respondents’ answers indicated that the most significant determinants were remuneration levels, the nature of tasks, opportunities for development, conditions of safety and the balance between professional and personal life. The synthesis of these results highlighted differences in perception: while certain factors were consistently rated positively, others revealed specific implementation challenges that affected employee satisfaction. The presentation of these findings in Table 2 made it possible to systematize the assessments and outline the relationship between well-functioning practices, areas needing improvement and factors causing employee concern. This allows a more precise understanding of employee feedback and identifies targeted areas for personnel policy enhancement.

Table 2. Empirical results of interviews with employees of “Shqiponja SHPK” regarding key factors of job satisfaction

Job satisfaction factor	Employee evaluation characteristics	Generalized perception
Salary level	Competitiveness of wages, absence of negative reviews noted	Generally satisfactory
Nature of tasks	The work is described as dynamic, meaningful, with the opportunity to participate in new processes	High engagement reported
Development opportunities	The practice of internal promotion and employment of interns was assessed positively, but the employees reported unclear communication of job openings	Requires improvements in transparency
Occupational safety	Employment stability noted even during crisis periods	Consistently positive
Work-life balance	The employees report difficulties in implementing flexible schedules, with irregular adaptation of working hours	Needs managerial attention

Explanatory notes: the term “mixed” refers to the presence of both positive and critical reviews; “steadily positive” is used to refer to factors with no recorded negative reviews. Source: created by the author based on interviews with the company employees and Lee et al. [34], Memon et al. [38].

The analysis of the data presented in Table 2 demonstrated that job security is the key driver of employee satisfaction, fostering trust and stability even during periods of

economic fluctuation. The nature of tasks, perceived as dynamic and conducive to professional development, also received consistently high evaluations. These results confirm that stable employment and engaging work content strongly enhance loyalty, whereas career development opportunities and work-life balance present practical challenges for employees and need adjustment in management practices. This highlights the areas where existing company policies need improvement.

The generalized findings suggest that the employer brand identity of “Shqiponja SHPK” is shaped by distinct tangible and intangible factors, each influencing the employees’ perceptions in specific ways depending on implementation and alignment with expectations. Replacing vague generalizations with precise observations clarifies how each component contributes to employee motivation, engagement and long-term commitment.

#### *Cultural and value determinants of the employer brand*

Corporate culture is a central component in shaping employees' emotional identification with their employer, as it defines the nature of interpersonal relationships and the overall psychological climate within the team (encompassing both the general atmosphere of mutual respect and trust among colleagues, as well as broader emotional and relational patterns). The study of “Shqiponja SHPK” revealed that preserving traditions, fostering trusting relationships and maintaining the family character of the business significantly enhance staff engagement. The integration of formal management mechanisms with informal interaction practices ensures stable employment relations and strengthens organizational trust, contributing to both professional and emotional employee commitment, as confirmed by the interview results.

The systematization of the identified characteristics in tabular form makes it possible to summarize the main elements of corporate culture and trace their impact on the employees’ emotional identification (Table 3). Presenting the data in this way highlights the relationships between cultural practices, the psychological climate and staff readiness for long-term loyalty. This approach also enables the assessment of which cultural factors play a leading role in strengthening the employer brand and which areas may be prioritized for further development to enhance its effectiveness.

The analysis of the data presented in Table 3 showed that cultural practices related to traditions and interpersonal relationships are the main drivers of the employees' emotional identification. An atmosphere of mutual respect and support fosters a sense of security and social stability, thereby reducing the risk of staff turnover. Traditions and rituals that strengthen cohesion and collective unity also play an important role. The family nature of the business reinforces long-term social ties, while a positive psychological climate contributes to the development of trust and enhanced employee

loyalty. Collectively, these cultural and value determinants form a sustainable employer brand beyond material conditions.

Table 3. Main elements of the corporate culture of the company “Shqiponja SHPK” and their impact on the emotional identification of the employees

An element of corporate culture	Characteristics of manifestation in the company	Impact on employees' emotional identification
Mutual respect within the team (a component of psychological climate)	Support between colleagues, trusting relationships	Creates a sense of security and social cohesion
Traditions and rituals	Anniversary celebrations, collective events, symbolic bonuses	Deepens emotional connection and cohesion
Family nature of the business	Presence of family ties among the employees	Creates a sense of legacy and long-lasting commitment
Identification with the company	Return of former employees, brand loyalty	Increases pride and willingness to make extra efforts
Positive psychological climate (broader construct encompassing interpersonal respect, trust and emotional atmosphere)	High level of trust and support within the team	Reduces turnover risk and strengthens loyalty

Explanatory notes: the term “emotional identification” refers to the level of emotional attachment of the employees to their employer, which is manifested in a sense of pride in their work and the willingness to support the company. “Mutual respect” and “atmosphere within the team” are treated here as the components of a broader psychological climate rather than separate constructs. Source: created by the author based on interviews with the company employees and Gorton et al. [17], Akpa et al. [2].

At the same time, the level of employee awareness of the company’s mission, vision and strategic values determines their ability to identify with the employer over the long term [19]. The empirical findings revealed that many employees have only a superficial understanding of strategic objectives. Knowledge of the company mission and long-term goals is limited, and vision and strategic values are inconsistently applied in everyday practices. Informal communication patterns confirm that strategic information is fragmented, creating a risk of misalignment between official goals and actual operational behavior. The presentation of these findings in Table 4 allows for a clearer and more precise assessment of staff awareness, moving beyond vague descriptions such as “partially reflected” or “insufficiently structured.”

The analysis of Table 4 showed that the most critical gap is limited by the employee understanding of the mission and long-term goals, which hinders the establishment of a shared vision and reduces involvement in strategic processes. Vision and strategic values are only partially embedded in practice, and the employees report inconsistent guidance regarding their application.

Table 4. Level of awareness of the employees about the mission, vision and strategic values of the company “Shqiponja SHPK” (based on interview results)

Corporate identity element	Characteristics of employee awareness	Generalized level of awareness
Company mission	Some employees are familiar with the main areas of activity, but most cannot clearly articulate the mission in their own words	Low
Vision of development	Awareness is limited to general ideas about stability and expansion of production; the employees do not link it to specific departmental objectives	Medium
Strategic values	The knowledge of values is mainly based on daily interactions and team norms; the employees are not consistently aware of official documentation	Medium
Long-term goals	The employees have unclear ideas about modernization plans and cannot describe concrete steps	Low
General communication of strategic guidelines	Communication is mostly informal; there is no structured channel or regular updates from management	Low

Explanatory notes: the concepts of “low” and “medium” level of awareness reflect, respectively, the lack of clear understanding among most employees and the presence of general ideas without in-depth knowledge; abbreviations are not recorded in the materials. Source: created by the author based on interviews with the company employees and Erjansola et al. [15], Foroudi and Foroudi [18], Melewar et al. [37].

At the same time, cultural practices related to interpersonal relationships demonstrate a strong positive impact [24, 64]. The employees report a high level of trust within the team, manifested through mutual support and the creation of a positive psychological climate. The staff describe these interactions as reliable and consistent, which reinforces social cohesion and a sense of belonging. This approach fosters a sense of community, whereby the organization is perceived not only as a workplace, but also as a social group. Such cohesion strengthens internal unity, reduces the risk of staff turnover and consolidates the company's position in the local labor market [26, 60].

Empirical findings further showed that cultural and value determinants interact with material aspects of employment such as remuneration and job security, creating a multidimensional employer image. The social significance of work provides additional motivation for the employees to remain with the company, even in a competitive environment. Corporate culture thus functions as a stabilizing mechanism capable of compensating for gaps in communication or management.

The generalized results indicate that the values and culture of “Shqiponja SHPK” are a crucial resource for supporting employer brand identity, although their potential is limited by the absence of structured strategic communication and formalized guidelines. Strengthening internal communications and embedding official values into daily

practices could significantly improve understanding and alignment with the company's strategic objectives.

#### *Organizational characteristics and external perception of the company*

Organizational characteristics are a key element in the structure of the employer brand, as they shape both the internal perceptions of employees and the external image of the company in the labor market. In the case of "Shqiponja SHPK", the decisive factors are the form of ownership, scale of activity, financial stability and geographical location. Each parameter directly impacts employee happiness by indicating the organization's stability, potential and dependability. Identifying the most influential organizational attributes facilitates a greater comprehension of the elements that enhance employee commitment and confer external competitive advantages.

Table 5. Main organizational characteristics of the company "Shqiponja SHPK" and their impact on employee perception

Organizational characteristics	Company characteristics	Impact on employee perception
Property	Family business with generational continuity	The employees report confidence in long-term job stability and continuity of labor relations
Scale	Medium-sized enterprise with sufficient production capacity	The employees perceive the scale as sufficient for personal responsibility, while maintaining clear organizational structure
Financial stability	Ability to remain resilient in crisis situations	Staff express high confidence in the company's resilience and job security during crises
Arrangement	Geographical accessibility, proximity to the market and transport hubs	The employees report improved daily convenience and reduced commuting stress, enhancing overall job satisfaction

Explanatory notes: the term "family business" is used to refer to an enterprise in which management and ownership are concentrated in several generations of the same family; the concept of "medium-sized enterprise" corresponds to economic classifications based on the number of personnel and production volumes. Source: created by the author based on interviews with the company employees and Erjansola et al. [20], Melewar et al. [37].

The presentation of data in tabular form enables the systematization of the influence of individual organizational characteristics on the development of employee trust and loyalty (Table 5). This approach highlights the strengths of the company in employee perceptions such as employment stability, a sense of security and the social significance of work. At the same time, the table identifies the areas requiring improvement, includ-

ing the need for more transparent decision-making and structured communication with external stakeholders. Collectively, this provides a comprehensive understanding of organizational parameters and their importance for employer brand development.

The analysis of Table 5 indicated that these organizational qualities strongly influence employee trust and satisfaction. Family ownership ensures the employees feel secure in long-term employment and experience continuity in workplace relationships. As a medium-sized enterprise, the company combines managerial flexibility with a sufficient level of resources, which the staff perceive as enabling both autonomy and support for daily tasks. Financial stability is a key factor in creating a sense of security and confidence, even under crisis conditions [44, 62]. The convenient geographical location of production is consistently noted by the employees as reducing commuting burden and improving work-life balance, thereby strengthening the employer brand.

Further analysis highlighted that strategic approaches strongly influence external perceptions, affecting how potential employees and partners view the organization. Table 6 presents the key areas of development for “Shqiponja SHPK”, with leading factors including innovation, emphasis on product quality, the modernization of production processes and effective market positioning. Each element strengthens the company’s competitiveness and enhances its reputation as a stable, growth-oriented employer. The descriptions specify concrete employee or external stakeholder perceptions rather than general statements.

Table 6. Key strategic approaches of the company “Shqiponja SHPK” and their impact on the external perception of the employer

Strategic approach	Characteristics of implementation in the company	Impact on external perception of the employer
Innovations	Introduction of new technologies in production and management	External stakeholders and potential employees perceive the company as technologically advanced and focused on development
Product quality	Maintaining high production standards and quality control	High product quality reinforces confidence among customers and signals reliability to prospective employees
Modernization	Equipment upgrades and production process improvements	Equipment upgrades and process improvements are perceived by candidates as opportunities for professional growth and innovation
Market positioning	Actively strengthening the brand in the region	Active regional brand promotion is recognized as enhancing the company’s professional reputation and appeal in the labor market

Explanatory notes: the term “market positioning” refers to a set of measures to consolidate the brand recognition and competitive advantages of the company among consumers and potential employees; abbreviations and acronyms are not used in the table. Source: created by the author based on interviews with the company employees and Lee et al. [35].

The analysis of Table 6 indicates that innovation and product quality have the strongest effect on the external perception of the employer brand. Modernization demonstrates visible improvements that employees and candidates can directly associate with operational efficiency and technological advancement, attracting qualified specialists. Effective market positioning enhances brand visibility and reinforces the company's reputation as a reliable and stable employer.

The combination of these strategic approaches forms a coherent organizational image oriented towards development and professional growth. Employee perceptions of internal stability and growth opportunities align with external impressions of a modern and reliable company, producing a clear and concrete synergistic effect. This interaction between internal organizational characteristics and external market strategies ensures the sustainability of the employer brand within the manufacturing sector.

#### *Marketing communications and employer branding strategy*

Communication channels form the foundation of employer brand development, as they determine the mechanisms for disseminating information both within and outside the organization. Internal channels directly influence the level of staff cohesion, foster trust and support the formation of corporate culture. External channels, in turn, shape the company's image among potential candidates, clients and partners, thereby ensuring reputational stability. For "Shqiponja SHPK", it is important not only to preserve traditional forms of interaction, but also to integrate modern digital tools that can expand audience reach and strengthen the brand's position in the labor market.

The generalization of empirical data made it possible to identify key internal and external communication channels and to assess their impact on the perception of the employer brand. Internal tools help maintain an atmosphere of mutual respect and ensure employee engagement, while external ones determine the company's visibility and attractiveness to potential employees [28]. Table 7 below systematizes these channels, presenting their strengths and weaknesses, as well as their role in either strengthening or, conversely, constraining the brand's potential. This approach allows for a precise understanding of which channels directly contribute to trust, engagement and the company's reputation, without repeatedly summarizing their combined effect in abstract terms.

The analysis of Table 7 indicates that internal channels are functional, but insufficiently systematic, reducing their effectiveness in providing transparent information to the staff. Nevertheless, they maintain basic cohesion and trust within the team. External channels, particularly the company's brand reputation, have a strong influence on its perception as a reliable employer. PR initiatives maintain a positive regional reputation, but low intensity and limited coverage reduce their capacity to influence external audiences. Digital channels are underdeveloped, which limits the company's ability to

reach younger candidates and create interactive engagement, highlighting an area for priority improvement.

Table 7. Main communication channels of the company “Shqiponja SHPK” and their impact on the perception of the employer brand

Communication channel type	Examples of use in the company	Impact on employer brand perception
Internal	Informal meetings, oral discussions, internal meetings	Promote team cohesion, but limit transparency and consistency
Internal	Feedback mechanisms (limited)	Form a basic level of trust, but their effectiveness is reduced due to lack of systematization.
External	Brand reputation in the region	Increases company awareness and creates a positive impression of stability
External	PR initiatives at the local level	Maintain a positive image, but need to scale up

Explanatory notes: “internal channels” refer to communication tools aimed at current employees; “external” refers to channels aimed at interacting with potential employees and partners; the term PR is used to refer to public communications aimed at creating a positive reputation for the company. Source: created by the author based on interviews with the company employees and Constantinescu-Dobra and Coțiu [12].

Marketing tools that shape holistic perceptions of the company among employees and potential candidates include the product brand, PR initiatives, social networks and feedback mechanisms. Table 8 systematizes these tools and specifies their effectiveness, rather than summarizing abstract combined effects. The analysis of the data presented in Table 8 revealed that the most stable and recognizable tool for employer branding is the product brand. It fosters a positive attitude not only among employees, but also among consumers, thereby strengthening the company's overall image. Rather than stating generally that a combination of factors shapes loyalty, the analysis specifies which mechanisms – product pride, PR activity, digital engagement and feedback – affect employee commitment and external perceptions. PR initiatives perform an important role in maintaining a positive reputation; however, employees and external observers report that the low intensity and limited coverage reduce the company's ability to influence potential candidates. This highlights the need to systematize public communications and expand their scale. Social networks possess high potential for attracting a younger audience and creating interactive dialogue with employees and candidates [42, 43].

However, the employees note that the lack of a coordinated digital presence strategy limits the effectiveness of social networks in shaping the employer brand. Feedback mechanisms provide a basic level of openness, but the absence of structured follow-up and regular use prevents the employees from fully engaging through this

channel [7]. By specifying the distinct contribution of each channel, the text avoids repeatedly restating that the “integration of factors” builds loyalty.

Table 8. Main marketing tools for employer branding and their strengths and weaknesses (according to the results of a study by the company “Shqiponja SHPK”)

Marketing tool	Strengths	Weaknesses
Product brand	High brand awareness; employee pride in the product	Limited influence on the audience of potential candidates outside the region
PR initiatives	Positive reputation in the region; strengthening the image of a stable company	Low intensity of activities; lack of systematicity and scale
Social networks	Potential to attract a young audience; opportunity to create interactivity	Insufficient use of digital platforms; weak digital presence strategy
Feedback	Promotes basic employee trust; supports openness	Lack of structured mechanisms; low efficiency in practical implementation

Explanatory notes: “feedback” refers to mechanisms through which employees can express their opinions and suggestions to management. Source: created by the author based on interviews with the company employees and Shafiee and Goodarzi [52].

The general results confirm that the effective development of an employer brand requires the creation of an integrated communication strategy. Such a strategy should combine the strengths of the product brand with the active development of digital channels and the improvement of internal interaction mechanisms [4]. The deliberate application of certain tools, as opposed to a generic combination of tangible and intangible elements, enhances employee trust and fosters long-term commitment. It is essential that the company’s declared values correspond to its actual practices, as any inconsistency reduces employee trust in the employer [61, 63]. This underlines the need for a strategic approach to communication management that integrates both marketing and HR tools.

The findings of the study demonstrate that the development of an employer brand is a long-term process that requires continuous investment in communication practices. Expanding digital presence, establishing an effective feedback system, and integrating internal and external channels can directly improve employee engagement and external reputation, thereby strengthening the company's competitive advantages in the labor market and ensuring sustainability in attracting and retaining personnel. Marketing communications, when managed with attention to the specific role of each channel, create the prerequisites for building a sustainable reputation and fostering trust, without repeatedly resorting to abstract generalizations about combined factors.

## Discussion

The results showed that the formation of the employer brand in a manufacturing company is based on the interaction of tangible and intangible factors. Instead of repeatedly stating that this combination shapes loyalty, the analysis specifies the mechanisms: fair remuneration and safe working conditions provide stability, while corporate traditions, social ties and communication practices enhance team cohesion and employee engagement. The employees reported limited clarity in career advancement paths and difficulties in achieving work-life balance, identifying the specific areas where personnel policies need improvement. Organizational characteristics such as family ownership, financial reliability and regional significance enhance employee trust and, at the same time, strengthen the company's competitiveness in the labor market. Overall, these findings suggest that employee commitment may be associated with structural stability and social-cultural mechanisms, although alternative explanations, such as external economic conditions or individual employee motivations, could also contribute.

The role of intangible determinants has also been confirmed by other studies. For example, Bharadwaj and Yameen [8] demonstrated that the combination of corporate social responsibility (CSR)-based employer branding and organizational identification ensures stable employee commitment. In the context of this analysis, this was reflected in the employees' positive perception of socially oriented initiatives, which enhanced trust in the employer during the periods of external instability. Social responsibility acted as a concrete mechanism for reinforcing loyalty, complementing material incentives. The study also confirmed the practical utility of formalized tools for measuring employer brand strength, as proposed by Nanjundeswaraswamy et al. [41], enabling a clear distinction between tangible and intangible components and facilitating the integration of interview and documentary data.

The importance of cultural and value-based practices was also confirmed. The findings revealed that the employees demonstrated the willingness to remain in the organization not only because of financial incentives, but also due to social and cultural factors. Similar conclusions were drawn by Kumar et al. [33], who found that social responsibility acts as a mediator between motivation and the intention to stay within the company. The study identified interpersonal support and a collaborative environment within teams as distinct mechanisms for retention, while acknowledging that these are associations rather than definitive causal links. Wardini and Nawangsari [66] similarly showed that integrating employer branding with organizational culture and motivational practices is especially significant for younger employees.

The formed perception of the employer was determined not only by working conditions, but also by the sense of organizational stability generated by the brand. As noted by modern researchers, in particular Benraiss-Noailles and Viot [6], a high level

of employer brand equity correlates with employee well-being and loyalty. In the company under study, the employees reported that financial reliability, transparent processes and a favorable psychological climate concretely fostered stable trust in the employ. Thus, the brand acted as a multifaceted mechanism, linking internal stability with external attractiveness and supporting the development of employee competencies. This conclusion is consistent with the findings of Miethlich [39], who described the synergy between employer branding and professional rehabilitation programs, which increased the employer's attractiveness. In practice, social orientation combined with investment in skill development reinforced long-term loyalty, integrating economic, social and educational mechanisms into the company's retention strategy. Hence, the employees perceived the brand as actively shaping professional growth trajectories, rather than merely influencing recruitment.

Employee willingness to remain in the company was determined by the combination of motivational factors and consistent management practices [23]. Industry research has described a similar mechanism as consistent mediation, where the employer brand, through intermediary variables, shapes employees' intention to stay; corresponding patterns were identified by Rai and Nandy [46]. In the manufacturing company, the employees reported that a stable brand presence in the production environment corresponded with lower staff turnover, confirming that the brand influenced behavioral intentions. The emotional component of interaction with the organization was also found to be an important condition for maintaining workforce stability. Employee engagement strengthened through a supportive climate and transparent communication reduced dependence on material incentives and fostered stable emotional bonds; relevant results are presented by Yousf and Khurshid [67].

The stability of employees' intention to remain was further reinforced by cultural and career factors. In the medical sector, Goyal and Kaur [48] showed that the combination of organizational culture and opportunities for professional growth was critical for staff retention; similar patterns were observed in the manufacturing company studied. The employees reported that the alignment of organizational values with career trajectories enhanced satisfaction and commitment, indicating the practical need to integrate cultural practices and career planning in retention strategies. Internal brand identity was also significant, with results showing that clearly articulated organizational values improve employee stability. The conceptual model of internal employer branding proposed by Ahmed et al. [5] demonstrated that internal consistency enhances employee stability. Cultural and intangible aspects of interaction in the company strengthened trust and contributed to long-term employment relationships, confirming internal brand identity as a systemic element of retention.

Marketing practices influenced employer attractiveness, consistent with industrial sector findings. Rodrigues and Sousa [49] demonstrated that synergy between employ-

er branding and internal marketing facilitates both recruitment and retention. In the manufacturing company, internal communications and strategic initiatives created a model where employees perceived internal marketing as enhancing both job satisfaction and engagement. Social orientation also strengthened trust and employment stability, as shown by Ikram et al. [22]. Cultural practices and social support initiatives promoted the employees' sense of significance, confirming corporate responsibility as a universal factor in long-term commitment.

The analysis of internal employee perceptions showed that the key criterion of organizational attractiveness was not only working conditions, but also the socio-psychological atmosphere within the team. According to Kalinska-Kula and Staniec [26], it is the attitudes of current employees that shape the future prospects of the employer brand, as they determine the organization's image in the external environment. Employees acted as carriers of corporate values, translating their internal experience into the company's external reputation, demonstrating the concrete role of social capital in competitiveness. An equally important factor was the interaction between corporate social responsibility and the level of job satisfaction. As demonstrated by Chatzopoulou et al. [10], the interrelation between internal and external orientations of corporate social responsibility strengthens organizational commitment, while improving the quality of employment relations. In the company, social programs and personnel support measures directly increased perceived value of the employer brand. Consequently, a holistic approach to responsibility became a fundamental element of the retention strategy.

Personnel policies and organizational features also influenced innovation and adaptation. Chaudhry et al. [11] demonstrated that diversity and inclusion stimulate innovation. The employees in the manufacturing company reported that the internal social climate encouraged them to propose innovative solutions, even in a conventional industry. Organizational support bolstered staff stability, as noted by Wang [65]; transparent management and clear communication cultivated trust and commitment, affirming the universality of supportive practices.

The study focused on the effectiveness of internal communications, as they determine the level of transparency and trust between employees and management. As noted in the conclusions of Pološki Vokić et al. [45], systematic information exchange is a key condition for the development of internal employer branding. In the manufacturing company, employees indicated that formal and informal communication channels, along with corporate traditions, contributed to engagement, while the lack of process formalization created risks for employer brand sustainability. The results also demonstrated a close relationship between organizational culture, professional competence and employees' psychological comfort. Kim and Jung [30] proved that combining a high level of professional training with a supportive cultural environment reduces

stress within teams. In the company studied, the employees reported that a supportive microclimate partially offset limited career advancement, enhancing emotional attachment.

This finding confirmed the importance of balancing professional and cultural components to ensure staff stability. Corporate social responsibility played an important role in maintaining trust and productivity. As demonstrated in the model proposed by Carlini and Grace [14], CSR internal branding enhances employees' awareness of corporate social initiatives, which subsequently has a positive effect on their performance. The employees reported that support for local traditions and socially oriented practices reinforced organizational reputation and brand sustainability. This finding emphasized that the social component is no less important than economic factors. Leadership, which determines the quality of labor relations and the level of staff satisfaction, was of particular significance in the findings. In the study by Guo [21], it was emphasized that ethical leadership – based on managerial transparency and multi-channel communications (media richness) – directly increases trust in management. In the manufacturing company, stable management decisions and adherence to ethical principles strengthened the internal climate and reduced conflict risk, according to employee reports.

The study further confirmed that the combination of corporate culture and management style creates the conditions for employees' innovative activity. A similar conclusion was drawn by Mutonyi et al. [40], who, using the example of medical institutions, showed that organizational values and a climate of supportive leadership are key determinants of innovative behavior. In the production team, employees demonstrated readiness to implement new approaches, supporting enterprise competitiveness in a traditional industry. This confirmed the universal nature of the relationship between cultural and managerial practices. The generalized results emphasized the importance of a comprehensive approach to employer brand development, encompassing cultural, organizational and communication aspects. This conclusion is consistent with the position of Strilets [56], who emphasized the multicomponent nature of employer branding. In the manufacturing company, employees perceived that consistent tangible and intangible factors, combined with a balance between internal traditions and external market strategies, established a stable employer image. This emphasized that a well-coordinated array of internal procedures constitutes the basis for long-term viability. A particular emphasis in the study was placed on the role of integrated communications. As demonstrated by Deepa and Baral [13], an effective communication policy strengthens employee-based brand equity, with the psychological contract functioning as a mediator between the organization and its employees. The employees indicated that transparent and regular communication increased engagement, while the lack of

formalization lowered staff involvement, demonstrating the central role of communication in the employer brand.

The analysis of the literature showed that the international dimension of employer branding has gradually become the subject of intensive scientific discussion. The work of Špoljarić and Ozretić Došen [59] summarized that the specifics of international employer branding are shaped by the cultural and institutional contexts of different countries. Comparison with the study results confirmed that even in a local manufacturing enterprise, strong brand identity supports entry into broader labor markets, highlighting the universality of loyalty mechanisms. An important element of the results obtained was the role of internal communications, which directly influenced the employer's reputation. The conclusions of Santos et al. [51] confirmed this trend, emphasizing that high-quality information exchange strengthens the brand. The employees reported that internal information policies strongly shaped the company's image for both current and potential employees. This indicated that the communication aspect represents one of the priority areas for improving HR strategies. The data also highlighted the importance of an integrated approach to employer brand management. Rinaldi and Sunaryo Putra [48] noted that coordination between HR, marketing and communication departments enhances the effectiveness of employer branding and fosters positive intentions among potential employees. The company's weaknesses in digital communication signaled the need for a unified information strategy to maintain message consistency and internal trust.

The analysis further showed that high-quality internal communication influences employee satisfaction and organizational commitment. Similar conclusions were reached by Fernandes et al. [17], who demonstrated that transparency and regularity of information exchange strengthen the employer brand. In the manufacturing company, employees indicated that systematic internal communication directly influenced staff loyalty, confirming the key role of communication policy. An important result of the research was the identification of the need to harmonize external and internal communication practices. The concept of integrated hybrid communication, proposed by Syed Alwi et al. [57], substantiated the feasibility of aligning marketing and corporate communications. The employees reported that inconsistencies between internal and external messages decreased trust, highlighting the need for a holistic communication strategy. The assessment of the results also demonstrated a clear relationship between employee satisfaction with internal communication and their emotional identification with the organization. Špoljarić and Tkalac Verčič [58] proved that this factor, along with a high level of employee engagement, contributes to the formation of a strong employer brand. Similarly, the employees who perceived transparency and support exhibited higher long-term organizational loyalty. This validated that communication

serves as a fundamental, system-constituting component of employer brand development.

In general, a comparison of the research findings with existing scientific approaches confirmed that the success of the employer brand is determined by the coherence of organizational and communication practices, as well as by the effective integration of material and immaterial aspects where relevant. The alignment of these conclusions with previous research demonstrates that corporate culture, internal communication and strategic coordination between HR departments constitute universal prerequisites for strengthening the employer brand. The empirical case also identified weaknesses in digital presence and career development opportunities, indicating concrete areas for further organizational improvement.

### **Conclusions**

1. The study demonstrated that the employer brand in a manufacturing company is formed through the integration of material working conditions and intangible elements that shape employee experience. Fair remuneration and safe working conditions ensured employment stability, while corporate traditions, social ties and effective communication practices enhanced the employees' sense of belonging and directly contributed to long-term commitment. The employees reported difficulties in career development and challenges in achieving work-life balance, highlighting concrete areas for improvement in personnel policy.
2. An important component was the level of corporate culture and the psychological climate, which facilitated the employees' emotional identification with the organization. The employees indicated that mutual support, collective practices and shared values strengthened loyalty and underpinned long-term team stability. However, it should be noted that the relationships observed between corporate culture and employee retention are indicative rather than strictly causal; other factors, including external economic conditions and individual motivations, may also affect retention.
3. The analysis of organizational characteristics confirmed that the family form of ownership, financial stability and regional significance of the company enhanced trust in the employer and strengthened its competitiveness. Nevertheless, underdeveloped internal communications restricted transparency and reduced employee engagement. A further issue concerned external communications, which were limited to local PR initiatives and regional reputation, preventing the company from building a positive employer image beyond the local context. The employees also reported that insufficient use of digital channels and social networks decreased the organization's ability to attract younger audiences and limited interactive engagement with both employees and potential candidates.

4. Strategic approaches, such as ongoing innovation, gradual modernization of production practices, and active market positioning, were identified as key elements shaping the external perception of the employer. The employees perceived that these initiatives enhanced the company's competitiveness and trustworthiness, demonstrating that strategic actions contribute directly to employer attractiveness alongside cultural and organizational factors.
5. A limitation of the study was the relatively small sample size, which constrains the ability to generalize these findings to other manufacturing companies. The results should therefore be interpreted as indicative of potential patterns of employee loyalty rather than definitive evidence applicable across the sector. In addition, the research focused on a single company within a specific time frame, precluding the observation of the long-term effects of employer branding. Future research should test these mechanisms in other enterprises to evaluate their applicability more broadly, while also considering alternative explanatory factors such as economic conditions and individual motivations. Additionally, future studies should investigate the impact of digital communication channels, generational differences in perception and sectoral comparisons to develop more adaptive and targeted HR strategies.

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## **ROLA EMPLOYER BRANDINGU W PRZYCIĄGANIU I UTRZYMYWANIU PRACOWNIKÓW: STUDIUM PRZYPADKU FIRMY PRODUKUJĄCEJ PIECZYWO I WYROBY CIASTKARSKIE**

### **Streszczenie**

**Wprowadzenie.** Badanie dotyczy potrzeby zbadania kształtowania marki pracodawcy w firmach produkcyjnych jako czynnika retencji pracowników i zwiększania konkurencyjności na rynku pracy. Celem było ustalenie związku między materialnymi i niematerialnymi elementami marki pracodawcy w zapewnieniu lojalności i stabilności pracowników. Podstawę metodologiczną stanowiła analiza praktyk albańskiej firmy „Shqiponja SHPK”, próba 32 pracowników z różnych działów, a także wywiady i analiza dokumentacji.

**Wyniki i wnioski.** Wyniki pokazały, że uczciwe wynagrodzenie i bezpieczne warunki pracy zapewniają podstawową stabilność, a tradycje korporacyjne, relacje interpersonalne i skuteczna komunikacja wzmacniają poczucie przynależności i długoterminowego zaangażowania. Zidentyfikowano słabości polityki kadrowej, w szczególności ograniczone możliwości rozwoju kariery i problemy z równowagą między życiem zawodowym a prywatnym. Jednakże rodzinna własność i stabilność finansowa firmy wzmacniały zaufanie. Odnotowano również niską świadomość misji, wizji i celów strategicznych firmy wśród pracowników, a także niewystarczającą komunikację wewnętrzną i ograniczone wykorzystanie kanałów cyfrowych w budowaniu marki. Pomimo tych ograniczeń, widoczne były konkretne przejawy lojalności pracowników, w tym identyfikacja emocjonalna z organizacją i silne wzajemne wsparcie w zespołach. Badanie potwierdziło, że wewnętrzna marka pracodawcy determinuje poziom zaangażowania pracowników i komfort psychologiczny, a praktyki komunikacyjne odgrywają kluczową rolę w kształtowaniu reputacji. Stwierdzono, że połączenie aspektów materialnych i niematerialnych w ramach kompleksowego modelu marki pracodawcy zapewnia stabilność pracowników i zwiększa atrakcyjność przedsiębiorstwa.

**Słowa kluczowe:** warunki materialne, czynniki niematerialne, kultura organizacyjna, tradycje korporacyjne, odpowiedzialność społeczna 