



Employer branding into the future: what is the "Gen Z" talent pool, with 4IR-related skills, looking for when it comes to employee branding in South Africa today?

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the emerging Generation Z (Gen Z) workforce in the sought-after technological, digital, and software industries (roles that support the Fourth Industrial Revolution). The research explores the most pertinent employer branding themes for organisations to address.

The study seeks to deepen South African company leaders' understanding of Gen Z's distinctive workplace preferences. The findings should influence HR decisions and internal brand-building strategies to be more effective in attracting and retaining top talent, and to know how to integrate Gen Z most effectively into the workplace. Since losing talented employees to competitors or other organisations can result in negative cultural and financial consequences, it's imperative to understand what organisations can do to enhance the overall employer brand experience and Employer Value Proposition (EVP).

The study conducted five in-depth semi-structured interviews with Gen Z digital marketers and software developers from organisations within South Africa. The interviews were transcribed, and inductive content analysis was used to identify themes that make employer brands attractive.

The findings reveal that Gen Z desire high-growth and high-learning careers, a strong sense of autonomy, organisational transparency, approachable leadership, and a working environment that allows flexibility yet a strong sense of accountability and focus.

Key words: Employer Branding, Employee Value Proposition, Generation Z (Gen Z), Employee Retention, Employee Attraction.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the **research report** submitted for the BA Honours in Strategic Brand Communications to The Independent Institute of Education (The IIE) is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for a postgraduate qualification.

Signature_____



Date_____

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1 INTRODUCTION

For the past decade, research has been focused on the millennial generation in the workplace and in the larger world context (Agarwal & Vaghela, 2018). More recently the focus has shifted to investigations into what the emerging Gen Z preferences are; their views, habits, modes of communication, and values. Understanding these factors are an integral part of setting up an employer branding strategy that will future-proof a company's attractiveness (Pandita, 2021).

Since millennials and Gen Z are switching jobs more frequently than the prior generations, employee retention, and employer branding strategies, are more critical than ever before (Agarwal & Vaghela, 2018). If high-value and scarcely talented employees are not satisfied in their place of work, it's relatively easy for them to move on to another company that they feel that they will be content in. This could result in a major sunk cost, with no return on investment for the company they are leaving.

Compounding this, is the fact that the recruiting, onboarding, and training of these employees cost organisations significantly. More so than roles in administration or sales, it's especially costly when it comes to funding the development and training of digital specialists and software developers, many of whom in the Gen Z cohort will be entering the workforce for the very first time (Chitu & Russo, 2020). Thus, losing these staff after just a few months could be of major financial and cultural detriment (Chitu & Russo, 2020).

It's therefore very important to establish and articulate the benefits of a particular company in order to attract potential employees, as well as to maintain the engagement and investment of existing employees (Foster, Näppä & Styvén, 2023). Communications and actions that speak to this, will mean that top talent are less likely to move to competitors or look for employment elsewhere.

Whilst there is much written on employer branding as it pertains to the millennial workforce, the research will help to close the gap in the literature relating specifically to Gen Z and employer branding (Pandita, 2021). Furthermore, the site of investigation is specifically relating to 4IR skills and what's considered scarce talent; such as digital marketing, coding, and software development within the South African context (BusinessTech, 2023).

Company growth, competitiveness, and longevity is central to the importance of understanding this topic. This is because companies with strong employer branding have shown greater profitability, with significantly lower recruitment and employee retention costs, as well as healthier relationships with their employees (Foster, *et al.*, 2023).

Employer branding, which is an internal and external brand-building concept used to create and communicate an attractive place of employment, is a fundamental part of recruiting and retaining the

desired talent in the workforce (Enslin & Wolfswinkel, 2020). In a manner similar to how brands promote their distinctive product features in a competitive consumer market, organisations should strategically and intentionally position their employer branding. This involves effectively communicating their Employee Value Proposition (EVP) within the workplace and talent markets (Barrow & Mosley, 2011).

Just as consumer-facing brands have both functional and emotional benefits, employer brand benefits can be both practical and emotive too (Kapferer, 2008). For example, a talented young individual may consider what the brand's purpose is, or how they live out their values, in addition to the more practical aspects such as the salary or provident fund options (Allen, 2008).

So, what are the emerging generation of skilled workers looking for specifically when it comes to employers? With each generation comes different general habits and preferences (Pandita, 2021). This research paper explores a handful of views of individuals in a specific Gen Z cohort. The learnings and insights may be useful in identifying key themes and ideas for employers to consider when it comes to evaluating their employer branding strategies and communications overall.

In addition, the appropriate supporting theories and theoretical frameworks that can help analyse the research question will be explored. Faisal and Mustafa's (2015) Employer Brand Equity (EBE) model will be used, with supporting theoretical frameworks including the Signalling Theory and the Social Identity Theory (SIT).

The findings and discussion that follows will relate the research insights to the practical models that are already available with a tried and tested theoretical foundation. The new knowledge gained from the research aims to identify important themes that can be analysed and then translated into practical, clear, deployable strategies for the context of Gen Z 4IR talent in South Africa. The intention is for HR, brand-builders, and business leaders to utilise these findings in their pursuit of developing a strong employer brand, and ultimately, build successful brand experiences for both internal and external stakeholders.

The following sections will explain the research problem, the research aim and purpose, the research objectives, and the research questions. Anticipated contribution to the broader body of knowledge and identified research gaps will also be discussed further. Once this has been explained, a review of the available literature will be discussed, as well as the key concepts that form the base of the literature review. Lastly, the research methodology, data collection and findings will be shared.

In order to contextualise the ideas that are discussed in this research study, the following list of key definitions have been provided to enable a better understanding of the topic and themes that emerge.

Key definitions

- *Employer Branding*: Employer branding refers to the strategic process through which organisations shape its reputation and image as an employer, aiming to attract, engage, and retain talented individuals (Ambler & Barrow, 1996).
- *Employer Brand Equity*: This can be articulated as the overall net effect of all the employer brand attributes that inspire current employees to remain positive and engaged in the organisation, while also influencing potential applicants positively or negatively in their decision to pursue positions within the company. The set of attributes can be defined as; “(1) the employer’s symbolic attributes, such as employer brand awareness, employer brand image, employer product brand experience, and corporate reputation; (2) the working culture and environment; (3) the stance of current and prospective employees; and (4) the firm’s marketing activities that add to or subtract from the value provided by working for the organization” (Faisal & Mustafa, 2015: 77).
- *Employee Value Proposition (EVP)*: Employee Value Proposition (EVP) is the unique set of offerings, benefits, and values that an organisation promises to provide to its employees in return for their skills, contributions, and commitment (Sullivan, 2004)
- *Generation Z*: Generation Z refers to the demographic cohort succeeding Millennials, typically born from the mid-1990s to the early 2010s. This generation is characterized by its familiarity with digital technology and a globalized worldview (Seemiller & Grace, 2016).
- *Signalling Theory*: The Signalling Theory contends that individuals use certain signals or indicators to convey information about themselves or their qualities to others. In the context of employment, it explains how job seekers and employers use signals to communicate their attributes and intentions (Spence, 1973).
- *Social Identity Theory*: This is a psychological theory that explores how individuals categorise themselves and others into social groups, leading to the formation of social identities that influence behaviour and attitudes (Tajfel & Turner, 2004).
- *Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) Talent*: For the context of this research paper, this is defined by the critically important cohort of the employee market with scarce and/or desirable skills for the future, to keep the business/brand competitive in a marketplace of exponential innovation in terms of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Problem Statement

Building a strong employer brand is critical to attract and retain employees in the competitive workplace both today and in the future (Enslin & Wolfswinkel, 2020). Gen Z is starting to enter the

talent pool with their own set of desires, motivations, intentions, and needs (Lazarević & Nikolić, 2022).

Since Gen Z are the future of the workforce, it's critical to understand their drives and motivations in order for businesses to focus their employer branding accordingly. In doing this, brands can attract the best possible talent that can contribute to the business success, and remain a step ahead of the competition in highly competitive times (Briganti & Samson, 2019).

Research Aim and Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to understand the next generation of key skilled workers and what they will look for in employers. In researching this specific cohort, insights can be identified to help brands develop their employer branding more effectively in a manner that can attract and retain talent, and establish a competitive advantage (Pandita, 2021). This will be beneficial in attracting the sought-after talent of the future workforce in 4IR related roles; winning the hearts and minds' of employees over the competition (Enslin & Wolfswinkel, 2020).

Themes such as *work culture*, *benefits*, *leadership*, *organisation size*, and *values*, are likely to make someone leave a company, or, encourage them to stay (Enslin & Wolfswinkel, 2020). These topics will be explored in the interview discussions.

The research aims to explore various topics relating to employer branding and EVP, in order to better understand what it is that makes an attractive employer to this cohort of Gen Z. Unpacking the motivations or reasons behind why a Gen Z' employee, or future employee, will choose to work for a certain company over another, is very important for building stronger employer brands. According to Keller and Meaney (2017), this is key for the future of holistic brand building and business success.

Research Questions

Looking at this Gen Z population that have graduate qualifications in 4IR-related skills, the researcher sets out to understand:

- What brand attributes, company values, and company benefits attracts Gen Z to an employer (brand) in South Africa today? Or, in simple terms; what are they looking for in employers?
 - How might these have shifted from the previous generation?
- How might employers better focus their employer branding strategies to retain Gen Z talent?
 - What practical (tangible) and emotive (intangible) value propositions can be suggested for brands to consider in their talent acquisition and retention strategies?
 - What makes a fulfilled and engaged workplace?

Research Objectives

- Within the group of South African Gen Z cohort that have 4IR-related skills with post-graduate degrees, the research should give the reader a better understanding of what employer brand characteristics are valued by this specific group, so that employers will have better insight into their decision-making process, as well as have a clearer understanding of how to market and build their employer brand for recruitment and retention strategies. The research aims to glean insights and understanding around the four key themes highlighted below:
 - Communications: Communication channels, language, tone of voice
 - Tangible benefits: Benefits, perks, remuneration, special policies
 - Culture: Values, culture, people, leadership ethos
 - Career advancement: Study and growth opportunities
- The research should identify key themes and trends that brands can leverage to ensure their employer branding strategies are effective, relevant and competitive for the emerging Gen Z talent market in South Africa, which is set to take-over from the millennial cohort in the next 15 years (Henderson, 2022) .

Research Rationale and Academic Contribution

This research will be beneficial to brands and business leaders, Human Resource (HR) departments, and internal marketing departments, in better understanding the drivers of the competitive nature of talent acquisition and retention in the emerging Gen Z employee marketplace (Pandita, 2021).

In terms of the domain of research, the focus will be on individuals who have sought-after, emerging roles; the types of jobs that didn't quite exist a decade ago. BusinessTech (2023), identifies digital marketers, digital product owners, digital media developers, software engineers, data scientists, and related 4IR qualifications as being critically scarce skills in South Africa.

Currently, there are limited studies on the concept of Employer Branding and EVP that look at the Gen Z employee market, specifically in South Africa today (Gilani & Cunningham, 2017). Particularly within the 4IR-related fields, the local research is severely limited, as recognised by the absence of literature with this topic. Thus, in exploring this specific cohort, the findings will shed light on this group in the South African Gen Z context; one that has not ever been explored for the purposes of building strong employer brands and remaining competitive globally through this context.

Localised research that explores both the emotional and functional motivations of the emerging Gen Z employer market will be an original piece of academic literature, and aid in closing the knowledge gaps around this particular topic.

Enslin and Wolfswinkel (2020) and Pandita (2021) are valuable contributors to this topic, however, these studies focus on the perspective of HR Management (HRM), rather than the perspective of the Gen Z talent market themselves. Gilani and Cunningham (2017) reinforce this idea, emphasising that an aspect that has been even less explored is the viewpoints of employees regarding their workplace or the employer brand.

In addition, the research to date has focused on talent attraction rather than retention. Employer branding strategies need focus retaining the existing talent in order to mitigate a weakened morale when staff leave, and also to mitigate loss on their talent investment and training (Theurer, Tumasjan, Welpe, & Lievens, 2016).

Thus, this research will look at key aspects of employer branding from the perspective of Gen Z employees and potential employees (graduates, or individuals looking to move jobs).

In exploring the research questions, the study aims to highlight themes and insights that can help brands focus their employer branding strategy and thus unlock a (global) competitive edge through being a desirable employer to the emerging Gen Z audience that have acquired the sought-after 4IR job skills and education. In essence, building a reservoir of young talent is crucial for the well-being and sustainability of a business in the years to come. (Briganti & Samson, 2019; Pandita, 2021). Chitu and Russo (2020), discusses how employer branding surpasses the company reputation, and that the level of employee engagement has a direct impact on the company reputation and brand image. If employers are not convinced that they need to invest so heavily in Employer Branding and EVP strategies, then this idea may sway them otherwise.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review looks at authors who have explored similar ideas to the research topic at hand, and the theoretical frameworks that are useful in the analysis and explanation of the research. Literature that identifies discusses innovation within employer branding, and related concepts, are discussed.

The following theories identified form the grounding of this research. These theoretical frameworks are outlined below.

The Signalling Theory

Spence (1973) laid the theoretical foundation of the "signalling theory" in the seminal work *Job Market Signalling*. Spence innovatively applied the signalling theory in an article that scrutinised the recruitment of college students. More broadly, the signalling theory examines the communications between different parties. The information could result in honest and dishonest signals as a means of communications and gaining influence. The theory also looks at how the entire system of communications can be undermined due to dishonest signals (Backhaus, Stone, and Heiner 2002). This theoretical framework proves valuable for the present research study as it considers important signals conveyed by potential employers to graduates and sought-after Gen Zers seeking employment. Unlike Spence's study, the decision under examination is not the employer's decision to hire, but rather the student's decision to accept a job offer. The Signalling Theory posits that individual job-seekers find different pieces of information provided by the company to form judgments about the actions or intentions of the firm (Srivastava & Lurie, 2001). This research, however, will consider not only the pre-employment signals, but also the organisational attributes, behaviours and signals that might effect employee retention.

In essence, businesses use brand communications or signals to communicate their views and actions to their target markets and employee markets (Enslin & Wolfswinkel, 2020). We have seen businesses use the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to create purposeful signals and the perception of 'giving back' or 'doing good' (Park, 2018). More recently, Environmental Social Governance (ESG) is a more formal business framework to strategically link the efforts of social and environmental advancements to monetary or investment incentives. However, consumers, and particularly Gen Z, have a communication and 'signal' fatigue where they are weary of common false signalling or exaggerated messaging (Grove, Hunsaker, James, and Knowles, 2022).

In a McKinsey survey, more than 80 percent of 1000 surveyed companies in the US believed that a meaningful purpose in business was important, yet, only 42 percent believed that their company's

purpose was positively impactful (McKinsey & Company, 2020). In other words, many companies appear to be pretending that their business is more purposeful than it really is, to gain favor from consumers, employees, and other key stakeholders such as investors.

Thus, when it comes to applying the Signalling Theory to the topic at hand, businesses must be very weary of 'over-selling' their efforts to key stakeholders, including employees and potential employee candidates. Their Employer Branding, which includes CSR and ESG, should live up to their brand promises, because if there is inconsistency that leads to failure in trust, the brand can risk losing both customers and employees.

Making a positive impact on society and engaging in meaningful work are identified as the primary concerns for employees within companies (McKinsey & Company, 2020). However, fewer than half of the surveyed executives acknowledged the practical realisation of these priorities. Therefore, there seems to be a very real gap between what employees value most, and what companies are in fact doing. This insight opens an opportunity for brands to differentiate by focusing on being truly authentic in living their values and purpose, thereby creating positive signals that will attract a certain calibre of talent and distinctive reputation that 'money can't buy'.

The Social Identity Theory (SIT)

First introduced by Tajfel and Turner in 1971, the Social Identity theory frames how individuals desire to be a part of something with purpose, and greater than themselves (McLeod, 2023). This theory emerged from research utilising the minimal group paradigm where investigations revealed a seemingly inherent human inclination to differentiate oneself based on group affiliations and a willingness to forego rewards to maintain a relative advantage over members of other groups (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). Building upon these findings, Tajfel and Turner (2004) developed a model outlining how individual motivations, related to identity, predict the inclination to discriminate between groups at the individual level. This model also encompasses individual and collective responses to the societal-level status of groups (Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

Social Identity Theory is in essence grounded in the intrinsic importance of individuals to attach their affiliations with social groups and their inclination to perceive these specific social groups positively (Harwood, 2020). According to McLeod (2023), SIT is defined as an individual's perception of self, shaped by their affiliations with various groups. By implication, it also forces people to put others' into groups and this makes generalisations or simplifies conclusions about them (McLeod, 2023).

This could feed into the idea that people will choose to work for an organisation or brand that aligns with their own value system, beliefs, or even one that represents their life goals and desires. For

example, an individual may choose to work for a business that has strong principles around environmental sustainability, because that's what they want to be associated with in terms of their own brand image (Backhaus, et al., 2002).

Garia and Moses (2022), in the Deloitte Insights report, discuss how the digital era of the past 25 years has resulted in drastic social differences of the post-millennial generation, and comments on how social media and 'talking behind screens' have stunted real human connection. Thus, we can deduce that the concept of the Social Identity Theory is possibly more pertinent than ever before.

Furthermore, the "cancel culture" phenomenon and the sense of a binary "us" vs "them" are also relevant relation to SIT (Saint-Louis, 2021). On the topic of politics, for an example, individuals may be influenced or attracted to brands associated with particular views or political parties. If businesses wish to tap into this concept, and how it pertains to attracting employees and building their EVP, then they may wish to identify what kind of values, beliefs, trends, or work habits the emerging talent market is seeking to be a part of.

Employer Branding and Employer Brand Equity (EBE)

First cited in 1990 in the *People in Business* magazine in an article by Simon Barrow, the term Employer Branding was used to describe how the internal brand should reflect that of the external brand (Chitu & Russo, 2020). From a commercial perspective, employee engagement, support, loyalty, and satisfaction typically translates to increased share of the market, business growth, better stakeholder interest, and ultimately increased profits (Chitu & Russo, 2020). It also means that good potential employee candidates might be attracted to the organisation, thereby saving lengthy recruitment fees, and, existing employee talent are less likely to move to competitors which can put the business' investment (in people and proprietary assets) at risk (Chitu & Russo, 2020). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) as well as Backhaus (2016), describe employer branding as promoting the differentiated aspects of a company that could make it desirable to prospective employees and existing employees.

Faisal and Mostafa (2015) argued that EBE is more holistic, where the outward brand reputation affects those of the internal brand too. "The employer's brand symbolic attributes include employer brand awareness, employer brand image, employer product brand experience, and corporate reputation" (Faisal & Mostafa, 2015: 78). After establishing that despite much literature on the topics of both brand equity and employer branding, the authors argue that "the current literature lacks a clear description of what constitutes employer brand equity (EBE)" (Faisal & Mostafa, 2015: 74). This perspective motivates for a more thorough articulation of EBE and provides more focused clarity

and possible measures that can be deployed as employer branding strategies to maximise employer brand equity (Faisal & Mostafa, 2015). The model that they have created is shown in *Figure 1*.

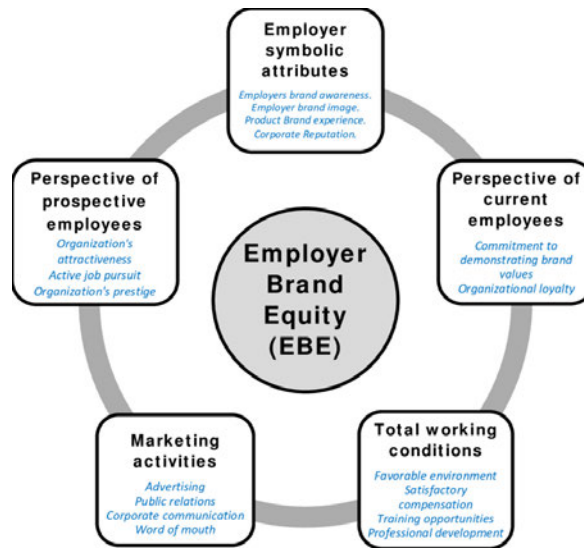


Figure 1: *Employer brand equity model* (Faisal & Mostafa, 2015).

Faisal & Mostafa (2015) present this conceptual framework that suggests the critical variables influencing employer brand equity, categorising the key initiatives or themes into five groups. They contend that this framework holds significant utility in both research and practical applications. Their assertion is that employer brand equity is pivotal for organisational success, serving as a cornerstone for organisations to construct, oversee, and enhance their employer brands. This framework could be deployed by business, brand and HR leaders when working through intentional strategies around enhancing the employee brand experience.

More recently, the second model presented (Figure 2) was created to “describe[s] the holistic role of employees as co-creators and active performers in the employer branding process, both internally and externally” (Foster, *et al.*, 2023: 13). This research introduces a conceptual framework to involve employees in the employer branding process. This model introduces the co-creation of employer branding; an area with limited exploration that is proposed to evolve into a new paradigm in the employer branding literature. The framework development was focused specifically within the tourism and hospitality domains, however, this model can be utilised in framing the discussion of employer branding further than the original industry.

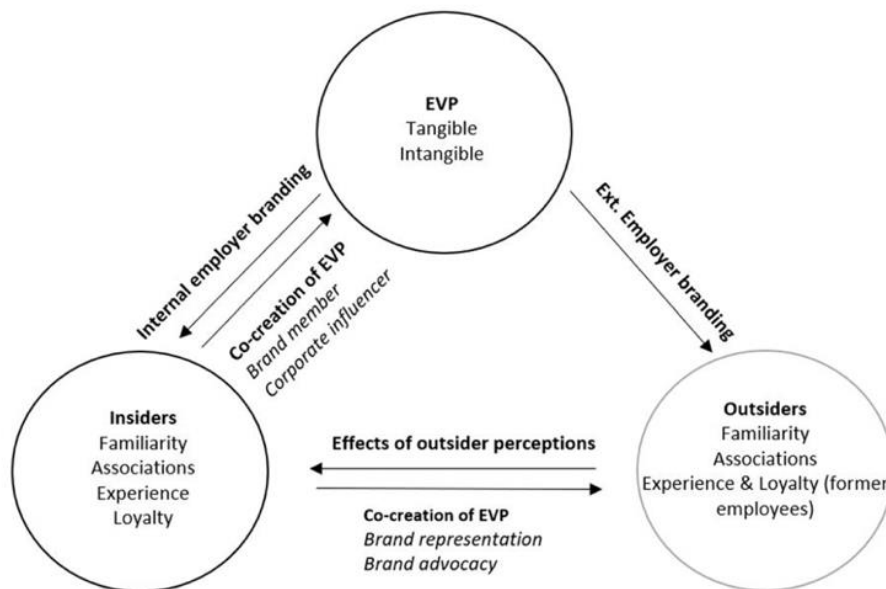


Figure 2: *The co-creating role of employees in employer branding (Foster, et al. 2023)*

Employer Value Proposition (EVP)

Employer Value Proposition is a key topic that is closely related and integrated with the concept of Employer Branding (Goswami, 2015; Ariyanto & Kustini, 2021).

Charak and Pawar (2014, 2015) are key contributors on the initial writings around the subject of EVP. The authors describe EVP as being the reciprocal relationship between employer and employee in terms of the benefits the employee receives in return for the value they offer to the company. These include aspects such as remuneration and incentives, leave policies, career development, as well as fair and honest performance management. Faisal and Mostafa's (2015) EBE model mentioned previously, are integrated with these pillars of EVP. Charak and Pawar (2014) discuss how attributes of the EVP should be evident in both the corporate and employer brands. The authors also draw the link with employee engagement and EVP, as well as how EVP acts as a key method to attract and retain employees.

Pawar, Nuradhawati, Rochaeni and Kristian (2023: 2) describe EVP as “the deal between an organisation and employees for their contribution and performance. This “deal” characterises an employer and differentiates it from its competition”. Thus, we argue that components of the EVP are central to the topic of Employer Branding.

Ferriera (2016), discusses corporate brand preferences in the context of South African talent attraction and how employee value proposition plays a key part in this. Ferriera's (2016) literature offers further understanding and analysis on the subject with a study that looks at what job-seekers

value when it comes to EVP and employer brand. Ferreira (2016) also provides substantiation for the basis of the argument that organisations need to take EVP and Employer Branding more seriously should they want to remain competitive in “the war for talented and skilled employees” (Ferreira, 2016: 1) Whilst this source has been around for seven years, the content and literary foundation is both useful and relevant since it pertains to the South African context specifically, which varies from the rest of the literature where the context are countries such as the USA, India, the UK.

Corporate Social Performance (CSP)

Backhaus, *et al.*, (2002) emphasise the significance of Corporate Social Performance in the process of job selection. The authors delve into factors such as the environment, community relations, employee relations, diversity, and product issues, and how these influence the perceptions of prospective employees. Employing social identity theory and signalling theory, these authors hypothesise variations in the impact of CSP data on assessments of employer attractiveness. Their findings reveal that the dimensions of environment, community relations, and diversity exert the most substantial effects on attractiveness ratings.

The “Gen Z” Cohort and Employers

Pandita (2021) points out two distinct differences that Gen Z has to its former generational counterparts. Firstly, Gen Z were raised in the digital age; where smartphones, laptops and the internet were part of their lives growing up. Since the generation has grown up with so much information at their fingertips with tools such as Google, apps, and online libraries, they are typically quite critical, analytical, and aware. This is coupled with a more pragmatic view and a sense of realism in decision-making, which could have also been influenced by watching their parents tackle the great recession circa 2007 (Pandita, 2021).

Secondly, this generational group is the most diverse racially and ethnically, as well as having grown up in a globalized world where borders are broken by the world-wide-web and online communities (Hais & Winograd, 2016). Gen Z, more so than their predecessors, are typically more liberal in their view of the world, where they embrace different themes, identities, sexualities, beliefs, and cultures (Pandita, 2021).

In addition, previously rated social status, such as education level, are less important to this emerging generation. Rather, interests and beliefs are more important when it comes to forming groups and communities (Wiedmer, 2015; Pandita, 2021;). Here, we see the Social Identity Theory coming into play, where feeling a sense of belonging through a group that shares common interests and values is deeply important to this generation.

Pandita (2021) explores a similar research topic that unpacks *innovative employer branding strategy to attract generation Z*, but through the lens of HR managers, and on a global scale with a more general labour landscape. Whilst the author's literature is useful in the contextualisation and planning for this research, the sample audience and lens through which the research was discussed, is different to that of this research that looks at the viewpoints and ideas of Gen Z themselves.

Pandita's (2021) research reveals that Generation Z exhibit elevated career aspirations, distinctive working styles, preferences in education, and an inclination towards innovation. Their characteristics demand adaptability, independence, and confidence. Beyond valuing diversity in terms of race and gender, they also seek diversity in identity and orientation. Notably, financial incentives are not the sole priority for their career development; they also desire association with a workplace that demonstrates community support. Driven by an innovative mindset, they employ creative means to achieve their goals (Pandita, 2021).

Regarding Gen Z in the workplace context, Pandita (2021: 559) says that "[i]t is vital to understand what motivates them to be associated with an organization". Pandita (2021) identifies five key themes that have been observed in their study (from a Human Resource Management perspective). These are: career development, working styles, core values, diversity, and communication.

Firstly, *career development* refers to the desire to have clear roadmap set out for them in order to achieve their goals and build on their careers. Pandita (2021), goes on to say that Gen Z typically avoid repetitive or menial tasks, but seek out situations where they can learn through practical situations and problem solving. Entrepreneur exposure is also highly valued, despite job security being more sought-after than increased remuneration.

Secondly, *working styles* need to be considered, due to this generation growing up in a world where there are infinite self-study resources available to broaden ones' knowledge and sharpen their skills, Generation Z are undergoing continuous learning, and therefore have an identifiably different working style to their colleagues of an older generation (Pandita, 2021). Agarwal and Vaghela (2018) also highlights how Generation Z are more independent and typically prefer to work independently than in a group. Linked to this, Gen Z value flexibility and the option of working remotely. Both these ideas could point to the motivation for individual recognition, and proving themselves. Another idea to surface is that there may be retention and loyalty strategies that dive deeper than employer brands; where, due to the independent nature of Gen Z – their creativity, innovation and ambition – their very lifestyles are considered more critically, such as their desire for flexibility.

Next, when it comes to core values, it's clear that Gen Z are more attracted to organisations that share in their values and views on the world. Pandita (2021) specifically mentions honestly and

integrity as being paramount to the Gen Z generation. Faisal and Mostafa (2015) display in their EBE framework the importance of the commitment to demonstrating brand values, in respect to driving the loyalty of current employees, and retaining a positive perspective of the brand overall. Furthermore, the deep desire to be associated with a company than shares in an individuals' core values may be referenced back to the principles of the Social Identity Theory (McLeod, 2023). Ensuring authentic delivery is pertinent to a strong employer branding strategy, since a view of an organisation is quickly formed based on an observation of practices, social impact, and general ethics Pandita (2021). Schawbel (2014), identifies, for example, that wellness programs are more important to the emerging generation.

Pandita (2021), identified diversity as another key theme that is highly relevant to the emerging Gen Z employee. Furthermore, the term diversity itself is defined differently by this emerging talent market (Karianne, Kimberly, &Tiffany, 2019). Where diversity in the past typically referred to race, gender and religion, Gen Z included sexuality and orientation as part of the definition (Pandita, 2021). Inclusivity and openness are also important, and therefore places of work and employers need to consider this in policies, their workspace layout, and their communications.

Lastly, when it comes to the workplace, Pandita (2021) has found that employees want to have their voices heard, and to engage in a personal manner with their leaders. Whilst some domains of work are happily conducted via digital mediums or virtually, this real human-to-human contact is important for Gen Z. It makes them feel like they are able to contribute, set goals, learn better, and that they are heard and valued, despite their younger age (Bencsik, Horvath-Csikos, & Juhasz, 2016).

A highly critical emerging generation?

Saint-Louis (2021), discusses the immense pressure and push back that brands are facing from outspoken millennials and Gen Z on social media, and the rise of the “cancel culture” phenomenon. When it comes to managing public relations and reputation, this is an increasing concern for businesses and brands and companies (Crimmins, 2020). Ferguson (2020) in a McKinsey quarterly interview, says that “[i]f your company has not been on the receiving end of a Twitter storm, then don’t worry, it soon will be” (McKinsey & Company, 2022). Whilst the generalisation cannot be made that all Gen Z support this type of social media behaviour, the point should be highlighted because of the importance of internal and external brand Public Relations. Brands are open to mass-scrutiny, whether the public relations are positive or negative, due to matters relating to its employer branding and overall treatment of employees (McKinsey & Company, 2022).

Given the risk of the consequences of “getting it wrong”, as well as the un-predictability of the social media response, it may be safer to stay out of the conversation altogether. An example of this is the Bud Light alcohol brand in the USA, who attempted to be progressive in their stance toward non-

binary and gender fluid communities, but instead their sponsorship of the trans-gender athlete, Dylan Mulvaney, was met with major criticism and the entire campaign fell apart, and subsequently, the share price and sales volumes have been decimated by a deliberate target or “cancelling” of the brand (Holpuch, 2023).

In the 2016 study “Gen Z Goes To College”, it’s evident that post-millennials like to think of themselves as loyal, open-minded, thoughtful and responsible (Uche, 2018). Garia and Moses (2022) provide a compilation of useful commentary on the Gen Z mindset as both consumers and employers. As outlined by Uche (2018), apart from social and political factors, environmental issues seems to be the most commonly raised concern by Gen Z, and the generation is expecting transparency from their employers and consumer brands. As discussed in the (Garia and Moses, 2022), Gen Z’ers expect transparency from brands and employers, and will stop supporting brands that don’t deliver on what they market themselves to be.

There are some initiatives and policies that are considered a basic ‘entry to the game’, when it comes to sustainability and environmental policy; recycling, and responsible food sourcing for the company canteen, for example (Ottman, 2017). However, increasingly, individuals are scrutinising corporations for more significant environmental effects such as manufacturing processes, the choice of supplier partners, and the overall company carbon footprint (Whelan & Kronthal-Sacco, 2019). Just as the case with consumers, employees and talent candidates are becoming wary of green marketing and very critical of green washing.

Thus, businesses need to address how they will comment (*or if they will comment given the above-mentioned risks*) on the issue of sustainability and social awareness, and their practices that are in place to support such (Whelan & Kronthal-Sacco, 2019). Greenwood and Lim (2017), explain how CSR communications can improve a company’s reputation. “When organizations have a positive reputation among their stakeholders it promotes an organization’s business goals” (Uche, 2018:16). Tjiptonon and Yudarwati (2017) discuss how organisations have shifted the topics of ethics and social justice to the forefront of their PR efforts and brand-building campaigns.

As identified by Uche (2018), these communications and PR strategies might be even more important to the emerging Gen Z talent market. Faisal and Mostafa (2015) in Figure 1, have identified marketing activities as a key function in their EBE model. This includes communications and PR strategies that deal with topics mentioned above such sustainability policies, and CSR.

Agarwal and Vaghela (2018) argue that Gen Z are substantially different to their colleagues that fall in the millennial generation, and that studies are showing that assumptions shouldn’t be made that they are simply an extension of the former generation. Because of this, it’s important to start

understanding what some of these differences may be in order for companies to be aware of strategies, budget allocations, or communications that may need to be adapted. For example; perhaps the messaging in job advertisements should be tweaked in order to appeal more effectively in attracting the Gen Z market. This is where the Signalling Theory perspective is important to consider, since the signals (*all messages, images, language, tone*) that companies intentionally or subconsciously deliver may need to be re-visited to better align with the changing needs, wants, and values of the emerging Gen Talent market (Buchko & Gabrielova, 2021).

In their study Agarwal and Vaghela (2018) look at the varying values of the different generations in the work force (millennial and Gen Z), as well as work values based on Intrinsic, Extrinsic, Altruistic, Status-Associated, and Social Values Concerning the Relationship). This relates back to the social identity theory (SIT) where a sense of belonging and recognition of being part of a particular group makes one feel connected to something bigger than themselves, through the means of shared values and other identifying characteristics (McLeod, 2023).

A review of research methodologies

As outlined in *Table 1 below*, previous authors have taken different approaches to analyse similar research topics. Overall, from all the literature reviewed, approximately half the authors took an interpretivist lens, and the other, a positivist lens. For the purposes of this research, it's believed that the route of Pandita (2021) as well as Enslin and Wolfswinkel (2020), will most effectively answer the research questions by shedding deep, personal insights around the topic.

Table 1: Approaches to Research

Authors	Research Approach
Faisal and Mostafa, 2015	Working with existing literature, Faisal and Mostafa (2025) review the concept of employer branding where they then develop a conceptual framework of employer brand equity. The paper, "Conceptualizing and Modeling Employer Brand Equity", which takes on an interpretivist approach, was presented at the <i>20th International Conference on Corporate and Marketing Communications</i> .
Pandita, 2021	Pandita (2021) took an interpretative paradigm where the study involved 21 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with human resources (HR) heads from diverse organisations. Subsequently, each interview underwent transcription, and inductive content analysis was applied. This process revealed broad themes and several novel elements pertaining to innovation in employer branding.

Uche, 2018	Unlike Pandita (2021), Uche (2018) takes a on a positivism paradigm, whereby she uses data collection methods in a quantitative design to retrieve the research results. The research examines a range of variables such as progressive values, diversity, pro-social behaviours, brand attitude, perceived credibility, ulterior motives, commitment, perceived trust, word-of-mouth intentions, and purchase intentions. Results are then structured and ranked in order of importance.
Agarwal and Vaghela, 2018	Similar to the data methods of Uche (2018), Agarwal and Vaghela (2018) had a positivism paradigm and used qualitative survey methods to answer their research questions. Their data was gathered using a structured questionnaire distributed via Google Docs. Using a deductive research approach, two hypotheses were formulated based on existing theories, to investigate potential variations in work values among different subgroups within Generation Z.
Enslin and Wolfswinkel, 2020	Enslin and Wolfswinkel (2020) discuss that the most suitable research approach to fulfil the study's objectives was an exploratory investigation conducted within the interpretive paradigm. This approach allowed for the exploration of enlightening insights that, while not definitive, could provide valuable perspectives in this less-explored research domain and pave the way for additional empirical inquiries. They motivate that qualitative research methods would facilitate thorough exploration and a profound comprehension of the subject matter.

Conclusion

Understanding the theoretical basis of the Signalling Theory, Social Identity Theory, Employer Branding, EVP, CSP, and Gen Z preferences is crucial for companies to attract and retain talent successfully. According to the literature; authenticity, transparency, and a commitment to values are paramount in creating a positive employer brand. Businesses must adapt their signals and strategies to effectively resonate with the emerging Gen Z talent market.

In order to most effectively understand the motivations and desires of Gen Z in the workplace for this study, in-depth, purposive interviews will be conducted, in a manner similar to Pandita (2021).

3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Theoretical paradigm

The research takes on an interpretivist approach that explores the individuals' subjective realities by employing qualitative research methodologies (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2019). In order to enquire into the values, perceptions, motivations and feelings for the research topic, semi-structured, purposive interviews were conducted online, in a one on one setting, via Google Meets.

The qualitative research perspective argues that simplifying people's motivations into numbers and statistics results in one-dimensional models of human behaviour. In contrast, interpreting non-numeric data enables an understanding of the diverse meanings that individuals attribute to complex and multifaceted situations (Patton, 2015).

Arguing in favour of utilising interviews becomes particularly crucial in the present research landscape, where there is an increasing popularity in 'Big Data' methodologies for discerning and tackling globally significant issues (Hughesa, Hughesband, Portier-Le Cocq, 2020).

No singular research methodology serves all purposes, and the significance of qualitative research is essential in the broader context of the research goals set in this study. Qualitative research plays a crucial role in comprehending reality and describing the social world. It stands as the primary avenue through which the theoretical underpinnings of the social sciences, psychology, and marketing can be formulated or reconsidered (Field & Morse, 1996).

Research Approach

The aim of the research was to glean insights and understanding around the four key themes highlighted below. These themes were observed in the literature review, and formed the basis of the questionnaire design.

1. Communications: Communication channels, language, tone of voice
2. Tangible benefits: Benefits, perks, remuneration, special policies
3. Culture: Values, culture, people, leadership ethos
4. Career advancement: Study and growth opportunities

Purposive sampling was chosen to intentionally identify interviewees that were appropriate for the research study.

- Sample size of 5 Gen Z participants (Ages 22-28).
- Post-graduate qualifications of the participants must have included a 4IR-related education:

- Software Engineering, IT Development, Data Science, and Digital Marketing qualifications were held by this sample.
- Participants needed to be working in a company, or currently looking for employment.

The interviews conducted were semi-structured, with open-ended questions. For vast geographical purposes, the interviews were held online via Google Meets video conferencing. Of the five individuals, all qualified under the Gen Z talent definition specified above. Their geographical locations included Cape Town, Stellenbosch, and Johannesburg.

Through the researcher's own personal and professional networks, the five individuals were identified and contacted three weeks prior to the interview dates. A time and date was then confirmed, using WhatsApp and email, and the interviews then took place for approximately one hour each. Using the Cockatoo platform, the interview recordings were then transcribed and the transcripts checked and edited for accuracy. During the analysis, the original recordings were also referenced for tone of voice, facial expressions, and other contextual nuances that the transcripts could not provide.

The sample was capped at five individuals, after which data saturation was reached, whereby no new information or ideas were emerging by the fifth interview.

Sample size represented a diverse mix of individuals including a difference in genders, economic orientation, and geographic locations within South Africa. Unfortunately, due to accessibility and limitations around the time frames, the racial orientation of the participants were all white. The intention was to have a more diverse sample so that the themes and insights collected could offer knowledge on a broader snapshot of the country's demographics; thereby avoiding skewed research results to one particular group. For future researchers on this topic, it would be advised to increase the sample size to include more racially diverse candidates.

Supporting the interview research, desktop research has also been considered and used in the arguments for the research analysis. The first type of desktop research are academic studies; scholarly papers such as thesis and journals that speak to the topic of employer branding. The topic has been thoroughly researched in terms of how it relates to Gen Z in the context of South Africa today, as well as a more global context of workplace culture regarding Gen Z.

Secondly, corporate studies that include qualitative reports, statistics and trends, from Harvard Business Review, McKinsey & Company, and Deloitte Insights, have also been used in this report to supplement scholarly findings and insights.

Interview Questions

Participants were initially presented with broad, open-ended questions. This was to ease into the conversation and establish an initial rapport and comfortability with the interview.

1. Tell me a bit about yourself: your dreams, goals, desires for your life (analyse the characteristics of Gen Z).
2. What do you value most in life? (analyse the characteristics of Gen Z).
3. Which brands and companies do you love, and why?

The line of questioning progressed into more closely topic-related questions, with the intention of retrieving information that could best answer the research questions set out.

4. Which brand or company would you really like to work with, and why?
 - What do you like about the place where you currently work? Why?
 - What don't you like about the place where you currently work? Why?
5. What are the most important attributes in an employer for you? Why?
6. What tangible benefits would be most important to you? Why?
7. Describe the type of workplace culture that you like? Why?
8. Describe the type of leadership you're attracted to? Why?
9. When communicating with a potential employee about an opportunity at their company, what are your preferred communication channels? Why?
10. When it comes to an employer, how would you wish to be communicated with? At work, what are your preferred communication and collaboration channels? Why?
11. As an employee, how do you wish to be kept in the loop? Why?
12. What forms of career advancement would you expect from your employer? Why?
13. What would be a key attraction point in making you want to move to another company?
14. What is the one thing that would make you want to really leave a company? Why?
15. Is there anything else you wish to add to the discussion?

Research Limitations

Limitations in access to a viable sample

The first limitation that was encountered was enlisting the participation of non-white samples for the interviews. Should there have been more time allowance in the research gathering phase, the researcher might have been able to search for a more diverse base of interviewees. Whilst the research findings are nonetheless useful for the purpose of the topic, the research results may have been more nuanced had there been a greater sample size that included other racial background

such as Indian, Black and Coloured participants. Whilst data saturation was reached with the five individuals, it is likely that there would have been different ideas, concerns, and viewpoints that might have been different or unique to different racial groups.

Compounding the challenge of connecting with a more racially diverse sample was that the researcher's immediate accessible networks were of the millennial generation, and finding relevant Gen Z candidates posed an issue.

Another factor that might affect the data results, is that since the oldest segment of this category is around twenty-eight years' old, the work-place experience for interview candidates is shallower than that of the previous generation. This is because they have only been working in the industry for approximately two to six years. Thus, insights or opinions may be somewhat naïve because of a lack of experience.

Do South Africans have the "luxury" of choosing their ideal employer?

As noted by Mbekeni and Phiri (2020), we have an unemployment crisis in SA, where more than one-third of our potential workforce are not working. This means that job competition is at an all-time high, and the idea that Gen Z can be very selective with employers they want to work for may not be as prevalent a factor in South Africa than it is in the USA or Europe. Linked to this, is that the majority of South African youths don't have easy access to a good secondary or tertiary education that can set them up to be part of a desirable talent pool with scarce or unique skills (South African Market Insights, 2020).

Despite this argument, companies such as Derivco and iKhokha that specialise in technology products, have vacancies in the hundreds. These roles require specialised 4IR technology skills such as software engineering and digital marketing (LinkedIn, 2023; Derivco, 2023; iKhokha, 2023). This indicates that while there are many semi-skilled individuals who are unemployed in South Africa, technology skills requirements are at an all-time high, and sought-after 4IR talent leads itself to a very competitive recruitment space.

Ethical considerations

Study participants were encouraged to voluntarily take part in the research without any coercion. Participants were provided with a debriefing session before the interview to address any concerns or questions they may have had.

During the interviews, the confidentiality and anonymity of participants were consistently upheld and assured. Participants were required to sign an informed consent letter to engage in the

comprehensive study. The consent forms and discuss assured the confidentiality of participants by protecting their identities, and it was also discussed that they could remove themselves from the study at any point, should they feel they wanted to.

To protect the individuals' identities in the thematic analysis, names were replaced with Participant and their corresponding number. To ensure a relaxed and comfortable setting, interviews took place at a time and place of the participants' choosing so that they could speak freely without their colleagues, employer or family listening in.

4 FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Findings

There are six key themes, informed by corresponding categories of codes that were identified in data analysis process. These codes and themes can be seen in the table below. Some of these codes are grouped into a theme category, yet hold slightly different meanings. The context in which words or phrases were used have informed where the codes are orientated and under what theme or category they fall (Lochmiller, 2021). The reason for this was to record a more accurate reflection and meaning of what the participant was saying.

Table 2: Themes and Codes.

Themes	Codes	
ADVANCEMENT	Free thought	Graduate programs
Stimulating / innovative Environment or Work	Innovation	Training
Personal development / growth	Information	Experience
Meaningful work	Interesting	Grow
	Stimulating environment	Get Better
	Smart	Learn new things
	Make a difference to the world	Be challenged
	Values	Unstructured

	Impact Self-improvement Career path Intentionality	Learning Entertaining Captivating Out of my comfort zone
LEADERSHIP Management styles Leadership communication	Empathy / Understanding Valued Mutual respect Humility Hierarchy Hearing opinions / listening Share ideas Micromanaging (dislike) Confidence in abilities / autonomy	Trust from employers Trustworthiness Open communications Open-minded Support Transparency Authenticity Coaching
LIFESTYLE Work-life balance Freedom & flexibility	Work-life balance Work nomadically Hybrid work / flexible system Flexibility Freedom Spend time how I want to Still get my work done but where and when I want to	Time is money All-consuming Stress Free time Balance Break Holiday

	Work from anywhere Traveling	Self-care / mental health Earning enough to travel How people are treated
BENEFITS Money / economy Tangible Benefits (including salary)	Economic environment Financial situation Underpaid Inflation Money Financially free Living at home Salary / Pay Rent Bonuses / annual incentives Salary Retirement Annuity Financial Planning	Maternity leave School fees Child care at work Social /hobby clubs Work Hours Leave Health & Medical Aid Food vouchers / food / canteen Mentorship programs and conference attendance allowance
WORKLACE CULTURE Colleagues / people Space/ physical environment	People Colleagues Team Team members Team Work	Social time Interactions Space Work environment (physical) Outside / Nature

	Team efficiency Collaboration Respect Good people	Open environment Location Comfortable Relaxed, laid back Productive environment
ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION <i>pre- and post-employment comms</i>	Email LinkedIn OfferZen WhatsApp Phone calls Zoom/video calls	Slack Team stand-up Check-ins Meetings Staff announcement videos Letter/ newsletter Q&A sessions

Introducing the participants

The research participants were between the ages of 22 and 28. The participants were forthcoming in their ideas, thoughts and opinions in regard to the topic. This made for an effortless discussion and a flow of honest, useful commentary around the questions posed.

Overall, there were multiple similarities in terms of what the individuals' values in their lives.

- All participants mentioned that travelling was important to them at this time of their lives. Most participants mentioned the fact that they would rather spend their money on travelling and exploring rather than buying physical assets such as a home.
- All participants made mention of time with their family and/or their partner being a major priority.
- Most participants mentioned physical health or fitness and/or mental health.
- Most participants made mention of valuing their independence and seeking financial freedom.

- All participants expressed the desire to 'settle down' in the next ten years; to likely have children and get married.

Apart from Participant A, who has had work experience at four companies since graduating, the rest of the participants had no more than one or two organisations they had worked for since they started their careers. This information is noted because the participants' 'real world' work experience is somewhat limited, and much of their ideas or references were based on their experience of one company. In an attempt to most accurately address the research question however, the researcher made an effort to remind the participants to share around their overall personal preferences and feelings, rather than share commentary on their experience with their current employer.

Despite the limited knowledge of working for different companies, most participants had an extensive choice of offers from companies that they could choose from due to their sought-after qualifications. This made for an interesting and relevant discussion for the research questions because the reasons for choosing (or not choosing) certain companies to work for were discussed.

The first two interviewees were individuals who have Digital Marketing qualifications and Digital Marketing related professions. Participant A had studied at both Red & Yellow and AAA School of Advertising. Participant B had studied at The Vega School of Brand Communications. These individuals were both females, and both alluded to the fact that times were sometimes tough financially, and despite digital marketing roles being widely advertised, finding well-paid jobs in the field wasn't easy. Participant B mentioned that some of her peers were offered a meagre R10 000 for their first jobs after graduating, and Participant A mentioned that despite nearing their thirties, many of her peers with the same qualification were still living at home with their parents due to financial strain.

The other three participants were all males, who had graduated with Software Engineering degrees. This group of participants expressed that it was relatively easy to find suitable work in South Africa with their qualifications, and each of them had two or more job offers to choose from when seeking work after University.

An observation was made that whilst digital marketing is ever-growing and evolving, software engineers are more sought-after, specialised, and unique in their skill-sets. Hence, there was a distinct difference in some regards when it came to the demand for software engineering talent, versus the digital marketing managers.

Whilst all individuals mentioned pay or salary on a few occasions, remuneration was not the most important factor at this stage of their lives. Most of the interviewed individuals expected a fair remuneration for their amount of work experience, as well as the salary falling in line with the volume

of work. However, the main financial factor for participants interviewed was to be able to cover their monthly expenses and earn enough excess pay (through salary or performance incentives) to travel and explore the world during their leave periods.

Interpreting the research findings

The diagram below shows the six identified themes that are pertinent to the research discussion.



Figure 3. Six factors that inform the views of skilled Gen Z employees in the workplace today

Personal Advancement, and Making the World a Better Place

Osborne & Hammoud (2017) discuss the importance of workplace engagement through effective career advancement and employee training programs. This theme was identified since the participants made frequent reference to *individual personal development* and career growth, how *stimulating or interesting* the work is, as well as the *organisations' expertise* and the *company standing* in the marketplace. Mentions of work that has a *positive global purpose* also falls into this category due to its contribution to global advancement.

Due to the nature of 4IR work; technology, data, software and digital marketing, advancement and innovation is fundamental to the participants' career path choices. Also, since Gen Z are the younger generation in the workplace, there is a natural desire for learning and career advancement. Participants referred to seeking employment that was "interesting", "stimulating", "smart" and "challenging". Participant 3 specifically made mention of the fact that his current company is helping him develop his skills in data science in order for him to move into a machine learning role, and participant 5 mentioned that he admires companies "that [strive] to push the boundaries of web development" and "bring new ideas to the web environment".

The topic of career advancement and facilitated performance development was a major conversation point with all interviewees. There were various approaches that were mentioned in terms of how companies might aid them with this. This was informed by what they wanted their company to start doing, or what their company was already doing well.

- Mentorship and coaching programs (Participant 1; 2; 3; 4; 5)
- Formal graduate programs (Participant 3; 4)
- In house courses and relevant learning portal subscriptions (participant 4)
- Centre of Excellence (COE) – for additional coding/software passion projects (participant 4)
- ‘Buddy system’ with other skilled employees (participant 4; 5)
- Financially subsidised studies (participant 5)

Participant 3 aptly summarised that he wants to feel that “the company has an intention for [me]”, and when he went through some prospective employer interviews and asked about formal graduate training, he was “put off by companies that sort of gave me a wishy-washy answer.” Putting herself in the shoes of the employer or manager, participant 2 mentioned that “*you want your employees to stay with you, but you also want your employees to grow*”. In other words, echoing one of Richard Branson’s famous quotes “train people well enough so they can leave, treat them well enough that they don’t want to” @richardbranson (2014).

Apple, Intel, OpenAI, Elon Musk’s Boring Company, and Tesla, were mentioned by the various participants when asked about their most desirable organisations to work for. The reasons stipulated was due their innovative foundations as well as their desire to make the world a better place.

Philanthropical and wildlife preservation organisations were also mentioned by two participants due to the desire to ‘do good work’. Most participants at some stage during their interviews mentioned the desire to work for companies that make “make the world a better place”. Solving global warming effects and pollution were two specific causes mentioned. In their paper on talent attraction and retention through the practice of brand building, Enslin and Wolfswinkel (2020), discuss the increasing desire for employees to work for “purpose-driven brands”.

Participant 1, in speaking about Elon Musk, stated that “all of his ideas and his companies are so innovative and I think will actually make a difference...I like something that would help the world.” Participant 4 mentioned that company ethics and values are at the top of his list. In fact, Participant 4 turned down a job offer to a company that did military drones for the Saudi Arabian army, because “it didn’t sit right” with him. He later summarised “I think it’s important that your company is morally pointed in the right direction.”

Barriere, Owens, & Pobereskin (2018) define *talent* as individuals holding rare and critical skillsets, thus, implying that there is a degree of under supply and over-demand in such a category. In order to find their preferred place of work, all other factors being equal, talented individuals will consider their own vision, views, values and purpose when making the decision as to where they would want to work (Balmer, 2017; Kaplan, 2017; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2017). Thus, it's imperative that companies reflect on their purpose and values as it pertains to their employee value proposition. Keller and Meaney (2017); and Andrianova, Maor, and Schaninger (2018) discuss the ability to attract and retain talent has a direct impact on a company's competitive advantage, performance, and success. Therefore, while many business' objectives may be centred around market-share and profits, they would need to seriously consider their higher purpose and how they might be contributing to making the world a better place. Should they not, they risk losing talent to other organisations that are able to offer both good tangible benefits along with a purpose rooted in global advancement for the greater good of the earth and humankind.

Leadership

"Career planning discussions, employee work autonomy, and manager recognition contribute to employee engagement which leads to increased performance" (Lartey, 2021; 1). As identified in the previous section, job advancement and career planning conversations are indeed important to the individuals that were involved in this study. When asked what type of leadership style was favoured, the most commonly mentioned traits were *trust* and *autonomy*, where the individual has ability to do their work well, without being micromanaged. Open communication, and frequent feedback, were also mentioned by all participants as key factors in regard to favoured leadership styles.

Participant 3 described his desire for autonomy in the context of "*having the space where I can come up to [the leader] and say, hey listen, I'm struggling with this, or I need help with that, but generally being fairly hands-off [...] and giving me the understanding that when it's time for me to work, they're confident that I can get the work done to a high standard.*" Participant 2 made mention that "*there's a flexibility and a trustworthiness that's required*" between the leader and the employee, which was echoed by Participant 1 in the context of being able to work remotely is "*having the trust from the employers*". Participant 3 and 5 both expressed themselves by saying that "*you don't want to feel like someone is hovering over your shoulder*".

These views are understandable given the qualifications and intellect that the individuals in the study possess, and, given the fact that they all exhibit traits of being driven and independent thinkers, they desire the opportunity to work without being frequently directed and closely managed. Pattnaik and Sahoo (2021) discuss the relationship employee autonomy plays in influencing the connection between employee engagement and creativity. Hence, when one is able to figure things out by

themselves', it can result in creative development and enhanced job satisfaction. At the same time, they want help from time to time, so it appears that they want a healthy balance of autonomy and guidance when required.

It should be noted that this is likely to differ to other roles and job profiles. It can be argued that a blanket level of autonomy may not be desired by all employees in all organisations. For instance, if an administration role is considered, these jobs are often conducted by individuals with no tertiary or highly-skilled qualification. Autonomy and freedom to work independently may be daunting and have a different effect to the overall employee satisfaction (Zhou, 2020).

In regard to open communication and feedback, Participant 5 stated that *"I've got a lot of respect for someone that can take the time to explain something to me in a non-condescending way"*, participant 4 mentioned that he *"enjoy[s] leadership that [is] open and transparent"*, and participant 2 said that *"I'm someone who likes open communication... what I value the most is to have a leader that you can talk to and not be scared of what they're going to say."* Frequent one-on-one check-ins, as well as team 'stand-up' meetings, or sprint meetings, were also particularly valued amongst the participants as a means to openly communicate.

Other attributes that participants are seeking are transparency and clarity. Humility and empathy (Participant 2) , understanding (Participant 1; 2; 4; 5) , and limited hierarchical or 'overly corporate' (Participants 4; 5) structures were also mentioned. In essence, an environment that is human-centric, mutually respectful, mature, and practical is favoured by this cohort of Gen Z professionals. Two participants (4 and 5) mentioned that while they admire some of the great companies such as Google, they would want to avoid working there for fear of being 'lost in the masses' and losing close ties with management and leadership.

Lifestyle

Pandita and Singhal (2017) explore the relationship between employee engagement and work-life balance, stating that it's one of the toughest challenges that HR leaders are facing today. Brace (2022) believes that work-life balance is a major contributor to overall job satisfaction, especially since the Covid-19 lockdown of 2020 and 2021. Work-life balance, as well as freedom and flexibility were two concepts that were brought up at numerous stages throughout the discussions with the participants. All participants, except for participant 5, seemed to place a lot of emphasis in their desire for flexibility, and work-life balance. Participant 5 in some ways was an outlier – stating that work is his top priority at the moment and once he has a firmer hold on his career he'll re-shift his focus. That being said, he did make mention to mental health being something he valued the most, so, his work would not be at the expense of his mental health.

The other four participants all mentioned their desire to work effectively and efficiently and once they had done so, have the time to enjoy their partners, hobbies, and environments. These same participants also made mention of their desire to travel before they would choose to “settle down”. Two participants mentioned that at their companies, once you’d finished the tickets or projects in your task list for the week, employees were free to do as they pleased. Whether it be to leave work early and go for a run, or get involved in additional learning or training. This type of approach to work encourages individuals to work smarter, not necessarily harder or longer, which seems to be an emerging valued trend, particularly in IT-related workplaces (Pandita & Ritesh, 2017).

When asked what would be the main factor that would make [him] want to leave a company, Participant 3 answered by saying that it would be if the company was “consuming my life outside of work by trying to put on more work than I can handle”. He also mentioned that “I dream of traveling a lot and exploring the world around me.... [I want to earn] enough to be able to travel and that's kind of your short-term goal.”

Flexibility in terms of being able to work from home, or from another city, was also evidently valued by this sample. Each participant made a reference to valuing flexibility and freedom, despite two of them preferring to work from the office due to a preference for being around colleagues.

Employee Benefits

Interestingly, aside from pay and remuneration, there were no employee benefits that were repetitively mentioned or given much weight in terms of desire or preferences. Medical aid benefits, as well as provident fund or retirement annuities were mentioned on three occasions, but this was mentioned in the context of which benefits they currently have in place.

The two women interviewed however, did make specific mention for the need for flexibility during child-rearing years, or where day-care ideally would be provided in some form, as well as maternity benefits were made note of being important when that time was to arise (Participants 1; 2). Participant 3 mentioned that he had an extra four leave days than the annual legal limit, as well as subsidised lunch vouchers, which are both benefits he valued but were not a major factor in his decision to choose his employer over another.

Overall, the general conclusion made from the interviews was that financial freedom was paramount, but that given the right level of remuneration, one can be satisfied with being able to buy their own lunch, invest in retirement annuities, or explore their own medical aid and gap cover solutions on an individual basis.

Workplace Culture

Workplace culture was very important to all participants who were interviewed. All participants valued a “relaxed” working environment that were not “too corporate” in nature (Participants 1; 2; 3; 4; 5). Despite this, most participants expected a high standard of work for themselves and their peers, and whilst they valued the opportunity to be able to work remotely, it was very important to have colleagues that work well together and can collaborate effectively.

Dulewicz and Lippert (2018) found that of trustworthiness, interpersonal communication, commitment, and cross-cultural communication approach, emerge as primary factors impacting high-performing teams. The findings also go on to explain that a relaxed environment (whether virtual or in-person) is imperative in fostering effective peer-to-peer communication. Thus, it's important to distinguish between a “laid-back” culture (participant 4), and a slow-performing team. In fact, participants discussed how a friendly, informal environment helped drive higher performance and cross-team collaboration.

Three of the five participants made notable mention of their physical workspace environment affecting their mood and work productivity. Participant 1 made mention of enjoying her company's new office that had an open courtyard, lots of light, and greenery. Participant 4 explained how his workplace had a great open-plan social area that incorporates games and activities such as table tennis and dart boards. This he believed helps foster interpersonal relationships at work and strengthen their teams. *“It allows a lot of team-building and you actually become good mates with people you work with which I think is important. If you're working with people you dislike you're going to have a hard time getting things done.”*

This notion was supported by Participant 5, stating that “conversations with work colleagues are definitely beneficial to getting along and understanding the other person.” He went on to say that the people he works with probably have the most significant impact on his job satisfaction; “overall [my colleagues have] got [to have] a passion, for either their job or their life, and they're [must] always try to better themselves or just be a good person in the work environment, and not try to bring people down.” This was raised in the context of the discussion around what would be a major factor that would make him want to leave his employer. Whilst peers and colleagues didn't seem to have as much of an impact on participant 4, it is possible that participant 5 values his work peers more than the other participants since he also mentioned that he focuses more on work than his out-of-work life.

Finally, there was an explicit line of questioning around communications since this was observed to have a significant effect on employer branding and work-place satisfaction in the literature review.

The questions around pre-employment communications and engagement styles were all fairly consistent; Email, LinkedIn and OfferZen were seen to be the most appropriate channels of communication; where phone calls or WhatsApp's were sometimes seen as too informal or untrustworthy in the initial phases of 'head-hunting'. The two software engineering students that had studied at Stellenbosch University made mention of recruiters and companies conducting interviews and presentations at their University which opened up opportunities for both. The company's website was said to also be a key touch-point during the initial investigation phase. Thus, websites need noteworthy attention when considering employer branding strategies in the context of attracting talent.

In terms of communication with employees in the organisation, a thorough onboarding program is valued by the participants. Participants 1 and 2 discussed past experiences where they were unimpressed by companies that lacked formal on-the-job training and an organised induction with the company. Since this is one of the very first employee brand impressions, companies should focus their attention on creating 'wow' experiences for new employees, where they are also more likely to talk about their new company in a positive light, thereby creating positive word-of-mouth communications for the organisation (Lievens, Stockman, Weijters, Van Hoya, 2016).

In terms of the context and type of communication, there were different preferences accordingly. The table below shows a summary of these preferences that were similar or the same across all participants in the sample:

Table 3: Communication Categories and Preferred Channels

Type of communication	Forum/ format
<i>Team updates or project updates</i>	Slack or emails (Slack is the preference)
<i>Project or work-related information</i>	Team meeting / morning stand-up or "sprint" meeting
<i>Important information on significant company news or company updates</i>	A company-wide conference call or in-person meeting with all employees – supported by a presentation if appropriate
<i>Aspects affecting all staff but not necessarily big items</i>	Company newsletter via email, or video upload with a link to watch an address from the leader or managing executive

In all communications, again, transparency, openness and honesty were deemed as very important. Being kept 'in the loop' is an important aspect of being able to do one's job and feel secure in the workplace.

Research Question, Problem, and Objectives Addressed

Having skilled, talented employees directly enhances organisational performance and contributes to its success (Andrianova, *et al.*, 2018; Keller & Meaney, 2017). As the world changes and workplaces require new talent and fresh skills, it's imperative that business leaders inform themselves of the factors that can affect Gen Z's desire to be employed, and stay employed, at their organisation.

This research set out to answer the simple question of "what are Gen Z's looking for from their employers today?" The six key themes identified, as well as the examples discussed, aim to assist HR and business leaders, as well as brand-builders that oversee the employer brand. Armed with more information around South Africa's young 4IR talent; namely digital marketing specialists and software developers, they can better plan, prioritise, and strategise around their employer branding; including their EVP, talent attraction, and retention.

Lartey (2021) believes that employee engagement is rooted in the heart of an employee – a deep dedication of an employee to the mission, vision, values, goals, and purpose of the organisation. This suggests that it's imperative that the organisation first looks to its intrinsic purpose and reason for being in order to resonate with a workforce market that may have many other job opportunities and companies to choose from.

Intentional employee performance and skills development is also a noteworthy cause to invest in for young talent, since naturally, the Gen Z workforce are at the start of their careers and wanting to set themselves up for future success (Pandita, 2021). Should they not find the right career advancement opportunities or appropriate mentorship, they are likely to look elsewhere for employment. Leadership rooted in humility and understanding, but not without high-standards, is also important. Gen Z want to be able to voice their opinions, have a deep trust, and a mutual respect for their leaders (Garia & Moses, 2022).

In addition, insights and understanding were shared around what the South African Gen Z cohort may prefer in terms of employee benefits, workplace culture and environments, as well as company communication styles and sought-after channels (Dulewicz & Lippert, 2018).

The research identified these key themes and trends that brands can leverage to ensure their employer branding strategies are effective, relevant and competitive for the emerging Gen Z talent

market in South Africa, which is set to take-over from the millennial cohort in the next 15 years (Henderson, 2022) .

Conclusion

Understanding how to establish a strong employer brand must not be overlooked by brand-builders, HRMs, and business leaders. This is a critical aspect of any company strategy in order to remain competitive and to have good 4IR talent as an advantage. From research conducted, six themes we observed that are deemed critically important. These include *career advancement, transparent leadership, lifestyle benefits and flexibility, employee benefits, workplace culture and organisational communication*.

Whilst remuneration is an important factor, it is not everything to Gen Z. Being a part of a work culture and community that has admirable values, transparent communication, and a clear purpose is sometimes more important. Flexibility in terms of working arrangements and timing of work is also notably important to this generation.

Since these individuals are smart and highly-skilled, they have high ambitions and a desire for autonomy. They want to be able to use their brains and to be challenged. They want to work for companies that value innovation and are challenging the status quo. They also want to have the right guidance and career development plans to assist their personal development and growth.

Lastly, whilst software developers, IT engineers, and data coders evidently have many job offers and companies they can choose to work for, other 4IR related specialists, such as digital marketers, are slightly less sought-after.

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ANNEXURES

Annexure A: Concept Document

Proposed topic:

Evolving employer branding: What attracts "Gen Z" to corporate employers in South Africa today?

Problem statement:

Building a strong employer brand is critical to attract and retain employees in the competitive workplace both today and in the future (Enslin and Wolfswinkel, 2020).

Generation Z will soon be entering our talent pool with their own set of desires, motivations, intentions, and needs (Lazarević and Nikolić, 2022). Whilst there is much written on employer branding for as it pertains to the millennial workforce, the research will help to close the gap in the literature relating to Gen Z and employer branding (Pandita, 2021).

Since 'Gen Z' are the future a brand's workforce, it's critical to understand their drives and motivations in order for businesses to focus their employer branding accordingly. In doing this, brands can attract the best possible talent that can contribute to the business effectively, and stay competitive (Briganti and Samson, 2019).

Purpose statement:

The research paper aims to understand the next generation of key skilled workers and what they will look for in employers. In better understanding this, brands can develop their employer branding more effectively, in order to both attract and retain talent, and keep a competitive advantage (Pandita, 2021). Understanding this will be beneficial in attracting this future talent long-term (Enslin and Wolfswinkel, 2020).

The research will explore what it is that makes an attractive employer brand, and unpack the motivations behind why a Gen Z employee will choose to work for certain company, and how this aligns to their personal values and purpose. According to Keller and Meaney (2017), this is key for the future of holistic brand building.

Research questions:

- What brand attributes attracts Gen Z to an employer (brand) in South Africa today? Or, in simple terms; what are they looking for in employers?
- What talent groups are critically important to attract and retain within the Gen Z cohort (due to scarce and/or desirable skills) for the future?
- How can employer brands focus their employer branding strategies to attract and retain Gen Z talent?

Objectives:

- Understand what employer brand characteristics are valued by Gen Z in South Africa.
- Identify key themes and insights that brands can leverage to ensure their employer branding strategies are effective for the emerging Gen Z talent market in SA.

Research rationale:

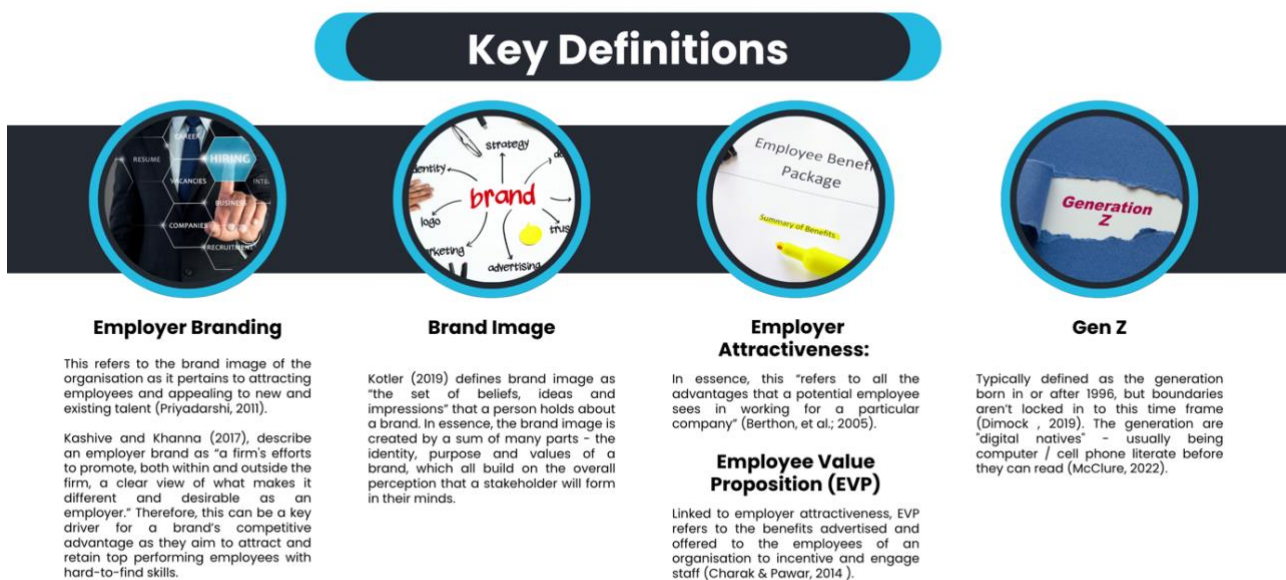
Limited research studies specifically providing current insights into what employer branding elements impacts the talent attraction and retention of the emerging Gen Z employee market in South Africa today.

Enslin and Wolfswinkel (2020) as well as Pandita (2021), are beneficial for the building of this research, however, these studies focus on the perspective of HR management and leadership, rather than from the perspective of Gen Z talent market themselves.

This research will look at key aspects of employer branding from the perspective of Gen Z employees and potential employees.

The aim of the paper will highlight themes and insights that can help brands focus their employer branding strategy and remain competitive as a desirable employer of choice.

Literature review themes:



Key Theories:

Social Identity Theory (SIT), and / or Herzberg's Motivation Theory

First introduced by Tajfel and Turner (1986), the Social Identity Theory is used as a basis for the paper. This theory frames how individuals desire to be a part of something with purpose, and greater than themselves. Harwood (2020), defines SIT as "based on the inherent value humans place on social group memberships, and their desire to view their specific social groups in a positive light".

McLeod (2023), supports Ashforth & Mael, (1989) which describes SIT as being "a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s)". By implication, it also forces people to put others' into groups and this make generalisations or simplify conclusions McLeod (2023).

Turban & Greening (1997), discussed the SIT theory in the context of CSR practices on reputation and organisational attraction, however, did not test in the context of recruitment or talent attraction.

Seminal authors and sources:

Employer Branding: Ambler and Barrow (1996) first introduced the term “employer branding”. The team identified the need and opportunity to attract employees to companies, using brand-marketing techniques. In addition, they identified the need for internal brand building; how this would aid in employee motivation, and in turn, enhanced customer outcomes (**Backhaus**, 2016).

Brand Image: **David Ogilvy** initially put forward the Brand Image Theory in the 1950s, pointing out that "Brand is an intricate symbol, which is the intangible sum of Brand attributes". Subsequently, **Phillip Kotler** has focused his writings on Brand Image specifically which too provides helpful resources for this paper.

Social Identity Theory: First introduced by **Tajfel and Turner (1986)**, a key theory that is used as a basis for the paper is the Social Identity Theory (SIT).

Employee talent market in SA: Ferreira (2016), describes the key importance of human resources and the scarcity of highly skilled workforce.

Research Approach

The research will take on an interpretivist approach using qualitative analysis. A technique of inductive content analysis will be used, where we plan to look at themes that emerge in respect to employer branding in South Africa.

Data collection and instrument overview

Academic Studies: Using desktop-based research; looking at scholarly papers, we will explore the topic of employer branding as it relates to Gen Z in the context of South Africa today.

Corporate Studies: Qualitative reports and studies from Harvard Business Review, Mckinsey & Company, Deloitte Insights, and other corporate reports will be used to supplement scholarly findings.

Questionnaire: Open-ended questions via digital questionnaire, with a sample size of 3-5 individuals (who will qualify under Gen Z talent definition).

Provisional Research Plan

- Sample size of 3-5 employed 'Gen Zers'

- Working in a company of 5+ employees
- Ages 21-25
- Specialised skills and a tertiary education, examples of which are below
 - *Finance / Accounting*
 - *Digital Marketing Specialist*
 - *Web Developer / Software Engineer*
 - *Actuary / Data Scientist*
 - *Robotics / AI / Automation Engineer*
- The sample size needs to represent a diverse mix of individuals - cultural backgrounds, economic orientation, geographic locations (within SA), gender, religion. *This is so that the themes or insights gleaned can talk to a broad snapshot of the country's demographics, and so that the research isn't bias or skewed to one particular group.*

Example questions for the sample

- ❓ Tell me about yourself... (analyse the characteristics of Gen Z).
- ❓ What do you value?
- ❓ Which brands do you love and why?
- ❓ Which brand/company would you really like to work with and **why?**
- ❓ What are the most important aspects / attributes in an employer for you? Why?

Ethical considerations and limitations

Many South Africans won't have the luxury of "choosing their ideal employer"...

As noted by Stats SA (2022), we have an employment crisis in SA (33%), which means that job competition is at an all-time high, and the idea that Gen Z can be selective in 'choosing' certain employers may be unrealistic.

Linked to this, is that the majority of South African youths don't have easy access to a good secondary or tertiary education that can set them up to be part of a desirable talent pool with scarce or unique skills (South African Market Insights, 2020).

There aren't many 'Gen Zers' in the workforce yet...

The oldest segment of this category is around 25 years' old. Therefore, the sample size and workplace experience is shallower than that of the previous millennial workforce market.

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Annexure B: Ethical Clearance Letter



06 July 2023



Student name: Grace Winter
Student number: [REDACTED]
Brand and campus: Vega Online



Approval of BA Honours in Strategic Brand Communication Proposal and Ethics Clearance



Your research proposal and the ethical implications of your proposed research topic were reviewed by your supervisor and the campus ethics committee, a subcommittee of The Independent Institute of Education's Ethics Committee.



Your research proposal posed no significant ethical concerns and we hereby provide you with ethics clearance to proceed with your data collection.

There may be some aspects that you still need to address in your proposal. If this is the case, feedback will be provided to you in writing. You will need to address these aspects in consultation with your supervisor.

In the event that you decide to change your research topic or methodology in any way, kindly consult your supervisor to ensure that all ethical considerations are adhered to and pose no risk to any participant or party involved. A revised ethics clearance letter will be issued in such instances.

We wish you all the best with your research!

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED SIGNATURE]

Nitasha Ramparsand
Supervisor

Dr Tish Taylor
Chair of the Campus Ethics Committee

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Annexure C: Participant Consent Form Template



Explanatory information sheet and consent form for participants

To whom it may concern,

My name is Grace Winter (Robinson) and I am a student at The IIE's the [REDACTED] of Brand Communications. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of DR NITASHA RAMPARSAD about Employer Branding into the future, and what it is that attracts the emerging South Africa Gen Z talent pool to companies/ organisations today. I hope that this research will enhance our understanding of What Gen Z employees will be looking for when it comes to employers, and also to give brands insight into how they might wish to develop their Employer Branding strategies accordingly in order to remain competitive in the fight for a highly skilled workforce.

I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to explain to you what your participation in my study will involve, I have formulated questions that I will try to fully answer so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any additional questions that you feel are not addressed or explained in this information sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me for more information. Once you have read and understood all the information contained in this sheet and are willing to participate, please complete and sign the consent form below.

What will I be doing if I participate in your study?

I would like to invite you to participate in this research because (insert reason). If you decide to participate in this research, I would like to (explain exactly what participation will involve).

You can decide whether or not to participate in this research. If you decide to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time or to decide not to answer particular interview questions.

Are there any risks/ or discomforts involved in participating in this study?

Whether or not you decide to participate in this research, there will be no negative impact on you. There are no direct risks or benefits to you if you participate in this study. You might, however, indirectly find that it is helpful to talk about your (insert what you are examining).

If you find at any stage that you are not comfortable with the line of questioning, you may withdraw or refrain from participating.

Detail the potential risks and how it will be managed by the researcher. Indicate how the ethical considerations will be applied in the context of the study.

Do I have to participate in the study?

- Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary.
- If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so;
- Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.

Will my identity be protected?

I promise to protect your identity. I will not use your name in any research summaries to come out of this research and I will also make sure that any other details are disguised so that nobody will be able to identify you. I would like to ask your permission to record the interviews, but only my supervisor, I and possibly a professional transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement) will have access to these recordings. Nobody else, including anybody at The Vega School of Brand Communications, will have access to your interview information. I would like to use quotes when I discuss the findings of the research, but I will not use any recognisable information in these quotes that can be linked to you.

What will happen to the information that participants provide?

Once I have finished all interviews, I will write summaries to be included in my research report, which is a requirement to complete my BA Honours in Strategic Brand Communications. You may ask me to send you a summary of the research if you are interested in the final outcome of the study.

What happens if I have more questions about the study?

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about this research, or if there is anything you need to know before you decide whether or not to participate.

You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed.

My contact details are as follows:

Grace Winter

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:

Nitasha Ramparsad



Participant or respondent consent

I, _____, agree to participate in the research conducted by Grace Winter (Robinson) about what Gen Z are looking for in employers in South Africa today.

This research has been explained to me and I understand what participation in this research will involve. I understand that:

- I agree to be interviewed for this research.
- My confidentiality will be ensured. My name and personal details will be kept private.
- My participation in this research is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. There will be no repercussions should I choose to withdraw from the research.
- I may choose not to answer any of the questions that are asked during the research interview.
- I may be quoted directly when the research is published, but my identity will be protected.

Signature

Date