Article

Corporate heritage employer branding in the service of national-level labor objectives

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Abstract: This paper explores how Saudi managers perceive the role of corporate heritage in achieving the employment goals of heritage organizations operating in Saudi and, in turn, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 in relation to the Nitaqat program. Using an exploratory qualitative method, the study involved fifteen in-depth semi-structured interviews with HR managers from ten heritage-rich organizations. The analysis identified five key organizational identity traits with heritage—proficient, shelter, responsive, advancing, and centrality—that can be leveraged in employer branding to attract potential employees and enhance the employer brand of organizations operating in the Saudi market. This study is significant as it is the first to investigate corporate heritage from an employer branding perspective and in relation to national employment goals in emerging markets.

Keywords: corporate heritage; corporate heritage identity with heritage; Saudi Arabia; national employment policy

1. Introduction

In 2016, Saudi Arabia announced its 2030 Vision, which aims to transform the kingdom's economy to become more sustainable and prosperous (Vision 2030 Saudi Arabia, 2024). Known for its significant role in the global oil industry, the kingdom's economy has been heavily reliant on oil exports, which are estimated to amount to 77% of the kingdom's total exports, and the oil sector accounts for 46% of its GDP (Borck, 2023; General Authority for Statistics, Saudi Arabia, 2024a, 2024b).

The 2030 vision consists of three main dimensions that constitute the objectives the country leadership aspires to achieve: 1—a vibrant society, 2—a thriving economy, and 3—an ambitious nation. For each of these dimensions, there are several corresponding programs; through these, the vision hopes to further the socioeconomic and sociocultural development in Saudi Arabia (Vision 2030 Saudi Arabia, 2024).

However, employment, particularly in the private sector, is an Omnipresent element of the vision that significantly contributes to all its three dimensions. Saudi Arabia's labor market is unique in that it is characterized by high unemployment levels among domestics, a low private employment ratio, low levels of female participation, high pay disparities between domestics and expatriates, and a reluctance by nationals to work in the private sector (International Monetary Fund, Middle East and Central Asia Department, 2018). In this respect, the Saudi government has paralleled the 2030 vision with the "Nitaqat" program (i.e., it is known more as the "Saudization" program

(the nationalization/localization of the workforce)), which aims to replace the foreign workers in Saudi private sector with Saudi workers. This program contributes to the 2030 vision by reducing the unemployment rate in the kingdom and releasing pressure on the Saudi public sector to create jobs (Al-Dosary and Rahman, 2005). In doing so, the program imposes the mandatory hiring of Saudis following specific quotes based on some criteria and develops the competencies of Saudi workers (Javed, 2024).

Following the guidelines of the Nitaqat program, organizations operating in Saudia Arabia have been developing their efforts to attract local human capital through various initiatives. While multinational organizations can use their corporate brand to attract local talent, domestic organizations are argued to be less able to do so. The challenge of attracting local human capital is argued to be one of the main hindrances to achieving the aim of the Nitaqat program and the Vision 2030.

The aim of this study is to examine the use of corporate heritage, exploring its usefulness to the local corporate recruitment efforts and the achievement of the "Nitaqat" program from the perspective of managers (Urde et al., 2007). Corporate heritage is a corporate marketing concept (Balmer and Burghausen, 2015) that refers to:

> "Those institutional traits which have remained meaningful and invariant over time and, as such, a corporate heritage identity viewed as being part of the past, present and future." (Balmer, 2011b, p. 1385).

Studies indicate that corporate heritage organizations hold appeal for customers and stakeholders in general (Balmer and Burghausen, 2015a; Balmer and Chen, 2016, 2017; Santos et al., 2016). Additionally, managers strategically leverage corporate heritage, as corporate heritage is associated with authenticity, credibility, trust, affinity, reliability, and stability (Balmer, 2011a, 2011b; Balmer and Burghausen, 2015a; Hakala et al., 2011; Rose et al., 2016). One particular stakeholder group with which corporate heritage can be particularly effective is prospective employees. In fact, early corporate heritage research indicated that corporate heritage could play a significant role in attracting potential employees (Urde et al., 2007).

As such, this study aims to answer the question of how corporate heritage can be useful to the corporate institutions with heritage in trying to service the 2030 vision by enhancing their attractiveness to Saudi human capital (Balmer, 2023). To answer this question, the study explores how corporate identities with heritage can be helpful to managers in developing a compelling employer brand. This contributes to the literature in multiple ways. First, the study links corporate heritage to employer branding by proving the usefulness of a company's heritage in its employee attraction efforts. Second, the study links corporate heritage to public policy research, particularly topics relating to labor and employment policies, by revealing the usefulness of corporate heritage in this respect. Third, the study provides practical recommendations that can increase the competitiveness of Saudi corporate heritage institutions in the local labor market (Muyia et al., 2018; Saini et al., 2014). The findings of this study can be transferred to other emerging economies that are undertaking similar labor nationalization projects under the umbrella of national development programs, such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Government of the United Arab Emirates, 2023).

2. Literature review

2.1. Corporate heritage

The corporate heritage notion emerged from a seminal research study on monarchies and was explicated in greater depth in the subsequent literature (Balmer, 2017; Balmer et al., 2006; Burghausen, 2024; Pecot, 2022). This research has revealed that heritage institutions appeal to customers and stakeholders (Balmer and Burghausen, 2015; Balmer and Chen, 2016, 2017; Santos et al., 2016). Corporate heritage organizations are often seen as authentic, credible, trustworthy, and stable (Balmer, 2011a, 2011b; Hakala et al., 2011). Key attributes of corporate heritage include consistency and continuity, which are rooted in an organization's history, core values, symbols, and longevity (Gill and Broderick, 2014; Hakala et al., 2011; Urde et al., 2007).

Management plays a crucial role in shaping, expressing, and leveraging corporate heritage within a company (Burghausen and Balmer, 2014; Rindell and Strandvik, 2023; Urde et al., 2007). Foundational research suggests that managers engage in three essential processes: uncovering, activating, and safeguarding the corporate heritage (Urde et al., 2007). The activation of corporate heritage requires a multifaceted managerial approach that encompasses awareness and stewardship, leading to strategies that integrate an organization's identity with its heritage for strategic objectives (Burghausen and Balmer, 2014). However, not every organization is inherently heritage-based. To become heritage-focused, a company must highlight its history as central to its corporate identity (Urde et al., 2007).

Therefore, Balmer's (2023) work introduces a new dimension to the corporate heritage concept by presenting the idea of "corporate identity with a heritage". This refers to companies that possess a rich heritage but have not yet strategically harnessed or implemented it. Building on earlier studies, Rindell and Strandvik's (2023) research suggests that the personal acknowledgment by managers of their organization's heritage elements and their attitudes towards their present-day significance form what is known as a corporate heritage mindset (Burghausen and Balmer, 2014; Urde et al., 2007). This mindset is crucial in deciding if an organization with a heritage background can develop into one oriented around its corporate heritage.

In addition to managers, other employees also play a crucial role as stakeholders in an organization. Research has delved into various aspects such as the projection of a responsible corporate brand image to organizational members, issues of authenticity and belonging with stakeholders, the impact of heritage identity on employee identification and engagement, the importance of heritage in creating value and distinction for employees, and the impact of heritage on volunteers in NGOs have also been highlighted (Blombäck and Brunninge, 2016; Curran et al., 2016; Gill and Broderick, 2014; Maier and Andersen, 2017; Santos et al., 2016).

Despite the significance of these factors, the potential influence of corporate heritage on prospective employees has not been extensively studied, particularly in emerging markets where several countries have undertaken efforts to reform the labor market and encourage the employment of local human capital. Recognizing the strategic value of employer brand management, this research addresses this gap by

examining managers' perspectives on leveraging corporate heritage in employer branding. This novel focus acknowledges the previously noted conceptual relevance of an organization's heritage identity in employee attraction (Burghausen and Balmer, 2014; Urde et al., 2007). As such, building on these efforts, this study aims to empirically investigate corporate heritage practical application in enhancing employer brand management and, in turn, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 in relation to the Nitaqat program.

2.2. Organizational heritage

As discussed by Balmer and Burghausen (2015a) and further elaborated by Balmer and Burghausen (2015b), organizational heritage refers to how organizational members perceive their organization's heritage. This perception is significant for organizational identity, organizational identification, and organizational cultural identification. Organizational heritage identity refers to:

> "(the) Perceived and reminisced omni-temporal traits—both formal/utilitarian and normative/societal—of organizational member's work organization." (Balmer and Burghausen, 2015b, p. 376–377).

This concept is important because it represents the facet of the grand corporate heritage phenomenon that is foremost concerned with the organizational aspects of corporate heritage institutions. Consequently, this concept provides the principal focus for this study. Balmer and Burghausen (2015a, 2015b) note how a family of related concepts is associated with organizational heritage, namely organizational heritage identity, organizational heritage identification, and organizational heritage cultural identification. Organizational heritage identity relates to organizational traits that are both formal/utilitarian and normative/societal but perceived and reminisced in an Omni-temporal fashion by organizational members; organizational heritage identification refers to "organizational members' identification and self-categorization vis-a-vis" these traits; and organizational heritage cultural identification is associated with organizational members' multi-generational identification/self-categorization with formal/utilitarian and normative/societal traits of their work organization's corporate culture, which are similarly perceived and reminisced in an Omni-temporal fashion (Balmer and Burghausen, 2015a). Thus, the organizational heritage family of concept is of palpable importance not only to corporate marketing but also to organizational behavior and management (Balmer and Burghausen, 2015b). To date, limited research has purposefully focused on the concept of organizational heritage. This research examined the effect of organizational heritage identity on employee identification (Lee and Davies, 2021; Maier and Andersen, 2017).

More generally, although employee branding has emerged as an important area of inquiry, employee corporate brand identification is an under-explored area of scholarship, although there are exceptions within the canon (Balmer, 1995; Balmer and Liao, 2007; Balmer et al., 2010; Garas et al., 2018; Kaewsawang and Winit, 2016; Maxwell and Knox, 2009; Mokina, 2014). Employee branding is a major facet of this importance (Garas et al., 2018; Kaewsawang and Winit, 2016; Mokina, 2014).

2.3. Employer branding

Employer branding, within the context of recruitment and employee selection, encompasses the bundle of psychological, economic, and functional benefits that potential employees associate with working for a specific organization (Thorne, 2004; Wilden et al., 2010). When organizations understand and respond to these perceptions, they can create an appealing and competitive employer brand (Wilden et al., 2010). Scholars argue that employer branding is crucial in establishing and maintaining corporate reputation (Dowling, 2016; Martin and Hetrick, 2006; Martin et al., 2011).

In the realm of recruitment and employee selection, employer branding is linked to a trend known as "corporateness", a term coined by Balmer and Greyser (2003) to describe the growing interest in corporate-level integration and identity management (Martin and Sinclair, 2018). The intended outcomes of effective employer branding can be categorized into two forms of capital assets within organizations, namely employer brand capital and reputational capital.

Employer brand capital reflects the extent of employee advocacy for the organization, its products, services, and reputation as an employer of choice (Barrow et al., 2007; Joo and Mclean, 2006). Differently, reputational capital pertains to the organization's degree of (a) corporate differentiation and prominence in product and labor markets and (b) legitimacy with key stakeholders concerning good corporate governance, leadership, and corporate social responsibility (Deephouse and Suchman, 2008; Foreman et al., 2012; Lievens et al., 2007; Martin et al., 2016). These capital assets are increasingly recognized as critical for both short-term and long-term organizational performance and sustainability (Martin and Sinclair, 2018).

Organizations strategically cultivate their employer brands to attract, secure, and retain the most qualified employees within competitive markets (Moroko and Uncles, 2008; Pidcock, 2017). A well-crafted employer brand yields a sustainable competitive advantage based on human capital, which in turn reflects positively on the organization's consumer brand (Moroko and Uncles, 2008; Urbancová and Hudáková, 2017). Scholars draw parallels between employer brands and consumer brands, emphasizing concepts such as brand awareness, value proposition, and differentiation (Bhasin et al., 2019; Moroko and Uncles, 2008; Wilden et al., 2010). However, in the context of employer brand management, these elements are primarily tailored to resonate with potential employees rather than the broader consumer audience (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010; Moroko and Uncles, 2008; Pidcock, 2017; Soeling et al., 2022).

The concept of employer branding draws on several theories, including the resource-based view (RBV), psychological contract, and signaling theory. According to the RBV, skilled employees are a unique resource contributing to sustainable competitive advantage (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Pidcock, 2017; Theurer et al., 2018). Employer branding serves as a tool to communicate an organization's value proposition to potential employees (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Moroko and Uncles, 2008; Pidcock, 2017; Soeling et al., 2022). Positive associations with the employer brand facilitate talent attraction and retention (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Theurer et al., 2018; Wilden et al., 2010). Additionally, the psychological contract and signaling theory play roles in shaping employer branding strategies.

The psychological contract theory posits that employees exchange loyalty and commitment for job security, personal growth opportunities, and career advancement within an organization (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010; Moroko and Uncles, 2008; Pidcock, 2017). On the other hand, employer branding serves as a marketing tool to highlight the functional, economic, and physiological benefits of working for a specific company (Ambler and Barrow, 1996).

According to signaling theory, jobseekers actively seek out relevant details when encountering an information gap about a potential employer (Wilden et al., 2010). In this context, effective employer branding becomes crucial for organizations to signal positive information to job seekers regarding employment opportunities (Moroko and Uncles, 2008; Wilden et al., 2010). Additionally, research focusing on brand heritage from a signaling perspective reveals that it enhances consumers' perception of brand credibility and quality (Pecot et al., 2018). Specifically, brand heritage, represented by factors like the establishment year, influences brand attitude, perceived quality, and price premium (Pecot et al., 2018; Pizzi and Scarpi, 2019).

In summary, leveraging corporate heritage can play a valuable role in employer branding. Even without a dedicated employer brand, an organization's heritage may still convey positive information to job seekers. However, in the absence of effective employer branding, jobseekers might turn to aspects of the consumer brand for insights (Wilden et al., 2010).

3. Empirical context for the study

Previous corporate heritage research primarily centered around developed Western markets (Balmer and Burghausen, 2015a, 2015b; Balmer et al., 2006; Lee and Davies, 2021; Santos et al., 2016; Urde et al., 2007). This study focuses on the emerging country of Saudi Arabia as emerging countries represent a context that is overlooked in employer branding literature (Muisyo et al., 2023; Pereira et al., 2022). Generally, organizations in emerging countries, including Saudi Arabia, face challenges such as underdevelopment, weak governance, unstable workplace environments, and inefficiency (Chopra, 2009; Sayari and Marcum, 2018).

The context of employment in Saudi Arabia was deemed as an exciting venue to research due to its uniqueness in the fact that while there is an abundance of development and employment activities, there is high unemployment in the local population as most Saudi nationals prefer to work in the less intensive and often more rewarding public sector while private companies prefer to employ expats who are often paid substantially less than their Saudi counterparts (Moussa, 2013; Saleh, 2022).

One of the key challenges for domestic private organizations is employee attraction and retention, as Saudi nationals often have high expectations and aspirations about the job market (Singh et al., 2012). Indeed, research has found that the high turnover of Saudi nationals in the private sector is a significant concern, with factors such as job characteristics and rewards, often higher in multinational organizations, being important determinants of employee attraction and engagement (Moussa, 2013).

In order to address these challenges, private organizations in Saudi Arabia are

increasingly focusing on employer branding as a means of attracting and retaining talent (Singh et al., 2012). However, it is mostly larger, and often multi-national, organizations that are able to utilize their brand to attract employees (Anlesinya and Amponsah-Tawiah, 2020; Gandasari et al., 2024). Differently, domestic private organizations that typically suffer from weak branding and are unattractive to the Saudi workforce can be privileged with a corporate heritage that is immensely valuable in socio-spatial terms. This corporate heritage can be utilized to strengthen and differentiate their relatively weak brands and enhance their attractiveness in the local labor market.

Despite this important challenge and opportunity, there is scarce literature about employer branding in the context of domestic organizations in Saudi Arabia and how domestic private organizations can use their corporate heritage to attract employees and align with national employment policy (Alzaid and Dukhaykh, 2023).

4. Materials and methods

4.1. Research approach

This study aims to explore senior managers' perspectives on corporate heritage in emerging markets and its relevance to employer branding and national employment policy. To achieve this, we adopted an interpretive approach commonly used in qualitative research (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). This approach allows us to delve deeply into the managers' intangible 'lived' experience of corporate heritage. Previous research on this relatively nascent topic has used the same approach in studying the corporate heritage concept, allowing us to start the development of our understanding of this concept (Al-Amad and Balmer, 2023; Al-Amad et al., 2023; Balmer and Burghausen, 2014a, 2015; Lee and Davies, 2021).

This is one of the first studies to empirically examine corporate heritage's role in employer branding and national employment policy in an emerging market. As an initial exploration of this corporate marketing topic, we focused on managerial views. Managers provide valuable insights by considering their strategic roles and influence on corporate marketing (Gregory, 2007; Hambrick, 2007; Hambrick and Mason, 1984; Vallaster and Lindgreen, 2011). Their experiences within their respective organizations allowed us to gain a deep understanding and reveal the role of corporate heritage in employer branding.

From an epistemological perspective, managers are argued to be able to authentically represent their organizations regarding stakeholder-related topics, including potential employees, due to their interactions with members on different levels of the organization and their access to internal and higher-level information from the organization (Barich and Kotler, 1991; Drewery et al., 2020; Scott and Lane, 2000; van Riel, 1997). We approached managers who have worked in identified heritage organizations and were deemed to be directly involved in employer brand management, recruitment, and human resource activities across various industries in Saudi Arabia. All the interviewees have at least fifteen years of experience within their respective companies and are the second generation of their families to work in their respective companies. This approach allowed us to gain profound insights into the role of corporate heritage in employer branding.

4.2. Data collection

In-depth semi-structured interviews serve as a valuable research method. They allow researchers to explore unobservable behaviors, delve into complex issues, and understand individual perspectives (Belk, 2017; Rubin and Rubin, 2012; Watson, 2011). Additionally, these interviews facilitate detailed probing and enhance social interaction between the interviewer and interviewee (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2018).

We conducted online "live" semi-structured in-depth interviews with ten managers from organizations of corporate identity with heritage to explore the usability of corporate heritage in employer branding and employee attraction from their perspective (Balmer, 2023). In addition to these ten online interviews, five managers who were unavailable to conduct live interviews answered the interview questions through Microsoft Forms. This resulted in a sample of 15 interviews.

The interviewer in this study is a female Saudi national with extensive experience as a university lecturer at a business school. This led to leveraging academic connections to access a diverse group of managers. Being a female researcher helped in overcoming the cultural barriers related to gender segregation, which, although diminished, remain relevant in Saudi Arabia. As a result, the study sample consisted of male and female managers. In identifying sample organizations, we drew on Urde et al. (2007) and Hakala et al. (2011) criteria of heritage organizations and the third author's knowledge of the Saudi environment, reflecting a purposive sampling strategy. A purposive sampling strategy focused on companies with over 50 years of presence in the Saudi market (Urde et al., 2007).

The execution of interviews, the subsequent analysis, and the interpretation of the gathered data were conducted with the utmost care. This careful approach aimed to ensure that the responses from the informants accurately represented their genuine perspectives and positions. To minimize information bias, we guaranteed informant anonymity, mitigating any inclination to overly praise their respective companies and brands. Furthermore, the use of probing questions played a crucial role in elucidating the informants' views and positions, addressing any inconsistencies that may have surfaced in their initial responses. After the eighth interview, similar themes emerged with little new insights. When we conducted the 10th interview, there were almost no new insights. As such, we have conducted five more interviews to ensure that no more significant insights emerge (Patton, 1990). This implies that data saturation was reached (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

4.3. Interviewing and data analysis

The lead author manually conducted the data analysis, with co-authors contributing by repeatedly reading the transcripts and refining the results at each stage of the three-stage analysis process (Braun and Clarke, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; Charmaz, 2006). Open coding helped identify concepts and their dimensions, creating descriptive categories for initial data analysis. During this phase, we used thematic analysis, which is common in qualitative studies in emerging research areas (Braun and Clarke, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c).

5. Results

The detailed analysis of the interviews identified five key themes relating to organizational identity traits with heritage—being proficient, providing shelter, being responsive, advancing, and central—that collectively attract potential employees and enhance the employer brands of the organizations studied. Senior managers view these traits as significant and unique, not only for current members but also for potential employees. Thus, having and activating these traits enables an organization to be viewed positively by job seekers and helps it attain talents. The "proficient" trait signifies a structured, clear, and effective working environment. "Shelter" reflects the sense of security and assurance felt by current and potential employees regarding their employment. "Responsive" highlights the high value and importance the organizations place on their employees, fostering a sense of belonging and making them attractive to potential employees. "Advancing" indicates the substantial opportunities for personal and professional growth provided by the organizations. Finally, "Centrality" emphasizes these organizations' leading role in the Saudi market in both socioeconomic and sociocultural terms. Research participants consistently recognize these traits as defining characteristics of their organizations, enhancing their corporate heritage, and making them desirable employers.

5.1. Proficient

The "proficient" trait highlights the organizations' well-structured and efficient business environment, which senior managers recognize as organized, clear, and effective. This proficient atmosphere has been attractive to potential employees and has enhanced the organizations' employer brands. The traits of organization and clarity are evident in the clear working structure, systematic management, and transparency that define the organizations' interactions with stakeholders. Effectiveness is demonstrated through a strong focus on customer service, satisfaction, and high quality, which have significantly characterized the working environments and facilitated smooth business operations.

Interviewee 4 explains how this is manifested in their organization;

"The core values are transparency, leading by example, and customer care. For example, there has always been high transparency between management and employees, which is reflected in this transparency between employees and the service provided to external customers, […] Also, the value of leadership by example has been for long embraced by managers at senior levels, which continually motivates employees when they are assigned tasks with certain requirements to implement them successfully because they have seen the performance and actions of their managers on the ground. Overall, there has been a very positive mindset that you see reflected on employees in all departments from sales, to manufacturing, and to human resources, everyone embraces, applies and maintains values through his/her dealings with internal and external customers."

5.2. Shelter

The "shelter" trait highlights the sense of certainty and assurance that managers feel regarding the continuity of their own and others' employment within their organizations, which in turn supports the present and future welfare of themselves and their families. This sense of security is reflected in various aspects, such as the perception that these heritage organizations are industry leaders, growing and expanding. This growth implies a stable future for the organizations and, consequently, for the employees' jobs. Secure employment and the encouragement of long-term service within these organizations further contribute to this feeling of assurance and enhance the attractiveness of their employer brands. Additionally, managers view their organizations as trustworthy and stable, largely due to their longevity and familiarity within their socio-spatial environments.

Interviewee 8 states:

"The company has a long history in the Kingdom, more than 50 years, and being not new reflects the confidence of Saudis that it will provide job security and renewed contracts."

5.3. Responsive

The "responsive" trait highlights how organizations value and cherish their employees, as seen by senior managers. This appreciation is evident in two main aspects. Firstly, organizations view their employees as their most valuable investment for ensuring continuity and growth. Secondly, they create supportive work environments where management is attentive to employees' needs and fosters a positive atmosphere. Consequently, these organizations have become attractive to potential employees, enhancing their employer brands. Additionally, current employees feel a strong sense of belonging to their organizations.

Interviewee 7 exemplifies this:

"The most important values (value) that I see prominent in the company's practices is the value of "work like a family", there is a high keenness that the employee feels that he is an important part of the company and each one of her (the company's) family members is provided with support, which builds loyalty and encourages everyone to work honestly and thus build a good reputation in the market for the company."

5.4. Advancing

The "advancing" trait reflects managers' views of their organizations as environments that significantly encourage employees' professional and personal growth. This trait enhances the attractiveness of these companies' employer brands. Key aspects include a strong emphasis on training, which equips employees with the skills and knowledge needed for career advancement, and the unique experiences gained from working in organizations with extensive market experience.

Interviewee 7 explains:

"One of the plans we have made to attract Saudis is to make sure to build a development plan for each employee and work on projects to enable professional certificates and provide full financial support to them. Any Saudi who joins will

have an evolutionary trajectory, and this will also strengthen their sense of loyalty to the company."

Additionally, this trait is evident in two other areas directly related to progression and achieving aspirations: the ample opportunities for advancement, often through internal promotions, and the valuable financial and non-financial rewards and benefits offered to employees.

5.5. Centrality

This was a new novel trait in terms of heritage research, which relates to the leading role the organization has in the Saudi market due to its importance, historic presence accompanied by the importance of the organization, and employees' roles in achieving the macro-Vision 2030 goals. Interviewee 10 explains:

"As I mentioned earlier, the fact that the company is national and has a vital role in the development of the Kingdom, and the most prominent leaders in the Kingdom worked in it, and currently even the prominent leaders in it are Saudis, all these factors in the identity of the company give hope and a positive feeling to the job seeker that one day he may be in the place of the CEO, because there are actual examples of Saudis who have developed and progressed professionally in it (this company)."

Interviewee 9 further explains how this attracts employees who will want to work for this organization due to its importance in the national project, which would allow them to develop their careers:

"The company had projects in other cities in the Kingdom, but there was no official headquarters where Saudis were employed until after our name was associated with a huge national project, and we became known for the clean energy construction sector. Therefore, Saudis want to work in the company in order to gain qualitative experience and know that after five years they will be in great demand in the companies that will come after us and want to provide services like the one we provide."

6. Discussion

This paper underscores the importance of corporate heritage in employer branding for organizations with a heritage identity in emerging markets. It adds to the body of research on corporate heritage and employer branding by identifying five key organizational identity traits with heritage—proficient, shelter, responsive, advancing, and centrality—that are integral to the organizational culture and internal environment and can be leveraged for employer branding. According to the managers, these traits attract potential employees and enhance employer brands, which, in turn, can be helpful to Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, particularly its "Nitaqat" program. Generally, the discovered traits are considerably useful for companies in emerging economies aiming to develop strong employer brands. The latter is crucial for the success of programs like "Nitaqat" and similar programs in countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman, and South Africa (Peck, 2007; Tangri and Southhall, 2008). While such programs might be viewed negatively in the context of anti-globalization rhetoric, in the long run, they help develop employees' talents and enhance

organizations' employer brands in emerging economies. This, in turn, improves their competitiveness and positions them on an equal footing with the developed countries' organizations (Suntharasaj and Kocaoglu, 2008).

The study provides empirical support for earlier literature on the value of corporate heritage in recruitment and demonstrates how organizational culture and internal environments can form meaningful heritage identity traits (Balmer, 2013; Burghausen and Balmer, 2014a; Urde et al., 2007). When aligned with corporate heritage identities, these traits become valuable for employer branding and attracting potential employees (Balmer and Burghausen, 2015). The traits "proficient" and "shelter" align with goals identified for corporate heritage communications aimed at potential employees (Blombäck and Brunninge, 2016). Concerning the "centrality" trait, previous corporate heritage research pointed to the central importance of corporate heritage institutions within their socio-spatial contexts. This is illustrated by the role these institutions play in defining societies' national, territorial, temporal, and social identities and their prominent roles in nation-building and community development (Al-Amad and Balmer, 2023; Balmer, 2013; Balmer and Chen, 2016; Mitra, 2011).

The findings reveal that senior managers in emerging markets recognize these five traits as crucial to their organizations' internal environments, culture, and employment benefits, making them attractive to potential employees and valuable for employer brand management. The study also builds on previous employer branding research, showing that the "shelter" and "advancing" traits align with factors like employment stability and employee development, which are critical for successful employer branding (Urbancová and Hudáková, 2017). These traits also resonate with the psychological contract between employees and employers, emphasizing personal growth, career advancement, and job security (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010; Moroko and Uncles, 2008; Pidcock, 2017). Additionally, they align with three of Berthon et al.'s (2005) five sets of benefits—economic, developmental, and social value—highlighting how these values can differentiate an employer brand. As for the "responsive" trait, previous employer branding research found that the supportive work environment is an employer branding technique that can effectively enhance employee retention (Arasanmi and Krishna, 2019; Naz et al., 2020; Yusliza et al., 2020).

7. Conclusion

7.1. Implications

The study's findings offer practical guidance on leveraging corporate identity traits with heritage valued by employees in emerging markets to attract potential employees. Managers responsible for employer brand management in Saudi domestic organizations should emphasize their corporate heritage in employer branding to enhance their competitiveness in labor markets.

These managers should systematically uncover and activate their organizational heritage to identify and utilize latent heritage identity traits (i.e., identity traits with heritage) (Balmer, 2023; Rindell and Strandvik, 2023). These traits, related to organizational culture, working environment, or employment benefits, can be

strategically valuable for employer brand management and consequently to achieving Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and its "Nitaqat" program.

In this vein, managers are advised to discover or rediscover their organization's past and memory (Balmer, 2011b; Burghausen and Balmer, 2014). One effective way to do so is by carefully scanning the organization's archives for consistent facts, stories, policies, and decisions that authenticate the heritage identity traits recognized by managers and other employees. It is through these that managers can find valuable material for activating and implementing the discovered identity traits with heritage relating to the organizations' culture, internal environment, and employment benefits in employer branding.

Organizations with heritage in countries similar to Saudi Arabia that have a development vision with objectives relating to national labor and employment policy can play a significant national role in achieving such objectives. With their central importance (i.e., represented in the "centrality" theme of findings) and the authenticity, credibility, and trust they enjoy in their domestic markets, organizations with heritage can give great momentum to national labor and employment plans that aim to address any of the imbalances of a local labor market.

In summary, corporate heritage connects the past, present, and future. This study provides guidance on incorporating a corporate heritage strategy into employer branding in emerging markets in a way that is also useful to the "Nitaqat" program and similar programs in other countries.

7.2. Limitations and future research recommendations

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, this study is one of the first to provide empirical evidence on the value of corporate identity traits with a heritage for effective employer branding and the service of national labor and employment objectives. However, the study has some limitations. Firstly, its qualitative nature and focus on specific institutional and emerging country contexts limit the generalizability of its findings. Quantitative research could verify and generalize these findings, and future studies could compare them to other institutional and emerging country contexts. Secondly, the findings reflect managers' views during the study, which may limit their interpretation. Thirdly, the study relied on semi-structured interviews for data collection. While valid, this method is just one way to uncover managerial views. Within an interview and across interviews triangulation was used to enhance the reliability of the findings.

The study opens avenues for future research. Future research could explore the usability of organizational heritage identity for employer branding from the perspective of potential domestic employees, highlighting any discrepancies in views among different stakeholders. Future research could examine the interdependencies between organizational heritage identities as socially constructed phenomena and socio-spatial contexts through cross-sectional and longitudinal studies in various institutional, industrial, and emerging country contexts.

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