

Huang et al., 2026

Volume 10, pp. 118-135

DOI- <https://doi.org/10.20319/socv.10.118135>

Received: 29rd October 2025

Revised: 06th November 2025, 22nd April 2026

Accepted: 25th June 2026

Date of Publication: 27th July 2026

This paper can be cited as: Huang, Y.M., Chen, Y.T. & Wang, Y.T. (2026). Exploring How Applicants' Personality Traits Moderate the Impact of Employer Branding on Organizational Talent Attraction. Socialis Series in Social Science, 10, 118-135

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EXPLORING HOW APPLICANTS' PERSONALITY TRAITS MODERATE THE IMPACT OF EMPLOYER BRANDING ON ORGANIZATIONAL TALENT ATTRACTION

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Abstract

In the context of global talent competition, employer branding is crucial for talent attraction. However, existing research has largely overlooked individual differences among job applicants, leading to an incomplete understanding of the interaction mechanisms. To address this research gap, this study aims to construct an integrative conceptual framework to elucidate how job applicants' personality traits moderate the relationship between employer branding and organizational attraction. Grounded in Social Identity Theory and Symbolic Interactionism, this paper, through a systematic review of existing literature and theoretical deduction, argues how the five value dimensions of employer branding (interest, social, economic, development, and application) interact with applicants' personality traits of extraversion and conscientiousness, thereby influencing their organizational identification and pursuit intentions. The contribution of this paper lies in proposing a series of propositions for future empirical examination. This work not only enriches employer branding theory from an individualized perspective but also offers profound theoretical guidance for organizations to formulate more targeted talent attraction strategies.

Keywords:

Employer Branding, Organizational Attraction, Personality Traits, Social Identity Theory, Talent Attraction

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Motivation

In recent years, the global labor market has continued to face structural talent shortages. The 2024 ManpowerGroup Talent Shortage Survey reports that 75% of employers worldwide experience difficulties in filling job vacancies, a phenomenon widely observed across industries such as healthcare and life sciences, information technology, transportation and logistics, retail, and manufacturing (ManpowerGroup, 2024). This indicates that talent scarcity has become a critical managerial challenge for organizations across countries.

Taiwan similarly faces a severe imbalance between talent supply and demand. Oxford Economics (2021) identifies Taiwan as one of the countries experiencing the most serious talent shortages globally. Consistent with this trend, the ManpowerGroup survey shows that 73% of Taiwanese employers report difficulties in finding suitable candidates to fill vacant positions (ManpowerGroup, 2024). Moreover, data from Taiwan's major recruitment platform, 104 Job Bank, indicate that only approximately 20% of recruitment attempts result in successful hires, reflecting the high level of competition and uncertainty in Taiwan's recruitment market (104 Job Bank, 2023).

Against this backdrop, organizations have increasingly adopted employer branding as a strategic approach to attract potential talents beyond traditional recruitment channels. Qian et al. (2013) note that recruitment is essentially an interactive process between organizations and job seekers, in which job seekers select organizations based on their personal expectations and preferences. Accordingly, employer branding serves not only as an external recruitment communication tool, but also reflects an organization's internal culture, benefits, and development opportunities, thereby shaping job seekers' overall evaluations of the organization.

However, job seekers are not a homogeneous group. A survey conducted by Taiwan Employment Service shows that job seekers differ significantly in the workplace attributes they value; some prioritize compensation and benefits, while others place greater emphasis on promotion opportunities and training systems (Workforce Development Agency, Taiwan Employment Service, 2023). This suggests that individual differences may influence how job seekers interpret and respond to employer branding messages.

Recent studies further indicate that individual differences play an important role in processing recruitment information. Collins and Martinez-Moreno (2022) find that personality traits and job-search experience influence how job seekers evaluate the credibility and verifiability of recruitment messages. Yu et al. (2022) also suggest that incorporating individual differences into recruitment communication research is a promising future direction and may help explain variations in the effectiveness of employer branding strategies.

In practice, organizations have increasingly emphasized job seekers' personality traits by adopting assessment tools such as DISC and MBTI to support recruitment decisions, enhance team collaboration, reduce turnover risks, and optimize talent allocation (H&L Management Consultants, 2023). Nevertheless, existing employer branding research has largely focused on the

general effects of employer branding on overall talent attractiveness, while paying limited attention to how job seekers' personality traits systematically moderate the relationship between employer branding and organizational talent attractiveness.

Based on the above, this study argues that integrating job seekers' personality traits into employer branding strategies may help organizations more precisely understand how different types of job seekers perceive employer brand values, thereby enhancing organizational talent attractiveness and recruitment effectiveness. Accordingly, this study proposes a conceptual framework integrating employer branding, job seeker personality traits, and organizational talent attractiveness, using Taiwan's labor market as the research context, to address the existing research gap regarding job seeker heterogeneity in employer branding literature.

1.2 Research Purpose

Employer branding has become a crucial strategy for attracting and retaining talent, yet its effectiveness depends not only on the brand values communicated by organizations, but also on how job seekers interpret and perceive these messages. Given that job seekers differ in personality traits, values, and career expectations, they may respond differently to the same employer brand image (Theurer et al., 2018).

This study proposes that job seekers' personality traits influence their preferences for different dimensions of employer brand values, thereby altering the relationship between employer branding and organizational talent attractiveness. Understanding such differentiated responses enables organizations to develop more targeted employer branding strategies to attract talent that better fits organizational expectations.

Accordingly, this study aims to develop an integrative conceptual framework to address the following research questions:

1. Does employer branding positively influence organizational talent attractiveness?
2. Do job seekers' personality traits moderate the relationship between employer branding and organizational talent attractiveness?

By constructing this conceptual framework, this study seeks to introduce an individual-level heterogeneity perspective into employer branding research and provide theoretical guidance for organizations developing employer branding strategies in Taiwan's recruitment market.

2. Literature Review

This chapter aims to establish the theoretical foundation and conceptual structure of this study. It first introduces the definition of employer branding and its five value dimensions, followed by the definition of organizational talent attractiveness. Next, the rationale for selecting job seekers' personality traits is presented. Subsequently, Symbolic Interactionism and Social Identity Theory are introduced as the theoretical bases to explain how personality traits moderate the relationship between employer branding and organizational talent attractiveness. Finally, research gaps in the existing literature are identified to position the theoretical contributions of this study.

2.1 Definition and Five Dimensions of Employer Branding

Employer branding originates from the concept of “brand” in marketing. The American Marketing Association (2016) defines a brand as a name, symbol, or any other feature that distinguishes one seller's products or services from those of competitors, highlighting the role of brands in differentiation and identification. Aaker (2009) proposed the concept of brand equity, indicating that assets and liabilities linked to a brand name and symbol influence overall brand value. Brand equity is reflected through five dimensions: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and other proprietary brand assets. Extending this branding logic to the labor market leads to the concept of employer branding.

Ambler and Barrow (1996) were among the first to define employer branding from the perspective of the employment relationship. They conceptualized employer branding as the sum of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by the employer. Functional benefits reflect the fulfillment of social and interpersonal needs at work; economic benefits include salary and compensation; psychological benefits derive from employees' identification with and emotional attachment to the organization. Subsequent studies further indicated that employer branding represents both external employer image and internal organizational culture, values, and commitments (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Sullivan, 2004; Theurer, 2016). Therefore,

employer branding can be viewed as a long-term strategy through which organizations build a distinctive employer image in the labor market to attract and retain talent.

To operationalize employer branding, this study adopts the Employer Attractiveness Scale developed by Berthon et al. (2005), which conceptualizes employer branding value through five dimensions:

1. Interest Value: The extent to which work is creative and exciting, and whether the organization provides innovative and high-quality products or services.
2. Social Value: The extent to which the organization offers a pleasant working environment, good interpersonal relationships, and a positive team atmosphere.
3. Economic Value: The attractiveness of salary, compensation, job security, and promotion opportunities.
4. Development Value: Opportunities for personal achievement, self-confidence, and future career development.
5. Application Value: Opportunities to apply knowledge, teach others, and engage in customer-oriented and humanitarian practices.

These five dimensions have been widely applied to measure how employer branding attracts potential job seekers and are consistent with the conceptualization of employer branding in this study.

2.2 Definition of Organizational Talent Attractiveness

Organizational attraction refers to the extent to which job seekers are drawn to and willing to pursue employment with a particular organization (Turban & Keon, 1993). Highhouse et al. (2003) further categorized organizational attraction into three dimensions: general attractiveness, intentions to pursue, and prestige, which reflect job seekers' overall evaluation of the organization, their willingness to apply or accept job offers, and their perception of the organization's social image.

Barber (1998) viewed organizational attraction as a dynamic process, spanning from initial awareness of an organization, participation in recruitment activities, to the final acceptance

of a job offer. Throughout these stages, organizational attraction plays a crucial role. Therefore, organizational talent attractiveness can be regarded as a key outcome of employer branding in the external labor market and a core indicator of whether an organization can successfully recruit suitable candidates in a competitive talent environment.

Accordingly, this study defines Organizational Talent Attractiveness as job seekers' overall evaluation of an organization as a desirable workplace and their intention to further pursue employment with that organization.

2.3 Job Seeker Personality: Extraversion and Conscientiousness

Personality traits are considered important factors influencing how job seekers interpret organizational characteristics and make job choice decisions. The Five Factor Model is the most widely accepted framework for personality classification and has been validated across cultures, including in Chinese contexts (McCrae et al., 1996). The five traits include extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, emotional stability, and openness to experience.

This study focuses on extraversion and conscientiousness for two main reasons. First, both traits are strongly associated with work motivation, interpersonal interaction, and achievement orientation, which are highly valued in recruitment and selection processes (Huffcutt et al., 2001; Judge & Ilies, 2002). Second, Chien et al. (2013) indicated that job seekers' personality traits and perceived fit with job and organizational characteristics effectively predict organizational attraction, suggesting that personality may influence how employer branding messages are interpreted.

Therefore, this study proposes that job seekers' extraversion and conscientiousness influence their preferences and evaluations of employer branding value dimensions, thereby shaping the effect of employer branding on organizational talent attractiveness.

2.4 Symbolic Interactionism and Social Identity Theory as Theoretical Foundations

2.4.1 Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic Interactionism originated from Mead's (1934) social psychological perspective and was later systematized by Blumer (1969). The theory posits that individuals

assign meanings to objects through social interaction and form actions and attitudes based on their interpretations of these meanings. Carter and Fuller (2015) emphasized that language, symbols, and meanings are essential media through which individuals understand social situations and construct self-concepts.

In the recruitment context, employer branding can be viewed as a system of symbols transmitted by organizations, including compensation systems, organizational culture, work climate, development opportunities, and organizational values. Job seekers are not passive recipients of these signals; instead, they interpret and assign meanings to employer branding symbols based on their own life experiences and personality traits. Consequently, the same employer branding message may be interpreted as more or less attractive by job seekers with different personality traits.

In other words, Symbolic Interactionism provides an explanatory mechanism for how employer branding conveys meanings through symbols and how job seekers interpret these symbols differently, thereby influencing their evaluation of organizational attractiveness. This study thus posits that job seekers' personality traits moderate the effect of employer branding on organizational talent attractiveness.

2.4.2 Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory, proposed by Tajfel (1982), suggests that an individual's self-concept is derived not only from personal identity but also from membership in social groups. When individuals categorize themselves as members of a particular group, the image and values of that group influence their self-evaluation and behavioral tendencies.

In the labor market, organizations can be regarded as social groups. When companies build a positive organizational image, culture, and values through employer branding, job seekers who believe that joining the organization can enhance their social identity are more likely to perceive higher organizational attractiveness. That is, employer branding not only

communicates job-related conditions but also provides job seekers with symbolic cues regarding “who I am” and “where I belong.”

Therefore, Social Identity Theory complements the explanation of the psychological mechanism linking employer branding and organizational talent attractiveness: when the symbolic image and values conveyed by employer branding satisfy job seekers’ pursuit of positive social identity, organizational attractiveness increases.

2.5 Research Gaps

Based on a synthesis of existing literature, three major research gaps are identified: First, while existing employer branding research has predominantly focused on the direct effects of employer branding on organizational attraction, and although the instrumental-symbolic framework has been proposed (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003), limited attention has been paid to how employer branding is interpreted by job seekers "as a symbol." Specifically, there is a lack of theoretical explication from the perspective of Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1969).

Second, although Social Identity Theory has been applied to explain the formation mechanisms of organizational attraction (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004), few studies have simultaneously integrated the transmission of employer branding symbols with the process of job seekers' identity construction. Consequently, a comprehensive explanation of how employer branding influences job seekers' evaluations of self and social identity remains insufficient.

Third, current employer branding literature rarely incorporates job seekers' personality traits into theoretical models (Yu et al., 2022). While early research, such as Judge and Cable (1997), explored the influence of the Big Five personality traits on organizational culture preferences, and Turban and Keon (1993) examined interactionist perspectives, there is a need to further investigate how different personality traits lead to divergent interpretations of employer branding symbols, thereby resulting in heterogeneity in employer branding effectiveness.

Consequently, this study integrates Symbolic Interactionism and Social Identity Theory and incorporates job seekers' extraversion and conscientiousness as key moderating factors. It proposes a conceptual framework regarding the impact of employer branding on

organizational talent attraction to address two critical research gaps: "how employer branding is interpreted" and "job seeker heterogeneity."

2.6 Proposition Development and Conceptual Framework

Based on the aforementioned literature and theoretical foundations, this study posits that employer branding represents not merely objective working conditions but a system that transmits meaning through symbols. Job seekers engage in differential interpretation of these symbols based on their personality traits, which subsequently influences their social identification and intentions to pursue employment. The theoretical propositions regarding the core relationships of this study are proposed as follows:

First, regarding the relationship between employer branding and organizational attraction. According to Symbolic Interactionism, organizations transmit a set of symbolic signals to the market through employer branding (e.g., interest, social, economic, development, and application values) (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). When these symbols convey a positive and distinctive organizational image, job seekers interpret the organization as an attractive workplace. From the perspective of Social Identity Theory, organizations with strong brand influence can provide superior social group status (Highhouse et al., 2003), thereby satisfying individuals' needs to enhance their self-evaluation (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Accordingly, Proposition 1 is proposed:

Proposition 1 (P1): Employer Branding Value has a Positive Influence on Organizational Talent Attractiveness.

Second, regarding the moderation of extraversion and identification enhancement. Individuals with high extraversion typically possess strong social drives (Judge & Cable, 1997) and are more sensitive to environmental rewards and social prestige. During the symbol interpretation process, extraverts are more likely to perceive symbols related to "social value" or "organizational prestige" within employer branding, viewing them as critical opportunities to acquire social identification (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Such job seekers derive higher self-worth from joining organizations with strong brand images. Therefore, extraversion reinforces

the process of transforming brand symbols into a sense of identification. Accordingly, Proposition 2 is proposed:

Proposition 2 (P2): Job Seekers' Extraversion Positively Moderates the Relationship between Employer Branding and Organizational Talent Attractiveness.

Finally, regarding conscientiousness and the rational filtering of symbol interpretation. Conscientious individuals typically exhibit a high degree of responsibility, achievement orientation, and rationality. Within the framework of Symbolic Interactionism, individuals assign meaning to symbols based on their own experiences. For rational and conscientious individuals, the interpretation of meaning may tend to be more "instrumental" rather than "symbolic" (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). When interpreting employer branding symbols, such job seekers may place greater emphasis on concrete information related to actual tasks, responsibilities, or professional development (Judge & Cable, 1997; Theurer et al., 2018), while reacting more indifferently to abstract corporate images or social identity symbols. This interpretative difference implies that the overall "symbolic attractiveness" of employer branding may not generate the significant reinforcing effect observed in extraverts. Accordingly, Proposition 3 is proposed:

Proposition 3 (P3): The Moderating Effect of Job Seekers' Conscientiousness on the Relationship between Employer Branding and Organizational Attractiveness Depends on the Degree of Fit between Brand Symbols and their Rational Values.

Furthermore, the framework proposed in this study not only presents the correlations between variables but also depicts the theoretical process of "Signaling—Interpretation—Identification": Signal Source (Source): Organizations emit employer branding symbols through five value dimensions. Moderation Stage (Moderation): Job seekers' personality traits (extraversion and conscientiousness) act as a "filter," determining how the meaning of symbols is interpreted. Identification Stage (Mechanism): Based on the interpretation results, job seekers assess whether joining the organization can satisfy their social identity needs. Outcome Stage

(Outcome): Ultimately, an overall evaluation of the organization and intentions to pursue employment are formed.

The conceptual framework proposed aims to open the psychological "black box" of how employer branding attracts talent. This diagram does not merely display variable relationships but illustrates a continuous psychological process of "Signaling Emission → Interpretative Filtering → Identity Transformation."

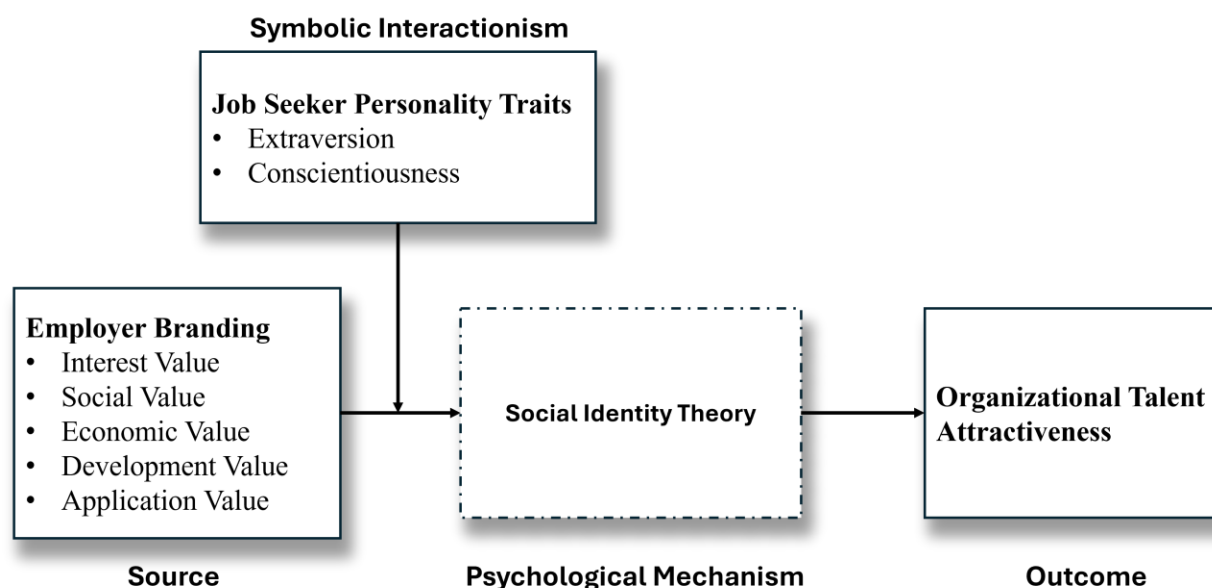


Fig. 1. *Conceptual Research Framework*

3. Discussion

3.1 Theoretical Contributions

By integrating employer branding, job seeker personality traits, and organizational talent attraction, this study constructs a conceptual framework grounded in Symbolic Interactionism and Social Identity Theory. Compared to past studies that primarily focused on the direct effects of employer branding, the propositions proposed in this study offer three core theoretical contributions.

First, this study deepens the understanding of the symbolic meaning and identification mechanisms of employer branding. Past literature has often viewed employer branding merely as

a marketing tool or a vehicle for information transmission. Proposition 1 (P1) of this study further elucidates the psychological operating mechanisms of employer branding from the perspective of Social Identity Theory. This study argues that employer branding provides not only functional benefits (such as salary) but also serves as a "social identity symbol". Specifically, regarding the extraversion trait explored in Proposition 2 (P2), this study points out that extraverts respond more strongly to employer branding because they transform brand symbols into part of their "self-concept". This supplements the insufficient explanation of psychological mechanisms in existing literature regarding "why employer branding attracts people" and establishes the theoretical perspective of "Brand as Identity."

Second, this study establishes individual differences as boundary conditions for symbol interpretation. Existing research often assumes that "strong employer branding is effective for everyone," overlooking the heterogeneity of individual interpretation. Proposition 3 (P3) of this study introduces Symbolic Interactionism to challenge this universal assumption. By exploring the moderating role of conscientiousness, this study proposes the concept of "Rational Filtering." That is, job seekers with high conscientiousness utilize their rational and task-oriented traits to "filter" or "reinterpret" emotional brand symbols. This introduces a critical boundary condition to employer branding research, explaining why certain high-profile enterprises fail to attract specific types of talent (e.g., highly conscientious and pragmatic individuals), thereby enriching the dynamic explanation of Person-Organization Fit (P-O Fit) during the recruitment stage.

Finally, this study proposes the construction of an integrative dynamic model of "Signaling-Interpretation-Identification." This perspective echoes the employer branding value chain model proposed by Theurer et al. (2018), linking marketing brand signals with psychological personality traits, and proposes a dynamic process framework of "Signaling—Interpretation—Identification." This framework positions personality traits as an "Interpretative Filter" located between brand signals and attraction. This not only bridges marketing (brand signals) and psychology (personality traits) but also connects the two through Social Identity Theory. This integrative perspective responds to calls in past research to incorporate individual heterogeneity into recruitment studies, providing a complete theoretical blueprint for future empirical validation.

3.2 Managerial Implications

The "Signaling-Interpretation-Identification" conceptual framework constructed in this study provides guidelines for enterprises to develop customized employer branding strategies in recruitment practice. Addressing the highly competitive nature of Taiwan's labor market, this study proposes the following managerial implications:

First, for extraverted job seekers: Focus on "Social Identity" and "Emotional Symbols." Although the propositions of this study predict that extraversion has an overall enhancing effect, a deeper investigation into the specific dimensions of employer branding suggests that the moderating effect of extraverts is primarily concentrated on "Social Value" and "Interest Value." Job seekers with higher extraversion are extremely sensitive to emotional and social symbols within employer branding and expect to enhance their social identity through them. Such talent is typically suitable for roles in sales, public relations, or positions requiring high cross-departmental collaboration. When recruiting such talent, enterprises should significantly reinforce the "Social Value" and "Interest Value" of their employer brand in recruitment advertisements or social media. For example, concretely presenting a lively team atmosphere, a flexible and innovative work environment, or the company's leadership status and prestige in the industry. These high-visibility "symbols" can effectively trigger the sense of identification and pursuit intentions of extraverts.

Second, for conscientious job seekers: Return to "Instrumental Value" and "Concrete Promises." Addressing the Rational Filtering mechanism in Proposition 3, this study further argues that job seekers with higher conscientiousness are not "indifferent" to all brand messages but rather exhibit a high degree of selectivity. Conscientious job seekers (such as engineers, accountants, and R&D personnel) possess high rationality and task orientation and are prone to applying "Rational Filtering" to overly packaged abstract brand symbols. Faced with this group of pragmatic talent, flashy corporate image advertisements may have limited effect. HR should shift the focus of recruitment messaging to "Economic Value" and "Development Value". Recruitment copy should provide concrete "Evidence," such as transparent salary structures, clear performance appraisal systems, comprehensive training plans, and distinct career advancement paths. Providing these concrete, verifiable working condition signals enables the

message to effectively pass through the interpretative filter of conscientious candidates and translate into substantial attractiveness.

Finally, regarding the optimization of the recruitment process, this study confirms that job seekers are not a homogeneous group and that significant differences exist in their interpretation of recruitment messages. Enterprises should change the past "one-size-fits-all" broadcasting mode of recruitment copy. It is recommended to moderately introduce simple personality trait classification concepts (such as aptitude tests) at the initial stage of recruitment (e.g., campus recruitment or online recruitment platforms). Once the system or HR identifies the trait tendencies of potential candidates, targeted brand value narratives that fit their traits can be delivered (e.g., pushing team activity videos to extraverts and sending career development white papers to conscientious candidates), thereby maximizing the Return on Investment (ROI) of employer branding.

3.3 Future Research Suggestions

Although this study constructs an integrative conceptual framework through theoretical deduction, certain limitations remain to be explored by future scholars. Based on the propositions of this study, three specific directions for future research are proposed:

First, Empirical Validation of the Conceptual Framework. The primary contribution of this study lies in proposing the "Signaling-Interpretation-Identification" theoretical model and related propositions. Future researchers are encouraged to adopt Quantitative Research methods to empirically validate these propositions. It is recommended to use survey methods to collect data on job seekers' perceptions of specific employer branding copy, along with measurements of their personality traits and attractiveness evaluations, to verify whether P1, P2, and P3 receive statistical support. Additionally, Experimental Designs could be employed to manipulate different types of employer branding copy (e.g., emphasizing team fun vs. emphasizing performance bonuses) to observe differences in attractiveness among subjects with varying personality traits, thereby establishing causal relationships between variables.

Second, "Granular Matching" Research on Employer Branding Values and Personality Traits. This study infers in the discussion that extraverts may be more sensitive to "Social Value," while conscientious individuals may be more sensitive to "Economic Value." However,

the current propositions P2 and P3 still largely focus on overall moderating effects. Future research could adopt a "Facet-level" analytical perspective to explore "Specific Matching Effects" between the Big Five personality traits and the five dimensions of employer branding values. For instance, examining whether the trait of "Openness" specifically moderates the relationship between "Interest Value" and attractiveness. Such granular matching research would help unlock the "black box" and establish a more precise recruitment fit theory.

Third, Incorporating Other Moderating Variables: Generational Differences and Industry Contexts. This study primarily focuses on personality traits as interpretative filters; however, job seekers' symbol interpretation processes may be influenced by other background factors. Generational Differences: Generation Z (Gen Z) job seekers may place greater importance on "Social Value" or "ESG Sustainability" symbols compared to Generation X. Future research could explore whether "generation" interferes with the moderating effects of personality traits. Industry Contexts: In high-tech industries (emphasizing hard technical skills) versus service industries (emphasizing soft interpersonal skills), the weights job seekers assign to employer branding may differ. It is recommended that future research compare the cross-contextual stability of the conceptual framework proposed in this study across different industrial contexts.

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