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Employee perceptions of employers' creativity and innovation: Implications for employer attractiveness and branding in tourism and hospitality

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ABSTRACT

Attracting and retaining high-quality employees is becoming an unrelenting challenge for many employers. Therefore, employer branding is a key developmental area for companies, as it aims to attract potential employees and to engage the current staff. This paper investigates how current employees in tourism and hospitality perceive their employers regarding the level of creativity and innovation in the workplace. The study adopts the Employer Attractiveness scale, with a specific focus on the component capturing aspects of creativity and innovation. An online survey and in-depth interviews were conducted with employees working in different areas of the tourism and hospitality sector in Sweden. The results suggest that many employees perceive their jobs as creative, and further indicate that the possibility of being creative and innovative at work is an important driver for employees to stay with their current employer. This factor also influences their intention to recommend employment at the company to others. Moreover, the results of this study suggest that the economic value in terms of total compensation is important for employees in the tourism and hospitality sector, as it affects intention to stay as well as likelihood to recommend.

1. Introduction

Today, creativity and innovation are critical sources of sustained competitive advantage for firms. Employees' ideas have been identified as a major driver of innovation, especially the ideas of employees who work close to customers (McGrath, 2008). However, attracting the right staff is becoming an unrelenting challenge for many employers as skilled and innovative employees are more and more selective when looking for professional opportunities and jobs. As a consequence, organizations increasingly invest in developing strong employer brands to help them attract and retain skilled employees (Charbonnier-Voirin, Poujol, & Vignolles, 2017). For this reason, employer branding has become one of the key developmental areas for companies, as it aims to appeal to potential employees and to engage and retain current staff (Benraïss-Noailles & Viot, 2021; Gilani & Cunningham, 2017).

Employer branding in services firms is particularly crucial because contact personnel in service settings play an essential role; not only for value creation but also for customer satisfaction during service interactions and encounters (Bitner, 1990; Smith, Bolton, & Wagner, 1999). This is particularly relevant in the tourism and hospitality sector, in which the satisfaction of guests is highly dependent on the quality of the service encounters (Mattila & Enz, 2002) and therefore on employees' skills, capabilities, and creativity. As Wang, Tsai, and Tsai (2014) point out, a more creative workforce is needed to provide high-quality services in the intensely competitive tourism and hospitality industries.

At the same time, employers in hospitality are rarely seen as forerunners in the area of employer branding (Gehrels, 2019). Moreover, employers in these sectors face difficulties recruiting and retaining staff due to factors such as a young transient workforce, low levels of pay, unattractive working hours, and a negative industry image (Lin, Chiang, & Wu, 2018). Additionally, hotels and retail are considered to be the

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least innovative business sectors (Tajeddini, Altinay, & Ratten, 2017), which further emphasizes the need for companies to address creativity and innovation as a basis for differentiation toward prospective and current employees. Employer branding is therefore an urgent issue for firms in the tourism and hospitality sector. However, while several studies have focused on employer branding as a means to attract new employees, studies on how existing employees perceive their employers with regard to the level of creativity and innovation in the workplace are missing in the tourism and hospitality marketing and branding literature (Hon & Lui, 2016). In addition, most of the current literature has focused on understanding staff turnover rather than studying factors that contribute to employee retention in tourism and hospitality (Yam, Raybould, & Gordon, 2018).

This study aims at contributing to fill this particular research gap. In doing so, we rely on the Employer Attractiveness scale (EmpAt) developed by Berthon, Ewing, and Hah (2005), with a specific focus on the "interest value" component which captures aspects of creativity and innovation, and explore this further through a mixed-methods study. The EmpAt scale was developed to measure external employer attractiveness; i.e., from the perspective of potential applicants, but it has the potential to also be a valuable tool for assessing current employees' perceptions and their connections to behavioral intentions, such as the likelihood of staying with the employer (Benraïss-Noailles & Viot, 2021). Hence, the objectives of this study are to (1) evaluate employees' perceptions of their employers' attractiveness by leveraging the EmpAt scale in the context of tourism and hospitality; (2) assess the relationships between the EmpAt dimensions and employees' intentions to stay with and recommend their employer; and (3) further explore the relative importance of creativity and innovation for employees in tourism and hospitality.

The remainder of the paper is structured in the following way. The next section describes and discusses the key conceptual areas of the study; i.e. employer branding and employer attractiveness, and their applications in the context of tourism and hospitality. Hypotheses are developed and summarized in a conceptual framework. Section 3 outlines the methodology of the study, followed by a presentation of the results of the empirical study in Section 4. Finally, conclusions and implications are discussed in the fifth and last section.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

2.1. Employer branding and employer attractiveness

Employer branding is an increasingly relevant subfield of branding studies in marketing. It is a long-term strategy that can be defined as "the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity" (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 502). That is, employer branding aims to present a positive and attractive image to current and potential employees and to differentiate the firm as an employer from its competitors (Backhaus, 2016; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). While the term "employer branding" refers to a strategy and a process, the *employer brand* concept has been defined as "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company" (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 187). Hence, a strong employer brand highlights the unique aspects of what the firm offers as an employer in a way that distinguishes it from its competitors (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Successful employer brands allow their respective companies not only to more easily attract new employees but also to minimize the cost of their acquisition and increase employee retention (Berthon et al., 2005). Consequently, firms interested in recruiting and keeping high-quality employees need to develop different forms of value for their employees; this is not only confined to economic value. These varying types of value have been studied extensively in the marketing research stream related to *employer attractiveness* (e.g., Ahmad, Khan, & Haque, 2020; Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Berthon et al., 2005; Ewing, Pitt, De Bussy, & Berthon, 2002; Sivertzen, Nilsen, & Olafsen, 2013).

Berthon et al. (2005) define employer attractiveness as "the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization" (p. 156). These researchers developed a scale of employer attractiveness (EmpAt) consisting of five dimensions. In relation to Ambler and Barrow's (1996) definition of the employer brand, *economic value* covers economic benefits; *development value* and *application value* relate to functional benefits; and *social value* and *interest value* constitute psychological benefits (Kashive, Khanna Vandana, & Bharthi Manish, 2020). More specifically, the economic value dimension consists of components such as salary and other aspects of compensation, as well as job security. Development value encompasses recognition, self-worth, confidence, career-enhancing experience, and a springboard to future employment. Application value relates to varying aspects, including acceptance and belonging, opportunity for the employee to apply at the job what they have learned, and opportunity to teach others. Social value entails a good social working environment, and relations with colleagues and managers. Interest value includes an exciting work environment, novel work practices, innovative and high-quality products/services, and the extent to which the company uses employees' creativity (Berthon et al., 2005).

Extant studies in the employer attractiveness research stream have mainly focused on identifying and measuring employer attractiveness from the perspective of specific subjects such as highly educated personnel and university students (e.g., Berthon et al., 2005; Reis, Braga, & Trullen, 2017; Sivertzen et al., 2013). Moreover, while an increasing amount of research has focused on the antecedents of employee creativity (Wang et al., 2014), the role of creativity as a part of the perceived employer brand has thus far received limited attention. Overall, this represents a relevant gap as employees increasingly seek intangible elements and traits in the company that allow them to express themselves, their beliefs and personality (Sirgy, 1982). In addition, Benraïss-Noailles and Viot (2021) recently advocated for replication studies with the EmpAt scale due to changes in the labor market and consumer expectations since the scale was first developed and published in 2005 by Berthon and colleagues.

To bridge the aforementioned research gap, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature on employer branding by assessing how current employees in the tourism and hospitality sector perceive their employers with regard to creativity and innovation, particularly in relation to other dimensions of employer attractiveness. In the next section, we situate our hypothesis development in the context of service industries where customer interactions are crucially dependent on the creative and innovative attitudes of employees.

2.2. Employer attractiveness and behavioral intentions in the tourism and hospitality sector

As employees involved in customer interfaces directly influence customers' views of the firm (Schlager, Bodderas, Maas, & Cachelin, 2011), companies should strive to hire, retain, and promote employees who represent the company brand well (Helm, Renk, & Mishra, 2016). This is particularly relevant in service industries where frontline employees play a crucial role not only in value creation and co-creation with the customer (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004) but also in customer satisfaction during service interactions and encounters (Bitner, 1990; Smith et al., 1999). Co-creation requires flexibility, spontaneity, and innovative thinking from the organization to respond to the individual needs of each customer and to offer value-added experiences (Chathoth, Ungson, Harrington, & Chan, 2016). This type of proactive and innovative thinking has also been identified as a component of entrepreneurial orientation, which has been found to positively influence aspects such as the organization's service capabilities and performance (Martin, Javalgi, & Ciravegna, 2018). More specifically, in contexts such as the tourism and hospitality service sector, in which the satisfaction of tourists and guests is highly dependent on the quality of

the service encounters (Mattila & Enz, 2002), employees' skills, capabilities and creativity are particularly important. Co-creating memorable experiences is complex, as it requires a high level of competence that combines responding to (unexpected) customer needs, while taking into consideration available organizational resources (Chathoth et al., 2016).

Previous research in tourism and hospitality has stressed the importance for hospitality firms to attract and retain creative and innovative employees, as they play a major role in the company's competitive advantage (Hon & Lui, 2016). It has been suggested that competitive advantage can be achieved with the help of valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources (Barney, 1991), and the employer branding literature suggests that human capital lies at the heart of this (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Creative employees can solve critical problems, enhance organizational effectiveness, and generate novel ideas for new products, services and processes (Hon & Lui, 2016; Wang et al., 2014). In so doing, employees' psychological benefits stemming from acting creatively and innovatively in their employment might translate into a higher likelihood of staying with the employer. Research suggests that organizations with innovative products and a strong innovation culture appear more attractive to potential employees (Sommer, Heidenreich, & Handrich, 2017). Moser, Tumasjan, and Welpe (2017) advocate that this is particularly true in certain contexts, such as new business ventures, as innovative individuals seem to be attracted to startups due to associations with innovation and invention. Thus, aspects of creativity and innovation are potentially important also for current employees.

Previous research has shown that psychological benefits captured by interest value, including creativity and innovation at the workplace, could positively influence attitudes and behavioral intentions among potential or current employees. More specifically, in a study of Norwegian university students, Sivertzen et al. (2013) found that the innovation parts of the interest value construct (consequently renamed by the authors to innovation value) significantly affected perceptions of corporate reputation and indirectly affected the intention to apply for a job at the focal company. Application value and the psychological aspects of development value (renamed "psychological value") were also significant predictors in their study, while social value and economic value were not (Sivertzen et al., 2013). Roy (2008) surveyed Indian university students and found that interest value was positively related to the perceived general attractiveness of four out of five different IT companies. The other EmpAt factors, which differed somewhat from the original scale, were also significant and positive predictors for the attractiveness of at least some of the tested employers (Roy, 2008). Using an adapted version of the scale, Ha and Luan (2018) studied Vietnamese pharmaceutical students and found interest value to be positively related to their intention to apply for a job. Development value was also significant, while social and economic value did not have any significant influence on the dependent variable.

However, based on a sample of current employees in the Indian IT sector, Kashyap and Verma (2018) did not find interest value to be a significant predictor of turnover intentions, which is more or less the inverse of intention to stay with the employer. The only dimensions of EmpAt that influenced employees' turnover intention in their study were social and development value. Notwithstanding these mixed results, it is important to recognize that attributes of employer attractiveness may vary with the type of industry and sector (Lievens, Van Hoye, & Schreurs, 2005). Therefore, in the absence of studies testing the EmpAt scale specifically among current employees in the tourism and hospitality industries, we hypothesize that all dimensions potentially have a positive influence on the intention to stay with the employer. Loyalty with an employer (brand) is often measured in terms of positive or negative retention (Benraïss-Noailles & Viot, 2021). As high employee turnover is very costly (e.g., Benraïss-Noailles & Viot, 2021) and the aim of employer branding is not only to attract new employees, but also to retain them (e.g., Charbonnier-Voirin et al., 2017), we focus on employees' intention to stay as the dependent variable. Hence:

H1a: The intention to stay with an employer in the tourism and hospitality industry is positively influenced by interest value.
H1b: The intention to stay with an employer in the tourism and hospitality industry is positively influenced by economic value.
H1c: The intention to stay with an employer in the tourism and hospitality industry is positively influenced by development value.
H1d: The intention to stay with an employer in the tourism and hospitality industry is positively influenced by social value.
H1e: The intention to stay with an employer in the tourism and hospitality industry is positively influenced by application value.

Employer branding practices have been found to positively affect aspects such as organizational commitment (Botella-Carrubi, Gil-Gomez, Oltra-Badenes, & Jabaloyes-Vivas, 2021), job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behaviors (Kaur, Malhotra, & Sharma, 2020). This draws on social exchange theory and the idea that when an employee feels taken care of by the employer, they wish to reciprocate this behavior (Kaur et al., 2020). Employer branding has also been identified as important in creating brand ambassadors or advocates (Backhaus, 2018; Näppä, Farshid, & Foster, 2014), which often presents itself as word-of-mouth and promotes the employer to outsiders (Backhaus, 2018; Keeling, McGoldrick, & Sadhu, 2013). Furthermore, the extent to which the employee is attracted by the employing organization has been found to positively correlate with the intention to recommend the employer (Highhouse, Lievens, & Sinar, 2003). In a recent study, Dabirian, Paschen, and Kietzmann (2019) analyzed reviews of IT companies on the Glassdoor website and concluded that interest value, along with social value, were the most important employer attractiveness factors connected to positive reviews of employers. We posit that similar relationships hold true in the tourism and hospitality setting and conjecture that current employees' psychological, functional, and economic benefits stemming from their employment might translate into a higher likelihood of recommending the employer. As such, we hypothesize that:

H2a: The intention to recommend an employer in the tourism and hospitality industry is positively influenced by interest value.
H2b:The intention to recommend an employer in the tourism and hospitality industry is positively influenced by economic value.
H2c: The intention to recommend an employer in the tourism and hospitality industry is positively influenced by development value.
H2d: The intention to recommend an employer in the tourism and hospitality industry is positively influenced by social value.
H2e: The intention to recommend an employer in the tourism and hospitality industry is positively influenced by application value.

The constructs included and their hypothesized relationships are summarized in a conceptual framework guiding the study, as depicted in Fig. 1.

3. Method

3.1. Study context

The empirical study is situated in the context of the tourism and hospitality industry in Sweden. According to the World Tourism Organization, "tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes" (UNWTO, n.d.). While there is no formal, universally accepted definition of what the tourism and hospitality industry specifically includes, the Swedish Government Official Report "Ett land att besöka" ("A country to visit"), defined the term as comprising all actors in business sectors that sell services to visitors, i.e., customers whose consumption is defined as

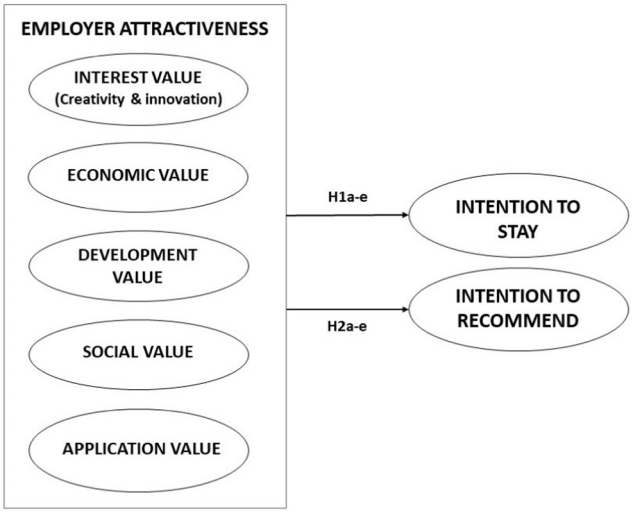

Fig. 1. Conceptual framework.

tourism consumption (Bohlin, Algotson, Rosander, & Philp, 2017). Therefore, retail is considered to be part of the tourism and hospitality industry, as shopping comprises a large part of tourists' spending (cf. Crouch & Ritchie, 1999). For example, tourists' retail expenditures constituted 35 percent of total tourist consumption in Sweden in 2019 (Tillväxtverket, 2020).

The Swedish tourism and hospitality industry is characterized by a relatively low average age and high staff turnover (Näringsdepartementet, 2016). It is also relatively easy to switch jobs within the industry because the thresholds to entrance are generally low. Finding suitable employees and the right competences has been identified as a major issue among Swedish tourism and hospitality employers, and there seems to be an expectation that hospitality career paths ought to be highly mobile, leading to constant employee turnover (Cassel, Thulemark, & Duncan, 2018). Employer branding can be a means to attract, and to a higher degree retain, employees. Hence, the Swedish tourism and hospitality industry is a relevant context in which to study aspects of employer attractiveness.

To fulfil the study objectives, a quantitative method was used to test the stated hypotheses, while a qualitative method enabled further exploration of the concepts.

3.2. Exploratory study

First, we conducted in-depth interviews with employees in tourism and hospitality companies. A semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the dimensions of employer attractiveness (Berthon et al., 2005), with a specific focus on aspects of creativity. The interview guide also covered questions related to the employee's intentions to stay with the current employer and their inclination to recommend the company to others as a place to work. Hence, the topics of the qualitative study were connected to all three objectives of the study, although the aim was not to test hypotheses, but to explore the topic area and gain a deeper understanding of employees' perceptions of the industry, their employers, employer attractiveness overall, and creativity and innovation in particular.

Participants were recruited using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling. Possible interviewees were identified through previous contacts as well as a local destination marketing organization that connected the researchers with employees in the sector. Some of the initial interviewees referred us further to other potential participants. A maximum variation approach was taken in the sampling process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to achieve a variety of informants in terms of gender, age, type of sector, and time of employment. Two researchers conducted the interviews face-to-face, taking careful notes and recording all interviews. Results were analyzed by both researchers. Common quality standards of trustworthiness were followed, such as investigator triangulation, variation in time and place of the interviews, discrepant data checks, and storing all recordings and notes (Lewis, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In total, 16 employees (five men, eleven women) in hotels, restaurants, and retail stores in Sweden were interviewed. Among these, seven worked in retail, five in restaurants, and four in hotels. The age of the interviewees ranged between 19 and 75 years with a median of 34, and the median time of employment within their respective industry was 10.5 years. Nine of the participants were working full time with their current employer while seven worked part time.

3.3. Survey

For the quantitative part of the study, a questionnaire was developed based on extant scales: employer attractiveness as previously described, using 23 items (Berthon et al., 2005), intention to recommend, using three items (Highhouse et al., 2003; Jeong, Lee, & Nagesvaran, 2016), and intention to stay, using two items (Milliman, Gatling, & Kim, 2018). Scale items were translated to Swedish and slightly adapted to fit the studied context. Respondents were asked to indicate on a seven-point Likert scale to what extent they agreed with each of the statements when considering their current employer. Since all measures were previously used and validated by other researchers, we conducted a qualitative pretest in which a small sample of researchers in the broader area of branding provided feedback on the questions and wording. This resulted in some minor adjustments. Compared to the original scale, we excluded two items – one from social value and one from development value – because they became highly overlapping with other items after the translation to Swedish.

Data were then collected through an online survey, which was distributed to consumer web panels in Sweden via the market insights company Cint. The survey was directed to men and women between 20 and 64 years old working within the tourism and hospitality sector. Care was taken to screen out respondents who did not fulfill these criteria.

After screening, we removed two respondents due to missing values exceeding 15% (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Little's MCAR test showed that the few remaining missing values in the dataset were missing completely at random (X^2 233.93, sig. 0.263). Furthermore, nine respondents were excluded due to very short response times, which suggests low-quality answers (Zhang & Conrad, 2014). Following this screening and data cleaning process, 193 valid and usable responses from individuals currently working within tourism and hospitality industries were retained. Sixty percent of the respondents were female and 59% were in the age range of 20–44. Almost half (48%) of the sample were working in retail, with the rest working in other areas of tourism and hospitality (mainly hotels, restaurants, events, activities, and transport). Their working experience in the sector varied between 1 and 40 years, with a median of ten years.

4. Results

4.1. Exploratory study

Most of the interviewees felt that their jobs truly were creative, in several different ways, and to some extent innovative. They indicated that the variation this brought to the work was important to them. Many of them pointed out that one has to be creative and adaptive to meet customers' needs and answer various questions. One hotel employee said, "You get to be involved in creating something all the time." At restaurants, creativity could also mean being involved with creating new menus, or developing the way food is displayed and presented, while those working in retail often mentioned the creative aspects of arranging and displaying products. For example, one salesperson said, "It's truly

creative – we make new [interior] environments and rebuild things."

A perceived *lack* of creativity was also clearly seen as negative, as the following comment from a retail employee illustrates: "It was creative when I could do it the way I wanted to. I was allowed to choose how it should look, at least to some extent. […] However, it became more centrally managed. And then [the job] was less fun." This interviewee eventually left the employing company, describing the lost creativity as one of the contributing factors.

Among the other dimensions of employer attractiveness, the results of the interview study suggest that social value is important, particularly when working in a team in a stressful environment. Varying work tasks and the opportunity to learn new things, which could be related to development value as well as to creativity and innovation, also appears essential and likely to increase the possibility of staying with the employer. At the same time, interviewees tended to perceive the economic value as rather low, particularly in the hotel and restaurant sector. This was related not only to the salary level as such but also to the actual and expected increase of the salary over time and, not least, to working conditions in terms of working evenings and weekends, working part-time, and being hired in temporary positions despite many years of experience in the sector. Perceptions of low economic value clearly increased the probability that the interviewed employees would consider leaving their job in the long-term; hence, those perceptions decreased their intentions to stay with the employer.

4.2. Quantitative study

After the initial data cleaning described in Section 3.3, the normality of the variables was checked in terms of skewness and kurtosis (Hair et al., 2010). Thereafter, the dimensionality of the EmpAt scale was assessed by means of a principal components analysis in IBM SPSS, followed by a confirmatory factor analysis in IBM Amos. This resulted in the removal of seven items in total based on high cross-loadings, standardized residual covariance, and/or modification indices. Thus, 16 out of the 23 items were retained. Similarly, Benraïss-Noailles and Viot (2021) dropped nine (of 25) items in their validation of the EmpAt scale. The fit indices of the final CFA were acceptable (X^2/df = 2.35, CFI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.08) (Iacobucci, 2010) and the average variance extracted was well above 0.50 for all constructs. Cronbach's alphas for all independent constructs were within 0.80 to 0.87 (see Table 1).

As Sivertzen et al. (2013) point out, using factor analysis for this type of study produces the best results, but the validation is specific to the existing dataset. Similar to previous studies employing the EmpAt scale (e.g., Alnıaçık & Alnıaçık, 2012; Roy, 2008; Sivertzen et al., 2013), we found that some of the resulting dimensions did not correspond to the original factors, possibly because of differences in cultural or industrial context (cf. Lievens et al., 2005). These factors were renamed accordingly. *Creativity and innovation value* includes the first three items from the interest value dimension ("The company/organization is innovative and forward thinking"; "The company/organization values and makes use of my creativity"; "I work in a stimulating environment"). One additional item which on the EmpAt scale of Berthon et al. (2005) belonged to economic value ("I work with varying tasks within my job") also fell into this factor. From a face validity perspective, this item seems to fit better with the statements focusing on creativity and innovation, than together with the salary and compensation items. *Economic value* and *social value* consist of only items initially included in these dimensions. *Career value* includes only items from development value, but we renamed this dimension since the two items that formed this factor concerns solely career opportunities (i.e., no other aspects of development are captured). This result is analogous to the study of Sivertzen et al. (2013), in which only two items from development value could be retained; however, in their case, it was the items representing "psychological value" rather than career. Finally, *customer and society orientation* consists of two items from interest value and two from application value. All four statements focus on the company's external

Table 1
Employer attractiveness dimensions.

	Creativity & innovation value	Customer & society orientation	Social value	Economic value	Career value
Cronbach's alpha	0.858	0.813	0.871	0.803	0.816
AVE	0.630	0.531	0.716	0.574	0.694
Composite reliability	0.835	0.818	0.883	0.802	0.819
IV1 The company/ organization is innovative and forward thinking	0.795				
IV2 The company/ organization values and makes use of my creativity	0.826				
IV3 I work in a stimulating environment	0.866				
EV5 I work with varying tasks within my job	0.677				
IV4 The company/ organization offers innovative products and/ or services to its customers		0.815			
IV5 The company/ organization offers high-quality products and/ or services to its customers		0.704			
AV3 The company/ organization is customer oriented (has the customer's needs in focus)		0.688			
AV4 The company/ organization takes social responsibility (does good things for the society)		0.700			
SV1 I have good relationships with my colleagues			0.821		
SV3 My colleagues are supportive and encouraging			0.926		
SV4 The atmosphere at my workplace is happy and positive			0.785		
EV1 I am satisfied with the overall				0.791	

(*continued on next page*)

Table 1 (*continued*)

	Creativity & innovation value	Customer & society orientation	Social value	Economic value	Career value
compensation I get (salary, vacation, other increments and benefits)					
EV2 My base salary is higher than the average in the sector				0.704	
EV3 The job security within the company/ organization is high				0.776	
DV2 My job has given me experience that is beneficial for my future career					0.871
DV3 My job is a good springboard for future employment (within the company/ organization or somewhere else)					0.793
Items removed					
AV1 In my work I have the opportunity to teach others what I have learned at my job					
AV2 My work allows me to use knowledge I have gained through education					
AV5 I feel like I belong in this organization					
SV2 I have a good relationship with my superior(s)					
EV4 There are good promotion opportunities within the organization					
DV1 Working for this organization has made me feel more self-confident					
DV4 My superiors recognize and appreciate the work that I do					

orientation rather than on what it offers employees, including an aspect of social sustainability. Again, considering face validity, this factor seems to make logical sense.

The resulting dimensions and factor loadings from the CFA are presented in Table 1, along with the measures of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha, AVE, and CR). For completeness, the seven items removed in the process are also displayed in the table.

Before proceeding to hypothesis testing, we checked the reliability of the two dependent variables, i.e., intention to stay and intention to recommend. Both displayed a strong internal consistency with Cronbach's alphas well above 0.80 and item-total correlations exceeding 0.60 for all items; i.e., well above the most commonly used thresholds of 0.70 and 0.50, respectively (Hair et al., 2010). Table 2 below shows the item-total correlations and Cronbach's alphas for these two constructs.

Next, to address the stated objectives and test the hypotheses, we ran multiple hierarchical regressions to analyze the influence of employer attractiveness on the dependent variables. Following the same approach as Kashyap and Verma (2018), age, gender, and years of working in the industry were entered in the first step as control variables (Model 1), and the five employer attractiveness factors were added in the second step (Model 2). Multicollinearity statistics for all independent variables were well below the recommended threshold value of the variance inflation factor (<10) and above the corresponding threshold of tolerance (>0.10) (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 2
Reliability of dependent variables.

Construct and items	Item-total correlation	Cronbach's alpha
Intention to stay		0.860
IS1 I plan to work at my present employer for as long as possible	0.753	
IS2 I plan to stay in this job for at least two to three years	0.683	
Intention to recommend		0.905
IR1 I would recommend the company/ organization to a friend looking for a job	0.855	
IR2 Based on my experiences, I would encourage others to apply here	0.885	
IR3 I would recommend the company's/ organization's products/services to friends and acquaintances	0.704	

Tables 3 and 4 below show the regression results of Model 2 for intention to stay and intention to recommend, respectively. Since creativity and innovation value corresponds partially, but not completely, with the original dimension interest value, the number of the hypotheses (H1a and H2a) is put within parentheses in both tables. In the same way, career value corresponds partially with development value; therefore, H1c and H2c are in parentheses. Application value did not emerge as a factor; hence, H1e and H2e could not be tested.

The results suggest that the respondents' intention to stay with their current employer was influenced primarily by the perceived level of creativity and innovation at the company and workplace, as well as by the economic value. Hence, H1a and H1b are supported. However, none of the other three dimensions of employer attractiveness was significantly related to the intention to stay; thus, we could not reject the null hypotheses for these factors. Among the control variables, there was a tendency toward stronger intentions among older respondents and men (these beta values would have been significant at the 5% level with one-tailed tests). In total, the model explained 43.8 percent of the variance in the dependent construct intention to stay.

The intention to recommend the employing company to others was significantly influenced by the creativity and innovation value and the economic value, as hypothesized in H2a and H2b. However, the effects of these factors, as well as of social value (H2d), were weaker, while the perceived customer and society orientation of the company considerably influenced recommendation intentions. This seems logical considering that this factor captures more of the external view of the company, which is probably easier for employees to communicate to others. Because career value was not significantly related to the intention to recommend, H2c is not supported. The model explained a large portion (67.2%) of the variance in the dependent variable.

Table 3
Regression results for intention to stay.

	Independent Variable	β	*t*	*p*
Control	Age	0.12	1.72	n.s.
	Gender	-0.11	1.92	n.s.
	Working experience (years)	0.08	1.21	n.s.
(H1a)	Creativity & innovation value	0.35	3.87	***
H1b	Economic value	0.30	4.14	***
(H1c)	Career value	0.02	0.28	n.s.
H1d	Social value	-0.03	0.40	n.s.
–	Customer & society orientation	0.06	0.67	n.s.
R^2 0.438	Adj. R^2 0.413			
F 17.54				

Note: ***) $p < .001$, **) $p < .01$, *) $p < .05$, n.s.) $p > .05$ (One-tailed for EmpAt factors).

Table 4
Regression results for intention to recommend.

	Independent Variable	β	*t*	*p*
Control	Age	0.01	0.17	n.s.
	Gender	0.03	0.60	n.s.
	Working experience (years)	-0.06	1.09	n.s.
(H2a)	Creativity & innovation value	0.13	1.88	*
H2b	Economic value	0.19	3.41	***
(H2c)	Career value	0.07	1.08	n.s.
H2d	Social value	0.11	1.86	*
–	Customer & society orientation	0.46	6.36	***
R^2 0.672	Adj. R^2 0.658			
F 46.17				

Note: ***) $p < .001$, **) $p < .01$, *) $p < .05$, n.s.) $p > .05$ (One-tailed for EmpAt factors).

5. Conclusions and implications

5.1. 1 Conclusion and key findings

The objectives of this study were to evaluate employees' perceptions of their employers' attractiveness by leveraging the EmpAt scale in the context of tourism and hospitality, to assess the relationships between the EmpAt dimensions and employees' intentions to stay with and recommend their employer and to further explore the relative importance of creativity and innovation for employees in tourism and hospitality. By deploying literature in the areas of employer attractiveness (e.g., Ahmad et al., 2020; Berthon et al., 2005; Sivertzen et al., 2013) and employer branding (e.g., Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus, 2016), this study's findings indicate that employers' brands can be managed effectively in the hospitality and tourism field by allowing employees to be creative and innovative at work. We also show that the same innovativeness and creativity is the most influential factor for employees' intention to stay with their current employers, in addition to economic value. In the following subsection, we explain how our key findings generate important research contributions and implications.

6. Research contributions and implications

Overall, this study makes several contributions to research in the space of employer branding (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus, 2016; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) and attractiveness (e.g., Ahmad et al., 2020; Benraïss-Noailles & Viot, 2021; Berthon et al., 2005; Ewing et al., 2002; Sivertzen et al., 2013). First, we extend the extant literature pertaining to how existing employees perceive their employers with regard to the level of creativity and innovation in the workplace (Hon & Lui, 2016). Second, the qualitative and quantitative results of this study suggest that the possibility of being creative and innovative at work is an important driver for employees in the tourism and hospitality industries, and could be used to manage the employer brand. This finding corroborates and extends previous research, which has shown that a more creative workforce can provide high-quality services in the intensely competitive tourism and hospitality industries (Wang et al., 2014). In addition, according to Moser et al. (2017), the ideological value of the innovativeness of startups helps attract innovative personalities; a similar approach could be of value to companies in the tourism and hospitality industry. As Chathoth et al. (2016) suggest, co-creation is particularly relevant for this sector, placing a great deal of responsibility on employees to be flexible, spontaneous, and react to unexpected interactions in ensuring high-quality service. Thus, using innovation and creativity to promote the employer brand in tourism and hospitality can attract the right talent.

Third, we show that the possibility of being creative and innovative at work was the most influential factor for employees' intention to stay with their current employer, along with economic value. This finding adds to the specialized literature in the tourism marketing and management field, which is trying to make sense of some of the drivers behind employee retention (e.g., Ahmad et al., 2020; Yam et al., 2018). Fourth, from a methodological point of view, we rely on the Employer Attractiveness scale (EmpAt) developed by Berthon et al. (2005), with a specific focus on the "interest value" component, which captures aspects of creativity and innovativeness that are not always at the center of the stage.

Finally, we found that creativity and innovation value significantly influenced employees' intention to recommend the employing company to others. Considering the role of employer branding in the creation of brand ambassadors or advocates (Backhaus, 2018; Näppä et al., 2014), it is important to understand which aspects of employer attractiveness are drivers of recommendation behavior. In this case, the perceived customer and society orientation of the company, which to some extent also captures the innovativeness of the company, was the most influential factor.

6.1. Practical implications

This study generates important practical and managerial implications. First, the results indicate that tourism and hospitality companies could strengthen their employer attractiveness by giving employees flexibility and responsibility to, for example, develop new services, test new concepts, decorate the lobby or other common spaces, or try new ideas with signage and product display. Second, social value, which appeared to be an important aspect of work in the exploratory interviews, did not emerge in the survey results as a significant predictor of intention to stay with the current employer. Although social value had some positive influence on the intention to recommend the company to others, it is possible that good relationships with colleagues and a positive atmosphere at work are more of a hygiene factor which can deter when it is not present, but which cannot on its own increase the likelihood to stay.

Third, application value did not result as a factor from the analyses conducted. Instead, the perceived customer and society orientation emerged as an important predictor of the intention to recommend the company/organization to others. This dimension captures aspects that are more easily evaluated by external stakeholders and is related to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability efforts, as it involves the extent to which the company takes social responsibility, is customer-oriented, and offers innovative and high-quality products and/or services. It therefore seems that employees who rate their employers highly on these attributes are no more likely than others to stay over time, but they are proud to recommend the company as a place to work. Interestingly, career value was not significantly related to any of the two dependent variables, which perhaps can be explained by the general view of the tourism and hospitality industry as being dominated by temporary work with limited career opportunities.

Fourth, while a strong employer brand can be considered a way of not having to compete for employees based on economic benefits, the economic value in terms of the total monetary and nonmonetary compensation is important both for employees' intentions to stay with their employer and their likelihood to recommend the company as a place to work. This was also clear in the qualitative study and is likely a reflection of the generally low salaries and insecure employment terms that dominate the tourism and hospitality industries. Hence, while it would be difficult for companies in these sectors to compete based on salary, they should consider ways to increase the perceived value of the compensation as a whole, for example, by decreasing the ratio of temporary employment and offering flexibility in work-hour scheduling.

Fifth, with the help of employer branding, companies could create a differentiated brand image based on values related to creativity and innovation. Thereby, they could attract employees with a similar mindset and then enforce these values internally with suitable branding and human resource management (HRM) practices. This could create value to the employees and strengthen the service brand further, as the

employees have the tools to create individual and specialized services in each customer encounter. Moser, Tumasjan, and Welpe (2021) indicate that while the traditional view on employer attractiveness suggests that offering more benefits will lead to higher perceived employer attractiveness, this is not always the case. Instead, employer attractiveness is a complex phenomenon in which it is possible to configure a mix consisting of a smaller number of benefits that attract the target market. Thus, it is important to understand the perceptions and expectations connected to working in a specific industry context and how organizations can use these to develop and communicate relevant benefits. Hence, the creative and innovative aspects of the work can also be communicated on an overall level as part of an "industry value proposition" that could attract and retain employees and make them feel "at home" when working in these industries.

6.2. Limitations and future research

This study has limitations in terms of sampling and the use of a qualitative interview study and a cross-sectional survey conducted in one country. Employees from different sectors were included in the exploratory study as well as in the survey sample, and the results might differ between these sectors. A larger sample would allow for investigating differences between groups. Alternatively, one specific industry (e.g., hotels) could be targeted. As data were collected at one point in time in one specific country (Sweden), further research is needed to assess whether the results are similar in other samples of employees in tourism and hospitality. Longitudinal studies or experimental designs could also be utilized to make causal inferences of results. Additional studies with qualitative approaches, including participant or nonparticipant observations, would be valuable to gain deeper insights into employees' perceptions and use of creativity and innovation in their work.

Moreover, the dimensionality of the EmpAt scale differed from the original factors. Such deviations have also occurred in other studies employing this instrument (Alnıaçık & Alnıaçık, 2012; Benraïss-Noailles & Viot, 2021; Roy, 2008; Sivertzen et al., 2013), suggesting that adaptations to cultural and/or industrial contexts might be necessary in future applications of the scale. As Moser et al. (2021) state, the employment context is essential, and therefore "the specific configurations of instrumental and symbolic employer benefits that relate to a favorable employer image should also be sensitive to context" (p.4–5).

Finally, while this study has focused on the perspective of current employees, further research from the perspective of employers may add valuable insights into how companies in tourism and hospitality could proactively work with developing and communicating creativity and innovation as part of their employer brand.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Maria Ek Styvén: Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Software, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis. **Anna Näppä:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Investigation, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Marcello Mariani:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Rajan Nataraajan:** Writing – original draft, Supervision.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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