



AALBORG
UNIVERSITY

MASTER'S THESIS

CSR, ATTRACTION, AND RETENTION

***A STUDY ON HOW CSR INFLUENCES
ATTRACTION AND RETENTION OF EMPLOYEES***

Number of keystrokes: 191.556 equivalent to 79,815 pages

Bastian Holm
Student number: 20173260

Thesis supervisor: Peter Kastberg

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Abstract

Dette speciale undersøger rollen af virksomheders samfundsansvar i employer branding. Mere specifikt belyser specialet, hvordan samfundsansvar påvirker tiltrækning og fastholdelse af medarbejdere i den amerikanske virksomhed Columbia Sportswear. Dermed klargør specialet, hvordan virksomheder kan arbejde strategisk med samfundsansvar således, at de ikke blot imødekommer bæredygtige og etiske krav fra forbrugere og samfundet, men også positionerer sig som en attraktiv arbejdsplads. Dette er relevant at undersøge, da virksomheder oplever stigende krav til deres samfundsansvar i forbindelse med bæredygtighed og etik. Ligeledes oplever erhvervslivet et øget pres i forbindelse med at rekruttere de bedste kandidater og fastholde medarbejdere generelt.

Specialet undersøger empiri, der både repræsenterer medarbejdernes såvel som virksomhedens syn på bæredygtighed, og hvordan disse synspunkter påvirker virksomhedens employer brand. Virksomhedens side 'Our company' samt siden 'Corporate responsibility' undersøges fra et employer branding perspektiv med fokus på de initiativer og værdier, som virksomheden kommunikerer. Dertil undersøges anmeldelser af virksomheden fra 68 nuværende medarbejdere for at få indblik i disses syn på vigtigheden af samfundsansvar i den virksomhed, de arbejder i, samt hvilke værdier, de tilskriver virksomheden. Disse bedømmelser hentes fra hjemmesiden Glassdoor, som er en online portal til anonym bedømmelse af arbejdsgivere.

Til at udpege og fremhæve disse værdier benyttes Johnny Saldañas (2016) kodningsanalyse 'values coding'. Dette tillader specialet at fremhæve og kategorisere de værdier, som virksomheden og dens medarbejdere udtrykker. Kodningsmetoden muliggør dertil en tematisk analyse af de fremhævede værdier, hvilken undersøger de enkelte temaer, der bliver fundet, samt hvor meget samfundsansvar fylder i disse.

For at kunne undersøge den indflydelse samfundsansvar har på virksomhedens employer brand benyttes Backhaus og Tikoos (2004) 'employer branding framework' teori. Tilføjelsen af denne teori muliggør overførslen af temaerne og værdierne fundet i kodningsanalysen til virksomhedens employer branding. Dette skaber fundamentet for evalueringen af virksomhedens employer branding og muliggør diskussionen af samfundsansvars rolle internt og eksternt i virksomheden.

Specialet finder, at samfundsansvar kan påvirke tiltrækning og fastholdelse positivt. Dette skyldes i særdeleshed samfundsansvars indflydelse på den interne identitet og kultur i virksomheden, der påvirkes stærkt af etiske politikker og holdninger, hvilke både danner rammen for at skabe en virksomhed med en attraktiv profil samt et inkluderende og fællesskabspåvirket arbejdsmiljø. Specialet finder desuden, at ansættelsesvilkår og medarbejderfordele har større indflydelse på tiltrækning og fastholdelse end samfundsansvar. Slutteligt finder specialet, at den vigtigste faktor i forbindelse med at skabe et stærkt employer brand er virksomhedens evne til at skabe et person-organisation-fit igennem employer branding, hvilket resulterer i både effektiv tiltrækning og høj fastholdelse af medarbejdere.

Specialets resultater er således relevante for virksomheder, da undersøgelsen belyser, hvordan arbejdet med samfundsansvar kan have en positiv indvirkning på virksomheders employer branding i forhold til tiltrækning og fastholdelse. Dette giver anledning til videre forskning i sammenspillet mellem samfundsansvar og employer branding for at få en bredere forståelse af, hvilke specifikke områder af virksomheders samfundsansvar, der har særlig betydning for medarbejdere generelt.

1. Introduction

In contemporary society, employers are experiencing increased pressure and demands from society and employees regarding their responsibilities, which is why companies are shifting their focus from profits to the co-creation of values in order to be regarded as attractive (Beckman, Morsing & Reich 2006). This means that companies must be exact in communicating their values to be perceived as preferred employers by potential and current employees. This can be referred to as *employer branding*, which concerns the values of a company and how it integrates these into its business operations and communicates them to its stakeholders in order to be regarded as a desirable employer (Ramaswamy, 2009). In its essence, employer branding defines how a company portrays itself and its activities in order to create a long-term perception of its values and brand in the eyes of its stakeholders (Lake 2021; Edwards 2010). More specifically, it can be defined as a fusion of marketing and HR to be perceived as attractive an organisation as possible (Sullivan 2004).

If employer branding is conducted successfully, companies may reap benefits in areas such as improving public image, increased interest from potential employees, improvements in workforce efficiency, and employee loyalty (Aggerholm, Andersen & Thomsen 2011). To do so, companies must stay updated on, and adapt to, stakeholders' most current needs (Hatch and Schultz, 2003).

In recent years, companies have experienced higher demands from stakeholders ranging from investors to consumers regarding their environmental and ethical responsibilities (White, Hardisty, & Habib 2019). In addition, potential and current employees are more and more interested in working for companies that act responsibly and implement sustainability in their operations (Rosmarin 2020; Fagan & Huang 2019; Dager 2017). This is, among others, referred to as corporate social responsibility (henceforth CSR), which regards the social, ethical, and environmental responsibilities companies' have to society (Pedersen 2015).

As a result, companies are integrating responsible policies into their business models and values to meet demands in order to be perceived as attractive employers (Jones, Willness & Madey 2013). In this relation, companies are publicly communicating their sustainable and ethical activities to a higher degree in order to improve or maintain their image. Incorporating CSR in a company's

employer branding has been found highly beneficial to companies as the interest in the topic has increased exponentially over the past decades. Firstly, studies show that having a strong CSR profile affects company stocks positively (Brammer, Millington & Rayton 2007). Secondly, companies devoted to CSR are perceived as more attractive workplaces by potential employees (Jones, Willness & Madey 2013).

Lastly, current employees have been found to find greater meaningfulness in their jobs if their employer is actively engaged in, and associated with, CSR (Chun et al. 2011; Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). In sum, integrating ethics and sustainability in company operations and communications can improve the recruitment and retention of employees by displaying responsible practices (Haugh and Talwar, 2010).

One of the companies that are continually integrating CSR into its operations is the outdoor clothing company Columbia Sportswear. In the past years, the company has set a wide range of CSR-related targets related to carbon emissions, supply chain, production, and employees (Retail Insight Network 2021). In addition, Columbia Sportswear has integrated CSR into its core values through the value ‘do the right thing’, which is defined on the company website by its CEO, Tim Boyle, as “to do the right thing, not just for our company, but also for our consumers, customers, employees and their communities” (Columbia Sportswear n.d. a).

Therefore, this study will examine the relationships between Columbia Sportswear’s employer branding, its integration of ethical and environmental efforts, and the aspects highlighted about the company as an employer by current employees. This will assist in providing research on how the use of CSR in employer branding affects the company as an employer.

1.1 Problem statement

Hence, the following problem statement has been proposed,

How does Columbia Sportswear’s integration of CSR in its employer branding influence attraction and retention of employees based on employee reviews of the company on Glassdoor?

Subsequently, in order to provide the most valid, comprehensive, and nuanced answer to the above problem statement, the following two research questions have been proposed:

- RQ 1: How much does Columbia Sportswear focus on CSR in its employer branding?
- RQ 2: How dominating is CSR in the employee reviews of Columbia Sportswear as an employer?

The purpose of RQ 1 is to evaluate the level of attention that Columbia Sportswear pays to CSR in its employer branding. This is important to be aware of in answering the main problem statement, as the representativeness of CSR values versus other values will influence the perceived employer brand of the company. Likewise, it will potentially affect its actual employer brand, as employees might not pay attention to the company's CSR in their evaluations if the area is not of particular interest to the company.

The purpose of RQ 2 is to provide a nuanced answer to the main problem statement by addressing the representativeness of CSR in the reviews compared to other areas. By proposing this research question, the thesis will not only discover the presence of CSR values and alignment between these and those communicated by the company but also give an overall evaluation of the importance of CSR to the employees as opposed to other areas. Therefore, by adding this perspective, the problem statement will also provide an understanding of the employees' most important areas to cover in their evaluation, which will assist in determining the significance of the company's CSR from an employer branding perspective.

1.2 Structure

To answer the problem statement satisfactorily, the company's communication on its website regarding the company itself, its employee policies, and its CSR will be examined. The examination will be conducted by extracting values from the company's communication using coding methods. More specifically, Johnny Saldana's (2016) values coding will be applied. Then, reviews of the company as an employer made by current employees will likewise be examined using coding methods. This will provide a two-way perspective of the company and the values ascribed to it, which will enable the thesis to draw conclusions on the effects of Columbia Sportswear's employer branding.

The codes will subsequently be analysed by using employer branding theory, which will contribute to a discussion on the effects of the company's employer branding and whether its integration of CSR has influenced the company's brand. To elaborate, Backhaus and Tikoo's (2004) 'Employer branding framework' will be used as a tool to examine the company's employer branding. Thereby, the values extracted from the communication by both employer and employees will act as the foundation of the analysis of Columbia Sportswear's employer brand. This will allow for a nuanced analysis of the company's employer branding, as the employer branding analysis will represent both employer and employee opinions.

Lastly, a discussion on the company's employer branding will be conducted, which will debate both the effectiveness and accuracy of the company's employer branding of CSR as well as the similarities and differences in values linked to the company by itself and its employees. The discussion will then lead to a conclusion on the effects of Columbia Sportswear's employer branding in relation to attraction and retention, which will provide an answer to the problem statement.

2. Theory of science

This section will cover the approach to science undertaken in the thesis. This means that an elaboration of the researcher's scientific beliefs will be highlighted and elaborated. Lastly, it will be covered how the specific approach to science affects the thesis and its findings.

2.1 Scientific approach

As this thesis is interested in exploring values, attitudes, and beliefs, it will adopt a social constructivist approach to science. By doing so, the researcher will perceive the values communicated in the examined research materials as independently representing the author's views regarding the examined communication (Collin & K ppe 2015; Kim 2001).

By adopting a social constructivist approach to science, this thesis perceives social interaction to be the foundation of reality (Detel 2015). This means that human interaction is regarded as that which constructs the world, communication, values, and individual beliefs. Therefore, interactional

context is a focal point within social constructivism, as the context of interaction defines how the world is perceived (Kim 2001).

2.2 Ontological approach

Besides perceiving the world as constructed through interaction, social constructivism demands a certain perception of reality, more specifically, a certain perception of ontology. Ontology regards the relationship that the researcher has to reality and how it is understood (Blackburn 2016). Within the realm of social constructivism, a relativist ontology is applied. This means that reality is perceived as subjective and that each individual defines and creates his/her own reality (Levers 2013; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson 2012). Therefore, the reality presented by Columbia Sportswear might not align with the reality presented by its employees. In addition, the researcher's reality will not be in accordance with that of the company or its employees. Hence, as one reality does not exist, one final answer cannot be provided (Grix 2002). With that said, the findings will reflect how reality is constructed and understood by the researcher, meaning that the findings will reflect the researcher's knowledge of employer branding and CSR and interpretation of the examined contents. In relation to this study, this means that the scientific approach, thereby, influences the choice of method and theory used to answer the problem statement. It does so, as the chosen method and theory allow for an examination of values expressed by the individual employees and bring forth their subjective realities and definitions of Columbia Sportswear's employer brand.

2.3 Epistemological approach

Besides having a certain stance on ontology, a researcher must also clarify his/her approach to epistemology. Epistemology concerns how knowledge is regarded and where its origins are formed (Blackburn 2016). Within social constructivism, epistemology is perceived as subjective (Kim 2001; Burr 2015). This means that knowledge is regarded as subjective rather than objective, since it is the individual's experiences that shape his/her reality and, thereby, construct the knowledge held by the individual (Levers 2013). In other words, knowledge is regarded as value-laden as it is obtained and understood based on the individual's experiences (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson 2012). This means that the research will not be able to provide a single, true answer, as the knowledge held by the researcher is regarded as subjective, which means that it will be impossible

to provide an objective answer to the problem statement. With that said, as the findings are examined based on previous research within employer branding, the conclusion will somewhat represent knowledge presented in current research arguing for the representativeness of the findings. Also, by having a subobjective epistemology, the thesis will be able to reveal the reality presented by Columbia Sportswear's employees of its employer brand as interpreted in the chosen data, meaning that the findings will be influenced by the employees' collective understanding of the company.

By applying a social constructivist approach to science, a relativist ontology, and a subjective epistemology, the company's communication will be perceived as being in accordance with how Columbia Sportswear frame the world, its activities, and overall communication. It also means that each review made by the employees will be regarded as representing the individual employee's values and worldview, allowing the extraction of the values most important to each employee.

In addition, it is acknowledged that the worldview of the researcher is unique, meaning that the knowledge of the researcher will to some extent, influence how the data is perceived, examined, and debated (Levers 2013). This means that the findings made in this thesis are not attempting to provide a single truth or conclusion to the problem statement but rather propose an answer based on the 68 employee reviews of the company, providing a collective understanding of the company (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson 2012).

3. Literature reviews

In this section, existing literature within the areas of employer branding and CSR will be presented and elaborated on. In addition to a section covering employer branding in general, a section on attraction and a section on retention will be presented. The section on CSR will consist of two parts, namely, one focusing on CSR from an external perspective and one covering CSR from an internal perspective. Lastly, a section on CSR and employer branding will be covered. By applying this approach, a detailed understanding of employer branding and CSR will be provided as well as an understanding of how CSR is utilised within employer branding. Combined, these reviews act as the supporting factor for choosing the specific theory and relevance of proposing the problem statement.

3.1 Employer branding

Within employer branding, Ambler and Barrow (1996) are considered the first pioneers. In this relation, they referred to it as “the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company” (Ambler and Barrow 1996, 187). In sum, they argued that an employer brand is the combined financial, e.g., salary and material, and personal, e.g., development or social, benefits that an employer offers employees to be regarded as attractive.

Preceding Ambler and Barrow’s introduction of the term employer branding, branding was primarily associated with product-related marketing and Human resource management (HRM) was solely focused on the internal processes regarding employees. Thereby, Ambler and Barrow (1996) created a bridge between the two areas they suggested to communicate internal values and benefits externally.

In marketing, research is mainly concerned with brand attractiveness, the strategies implemented to stand out as a public brand, and how a company’s products may be perceived in relation to similar products in a given market (Mosley 2007). In employer branding, the aspect of attractiveness is just as essential, however, what is being communicated is not focused on the brand and the product but the values of the organisation and its internal benefits (Cable & Turban 2001; Lievens et al. 2007).

As a company’s employer brand defines all its activities, both internally and externally, as well as its attractiveness and credibility, research within the area touch upon a wide range of overlapping subject. This is because the aspects that persuaded a current employee to apply for a specific job may also be the aspects that keep them at the company (Saini, Rai and Chaudhary 2014). Therefore, many scholars have tried to encompass both internal and external focuses in their research as the aspect of attracting and retaining employees are somewhat interrelated (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004).

In this relation, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) defined employer branding as “the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity, and the employer brand as a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors.”, which highlights the internal and external aspects of employer branding (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, 502). Furthermore, Miles and Mangold (2004) highlighted the importance of establishing mutual expectations and perceptions of the employer

brand between the employer, potential employees, and current employees for employer branding to be considered successful.

Therefore, the following section will consist of a literature review on internal employer branding and a literature review on external employer branding, as it is essential to understand the differences in perspective and benefits each area provides an employer brand and how they may be combined to establish a strong employer brand.

3.1.1 Employer branding and attraction

The main function of external employer branding is the attraction of workforce, which stretches from ground to management level positions. In addition, it is a useful tool in talent attraction and recruiting the most sought-for employees. Research has found several benefits of engaging in external employer branding including improvement of public image, increased interest from potential employees, and employee loyalty (Aggerholm, Andersen & Thomsen 2011; Beckman, Morsing & Reich 2006). Therefore, it can be argued that the most central element in external employer branding is attraction, as the employer brand defines potential employees' perceptions and associations with a company (Cable and Turban 2001).

Within external employer branding, several scholars have contributed with research on what the most essential and effective measures are to attract the right employees. In this relation, the concept of *person-organisation fits* has been highlighted by scholars, which aim at establishing a dimension of common, or shared, interests and values between employer and employee (Backhaus 2016; Torrington et al. 2020). Companies may benefit from targeting job applications toward job seekers with the same values as the company communicates internally to be perceived as the most ideal employer for the specific employee. This is backed up by studies that have proven a connection between recruitment postings that highlight the specific company's values and an increased level of responses to the postings (Baum et al. 2013; Casper et al. 2013).

To establish a successful person-organisation fit, the employer must articulate values, finance, and benefits, in a manner that is concrete and easy to understand by the employee. This concept is referred to as a 'psychological contract' (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). Biswas and Suar (2016) define the psychological contract as "the unwritten beliefs held by the employee and the employer about

what each should offer the other as well as what each is obligated to provide in the exchange relationship that operates between them” (Biswas and Suar 2016, 60). The psychological contract can therefore be argued to be a byproduct of a company’s employer branding, which establishes the expectations of potential as well as current employees.

If the contract is breached, repercussions such as reduced loyalty, reduced job satisfaction, turnover intention, and decreased performance can occur (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). Therefore, employers must communicate their values consistently, articulate expectations and benefits explicitly, and establish a strong person-organisation fit in its external employer branding to attract and recruit the right candidates.

3.1.2 Employer branding and retention

As mentioned above, the importance of a successful person-organisation fit and establishing a mutual psychological contract is highly important in attracting potential employees and maintaining a good employer brand. With that said, it is equally important to maintain these expectations when a job applicant becomes an employee. If companies communicate different values and practices internally than they did in their external communication, a new employee may experience a mismatch in person-organisation fit and a breach of the psychological contract (Biswas and Suar 2016).

Inconsistency in relation to the psychological contract, which can be defined as when employees believe that the company has communicated job-related information wrongfully, will lead to dissatisfied employees and higher turnover intention (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). This is highly important to avoid as higher turnover will increase expenses related to the employee life cycle and make it harder to keep talent in a current environment in which employers compete fiercely for talent (Backhaus 2016). In this relation, Cascio & Graham (2016) state that “an employer’s brand is also a promise to employees that needs to be kept”, which highlights the importance of maintaining one’s employer brand consistently (Cascio & Graham 2016: 184). This is contrary to earlier studies, which mainly regarded employer branding as how the company was portrayed to the public (Devina

et al. 2016; Mosley 2007). For this reason, the internal focus of employer branding will be difficult to maintain, if the external employer brand is not in accordance with the internal employer brand.

Therefore, this study will rely on Backhaus and Tikoo's (2004) perception of employer branding, as the foundation of retaining employees is established in a company's external employer brand. This creates a dimension of interest in examining the relationship between Columbia Sportswear's external employer branding and whether this is consistent with its internal employer brand.

3.2 CSR

Briefly mentioned in section 1., CSR engages with companies' social and ethical responsibilities. It can be defined as "A view of the corporation and its roles in society that assumes a responsibility among firms to pursue goals in addition to profit maximization and a responsibility among a firm's stakeholders to hold the firm accountable for its actions" (Schmeltz 2020, 18 cited from Chandler & Werther 2014: 6). Thus, CSR does not only concern a company's own perception of its responsibilities but also the demands it meets from stakeholders.

Studies on CSR have shown that companies may benefit in various ways if they engage in CSR successfully. Among others, these benefits include increased employee attraction and retention, as companies are regarded as favourable workplaces if they possess a strong CSR profile (Jones, Willness and Madey 2017). In order for companies to define their perceptions of their responsibilities as well as those of stakeholders, researchers have proposed several frameworks for mapping and conducting CSR activities.

Since its introduction by Bowen (1953) in the 1950s, CSR has become an increasingly important area to focus on for companies and their stakeholders (Schmeltz 2012). Consequently, research within the field has likewise experienced an increased interest over the past decades (Pedersen 2015; Beckmann, et al. 2006). In 1979, Carroll's (1979) work categorised companies' responsibilities within CSR as being of economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary nature. In 1991, Carroll reintroduced this definition as a part of his 'CSR pyramid' framework, which has become of the most referred to theories within CSR by scholars (Schmeltz 2020). 'The pyramid of CSR' intend to elaborate on companies' responsibilities, as they must focus on various requirements to

benefit society. In this relation, it is relevant to highlight Pedersen (2015), who in his research stated that businesses that focus on meeting stakeholders' economic, social, and environmental expectations will be positioned well in creating long-term value for their business and society. The above research provides merit to the further research on CSR, as its importance is continually pointed out and acknowledged by various scholars. In relation to this study, however, it is also relevant to point out not only what should be communicated within CSR but who it should be communicated to.

3.2.1 CSR and stakeholders

To meet these expectations, companies must handle demands from a wide pallet of stakeholders such as investors, suppliers, business partners, and employees (Heyward 2020; Schmeltz 2012; Kang, Germann, & Grewal 2016).

Chandler (2020) emphasised the importance for companies to engage in 'strategic CSR', which "enables firms to respond to the varied interests of all the individuals and groups that have a stake in the firm's pursuit of profit" (Chandler 2020, 122). In this relation, the importance of stakeholders has been stressed in various works on CSR (Pedersen; Hopkins 1998; Schmeltz 2020). As CSR revolves around stakeholders' demands on environmental and ethical responsibilities, strategic CSR is often associated with the 'triple bottom line' principle, which suggests that CSR activities must include people, profits, and the planet (Chandler 2020; Cornelissen 2017; Backhaus 2016).

Regarding stakeholders and CSR, Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory has been widely utilised in mapping and identifying companies' most important stakeholders (Chandler 2020; Schmeltz 2012). The stakeholder theory divides all stakeholders into individual groups and perceives their relationship with the company as interdependent meaning that the company should be concerned with each stakeholder's CSR interests (Cornelissen 2011; Coombs and Holladay 2012).

Chandler & Werther (2014) proposed dividing CSR into three categories, namely, owners, society, and environment, to differentiate between and determine the most important activities to focus on. Another model, namely, the stakeholder salience model, suggests dividing and prioritising stakeholders according to power, urgency, and legitimacy (Cornelissen 2011). Furthermore, Coombs and Holladay (2012) proposed to engage in CSR from an interest perspective, suggesting

that the company should not only focus on the position of the stakeholders but rather on activities that bridge or connect the interests of the company with the interests of its stakeholders.

As the needs of stakeholders change, Coombs and Holladay (2012) argued that CSR should be driven by stakeholders. This is supported by Friedman & Miles (2006), who defined an organisation as a collective of stakeholders, since these are the core of a business's operations. Therefore, it is important to know exactly how to communicate CSR to each stakeholder group.

As this study is interested in examining the communication of Columbia Sportswear to its employees, a literature review on CSR communication and values will be conducted below. This will assist in clarifying the findings made in research on employee-targeted communication, which will establish the foundation of how Columbia Sportswear communicate CSR in its employer branding material and how it is received by employees.

Based on this review on CSR and stakeholders, the following literature review will examine the research made on addressing CSR in company information in order to suit employees' demands on the subject. Also, this review will investigate current studies on how to integrate CSR values in a company's communication targeted employees, which will aid in the debate on Columbia Sportswear's communicated values and the values highlighted by its employees.

3.2.2 CSR communication and values from an employer branding perspective

For a company's communication to be regarded as interesting by its stakeholders in general, it must contain a dimension of interest (Coombs and Holladay 2012; Schmeltz 2012). Regarding attracting employees, Jones, Willness & Madey (2013) argued, that companies highly invested in CSR are regarded as attractive employers by potential employees. Concerning retention, employees generally find greater meaningfulness in their jobs if their company is invested in CSR, which affects retention positively (Chun et al. 2011; Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). Therefore, it is in this instance essential to know the preferred values of employees.

Coombs and Holladay (2012) argued that CSR initiatives should first and foremost appeal to the employees for them to be invested in it. In this relation, Ohlrich (2015) found that the company's expressed values, vision, and organisational culture must align with the values of its employees in

order for the employer to be perceived as attractive. In this relation, Cone (2006) suggested that employees prefer companies expressing societal concerns. This is backed by Backhaus (2016), who argues that matching values between the company and potential employees encourages them to apply.

Following, Cornelissen (2017) found that companies should communicate values that have a personal interest to potential and current employees, as this will increase employer loyalty. Additionally, Coombs and Holladay (2012) stated that individuals are more interested in initiatives if they are deemed of personal interest. In addition, Schmeltz (2012) and Green and Peloza (2011) also found personal interests to be highly relevant to focus on in CSR communication. This fit between employer and employee values is crucial to have in mind, as a mismatch in values may result in negative reputational outcomes, as employees function as a public mediator of the company and its reputation (Coombs and Holladay 2012).

Lastly, it can be argued that incorporating CSR in the corporate values and communicating these consistently whilst integrating CSR in the organisational identity will create a stronger match between employer and employees. This assumption is supported by Backhaus (2016), who argues that organisational values, identity, and culture, must be consistent with the values that the company communicates in the attraction and recruiting phase. Otherwise, inconsistency in externally expressed values and internal values would be perceived as a breach or violation of the psychological contract (Backhaus 2016; Backhaus and Tikoo 2004).

3.3 Linking employer branding and CSR

Above, literature on CSR from an employer branding perspective has been examined with the purpose of revealing *what* type of values to communicate to potential and current employees regarding CSR. In this review, theories that can be utilised to examine *how* to communicate values to potential and current employees will be conducted.

In 2011, the 'Creating Shared Values framework' was introduced by Porter and Kramer (2011), which aid in implementing sustainability throughout a company's value chain. While this theory

does assist in establishing CSR initiatives that also concern employees, the theory does not go in-depth with organisation identity or employees' perception of the company. Another theory relevant to mention is the 'Triple-fit framework' developed by Schmeltz (2017). Schmeltz (2017) highlighted three fits that a company must establish to carry out CSR successfully, i.e., the CSR-Consumer fit, the CSR-Company fit, and the CSR-Consumer-Company fit. However, the theory lacks an internal focus on employees, making the theory relevant concerning attraction but not retention. A theory that also focuses mainly on external stakeholders, mainly, consumers, is 'the three-dimensional model of sustainable consumption' by Bachnik et al. (2020). This theory is also interested in connecting CSR with the company; however, it is primarily engaged in attracting consumers (Bachnik et al. 2020).

A framework that does consider employees is the 'Sustainable HRM framework' introduced by App and Büttgen (2016). This framework aims at implementing sustainability to improve and attraction and retention of employees. With that said, it is argued that the theory has provided little attempt to connect Sustainable HRM research and employer attractiveness, which is one of the focal areas of this study.

Another theory proposed is the 'employer branding framework' by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), which focus on two main aspects, namely, attraction and retention. The framework suggests that employers must establish coherency in both their image, culture, and identity, which resonates with the importance of communicating CSR consistently in both internal and external communication (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004; Jones, Willness & Madey (2013). In addition, Backhaus (2016) supported the applicability of the framework in relation to sustainability, as she highlighted the importance of establishing a triple bottom line and a sustainable employer brand.

Consequently, this thesis will utilise Backhaus and Tikoo's (2004) 'employer branding framework' as the theory focuses on both internal as well as external employer branding. Thereby, the theory agrees with the abovementioned findings in the literature reviews on employer branding, as it was found that attraction and retention are somewhat connected. In addition, the theory allows for an in-depth analysis of the values ascribed to the company by both employer and employees. Lastly, the theory is well suited for an examination of CSR integration in employer branding, as it debates both external image and internal identity and culture, which all were found to be important areas to express CSR values in for it to be perceived as successful in employer branding.

From the abovementioned literature reviews, research on employer branding and the interconnectedness between attraction and retention have been examined. Subsequently, the most prominent research on CSR has been brought forth and elaborated on. Lastly, the importance of stakeholders and their demands regarding CSR has been established.

4. Theoretical framework

In the following section, Backhaus and Tikoo's (2004) Employer branding framework will be elaborated. In addition, the terms within the theory will be highlighted and described in order to provide the reader with a detailed understanding of the terms used and applied to the data. Lastly, a critical section on employer branding is included to justify the chosen theory.

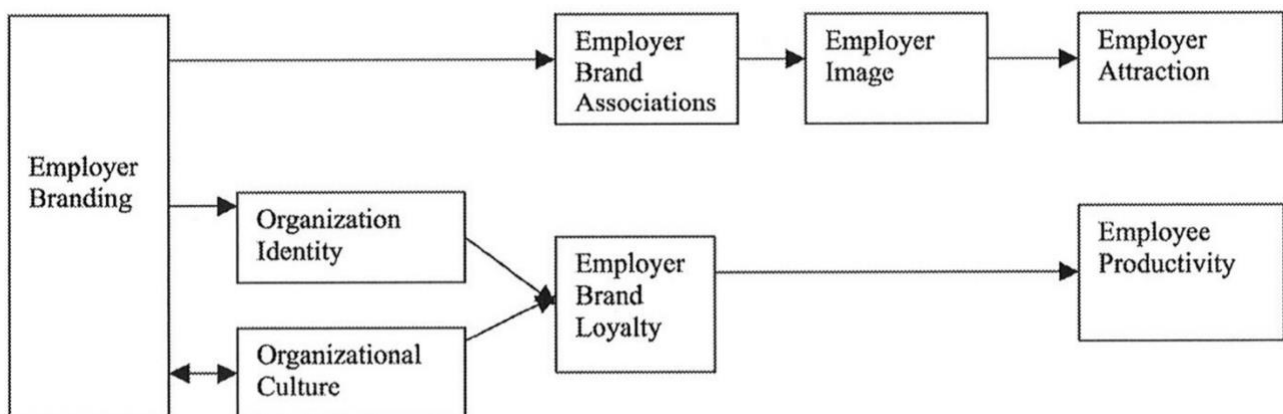
4.1 The Employer branding framework

As described earlier, most scholars and research within employer branding have not provided a solid theoretical approach to examining both internal and external employer branding. In addition, this applies to research on attraction and retention. However, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) developed the 'employer branding framework' to address two main areas within employer branding, namely, external employer branding and internal employer branding, which constitute the overall employer brand of an organisation (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004; Backhaus 2016).

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argue that these aspects combined will enable a company to develop employer branding and "a targeted, long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm" (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, 501). Thus, employer branding is concerned with the two focus areas; employee attraction and employee retention, which is defined as communicating values, identity, and culture, in a manner that is as attractive to potential and current employees as possible (Backhaus 2016). This aligns with the original definition of employer branding by Ambler and Barrow (1966), who suggested that effective employer branding may result in employer attractiveness and employee loyalty. In this relation, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) highlight the term *person-organisation fit* as the phenomenon is regarded as the backbone of establishing a match between potential and current employees and employers, as mentioned in section 3.1.1. More

specifically, they define a person-organisation fit as “the better the match between the values of the firm and the values of the individual, the more likely the individual is to be attracted to the organization” (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004, 506).

In their framework, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) highlight several factors that affect a company’s position in attracting and retaining employees and establishing a fit between the parties. These are illustrated below, in the ‘employer branding framework model’.



Model 1 - The Employer branding framework (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, 505)

The different aspects and terms within the theory will now be elaborated on in the section below. In addition, their interrelatedness will be elaborated on to clarify the dynamics of the framework. In total, this detailed clarification will provide a greater understanding of its usefulness in order to understand the further analysis based on the framework.

4.1.1 External employer branding

Firstly, the elements related to external employer branding will be elaborated on. These elements establish the employer brand as presented publicly by the company, in this instance, Columbia Sportswear, to be as attractive towards the public, new stakeholders, and, particularly, potential employees, as possible.

As Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argue; “Accuracy of perceptions about the organization is particularly important because it helps to reduce perceptions of breach of the psychological contract, or worse, violations of the psychological contract on the part of new employees” (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, 507). Therefore, it can be argued that the external employer brand to some extent should reflect the internal employer brand. This is because inconsistencies in the internal and external employer brand can be regarded as a breach or violation of the psychological contract, which may lead to reduced loyalty, reduced job satisfaction, turnover intention, and decreased performance (Biswas and Suar 2016; Backhaus and Tikoo 2004; Ambler and Barrow 1996).

Moreover, as the external employer brand presents the values of the employer to external stakeholders, including potential employees, external employer branding may also be regarded as the introductory step in establishing a person-organisation fit since “potential applicants compare the employer brand image they have to their needs, personalities, and values” (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, 506). Consequently, this thesis will regard external employer branding as the founding element of Columbia Sportswear’s employer branding, which will be compared to the internal employer brand as represented by the company’s employees. Therefore, the external aspect will assist in establishing how Columbia Sportswear integrates and presents overall values and CSR values in its external employer branding.

Regarding external employer branding, Backhaus and Tikoo introduce the area of *Employer Brand Associations*, which impact the external perception of a company’s *Employer Image*. Subsequently, the outcome of the employer image will determine the *Employer Attraction* of the company regarding potential employees. These three elements in a company’s external employer branding will now be elaborated.

4.1.1.1 Employer brand associations

Already elaborated to some extent, but not defined as a singular concept, employer brand associations “shape the employer image that in turn affects the attractiveness of the organization to potential employees” (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, 504). Thereby, employer brand associations can be regarded as the main attribute influencing a company’s external employer brand. Subsequently,

employer brand associations can be regarded as the establishing factor of a person-organisation fit, as these determine the perception an external individual has of the organisation.

Employer brand associations are influenced by four areas, namely, external perceptions of product-related attributes, non-product-related attributes, functional benefits, and symbolic benefits (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). Together, these areas shape the attractiveness of the company through stakeholders' associations with the company's products, its brand, the benefits that the company provides, and the values ascribed to the company as an employer. The four elements will now be elaborated below individually.

Product-related attributes

These attributes are linked to the objective and perceptible benefits that a product offers regardless of the brand. Product-related attributes are therefore established by the experiences stakeholders have with a product and the relief the product offers (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004).

This means that these attributes are ascribed to the company and its products by interacting and engaging with the company's products specifically.

Non-product-related attributes

In contrast to the above, non-product-related attributes are established based on the mental perception of the product. This means that these attributes are not necessarily true or based on concrete information about the benefits of the product or the company. Instead, they represent what is thought of when thinking about a product from the company (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004).

Functional benefits

This factor does not relate to the products of a company or the benefits its products offer. Rather, it concerns employee-related benefits regarding functional job benefits that are perceived as attractive by potential and current employees in objective terms. These are communicated by the company in its employer branding and, e.g., include, leave allowance, salary, and other job-specific benefits (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004).

Symbolic benefits

As opposed to functional benefits are symbolic benefits, which do not concern internal, job-related benefits but rather benefits related to prestige and recognition outside the company. This means that the individuals' perception of the company's prestige and values will lead them to expecting social approval benefits if employed at a desirable company. Therefore, companies that are regarded as prestigious by society will arguably also lead to higher social approval of their employees (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004).

4.1.1.2 Employer image

The employer image is shaped and defined by the outcome of the employer brand associations. Depending on whether the four factors of the employer brand associations are of positive or negative nature, the employer image will either be desirable or undesirable. This means that the perception of a company's employer image influences the degree to which potential employees identify with the company.

In this relation, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argue, "In the context of recruitment, potential applicants will be attracted to a firm based on the extent to which they believe that the firm possesses the desired employee related attributes and the relative importance they place on those attributes" (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, 505). In this statement, it is highlighted that potential employees may prioritise differently if they find certain attributes more important than others, which supports the importance of focusing on each of the four employer brand association factors.

4.1.1.3 Employer attraction

This is the result of a company's external employer branding that influence the person-organisation fit between employer and potential employee. According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), "Employer brand associations enhance the process of person-organization value matching." (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, 507). In other words, the outcome of the employer image, based on the evaluation of

employer brand association factors, is the bedrock of a strong person-organisation fit. Thus, it is essential to communicate and establish values that align in relation to all employer brand association factors and a company's desired potential employees as a match in values shapes the employer image, which determines the organisational attractiveness. To elaborate, employer attraction influences the degree to which potential employees will seek membership with a given company (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004).

Having described the underlining terms, factors, and processes in external employer branding according to Backhaus and Tikoo's (2004) employer branding framework, the following section will examine the internal aspects of the theory in relation to employer branding.

4.1.2 Internal employer branding

Concerning internal employer branding, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) highlight two main elements, namely, *Organisation culture* and *Organisation identity*. These elements are the determining factors affecting *Employer brand loyalty*. Depending on the negative or positive evaluation of the employer brand loyalty, *Employee productivity* may be increased or decreased. With that said, this thesis will not concern Employee Productivity, as the interest and purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between attraction and retention of employees and whether CSR affects these areas specifically. However, further studies are encouraged to examine this aspect.

The aspect of internal employer branding is just as essential to be perceived as an attractive employer as external employer branding is. To elaborate, Backhaus (2016) stresses the importance of consistency between employer branding promises made prior to employment and withholding these obligations when employment is in effect. More importantly, it is argued that inconsistencies in employer promises consequently leads to employee disappointment (Backhaus 2016). Therefore, it is relevant to mention that "Employer branding is often used to affect organizational culture and organizational identity, and in turn affect employer brand loyalty", which can be interpreted as investing resources in internal employer branding will in turn secure committed and loyal employees (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, 508). The aspects of organisational culture and organisation identity will now be elaborated on in the following sections.

4.1.2.1 Organisational culture

According to Backhaus (2016), Organisational culture consists of the understanding and values of the organisation that are learned and passed on to new employees, which influence the way individuals behave at their respective workplaces. In this relation, maintaining and developing organisational culture are highlighted as essential functions for management. To do so, companies must promote current values internally or develop new internal communication strategies to make cultural changes within the company (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004).

Organisational culture is not only focused on communicating and promoting values internally but also on what is communicated externally. This is because potential employees will establish an idea or interpretation of what a given company's internal environment and culture might be like based on the material and values that the company communicates. As new employees will have certain expectations towards a new employer, their preconception of the company will influence the success of their integration within the company. Therefore, establishing value congruence between new employees and the company is important in order to create a strong fit between employee and employer (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). Also, Backhaus (2016) highlights, that communicating a strong brand and culture may attract like-minded individuals, who will contribute further to establishing a strong and unique organisational culture and work life. In this relation, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) suggest, that if culture contributes to work-life quality, the culture will be more likely to contribute to higher organisational commitment. In contrast, a weak or inconsistent organisational culture can lead to several negative outcomes.

If the company is communicating an aspirational employer brand in hope of attracting skilled job seekers, new employees may be disgruntled or let down by the actual employer brand (Backhaus 2016). Therefore, it is important to communicate a consistent and reliable employer brand and culture in order not to mislead or disappoint new employees.

Communicating an employer brand that is inconsistent with – or misleading from – the actual employer brand and culture can be interpreted as a breach or violation of the psychological contract leading to disappointed employees (Backhaus 2006). Subsequently, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) highlight, that dissatisfied employees are more likely to quit, stressing the importance of creating a consistent and desirable organizational culture.

4.1.2.2 Organisation identity

To be an attractive employer, a company must possess a strong, unique, and positive organisation identity, which is the collective understanding of the company and what distinguishes it (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). The organisation identity of a company is developed internally but is constructed by the interactions employees have internally and externally. If a company has a strong, positive identity employees will experience raised self-esteem, resulting in greater identification with the employer and organisational commitment.

Organisational commitment can be described as the “[...] acceptance of the organization's goals and values, eagerness to work hard, and desire to remain with the firm” (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004, 508). Moreover, organisational commitment is characterised by the degree to which employees identify with the way the employer brand is presented. The organisation identity is moulded by what is communicated internally and externally about the company (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004). It can be influenced by organizational goals, policies, and practices instilled by management to maintain or develop the overall perception of the company by its employees.

By implementing the abovementioned measures, management has the power to secure a unified perception of the company based on the values and beliefs of the company. It is by moulding the organisation identity and making sure it aligns with the overall message the company wants to express that trust is built between employee and employer (Backhaus 2016). Also, if employees trust their employer and feel positive about the organisation identity, this will be reflected by employees promoting it to others (Backhaus 2016). In addition, Backhaus (2016) points out, that organisations that are regarded as positive from an employer branding perspective and offer attractive material and non-material advantages stand out in the labour market.

4.1.2.3 Employer brand loyalty

Employer brand loyalty is the result of the internal employer branding efforts made by the organisation. It is formed by the consistency in brand message, organisational culture, and organisation identity (Backhaus 2016). If Employer brand loyalty is high, the employee will have a greater organisational commitment, lust for work, intention to stay, and appreciation of the

company's goals and values (Backhaus and Tikoo 2004; Backhaus 2016). Backhaus (2016) refers to this as *the service profit chain*, which suggests that high employer loyalty ultimately leads to high customer satisfaction entailing better profits. Consequently, companies need to incorporate their cultural values in their overall employer branding strategy, as the alignment between identity and culture is necessary for the employer branding to be successful and frugal in presenting the internal employer brand as attractive.

In the abovementioned section on the theoretical framework, Backhaus and Tikoo's (2004) employer branding framework has been elaborated. Furthermore, both internal as well as external processes and factors affecting a company's employer branding have been brought forth. Additionally, the interrelationship between internal and external employer branding has been covered, and the coherence between attraction and retention in employer branding has been highlighted. Furthermore, the advantages and disadvantages of employer branding have been highlighted in regard to internal as well as external employer branding.

Based on these elaborations and the analytical tools that the framework provides, it will enable the thesis to examine Columbia Sportswear's employer branding from an internal and external perspective. In addition, it will allow the thesis to discuss the alignment in the internal and external employer branding. Lastly, the framework will assist in debating the effects and consistency of Columbia Sportswear's employer branding by comparing its employer branding to employee reviews of the company in order to find similarities and differences in the values associated with the company.

4.1 Critique of employer branding research

As the employer branding framework by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) is based on research within employer branding, the extensiveness and of the field will now be examined to evaluate the credibility of the research behind the theory.

Firstly, it has been noted by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) and Backhaus (2016) that employer branding is unrepresented in research. Therefore, Backhaus (2016) highlight the need for further

empirical studies on the area. This is supported by Maxwell and Knox (2009), who argue that the research within employer branding has been too focused on external employer branding in contrast to internal employer branding. In addition, the lack of research within the field in general is pointed out by Moroko and Uncles (2008) and Rai and Nandy (2021). This thesis will, therefore, contribute to the current research within employer branding and, in addition, provide empirical research within external as well as internal employer branding. This speaks to the relevance of applying the employer branding framework to this thesis, as utilising the theory on empirical data will provide evidence of its applicability.

5. Methodological considerations

In this chapter, the methodological considerations of the thesis will be elaborated, which constitute the overall research design. More specifically, the empirical data, sampling method, approach to analysis, and method of analysis will be clarified to understand the underlying thoughts, decisions, and processes that constitute the analysis of this thesis.

5.1 Methodology

This section will elaborate on the approach to research undertaken by the thesis. In this relation, two approaches are considered to dominate academic research, namely, qualitative and quantitative research (Bryman 1988). This thesis has taken a qualitative approach to research, elaborated on below.

As this study gathers data in the form of text and examines this by conducting an in-depth analysis of a limited amount of text, the thesis will be utilising a qualitative approach to research. Qualitative research is concerned with limited data and often involves studying social phenomena (Bryman 1988). Furthermore, qualitative research can be characterised as consisting of paragraphs of text in contrast to quantitative research, which mainly engages in measurements, variables, and numbers (Punch 2014). Subsequently, quantitative studies often propose generalising hypotheses tested by analysing substantial amounts of data (Bryman 1988). Also, the research approach taken and means

of data collection are influenced by the philosophy of science of the researcher, which dictates how the data will ultimately be perceived, handled, and analysed (Bryman 1998).

In this study, a qualitative approach to science is therefore ideal for applying, as the thesis intends to examine a single phenomenon based on a limited number of textual elements. Additionally, by applying a social constructivist approach to science, the data will have many possible meanings depending on who engages with it and can be interpreted differently (Levers 2013; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson 2012).

With that said, the thesis will draw on the statistical elements of quantitative research to some extent. The findings will be categorised and compared in diagrams and schemes to reveal the most dominating values and themes highlighted by Columbia Sportswear and its employees. Therefore, measurements will, to some extent, be an integral part of the analyses, however, the in-depth textual analysis will be the main and dominating method of analysis.

5.2 Method

This section will elaborate on the empirical data, how it has been sampled, and how it has been analysed.

5.2.1 Empirical data

The empirical data will now be elaborated. More specifically, the employer-review site, Glassdoor, will be elaborated on, and the chosen contents from the site will be presented. Also, Columbia Sportswear will be presented as a company and the chosen communication by the company will be described.

5.2.1.1 Glassdoor

Glassdoor is an online portal for former and current employees to anonymously review current and former employers. Subsequently, the website functions as a job posting site targeted job seekers (Glassdoor n.d. a). These services have been provided since 2007, when it was founded by Robert

Hohman, Rich Barton, and Tim Besse. More specifically, as expressed on the ‘About us’ page, “Glassdoor offers insights into the employee experience powered by millions of company ratings and reviews, CEO approval ratings, salary reports, interview reviews and questions, benefits reviews, office photos and more, combined with the latest jobs” (Glassdoor n.d. a).

As of May 2022, the site records 54 million visits monthly and contains more than 110 million reviews from a combined 2.1 million employers (Glassdoor n.d. a). These figures highlight its popularity among employees and its importance for employers, given the vast amounts of visits the site has on a recurrent basis.

In this relation, a study on job search revealed that half of the questioned respondents mentioned that they had investigated companies on Glassdoor specifically before applying (Patel 2017). This study highlighted the importance of receiving positive reviews to be regarded as an attractive employer. In addition, it is argued that a predominance of negative reviews will result in fewer applicants (Patel 2017).

This is supported by Torrington et al. (2020), who pointed out the importance for employers to be aware of their reviews from employees on Glassdoor in relation to employer branding. More specifically, it is highlighted that “HR professionals need to understand the significance of this for building their employer brand” (Torrington et al. 2020 after Lakin 2015).

Despite the abovementioned usefulness of the site, there are also several risk factors and undermining aspects of utilising and relying on publicly available information from an online review site. Among others, Dube and Zhu (2021) pointed out the fact that reviews can be overly negative if conducted by aggrieved employees. In addition, reviews can be conducted as bait by management in order to better a company’s evaluation or make it stand out (Dube and Zhu 2021). In addition, the concern of anonymity should be highlighted as well, as current employees may feel unsure whether they can be linked to their reviews, which may result in dishonest reviews.

However, Torrington et al. (2020) underlined the site’s trusted status and that employees rely more on the reviews on the site rather than the company’s own information and communication. In addition, Dube and Zhu (2021) pointed out that the site is renounced for implementing measures to

safeguard credibility and ensure anonymity making sure reviewers feel confident about reviewing their employers. Moreover, it is highlighted that Glassdoor reviews do, in fact, display useful information and that biased or misleading reviews will lead to other employees highlighting the real state of the company in their reviews. (Torrington et al. 2020; Hales, Moon, and Swenson 2018).

Based on the abovementioned presentation of Glassdoor and the elaboration of its downfalls, usefulness, and credibility, the site is deemed as fitting for utilisation in this thesis. This is because the site's importance in relation to employer branding and employer attractiveness is highlighted. By analysing reviews from current employees at Columbia Sportswear, it will be possible to examine opinions from a representative number of employees. In doing so, the thesis will be able to analyse the company's reviews in relation to the attraction of potential employees, how current employees review the company in relation to retention, and, lastly, the relationship between the company's own employer branding on its website and whether it aligns with what is expressed by employees in their reviews.

5.2.1.2 Columbia Sportswear

Columbia Sportswear is an international retail company within the outdoor clothing and equipment industry. The company was founded in 1938 in Portland, Oregon, by Gert Boyle and her family (Columbia n.d. a). The company consists of four main brands, namely, Columbia, Mountain Hardwear, SOREL, and prAna (Columbia n.d. b). Columbia produces outdoor clothing and equipment with a focus on connecting all people with the outdoors, Mountain Hardwear is specialised in outdoor equipment and also produces clothing for athletes, SOREL is engaged in footwear, and prAna produces clothing for all occasions with a strong focus on sustainability (Columbia n.d. b). As these four brands are all represented by and represent Columbia Sportswear, the company has a versatile profile and offers apparel and equipment for a wide pallet of individuals. With that said, the Columbia brand is responsible for the vast majority of the company's revenue as the flagship brand (Columbia n.d. c).

According to the company's investor relations website, it states:

*“At Columbia, we utilise **responsible practices** to continuously provide innovative and **enduring products** that **empower people** and **help sustain the places** we touch. We believe **giving back to***

*communities and using ethical sources for our product materials will **help preserve the environment and encourage people to spend more time outdoors.***”

(Columbia n.d. c).

Thereby, the company presents two focal areas of its operations, i.e., responsible practices and motivating and encouraging people to visit the outdoors. Moreover, it can be argued that the company tries to differentiate and define itself by its practices and its focus on adding value to both society and the environment. This interpretation aligns with how the company presents three strategic focuses; empowering people, sustaining places, and responsible practices, which emphasises the company’s focus on people and the planet (Columbia n.d. c).

In this relation, the company presents five core company values, as seen in the following screenshot:



OUR CORE VALUES

- Enjoy an Active Life
- Compete to Win
- Relentless Improvement
- Culture of Honesty, Respect & Trust
- Doing the Right Thing for Consumers, Customers, Employees, the Company & our Communities

(Columbia n.d. d)

In addition, Tim Boyle elaborates on the last value and states, “Here at Columbia, our entire 81-year history has been driven by a deep commitment to the people and families who live, work and play in the communities where we operate and to the scarce resources that we all have a responsibility to steward effectively” (Columbia n.d. e).

In these values, topics such as outdoor lifestyle, culture, and environment are included. Moreover, having the CEO elaborate on the last value can be seen as a way of underlining the importance of social responsibility for the company.

Based on the communication from Columbia Sportswear mentioned above and the company's emphasis on culture and environment in its self-description and values, Columbia Sportswear has been chosen as the case company for this thesis. This is because the main values communicated in relation to the company align with the field of interest of the thesis. More specifically, as the thesis is interested in finding out how a company's engagement in culture and social responsibility in its employer branding affects attraction and retention of employees, Columbia Sportswear was ideal to choose for the study.

5.2.2 Empirical choice and sampling

As mentioned in section 1.2, this thesis will utilise data that have been extracted from two online web pages. More specifically, corporate information from Columbia Sportswear's website and employee reviews of the company from Glassdoor's webpage on the company.

As this thesis is interested in examining the relationship between Columbia sportswear's employer branding and employee reviews of the company in relation to attraction and retention, the data has been collected by means of purposive sampling. Characteristically, purposive sampling regards the collection of data that is directly linked to the topic of one's research (Bryman 2016). Specifically, the data has been gathered by means of typical case sampling, i.e., the sampling of data that is relevant for the researcher in order to answer his/her problem statement.

The purpose of gathering data from individuals linked to an organisation, in this instance employees, to examine their beliefs, is well suited to research having a social constructivist approach. This is because social constructivism focuses on values and beliefs rather than numbers and measurements (Bryman 1988). In qualitative research, data is often extracted from interviews or observations (Bryman 1988). Interviewing has the advantage of offering an in-depth understanding of a participant's worldview and why they highlight certain values (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). Even though this approach offers the potential of analysing qualitative data in-depth, the number of participants will be limited depending on the number of employees who are willing to participate in interviews.

In this instance, Columbia Sportswear is the company subject to examination, which consists of 8,300+ employees, meaning that a high number of employee opinions should be considered to include in order to establish a representative perception of the company as an employer (Columbia n.d., e). Therefore, the internet is relevant to consider for data collection, as it offers easy access to a broad collection of values and beliefs expressed by the company's employees on Glassdoor (Sheehan 2002). In other words, online data collection on Glassdoor enables researchers to gather data from a representative number of employees in a time-limited manner through easily accessible information, which is why the sampling method is continuously increasing in popularity amongst researchers. (Flick 2015; Granello & Wheaton 2004).

More specifically, the two pages 'Corporate Responsibility' and 'Our Company' have been chosen to represent the company's employer branding. Concerning the page 'Corporate Responsibility', the page itself as well as the sub-pages 'Empowering People', 'Sustaining Places', and 'Innovating Products' have been examined, found in appendices F, G, K, and I, accordingly (Columbia n.d. f; Columbia n.d. g). The reason for choosing these pages is because of their direct link to the company's CSR approach, in which it will be possible how its communication is useful in relation to employer branding. The second page, 'Our company', consists of the sub-pages 'Strategy, Mission & Values', 'Inclusion & Diversity', and 'Wellbeing and Benefits', found in appendices J, H, and L, accordingly. The reason for choosing these pages was to incorporate the core values of the company, and the specific values it communicates regarding employee policies. This will allow for an examination of whether the company only communicates CSR in its CSR communication or if it has integrated CSR values into its core values as well.

By using online data collection as a sampling method, the paper is firstly able to access information from Columbia Sportswear itself on its values, external communication, as well as information related to potential and current employees on benefits, internal values, and its integration of CSR. Secondly, online data collection will make it possible to examine company reviews on Glassdoor to reveal employees' perceptions of the company representatively. This is possible as the gathering of reviews has been done independently from the employees, meaning that the individuals have expressed what they have deemed as relevant, since questions and interaction from interviewing have been omitted. Therefore, the individual reviews will not display vast amounts of text and recurring statements as may be found in interviews. To summarise, it will be possible to examine

the opinions expressed by a high number of reviews qualitatively, as the evaluation of employees' perception of Columbia Sportswear as an employer will only reveal what they have deemed as necessary to highlight.

Even though the answers will be somewhat limited in data in contrast to interviews, Torrington et al. (2020) highlighted that potential job seekers value honest opinions from current employees on their work experiences the most. Therefore, the Glassdoor reviews are well-suited as the data in an analysis of attraction and retention, as they will consist mainly of the most important factors, benefits, and disadvantages to current employees.

In relation to meeting the course curriculum criterion of having an international, English focus in the thesis, Glassdoor was ideal as a data source, as the site is American itself and its default language is English. Secondly, Columbia Sportswear, although international, was likewise ideal as the subject of analysis, as it is headquartered in Grand Junction, Colorado, US, and has English as its primary company language (Glassdoor n.d. a). This means that all the analysed reviews were written in English and that the company communication analysed from its website was likewise written in English.

As for the extraction and selection of the individual comments, 68 reviews were extracted from Glassdoor. This number was chosen based on the publishing of the company's latest CSR report. To clarify, the company's 2020 sustainability report covering the financial year 2020 was set as a parameter for the number of reviews to be extracted, as the company's communication of its latest CSR initiative, both internally and externally, is based on the initiatives within the report. Therefore, reviews made prior to 2021 have not been included, as they can be argued to reflect a former corporate CSR strategy, meaning that the employees were not necessarily exposed to the initiatives and policies currently communicated by the company before 2021.

To ensure that the reviews were from respectively 2021 and 2022, search categorisation on Glassdoor was set to 'Chronological', which means that the comments were sorted according to their timestamp of creation. Furthermore, 'In English', which was done as the thesis is interested in examining current employees specifically and ensuring that the reviews were in the English

language (Glassdoor n.d. b). Lastly, it is relevant to address that the reviews have been gathered by taking screenshots of them independently, which were chronologically ordered in appendix E.

The following section will elaborate on the examination of the reviews extracted. This will provide a greater understanding of how the reviews have been understood and what has been extracted from them. Furthermore, the following section will provide an understanding of the specific value extraction method utilised, whose findings found the value analysis and subsequent employer branding analysis.

5.2.3 Coding method

To extract the values that current employees recognise and associate with Columbia Sportswear as well as the values communicated by the company in its employer branding, Johnny Saldaña's (2016) coding manual will be utilised. Saldana (2016) provides comprehensive guidelines and a meticulous step-by-step approach to extracting values. His work has been highlighted by various scholars, and his coding methods have been widely applied in research, which provides both merit and reason for utilising the method in this thesis (Sage Publishing n.d.). Another method considered was Rokeach's (1973) value system, which has been proven relevant in extracting values in relation to CSR specifically (Schmeltz 2017). However, as Rokeach's (1973) coding method contains predefined values, Saldaña's (2016) coding method was deemed as more applicable in this study based on the social constructivist approach of the thesis, since Saldaña's (2016) coding method allows for the researcher to establish and define each code.

The very first step of the coding process occurs when the researcher interprets data in order to define and categorise it, which is regarded as decoding. Subsequently, the researcher encodes the data as he/she defines a given code (Saldaña 2016). This first step of engaging coding aligns with applying a social constructivist approach to research, as it is the individual researcher's understanding of the codes that define their subsequent definition. In relation to this, Saldaña states, "Coding is not a precise science; it is primarily an interpretive act" (Saldaña 2016, 5). Also, Saldaña's (2016) coding method is targeted qualitative research, which is another contributing factor to why it has been chosen as fitting for this study as the data analysed is qualitative.

In his definition of a code, Saldana describes it as, “a code is a researcher-generated construct that symbolises or “translates” data” and adds that it can “[...] range in magnitude from a single word to a full paragraph, an entire page of text or a stream of moving images.” (Saldaña 2016, 5). This means that a code is relative in its definition as it can possess various meanings depending on who interprets it. Moreover, as Saldaña suggests that the data a code is extracted from is not depending on the amount of data it has been extracted from, codes in this thesis will be considered equally important whether they consist of a single word or an entire review. This is because it is believed that employees communicate values differently, meaning that some might perceive a single word as enough in describing Columbia Sportswear as an employer, whereas others might feel the necessity to elaborate on a specific value. An example hereof might be the code ‘good company’, which describes the entirety of Columbia Sportswear, or the code ‘good pay’, which concerns a specific aspect of being employed at the company.

As elaborated in section 6.2.2, the data in this thesis will consist of both online corporate communication as well as reviews made by employees. In connection with this, Saldaña (2016) suggests the following regarding the types of data that codes and values can be extracted from: “The data can consist of interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journals, documents, open-ended survey responses, drawings, artefacts, photographs, video, Internet sites, e-mail correspondence, academic and fictional literature, and so on.” (Saldana (2016, 4).

In this instance, the codes will be extracted from websites and, to some extent, third-party review transcripts, which cover the data consisting of predefined online employee reviews from Glassdoor. Based on Saldaña’s definition of data sources, both Columbia Sportswear’s website and Glassdoor are deemed equally appropriate to include as data sources in the thesis.

To analyse and interpret the data, Saldaña (2016) point out the importance of self-awareness in the researcher concerning how one perceives phenomena. More specifically, Saldaña (2016) states that a researcher must wear an analytical ‘lens’ in the way one perceives data. Moreover, the lens of a researcher may be influenced by ‘filters’, which, among others, consist of the data format, the particular coding method, or the degree of detail in the analysis. In addition, the ontological, epistemological, and methodological stance of the researcher and the study act as filters, as they influence how the researcher works with and understands the data (Saldaña 2016).

Another aspect to consider in the coding process is the aspect of ‘preliminary jottings’, which are “preliminary words or phrases for codes on the notes, transcripts, or documents themselves” (Saldaña 2016, 21). In other words, preliminary jottings are the initial thoughts a researcher has towards the data on the first encounter with the data and in the pre-coding stage. For this thesis, Saldaña’s (2016) suggested usefulness of preliminary jottings has been considered and, to some extent, included in the form of writing down mental injunctions about the data as notes that were formed prior to the actual coding. These notes included the first thoughts on possible values expressed by both company and employees and how these may be related or unrelated. However, these notes were not considered to possess any merit or accuracy before the analysis as it is pointed out that “They do not have to be accurate or final at this point, just ideas for analytic consideration while the study progresses” (Saldaña 2016,)21). Hence, the preliminary jottings mainly provided clarity on what the data communicated.

Concerning the thoughts of the researcher, Saldaña (2016) also point out that most qualitative research is a ‘solitary act’, suggesting that coding of qualitative data is most often conducted by a single researcher. In this relation, Saldaña (2016) advocates for the usefulness of going over the work with a mentor. In addition, he mentions, “Discussion provides opportunities not only to articulate your internal thinking processes but also to clarify your emergent ideas and possibly make new insights about the data” (Saldaña 2016, 38). As this thesis is conducted by a single researcher, this advice has been dually noted. As a result, the important role of the counsellor of the thesis is acknowledged, as the counsellor has not only provided valuable feedback and suggestions but allowed the researcher to contemplate on and improve paragraphs and findings, which has led to stronger argumentation and new findings.

To find consistencies and similarities in codes, Saldana (2016) proposes to first define codes from the data and subsequently categorise the codes under common labels or themes in order to create an overview of the most dominating and reoccurring values and topics extracted from the data during the coding process. This is referred to as first cycle coding and second cycle coding (Saldaña 2016). Since this thesis is interested in examining the values expressed by Columbia Sportswear and the presence of values related to CSR in the data as well as finding the most highlighted values linked to the company by employees, this method of labelling and categorising the codes and values

extracted are considered the main tool in answering the problem statement. The first- and second cycle coding methods will be elaborated independently in the two following parts of the coding section as they combined construct the coding of the data.

5.2.3.1 First cycle coding

Briefly described in the abovementioned section, First cycle coding is the initial coding process of the data. Within first cycle coding, Saldana (2016) proposes seven categories of coding methods, which each offer different approaches to coding, namely, Grammatical, Elemental, Affective, Literary and Language, Exploratory, Procedural, and, lastly, Theming the data (Saldaña 2016, 80). The coding methods are regarded as independent meaning that only one of the seven is to be applied in a study.

In this thesis, the affective coding method will be utilised, which “investigate participant emotions, values, and other subjective qualities of human experience” (Saldaña 2016, 80). This is because the main topic of interest in this thesis is the values communicated by Columbia Sportswear and its employees. Additionally, the employees are expressing their opinions based on their experiences and interactions at the company, which is also why the affective method is ideal to utilise in this research.

The affective coding method offers four subcategories of coding; Emotion coding that focuses on feelings, Values coding that focuses on attitudes, beliefs, and values, Versus coding that focus on power struggles, and, lastly, Evaluation coding that focuses on merit in programs and policies (Saldaña 2016, 124). Since this thesis is interested in examining values communicated by Columbia Sportswear and the values and attitudes expressed by its employees towards the company, Values coding has been applied in this study.

Saldaña (2016) define a value as, “[...] a value is the importance we attribute to ourselves, another person, thing, or idea. They are the principles, moral codes, and situational norms people live by” (Saldaña 2016, 131). An attitude is referred to as what individuals think about themselves, others, a thing, or an idea (Saldaña 2016). Lastly, a belief is a construct of values and attitudes as well as

experiences, knowledge, and perceptions of the social world, which determines the actions one takes (Saldaña 2016).

As part of this thesis, values coding has been applied to extract values, attitudes, and beliefs from Columbia Sportswear's website as well as from the employee reviews on Glassdoor.

These codes have been gathered in two first cycle schemes, i.e., one for the company information and one for the employee reviews. Illustrations of the schemes are seen below, presenting the source of the code, the unit the code has been extracted from, the code itself, and the number of codes found in total.

Comment no.	Unit (quote)	Code	No. in total

Figure 1. – Employee first cycle scheme.

Page	Unit (quote)	Code	No. in total

Figure 2. – Company first cycle scheme.

As both schemes intend to extract values by applying the same approach, they are almost identical. However, as the data sources differ, the two schemes have each been adapted to their respective source in their first columns, i.e., the columns' Comment no.', representing the comment number of each review from Glassdoor, and the column 'Page', representing the page each code has been extracted from, as seen in appendices A and C.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the company or its employees determine what is coded, but also how the researcher interprets the reviews., e.g., the text in a review 'awesome co-workers' has been coded as 'Good co-workers' and 'Pay is a bit lower than other companies in this area' has been coded as 'low pay' as seen in appendix C. The company's online information that has been gathered and coded can likewise be found in the appendix, as well as the reviews that have been collected and coded.

5.2.3.2 Second cycle coding

Having conducted the first cycle coding, the second cycle coding is conducted in order to find patterns and recurrences in the codes extracted from the data. Additionally, it is conducted to organise, sort, and reanalyse the first cycle codes. The subsequent sorting of the codes in this stage of the process is conducted to create patterns or themes, that each holds several different codes that possess common traits (Saldaña 2016). In addition, it is argued, “Before categories are assembled, your data may have to be recorded because more accurate words or phrases were discovered for the original codes” and that some codes may be relevant to fuse as they convey similar values (Saldaña 2016, 134). The patterns that emerge are sorted in a ‘coding scheme’, which acts as the main overview of the codes and patterns as well as displaying the number of recurrences of the individual codes.

Within second cycle coding, Saldaña (2016) states that there are six coding methods, i.e., Pattern Coding, Focused Coding, Axial Coding, Theoretical coding, Elaborative coding, and Longitudinal coding. This thesis will utilise Pattern coding, which allows for broad categories to be created that contain various codes with similar meanings. This is because the overall employer brand of Columbia is to be examined by finding trends in the employee reviews as well as similarities and differences in these. Thereby, the patterns created will possess codes from many employees and represent common values linked to Columbia Sportswear as an employer.

In this relation the two scheme below was produced to create an overview of the patterns, the codes connected to each, and the data source of each code:

Pattern	First cycle codes	Repetitions	Comment no.

Figure 3. – Employee pattern scheme.

Pattern	First cycle codes	Repetitions	Page

Figure 4. – Company pattern scheme.

As the purpose and function of the two schemes are similar, they are almost identical. However, as the type of data source differs, figure 3 has a column named ‘Comment no.’, representing the comment number of each review from Glassdoor as seen in appendix D. Likewise, the coding scheme related to the company’s communication has a column named ‘Page’, representing the given page on the company’s website that the codes have been extracted from, found in appendix B. In addition, the page names are, in some cases, followed by a parenthesis with a number in it. This number represents the number of times a given code has been found on each page if it is present on different pages. For example, the code ‘collaborative environmental efforts’ have been found two times in total on the two pages, which is represented as follows; Empowering People (1), Sustaining places (1) (App. B).

Also, it should be mentioned that the codes in the first cycle coding schemes were colour coded during the second cycle coding, which was done to create an overview of the codes belonging to

each pattern. This has resulted in the first cycle coding schemes being colour-coded to match the established patterns, as seen in appendices A and C.

By bundling codes from several reviews together, it will be possible not only to reveal the worldview and opinions of the individual employee but the worldview and opinions of the company's employees as an entity.

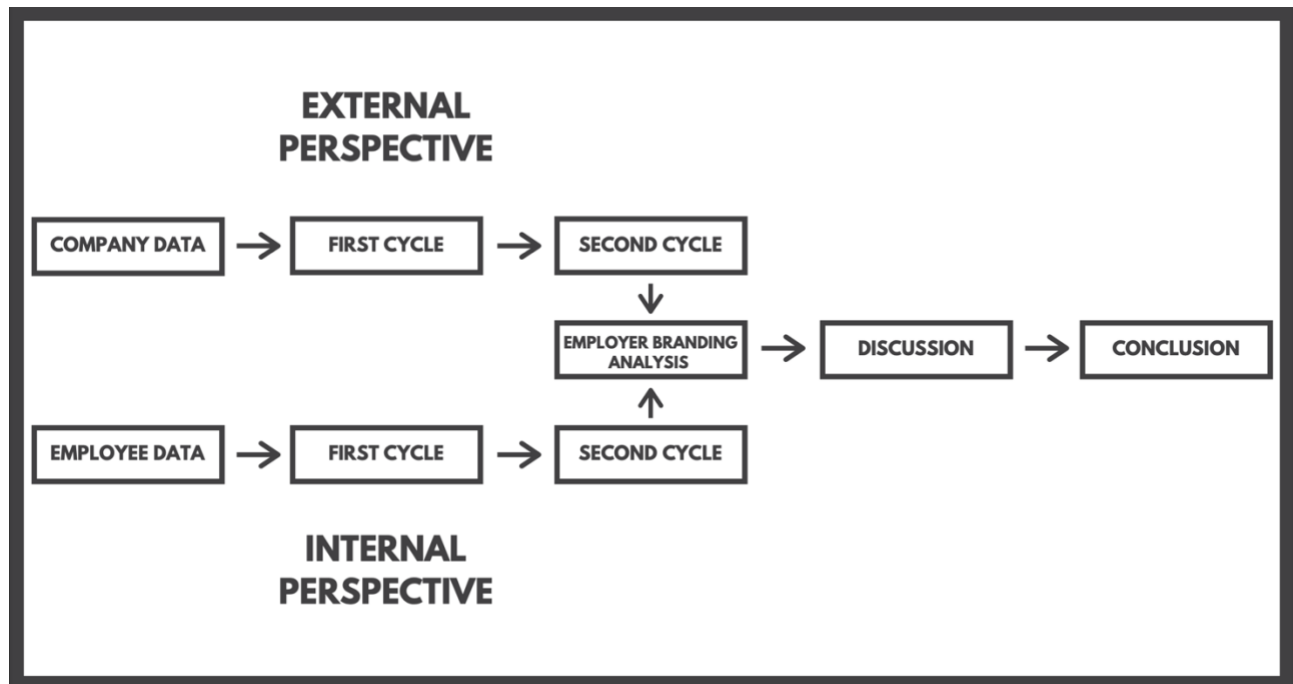
Therefore, the patterns will have an integral part of the employer branding analysis, as they provide insight into the internal values of Columbia Sportswear from the employees' perspective and provide an overview of the values communicated in the company's external employer branding. Consequently, the patterns will assist in evaluating the company's employer branding in relation to attraction and retention. This is done by revealing similarities and inconsistencies in how the company frames itself and how the employees perceive the company, as the patterns will be examined in-depth and independently.

In doing so, the potential findings relevant to answering the problem statement will be brought forth and subsequently analysed. In addition, the comprehensive analysis of the patterns found will assist in establishing an overall understanding of the values linked to Columbia Sportswear by itself as well as by its employees. In addition, a potential focus on its CSR will be brought forth. This will likewise assist in answering the problem statement as the presence of CSR values in the company information and the employee reviews will be revealed and debated in relation to the attractiveness of the company and how these values have influenced retention.

5.2.4 Method of analysis

Having elaborated the backbone of the analysis, i.e., values coding, in the abovementioned section, the following section will cover the method of analysis. More specifically, this section will clarify how the findings from the values coding have been analysed using the employer branding framework by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004).

To illustrate the process of examining the two data sets individually and applying their findings in a combined employer branding analysis, the following model has been created.



Model 2 – Method of analysis.

To elaborate, the findings made from the first- and second cycle analysis of the employee reviews will be regarded as the internal perception of Columbia Sportswear, as the employees are presenting current internal values and knowledge gained internally at the company. In this relation, these codes will be discussed with regard to both the internal and external employer branding, as new or potential employees partly evaluate and form their perceptions of a company based on how current employees evaluate it to some extent (Torrington et al. 2020). The external perception of the company will be based on the codes extracted from the company's own website, as these represent how the company wishes to be perceived by new and current employees. Also, a company's online information is used in researching potential employers, which means that this communication will have an impact on attracting potential candidates.

Then, the findings will be compared in relation to the aligning and opposite values highlighted by employer and employees in a discussion on the role and effect of CSR in the company's employer brand. These findings will constitute the foundation of the debate on the company's social responsibility and how CSR might have influenced attraction and retention. Lastly, the merging of the findings from the coding analysis and the employer branding framework will enable the thesis to propose a satisfactory conclusion to the problem statement.

5.2.4.1 Applying the employer branding framework

As mentioned above, the first data set that will be examined is the company's communication on its website. The online communication will be analysed in relation to how Columbia Sportswear communicates its employer branding material externally. This means that the findings from the value analysis will be examined concerning how the company strategically communicates values and CSR in order to attract and retain employees.

The second data set that will be examined is the employee reviews of the company. These will provide an internal understanding of the actual employer brand by providing findings based on current employees' perceptions of the company. Thereby, it will be possible to examine how the company intends to be perceived and how its employees actually perceive it. In doing so, it will be possible to evaluate the success and accuracy of the company's employer branding and its association with CSR.

After these analyses have been covered, the employer branding framework will be applied to the findings. This means that an evaluation of Columbia Sportswear's internal and external employer branding will be conducted. These will now be elaborated on in-depth.

Firstly, the findings made based on the company's own information and employee reviews will be analysed by applying the external aspect of Backhaus and Tikoo's (2004) employer branding framework to the separate findings. This means that the communicated values and findings from the two pattern analyses will be analysed in relation to employer branding associations, employer image, and employer attraction. In addition, the results will be examined concerning product-related attributes, non-product-related attributes, functional benefits, and symbolic benefits. By firstly examining how Columbia Sportswear frames and describes the abovementioned factors and subsequently examining how the employees perceive these factors, it is possible to evaluate the company's external employer branding as coherent or incoherent as the findings will determine the success of the employer branding on its current employees. In this relation, it is relevant to cover the success of the company's external employer branding, as communicating an ideal or visionary employer brand instead of an actual or accurate employer brand can lead to a breach of the psychological contract made in the employment process. Therefore, the external examination of the

two data sets will provide a two-way perspective of the company's external employer branding and its integration of CSR.

After the external elements of the company's employer branding have been covered, the findings from the pattern coding analyses will be applied to the internal elements of the employer branding framework. This means that the patterns will firstly be used to examine how Columbia Sportswear attempts to present itself as an organisation and employer. More specifically, the presentation of the company's organisation identity and organisational culture will be examined in order to find out how it attempts to establish employer brand loyalty and how successful the communicated values have been.

By doing so, it will be possible to evaluate how employees perceive and assess the organisation identity and organisational culture of Columbia sportswear. Following this, it will also be possible to evaluate the employees' internal perceptions of the company in relation to employer brand loyalty. In analysing the company's own communication of its internal employer brand and then analysing how its current employees portray it from an internal perspective, it will be possible to compare the two parties' perceptions and determine the influence CSR has on its internal employer brand.

To find out how important CSR is to the company and its employees, a discussion will subsequently be made based on the findings from the employer branding analysis. This discussion will be based on the findings presented by the company and the information presented by its employees. Thereby, the discussion will be nuanced, representing the values and opinions of both employer and employees.

Unlike the abovementioned analysis, the discussion will not be based on the findings of the pattern coding. Rather, it will be based on the discoveries made from the analysis of the employer branding framework. This will allow the discussion to evaluate the success of establishing a valid psychological contract in the recruitment process and how important CSR is to the company and its employees. Subsequently, this evaluation will assess the establishment of a person-organisation fit, which represents the company's ability to retain employees through CSR. Therefore, the discussion will be able to determine the coherence in the perception of Columbia Sportswear as an employer,

the similarities and differences of the company's culture, and how the company is positioned in relation to attracting and retaining employees based on its CSR efforts.

Lastly, a conclusion and answer to the problem statement will be made based on the findings from the discussion and the additional most relevant findings concerning the employer brand of Columbia Sportswear. As the last section of the thesis, the conclusion will narrow down the most prominent findings from the discussion and analysis to provide a short, concise answer to the problem statement.

6. Analysis

In this section, the analysis will be carried out by presenting the findings from the first- and second cycle coding of Columbia Sportswear's communication on its website and the findings made from the examined employee reviews on Glassdoor. This will be done by reviewing the individual patterns made as part of the second cycle codings. Subsequently, the findings from the pattern analysis will aid in the employer branding framework analysis, in which the internal and external employer brand of Columbia Sportswear will be discussed.

6.1 Coding analysis of Columbia Sportswear's communication

This section will elaborate on the findings made regarding Columbia Sportswear's communication specifically. Firstly, the first cycle coding analysis will be conducted based on the company's own communication. Secondly, the second cycle coding analysis will be conducted to examine the different patterns made from the first cycle codes.

6.1.1 First cycle coding analysis

The most prominent findings from the first cycle coding of Columbia Sportswear's communication will now be elaborated. This analysis will bring forth the most noticeable codes found throughout the first cycle coding. Also, the first cycle coding analysis will provide an understanding of the most central values communicated by the company.

In its communication, Columbia Sportswear uses various values in relation to the company itself, its different stakeholders, and its efforts within sustainability and ethics. An example of this is quote 1, in which the company writes, “commitment to our consumers, communities, and the environment” (Code 2, App. A). In this comment, which is from the page ‘Corporate responsibility’, it becomes clear that the company is not only interested in being associated with its responsible initiatives but also how these initiatives positively impact its consumers and communities. In doing so, the company portrays itself as a responsible company in regard to the environment and, at the same time, a company that is highly invested in its stakeholders.

This point is backed up by various comments across the company’s communication, such as, “We want you to be proud to wear our products”, “The outdoors is ours to protect”, and “environmentally friendly and safe production” (Code 3, 8, 114, App. A). In quote 3, the company emphasises the importance of being a preferred brand by its stakeholders. In quote 8, the company once again ties itself to the environment, and, in quote 114, it highlights its sustainable and ethical approach to production. By continuously associating itself with the environment, ethical production, and its commitment to its stakeholders, it is clarified by Columbia sportswear that these three priorities are tied together within the company.

As the company is a retailer in the outdoor industry, the latter point should be regarded as a strategic move to position itself firmly within the industry. This is because the company should, to some degree, display a dimension of interest in the outdoors and the outdoor community in order to be regarded as a preferred brand. Moreover, by focusing on sustainable and ethical values and its stakeholders, the company is simultaneously meeting the societal demands on retail companies to take responsibility, as mentioned in section 1. Lastly, by highlighting these values, the company may attract new employees interested in the outdoors while remaining attractive to current employees by investing and engaging in initiatives these might support personally. Hence, by consistently highlighting various stakeholders, the environment, and ethical practices, Columbia Sportswear displays values that correspond with contemporary values and comes across as a responsible employer.

With that said, the company also highlight other values in its communication and communicates different aspects regarding each of the topics it discusses on its website. Combined, these values have been gathered in patterns as part of the second cycle analysis. To extract all relevant findings in relation to the values communicated by the company, these patterns will be examined independently in the following section.

6.1.2 Second cycle coding analysis

As briefly pointed out in the abovementioned section, this section will concern the second cycle patterns created based on the first cycle codes. The patterns will be examined individually, which will allow for an in-depth examination of the most prominent and recurrent values within each pattern. In addition, the patterns will reveal Columbia Sportswear's expressed values..

In this relation, the diagram below has been created, presenting the representativeness of the different patterns created in percentage and the number of codes gathered within each pattern. The actual patterns and codes can be found in the appendix B.

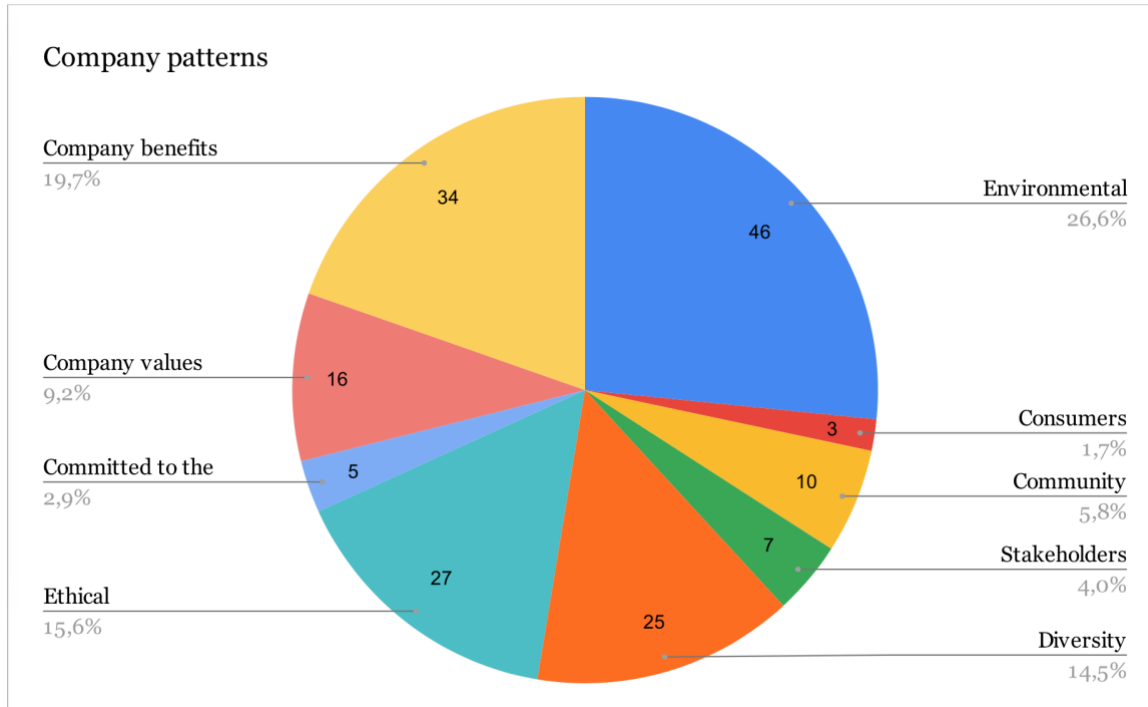


Figure 5 – Company pattern representativeness.

This diagram will not be essential in the analysis but functions as an overview to understand and perceive the weight of the patterns examined. This is important to be aware of as the distribution of patterns reflects certain values in the company's employer brand.

Pattern 1: Environmental

This pattern consists of 21 codes that have been found 46 times throughout the examined communication from Columbia Sportswear. This makes the pattern the largest and most represented of the patterns found during the second cycle coding.

As this pattern is the most recurrent in the company's communication, it can be seen as a sign of Columbia Sportswear's focus on CSR. Moreover, it can be interpreted as a means of attracting new employees and engaging current employees by meeting societal demands on CSR.

Of the 21 codes that constitute the pattern, the code "produces products sustainably" was the most recurrent found nine times in the company's communication. Therefore, the company has a high focus on its products in relation to sustainability on its website. Being a retail company, it is important to engage in and communicate corporate environmental efforts to meet societal demands towards the industry, as mentioned in section 1. This is supported by the three codes, "uses environmentally-friendly chemicals", which has been found five times, "Engages in sustainable manufacturing practices", which has been found three times, and "products use less water", found three times.

The three abovementioned codes all display different concerns regarding Columbia Sportswear's production and manufacturing from an environmental perspective. By including various aspects of sustainable production, the company presents itself as highly invested in the environment and indirectly takes responsibility for its actions by initiating various efforts to become more sustainable.

This point is supported by the finding of the two codes "takes environmental responsibility" found three times and "committed to the environment" found four times. These two codes reveal that the company purposely displays dimensions of concern and responsibility as it acknowledges its

impact. The reason why the company does so may be a consequence of being an outdoor retailer, which means that the company produces clothing and gear designed for outdoor activities. This is because a company devoted to the outdoors may be at risk of public scrutiny if it does not take action to protect the environment, since its target audience is people who enjoy and are devoted to the outdoors. With that said, it should be mentioned that individuals who are passionate about an active outdoor lifestyle may not be equally passionate about protecting it as enjoying it. However, if companies and individuals do not act, individuals and companies with a passion for the outdoors may be influenced by, i.e., deforestation, pollution, and loss of animals, directly affecting the outdoors.

This may be why the codes “collaborative environmental efforts” found thrice and “Collaborates with green NGOs” found once are present in the company’s communication. In order to be regarded as sincerely passionate about the outdoors, the company is communicating not only that it is focusing on sustainable production but also elements of activism. By using activist values regarding the environment, the company displays itself as invested in protecting the environment. Subsequently, these values showcase that the company engages with outdoor communities and makes local efforts to protect the environment, protecting what its products are created for enjoying.

Pattern 2: Consumers

This pattern, consumers, is the smallest of the nine patterns established in the second cycle coding of the company's communication. The pattern consists of three codes that have been found once each. The three codes are "committed to its consumers", "Devoted to consumer safety", and "Wants products to be regarded as sustainable by consumers".

Although this pattern and its codes are not well-represented, it has been deemed fitting to include, as the three codes regard a specific stakeholder group. As consumers are the retailer's target audience and as employees, investors, and other stakeholders can be regarded as potential consumers, it is important to address this group in its communication. By using values such as 'committed' and 'devoted,' the company emphasises the important role of this specific stakeholder group. Moreover, by striving for a certain view by consumers on its products, the company

highlights the importance of meeting consumer demands and the values it wants to be connected with.

Pattern 3: Community

The third pattern is 'Community', which consists of 8 different codes, and the most recurrent code is "Committed to its community", found three times in the company's communication (App B). The finding of this pattern can be seen as the company expressing that it is not only interested in selling products to individuals who enjoy the outdoors but also in the outdoor community itself. This sits well with the fact that the company is actively engaged in many environmental initiatives preserving the outdoors, which the outdoor community might also be affected by.

With that said, community is a broad term and encompasses a wide range of stakeholder communities, which is illustrated in the codes "Financially supports employee communities" found once, "Contributes financially to employee supported initiatives" found once, and "Supports poor communities" also found once. In the first two codes, it is clear that the community the company referred to is its own. By this is meant that the company supports its employees, their internal community, and the external communities they find important. The company may be doing so to take societal responsibility by engaging in funding of certain communities. With that said, it is more likely that the company supports the internal employee community to strengthen its culture and employee-supported communities to please its employees and be regarded as an attractive, ethical employer.

Nonetheless, the company also explicitly expresses philanthropic values by supporting poor communities, which is an ethical act. This is supported by the codes "Investing in community" found once, "Empowering communities" found once, and "Supports communities financially" found once. By contributing financially to various communities and supporting at-risk communities, the company goes beyond internal concerns and displays values of social concern, which presents Columbia Sportswear as an ethical company.

Pattern 4: Stakeholders

The fourth pattern, Stakeholders, contains five codes of which "Listens to stakeholders" and "Wants to support stakeholder" are the most recurrent, found twice each. In establishing this pattern, the important role of stakeholders for a public retailer is demonstrated. This is because the company not only has consumers as their target audience but also has an internal community as well as a shareholder community to have in mind in its communication being publicly traded. As a result, this pattern is regarded as an expression of the diverse stakeholder group Columbia Sportswear has in mind in its communication and initiatives, as the company, in this instance, is mainly highlighting stakeholders in general and not a specific stakeholder group apart from employees.

The codes "wants to make stakeholders proud" found once, "Listens to stakeholders" found twice, "collaborates with stakeholders" found once, are examples of this point. The first code can be interpreted as a general value of satisfying all who have a stake in the company. The second code can be an expression of listening to, e.g., investors or business partners in the further strategic development of the company. Lastly, the third code might be seen as displaying concern for the health of those working in the company's supply chain or its employees in general, as ethical and safe practices are important factors to maintain for a retail company.

Pattern 5: Diversity

The fifth pattern, Diversity, is well-represented, consisting of 21 codes found 25 times in the company's communication (App B). The large number of codes found in this pattern may well be a consequence of the diversified areas within corporate diversity, which means that the values found vary in topics. Examples of this might be the codes "supports female workforce" found three times and "Condemns racism" found once, highlighting the two main areas within the pattern, namely, gender equality and racism.

Concerning gender equality, it is clear to see that the company is invested in women particularly, which is supported by codes such as "supports female workforce" found three times, "provides skill training to female workforce" found once, "develops female workforce" found twice, and "educates female workforce" found once.

The above-mentioned codes display the company's stance on gender equality, as the values expressed both concern corporate as well as supply chain workers. This is because the company is not only invested in the corporate female workforce but also in the education and training of the females in the company's supply chain. By having this focus, the company again frames itself as ethical and responsible, as training and development of both internal and external female personnel means that the company goes beyond its own agenda to support those with lesser opportunities.

This fact is also somewhat true in relation to racism, which is the second dominating theme within the pattern of diversity. Among others, this theme is represented by codes, such as "Encourages corporate diversity and inclusion" found once, "Condemns racism" found once, "Wants to improve societal racism issues" found once, and "Supports Black Lives Matter movement".

In the first two of the above-mentioned codes, the company expresses values in relation to its internal culture by addressing that it, firstly, actively encourages inclusion at the company and, secondly, that it is against racism in general. In the two latter codes, the company expresses values in regard to external factors. It does so by highlighting its views on societal and political topics. Firstly, the company states that it wishes to take part in fighting societal injustice, and secondly, it states that it supports the Black Lives Matter (or BLM) movement. This can be regarded as an expression of both racial and political concern as the company addresses its support of a movement heavily engaged in the political and racial agenda regarding the culture in America.

Pattern 6: Ethical

The sixth pattern, Ethical, consists of most different codes of all patterns, namely, 23 codes, which are present 27 times throughout the company's communication. As ethics cover many aspects, initiatives, and values, it should be mentioned that this pattern is not solely representing specific ethical values of Columbia Sportswear. It represents values primarily concerned with overall ethical values such as "Wants to do good" found once, "Proud of ethical efforts" found once, and "Provides life-cycle transparency" found once, which are values directly linked to the company's values and the way it conducts business in general.

Of the 23 codes in the pattern, “Engages in animal-friendly production” is the most represented, found three times in the company’s communication. By addressing its views on the use of animals in the production of goods, the company expresses values that can be argued to be generalising within the retail industry. Also, a reason for highlighting this area is that animals might be regarded as important for the outdoor community in particular, as wildlife is a topic often linked to the outdoors.

Likewise, the codes “Engages in responsible manufacturing” found once, “uses ethical materials” found once, “committed to sourcing ethically” found twice, and “produces long-lasting products” found twice, display ethical values linked to the outdoors, as both sourcing, manufacturing, and components in materials can affect the outdoors negatively if not conducted ethically and sustainably. Also, by linking its products with ethical values, the company makes its products more attractive to purchase, as they are presented as durable, sustainable, and produced ethically. In addition, these codes display a dimension of concern for employees, supply chain workers, and local communities, as ethical business practices are often linked to safety and health of those working in production and manufacturing.

Pattern 7: Committed to the outdoors

The seventh pattern, Committed to the outdoors, consists of the three codes, “Promotes the outdoors” found once, “Cares about the outdoors” found thrice, and “Proud to support national park conservation” found once.

This pattern is relatively small, nonetheless, it does highlight the most vital value for the company to express in its communication, i.e., its passion and devotion to the outdoors. The outdoors is mentioned in multiple patterns and is included both implicitly and explicitly in much of the company’s communication in different contexts. However, this pattern was established as the codes within were found only to emphasise the company’s commitment to the outdoors. More specifically, the company expresses how it cares for the environment and is proud to take care of it. This point is rather important for the company to express as its devotion and actions taken in relation to the outdoors contribute to the evaluation of whether the company merely produces products designed for the outdoors or if it is also concerned with protecting it.

Pattern 8: Company values

The eighth pattern, Company values, consists of 14 codes, represented 16 times in the company's communication. However, this pattern differs from the abovementioned patterns as it only consists of the values that the company communicates on its page, 'Strategy, Mission, and Values'. The reason why the values from this page have not been divided into different patterns they are topically related to is that these values can be argued to represent the core values of the company.

The two most recurrent codes in this pattern are "Cares about the outdoor community" and "Committed to sustainability", both found twice on the page. These codes are somewhat interrelated because both of them concern the outdoors to some extent. Firstly, by caring for the outdoor community, the company expresses concern and interest in a wide pallet of its stakeholders, e.g., consumers and employees, and at the same time express its focus on the outdoors in general. This is supported by the company expressing its devotion to sustainability, which consequently regards the state and health of the outdoors.

Other values related to those above are "Cares about its employees" found once, "Committed to the outdoors" found once, "Engaged in its consumers", found once, and "Invests in consumers demands" found once, which all display similar interest and concern for its employees, consumers, and the outdoors.

Apart from the abovementioned values, the company also highlights the importance of its externally focused values, which can be seen in codes such as "Invests in responsible practices" found once, "Wants to give back", found once, and "Wants to be better", found once. These codes all express values of social concern, as the company express ethical values related to its supply chain and manufacturing practices by compensating for its footprint and improving its business practices in its operations.

Pattern 9: Company benefits

The ninth pattern, Company benefits, consists of 23 codes, represented 34 times in the company's communication. This pattern also differs from the rest of the codes, like the pattern 'Company values' above. It does so, as it consists of only the values found on the page 'Wellbeing and Benefits'. As it would not have been possible to establish a comprehensive overview of the values related to employee benefits specifically if they had been scattered throughout different patterns, the decision was made to examine the codes from this page independently.

Firstly, the company expresses values related to health, which can be seen in codes such as "Focused on wellbeing", found thrice, "Provides medical benefits", found once, "Employee health plans", found twice, and, "Committed to employee wellbeing", found once. From these codes, it is revealed that the company is highly invested in both the physical and mental health of its employees as both health and wellbeing are highlighted, which are arguably necessary to be considered an attractive employer with a healthy work environment.

Another area that Columbia Sportswear is communicating heavily is financial values. This can be seen in codes such as "Good pay", found once, "Financial management support", found once, "Provides pension", found once, and "Supports employees' families", found once. From these codes, it can be stated that the company is focused on providing various financial values to its employees. In addition, these codes assist in presenting the company as an attractive employer, since it is important to offer competitive economic benefits to employees in general.

Another area of values that is more specific to Columbia Sportswear, is the values it communicates regarding the outdoors. These are represented in codes such as "Cares about the outdoor community", "Devoted to its employees' passions", "Support employees' communities", "Provides outdoor activities for employees", and "Encourages adventure" all found once. In these codes, the company's devotion to the outdoors once again shines through as well as its intent to share these values with its employees. As the company offers a wide range of benefits related to the outdoors, this can be regarded as a strategy for attracting employees who appreciate and share these values.

In addition, the codes "Great work-life balance", found twice, "Opportunities to volunteer", found once, "Parental leave benefits", found once, and "Travel benefits", found once, are all values that can be seen as enabling the company's employees to control their hours, be flexible, spend time

outdoors, and contribute to the ethical initiatives. Also, the company emphasises its devotion to its employees and meeting their needs as seen in the codes “Benefits meet employee expectations”, found once, and “Provide benefits according to needs”, found twice, suggesting that employees are compensated sufficiently from the company’s perspective.

6.1.3 Sub conclusion

From this coding analysis, various values communicated by Columbia Sportswear have been examined. Combined, the individual analyses of the patterns provide an overall perception of the company, the values it ascribes to itself, and the values it wishes to communicate to its stakeholders.

It has been found that the company communicates values related to sustainability and ethics both in relation to its operations, employees, as well as corporate priorities to a high degree. Concerning the outdoors, the company emphasises values in relation to its production, manufacturing, and corporate citizenship.

Regarding ethics, the company is highly vocal in relation to values such as safety and health in its supply chain, diversity and inclusion, and competitive benefits, including good compensation and a good work-life balance.

Subsequently, it has been found that the company emphasises its devotion to the outdoor community and its stakeholders in its communication. Columbia Sportswear addresses the importance of the outdoor community both internally as well as externally, since it offers employees various ways to enjoy and contribute to the outdoors and engages with various communities to improve and maintain the outdoors.

6.2 Coding analysis of employee reviews from Glassdoor

This section will analyse the findings made regarding Columbia Sportswear’s employee reviews on Glassdoor. Firstly, a first cycle coding analysis will be carried out based on the employees’ reviews of the company. Secondly, a second cycle coding analysis will be conducted, which will examine the different patterns made from the first cycle coding of the company reviews.

6.2.1 First cycle coding analysis

The most prominent findings from the first cycle coding of the employee reviews will now be elaborated on. Therefore, this analysis will provide an understanding of the values communicated by the employees at Columbia Sportswear and the values most important to them.

From the 68 comments, the most recurrent codes are “Good employer”, found 21 times, “Good coworkers”, found 20 times and “Good work-life balance”, and “Good benefits”, both found 18 times. As the top four comments are positive of nature, this can be interpreted as the reviews are mainly positive of nature, which is reflected in quotes such as “Great individuals to work with”, “Over all great company to work for!”, and “Fun coworkers” (App. C, Code 14, 20 & 57).

From the above-mentioned codes and quotes, it is revealed that the employees are generally satisfied with the company’s social aspects, both in regard to Columbia Sportswear as an employer and the employees’ coworkers. However, unlike the communication from the company itself, the first cycle coding of the employee reviews also found various negative comments and codes. The most recurrent negative codes are “Bad work-life balance”, found 13 times, “Bad management”, found 12 times, and “Bad pay”, found 11 times.

The finding of the three above-mentioned codes can be regarded as an expression of areas the company needs to improve in to become a more attractive employer. As the reviews did reveal negative aspects about the company’s products, the comments provide a nuanced perspective of Columbia Sportswear. For example, some of the employees provided negative quotes in their reviews, such as “The workload isn’t worth the pay and stress”, “Lack of diversity”, and “horrible corporate leadership” (App. C, Code 18, 12, and 33). In these comments, employees question aspects such as pay, diversity, and management. This means that the company need to be aware of these issues to improve its chances of employees’ providing positive reviews of the company.

With that said, the first cycle coding found quotes and codes contradicting the above-mentioned, suggesting entirely different perceptions of the company. Examples thereof might be the codes “Good pay”, found 12 times, “Good management”, found six times, and “Diverse work

environment”, found two times (App. C). Hence, the first cycle coding analysis provided mostly positive codes, however, some negative codes were found to be present several times, providing two different views upon certain areas of the company by a number of employees.

6.2.2 Second cycle coding analysis

As mentioned above in section 8.2, this part of the analysis will examine the individual patterns made from the coding analysis of the Glassdoor employee reviews based on the first cycle codes. As the employee data consists of 68 reviews, this analysis will provide a comprehensive understanding of Columbia Sportswear’s positives and negatives as an employer.

As included in the second cycle coding analysis of the company’s communication, a diagram showcasing the representativeness of the codes found in the reviews has likewise been created.

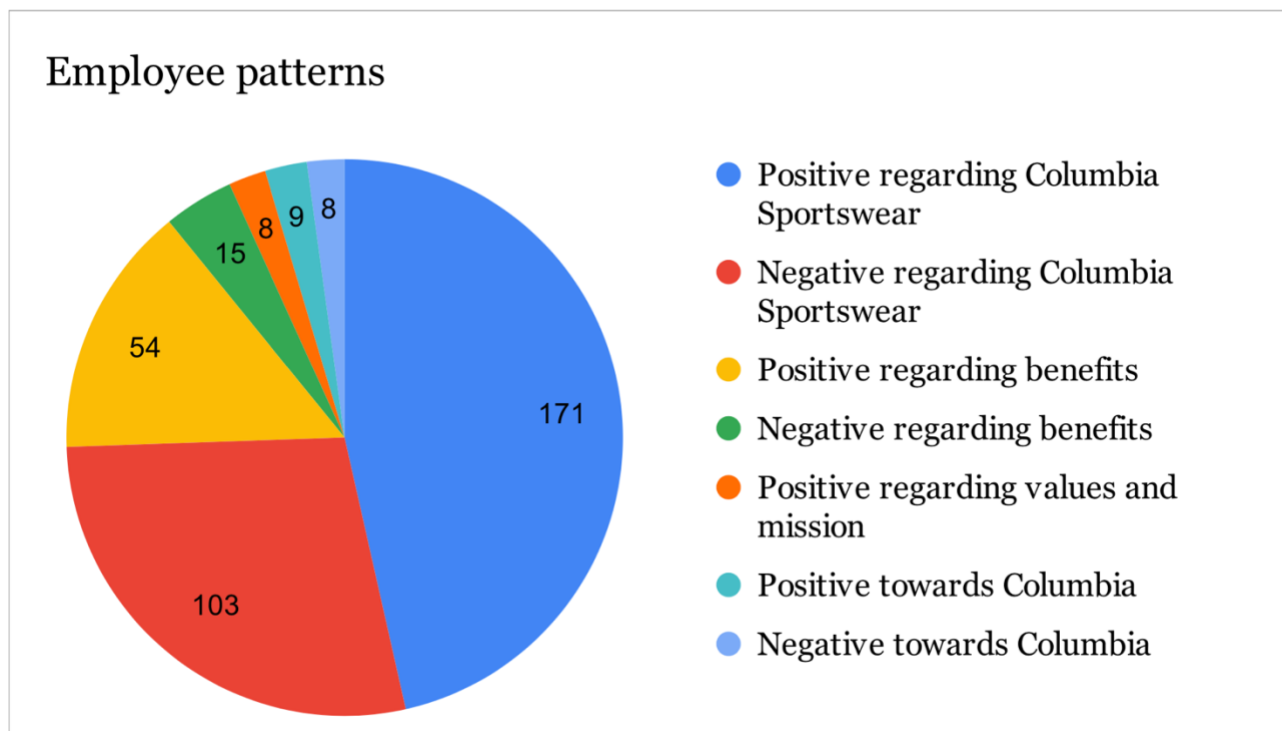


Figure 6 – Employee pattern representativeness.

This diagram presented above provides an overview of the patterns, their representativeness in percentage, and the number of codes belonging to each pattern. As it was argued in section 8.1.2, such an overview will assist in establishing an understanding of the areas found to be most

important, which is important to have in mind as the representativeness of the patterns influences the employer brand of Columbia Sportswear. The patterns will now be examined in-depth individually.

Pattern 1: Positive regarding Columbia sportswear

The first pattern, Positive regarding Columbia Sportswear, consists of 35 codes represented 171 times. This makes it the pattern that consists of most codes and being of highest representativeness, which indicates that the majority of the employees ascribe the company with positive values. The most represented code in the pattern is “Good employer”, found 21 times. As this is the most recurrent code of all, it can be seen as an indication that the company’s employees are satisfied with the company as an employer overall. This might be related to the second-most recurrent code, “Good co-workers”, found 20 times. The reason for this is that the large number of employees who highlight their co-workers positively can be seen as a sign of a positive work environment and the employees being satisfied in general.

Another element contributing to this point is the code “Good work-life balance”, found 18 times in the reviews. As many of the employees highlight work-life balance positively, this aspect may also contribute to Columbia Sportswear being regarded as a good employer, since employees with a good work-life balance may not feel overworked or burnt out regarding their work. This is backed up by the codes “Good work environment”, found 13 times, “Great culture”, found 17 times, and “Good community”, found 14 times. These codes all regard the internal relations and community at Columbia Sportswear and reflect a picture of a positive, supportive work environment consisting of like-minded individuals. This statement means that the culture and people within the company can be regarded as positive by its employees.

Another positive aspect highlighted about Columbia Sportswear as an employer is that it cares for its employees. This is seen in codes such as “Caring employer”, found nine times, “Caring management”, found once, and “Devoted to employees”, found once. These codes all reflect that the employees regard the company as not only being interested in performance but also its employees. From this finding, the importance of paying attention to one’s employees is highlighted, at the employees in this instance highlight the necessity of being regarded as a caring employer.

Lastly, it has been found that the employees regard the company as good based on its reputation, the quality of its products, and the ability to advance within the company. This is seen in the three codes “Prestigious company”, found thrice, “Good products”, and “Good advancement opportunities”, found four times each. These codes highlight that the reputation and quality of a company’s goods reflect on its company reviews by employees. Moreover, the ability to advance internally is regarded as important in evaluating a company as an employer.

Pattern 2: Negative regarding Columbia sportswear

Despite the abovementioned findings and arguments made, the construction of the second pattern, Negative regarding Columbia Sportswear, indicates that the company also has downsides and room for improvement in some areas. The pattern consists of 39 codes that have been found 103 times, which makes this pattern the second-largest pattern established regarding the employee reviews.

The most recurrent code in this pattern is “Bad work-life balance”, found 18 times, indicating that many employees feel overworked and lack time off work. This is supported by the codes “Not flexible work location”, found twice, “Stressful work”, found four times, “Too high expectations”, found once, and “Overworked employees”, found thrice. From these codes, being employed at Columbia Sportswear is presented as time-consuming, hard work. Furthermore, as various employees highlight this, it can be regarded as a sign of the company handing out more work than agreed upon when first being employed.

Another area that is highlighted negatively is the management within the company. This is seen in the codes “Bad management”, found twelve times, “Management not supportive”, found four times, and “Strict management”, found thrice. In these codes, various employees present the company’s management negatively. This is an essential area to improve within, as good management is crucial to establishing an attractive workplace. Furthermore, it might be a reason why several employees regard the company as an employer and its culture negatively.

These negative aspects are highlighted in codes such as “Bad employer”, found five times, “Bad culture”, found six times, and “Changing culture”, found twice. In these codes, the company is

presented negatively both in terms of it as an employer and the culture within the company. This presents the company unfavourably as maintaining a good culture within a company is highly important for the relations within the company. This point is supported by the finding of the code “Bad co-workers”, found once, “Uncaring co-workers”, found once, and “Disrespectful employer”., found once. In these codes, the reviews present other employees and the company negatively, which consequently reflects an undesirable workplace.

Pattern 3: Positive regarding benefits

The third pattern, Positive regarding benefits, consists of 13 codes that have been found 54 times in the reviews. The finding of this pattern points out the importance of offering attractive benefits and compensation, as the vast majority of the comments included values related to benefits in their reviews of the company as an employer.

The most recurrent code in the pattern is “Good benefits”, found 18 times. This indicates that the overall benefits offered to the employees are perceived as favourable. In this relation, two of the most recurrent codes are “Good pay”, found 12 times, and “Good employee discount”, found seven times.

From the two abovementioned codes, the financial aspects of being an employee are highlighted. As the most recurrent individual benefit regard salary and the second-most regards economic discounts, this can be taken as a sign that the company meets its employees’ expectations regarding compensation. In addition, the highlighting of employee discounts can also be regarded as an expression of how the employees feel positively about the products that the company produces.

Another area that is highlighted in this pattern is development. This can be seen in codes as “Development opportunities”, found seven times, “Professional development”, found twice, and “Personal development”, found once. From these codes, it has been found that being able to develop one’s skills both personally and professionally is valued by the company’s employees. As these areas of development are mentioned positively in this relation, the company can be regarded as offering satisfactory opportunities to its employees.

Pattern 4: Negative regarding benefits

Despite the abovementioned points, the fourth pattern, Negative regarding benefits, was also established. The pattern consists of three codes, which are represented 15 times.

In spite of the pattern consisting of relatively few codes, the most recurrent of these, “Bad pay”, was found 11 times, which reveals a view shared by multiple employees. In this instance, it is argued that various employees feel negative about the monetary compensation they receive at Columbia sportswear. This can be regarded as the employees’ expression of underappreciation, as they feel worth more than the company offers them.

In this relation, the code, “Bad advancement opportunities”, which was found three times, can also be seen as an indicator that the employees feel underappreciated or unnoticed. This is because a lack of advancement within the company might be a result of not being noticed for the accomplishments the employees make or simply not being appreciated enough.

Pattern 5: Positive regarding values and mission

The fifth pattern, Positive regarding values and mission, consists of four codes that have been found eight times in total. The most recurrent of these codes are “Stands by its values”, found three times, and “Good values”, found three times.

By establishing this pattern, the company’s values and mission are presented as supported by several of the company’s employees. This can be seen in the first of the two codes in which the employees argue that the company is, in fact, honouring the values it communicates. Furthermore, in the second code, the employees’ support of the company values comes to light. This is supported by the two remaining codes, “Lives up to morals” and “Lives up to values”, found once each, reaffirming that the company is invested in the values it communicates.

Pattern 6: Positive towards Columbia Sportswear’s social responsibility

The sixth pattern, Positive towards Columbia Sportswear's social responsibility, is represented by five codes that have been found nine times in total. The most representative codes in this pattern are "Diverse work environment" and "Responsible company", found twice each.

From the creation of this pattern, the company's CSR is highlighted. This is seen in codes such as "Responsible company", "Ethical employer", and "Acts on values and morals" all found once. From these codes, it has been found that some of Columbia Sportswear's employees acknowledge the company's efforts within responsible business practices, which indicates that it stands by its core values.

Also, the codes "Diverse work environment", found twice, and "Inclusive company", found once, reveal that some of the company's employees regard the company as living up to the values it communicates. More specifically, these codes regard diversity and inclusion, which the employees link to the company positively.

Pattern 7: Negative towards Columbia Sportswear's social responsibility

Despite the abovementioned positive points connected to the company being ethical, the seventh pattern, Negative towards Columbia Sportswear's social responsibility, suggests that some employees regard its efforts as unsatisfactory. The pattern consists of four codes found eight times.

The most recurrent code in the pattern is "Lacks diversity", found in four instances, which reveal a negative perception of the company's internal culture. This code is supported by the code "Lacks diversity in management" found once, which also suggests that a lack of diversity is a problem throughout the company. Subsequently, the finding of the two codes, "Gender inequality" and "Male-dominated company", add to a negative perception of the company by including negative aspects of equality within the company.

6.2.3 Sub conclusion

From this second cycle analysis, the employees' values and beliefs linked to Columbia Sportswear have been brought forth and examined. Overall, the employees highlighted both positive and negative aspects, which combined provide a nuanced perception of being employed at the company.

Firstly, it was found that the majority of the employees highlighted the company, its products, and its culture positively. In addition, various employees referred to the work-life balance as good, the company as a good employer, and the management was referred to as caring by several employees. However, some of the employees also expressed negative perceptions, particularly towards the management at the company. Additionally, the culture was referred to negatively by some employees, and the work-life balance was found to be regarded as unfavourable by several employees.

Concerning the compensation at the company, several employees found the benefits to be favourable, highlighting pay, discounts, and development opportunities as positive. Yet, negative aspects were also connected to the compensation regarding pay and advancement opportunities, suggesting a divided perception of the pay employees receive at the company.

In relation to the company's values and mission, various employees regarded these as positive and perceived the company as honouring these. In addition, no negative pattern was established regarding the values and mission of the company, supporting the above point.

In regard to the responsibility and ethics of the company, the company was referred to as responsible, ethical, and living up to the values it communicates. In addition, the company was referred to as being invested in diversity. However, the dominating perception of the company in relation to diversity was negative of nature. In addition, gender equality was highlighted as a negative aspect of being employed at Columbia Sportswear.

6.3 Applying the employer branding framework

The findings from the two second cycle coding analyses in sections 8.1 and 8.2 will now be applied to Backhaus and Tikoo's (2004) employer branding framework. This will enable the thesis to discuss the similarities and differences in how the company frames itself as an employer, its culture,

its values, and how its employees regard these areas in their reviews of the company. In addition, it will evaluate the role of CSR in the company's employer branding.

6.3.1 External employer brand

In this section, the external employer branding will be discussed. More specifically, the external employer branding associations, employer image, and employer attraction will be covered. The analysis will consist of the findings from the company's communication and the company reviews. This will allow for a nuanced perspective of the external employer brand of Columbia Sportswear.

6.3.1.1 Employer branding associations

This section will examine the employer branding associations of Columbia Sportswear. This includes product-related attributes, non-product-related attributes, functional benefits, and symbolic benefits, which are the main areas highlighted by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) in relation to employer branding associations. Combined, this section of the analysis will reveal how the company's products are perceived and presented, the external perception of working at Columbia Sportswear, the benefits that the company offers, and the benefits highlighted by the company's employees.

Product-related attributes

This section will cover the product-related attributes regarding the products produced and sold by Columbia Sportswear. This means that only the values communicated regarding the company's products by itself and in the employee reviews will be relevant to highlight in this section.

In relation to the company's communication regarding its products, the pattern 'Environmental' reveal several relevant findings, which are revealed in the codes, "uses environmentally-friendly chemicals", "Produces environmentally-friendly materials", "products use less water", and "Engages in sustainable manufacturing practices". From the finding of these codes, it can be argued that the company tries to communicate its products as sustainable, using the company's efforts within sustainability as a product perk.

Likewise, the company wishes to add value to its products by associating them with the company's ethical measures connected to the physical benefits of the products. This is seen in the codes "committed to sourcing ethically", "Engages in animal-friendly production", and "Engages in responsible manufacturing" found in the company pattern 'Ethical'. In these codes, the company adds value to its products by highlighting various measures that indirectly affect the associations one makes with its products. However, the code "produces long-lasting products" was also found, which is the only code concerned with the physical quality of the products, as it speaks to the quality of the materials and durability of its products.

The company's employees did not highlight either sustainable or ethical values. The only codes found in relation to its products specifically were "Good products" and "Good employee discount". The first code suggests that the company's employees regard its products positively, which speaks to the attractiveness of its products. The attractiveness of the products is likewise pointed out in the latter of the above-mentioned codes, as the mentioning of a discount on company products suggests that employees want to wear and purchase its products.

Non-product-related attributes

As with the above-mentioned section, this section only concerns the company's products. More specifically, it examines the elements or thoughts associated with the company's products.

In relation to non-product related attributes, it is relevant to highlight the code "Wants products to be regarded as sustainable by consumers" from the company pattern 'Consumers'. This is because the code highlights the associations the company wishes its consumers to link mentally with its products. This is supported by the code "Proud to support national park conservation", which was formed based on the statement that the company's products are not only produced sustainably but are also donated to and used in relation to sustainable efforts, which arguably is highlighted, since the company intends to make the audience link sustainability to the company's products mentally.

With that said, the reviews did not reveal any mental values related to the company's products. However, it can be argued that the finding of the code "good products" indicates that consumers

form a positive mental image of the company's products in general. This is supported by the fact that no negative codes were found specifically in relation to the company's products.

Functional benefits

As mentioned in section 4.1.1.1, functional benefits concern the benefits related to being employed at a given company and not the functional benefits of its products. In this instance, the benefits highlighted by the company in its communication are gathered in the pattern 'Company benefits'. In relation to the employees, the values expressed regarding functional benefits are found in the patterns 'Positive regarding benefits' and 'Negative regarding benefits'.

Regarding the company, various benefits are highlighted in its communication. The company particularly focus on wellbeing and health. This can be seen in codes such as "Focused on wellbeing", "Employee health plans", and "Provides medical benefits". From these codes, it can be argued that the company is interested in using wellbeing strategically to attract employees by communicating it on various occasions.

Likewise, the company communicates various economic benefits, which are seen in the codes "Good pay", "Provides pension", and "Financial management support". Compensation is arguably a natural topic to highlight by companies in general, as it is essential in attracting employees. In connection to this, the company also emphasises development opportunities, which can also be regarded as commonly important to employees. This is seen in the code "Employee development", in which the company express its focus on personal and professional development of its employees.

Regarding the employee reviews, both positive and negative aspects were found in connection with the functional benefits at Columbia Sportswear. In this relation, it is interesting that the most prominent positive and negative codes contradict one another, namely, the codes "Good pay" and "Good employee discount" contradict "Bad pay". From these codes, the company's financial benefits are highlighted as particularly important to its employees. In this instance, employees expressed an equal amount of positive and negative feelings towards the company's compensation, indicating that not all employees are satisfied in this area. However, it should be noted that the code

“Good benefits” was the most dominant overall, suggesting that the company’s employees are generally satisfied with their benefits packages.

Subsequently, it was found that the codes “Development opportunities”, “Professional development”, and “Personal development” somewhat contradict the code “Bad advancement opportunities”. From this, it is revealed that the employees do acknowledge the company’s benefits concerning development and find these attractive. Still, the company may fail to offer its employees advancement possibilities making it harder to climb the corporate ladder.

Lastly, it should be noted that the company’s efforts in using sustainability, ethics, and community are not reflected in the reviews, but rather the most essential functional benefits to the employees were found to be of financial and professional nature.

Symbolic benefits

Unlike the functional benefits, the symbolic benefits of the company are not listed or defined by the company, but instead, they are made up of the social approval and prestige that relates to being employed at the company. With that said, any company aim at being as attractive as possible, which is why they invest in branding and initiatives to make them more desirable.

In this instance, it has been found that Columbia Sportswear is highly invested in ethics and community. This is seen in codes such as “Cares about the outdoor community”, “Cares about its employees”, “Devoted to its employees’ passions”, “Supports employees’ communities”, “Opportunities to volunteer”, “Provides outdoor activities for employees”, and “Encourages adventure”. By addressing its internal community and highlighting this focus, the company aims at using its culture and internal commitment as a benefit. Moreover, by addressing volunteering and caring for communities, it frames itself as ethical and portrays this as a benefit for employees. By doing so, the company actively engages in societal concerns, which is arguably to be regarded as an attractive company from a societal perspective and, thereby, become a prestigious employer.

In the company reviews, the codes “Prestigious company”, “Great company”, and “Passioned” were found. These codes reflect a dimension of societal attractiveness, as the company itself is being highlighted as great, that it is regarded as prestigious by employees, and that it is, in fact, invested in

its values. Therefore, the company is represented as possessing attractive symbolic benefits, which is a result of its engagement within the outdoor community.

6.3.1.2 Employer image

Having covered the most essential points in relation to Columbia Sportswear's external employer brand, various findings have been made. These include both positive and negative aspects, which revolve around the products, the brand, and the societal view of the company.

Firstly, Columbia Sportswear's products are presented by the company as sustainable and ethical choices when shopping for outdoor gear. In addition, the company highlights the durability of its products, which speaks to the quality of its products and, at the same time, makes them more sustainable as they last for a longer period. Although not highlighted by the consumers explicitly, the company's products are regarded as good by its employees, which supports the argument and benefit of the company producing high-quality products. This was also supported by the fact that employees expressed satisfaction with the products by the large number of reviews mentioning good discounts on products.

Secondly, the company wishes to create a mental perception of its products interconnected with sustainability and ethics. This can be regarded as a way of making its products and the company more attractive, as increased societal awareness on these subjects and linking the products with them makes the company an ideal choice in the industry to support. With that said, the employees did not express mental perceptions of the products as particularly sustainable or ethical but merely highlighted them as good, portraying the products as of high quality and attractive but not because of the sustainable and ethical choices the company makes in its production.

Thirdly, the company communicated various benefits related to being an employee, including well-being, financial compensation, and development opportunities. The employees highlighted both compensation and development but from different perspectives. Several employees highlighted salary negatively and, in addition, despite development being mostly regarded positively, some employees expressed lacking advancement opportunities. However, the most recurrent opinion was that the overall benefits at the company are great. Therefore, the functional benefits reflect a torn image of the company, as some areas within benefits are portrayed negatively.

Lastly, the employer image of the company is presented as caring for the outdoor community, sustainability, and ethics by the company itself. Its employees somewhat support this, as they regard the company as great, prestigious, and passionate. With that said, the employees did not associate sustainability and ethics with the company explicitly, indicating that the company is more related to its outdoor activities than its CSR efforts to preserve the outdoors.

In sum, the employer image of Columbia Sportswear is presented as a company that produces good products, cares for its community, is regarded as a good company, and offers good benefits. However, it is also presented as not offering competitive salaries to all its employees and as a company that is hard to advance in internally. Also, the employer image does not explicitly portray the company as sustainable and ethical despite the company's attempt to associate these areas with the company. With that said, these efforts may contribute to why it is regarded as good and prestigious, but this is not communicated by its employees explicitly.

6.3.1.3 Employer attraction

In this last section regarding the company's external employer brand, an evaluation of its efforts and its values will be examined in relation to establishing a person-organisation fit. More specifically, the values highlighted by the company and those highlighted by its employees will be examined to determine the success of the company's external employer branding and whether the company has established a valid psychological contract with its employees.

As the values communicated by Columbia Sportswear's employees have mostly been positive, it is argued that the company comes across as a good employer and workplace. This displays the company as an attractive employer, which assists in attracting the best candidates to the company. Moreover, the company's investment in its community and the outdoors makes it a favourable company to apply to if a given applicant is also interested in the outdoors and the outdoor community. Therefore, it is argued that the company's efforts to attract candidates through its devotion to the outdoors have created a strong person-organisation fit between the company and its current employees. This is evident in the fact that the vast majority of the reviews were positive and regarded the company as good and being a good employer.

With that said, the company's attempt to attract employees through incorporating sustainability and ethics in its values, operations, and products has not manifested in its employer brand, as the employees did not highlight or distinguish CSR values related to the company explicitly. Therefore, it is argued that the company's focus on promoting the outdoors have influenced its employer brand positively, but only in term of being active and sharing the passion for the outdoors and not in relation to being activist and protecting the outdoors. Nonetheless, the employer brand of Columbia Sportswear is capable of attracting like-minded individuals, which is highly beneficial to stand out as an employer and offer an attractive workplace to potential employees.

Moreover, the company is presented as an attractive employer regarding the benefits it offers its employees. However, there can be argued to be somewhat of a violation of the psychological contract in relation to salary. This is because the company promotes that it offers good pay, but several employees expressed negative feelings towards their compensation. With that said, as a similar number of employees expressed themselves positively regarding their salary, a violation of the psychological contract is not strongly evident. However, the company should focus on offering competitive salaries to avoid an actual breach of the psychological contract and avoid increased turnover intentions.

The abovementioned point is likewise relevant to highlight in relation to development and advancement. This is because the company communicates good development opportunities, but this area also somewhat violates the psychological contract. This is in spite of a high number of employees pointing development out positively, as a number of employees expressed lacking opportunities for advancement. Therefore, the company should engage more in advancement instead of offering courses and activities for the professional or personal development of skills. This is relevant to highlight, as it would be counterproductive to develop employees' skills if they do not get to utilise these in a higher position, which might lead them to seek out higher positions outside the company.

6.3.1.4 Sub conclusion

In sum, Columbia Sportswear has a strong external employer brand and is regarded as an attractive company to be employed at. The company's engagement in the outdoor community has resulted in a strong person-organisation fit, as current employees express values similar to those communicated

by the company. This was evident in various findings and patterns that highlighted the company's expressed values and passion regarding the outdoor community, which were also highlighted by its employees. On the other hand, the company's attempts to stand out as a CSR focused company have not been prudent in its external employer branding, as its efforts have gone unremarked by its employees. In addition, the integrity of the company's attractiveness is somewhat questioned by a number of its employees, who expressed themselves negatively about the benefits of being employed at Columbia Sportswear. This means that the company should engage more in communicating its CSR related efforts and values targeting potential and current employees, as these efforts were not reflected in the evaluations of the company.

6.3.2 Internal employer brand

In this section, the company's internal employer brand will be discussed. More specifically, the internal aspects of organisation identity, organisational culture, and employer brand loyalty will be examined to highlight internal values of importance to the company itself and its employees.

6.3.2.1 Organisation identity

As mentioned above, the organisation identity of Columbia Sportswear will now be elaborated. As mentioned in section 5.1.2.2., organisation identity is moulded by the company and is reflected in the organisational commitment expressed by its employees. Therefore, it will now be possible to examine the company's communicated identity, the identity presented by its employees, based on the values expressed by both parties.

Firstly, the findings from the coding analysis formed the pattern, 'committed to the outdoors'. From the discovery of this pattern, it is argued that the company is actively engaged in presenting itself as part of the outdoor community. Moreover, this is supported by the finding of the code "Cares about the outdoor community" in the company's communication of its values. By expressing its interest in the outdoors as part of its core values, the company attempts to influence the collective understanding of the company and what distinguishes it, as it communicates these values externally whilst including them as part of its internal values.

In this relation, the company is invested in including its commitment to the outdoor community as part of its organisation identity. This is seen from the creation of the pattern, 'community', in which the company's engagement in not only the outdoors but the social community revolving around it is expressed. From this, it is argued that the company wishes to stand out and not only be regarded as a provider of outdoor gear and clothing but a company that is sincerely invested in the outdoors as well. This is also supported by the finding of the code "Cares about the outdoor community" found in its values and mission communication, which is an expression of the company wanting to be associated with this particular community in its identity.

In this relation, the most significant pattern, 'Environmental', can also be connected to the identity the company attempts to communicate. This is first and foremost because the pattern was the largest found but also because codes related to the environment were found across the company's communication in general. Concerning the company's environmental values, it communicates two main focuses, namely, its commitment to environmentally friendly production and its engagement in activist practices.

Firstly, values such as "committed to the environment", "managing environmental impact", and "uses environmentally friendly chemicals" present the company as actively engaged in sustainable efforts. Secondly, the codes "takes environmental responsibility", collaborative environmental efforts", and "Collaborates with green NGOs" reflect the company's activist engagement within sustainability, which is supported by the values "Committed to sustainability" and "Invests in responsible practices" present in its values and mission communication. In relation to organisation identity, communicating these values is another way of being perceived as engaged in the outdoors, strengthening its identity by being associated with environmental commitment. This is arguably important for the company, as individuals involved in the outdoors and the community surrounding it are most likely interested in protecting and preserving the outdoors in general.

Likewise, the pattern, 'Ethical', is an expression of the company's engagement in establishing an identity of being committed to responsible practices. This is visible in codes such as "committed to sourcing ethically", "committed to ethical business practices", and "Provides life-cycle transparency", which all express dimensions of concern and commitment to preserving the outdoors. By communicating these values and highlighting its internal policies and initiatives

regarding responsible practices, the company is attempting to mould its identity to align with its goal of being a preferred company in the outdoor industry. This is because these initiatives and values affect both potential candidates as they are exposed to these initiatives as well as current employees as they are part of these initiatives indirectly internally.

In relation to the organisation identity presented by the employees, the most shared feelings towards the company are positive. This is seen in the pattern, 'Positive towards Columbia Sportswear', in codes as 'Great company' and 'Prestigious company'. From these findings, it is argued that the company is presented as having a good organisation identity, as the positive codes are regarded as a display of high organisational commitment.

This is also evident in the patterns 'Positive regarding values and mission' and 'Positive towards Columbia Sportswear's social responsibility'. The fact that enough codes highlighted the corporate values and mission to create this pattern supports the argument that the external communication of the company's identity is reflected in its internal identity, as various employees have highlighted these values in their reviews. In addition, the code 'Acts on values and morals' was found in the latest pattern mentioned above, which signals that some employees perceive the company to be standing by the values it communicates. This internal acknowledgement of the values that the company communicates externally is essential to highlight, as it supports the argument that a collective understanding of the company's identity is present, which has the potential to increase organisational commitment.

Likewise, the company's employees have highlighted its engagement in establishing an identity as being part of the outdoor community. This is evident in various findings of the code "Good community". As the company actively regards itself as part of the outdoor community, and the fact that several employees highlighted community, the finding of this code is seen as an expression of a collective internal and external perception of the company's identity in this area. This is because the many reviews highlighting the community are interpreted as if the employees feel connected to the community expressed by the company.

Unlike the abovementioned similarities in perception of the company's identity, its focus on environment and ethics have not been found to be as recurrently highlighted by the employees as its

community. The company was found to be highly engaged in communicating its efforts within CSR, which was interesting as the company wants to display these values in its identity. Nonetheless, these values have largely gone explicitly unnoticed, with a few exceptions. The codes 'Responsible company' and 'Ethical employer' were found in a few reviews, signalling that some employees do connect the company's efforts with its identity. However, the vast majority did not highlight these practices and initiatives. With that said, the findings of codes such as 'Great Company', "Passioned", and the creation of the pattern, 'Positive regarding values and mission', can be argued to represent the company's CSR efforts indirectly. This is because the company has integrated ethical and sustainable values into its corporate values and mission, which may have influenced the perception of the company's identity and values positively. It is so, as it has previously been argued that the employees at an outdoor company with similar interests are inclined to care about the environment and protect it, which may build higher organisational commitment and identification with the company as an employer.

6.3.2.2 Organisational culture

In this section, the internal environment at Columbia Sportswear and the values associated with it will be examined as communicated by employer and employees. More specifically, the pattern coding analyses will be utilised to analyse the communicated culture and the actual culture at the company. This will bring forth the most essential aspects to the company in its communication of its culture and, at the same time, reveal whether these aspects are highlighted by its employees.

Firstly, the examination of the company's communication has revealed that it is focused on communicating a culture in which employees and its stakeholders and not only business are important areas for the company. This is revealed in the finding of the pattern, 'Stakeholders', from which the importance of paying attention to its stakeholders. Similar codes specifically concerning the company's employees are 'Cares about its employees', 'Committed to employee wellbeing', and 'Contributes financially to employee supported initiatives', in which the company's attentiveness to its employees is highlighted as well.

In relation to the internal environment, the company makes an effort to communicate its values regarding diversity and inclusion, which can be seen as a strategy to create positive culture change

and strengthen its culture. This is seen in the creation of the pattern, 'Diversity', that brings forth different culture-related topics.

Among others, the codes 'supports female workforce', 'develops female workforce', 'empowers female workforce', and 'proud of female workforce' reveal the company's agenda of creating awareness on gender equality at the company. More specifically, these codes underline the company's engagement in promoting an internal culture that is invested in gender equality. Another topic that Columbia Sportswear is highly invested in communication regarding its culture is race and diversity.

This is seen in the finding of codes such as 'Promotes diversity', 'Condemns racism', 'Financially supports anti-racism funds', 'Supports Black Lives Matter movement', and 'Educates employees on racism'. In these codes, a strong incentive is to promote the company's stance on race and diversity. By addressing its collaboration with funds and NGOs on racism, the company attempts to mould its culture by using political views and agendas. This is seen as a way of clearly communicating a supportive culture that incorporates values of high relevance, which can be seen as a reaction to the increased awareness on racial injustice in the United States being an American company.

Another significant focus in the company's communication that can be connected to its culture is its devotion to the outdoors and the outdoor community. Also discussed in section 8.3.2.1, the company is heavily engaged in the outdoors, which is supported by the creation of the two patterns, 'Community' and 'Committed to the outdoors'. These patterns reveal that the company is attempting to create a culture that reflects its corporate values and mission. This is seen as a way of establishing and maintaining a culture revolving around the outdoors with the purpose of creating a collective understanding and perception of the internal culture. In doing so, the company is bringing its employees, regardless of position, together through a common interest. Moreover, it uses this interest to attract new, like-minded employees. By doing so, the company's culture is used strategically to present the company as an attractive employer within the industry and, at the same time, increase organisational commitment by establishing a sense of togetherness between its employees. Additionally, as the company communicates that it has always been invested in the outdoors, these values are arguably learned and passed on internally, amplifying the interest in the outdoors in its culture.

In this relation, the company also integrates values related to protecting the outdoors and making sustainable efforts as part of its culture. This is seen in codes such as 'Committed to sustainability', 'Wants to be better', and 'takes environmental responsibility'. From these codes, it is revealed that the company is not only focused on meeting social demands on responsible production and conduct but also acknowledges its own responsibility as a global company. Therefore, the company is attempting to communicate a culture in which societal concerns are integrated into how it acts internally. Also, by addressing its intention to improve, it reflects a culture that is ambitious and willing to make changes to protect the outdoors.

Concerning the employees, various aspects and values have been found that can be linked to the company's culture. Some of these values align with those communicated by the company, and some differ from the communicated values. In addition, aspects concerning the culture that the company has not highlighted have also been found in the reviews.

Firstly, it has been found that the employees at Columbia Sportswear confirm that the company does care about its employees. This can be seen from the finding of the codes 'Good employer' and 'Caring employer'. The finding of these codes reveals that the employees do find the company to be a good and caring employer, which creates a collective understanding of the company as a preferred employer. However, with that said, the code 'Bad employer' was also found, although not as recurrently as the positive ones, which suggests that a certain number of employees do not feel cared for at Columbia Sportswear.

Following, the employees also touch upon the area of diversity and inclusion in their reviews of the company as an employer. This can be seen in codes such as 'Diverse work environment' and 'Inclusive company', in which diversity is pointed out positively. With that said, most employees highlighting the topic did so negatively, as seen in the codes 'Lacks diversity', 'Lacks diversity in management', 'Gender inequality', and 'Male-dominated company', which constitute the pattern, 'Negative towards Columbia Sportswear's social responsibility'. Therefore, it is argued that the company falls short in this area in relation to its culture. This means that the company's substantial communication on diversity and gender equality is not reflected in the actual culture within the company. This is an important observation for the company to be aware of, as the employees

expressing themselves negatively on the area is a sign of a violation of the psychological contract. Hence, the company is not presented as diverse or inclusive as it communicates to be from an internal perspective.

An area that the company does excel in is the internal environment and community. This is seen in the many findings of the codes 'Good community', 'Great culture', 'Good work environment', and 'Good coworkers'. From these codes, it is underlined how the employees perceive the culture to be strong internally and the work environment to be regarded positively. This aligns with the fact that the community and fellow coworkers are regarded positively. As many of the reviews highlighted the community and their coworkers positively, this is taken as an indication that the company is successfully establishing a person-organisation fit. With this means that the company's engagement in communicating its passion for the outdoors has positively affected its internal environment by attracting like-minded individuals to the company. By doing so, the employees will have a shared passion not only with the company but with each other as well, which means that organisational commitment is increased based on a strong sense of community internally.

Despite the abovementioned fact, there was also found a recurrent negative perception towards the individuals internally. More specifically, recurrent codes such as 'Bad management', 'Management not supportive', and 'Strict management' were found. These codes suggest that the company has internal issues related to the employed management, as multiple reviews spoke of this area negatively. As management is an essential part of establishing a strong employer brand and running a company by instilling policies, goals, and practices internally, this is an important area for Columbia Sportswear to improve upon to continue having a strong employer brand. Furthermore, codes relating to the abovementioned point are 'Bad work-life balance', 'Stressful work', 'Challenging work', and 'Overworked employees'. These codes form a negative perception of the culture within Columbia Sportswear and may well be a result of the policies and practices imposed by management. Therefore, the company should be highly invested in improving its leadership or improving management communication, as this negative perception has proven to have direct negative implications on its internal culture. With that said, codes such as 'Good management', 'Good work-life balance', and 'Caring management' were also found, which signals that it is not all employees who think of the management negatively. This means that only a certain number of

employees perceive the leadership at the company negatively, which implies that the company generally leads its employees successfully.

Lastly, it has been found that the company has established a culture that embeds its values, which is stated based on the finding of the pattern, 'Positive regarding values and mission'. This is because the employees express approval of the company's values, which are seen in codes as 'Good values', 'Stands by its values', 'Lives up to morals', and 'Lives up to values'. From these findings, it can be argued that the chosen values of the company are accepted by its employees, and at the same time, the company is perceived to comply with these. This can be interpreted as the company's engagement in the outdoor community, and implicitly, the environment has successfully been used to establish a solid person-organisation fit that contributes positivity to organisational commitment internally. However, with that said, the company's environmental initiatives have not been mentioned in relation to the culture explicitly, suggesting that community is the most important factor concerning the values and commitment of the employees.

6.3.2.3 Employer brand loyalty

This section will gather the positive and negative values and opinions toward the company's internal employer brand to determine whether employer brand loyalty is high or low. Subsequently, this section aims at clarifying whether the communicated employer brand aligns with the internal perception of the employer brand presented in the company reviews.

Overall, the aspects related to the internal employer brand of Columbia Sportswear have been positive. Therefore, the employees expressed high organisational commitment. This was mainly because the internal environment and values revolving around the outdoor community were found to influence the employees' perception of the company's identity and its culture. This means that the company's communication of its internal employer brand has successfully established a person-organisation fit between employer and employees in general due to its engagement in communicating values relating to the outdoor community consistently.

The most important areas for the company in the employer branding of its identity were the outdoor community, environment, and ethics. In relation to its culture, the abovementioned aspects were also found to be relevant in relation to the company's culture but with the addition of the two areas,

stakeholders and diversity and inclusion. Therefore, the company has consistently communicated aligning values regarding its identity and culture, which can be linked to the finding of high organisational commitment.

This is because the areas of community, the values of the company, and the mentioning of it as both a good company as well as employer were interpreted as the employees expressing their consent and support of the company's communicated values, which is another factor supporting the evaluation of high employer brand loyalty. In addition, the employees expressed their support of the company's ability to act upon its values, which is an essential part of establishing trust between employer and employee, leading to increased organisational commitment.

Despite the overall employer brand loyalty being regarded as high, some employees were also found to express negative aspects both in relation to identity and culture, which have the potential of decreasing the employer brand loyalty in the future if not noted and handled by the company. More specifically, it was found that both diversity and inclusion and management were mostly regarded from a negative perspective, which was seen as an expression of the company somewhat violating the psychological contract. This is because the company presented an ideal employer brand and especially promoted a culture of diversity and inclusion in its employer brand, which its employees did not reflect.

In sum, the employer brand loyalty of Columbia Sportswear and the organisational commitment expressed by its employees were found to be high. This means that the company's representation of its identity and culture aligns with its employees' perception of the company as an employer. Furthermore, this means that the company's employer branding contributes positively to retaining employees, as these support the company's communicated values and are positive towards the internal environment.

6.3.2.4 Sub conclusion

In the examination of the company's internal employer branding, it was found that the company's communication and the employees reflected a collective understanding of the company's employer brand and the values represented by the company in most areas.

This was evident in the fact that the employees expressed recognition and approval of the company's values. Furthermore, it was discovered that the company's focus on the outdoor community had contributed positively to establishing a preferred employer brand. This means that both the identity of the company and its internal culture contribute to establishing employer brand loyalty through organisational commitment. This means that the company is successfully using its employer branding to retain employees, as these express positive views on the company's community, coworkers, and an overall perception of Columbia Sportswear being a great company and employer. In this relation, it was also found that the company's efforts to establish an employer brand that incorporates sustainable and ethical values did not succeed. The employees only expressed themselves regarding the company's great community but not its efforts in preserving the outdoors and ethical practices in its production.

However, shortfalls in the company's internal employer branding were also present, including a negative perception of the management and a lack of internal diversity. With that said, opposing views on these areas were also found, indicating that these views are not shared by all employees.

7. Discussion on the role of CSR

The abovementioned section concerned the overall employer brand of Columbia Sportswear, the most important focusses in the company's employer branding communication, and its employees' perception of its employer brand. Therefore, a discussion will now be conducted to debate the role of CSR in Columbia Sportswear's employer branding, the effects of including CSR-related topics, and the degree to which the company's employees express themselves on the subject. This will make way for an evaluation of how CSR influences attraction and retention of employees.

Firstly, it was found that the company was highly invested in communicating its CSR policies and initiatives and expressed values of environmental concern, ethical production, manufacturing, and diversity and inclusion. This strategy has influenced the company's external employer brand, as the abovementioned elements have been found to affect employer attraction from the perspective of potential employees. It is so, as the employer brand associations of the company were found to present a company that is highly invested in delivering products that are made of sustainable

materials from ethical productions. In addition, the company emphasises ethical aspects in its supply chain and manufacturing, which also presents its products as ethical.

Despite these efforts, the company's employees did not highlight product-related attributes or non-product-related attributes related to sustainability or ethics, which reveals that in spite of Columbia Sportswear using its CSR initiatives concerning its products in its employer branding, these have not had a visible influence on the attraction of the current employees. Therefore, based on this statement, product-related CSR initiatives were not found to influence the attraction of new employees.

In relation to benefits, the company emphasised the ethical aspect of wellbeing and health in its employer branding in contrast to sustainable aspects, which the company did not point out in this area. This is also reflected in the employer reviews, which, however, were mostly found to highlight financial and development benefits.

Regarding symbolic benefits, the company highlighted the possibility of doing volunteer work and mainly focused on caring for the outdoor community, which both display ethical dimensions. This was also highlighted by the company's employees, who were found to highlight the company's community numerous times. Therefore, the company's focus on its community, and not only its business, positively affect the attraction and retention of employees, as the current employees emphasise this aspect. However, sustainable aspects were not highlighted by the company nor its employees in this relation, indicating that these values are not a focus for the company in relation to employees as much as they may be towards consumers.

In relation to retention and employer brand loyalty, CSR has also been found to be used by the company in its communication of its culture and identity. In addition, CSR has been mentioned by its employees, however, both positives and negatives have been found concerning the internal perception of the company.

It was found that the company included several values related to CSR on its values and mission page, from which it was argued that the company is incorporating CSR into its identity. This is both in relation to its practices, its commitment to its community, and its devotion to protecting the

outdoors. This means that environmental and ethical values are incorporated into its identity in its employer branding. However, the presence of ethical values in contrast to sustainable values in the employee reviews suggests that CSR is mainly relevant to mention if the initiatives affect the employees directly.

Regarding its employees, CSR was explicitly and implicitly mentioned in the reviews, which points out its importance in establishing a strong identity and retaining employees. Among others, various employees connected the company to social responsibility, signalling the influence CSR can have in relation to satisfying employees and decreasing turnover intention. Furthermore, several employees expressed themselves positively towards the values and mission of the company and that its actions represented these values. This point stresses the importance of not presenting an ideal employer brand but a genuine employer brand, as inconsistency in what it communicates and what it does most likely would have had negative consequences regarding the employees' perception of the company. Therefore, there is evidence that including CSR into a company's identity, especially in relation to ethical aspects, affects employees positively.

In connection to the company's culture, several findings have been made on CSR and its effect on employees. Firstly, the company was found to be communicating a culture that promoted environmental responsibility and a desire to contribute positively to the outdoors. With that said, ethics were found to be more important to the company in the communication of its culture. This aligns with the fact that the employees were not found to be connecting the company culture with sustainability but with ethics as well.

More specifically, the company was found to be highly invested in communicating values of inclusion and diversity regarding gender equality and racism. The company expressed itself heavily on its work on gender equality regarding female empowerment and women's development opportunities. In addition, the company was found to take an activist approach to racism, in which it expressed political viewpoints and anti-racism policies. These initiatives can be seen as a way of displaying a safe and non-discriminatory work environment, which presents the culture as positive, giving employees a reason to remain at a company with a progressive culture in which they are treated equally.

In relation to inclusion and diversity, however, several employees expressed conflicting opinions, which emphasised the importance of these areas in corporate culture, being highlighted many times in the employer reviews. To elaborate, some employees regarded the company as inclusive and with a diverse work environment. This is an important finding to highlight, as it speaks to the credibility of the company's communicated values. Regardless, some employees also expressed that they did not experience this to be accurate, as they perceived the company as male-dominated and lacking diversity. As it is crucial to establish a culture internally that aligns with the expectations of a company's employees, inclusion and diversity are therefore highly relevant areas to engage in concerning the ability to retain employees and establish a preferred culture.

In sum, the company expressed sustainable values various times regarding its products in its employer branding, which may indirectly influence the positive mentioning of the company in the reviews. Subsequently, the company emphasised various ethical initiatives in its communication, which mainly centred around its communities. As this area was also pointed out by its employees, the ethical initiatives have positively impacted the attractiveness of the company as it is important to both the company and its employees, unlike its sustainable efforts, which were highlighted many times by the company but not by its employees.

In relation to the internal role of CSR, the company's efforts were found to influence its ability to retain employees by expressing values related to CSR. Moreover, the company was found to link its identity and culture with CSR heavily. This was reflected in the reviews by employees presenting the company as responsible and supporting its values, in which it has incorporated CSR. Moreover, the ethical aspect of CSR was found to be essential in relation to the company's culture, as several employees highlighted it as an ethical company, being inclusive, and having a diverse work environment. However, some employees were not satisfied with the level of diversity at the company or its gender equality, supporting the argument for improvement in the area.

8. Conclusion

In this section, the link between CSR, attraction, and retention will be established. Additionally, the essential values to the employees at Columbia Sportswear will be highlighted, which will aid in evaluating the importance of CSR in the company's employer branding. More specifically, the problem statement and its underlying research questions will now be answered as follows:

How does Columbia Sportswear's integration of CSR in its employer branding influence attraction and retention of employees based on employee reviews of the company on Glassdoor?

Aforementioned in section 1.1, the following research questions have been proposed to offer a valid and comprehensive answer to the above problem statement:

- How much does Columbia Sportswear focus on CSR in its employer branding?
- How dominating is CSR in the employee reviews of Columbia Sportswear as an employer?

Concerning the first research question, it was found in the first- and second cycle coding that the company is integrating CSR on all the examined pages in the information about the company on its website. Therefore, the company is strategically communicating values related to sustainability and ethics to attract and retain employees by focusing on these values externally and internally. This is concluded as the company not only integrates these values in relation to its products, manufacturing, and values but also in its communication targeted employees and internal operations. Moreover, the representativeness of CSR codes in the company's communication is regarded as an expression of the company's wishes to be associated with responsible practices and ethical business conduct. This concerns the products, materials, and manufacturing of its products and the values of the company and its efforts within CSR conducted in its business operations. Furthermore, the company particularly highlights ethical values in its internal communication, presenting the internal work environment as inclusive, diverse, and caring of its employees.

In relation to the second research question, CSR was mainly implicitly communicated by the company's employees. An example hereof might be the creation of the pattern 'Positive regarding values and mission'. As the company itself has integrated CSR values into its corporate values, CSR has been argued to be an influential factor in the creation of the aforementioned pattern. An

explicit example is, e.g., the code 'Ethical employer' or 'Responsible Company', which are centred around CSR. Furthermore, the employees were not found to express values explicitly in relation to the environment or sustainability but expressed themselves explicitly on the company's ethical responsibilities in relation to inclusion and diversity. In this connection, the opposing 'Positive towards Columbia Sportswear's social responsibility' and 'Negative towards Columbia Sportswear's social responsibility' were found, which both centred around the company's efforts in relation to inclusion and diversity. Therefore, ethical values are the most essential to employees within the field of CSR, whilst sustainability does not play an important part to employees internally.

With that said, the most recurrent values highlighted by the employees concern the company's internal environment, focusing on management, coworkers, and the company as an employer in general. In addition, the company's community was found to be represented heavily in the reviews. Therefore, it can be concluded that the social aspects of being an employee at the company are of greater importance than the company's CSR in attracting and retaining employees, despite the company's dominating focus on CSR in its communication. This is also the case with employee benefits, which were represented to a much higher degree than CSR in the reviews, both positively and negatively, from which it was found that good benefits are more important than responsible practices to the employees at the company.

Based on the findings related to the two research questions, it can be concluded that CSR has considerably influenced the company's external employer branding in its efforts to attract employees. However, the employees were not found to be as devoted to CSR as the company itself. With that said, most of the employees' expressed fondness for the company in general, its values, and its responsible practices, indicating that CSR influences employee retention as it affects the work policies and environment at the company. This means that the company's devotion to implementing responsible initiatives and engaging in its internal corporate responsibilities have affected attraction as the employees are presenting the company as an ethical employer. Moreover, this engagement has also influenced retention positively, as the employees mention CSR in relation to their satisfaction with the company as an employer and its internal environment. Therefore, it can be concluded that companies benefit from working with CSR in regard to its employees and not only in relation to societal and consumer demands on its responsibilities concerning the

environment, as the thesis has provided empirical evidence of the importance of being regarded as an ethical company.

From this study, the influence of CSR on employee attraction and retention has been established. It was found that companies do not only benefit nor should focus on CSR initiatives with an external focus but also benefit by focusing on how they can implement CSR internally. Moreover, the importance of not only satisfying consumers but employees has been brought to light in relation to CSR. Therefore, the findings of this thesis support the agenda of investing in CSR supported by beneficial arguments related to the internal attractiveness of companies. This is important to be aware of in relation to the competitiveness of companies, as the utilisation of CSR in attraction and retention of talent and employees, in general, is supported by these findings. Hence, companies that succeed in engaging potential and current employees in relation to their CSR initiatives will be regarded as more attractive and, to a higher degree, succeed in retaining workforce.

As this study has found a connection between CSR, attraction, and retention, the importance of further contribution to the research that CSR has on workforce is pointed out. As the empirical data has been gathered independently from the company and its employees, it is therefore encouraged that a further study might involve these parties actively. This will provide researchers with internal knowledge specifically concerning CSR, which will assist in exploring the aspects of CSR most important to companies as well as employees. This kind of study might be conducted through semi-structured or focus group interviews, allowing companies and employees to address and discuss their thoughts on CSR in-depth. In doing so, this type of study would be narrow in focus by revolving around how CSR and not, e.g., benefits or management, influences employer branding and be able to discuss how companies best utilise CSR in their employer branding in accordance with the priorities of their employees.

Likewise, a study including job seekers or pending applicants might be interesting to conduct, as this would provide an external perspective on company CSR from a professional viewpoint. In addition, this would make it possible to consider the thoughts of both potential as well as current employees on CSR to find out whether a shift in priorities or values occurs after employment is in effect.

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