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Editorial Note:

This latest issue of the Journal of Contemporary Society Education (JCSE) arrives at a moment when the boundaries between the academic, the social, and the urgently practical have never been more porous. A glance at the twenty-one articles in this forthcoming collection reveals a publication that understands its mandate: to serve not merely as a repository of scholarship, but as a sharp, coherent lens through which to examine the pressing complexities of contemporary society, with a firm grounding in education as a transformative force.

What distinguishes this issue is its refusal to settle for disciplinary comfort. The contributions, drawn from institutions across Africa, demonstrate a welcome intellectual restlessness. We see scholars interrogating the intimate, such as Mudau et al.'s exploration of language as a source of family conflict within Vhavenda families alongside those grappling with structural questions, such as Sikwela and Diedericks' critical look at performance management as "a mirror of inertia" in public administration. This range is not a sign of incoherence; it is a testament to the journal's understanding that societal education occurs in classrooms, in homes, in municipal water governance (as Zulu and Nojiyeza's work on Zululand shows), and in the very language we use to communicate.

Several pieces stand out for their conceptual bravery. Maungedzo's reframing of academic literacy through sociocultural theory for rural teacher development tackles a perennial challenge with fresh theoretical rigour. Similarly, Lubombo and Zethi's work on "linguistic justice" and the Disciplinary Literacies framework asks a question that South African higher education can no longer afford to postpone: how do we re-imagine instructional communication not as a barrier, but as an equitable foundation? These are not abstract debates; they are core pedagogical interventions.

The journal also demonstrates a commendable commitment to surfacing marginalised voices and experiences. Nkumane's exploration of intersectionality and the lived experiences of Black women scholars at UNISA, and Sibango's ethnographic look at how belonging is negotiated in Anthropology departments, remind us that the university itself is a site of intense social contestation. When Lekoa and Nojiyeza connect off-campus housing to "ecologies of distress" affecting student mental health, they do what good contemporary scholarship must: they trace the material conditions of life directly into the outcomes of education.

If there is a through-line to this collection, it is the insistence that no social phenomenon, whether climate governance under the AU (Yemisi and Ani), the antinomies of decolonisation in literature (Moopi), or the gendered nexus of marital status and poverty (Dunga), exists outside the purview of rigorous inquiry. The JCSE is building a platform where scholars can hold those complex phenomena up to the light.

This volume does not offer easy answers. It offers something more valuable: a coherent, sharply focused set of questions, pursued with methodological care and regional relevance. For a journal of contemporary society and education, that is precisely the work that matters.

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EMPLOYEE RETENTION AND TALENT MANAGEMENT IN THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR. DOES EMPLOYER BRANDING MATTER?

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Abstract

This purpose of this study is to examine the mediating role of employer branding in the relationship between talent management and employee retention within Zimbabwe's hospitality sector. Using a quantitative approach, data was collected from 200 employees across various levels to assess the impact of employer branding on retention outcomes. Positivism and cross-sectional survey research design were employed as the research paradigm and design respectively. This study utilized the stratified random sampling technique to ensure that all relevant employee groups are adequately represented. Data was collected by the aid of the questionnaire. The results revealed that employer branding significantly enhances employee retention by increasing job satisfaction, organizational commitment and engagement. Notably, effective talent management can enhance the employer brand. The research also found that employer branding effectively mediates the link between talent management practices like training and career development, and employee retention. The findings highlight the importance for the management of Rainbow Tourism Group (RTG) and Cresta Hotels to embed employer branding within their talent management frameworks. Practical recommendations include fostering an appealing work culture and ensuring clear career development pathways, which can improve retention and address the high turnover rates common in Zimbabwe's hospitality industry. This study contributes practical strategies which the managers can employ in

enhancing employee retention. It also offers a model which can be implemented for retaining top talent in emerging markets by leaders of hospitality firms. Policy recommendations entail developing a strong employer brand that showcases the firms' values, culture and opportunities for growth. The government can also come up with a policy that encourages public-private partnerships to promote employer branding and talent attraction.

Keywords: *Employer branding; Talent management; Employee retention; Employee performance; Zimbabwean Hospitality sector,*

Introduction

This study sought to assess the mediating role of employer branding on the nexus between talent management and employee retention within Zimbabwe's hospitality sector, focusing on Rainbow Tourism Group (RTG) and Cresta Hotels. In today's competitive global economy, the hospitality sector struggles with incidences of high employee turnover as the firms fail to retain top talent. The high intention to quit is largely driven by unpleasant working conditions and low salaries (Baum et al., 2020). This turnover disrupts operations and racks up recruitment and training costs. Consequently, effective talent management has become a strategic imperative for organizations aiming to sustain a competitive advantage in this volatile environment. Talent management involves a series of activities designed to attract, develop (Collings et al., 2019), and retain employees whose skills and competencies are critical to the organization's success.

Effective talent management is linked to improved organizational performance, innovation, and sustainability (Bharadwaj & Yameen, 2021). Employee retention, a crucial outcome of talent management, ensures

organizational stability and continuity, which is particularly important in sectors with high employee turnover, such as the hospitality industry (Deery & Jago, 2020). Keeping skilled staff is key to maintaining service quality and customer satisfaction which is vital for hospitality firms to thrive.

Employer branding involves creating and promoting a unique image of the organisation as a top workplace bent on attracting and keeping top talent (Tanwar & Prasad, 2019). A strong employer brand can significantly differentiate an organization from its competitors, making it more appealing to potential employees and fostering loyalty among existing staff. This strategic approach can enhance the organization's reputation, leading to higher job satisfaction, employee engagement, and organizational commitment, thus decreasing the likelihood of employee turnover (Lievens & Slaughter, 2021).

In the context of Zimbabwe, where the hospitality sector plays a crucial role in economic development, these issues are particularly pronounced. RTG and Cresta Hotels, as major players in this sector, face unique challenges due to the country's economic instability and political uncertainties (Muzondo & Runyowa, 2022). These factors

exacerbate the difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled employees, making effective talent management and robust employer branding even more critical.

In Zimbabwe, hospitality is a key economic player, boosting employment and gross domestic product (GDP) (Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, 2020), but struggles with economic instability, resource limits and high staff turnover (Mupani & Chipunza, 2019). Rainbow Tourism Group (RTG) and Cresta Hotels, though they are leading players in this sector, strive to overcome these challenges through strategic talent management and employer branding initiatives. These organizations aim to create a compelling employer brand to attract and retain skilled employees, thereby ensuring high-quality service delivery and competitive advantage. Therefore, the aging workforce and shrinking youth labor market force employers to rethink their human resource policies and craft new strategies for managing older workers. Employer branding is not merely a façade (Ahmed et al., 2022), it constitutes the essence of an organization's identity as an employer. It encompasses the unique value proposition that an organization offers to its employees and reflects the overall employee experience.

In the hospitality sector, where personal interactions are fundamental, employer branding plays a transformative role (Sharma et al., 2024). For RTG and Cresta Hotels, a strong employer brand that can be cultivated through establishing a clear set of company values that resonate with the workforce is crucial. For instance, if sustainability

and community engagement are values that firms in the hospitality industry emphasise, they can attract like-minded individuals who are passionate about these causes. Developing a compelling Employee Value Proposition (EVP) highlights the unique benefits that RTG and Cresta offer, such as career development opportunities (Pakhare et al., 2023), competitive pay, work-life balance, and a positive working environment. Such strategies can enhance the overall perception of the brand and draw in top talent.

A clear employer brand should permeate recruitment efforts, ensuring that potential hires align with the firm's culture and values. Using targeted recruitment campaigns that attract the "right fit" employees can streamline the on boarding process and enhance retention rates. Secondly, offering clear career development paths can aid in employee retention by providing opportunities for advancement (Bharadwaj & Yameen, 2021). Both RTG and Cresta Hotels can create tailored development plans that match individual goals with company needs, thereby being in a position to promote a culture of growth and ambition.

It is of essence to note that service delivery in the Zimbabwean hospitality industry has been severely affected by high labour turnover which ultimately leads to operational inconsistency (Wang et al., 2021). Effective staff retention strategies are essential for the hospitality sector. A structured on boarding process can significantly reduce early turnover. Firms in the hospitality industry can foster a feeling of belonging from employees by

embracing a culture of employer branding.

Fundamentally, offering ongoing training and development programs helps employees feel invested in their careers (Mustafa & Lleshi, 2024). RTG and Cresta hotels can implement mentorship programs, skill development opportunities and career advancement paths that motivate employees and reduce turnover. Regular feedback mechanisms, such as surveys and one-on-one check-ins, can foster a culture of communication where employees feel heard (Day et al., 2021). Thus, engaged employees are less likely to leave. Furthermore, integrating team-building activities can also contribute to a cohesive work environment. The retention of top tier talent and workforce development are crucial issues in the hospitality sector, where high turnover rates significantly impact operational efficiency and the quality of the service offered. The Zimbabwean hospitality industry is a key economic sector, yet it faces substantial challenges in maintaining a stable and skilled workforce. According to the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (2020), the hospitality sector's annual employee turnover rate is approximately 35%, which is way higher than the global industry average of 25% (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2020). This high turnover rate exacerbates the difficulties in sustaining service excellence and operational performance.

It is imperative to note that even though these constructs (employee retention, employer branding and talent management) are quite key, there is a lack of comprehensive research examining the interplay of these

variables in the hospitality sector, specifically within the context of Zimbabwe. RTG and Cresta Hotels have been bedevilled by significant challenges related to talent poaching and limited career growth paths. Bharadwaj et al. (2022) aver that understanding how employer branding can mediate the link between employee retention and talent management practices in these organizations is essential for developing effective human resource strategies that boost organizational performance.

This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the mediating role of employer branding on the bond between employee retention and talent management at RTG and Cresta hotels. By providing empirical evidence on this relationship, the study will offer valuable insights into how these hotel chains can leverage employer branding to improve employee retention and optimize talent management practices.

The study is structured as follows: the literature review section reviews relevant literature, followed by hypotheses development which outlines the formulated hypotheses. The methodology used in the study is detailed in the method section. The results section presents the findings, while the discussion section interprets and analyses these results. The conclusions section gives a summary of the entire study. The policy recommendations translate research findings into action. Finally, the study is concluded in the further studies section.

Research objectives

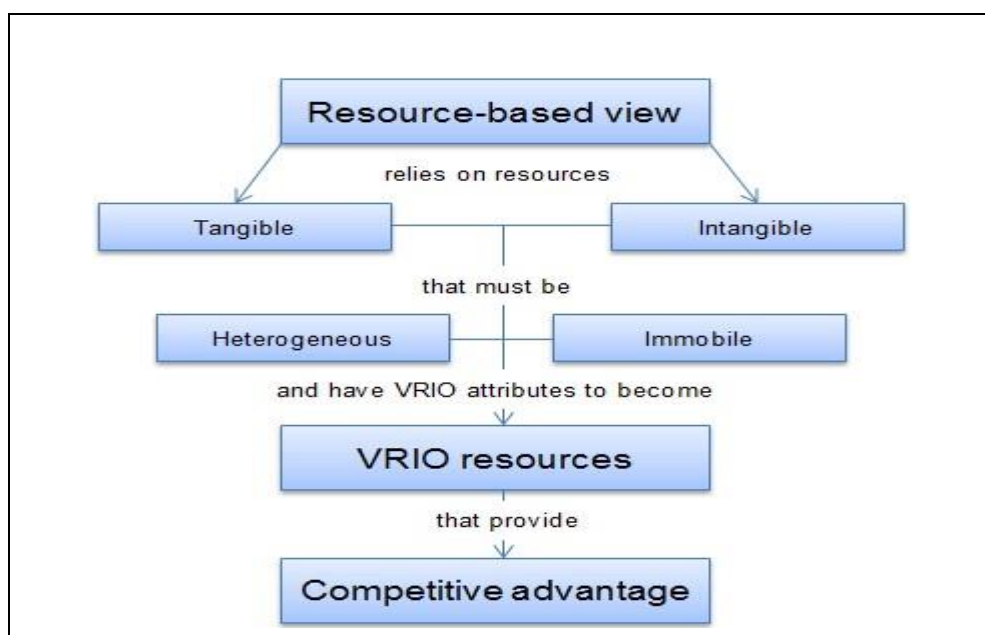
- To discover the nature of the relationship between employer

branding and talent management.

- To assess the relationship between talent management and employee retention.
- To establish the relationship between employer branding and employee retention.
- To examine the mediating role of employer branding on the relationship between talent management and employee retention.

Literature review and Hypothesis development

Figure 1: Resource Based View Theory



Source: Source: Lubis (2022)

The Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm, hinges on an organisation having a competitive advantage which emanates from possessing a unique resource which cannot be copied by a competitor and this resource cannot be a machine but a human being. The key resource should be valuable, rare, inimitable and

Theoretical underpinning of the study

Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory is a framework premised on the notion that for firms to operate head and shoulders above others, they should have a unique resource which is not at the disposal of rival firms. It suggests that a firm's unique resources may act as the organisation's competitive weapon. According to the RBV theory, a firm's resources can be tangible or intangible assets that it possesses, controls, or has access to.

above all non-substitutable (Barney, 1991). The RBV theory, is a strategy which emphasises the significance of continuously upgrading employee skills so that they remain current. Skilled personnel are key organizational resources and act as vital cogs in the attainment of the desired competitive

advantage (Chatterjee et al., 2023). Specialist employees tend to be innovative and competitive and above all they may make better decisions. Human capital, particularly in labour-intensive industries like hospitality, is one such critical resource. In an industry where customer satisfaction and service quality are directly linked to the performance and engagement of employees, retaining skilled talent is essential for maintaining a competitive edge (Thunnissen et al., 2019). In the case of Zimbabwe's hospitality sector, where turnover rates are high and economic instability is prevalent, managing human capital through effective employer branding is vital.

Practical examples from studies such as Mugobo & Mutize (2020) emphasize that organizations like RTG and Cresta Hotels, operating in Zimbabwe, have begun to realize that retaining top performers offer a significant competitive advantage in the hospitality industry. These companies can leverage their employer brand to enhance the perceived value of their workforce, thereby making employees feel more committed and less likely to leave. In a similar context, scholars Deery & Jago (2020) demonstrated how hospitality firms used employer branding as a tool to retain top talent, which in turn improved operational efficiency and customer satisfaction. This application of RBV is crucial for this research, as it highlights the strategic role of human capital and justifies the focus on employer branding as an intangible strategic resource that can provide a competitive advantage in a challenging labour market like Zimbabwe's.

The RBV framework is particularly relevant to this study because it emphasizes the importance of

strategically managing human resources, which aligns with the research's objective of exploring how employer branding can enhance talent management and employee retention. By treating human capital as a valuable resource, Zimbabwean hospitality firms can use employer branding to attract and retain top talent (Sugiarno & Novita, 2022; Nayak et al., 2023), thus gaining a sustainable competitive advantage in an industry where service quality is directly tied to employee performance.

Justification of using the RBV Theory

The application of the RBV theory in this research is justified as it helps to look at employees as vital assets of an organisation (Saks et al., 2022). Thus, this theory hinges on having competent workforce as the basis for competitive advantage (Kruesi & Bazelmans, 2023). By identifying and building upon their strengths, firms in the hospitality sector can create value for customers, differentiate themselves from competitors, and achieve superior performance. In practical terms, the RBV theory guides firms in making strategic decisions such as resource allocation, investment choices and organizational design (Nayak et al., 2023). It encourages firms to invest in resources and capabilities that are rare, valuable and difficult for competitors to imitate. By doing so, firms can develop distinctive competencies that provide a basis for long-term success and competitiveness in the market.

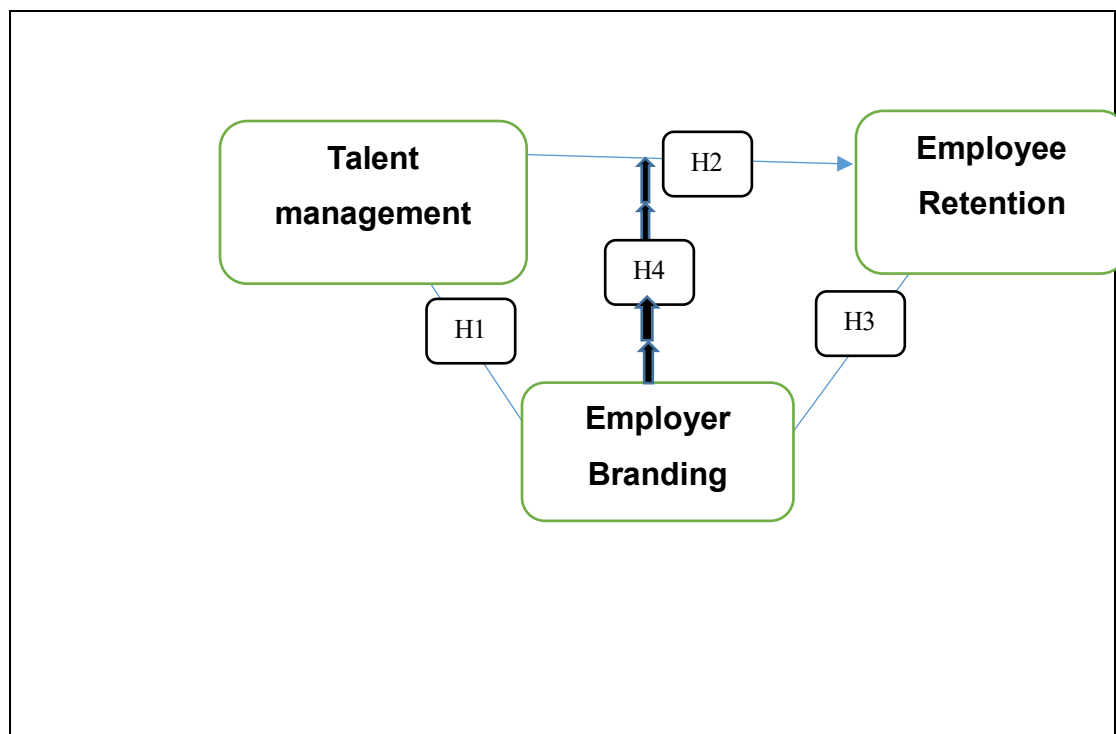
From an RBV perspective, the board's structure and composition are seen as a value-creation source, with human resources driving competitive advantage (Sugiarno & Novita, 2022; Rashid & Islam, 2013). The RBV theory promotes efficient resource allocation

by giving managers and leaders of firms a comprehensive view of the human resource pool, including their current skills, competencies as well as their experience and capacity. This enables informed planning, proper resource allocation, and decision-making, thereby allowing top talent to be leveraged optimally (Mailani et al., 2024; Cuthbertson & Furseth, 2022). The theory helps managers assess their

firm's resource strengths and weaknesses, in an endeavor to drive long-term success and competitive edge. Therefore, the RBV theory assists the managers in the hospitality sector make better strategic decisions. It also aid firms to guard against being complacent as they will be outward looking thereby being adaptability by continuously evaluating resources to match changing market demands.

Conceptualised framework and research hypotheses formulation

Figure 1 Hypothesis Development



Source: Researchers (2025)

Talent Management (TM) vs. Employer Branding (EB)

Talent management and employer branding are intertwined. Effective talent management practices such as recruiting, employee development and retaining top talent to a greater extent

shapes employer brand. On the other hand a strong employer brand, in turn, attracts top talent and boosts staff retention. Thus, it is a cycle, good talent management strengthens the firm's brand, and a strong brand attracts better talent. Conversely, the retention of

skilled employees also drives talent management practices. When retention is prioritized, organizations are more likely to invest in employee development and career growth, both essential aspects of talent management (Schuler & Jackson, 2019). Employees are more likely to stay in organizations that invest in their career trajectories. In the hospitality sector, this creates a positive feedback loop where employees who feel valued and developed through talent management initiatives are more likely to stay, further stabilizing the talent pool (Jiang & Iles, 2021; Gupta & Jain, 2023; Evans & Guzman, 2023).

Moreover, retention-focused talent management allows companies to cultivate a competitive advantage. Scholars (Collins and Smith, 2022) found that companies with high employee retention tend to reinvest in training and development, increasing employee expertise and organizational competitiveness. For Zimbabwe's hospitality sector, this implies that focusing on retention-driven talent management would enhance service quality and long-term organizational success.

Based on the above findings from previous researchers the following hypothesis was developed:

H1: Employer branding is positively associated with talent management.

Talent Management (TM) vs Employee Retention (ER)

Employee retention and managing talent are closely interlinked, as talent management directly impacts a firm's ability to retain its top tier workforce. The pinnacle of talent management is the attraction and retention of skilled personnel, all of which contribute to long-term staff preservation (Schuler & Jackson, 2019). Effective talent management systems that offer clear career paths, professional development opportunities, and performance-based incentives often lead to higher retention rates (Bhatnagar, 2021; Ali & Hafeez, 2021; Evans & Guzman, 2023). In the context of Zimbabwe's hospitality industry, where economic constraints make it challenging to retain skilled labour, talent management strategies play an essential role in maintaining a stable workforce.

Various studies highlight that talent management initiatives directly influence employee retention. For example, Manzoor et al. (2020) argue that well-structured talent management programs reduce turnover by increasing employee engagement and commitment. These findings align with industries that rely heavily on human capital, such as hospitality, where employee turnover can disrupt service quality. Zimbabwe's hospitality firms could benefit by integrating talent management strategies like succession planning, mentorship and skills development to address the sector's retention challenges.

Basing on the assertions above the following hypothesis is assembled:

H2: Talent management has a positive relationship with employee retention.

Employer Branding (EB) vs. Employee Retention (ER)

The relationship between employer branding and employee retention has been widely explored, with many studies underscoring how strong employer branding directly influences an organization's ability to retain employees. According to Tumasjan et al. (2020), employer branding creates an emotional connection between employees and their organizations, promoting loyalty and reducing turnover rates. For Zimbabwe's hospitality industry, which faces high employee turnover due to economic instability, employer branding could be a crucial strategy in improving retention.

Employees are likely to leave organizations that fail to meet the promises made during recruitment, a situation that is not uncommon in sectors like hospitality, where job demands often outweigh the incentives. Bharadwaj & Yameen (2021) affirms that proper employer branding engenders the retention of personnel. The study revealed that inconsistent employer branding exacerbates high labour turnover as employees seek opportunities elsewhere.

Furthermore, employer branding affects retention through its impact on employee identity and organizational commitment. Jain and Bhatt (2020) argue that an organization's brand is strongly associated with employees identify as they feel a sense of belonging

and pride. It is of essence to note that in the hospitality industry, the workforce directly interacts with customers and hence they are the image of the firm.

Based on the given reviewed literature, the following hypotheses is proffered:

H3: Employer branding is positively associated with employee retention.

Employer branding (EB) mediates on the relationship between talent management (TM) and employee retention (ER)

Bharadwaj et al. (2022) in their study entitled "unbundling employer branding, job satisfaction, organizational identification and employee retention: a sequential mediation analysis" found that employer branding and job satisfaction are intricately linked. Employer branding focuses on promoting an organization as an attractive place to work, while talent management revolves around attracting, developing, and retaining key employees. Ahmed et al. (2022) affirms that strong employer brand enhances the effectiveness of talent management by attracting individuals who fit the company culture, ultimately improving retention and development strategies.

Strohmeier & Kabst (2021) affirms that a well-established employer brand can attract talent and align with the company's long-term retention goals, reducing the brain drain to other countries. Moreover, employer branding contributes to employee engagement, a key factor in effective talent management. Jiang and Iles (2021) found that a strong employer brand fosters employee pride and belonging, leading to higher

engagement, which directly supports retention and performance outcomes. In the hospitality industry, where customer service quality is crucial, employee engagement can significantly impact organizational success. However, no specific studies have been conducted on the mediating role of employee branding on the relationship between employee retention and talent management in the hospitality industry.

Basing on the assertions above the following hypothesis is assembled:

H4: Employer branding mediates on the relationship between employee retention and talent management.

Methodology and data

Positivism

This study hinges on positivism research approach. The study aligns with positivism which assumes reality as objective and measurable through a combination of scientific methods and empirical data (Ali, 2024). This paradigm suits the research as it seeks to analyse relationships between the constructs namely employer branding, employee retention and talent management using quantifiable data. The objective nature of positivism allows for hypothesis testing (Wilson, 2020), which is central to understanding the mediating role of employer branding in this relationship. Moreover, positivism emphasizes the use of structured methodologies, which are essential for producing reliable and generalizable findings in this context. The positivist paradigm has been successfully applied in similar studies within the hospitality sector, where objective measurements and hypothesis testing were central to the research. For

instance, a study by Sharma and Dhar (2020) employed a positivist approach to explore the relationship between talent management practices and employee performance in Indian hotels. By adhering to the principles of positivism, the researchers were able to generate findings that were both reliable and generalizable, demonstrating clear patterns in the data regarding the impact of talent management on employee outcomes. This approach allowed the researchers to objectively assess the relationships between variables and provide actionable recommendations for improving HR practices in the hospitality industry. The positivist paradigm was essential in allowing the researchers to apply statistical tests, ensuring the results were based on empirical data and could be generalized to other hotel settings. These examples highlight the suitability of positivism for studying structured relationships in the hospitality industry, as in the current study of the hospitality sector.

Research Approach

Quantitative Approach

The quantitative research approach was employed in this study. It involved the collection of numerical data. Statistical tools were then used to analyse the relationships between the variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The use of this approach is justified because it facilitates the measurement of employer branding, employee retention, and talent management through structured survey instruments, allowing for the generation of data that can be analysed statistically. Additionally, this approach is appropriate for testing the hypotheses related to the mediating effect of employer branding, as it allows for the

establishment of causal relationships through regression analysis. The quantitative research approach was useful in this study which sought to assess the correlation among the constructs (employer branding, employee retention and talent management).

Quantitative methods facilitate structured data collection through surveys, allowing for statistical analysis and hypothesis testing regarding the mediation of employer branding. Similar studies within the hospitality industry have validated the effectiveness of quantitative approaches (Kucherov & Zavyalova, 2021). Quantitative approaches allow researchers to use large sample sizes, ensuring that findings are statistically significant and representative (Kaur & Dubey, 2022). Moreover, this approach enables the examination of mediation effects, using techniques such as regression and path analysis, which are essential for understanding complex relationships between employer branding, talent management, and employee retention (Mihalcea, 2023; Slater & Hasson, 2025). Additionally, a quantitative approach aligns with the study's goal of uncovering general patterns and relationships that can inform broader human resource practices within the hospitality sector in Zimbabwe. By utilizing structured surveys and statistical analysis, this approach supports the rigorous testing of hypotheses regarding how employer branding functions as a mediating variable between talent management and employee retention. This approach thus facilitates a clear, data-driven understanding of the impact of employer branding on critical human

resource outcomes, essential for developing effective talent retention strategies in the competitive and dynamic hospitality industry.

Research design

Cross-sectional survey Design

The research employed a cross-sectional survey design, gathering data from the chosen population at a single point in time. This research design is suitable for analysing the links between factors in a non-experimental setting (Pawliuk et al., 2024). This design allowed the researchers to efficiently gather large amounts of data from employees in the hospitality sector and above all to investigate the proposed mediation model. This research design took a snapshot of the current state of employee retention, talent management, and employer branding practices within these organizations. Cross-sectional survey designs have been effectively used in studies similar to this one, especially in exploring relationships between employer branding (EB), employee retention (ER) as well as talent management (TM). Data was collected from employees ranging from general employees to top managers. The cross-sectional design allowed for efficient data collection and analysis (Roberti et al., 2024; Khalid and Tariq (2020), which revealed that employees' perceptions of strong employer branding were positively correlated with higher retention rates. The study highlighted how this design is particularly useful for understanding current employee attitudes and making real-time strategic adjustments in talent management.

Target population and sample size

The study's target population was the employees working in the hospitality sector in Zimbabwe. The two hotels (RTG and Cresta Hotels) were selected because they are the major players in the local hospitality industry. The focus on these hotels is justified by their substantial workforce, making them ideal for assessing employer branding's mediating role. Employees at various organizational levels, from operational to managerial, formed the target population.

The sample size for this study was determined using Cochran's formula for

sample size calculation in large populations, as this ensures statistical validity and precision (Israel, 2019; Cooper & Schindler, 2020). A sample size of approximately 200 respondents was deemed appropriate, considering the size of the workforce at RTG and Cresta Hotels. This number provided enough data to detect significant relationships between variables and ensure the robustness of the mediation analysis. A sample size of this magnitude was also justifiable due to the anticipated response rate, which allowed for the generalizability of results within the context of the Zimbabwean hospitality sector.

Table 1: Population and sample size

Organisation	Population Size (N)	Proportion (%)	Number of Respondents (n)
RTG Hotels	400	50	100
CRESTA Hotels	400	50	100
Total	800	100	200

Cochran's Formula:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 p(1-p)}{e^2}$$

Where:

- n = Required sample size
- Z = Z - value (1.96 for a 95% confidence level)
- p = Estimated proportion of the population (0.5)
- e = Margin of error (0.05)

The sample size was two hundred (200) participants (100 from RTG Hotels and 100 from Cresta Hotels). This ensured statistical validity and precision as per Cochran's formula. This sample size was deemed adequate to detect significant relationships between

variables such as employer branding (ER), talent management (TM) as well as employee retention (ER). Dividing the sample equally between the two organizations allowed for a balanced representation and comparison between the groups, ensuring generalizable and robust findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Sampling technique

Stratified Random Sampling

Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation of all relevant employee groups. This involves dividing the population into subgroups (strata) based on characteristics like job position (operational, supervisory, and managerial levels), and then

participants are randomly selected from each stratum (Israel, 2019; Wu et al., 2024). This technique's advantage was that it boosted sample precision by ensuring that all important subgroups were included, which is essential for understanding how employer branding affects different levels of the organization. Stratified sampling can be pretty time-consuming, but this is mitigated by the clear structure of the employee hierarchies at RTG and Cresta Hotels.

By employing stratified sampling, the researchers were able to provide actionable insights tailored to different employee groups within the hospitality sector, further supporting the relevance of this technique in the current study. Stratified random sampling is the most appropriate sampling technique for this study, as it ensures comprehensive representation of all relevant employee subgroups within RTG and Cresta Hotels. Given the hierarchical nature of the hospitality sector, where employees hold diverse roles across different levels ranging from operational, supervisory and managerial. This method improves the precision of the sample and ensures that insights derived from the study can be generalized across various strata within the organization (Stratified random sampling has been successfully applied in similar studies within the hospitality sector, demonstrating its effectiveness in capturing diverse perspectives across employee groups (Slater & Hasson, 2025).

Research instruments

Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was the tool used to collect data in the hospitality industry. The questionnaire featured closed-ended Likert scale and

demographic questions to capture the respondents' views quantitatively (Iliyasu & Etikan, 2021). The questionnaire was adapted from validated scales used in previous studies on talent management, employer image (branding), and staff retention to ensure content validity. This structured format was deemed appropriate because it allowed for easy data coding and analysis, while the Likert scale facilitated the measurement of perceptions and attitudes in a consistent manner (Wilson, 2020). Structured questionnaires have been widely used in studies similar to this one, yielding reliable and valid data. For instance, a study by Tanwar and Prasad (2020) in the hospitality industry employed a structured questionnaire to assess the impact of employer branding on employee retention. The researchers used a Likert scale to capture employees' perceptions of branding and retention factors. The use of a validated scale helped ensure consistency and comparability of results across participants. The structured format of the questionnaire facilitated efficient data analysis, allowing the researchers to quantify employee attitudes and behaviours.

Structure of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire for this study was structured into four key sections, each designed to capture specific data relevant to the research objectives. These sections include demographic information, employer branding, employee retention and talent management. The use of a structured format, primarily employing closed-ended questions and a 5-point Likert scale, ensured consistency in responses and facilitates ease of data analysis. This structure was well-suited for collecting

quantitative data on employees' perceptions and experiences in the hospitality sector.

Section A: Demographic Data:

This section gathered standard demographic data to profile respondents, asking for age, gender, job position (operational, supervisory, or managerial), and years of experience at RTG or Cresta Hotels. This data was essential for analysing how demographic factors influence employee perceptions of employer branding, staff retention and managing talent.

Section B: Employer Branding:

This section measured employer branding using a modified version of the employer branding scale developed by Tanwar and Prasad (2019). Their scale assesses the factors that enhance employer attractiveness, including corporate reputation, work environment, and organizational culture. This study adapted 10 items from the original scale, focusing on aspects such as organizational reputation and employer attractiveness. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." For instance, participants rated statements like, "I believe the organization provides a positive working environment." The scale has been validated in several studies and has consistently shown high reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.89.

Section C: Employee Retention:

This section assessed employee retention using a modified version of the retention scale originally developed by Yamamoto (2011). The scale had 40

items which were validated to measure employee retention. In this study, 12 items were selected from the original scale, such as "I see myself working in this company for the next three years" and "I am satisfied with the career development opportunities provided." Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale has been validated in recent studies, showing internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91.

Section D: Talent Management:

The section measured talent management using a scale developed by Jayaraman et al. (2018). This scale was designed to measure the effectiveness of talent management strategies in areas such as training and development, succession planning, and performance management. Nine items were adapted for this study, focusing on questions like, "The organization provides sufficient opportunities for professional growth." The internal consistency of the scale in previous studies was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87.

Results and discussion

The results section discusses the descriptive statistics of respondents, the measures for scale accuracy and the results of the hypothesis tests.

Reliability analysis

Both SPSS 29.0 and SmartPLS 4.0 were utilized to evaluate the proposed hypotheses and ensure reliability. Internal consistency reliability was examined using Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR), while Convergent validity was evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and factor or outer loadings.

Table 2 presents an executive summary of the results.

Table 2: Reliability results

Variables	CA	CR	AVE
EB	0.830	0.930	0.951
TM	0.896	0.955	0.996
ER	0.926	0.874	0.837

Table 2 shows the study's constructs have strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR) values above 0.70 (CA: 0.830 - 0.926, CR: 0.874 - 0.955).

Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.5 confirm measurement reliability. The Fornell-Larcker criterion confirmed discriminant validity, with results in Table 3.

Table 3: Fornell-Larcker criterion results

	EB	TM	ER
EB	0.975		
TM	0.276	0.998	
ER	0.643	0.269	0.915

Note: The number in bold is the square root of AVE.

The data in Table 3 provide compelling evidence supporting discriminant validity, affirming the distinctiveness of the measurement model used in this study. Notably, the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each factor exceeds the correlation coefficients between factors, emphasizing the unique nature of the

measurement constructs. This implies that these constructs do not measure the same underlying phenomenon. Furthermore, the study fortified the evidence for discriminant validity by applying the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) technique, with detailed results in Table 4.

Table 4: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) discriminant validity results

	EB	TM	ER
EB			
TM	0.862		
ER	0.822	0.837	

The HTMT analysis shows ratios are below 0.9, indicating strong discriminant validity and confirming the measurement model's reliability. This means the constructs capture distinct aspects without overlap.

Goodness of fit

Before proceeding with hypothesis testing, this study assessed the model's adequacy by examining various model

fit indices. R2 and Q2, as advised by Briones-Penalver et al. (2018), are particularly important in evaluating the model's quality, with values greater than zero being recommended. Table 6 presents a comprehensive overview of several goodness-of-fit results, incorporating diverse model fit indices, including the Normed Fit Index (NFI) and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR).

Table 6: Goodness of fit results

Latent variable	R2	Q ²	SRMR	NFI
EB	0.992	0.744	0.077	0.905
ER	0.982	0.716		
TM	0.982	0.723		

Table 6 establishes the predictive relevance of the proposed path model for each dependent construct by presenting the outcomes of goodness-of-fit assessments. The model is supported by R2 and Q2 values surpassing zero, demonstrating good quality, following Briones-Penalver et al.'s (2018) recommendation. The model's robustness is supported by an SRMR value of 0.077 (below 0.08) and an NFI value of 0.905 (above 0.90), indicating a good fit and strong alignment with the data. This suggests the model captures the interrelationships among the study's variables.

Structural model

For the data analysis, the study used the SmartPLS software and employed the partial least squares (PLS) approach to

scrutinize the hypotheses proposed. The investigation aimed to test the following hypotheses:

H₁: Employer Branding (EB) is positively associated with Talent Management (TM).

H₂: Talent Management (TM) has a positive relationship with Employee Retention (ER)

H₃: Employer Branding (EB) is positively associated with Employee Retention (ER).

H₄: The mediating role of Employer Branding (EB) mediates on the relationship between Talent Management (TM) and Employee Retention (ER)

The stated hypotheses are analyzed, and Table 7 presents the PLS results from the SEM analysis.

Table 7: SEM path coefficients.

Hypothesis	Relationship	Coefficient	T statistic	P-values	Decision
H1	EB -> TM	0.513	8.010	<0.001	Supported
H2	TM -> ER	0.194	2.249	0.025	Supported
H3	EB -> ER	0.407	2.266	0.024	Supported
Mediating effect					
H4	EB -> TM -> ER	0.004	2.403	0.017	Supported

The outcomes observed among employees in the hospitality industry of Zimbabwe, as detailed in Table 7, reveal noteworthy insights into the study's structural model. Specifically, Employer Branding (EB) exhibits a significant positive effect on Talent Management (TM). ($\beta = 0.513$, $p < 0.001$), underscoring its influential role. The robust positive effect of ER on TM underscores the pivotal role of positioning the organisation as a desirable place to work among hospitality sector workers. Employee value proposition (EVP) enhances talent management there by bolstering organizational commitment. Additionally, Talent Management (TM) significantly positively impacts Employee Retention (ER) ($\beta = 0.194$, $p = 0.025$), highlighting its contribution to organisational citizenship behaviour. The positive influence of TM on ER suggests that fostering human resource development can positively contribute to improved staff retention among hospitality employees. Initiatives such as developing a talent management framework promotes job satisfaction and engagement thereby enhancing overall work outcomes. Furthermore, it is also essential to note that Employer Branding (EB) shows a significant and positive impact on Employee Retention (ER) ($\beta = 0.407$, $p = 0.024$). Thus, employee branding leads to employee turnover reduction as employees

become ambassadors of the organisations they work for. The findings robustly support H1, H2 and H3 confirming their statistical significance at the 5% level.

Regarding mediation, the findings suggest that employer branding significantly mediates the relationship between talent management and employee retention ($\beta = 0.004$, $p = 0.017$). A strong employer brand can attract top talent, as job seekers are drawn to organisations with a positive reputation.

Discussion of results.

Employee Branding (EB) and Talent Management (TM)

The hypothesis (H1) which states that Employee Branding (ER) positively impacts Talent Management (TM) was accepted ($\beta = 0.513$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, the outcomes observed among hospitality workers, as detailed in Table 7, reveal noteworthy insights into the study's structural model. The findings emphasize the interplay between employer branding and talent management in influencing employee retention, which is well-supported by recent studies (Albrecht et al., 2022; Kumar and Singh, 2023). As the hospitality sector faces intense competition for talent, organizations like RTG and Cresta Hotels find value

in strengthening their employer brand and refining their talent management practices. According to Kumar and Rout (2023), employer branding in the hospitality industry has grown critical not only for attracting skilled employees but also for retaining them, as employees are increasingly attracted to organizations where the brand reflects an alignment with their own values and career aspirations. This alignment builds a foundation of trust and mutual purpose, which has a direct impact on retention. Thus, the positive reception of employer branding efforts at RTG and Cresta Hotels aligns with this industry trend, suggesting that a robust employer brand acts as a retention tool by fostering a shared sense of organizational pride and identity.

The results are also consistent with Mazzetti & Schaufeli (2022) who reiterate that job engagement has a positive impact on organizational engagement and that the two concepts are intertwined. It is of paramount significance to note that employees who are more engaged with their organization put extra effort into their work. By fostering job engagement, organizations can create a motivated, satisfied and committed workforce, leading to higher organizational engagement. Engaged employees are more likely to be aligned with the organization's goals (Saks et al., 2022; Albrecht et al., 2022; Noercahyo et al., 2022) and hence put extra effort into their work. The strong effect of EB on TM highlights employer branding's role in attracting and retaining top hospitality talent.

Talent Management (TM) and Employee Retention (ER).

The hypothesis (H2) which states that Talent Management (TM) significantly positively impacts Employee Retention (ER) was accepted. TM significantly positively impacts ER ($\beta = 0.194$, $p = 0.025$), highlighting its contribution to organisational citizenship behaviour. Thus, employees who perceive strong talent management practices are more likely to stay with the organization (Kumar and Rout, 2023; Shabeer & Mahmood, 2025). Fundamentally, investment in training and clear opportunities for growth are critical factors influencing retention. The findings suggest that employer branding and talent management are closely intertwined and both significantly influence employee retention. Organizations in the hospitality sector, such as RTG and Cresta Hotels, benefit from investing in their employer brands and talent management strategies, as these factors create a strong foundation for long-term employee loyalty.

Moreover, studies by Malik and Asad (2021) highlight that when talent management strategies are well-defined, retention improves, as employees perceive a more structured and promising path for professional development. This perspective is echoed in the present findings, where structured talent management practices correlate positively with retention. Talent management elements such as training, mentorship and skill development initiatives not only engage employees but also enhance their commitment to the organization (Chopra et al., 2024). Notably, RTG and Cresta Hotels, by investing in these

areas, can create a more engaged workforce that sees the potential for growth and advancement, which is essential for retention in an industry with traditionally high turnover rates.

The findings also suggest that career advancement remains an area with opportunities for improvement, aligning with recent insights from McCarthy et al. (2022), who noted that one of the top reasons for employee turnover in the hospitality industry is a lack of clear career progression. In their study, Lee et al., 2022 found that when employees have transparent promotion paths, their commitment levels increase, as they see the possibility of long-term growth within the organization. Therefore, while RTG and Cresta Hotels have strong foundations in talent management and branding, refining these career pathways could further strengthen retention by providing employees with concrete reasons to envision a future within the organization. Employees who perceive limited growth options may view their positions as temporary, despite positive experiences with employer branding and development opportunities.

Employer Branding (EB) and Employee Retention (ER)

The hypothesis (H3) which states that Employer Branding (EB) positively affects Employee Retention (ER) has been accepted at 95% significant confidence level. It is essential to note that ER shows a significant positive impact on ER ($\beta = 0.407$, $p = 0.024$), indicating that employer branding plays a key role in staff retention. Employees who perceive their organization as a great place to work and who see a strong alignment between branding and

internal culture are more likely to remain with the company.

It is critical to note that employees who view their company as a desirable place to work and experience alignment between the external brand and internal culture are more likely to stay. Malik and Atif (2021) highlight that employees are more likely to remain with organizations that invest in strong employer branding because it enhances their sense of belonging and organizational pride, which are essential for long-term commitment.

Additionally, Phillips and Lee (2022) found that a well-integrated employer brand where employees feel the internal culture aligns with external branding positively impacts retention rates, as alignment reduces role ambiguity and fosters a supportive work environment. This resonates with the current findings, as employees at RTG and Cresta Hotels report a stronger inclination to stay when branding and culture align. Furthermore, Wang et al. (2023) confirm that employer branding efforts that align internal and external messaging are particularly effective in reducing turnover intentions, as employees feel a stronger connection to the company's mission and values.

The mediating role of Employee Branding (EB) on the relationship between Talent Management (TM) and Employee Retention

The hypothesis (H4) which states that Employer Branding (EB), Talent Management (TM) and Employee Retention (ER) was also accepted ($\beta = 0.004$; $t = 2.403$; $p = 0.017$). The results suggests that employer branding fully mediates the relationship between talent

management and employee retention. Organizations that manage talent effectively and have strong employer branding are more likely to retain employees. This reinforces the central premise of the study that branding not only attracts talent but also strengthens retention through better alignment with internal talent management practices. Furthermore, Albrecht et al. (2022) highlight that employer branding and talent management work synergistically to enhance retention, as a strong employer brand reinforces an organization's commitment to employee development. This synergy is particularly impactful in the hospitality sector, where employee perception of brand strength often influences their long-term engagement. The findings support this, demonstrating that investment in both areas positively impacts employees' decision to remain with the company.

Gupta and Jain (2023) found that while general development initiatives are beneficial, clear career advancement paths are essential to retaining high-potential employees, especially in competitive sectors. This suggests that RTG and Cresta Hotels could further strengthen retention by refining growth pathways, ensuring that employees see clear opportunities for upward mobility within the organization. Therefore, organizations with robust talent management practices and strong employer branding see higher retention rates, as branding enhances employee perceptions of stability and growth within the organization. According to Hashim and Tan (2021), employer branding enhances the retention effects of talent management by fostering a culture that aligns employees'

perceptions of the company with their personal and career development needs, thereby reinforcing commitment to the organization.

Furthermore, Patel and Jackson (2022) found that employer branding not only attracts talent but also strengthens retention by providing a sense of consistency and authenticity between external brand promises and internal practices. This supports the hypothesis that branding plays a critical mediating role, as employees who see alignment between talent development initiatives and employer branding are more likely to experience higher job satisfaction and remain with the organization. Kumar and Singh (2023) also emphasize that employer branding, when effectively aligned with internal talent management practices, can serve as a powerful tool in reducing turnover, as it integrates employees' developmental goals with organizational culture. This directly supports the central premise of the study, affirming that employer branding enhances retention by aligning talent management with a clear and attractive organizational image.

Conclusions

The study concludes that employer branding positively influences employee retention, with employees at RTG and Cresta Hotels more likely to stay when perceiving a strong, supportive brand. It is noteworthy that reputable brands foster employee pride and reduce turnover intentions, which is crucial in hospitality where retention impacts service quality. Moreover, the study finds that structured talent management practices, including career development and training, correlate with higher retention, as employees are

inclined to stay when they feel their growth is supported.

Additionally, the study establishes a link between employer branding and talent management, where investments in development enhance RTG and Cresta's reputations as desirable employers. This connection is critical in competitive sectors like hospitality, as organizations that support employee growth attract and retain top talent. Fundamentally, authentic, consistent branding that reflects the employee experience reinforces retention benefits.

Further, the study confirms that employer branding mediates the relationship between talent management and retention. A strong brand identity enhances the retention effects of talent management by fostering alignment between organizational values and employee goals. Branding alone may not suffice if internal practices are misaligned with the brand image. Therefore, the study underscores the importance of integrated approaches, showing that cohesive, authentic branding, combined with robust talent management optimizes employee retention.

Finally, practitioners in the hospitality industry should integrate talent management and employer branding strategies to create a consistent employee experience. For instance, by publicly communicating commitment to employee growth—through marketing materials, on boarding, and internal communications—organizations can reinforce their brand values. This would involve human resource departments working closely with branding and marketing teams to ensure that career development and training programs are

highlighted as key components of the organization's brand identity.

Policy recommendations

Policymakers could incentivize organizations in the hospitality sector to invest in structured training and development programs, recognizing the link between these programs and reduced turnover. Tax incentives or funding for industry-wide development programs could be introduced to support this alignment. Policies promoting workforce development as a branding strategy would be especially beneficial in sectors such as hospitality with high turnover, as they could strengthen the labour market by fostering employee engagement and reducing the costs associated with frequent rehiring.

In industries like hospitality, where employees often face limited advancement opportunities, clearly defined career pathways can make an organization more attractive and promote long-term loyalty. Policymakers could encourage organizations to highlight their career development opportunities in recruitment materials and internal branding efforts. Further, policy makers may develop a strong employer brand that showcases the firms' values, culture and opportunities for growth. The government can also come up with a policy that encourages public-private partnerships to promote employer branding and talent attraction.

The leaders of firms in the hospitality sector should provide clearly structured career paths in an endeavour to strengthen employees' commitment, particularly in the hospitality industry where career progression is essential for retention. RTG and Cresta might also

consider developing more formalized mentorship and training programs to support this.

By establishing formalised mentorship and training programs, hospitality organizations like RTG and Cresta can create an environment where employees perceive a clear trajectory for growth, thereby increasing job satisfaction and loyalty. Structured career pathways also allow employees to build valuable skills and experience, reinforcing their sense of purpose within the organization and strengthening retention

Policymakers could encourage organisations to offer structured training initiatives that align with clear career progression milestones. For example, providing certifications or skill-based training tied to job advancement opportunities can enhance employee retention. Incentives such as tax deductions or government-supported training funds could be introduced to promote employer investment in these structured development programs, particularly in high-turnover sectors like hospitality.

Further Studies

The focus on only two hotel groups limits the study's ability to offer insights applicable across diverse contexts within or outside the hospitality industry. Organizational cultures and employee needs can vary significantly across sectors, potentially affecting the impact of employer branding and retention strategies. Thus, while the study's findings are relevant to Zimbabwe's hospitality sector, they should be interpreted cautiously when applied to other industries or regions, as differences in employee expectations,

regulatory environments, and organizational practices may lead to different outcomes.

To further address these limitations, future research could expand the sample to include multiple hotel groups across various regions or industries. Comparative studies across different sectors could provide a deeper understanding of how employer branding and retention strategies might vary, enhancing the applicability of these findings. Additionally, multi-country analysis could be beneficial, allowing for cross-cultural comparisons and yielding insights applicable to a broader range of organizational settings.

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The authors have no competing interests to declare.

Authors' contributions

M. Chikove, L.R. Dowo & C. Hofisi contributed equally to this work.

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