Perceived brand strength and turnover intention: the mediating role of organizational identification and psychological contract violation

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Abstract

The effect of perceived brand strength on turnover intention is researched, as well as the effect of perceived brand strength on organizational identification and psychological contract violation. Furthermore, the potential relationships between both organizational identification and psychological contract violation and turnover intention are examined. In addition, the possibility that both organizational identification and psychological contract violation mediate the relationship between perceived brand strength and turnover intention, is also investigated. A quantitative, cross-sectional study was conducted, producing a total sample of 160 respondents. Results indicated that there was no substantial evidence on which to conclude that perceived brand strength had an effect on either turnover intention or psychological contract violation. Neither, could the mediating effects be confirmed. A positive effect was found of perceived brand strength on organizational identification. Moreover, the findings provide confirmation for the presence of a significant negative relationship between organizational identification and turnover intention as well as for a significant positive relationship between psychological contract violation and turnover intention. At first glance, these results imply that employer branding and the concept of perceived brand strength are not yet as important as the growing body of academic HR literature on this topic suggests. However, the significant effect of perceived brand strength on organizational identification, together with the significant effect on psychological contract fulfillment, are promising results and provide an optimistic foundation for academics and practitioners alike. In any case, future research should attempt to create a broader theoretical foundation for employer branding from an HR perspective and should subsequently try to develop a more tightly delineated and generally accepted definition of perceived brand strength, which will also allow for the creation of more adequate measures and scales.

Keywords: employer branding, perceived brand strength, turnover intention, organizational identification, psychological contract violation.
1. Introduction

When one enters the term \textit{employer branding} in the search engine of Google, this will result in approximately 2.200.000 pages that are either partially or entirely dedicated to this increasingly popular topic\textsuperscript{1}. In short, employer branding is about the presentation of an organization’s image to current and potential stakeholders as a positive place to work. One of the main reasons for this recent boost in popularity is the shortage of skilled labor as a result of the rapid development of Brazil, India and China as economic powers, together with the trend of an ageing population in the United States, Europe and Japan (CIPD, 2007; van Mossevelde, 2010). These phenomena have resulted in organizations experiencing increased competition in recruiting and retaining skilled workers, ensuing in a growing importance for companies to become and continue to be an attractive employer. Other factors that have influenced the increased significance of employer branding include the fact that both university graduates and skilled professionals have a desire to work for organizations that are considered to have a good reputation, and that the recent economic downturn has made it more important to get the right people for the right jobs. Employer branding could play an important role in achieving these objectives (van Mossevelde, 2010).

The concepts of a brand and branding have traditionally been ascribed to the area of marketing academics and marketing professionals (Martin, Beaumont, Doig & Pate, 2005). A brand has been defined by Swystun (2007, p. 14) as “a mixture of attributes, tangible and intangible, symbolized in a trademark, which if managed properly, creates value and influence”. However, in recent years the meaning of this concept has broadened, resulting in a growing awareness among academics and practitioners alike, that branding is a concept that is not exclusive to the marketing domain but can also be applied to the area of human resource management (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Martin et al. 2005; van Eck, Willems & Leenhouts, 2008; Edwards, 2010). In a recent publication, the CIPD (2007) argues that employer branding should not be perceived as a temporary instrument to promote an organization’s image, nor that it should be regarded as a new approach towards recruitment. Instead, they state that it should be

\textsuperscript{1} One should note that at the beginning of this research (in January 2011), the same search query resulted in finding ‘only’ 644.000 pages related to employer branding, indicating that the attention towards this topic is still growing rapidly!
considered as a way of doing business, presenting an accurate picture of what an organization is and is not about. As a result, organizations will be more capable of recruiting and retaining the right people (CIPD, 2007). Retaining the right people effectively means that an organization needs to strive towards a reduction of employee turnover, since these problems with retention are closely related to organizations encountering high levels of employee turnover. In this light, previous research by the CIPD (2010) has found that, in 2009, more than 50% of the employers in the UK were experiencing major retention issues. Consequently, the same research has illustrated that this trend goes hand in hand with the fact that as much as 13.5% of the working population in the UK, has left the organization for which they were working (CIPD, 2010). In view of the fact that Joo (2010) has found that the intention to leave the organization proved to be the best predictor of actual employee turnover, employers need to focus on keeping this turnover intention amongst employees as low as possible. Therefore, it is interesting to investigate which concepts may be of influence on the turnover intention of employees. Enhanced understanding of the reasons why employees want to leave an organization could subsequently contribute to organizations acquiring more control over these issues in order to keep the turnover intention as low as possible.

Taking the preceding into account, this research will examine if employer branding is related to the turnover intention of employees. High levels of employee turnover may lead to a loss of information and expertise and might also have a negative influence on organizational performance (Kim, 2002; Brown, Garino & Martin, 2009). Moreover, turnover can be a very expensive problem to an organization as e.g., replacement-, recruitment- and training costs have to be paid (Cascio & Boudreau, 2008, p.73). Perhaps surprisingly, it was very difficult to find earlier studies that have investigated this relationship. Therefore, it is fascinating to explore if employer branding is in fact an effective way to reduce the turnover intention of employees and thus to increase retention and prevent the aforementioned possible negative outcomes of turnover.

Furthermore, this study will investigate the relationship between employer branding and organizational identification. It may seem odd to focus on organizational identification in these times of downsizing, dynamic business environments and a growing trend towards short-term contracts (Albert, Ashforth & Dutton, 2000). After all, these trends may result in increased uncertainty and shorter employee-employer relationships, which makes identification with one’s
organization increasingly difficult. However, organizations are becoming less institutionalized and conventional organizational structures are disappearing. As a consequence “an organization must increasingly reside in the heads and hearts of its members” (Albert, Ashforth & Dutton, 2000, p.13). This study will examine if employer branding contributes towards the development of the feeling of organizational identification amongst employees.

Additionally, it will be examined if there is a relationship between employer branding and psychological contract violation. Since employer branding is concerned with presenting an accurate picture of what the organization is and is not about (CIPD, 2007), it is plausible to assume that this information will contribute to the perception of mutual obligations that form the basis of the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1990). Hence, the organization has to meet the expectations that it creates among employees as a result of the branding process, since failing to do so could lead to psychological contract breach and subsequent violation (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). This research aims to investigate the relationship between employer branding and psychological contract violation, rather than psychological contract breach, for two reasons. First of all, both of these concepts are mainly related to an emotional experience and feelings, whereas psychological contract breach on the other hand is a more cognitive experience. The second reason is that one could argue that investigating the effect of employer branding on violation is more interesting since psychological contract violation is more closely related with negative emotions that could have an adverse effect on employee behavior and performance, including feelings of anger, disappointment and outrage (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). The research on psychological contract violation is abundant, while studies on employer branding are flourishing. Nevertheless, investigating the relationship between these concepts is appealing since they have not been taken together in a research before, despite the fact that one could state that it is reasonable that these issues are related. It is therefore interesting to examine if discrepancies between the employer branding information and the employment relationship in practice will result in the feeling that the psychological contract has been violated.

Finally, this research will investigate the relationships between organizational identification and psychological contract violation on the one hand and turnover intention on the other. Examining these relationships will consequently allow for exploring if these concepts have a mediating effect on the aforementioned relationship between employer branding and the turnover intention of employees.
The preceding leads to the following research question:

To what extent does the perceived brand strength by employees influence the turnover intention of these employees and to what degree do organizational identification and psychological contract violation mediate this relationship?

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. How is perceived brand strength related to turnover intentions?

Various authors have presented a definition of employer branding. One of the earliest attempts to delineate the concept of employer branding was undertaken by Ambler and Barrow (1996, p.186) who identified an employer brand as “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company”. Martin et al. (2005, p.78) have described the concept of employer branding as “a process of managing a company’s image as seen through the eyes of its associates and potential hires”. In their turn, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004, p. 501) state that employer branding is “the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity”, and consequently see the employer brand as “a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors”. Each of these definitions has a slightly different focus. Ambler and Barrow (1996) emphasize the benefits that are connected to a certain employer, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) accentuate the unique employer identity whereas Martin et al. (2005) stress that the concept is about the management of a company’s image. This research will regard employer branding as “a process aimed at providing organizational information to potential hires and current employees consequently presenting the organization as a unique employer which has an identity that is different from other organizations”. The focus of this research will be on one of the elements of the aforementioned definition, namely the organization’s uniqueness as an employer. This uniqueness will be examined from an employee’s point of view by means of the concept of perceived brand strength. This concept of perceived brand strength thus describes “how unique and inimitable an organization is regarded by employees”. In practice, this means that high perceived brand strength should be considered as the perception of employees that their organization is a unique employer with a strong distinctive organizational identity. In contrast, low perceived brand
strength can be described as the perception of employees that an organization is not unique and that it does not possess a strong and distinctive organizational identity. Whether an employer is perceived by employees to have high or low brand strength is believed to be based on the information that is provided during the process of employer branding, in combination with the actual brand related experiences of the employees.

Even though one single universal definition is lacking, there is growing agreement among HR academics that employer branding is becoming an increasingly important tool for companies to create engaged employees who can identify with their organization’s strategy and culture (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Other research has also shown that employer branding has positive effects on workforce attitudes (Fulmer, Gerhart & Scott, 2003), the attraction of potential new employees (Collins & Stevens, 2002), positive job seeker reputation perceptions (Cable & Turban, 2003) and the extent to which managers identify with the organization (Davies, 2008). However, in spite of this growing interest of HR academics in the topic of employer branding, little to no research exists with respect to the relationship between employer branding and the turnover intentions of employees.

Tett and Meyer (1993, p.262) define the concept of turnover intention as “a conscious and deliberate willfulness to leave the organization”. Research by Joo (2010) has demonstrated that the intention to leave the organization proved to be the strongest precursor of employees actually leaving the organization. However, a high turnover intention among employees, subsequently resulting in a high number of actual turnovers, does not necessarily have to be a problem, depending on which employees are leaving the organization. In line with this argument, Boudreau and Berger (1984), Trevor (2001) and Sturman, Trevor, Boudreau and Gerhart (2003) have made the distinction between functional and dysfunctional turnover, stating that turnover could be considered functional when poorly performing employees leave the organization and dysfunctional when organizations are not able to retain their more capable employees. Without discarding this distinction, this research will be based on the idea that a having a high turnover intention among their employees is undesirable for practically all organizations. In support of this statement, earlier research has identified multiple possible negative consequences of employee turnover including an increase in costs associated with recruitment, selection and development as well as a rise in costs related to a loss in production (Achoui & Mansour, 2007). Achoui and Mansour (2007) and Heneman and Judge (in Iqbal, 2010) also found somewhat more
intangible costs linked to the existence of a high turnover intention and subsequent turnover, including a decline in organizational effectiveness, a decrease of employee morale, an increase in workload and a disruption of team performance. All things considered, organizations need to make an effort to keep the turnover intention of their valued employees to a minimum.

The rationale behind the possibility of a relationship between employer branding and turnover intentions is that the information that is made available during the employer branding process will cumulate with an employee’s experiences of the organizational brand in practice, resulting in either a high or low perceived brand strength. What could be problematic in ascertaining high perceived brand strength is that earlier studies have found that organizations have the inclination to brand themselves in ways that are not entirely congruent with the truth and present an overly positive representation of the organization (Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey & Edwards, 2000). Related to this, is the theory on realistic job previews. Meglino, Ravlin and DeNisi (1997, p. 413) describe realistic job previews as organizations offering “accurate information that includes the negative as well as the positive elements of a new job”. The rationale underpinning this concept is that the information that is presented to potential employees influences their opinion of both the job and the organization, subsequently affecting the decision to apply (Meglino, Ravlin & DeNisi, 1997). Research has shown that providing employees with realistic information can consequently result in higher levels of satisfaction and performance (Premack & Wanous, 1985) and lower levels of turnover (McEvoy & Cascio, 1985). Similarly, research by Cotton and Tuttle (1986) and Griffeth, Hom and Gaertner (2000) demonstrated that presenting inaccurate information and generating unrealistic expectations might result in problems such as an increase in turnover intention (Edwards, 2010).

Realistic job previews are aimed at presenting information on specific jobs within an organization, while the employer branding process seeks to present information on the organization as a whole. Therefore, the presented information during the employer branding process is much broader and is not aimed at displaying the content of a particular job. Though, both conceptions do have in common that they aspire to present information to (potential) employees. With this in mind, using the earlier mentioned findings on realistic job previews as an analogy for the information that is presented during the employer branding process, one could state that it is plausible that there is a relationship between the perception of brand strength, based on the content and truthfulness of the presented information during the branding process in
combination with actual experience within the organization on one side, and the subsequent turnover intention of employees on the other. After all, when an employee experiences that most of the information that has been presented as being a part of the organization’s image and identity is false or inaccurate, therefore resulting in low perceived brand strength, he or she will be more likely to leave the organization. Conversely, if all the presented information is in line with the unique image and identity an organization wants to convey, indicating a high perceived brand strength; employees will probably remain in the organization longer. The preceding amounts to the following hypothesis:

H1: The perceived brand strength by employees is negatively related to turnover intentions.

2.2. How is perceived brand strength related to organizational identification?

In line with earlier research, Edwards (2010) states that the foundation of the process of employer branding is that the organization presents one or more aspects of the organization’s employment brand with the intention of attracting and creating sympathy for the organization amongst potential recruits and current employees. Furthermore, Edwards (2010) has proposed that this attraction process could lead to current and potential employees developing a certain kind of affinity, subsequently resulting in the establishment of a link between themselves and the organization. The development of this link between an organization and potential or current employees could be ascribed to organizational identification, which refers to “the degree to which a member defines him- or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes define the organization” (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994, p. 239). Another definition was proposed by Ashforth and Mael (1989, p.33) who have defined the concept as “the perception of oneness with or belongingness to the organization”. These definitions demonstrate some resemblance to the concept of organizational commitment which is described by Porter, Steers, Mowday and Boulian (1974, p. 604) as “the identification of an employee with the organization’s goals and values; their willingness to exert a great effort on behalf of the organization; and their intention to stay with the organization”. Without discarding the existence of a certain amount of overlap between these concepts, they are unquestionably different from each other. Organizational identification is predominantly about the process of the organization’s identity and the personal identity becoming increasingly interwoven, whereas organizational commitment is about
regarding the employee-organization relationship as a cycle of social exchanges (Cole & Bruch, 2006). In line with this distinction, Riketta (2005) argues that, in contrast to organizational commitment, the core of the concept of organizational identification lies within the fact that an organizational member has connected its organizational membership to his or her own personal identity. In other words, being part of a certain organization becomes an important element of one’s self-identity.

The theoretical foundation underpinning the organizational identification process can be traced back to the Social Identity Theory that was created by Tajfel and Turner (1979). Social Identity theory is concerned with intergroup relations, group processes and the social self (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). The purpose of the theory is to understand how individuals make sense of themselves and other people in their social environment (Korte, 2007). The theory further assumes that people have an inner drive to connect themselves to social groups, consequently resulting in the connection to these groups becoming a part of one’s own identity (Edwards, 2010). Hogg, Terry and White (1995) present several examples of social groups including people having the same nationality, having the same political affiliation or belonging to the same sports team. Earlier research (i.e. Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994) has also identified organizations as possible social groups and that people like to identify with organizations that have a good reputation or image (Edwards, 2010). Along the lines of this argument, Dukerich, Golden and Shortell (2002) affirm that organizations that are perceived to have an attractive image and strong organizational brand will also have employees that increasingly identify themselves with the organization. However, it is important that the employer branding messages contain information that is in line with reality as this may influence the perceptions of employees of the employer brand and the organizational identity (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The foregoing leads to following hypothesis:

**H2:** The perceived brand strength by employees is positively related to organizational identification.

2.3. How is perceived brand strength related to psychological contract violation?

In addition to the link between employer branding and organizational identification, earlier research has also proposed that there is a relationship between employer branding and the
psychological contract (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Miles & Mangold, 2004; Edwards, 2010). The psychological contract is defined by Rousseau (1990, p.391) as “an individual’s beliefs about mutual obligations, in the context of the relationship between employer and employee”. Morrison and Robinson (1997) state that when an employee perceives that the organization is not adhering to its obligations that are believed to exist on basis of the psychological contract, this will lead to psychological contract breach. This cognitive evaluation of broken promises may subsequently lead to psychological contract violation, which Morrison and Robinson (1997, p.230) define as “the emotional and affective state that may, under certain conditions, follow from the belief that one’s organization has failed to adequately maintain the psychological contract”. Basically, the concept of violation embodies an emotional experience that is the result of a cognitive assessment of the extent to which the contract is fulfilled, based on what each party has promised and provided to the other (Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

Rousseau (2001) states that employees’ perceptions of the psychological contract are formed during the organizational socialization phase which consists of a recurring exchange of promises. Accordingly, the perception that the psychological contract is being violated is to a great extent dependent on the degree to which the employer is honoring these promises (Sutton & Griffin, 2004). In light of this, Morrison and Robinson (1997) state that incongruence between promises and the knowingly breaking of these promises, in combination with an interpretation process on account of the employee, form the foundation for psychological contract violation. Keeping the preceding information in mind, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argue that during the process of employer branding, the organization presents itself in a certain way with respect to several important aspects of the employment relationship, such as image, opportunities and challenges, and that this creates perceptions and expectations with the employees. In addition, these authors argue that the messages that are sent during the employer branding process also serve as signals towards the employees that can even be interpreted as promises. Consequently, it is important that the employer brand messages are in line with reality since these have an influence on the perceived brand strength and could therefore prevent the perception that promises were not honored and the subsequent feeling of psychological contract violation (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994). The preceding leads to the formation of the subsequent hypothesis:
H3: The perceived brand strength by employees is negatively related to psychological contract violation.

2.4. How is organizational identification related to turnover intentions?

This research has already put forward the proposition that employer branding could be an important concept influencing an employee’s level of identification with the organization. In turn, previous research has also found organizational identification to be the predictor of several work-related attitudes and behaviors including job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, in-role performance, emotional well-being, job involvement and turnover intentions (Riketta & van Dick, 2005; van Dick et al., 2004; Riketta, 2005; van Dick, Grojean, Christ & Wieseke, 2006; van Dick, van Knippenberg, Kerschreiter, Hertel & Wieseke, 2008; Mishra & Bhatnagar 2010). De Moura, Abrams, Retter, Gunnarsdottir and Ando (2009) found that organizational identification had a negative effect on the turnover intention of employees across various organizational contexts. Findings supporting the existence of this negative relationship were presented by van Dick et al. (2004). The theoretical foundation sustaining these findings could again be found in the earlier discussed Social Identity Theory. In line with this theory it seems plausible that the more employees identify themselves with the organization, the higher the support for the organization and the organizational group members is expected to be, most probably resulting in a lower turnover intention (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Moreover, Edwards (2010) states that an important part of the process of organizational identification can be attributed to value congruence. This means that the organizational member can identify with the organizational values as these are similar to his or hers. Consequently, this strong identification and the overlapping values could result in the organization becoming part of the self-concept and providing an answer to the question: who am I (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; van Dick et al., 2004)? Therefore, leaving the organization could be harmful to one’s own identity since a departure would effectively mean losing a part of one’s self (van Dick et al., 2004). Taking the preceding arguments into account, this leads to the following hypotheses:

H4: Organizational identification is negatively related to the turnover intention of employees.
H5: Organizational identification negatively mediates the relationship between perceived brand strength and the turnover intention of employees.

2.5. How is psychological contract violation related to turnover intentions?

A considerable amount of research has been devoted towards the examination of causes of psychological contract violation. Individual, organizational and external factors have all been associated with a subsequent breach and violation of psychological contract (Morrison & Robinson, 1997; Freese, 2007, p. 51). In turn, previous research has also explored the possible consequences when such a violation occurs. Freese (2007, p. 44) presents an overview of psychological contract violation linked to various outcomes including lower job satisfaction (i.e. Schalk, Campbell & Freese, 1998), lower performance (i.e. Lester, Turnley, Bloodgood & Bolino, 2002) and a higher intention to quit (i.e. Cavanaugh & Noe, 1999). In accordance with these findings of Cavanaugh and Noe (1999), Robinson and Rousseau (1994) state that a violation of the psychological contract can be considered to undermine the very basis of the relationship between an employee and an employer, weakening the mutual reciprocal bond between both parties. As a consequence, the employee whose psychological contract has been violated loses faith in the advantages of remaining in the relationship resulting in an increased intention to leave the organization. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H6: Psychological contract violation is positively related to the turnover intentions of employees.

H7: Psychological contract violation negatively mediates the relationship between perceived brand strength and the turnover intention of employees.
2.6. Conceptual model

The foregoing amounts to the subsequent conceptual model as foundation for this research:

![Conceptual Model Diagram]

Figure 1: Conceptual model

3. Method

3.1 Research design and procedure

To test the proposed hypotheses, this research has made use of an explanatory and quantitative cross-sectional survey design, distributing online questionnaires to the respondents at one point in time. Initially data was gathered in five large organizations in the Netherlands, including ASML, PepsiCo, NXP, Essent and Rabobank. These organizations were chosen because of the fact that they spend much time and effort on the creation of a distinctive organizational identity, branding themselves as unique employers to both current and potential employees. Each of these companies has a few specific core values, underlying their business identity and guiding their market behavior. It was believed that incorporating these companies in our sample would aid in the attainment of valuable results, since their employees would already be familiar with the concept of employer branding. Also, each of the organizations is active in a different business sector which would make comparisons between sectors possible.
Prior to the distribution of the online questionnaires, preliminary appointments were made with the responsible managers with the aim of acquiring permission to distribute the surveys among the employees and simultaneously gather managerial support for the research. Since the participating organizations were unable or unwilling to provide a list of e-mail addresses of their employees, an e-mail containing information about the research as well as a link to the questionnaire was sent to the contact person of each organization. The e-mail contained a brief introduction to the subject matter and the purpose of the research was explained. Moreover, this message made explicitly clear that absolute anonymity was guaranteed. Next, each of the contact persons forwarded the e-mail to employees throughout the organization asking them to partake in the research by filling out the questionnaire. In an attempt to increase the response, the contact persons send out an electronic reminder after one or two weeks urging those employees that did not complete the questionnaire yet, to still take the time to do this.

As a result of some technical difficulties with the software that was used for the development of the questionnaire, many of the possible respondents within these participating organizations were unable to fill out the survey. Therefore, in order to increase the number of respondents, the questionnaire was replicated with another software program and subsequently distributed amongst friends, family and acquaintances.

3.2 Sample and respondents

As was previously mentioned, the majority of the participants in the current study are employees from ASML, PepsiCo, NXP, Essent and Rabobank, supplemented by employees from a variety of other organizations. The total sample of the research consisted of 160 employees. Examining the sample, one would find that 68.3 % was male (N = 102). The predominant nationality of the respondents was Dutch (with 93.8 %, N = 150). With regard to education, only one of the respondents had no degree whatsoever (0.6 %), 19 of them completed secondary education (11.9 %), 138 respondents had graduated from a school for higher vocational education or a university (86.3 %) and two respondents were postgraduates (1.3%). The age of respondents ranged from 20 to 59 years, with an average of 38.77 (SD = 11.705). Finally, organizational tenure varied from < 1 year to 37 years, resulting in an average tenure of 7.78 years (SD = 8.676).
3.3 Instruments

Four different concepts form the basis of this research: perceived brand strength, organizational identification, psychological contract violation and turnover intention. Each of these concepts was measured in the questionnaire by a scale consisting of multiple items. For a complete overview of the scales and items that were used, see appendix I.

Perceived brand strength was determined by a relatively new scale that was recently developed by Edwards (2010). The scale consisted of four items in which the respondents were asked to provide the answer they felt most strongly about. All of these items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from „strongly disagree” to „strongly agree”. An example of the items that were included is the following proposition: ‘The organization I work for is a unique employer’. Factor analysis resulted in an adequate KMO of 0.719 and a significant value on the Bartlett’s test (p = .000). In addition, the analysis indicated that all four items loaded on the same factor. Reliability analysis found a Cronbach’s Alpha of .754, which can be considered acceptable since Nunnally (in Pallant, 2007, p. 6) has argued that a Cronbach’s Alpha of .7 is the minimum level that a scale must display in order to be reliable.

Organizational identification was measured with six items of the Mael scale (Mael & Tetrick, 1992). Again, answers were given on a five-point Likert scale ranging from „strongly disagree” to „strongly agree”. An example item was: ‘When someone criticizes the organization it feels like a personal insult’. This scale is widely recognized amongst academics as the preferred scale to measure organizational identification (Riketta, 2005). Factor analysis resulted in a KMO of .857 and a significant value on the Bartlett’s test (p = .000). Also, the analysis demonstrated that the six items all measured one underlying factor. The scale was found to have a good reliability with a Cronbach’s Alpha of .847.

Psychological contract violation was measured by the Psycones scale (European Commission, 2007). Psychological contract violation was measured by six items in which respondents were asked to consider how their employer generally held to its promises. Respondents needed to determine to what extent they agreed with six subsequent statements. They had to do this on a five-point Likert scale ranging from „totally disagree” to ‘completely agree’. An example was the following proposition: „I feel appreciated”. Factor analysis revealed a KMO of .833 and a significant value on the Bartlett’s test (p = .000). It also demonstrated that
the six items of the scale all measured one factor. Reliability analysis resulted in a Cronbach’s Alpha of .850.

Lastly, the turnover intention scale of Freese (2007, p. 215) was used to measure the turnover intention of employees. This is a combined scale consisting of items that can originally be found in Franklin (1975), Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979) and Freese and Schalk (1997). Eight statements were presented and the respondents again needed to indicate to what extent he or she agreed with the provided statements on a five-point Likert scale ranging from ‘totally disagree’ to ‘completely agree’. ‘I often think about quitting’, was an example of the included statements. Factor analysis showed a KMO of .855 and a value on the Bartlett’s test which was significant (p = .000). The results of the factor analysis indicated the possibility of two factors since there were three items which also loaded on a second component. However, both the Screeplot and the Eigenvalue criterion present good arguments to force a one factor solution. The second component only has a small Eigenvalue above 1 (1.205) as opposed to the first component (4.566). Moreover, the change in the elbow of the Screeplot indicates rather a clear break between component one and two, whereas the break between components two and three is not very clear. Considering these arguments, a one factor solution was forced. The scale was found to be reliable with a Cronbach’s Alpha of .885.

3.4 Control variables

Control variables were included in the research to investigate if these had an influence on the relationships between the variables that were being investigated. Four control variables were taken into account in order to ensure that the relationships that were being investigated were not contaminated as a result of spuriousness. These control variables were age, gender, level of education and organizational tenure.

Age: Porter and Steers (1973) have found that younger workers are more likely to leave the organization than older workers. Arnold and Feldman (1982) have also found a strong negative effect of age on the turnover intention of employees. These findings are confirmed by Cotton and Tuttle (1986) in their meta-analysis, which substantiates that there is a significant negative relationship between age and turnover. Since perceived brand strength is a relatively new concept, little is known about its influences and antecedents. For this reason it is difficult to determine if a link exists between the age of an employee and the perception that this employee
has with regard to the strength of the employer brand. Over fifty years ago, Munn (1960) found that the perception of a (product) brand was not significantly influenced by age. However, since then, much has changed and it is not implausible to state that as one grows older one’s perception of the world changes. Consequently, there might be a difference in perceived brand strength depending on the age of the employee. The age of respondents is measured by asking them to answer the question: *In which year were you born?*

**Gender:** The relationship between gender and turnover intention is not entirely clear. Both Chusmir (1982) and Cotton and Tuttle (1986) have found that women are more likely to leave an organization than men. Simultaneously, Weisberg and Kirschenbaum (1993) have found that women had higher actual turnover rates than men but that there were no gender differences in turnover intention. The link between gender and perceived brand strength is also difficult to assess since there is a lack of empirical evidence with regard to this connection. However, considerable research in the marketing domain has found that gender has an effect on i.e. brand name response (Klink, 2009) and brand perception (Kamineni, 2005). Therefore, one may argue that it is plausible to assume that gender will also have an effect on the perceived brand strength of an employer brand. The gender of respondents will be measured by asking them to tick a box indicating that they are either male or female.

**Level of education:** Porter and Steers (1973) have argued that the turnover intention of employees is influenced by their level of education in such a way that more highly educated employees will generate an intention to turnover sooner, when compared to co-workers with a lower educational level. The influence of educational level, especially that of women, on both job-to-job and job-to-unemployment turnover was again confirmed by findings that were presented by Royalty (1998). Recently, Beneke (2011) has examined brand management in higher education with the aim of finding ways to maximize the appeal of an educational institution in order to succeed in attracting high potential students. This implies that in order to attract the best students, the institute has to make certain brand related decisions to appeal to these top performers. One could therefore deduce that the perception of a brand might differ between top performers and average students. Conversely, following this line of reasoning and focusing on employees with different educational backgrounds rather than these two groups of students, one could thus state that that educational level of employees might influence the perceived brand strength of a certain employer. Level of education will be measured by asking
respondents the following question: „What is the highest level of education you have completed?‟

**Organizational tenure**: the relationship between organizational tenure and turnover intention is one that is prone to much uncertainty. It is plausible to assume that an employee that has been working for an organization for a fairly long time will have established some kind of bond with that organization, making him or her more reluctant to leave the organization. At the same time, the current dynamic business environment may also be a force driving employees to switch employers after a few years.

### 3.5 Analyses

Data analysis was conducted by means of a statistical software program known as SPSS. First of all, the dataset had to be created by importing data from the two different questionnaire programs that were used during the data gathering process. Subsequently, the dataset was checked for outliers and missing data. Due to the technical difficulties that had arisen during the stage of data gathering, there were numerous respondents that had provided data with much missing values. These respondents were consequently removed from the data set. Also, the use of two questionnaire programs resulted in the fact that some items had to be reversed manually. Finally, a correlation analysis and several hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to test the proposed hypothesis.
4. Results

4.1 Correlations

Table 1 presents the correlation matrix which includes the means, standard deviations and Pearson correlations of the variables that were used in the research. The Pearson correlation gives an indication of the strength of a relationship between two variables without explicating on the causality of that relationship (Pallant, 2007, p. 127).

Examining the correlation matrix, one of the first things that stands out is the extremely small and non-significant correlation between perceived brand strength and turnover intention (r = -.035, p = .662), which is contradictory to the assumptions that form the foundation of the first hypothesis. Moreover, the correlation matrix shows that although the correlation between perceived brand strength and psychological contract violation is in the right direction, it is found to be non-significant (r = -.109, p = .170). In contrast, the correlation between perceived brand strength and organizational identification is found to be significant and in the hypothesized direction (r = .268, p = .001). Following the suggestions of Cohen (in Pallant, 2007, p. 132) this correlation must be interpreted as rather small since it does not exceed the value of .30. The correlations of organizational identification and psychological contract violation on the one hand and turnover intention on the other, also show small significant relationships (with r = -.228, p = .004 and r = .242, p = .002 respectively), both completely in accordance with what was hypothesized. Finally, one of the control variables is found to be related to some of the main variables in the model. Level of education is significantly correlated with both organizational identification (r = .254, p = .001) as well as psychological contract violation (r = -.207, p = .001).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Turnover intention</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>2.834</td>
<td>1.078</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Perceived brand strength</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>2.872</td>
<td>.701</td>
<td>-.035</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Organizational identification</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>3.330</td>
<td>.652</td>
<td>-.228**</td>
<td>.268**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Psychological contract violation</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>2.173</td>
<td>.699</td>
<td>.242**</td>
<td>-.109</td>
<td>-.339**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>38.77</td>
<td>11.705</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>-.075</td>
<td>-.079</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>.482</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>-.015</td>
<td>-.046</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td>-.341**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1 = male, 2 = female)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Level of education</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>.416</td>
<td>-.068</td>
<td>.074</td>
<td>.254**</td>
<td>-.207**</td>
<td>-.040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Organizational tenure</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>7.78</td>
<td>8.676</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>-.074</td>
<td>.648**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05
** p < .01
4.2 Regression analyses

In order to test the hypotheses that have been proposed in the theoretical framework, hierarchical multiple regressions were used. In Table 2, the results of the regression analysis of perceived brand strength, organizational identification and psychological contract violation on turnover intention are presented.2

Table 2: regression analysis for perceived brand strength, organizational identification and psychological contract violation on turnover intention3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>β</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>-.066</td>
<td>-.006</td>
<td>-.082</td>
<td>-.012</td>
<td>-.176*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.078</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>-.037</td>
<td>-.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of education</td>
<td>.123</td>
<td>.064</td>
<td>.137</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.414</td>
<td>.217**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational tenure</td>
<td>-.019</td>
<td>-.205*</td>
<td>-.018</td>
<td>-.193</td>
<td>-.011</td>
<td>-.121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived brand strength</td>
<td>-.126</td>
<td>-.111</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>-.018</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational identification</td>
<td>-.280</td>
<td>-.229**</td>
<td>.538</td>
<td>.473**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological contract breach</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.078</td>
<td>.090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔR²</td>
<td>.078</td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>3.237*</td>
<td>3.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔF</td>
<td>3.237*</td>
<td>2.023</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05
** p < .01

Model 1, which only includes the four control variables, explains 7.8% of the variance in turnover intention. Furthermore, the findings of the first model indicate that there is a significant negative effect of organizational tenure on the turnover intention of employees (β = -.205, p < .05). In order to test the first hypothesis, perceived brand strength is incorporated in the second model. As a result, the significant effect of organizational tenure disappeared. Looking at the

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2 It should be noted that in this study results were found to be significant or non-significant based on significance levels of either p < .05 or p < .01. These results are presented as such in Table 2 through 5. However, given the small sample size an additional significance check was conducted with p < .1. This did not result in the finding of any additional significant effects, implying that the relationships that were being investigated were either significant or truly non-significant.
first hypothesis, the expectation was that the perceived brand strength by employees would be negatively related to the turnover intention of employees. However, model 2 shows that the effect of perceived brand strength on turnover is negligible and not significant (β = -.111, p = .157). Moreover, the ΔR² only increases by .012 and remains non-significant. Hence, hypothesis 1 is not supported. In the third model organizational identification and psychological contract violation are also taken into account. Adding these variables resulted in a major significant increase in variance explained to 39.7 %, while model 3 indicates that two other control variables, age and level of education, both have a significant effect on turnover (β = -.176, p < .05, β = .217, p < .01). One should also note that the already small and insignificant effect of perceived brand strength on turnover intention becomes even smaller with (β = -.018, p = .786).

In Table 3, the regression of perceived brand strength on organizational identification is presented.

Table 3: regression analysis for perceived brand strength on organizational identification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>β</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.008</td>
<td>-.138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.100</td>
<td>-.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of education</td>
<td>.388</td>
<td>.248**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational tenure</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived brand strength</td>
<td>.224</td>
<td>.241**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.078</td>
<td>.135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔR²</td>
<td>.078</td>
<td>.057**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>3.234*</td>
<td>4.759**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔF</td>
<td>3.234*</td>
<td>10.092**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*  p < .05  
**  p < .01

The regression analysis shows that the first model, in which again only the four control variables are included, explains 7.8 % of the variance in organizational identification. This model also indicates that educational level has a significant effect on organizational identification (β = .248, p < .01). In the second model, perceived brand strength was added to the model, consequently increasing the variance explained to 13.5 %. This increase in variance explained is significant at a p < .01 level with a sig. F change of .001. As a result, the second model will be
used to test hypothesis 2. After perceived brand strength was included, the effect of educational level on organizational identification remained significant but its strength declined slightly ($\beta = .232, p < .01$). More importantly, the effect of perceived brand strength on organizational identification is found to be positive and significant ($\beta = .241, p < .01$). These findings imply that an increase in an employee’s perceived brand strength of an organization will result in a higher level of identification with that organization. As a result, hypothesis 2 is supported. However, one should note that the effect size that was found is incredibly small and that the incorporation of perceived brand strength in the second model only explains an additional 6% in the variance of organizational identification.

Table 4 represents the results of the hierarchical regression analysis of perceived brand strength on psychological contract violation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.158</td>
<td>.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of education</td>
<td>-.334</td>
<td>-.199*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational tenure</td>
<td>-.011</td>
<td>-.140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived brand strength</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.069</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>.069</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
<td>2.814*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta F$</td>
<td>2.814*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

The regression analysis shows that level of education has a significant effect on psychological contract violation ($\beta = -.199, p < .05$). The effect of educational level is negative, which implies that as an employee’s level of education raises this will decrease the likelihood that he or she experiences a violation of psychological contract. The first model explains 6.9% of the variance in psychological contract violation. In the second model, perceived brand strength is included, which results in only a small increase in variance explained to 7.5%. Both, this difference in variance explained as well as the standardized coefficient for perceived brand
strength are not significant (β = -.080, p = .312). As a result hypothesis 3, which predicted that perceived brand strength would be negatively related to psychological contract violation, is not supported.

The fourth hypothesis proposed that organizational identification would be negatively related to the turnover intention of employees. Looking back at model 3 in Table 2, the results of the regression analysis do indeed find a significant effect of organizational identification on turnover intention (β = -.229, p < .01). The current findings would suggest that a higher identification with the organization would lead to a lower turnover intention amongst employees, which means that hypothesis 4 is supported.

Hypothesis 5 states that organizational identification negatively mediates the relationship between perceived brand strength and the turnover intention of employees. Baron and Kenny (1986, p.1177) propose that in order to test for the existence of mediation, three regression analyses should be conducted: “a regression of the mediator on the independent variable; a regression of the dependent variable on the independent variable; and a regression of the dependent variable on both the independent variable and on the mediator”. If these analyses would show significant relationships, this could be an indication of the existence of mediation. The foregoing implies that first the effect of perceived brand strength on organizational identification should be tested. Looking back at Table 3, this effect was found to be significant with β = .241. Next, there should be a significant direct effect of perceived brand strength on turnover intention. As shown in Table 2, it has been established that this effect is far from significant (β = -.111, p = .157). Finally, the effect of organizational identification on turnover intention should be examined. Table 2 shows that regression analysis has indicated that this effect is significant with β = -.229. All things considered, since the direct effect of perceived brand strength on turnover intention is not significant, our model does not fulfill the condition of three significant direct relationships. Thus, it can be concluded that there is no mediation effect of organizational identification (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Hence, hypothesis 5 is not supported.

Once more, reflecting on the results that are presented in Table 2, the third model provides evidence for the existence of a significant positive relationship between psychological contract violation and turnover intention (β = .473, p < .0001), supporting hypothesis 6. This implies that, as the feeling that the psychological contract has been violated increases, this will consequently result in a higher intention to leave the organization.
Finally, hypothesis 7 also expected a mediation effect, in which psychological contract violation negatively mediates the relationship between perceived brand strength and the turnover intention of employees. Again, following the propositions of Baron and Kenny (1986), for mediation to be present there should be three significant relationships. While psychological contract violation has indeed been found to have a significant effect on turnover intention ($\beta = .473, p < .0001$), significant effects of perceived brand strength on psychological contract violation ($\beta = -.080, p = .312$), and perceived brand strength on turnover intention ($\beta = -.111, p = .157$), are lacking. Thus, the condition of having three significant effects has not been met, eliminating the possibility of finding a significant mediation effect. The preceding results in the fact that hypothesis 7 is not supported.

In view of the fact that the majority of the hypotheses were not supported, some additional analyses were conducted to investigate if perceived brand strength would have a significant effect if other variables were taken into account as the dependent variable. The results of the additional regression analyses are presented in Table 5. No significant effects were found when taking into account several different types of engagement. However, a positive significant relationship was found between perceived brand strength and psychological contract fulfillment, indicating that as employees perceive that the strength of their employer’s brand increases, this will subsequently lead to an increased experience that the psychological contract has been fulfilled. This finding illustrates that perceived brand strength does indeed have a significant effect on the psychological contract experience, but that measuring its effect on psychological contract violation probably was not the best way to demonstrate this point. This issue will be more thoroughly debated in the upcoming discussion section.

Table 5: regression analyses for perceived brand strength on physical, emotional, cognitive and total engagement and on psychological contract fulfillment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical engagement</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional engagement</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive engagement</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total engagement</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological contract fulfillment</td>
<td>.192</td>
<td>.278**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .05$,
** $p < .01$
5. Discussion & Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

This study was aimed at investigating the effect of perceived brand strength on the turnover intention of employees, thereby taking into account the possible mediating effects of organizational identification and psychological contract violation. Contrary to the expectations, no significant relationship could be established between the perception that employees have of the strength of their company’s brand and their subsequent intention to leave the organization. Critically reflecting on the basic assumptions underlying this research, one could argue that it is plausible that perceived brand strength could indeed have an influence on potential applicants and relatively new employees (CIPD, 2007; van Mossevelde, 2010) but not so much on the turnover intention of these employees. The reason for this could be that there are a multitude of influences between the moment of entering an organization and the moment at which an employee decides that he or she wants to look for a job opportunity elsewhere. Hence, with respect to affecting the turnover intention of employees, other factors that are more related to the actual job and work conditions could be considered to be more important. For example, work related experiences such as job satisfaction and organizational identification (Tuzun, 2007) as well as affective commitment (Slattery & Rajan Selvarajan, 2005), have been found to influence the turnover intention of employees. Therefore, it could have made more sense to incorporate another variable, rather than turnover intention, to test if perceived brand strength is indeed a distinctive and valuable concept. Furthermore, although the proposed analogy between the theory of realistic job previews (Meglino, Ravlin & DeNisi, 1997) and perceived brand strength was thoroughly described and explained, perhaps one should conclude that this analogy was a too meager foundation to expect significant effects of perceived brand strength on turnover intention.

Evidence was found to support the link between perceived brand strength and organizational identification, indicating that higher levels of perceived brand strength will consequently result in higher levels of organizational identification. This implies that as employees increasingly regard their organization as unique and inimitable, they will incorporate the feeling of belongingness to the organization into their own self-identity. These findings are consistent with earlier related research which established that employees like to identify with...
organizations that have an attractive reputation or strong image (Dukerich, Golden and Shortell, 2002; Edwards, 2010). Even though the size of the effect was not overwhelming, establishing a significant relationship between these two concepts can be considered as an important finding, especially in view of the fact that up to this point there has been little empirical evidence to support and provide legitimacy for the growing interest in the topic of employer branding from a human resource perspective.

This study expected a negative relationship between perceived brand strength and psychological contract violation, but the findings have indicated that no significant relationship exists between these two aforementioned concepts. These findings are contradictory with the theoretical propositions of Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), Miles and Mangold (2004) and Edwards (2010). A possible explanation for the lack of a significant relationship could be found in the fact that psychological contract violation is usually considered to be the final outcome at the very end of an extensive causal chain. In this chain, a wide variety of antecedents are of importance, which are linked to an employee’s work experience and perceived mutual obligations. Looking at the model of Morrison and Robinson (1997), one would find that psychological contract violation is influenced by several factors including incongruence, salience, vigilance, a comparison process and perhaps most importantly an interpretation process. In turn, each of these factors also consists of several different elements, making the variety of antecedents of psychological contract violation even more widespread. Taking the aforementioned into account, there could be two reasons why no significant relationship was found between perceived brand strength and psychological contract violation. First of all, perceived brand strength is linked to an employee’s overall sentiment about an organization’s uniqueness and inimitability, rather than focusing on work related expectations and promises. As such, perceived brand strength could have an influence on some of the antecedents (i.e. the feeling of incongruence), but ultimately affect only a small fraction in a large chain of events leading to violation. Secondly, since perceived brand strength is quite an abstract concept, its effect could be fairly negligible compared to other factors that are more tangible as well as more directly work and job related. In the end, these directly related work experiences will probably have the biggest influence on the feeling that the psychological contract has been violated. The foregoing does not mean that perceived brand strength is not important, but it could mean that other factors have a stronger link to the actual work experiences and interpretation of mutual obligations by employees and
will therefore have a bigger influence on the feeling that the psychological contract has been violated. Taking the preceding into account, perhaps it would have been more suitable to investigate if perceived brand strength was of influence on psychological contract fulfillment, which is a more cognitive and straightforward concept. This proposition is supported by the additional analyses of this research that found a significant positive effect of perceived brand strength on psychological contract fulfillment. Hence, one can conclude that perceived brand strength does have an effect on the psychological contract, but that psychological contract violation was just not the right concept to help demonstrate this point.

As was expected, organizational identification was found to be negatively related to the turnover intention of employees, indicating that higher levels of identification with the organization will consequently result in a lower intention to leave the organization. This finding is in line with earlier research by van Dick et al. (2004) and de Moura et al. (2009) who established fairly strong indications that an increase in organizational identification would lead to lower levels of employee turnover.

The expectation that organizational identification would have a negative mediation effect on the relationship between perceived brand strength and the turnover intention was not confirmed. Baron and Kenny (1986) state that for the existence of mediation, there should be significant relationships between the independent variable and the dependent variable, the mediator and the dependent variable, and the independent variable and the mediator. Since the direct relationship between perceived brand strength and turnover intention was found to be non-significant, it makes sense that the mediation effect is also not significant.

A positive significant effect was found between psychological contract violation and turnover intention. This finding is in line with an extensive amount of previous empirical evidence provided by a number of authors including but not limited to Robinson and Rousseau (1994), Schalk, Campbell and Freese (1998), and Cavanaugh and Noe (1999). Thus, when an employee perceives that his or her psychological contract has been violated, this will result in a higher intention to leave the organization. This seems logical, since a violation of the psychological contract undermines the very basis of the relationship between an employee and an employer. Subsequently, an employee that perceives a psychological contract violation experiences feelings of anger, disappointment and frustration (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). As
a result he or she will lose faith in the organization and reciprocal relationship, which will lead to an increased intention to leave the organization (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994).

Since the relationship between perceived brand strength and turnover intention as well as the relationship between perceived brand strength and psychological contract violation were found to be non-significant, a significant mediation effect of psychological contract violation could not be established (Baron and Kenny, 1986).

Two of the control variables showed significant relationships with some of the main variables that are included in this research. The negative significant effect that was found between age and turnover intention affirms earlier findings by Porter and Steers (1973), Arnold and Feldman (1982) and Cotton and Tuttle (1986) that as one grows older he or she will have a higher inclination to remain in the organization rather than go looking for a job elsewhere. In other words, younger workers are more likely to leave the organization than older workers. A possible reason could be that younger people still need to discover where their talents and interests lie, resulting in a frequent switching of jobs and organizations during the first years of their professional career. Another explanation could be that this group, contrary to the group of older employees, has more opportunities available to them on the labor market. Presently, organizations in general are still prejudice towards older employees, believing that they are more expensive, less flexible and have increased difficulty in keeping up with the required pace of work, as opposed to younger employees (Ministry of SZW, 2010). As a result, older employees are less eager to leave the safety and security of their current employer. Finally, the level of education was also found to be related to organizational identification, psychological contract violation and turnover intention. Higher levels of education were found to be associated with increased levels of organizational identification, while simultaneously leading to a decrease in the feeling that the psychological contract has been violated. Strikingly, as the level of education increases, so does the intention to turnover. This would imply that, even though better educated employees increasingly identify with the organization and experience less violation of their psychological contract, they would still have a high intention to turnover. A possible explanation could be that this group of well educated employees does not necessarily link searching for another job to negative experiences with their current employer, but simply as a new and exciting opportunity to develop themselves and improve their position. As such, ambition, rather than disappointment, could be considered to be the main driver to leave the organization.
In conclusion, the preliminary question on which this research was based was the following: *to what extent does the perceived brand strength by employees influence the turnover intention of these employees and to what degree do organizational identification and psychological contract violation mediate this relationship?* Looking back at this question one has to conclude that based on this research, the turnover intention of employees is not influenced by their perception of the organization’s brand strength, nor is this relationship mediated by organizational identification or psychological contract violation. It is plausible to state that perceived brand strength is particularly important in the beginning of an employment relationship, while turnover intention marks the beginning of the end of the employment relationship. As a result, there are too many other factors, such as organizational identification and psychological contract violation, which are of influence on the intention of employees to leave the organization, for perceived brand strength to also have an impact. Nevertheless, taking into consideration that this research did find a significant effect of perceived brand strength on organizational identification and that additional analyses also demonstrated a significant effect on psychological contract fulfillment, it is reasonable to assume that perceived brand strength can affect some employee attitudes and behaviors. However, there is still too much unclarity with regard to this concept and it has yet to conquer the hearts and heads of human resource professionals as well as those of employees and their organizations.

5.2 Limitations

Taking into account the elements of the discussion above, and without discarding the findings, one could say that this research suffers from several limitations. First of all, the concept of perceived brand strength is relatively new and there is little empirical and theoretical evidence that provides the concept with legitimacy. Although there are many recent indications that give it a certain amount of raison d’être (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Martin et al. 2005; CIPD, 2007; Edwards, 2010), perceived brand strength has yet to establish itself as a unique and independent concept. In this light, one could argue that currently the concept of perceived brand strength is simply not yet sufficiently comprehensive, generally acknowledged and universally accepted. Following this line of reasoning, one could identify several major issues. First of all, earlier research has proven the possible positive effects of branding (Collins & Stevens, 2002; Cable & Turban, 2003; Fulmer, Gerhart & Scott, 2003; Davies, 2008), though all of these studies took an
organizational perspective, focusing on the existence of employer branding rather than on the perception of brand strength. In addition, even though one single definition is lacking, the concept of employer branding is more tightly delineated (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Martin et al., 2005), than the concept of perceived brand strength, for which earlier research has failed to produce even one single definition. Related to the aforementioned problem, is the fact that a fairly new scale had to be employed, which had hardly been used in any previous research. This scale only consisted of four items and although the reliability of the scale was acceptable, the question remains if the items of the scale were best suited to measure the concept of perceived brand strength.

A second limitation encompasses a conceptual issue related to the fact that there are multiple ways of looking at the concept of perceived brand strength and its relationship with turnover intention. In one interpretation, which can be labeled as the dynamic vision, one could imagine a brandless organization that has little attention towards employer branding, indicating a weak perceived brand strength. This organization attracts all kinds of people, without any specific beliefs or attitudes because there is no need for them to identify with a specific brand. When this organization starts diverting more of its attention towards the development of a strong brand, initially the turnover intention may increase since not all current employees will be able to identify with the new brand and this new brand may not match their beliefs. In the long run, when both organization and employees are more accustomed to the new brand, this turnover intention will probably go down again. The other interpretation, which can be labeled as the static vision, regards the concept of perceived brand strength more as a comparison tool. When comparing two or more organizations, those with low perceived brand strength will have higher levels of turnover intention among their employees when compared to those that have high perceived brand strength. The current study is only attentive towards the latter of these two interpretations, taking the static vision as the foundation for the proposed hypotheses. This can be considered as a limitation since the dynamic vision illustrates that if perceived brand strength increases this will not always lead to a lower turnover intention. In addition to these dynamic and static interpretations there is another issue with regard to the interpretation of perceived brand strength. This concept can be interpreted either as an encouraging tool for organizations to invest in a strong company brand or as a indicator of the quality of match between employees and their organization. If one were to interpret perceived brand strength as this quality of match, then other
(HR) issues such as selection, working conditions and workload would play a more important role, consequently diminishing the unique and independent character of the concept of perceived brand strength. Although this study recognizes that this relatively new concept has a number of issues, it rejects the possibility that perceived brand strength is a mere indication of the employee-organization match and has the conviction that this concept should be regarded as an inducement for companies to create a strong and distinctive organizational brand.

A third possible limitation is the fact that the research made use of a cross-sectional survey design, collecting data at one point in time. As a result, the causality of the relationships could not be determined for certain and no inferences could be made with respect to changing attitudes and perceptions of employees over time.

A fourth limitation is that self-reported questionnaires were used to collect the data. This could have led to several sources of measurement error including common method variance, which refers to the amount of spurious covariance shared among variables because of the common method used in collecting data (Buckley, Cote & Comstock, 1990). As a consequence, studies such as this one that uses a single method of data collection may be prone to a certain amount of bias (Malhotra, Kim & Patil, 2006). Another measurement issue was that a number of respondents commented on the questionnaire being too extensive and repetitive, which could have led to a loss of concentration and tiredness amongst respondents.

In addition, there are some limitations that are connected to the size and composition of the sample. Initially data was to be gathered at five specific organizations. However, as a result of technical issues related to the software that was used for the development and distribution of the questionnaire, some ad hoc decisions had to be made which had quite a few influences on the dataset and the way in which the data was obtained. First of all, due to the technical issues, the number of respondents in the participating organizations was much lower than expected. Many respondents started filling out the questionnaire but could not continue because the software crashed or other technical problems occurred. When everything was again in full working condition, many of the original respondents were unable or unwilling to take the time to fill out the questionnaire a second time. Therefore, the number of respondents had to be increased by additional convenience sampling amongst friends, acquaintances and family members of the researchers. These issues made comparisons, with respect to the effect of perceived brand strength, between the five original participating organizations as good as impossible. In addition,
these dataset problems prohibited the use company specific dummies (fixed effects) which would have made it possible to isolate the HR policies and solely focus on the specific brand effects of the participating organizations. The foregoing led to a relatively small and reasonably varied sample of 160 respondents in total. As a consequence, both the internal validity as well as the external validity of the sample suffered, which means that data cannot be generalized to either the population of one of the participating companies or to the general population of working employees. Also, the fact that the sample consists of employees from many different organizations, could have had an influence on the results. The five organizations, in which the data would originally be gathered, each have a strong organizational identity and brand. The perception of brand strength may be much more important in these (types of) organizations than in other, smaller ones with less attention towards the concepts of branding and identity. Because the eventual sample consisted of employees from both types of organizations, this may have influenced the way in which respondents reacted to the questions related to perceived brand strength and consequently affected the subsequent results.

5.3 Recommendations

In view of the results of this study and considering the aforementioned limitations, future research could benefit from the following recommendations. Firstly, additional theoretical exploration is needed, with a specific focus on the concept of perceived brand strength, to underscore the importance and added value of branding from a human resource perspective. Developing a broader academic basis for this subject matter will contribute to the development of a more tightly demarcated definition and will also allow for the creation of more adequate measures and scales. Moreover, reducing the current conceptual unclarity will also assist in making the concept more comprehensible and less open to multiple interpretations. This substantial theoretical foundation could subsequently be applied in prospective empirical research, to actively search for evidence that branding and perceived brand strength are indeed the important concepts that they are believed to be by a growing number of academics.

A second recommendation for future research relates to the use of a longitudinal design, rather than the cross-sectional design that was employed in the current study. Perceived brand strength as well as the other variables that were included in this research, are not one time feelings but continuous variables that are subject to change over time. Even though no significant
effects were found for organizational tenure, it could very well be that an employee initially perceives the brand strength to be high, only to see it decrease as time passes by (or vice versa). These changes over time as well as the causality of the relationships cannot be examined by research that has a cross-sectional design, but they can be measured in longitudinal studies. Thus, a better insight in these perceptions, their antecedents, and subsequent effects could be obtained by investigating the employees over a longer period of time. Moreover, it deserves recommendation to use multiple instruments to gather data instead of only relying on self-reported questionnaires. Combining the use of questionnaires with, for example, structured interviews would eliminate the occurrence of common method variance and decrease other sources of possible measurement error and bias.

Finally, it is recommended that future research tries to ensure that data is collected from as many respondents as possible, so that analyses can be conducted on a substantially larger sample than the relatively small sample that was used in this research. In this light, it would be very interesting to see if this research would have come to the same conclusions if the sample were three or four times larger. However, researchers should be careful during the process of finding and selecting suitable companies and employees since branding and perceived brand strength are concepts that are probably more essential in larger companies with a strong identity and distinctiveness, than in small and medium businesses. It would be appealing if future research would investigate the existence and extent of these company-size related differences.

5.4 Practical implications

Since the results of this study are not unambiguous, organizations should be very careful in translating these findings to their daily operations. That being said, this study affirms the growing belief that employer branding and perceived brand strength can have positive effects on employee attitudes and behavior, by establishing a significant positive relationship between perceived brand strength and organizational identification. This implies that organizations can possibly create and attract employees that increasingly identify themselves with the company, by presenting themselves as unique employers with their own way of doing things. In turn, organizational identification could have a positive effect on employee attitudes such as motivation and engagement, possibly magnifying the positive effect of having a successful brand (i.e. this research showed a significant positive effect of organizational identification on
engagement, with $\beta = .449, p < .0001$). Moreover, the additional analyses indicated that perceived brand strength is also significantly and positively related to psychological contract fulfillment. This entails that if an organizational can ensure that its employees regard the company as having a distinctive identity and being unique, these employees will more likely experience that their psychological contract is being fulfilled. In addition to the fact that this is in itself a favorable outcome for any organization, it may lead to other positive effects such as more engagement (i.e. this research showed a significant positive effect of psychological contract fulfillment on engagement, with $\beta = .304, p < .0001$). Thus, even though the evidence is not yet without ambiguity and is indeed not overwhelming, one could still argue that it is important for organizations to at least consider the possible positive (direct and indirect) effects of employer branding and prevent them from neglecting the subject altogether.
6. Reference list


7. Appendices

Appendix I: items, scales & answer categories used to measure the variables

**Perceived brand strength scale** \( (N = 4) \)

*Instruction:* the following statements are about the perceived brand strength of your organization. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement.

*Answer categories*
1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree, nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

*Items*
- The organization I work for is a unique employer.
- The overall package of employment conditions that this organization offers is unlike what you can get at other employers.
- This organization distinguishes itself clearly from other organizations in the kind of employment relationship that it offers.
- The employment conditions you receive in this organization are relatively equal than what I would expect to find in other organizations.

**Organizational identification scale** \( (N = 6, \alpha = > 0.81) \)

*Instruction:* please indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement.

*Answer categories*
1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree, nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

*Items*

- When someone criticizes my organization it feels like a personal insult.
- I am very interested in what others think about my organization.
- When I talk about my organization, I usually say ‘we’ rather than ‘they’.
- My organizations' successes are my successes.
- When someone praises my organization, it feels like a personal compliment.
- If a story in the media criticized my organization, I would feel embarrassed.

**Psychological contract violation scale** (N = 6, α = 0.86)

*Instruction:* consider how your employer generally held to its promises. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

*Answer categories*

1. Totally disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Completely agree

*Items*

- I feel satisfied
- I feel frustrated
- I feel happy
- I feel betrayed
- I feel appreciated
- I feel disappointed
Turnover intention scale (N = 8, α = 0.91)

*Instruction:* the following eight statements are about turnover intentions. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement.

*Answer categories*
1. Totally disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Completely agree

*Items*
- I plan to continue to work here until I retire.
- I often think about quitting.
- I am looking for an opportunity to find a job in another organization.
- I would leave this organization if I were offered the same job in another organization.
- I am actively searching for another job.
- The next few years I intend to stay with this organization.
- In the past three months I have applied for a job in another organization.
- If I had a chance I would change to some other organization.