

“#Australia in the morning, #Thailand by midday, #America in the afternoon”

Promoting
global mobility
in EB
messages

Global mobility in MNC employer branding messages on Facebook

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to generate insights into how multinational companies (MNCs) promote global mobility in their Employer Branding (EB) messages on Facebook.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors analyzed 13,340 EB messages found on the Facebook career pages of 30 major MNCs (10 of each in the US, UK and Germany) drawing on a methodological approach combining Grounded Theory and text-mining.

Findings – Building on the perspective of psychological contracts as sensitizing concept, the analysis of the overall sample reveals a range of core themes in EB messages across all MNCs studied. With regards to global mobility, MNCs emphasize relational, i.e. socio-emotional, contents, particularly, highlighting opportunities of experience and personal development. While global mobility is an overall marginal theme, German MNCs extensively promote global mobility, whereas US- and UK-based MNCs do not explicitly make it a subject of their messages. The findings are discussed in the light of institutional theory.

Originality/value – Despite mega-trend, little is known about social media EB, especially when it comes to the contents that MNCs communicate to (potential) employees. Applying an innovative methodological approach, the authors offer insights into these contents. Discussing the findings in the light of institutional theory, it is concluded that promoting global mobility in socio-emotional terms seems of high importance to reduce uncertainties associated with living and working abroad. This might help firms to hire internationally mobile employees, especially in countries where job mobility is generally low.

Keywords New technology, Employer branding, Multinational companies, Qualitative methods, Psychological contracts, Job mobility

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

As several industries experience severe talent shortage, attracting and retaining adequately qualified and motivated employees has become a difficult, yet paramount issue for companies (Beechler and Woodward, 2009; Boxall *et al.*, 2007; Reichel and Mayrhofer, 2009). Especially multinational companies (MNCs) operating at a global level are said to be in need of attracting and retaining sufficient talent (Caligiuri *et al.*, 2010; Fardale *et al.*, 2010; Tarique and Schuler, 2010; Dowling *et al.*, 2009), among them a certain share of globally mobile employees. These

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employees, ready to relocate or travel frequently, are of great importance in both operational (e.g. filling vacancies abroad quickly) and strategic (e.g. knowledge transfer) terms (Caligiuri and Bonache, 2016). At the same time, employment relations spanning across diverse national and institutional contexts greatly increase uncertainty on the side of employees, as working and living in another country is associated with manifold cultural and economic challenges for the individual (Guzzo *et al.*, 1994; Levy *et al.*, 2007; O'Donohue *et al.*, 2018; Harvey and Moeller, 2009).

For attracting appropriate employees, Employer Branding (EB), a targeted long-term strategy for promoting a clear value proposition of what is unique and desirable to an organization as an employer (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Theurer *et al.*, 2016), gathered notable attention in the past decades. Using social networks, such as Facebook, for EB is of high relevance for companies in general and MNCs in particular, as they can reach a global audience and provide rich and valuable information to job seekers with barriers of distance and time removed (see Point and Dickmann, 2012; Martin and Hetrick, 2009; O'Shea and Puente, 2017). The content made public via EB represents organizational input into the formation of psychological contracts, i.e. mutual expectations between (potential) employees and MNCs about the (future) employment relationship (Rousseau, 1989; Sherman and Morley, 2018). Proposing a unique value associated with being an MNC's employee strongly shapes the psychological contract, including expectations associated with global mobility. In this way, EB shapes what (future) employees expect to get when working for the organization abroad and presents additional information for employees. In this way, EB messages can mitigate uncertainties associated with global mobility (Guzzo *et al.*, 1994; Harvey and Moeller, 2009) and help MNCs to source internationally mobile employees.

By analyzing an extensive sample of 13.340 EB postings found on career pages of 30 major MNCs (10 of each headquartered in the US, UK and Germany) on Facebook through the lens of psychological contracts, we answer the following research question: what EB messages do MNCs send to attract a globally mobile workforce? Focusing on leading international MNCs gives us the opportunity to make two important contributions. First, our findings provide insights into the practices of experienced companies for sourcing globally mobile employees. International companies that are smaller and less experienced can build on these findings to attract globally mobile employees on their own. Second, looking at EB messages on a macro level gives insights into contemporary employment relationships in major MNCs, indicating some directions in which international employment relationships may develop in the near future.

2. Employer branding messages for attracting a (globally mobile) workforce

MNCs need a certain share of globally mobile employees who are ready to physically relocate. The prospect of working or even living in another country potentially increases the uncertainties expected by potential employees at cultural and economic levels (Guzzo *et al.*, 1994; Levy *et al.*, 2007; O'Donohue *et al.*, 2018; Harvey and Moeller, 2009), posing additional challenges on the task of attracting talent. Uncertainty reduction theory states that high levels of uncertainty will result in information seeking and that increased communication in turn decreases the level of uncertainty (Berger and Calabrese, 1975; Walker *et al.*, 2013).

Currently, the dominant channel for information seeking process is the Internet. Within the Internet, job seekers tend to especially consult companies' social media representations for gaining information on a potential future employer for reducing uncertainty. A big share of organizations, in turn, uses social media for conveying their value propositions to potential candidates (Employer Brand International, 2014) which is a key component in employee attraction (O'Shea and Puente, 2017).

An employer brand terms a package highlighting functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by an employment or work environment associated with a firm with the

aim to distinguish this firm from other employers (Ambler and Barrow, 1996; Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Theurer *et al.*, 2016). This brand usually conveys a value proposition, which includes tangible and intangible reward features, advantages and benefits offered by an employer (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010).

The content that organizations create in their EB messages represents organizational input to the formation of the psychological contract between organizations and employees, as it shapes beliefs and unwritten promises, expectations and obligations regarding the (future) employment relationship already in the pre-employment stage (Theurer *et al.*, 2016; Sherman and Morley, 2018; Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010). Signaling which attitudes and behaviors firms expect to see from their employees and what they are willing to offer in return, psychological contracts reduce individual uncertainty by establishing agreed-upon conditions of employment leading to employees “having a greater sense of security by believing that they have an understood agreement with their employers” (Shore and Lois, 1994, p. 93).

The literature on psychological contracts differentiates between a transactional and a relational nature of employment relationships (Rousseau and McLean Parks, 1993). A transactional nature emerges when the exchange relationship is based on extrinsic, direct quid-pro-quo features, such as skills, benefits or pay (transactional contents). A relational nature refers to socio-emotional and cultural features, including membership in an identity group and personal development (relational contents). Thompson and Bunderson (2003) proposed adding ideological contents, denoting an employer’s credible commitments to pursue a valued cause or principle in accordance with a set of values and principles.

Communicating such contents can reduce uncertainty related to global mobility across diverse national contexts. Via EB companies can, for instance, suggest economic benefits of working abroad (transactional contents), strong organizational support and special developmental opportunities for global workers (relational contents) or signal a strong orientation toward cultural diversity and inclusion (ideological contents). This is why we investigate how MNCs try to attract a workforce confronted with global mobility demands by analyzing which types of relationships are signaled to a (globally mobile) workforce.

3. Method

3.1 Sampling and data

We gathered messages from EB sites of 30 major MNCs posted between January 1, 2016 and January 1, 2018 on Facebook using the data extraction application netvizz (Rieder, 2013), which allows exporting data in standard file formats from different sections of Facebook. Social media is an appropriate source of data because of its centrality for EB activities (Employer Brand International, 2014) and because it gives information on actual human resource management (HRM) practices as compared to survey or interview data, where HR managers rather tend to report intended practices than what is actually done (Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007).

Company-wise, we chose the 10 MNCs with the highest market capitalization values in the US, UK and German national stock index (Dow Jones, Financial Times Stock Exchange [FTSE] and the Deutscher Aktien Index [DAX]), respectively. MNCs in these indices rank among the most influential firms worldwide, hence setting standards in recruiting global workforces. Also, MNCs in these countries post the vast majority of their messages in English and German language, hence making the task of analyzing EB messages feasible to us.

When browsing through the ranking of the stock indices, we noticed that some MNCs exclusively run a corporate info page. When we found a majority of postings on such info pages giving insights into the culture and everyday working reality in the MNC, we included the pages in our sample. In other cases, e.g. where the majority of postings contained product information, we jumped over to the next MNC in the ranking. For two MNCs, we found two

career pages addressing different audiences. In these cases, we included both pages into our sample. An overview over the final sample of 32 Facebook pages can be found in [Table I](#). For each page we captured two full-year cycles of EB activity (2016, 2017) to integrate all annual events (e.g. New Year's Day or Equal Pay Day) and to compensate for possible differences in the activities within one year. All in all, this process resulted in a total sample of 13.340 Facebook postings.

3.2 Data analysis

We analyzed the collected data following an interpretative research paradigm by applying an integrated approach combining the coding paradigm of Grounded Theory ([Corbin and Strauss, 1990](#)) with selected text-mining procedures using the RapidMiner software ([Nelson, 2017](#); [Chong et al., 2011](#)). [Figure 1](#) graphs the analysis steps in which

US	Postings	UK	Postings	Germany	Postings
Amazon fulfillment	314	AstraZeneca careers	535	Allianz careers	378
Amazon inside	607				
AT&T careers	920	Barclays	10	BASF careers	779
Chevron	310	BP careers	193	Bayer karriere	681
Comcast careers	774	British American Tobacco	459	BMW karriere	360
		Global careers			
ExxonMobil careers	232	BT careers	172	Daimler karriere	373
		BT Early careers	398		
Facebook careers	364	HSBC careers	576	Deutsche Telekom karriere	571
				Fresenius karriere	331
GE careers	681	Lloyds banking group early careers	340		
		Prudential careers	398	Henkel careers	475
Microsoft life	475	Unilever careers	297	Siemens jobs and careers	110
P&G careers	167			Volkswagen karriere	444
Walmart today	422	Vodafone careers	194		
Sum	5.266	Sum	3.572	Sum	4.502

Table I.
Facebook career pages in the sample

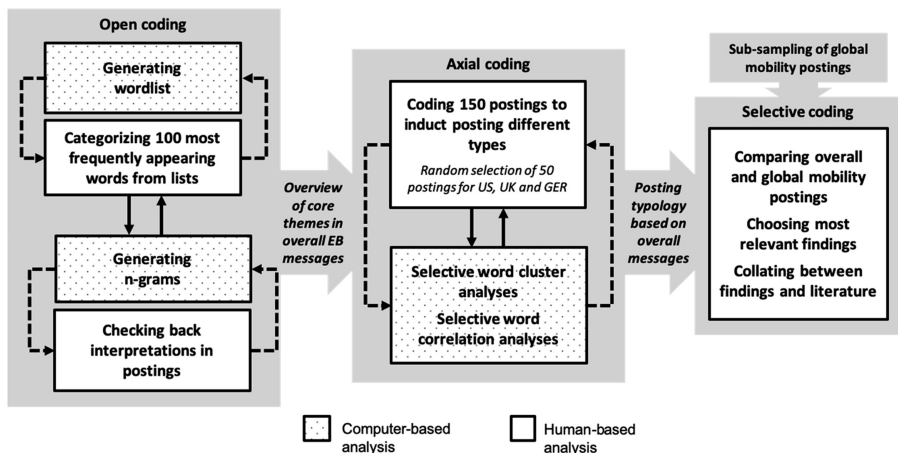


Figure 1.
Data analysis process

we triangulated several machine- and human-based data analysis techniques. The first and the third author executed the majority of these procedures in three joint sessions. The codings, analyses and interpretations were then presented to the second author in an extensive follow-up meeting in which they were scrutinized and refined. In case of discrepancies, all authors took a joint look into the data and discussed the matter until consensus was reached, thereby leveraging argumentative and consensual validation procedures.

In the first step, we aimed at developing an understanding of the overall patterns in the MNCs' EB messages. In the first phase of open coding, we inductively identified thematic clusters to generate first categories and overarching themes. To this end, we created word count lists according to the most frequently appearing words throughout the postings. After reducing the words on the list to relevant nouns (excluding, e.g. company names, nouns related to specific industries, such as "chemical" or "insurance" or very general nouns, such as "video" or "year") we manually categorized the first 100 most frequently appearing words in the US, UK and German sample postings according to the content categories derived from the psychological contract literature (transactional, relational and ideological). These categories served as a sensitizing concept for our analysis, suggesting directions along which to look into the data for providing a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances (Blumer, 1954). To further explore, substantiate and validate our initial interpretations, we created *n*-grams (a contiguous sequence of *n* items, in our case $n = 2$), that helped us to direct our attention to frequently occurring word combinations. For instance, the *n*-gram "career_fair" suggested that corporations communicate early career opportunities in their EB messages as they are often present at fairs to address potential candidates. We cross-checked this by manually searching and browsing through postings containing these words for understanding the actual meanings and contexts in which these words were used. In the case of career fairs, searching in the postings confirmed that many postings are related to recruiting activities at fairs and different other events. These procedures resulted in an overview of core themes in the overall sample.

In the phase of axial coding, we aimed at identifying relations between the themes identified by creating a posting typology. First, we inductively categorized 150 postings by hand (50 randomly selected candidates in each MNC home country) for identifying posting types. Second, we applied word cluster and correlation analysis for additionally verifying the inducted types. As an example, our hand-coding resulted in the posting category "development" where MNCs provide information on their education and training programs. To additionally validate this category, we ran selective word cluster and correlation analyses. The results demonstrated a considerable proximity of the words associated with early stage employees (e.g. "graduates", "intern", etc.) and development offers (e.g. "program", "opportunities", "development", etc.) in single postings, thus underpinning and at the same time refining our hand-coded finding. This process led to a typology of posting types in the overall sample.

After having gathered a good understanding of the overall data structure, the final stage of selective coding focused on the theme of global mobility. We first identified a sub-sample of postings specifically related to global mobility. To this end, we systematically searched for postings containing word combinations related to global mobility (derived from the word lists from the first step), resulting in a sample of 428 postings (see Table II). For generating insights into how MNCs promote global mobility, we then compared the global mobility-postings with the core themes and posting types found in the overall sample. For instance, we looked at to what extent transactional, relational or ideological contents or distinct posting types are represented in the global mobility-postings. Finally, we identified the most salient findings, i.e. the similarities and differences across the different MNC home countries and consulted extant literature to explain their emergence.

Table II.
Selection of postings
related to global
mobility in the overall
sample

Search terms	qnt	US	UK	GER
expat*	55	1	51	4
abroad/Ausland	57/63	5	32	83
international internship*/international* Praktikum	1/10	0	1	10
international* student*	26	4	5	17
international graduate*/international* Absolvent*	0/3	0	0	3
international apprentice*/international* Ausbildung	0/3	0	0	3
international career*/international* Karriere*	15/0	1	13	1
international opportunit*/international* Möglichkeit*	0/0	0	0	0
international employee*/international* Mitarbeiter*	0/7	0	0	7
international experience*/international* Erfahrung*	4/15	0	2	17
international development/international* Entwicklung*	1/5	0	0	6
global internship*/global* Praktikum*	10/9	0	10	9
global student*	0	0	0	0
global graduate*/global* Absolvent*	167/2	0	165	4
global apprentice*/global* Ausbildung*	0/1	0	0	1
global career/global* Karriere*	7/5	0	6	6
global opportunit*/global* Möglichkeit*	3/0	1	0	2
global employee*/global* Mitarbeit*	2/7	0	0	9
global experience*/global* Erfahrung*	1/8	0	1	8
global development/global* Entwicklung*	0/4	0	0	4
Sum		12	286	194
Selected sample		11	243	174
Overall postings		5.266	3.572	4.502
% of sample postings		0.21	6.80*	3.86

Note(s): * Concentrated on two MNCs.

4. Findings

4.1 General patterns across all MNCs

Starting with the list of most frequently occurring words, [Table III](#) shows the top 10 words in our sample, according to the content categories of psychological contracts. We included German terms with the same meaning in the field of the English term. The first row shows the share of words associated with different content categories in relation to the overall number

Table III.
Relative shares of the
top ten most frequently
appearing words in all
postings

Transactional		Relational		Ideological	
<i>Overall share</i>					
29.44 %		43.08 %		27.48 %	
Term	%	Term	%	Term	%
<i>Share of top 10 words within category</i>					
Company	10.34	Career	28.43	Future	12.15
Intern/ship	9.04	Team	15.14	Women	9.83
Students/study	9.03	Opportunity/ies	11.81	Life	8.34
Business	8.28	Program/s	7.35	#Passiontoinnovate	7.61
Engineer/ing	6.87	Employee/s	6.47	#Powertochange	7.61
Graduate/s	6.36	People	5.78	#Scienceforabetterlife	6.88
Sales	5.76	Experiences	5.52	World	6.70
Customer/s	5.15	Part	4.92	Veteran/s	5.32
Apprentice/ships	5.11	Development	4.86	Military	4.95
Service/s	4.14	Group	3.56	Diversity	4.63

of words coded. With about 43 percent across all countries, relational contents are the most important category. Transactional (about 30 percent) and ideological contents (about 27.5 percent) share almost the same frequency. The rest of the table shows the share of the top 10 words within each content category.

Words in [Table III](#) provide a first glimpse on the core themes of the MNCs' EB messages. Transactional contents relate to themes of economic exchange, including information on the company, employment, skills, benefits, pay, etc. Our analysis of words associated with transactional contents in the postings reveals three core themes. First, the terms "companies", "business", "engineering", "customer", "sales" and "services" relate to contents presenting the MNC and its business processes. Second, the terms "students" and "graduates" show that MNCs primarily address target audiences with a high level of formal education. Third, the high frequency of the word "internships" and "apprenticeships" indicates that many MNCs aim at providing early career opportunities for students and graduates, presumably for establishing fixed term work relations at a later career stage.

Relational contents include socio-emotional and cultural features of employment relations. Our analysis indicates three core themes in this category. Most saliently, these contents implicate a very strong orientation toward community and belonging in the messages, as expressed by the terms "teams", "part", "community", "colleagues" and "group". Second, the words "employees", "people" and "experiences" indicate that MNCs put people and their experiences in the MNC to the center of attention. Third, MNCs put a strong emphasis on opportunities for development of (future) employees in their messages ("career", "programs", "development").

Ideological contents relate to an employer's credible commitments to pursue a valued cause or principle. Our analysis reveals three core themes. The terms "future" and "world" as well as the hashtags "#passiontoinnovate", "#powertochange" and "#scienceforabetterlife" imply strong engagements of MNCs toward addressing "grand challenges" by leveraging passion and innovation capacities. The terms "women" and "diversity" point to a strong emphasis on equal opportunities for all (future) employees. Finally, the terms "veterans" and "military" reveal the US-based MNCs' engagement in societal issues by providing career opportunities for socially vulnerable people. [Table IV](#) shows an integrated summary of the core themes discovered in the data organized according to psychological contract contents.

After exploring core themes in the three content categories of psychological contracts, we manually categorized a sample of 150 randomly selected postings (50 postings related to US-, UK- and Germany-based MNCs). Based on this categorization, we were able to induct 10 saturated posting categories. Descriptions and examples can be found in [Table V](#).

Comparing the inducted posting types in [Table V](#) with the core themes identified through word counts and text-mining ([Table III](#)) shows a large overlap, pointing to a high internal and semantic validity of our findings. For instance, the posting type "company information" highly resonates with the core theme of "MNCs and its business". Postings of the type "events/lifestyle" and "employees-in-context" highly resonate with the core theme "people in the MNC", as MNCs put employees to the center and showcase their work experiences. To provide a better overview of the categories, we assigned each posting category to one of the three psychological contract contents (see [Figure 2](#)).

Transactional	Relational	Ideological
MNCs and its business	Community and belonging	Addressing "grand challenges"
Formal education	People in the MNC	Equality and diversity
Early career opportunities	Opportunities and development	Engagement in societal issues

Table IV.
Core themes identified
in the postings across
all MNCs

Category	Description	General example postings	Example postings related to global mobility
Job offers	Information on job offers, mostly with a short description and the invitation to apply	Are you an expert in quality control management and can lead a team to continuous improvement? Do you have experience in ISO site management as well as the testing of raw materials and finished products? Then we have the perfect job for you! (..)	(..) Start your investment banking career with us on our 2018 Global Banking internship in London which could lead into a full time offer on our Global Graduate Program. Learn more and apply here: [link] [MNC name] Asia will host an interactive information session on 20 October for penultimate and final year university students from University of Warwick. This session is for students who are interested in starting their investment banking career in either China, Singapore or Hong Kong (..)
Recruiting/ hiring	(Live) Information on opportunities for (direct) interaction with the MNC (career events, live chats, etc.)	Team Talent Organization/HR Services is excited to pitch in at Community FoodBank of New Jersey today! #[MNC name]Cares #[MNC name]Talent	Expats rank Singapore as the best place to live and work abroad in the 2016 [MNC] Expat Explorer survey. The research reflects the views of almost 27,000 expats about how moving abroad has helped them to achieve their ambitions. (..)
Company information	Information on MNC infrastructure, plans, rankings, current projects, economic development, company reports, awards, etc.	We're proud to be named one of the 2017 Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For. Thank you to all of our amazing employees who make #LifeAt [MNC name] so great!	How about a career journey? Start your trip with the #International #Procurement #Management #Trainee Program! Embark on an 18-month journey through the world of Procurement Management at #[MNC name]! (..) Collect valuable experience in Germany and abroad as well as developing yourself within the exciting program. (..)
Development	Information on education, training and/or development including tips for career/successful applications, etc.	Did you know you might be eligible for tuition assistance through [MNC name]'s Career Choice Program? We offer the flexibility and financial resources to associates who want to earn degrees in high-demand occupations. To learn more visit: [link]	Hello :) I am Mathias! (..) At the beginning of 2009 I got the chance to support the "Lagerverbund" management as operations assistant. During this time I gained my first experiences abroad (..) in the same year I was delegated to the [MNC name] site in Bradford, UK, where I took over responsibility for operational logistics with 70 employees. (..)
Employees-in-context	Information on MNC employee's biographies, careers and daily work experiences	As a new employee at [MNC name] I am passionate about explaining and promoting technology to support the digital thread. Only by embracing technology will we be able to achieve the goals set out by our leaders. I look forward to playing my small part.	

Table V.
Content categories
inducted from data

(continued)

Category	Description	General example postings	Example postings related to global mobility
Events/lifestyle	Information on events and lifestyle that comes with the job in the MNC	There's always time for a little (or big ;-)) bake-off right? Just do it like our colleagues at #[MNC name]Australia and treat yourself! :-)[link] #teambuilding #joinus #sweettooth	[MNC name] is home to many groups that help employees network and share hobbies with coworkers outside of work. One of the groups (. . .) was formed at Amazon by employees to help Chinese expats transition to a new city and meet other expats. Over 1,000 employees participate in various events and activities hosted by [them] every year [link]
Corporate values/culture statements	Information/statements that present the general self-understanding, values and cultural demands of the MNC	Passion has always been the driving force behind our culture. Discover what drives Jason's passion in [MNC name]'s Caribbean branch. Want to join our team? Follow us at [link]	It is the little gestures that help define our culture. Find out more about Christina's experience as a graduate in global Private banking
Activating/empowering statements	Empowering statements and a call to participate in an activity/express one's opinion	What does your Dream Workplace look like? What do YOU want from work? You'll find a few ideas from our inspirational [MNC name] Future Leaders League finalists in the video below. #Independence #Innovation #RESPECT #PutItRight	Tell us what is different for you about living and working abroad? Complete our 2016 Expat Explorer survey today and help inspire the next generation of expats. [link]
Mission/impact story	Information on how the products or philanthropic activities of the MNC impact society	#[MNC name] India has embraced a rural solar electrification initiative called "Henkel Lighting Lives" as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility initiative. Read the whole story here:	No postings found
Equality and diversity/social engagement	Information on the attitudes and actions related to equality of women, LGBTQ and social/societal issue	Today is International Women's Day on which we celebrate social economic cultural and political achievement of women. For [employee name] diversity is key to our business success. #InternationalWomensDay	No postings found

Table V.

4.2 Similarities and differences in global mobility-postings

Having analyzed the overall patterns in EB messages across all MNCs, we now attend to patterns identified in our sample of global mobility-postings in more depth. In this section, we focus on two particular findings: first, that MNCs promote global mobility in a transactional and, most importantly, in a relational fashion but not in an ideological one (see Table V and Figure 2) and second, that global mobility is an overall marginal topic in the sample postings (see Table IV) while at the same time notable differences exist in the emphases put on the topic relative to the MNC's home country.

MNCs build on transactional and relational contents when promoting global mobility. In transactional terms, MNCs promote global mobility mainly in job offer-, recruiting- or company information-postings by drawing attention to the professional and economic opportunities related to global mobility. For instance:

Applications for the Global Graduate Program are now open! [MNC name] Global Investors have opened their Global Graduate Program in London. Over 24 months you will have the opportunity to rotate around different business specializations as well as spending time working in other locations around the world. (. . .)

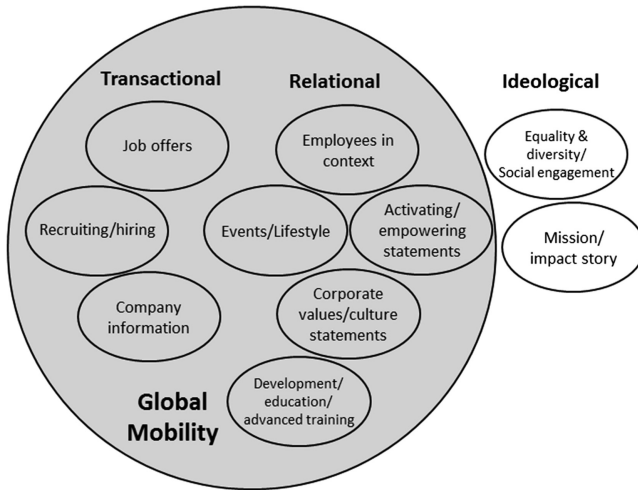


Figure 2.
Inducted posting categories related to contents of psychological contracts

JOB OF THE WEEK For all students who would like to gain more working experiences abroad: Singapore is searching for you! Join us as an intern in Corporate Communications and deal with exciting and creative topics! Are you interested?

Could you be better off in another country? Discover which countries are top for expat income in our latest Expat Explorer findings: [link]

However, resonating with the high share of relational contents found in the overall sample (see Table II), a clear emphasis in global mobility-postings is on relational contents. In accordance, the theme of global mobility mostly occurs in employees-in-context postings, events/lifestyle postings, corporate value and culture statements, activating/empowering statements as well as in development-postings. The messages mainly foreground opportunities for positive experiences and personal development for young people during their stays within a global corporate environment. Most importantly, MNCs promote the experience- and adventure-oriented character of global mobility enabled by their global work environment, as apparent in the following examples:

#Australia in the morning, #Thailand by midday, #America in the afternoon – the world is just a village. Philip works in this diverse world. As part of the global mobility team, he manages international expatriates of [MNC name] (. . .)

We were born global. It's a mindset you embrace and an influence you enjoy. Learn how a day at work looks like for Prisca, our Marketing Deployment Manager for the Caribbean.

Attorney around the globe? At [MNC name] this is possible. With legal departments in 33 countries and many global projects, jurists can reach out to thrilling horizons. Find out more today from Dr [MNC employee name] (. . .) at [MNC name] about job opportunities in our global company (. . .)

As already apparent in the examples above, MNCs very prominently provide “testimonials” of employees in the form of employees-in-context postings, who stay (or stayed) abroad reporting from their experiences in employees-in-context postings. Two of numerous other examples in the sample are:

Hey :) my name is Florence. After graduating in external trade in France I came to Germany for training. I then worked in export for 15 years, abroad and in and out of the office, and finished my

master's degree at the same time. From the [MNC location] site in Germany I support important customers in Western Europe, including France, Benelux, Denmark and Switzerland. (. . .)

Jessie and Anup appreciated the international opportunities and experience across job functions. They never thought such a dynamic career journey was possible at a single company. Meet Jessie and Anup from Asia Pacific: [link]

In these regards, MNCs also openly address potential difficulties these individuals face during their times abroad and let employees report from their experiences:

Everyone faces a few challenges on their journey to becoming an expat. Read our blog for a few simple solutions to some of the most common expat challenges: [link]

Starting your graduate career in a different country can be daunting. Find out more about Michael's transition from South Africa to join our global graduate program in the UK. (. . .)

As mentioned earlier, we did not find any global mobility-postings building on ideological contents – despite ideological contents being generally important in the EB messages (see [Table II](#)). However, ideological contents certainly play a role in promoting global mobility in an indirect manner. As [Table IV](#) shows, MNCs across all home countries communicate equality and diversity as one core theme. Related contents contribute to promoting global mobility as they suggest an inclusive and diverse work environment with a global mindset. An example is

[MNC name] Global Operations Center in Budapest is a perfect example of diversity at workplace. The center provides integrated multifunctional shared services to 35+ countries in Europe and beyond. Inaugurated in February 2014, the Center currently employs around 1,400 people with 62 percent women; 80 percent Hungarians and 46 other nationalities speaking a total of 37 languages making it a truly international place to build a professional career. (. . .)

The second overall finding is that global mobility is only a marginal topic in MNCs' EB messages (see [Table II](#)). Overall, MNCs mainly aim at recruiting home- and local-country employees, as they very often invite potential candidates to check out career opportunities at certain subsidiaries in their job offer- and recruiting-postings. Despite being a merely marginal topic, we discovered some notable differences between MNCs in different home countries. The first important, and quite striking, finding in these regards is that US-based MNCs, despite accounting for almost the half of the postings in our overall sample, relate to global mobility in only 0.21 percent of their messages (see [Table II](#)). Re-checking the postings of US-based MNCs with those in the overall sample revealed that US-based MNCs largely post information on job offers and recruiting events outside the US or introduce subsidiaries in countries outside the US. While frequently providing insights and referring to job opportunities at their subsidiaries, however, US-based MNCs do not proactively promote global mobility in their EB messages.

Compared to US-based MNCs, UK-based MNCs have a much higher percent of global mobility-postings. However, re-checking this comparably large share of global mobility-postings in the sample of overall postings reveals that they are highly concentrated only on two MNCs, one operating in the banking sector and another in the consumer goods sector, which have an overall large number of postings on their pages. While these two MNCs apparently put an extremely high emphasis on promoting global mobility, other UK-based MNCs remain quite silent in these regards. German MNCs, by contrast, promote global mobility quite extensively. In the sample, nine out of 10 German MNCs have postings promoting programs for early career employees to go abroad and provide numerous insights into experiences of employees with global mobility. We will unpack this finding more deeply in our subsequent discussion section.

5. Discussion

We have shown that MNCs put a high emphasis on relational contents when promoting global mobility, highlighting opportunities such as personal development, career opportunities and positive experiences, as well as inclusive work environments. Our findings also reveal that global mobility is an overall marginal topic in MNCs' EB messages and that US- and UK-based MNCs put only low to almost no emphasis on global mobility, whereas German MNCs strongly promote global mobility. In the following, we contextualize our findings in the extant literature and discuss some possible explanations for our findings.

First, the overall emphasis on relational contents resonates with young employees' increased demands for social connections, involvement, career advancement, mentoring and training within organizations (de Hauw and de Vos, 2010). Accordingly, MNCs present global mobility primarily as an opportunity for experience and personal development of employees at an early career stage, enabled by their exciting global work environment. Ideological contents, including themes such as diversity and equal opportunities, complement the promotion of global mobility, as they indicate an inclusive work environment with a global mindset. Relating these findings to our theoretical framework, cues of this kind can highly contribute to reduce uncertainty by increasing *relational certainty*, i.e. the degree to which job seekers believe they can predict the type of relationships they will have as employees after organizational entry (Walker *et al.*, 2013). High relational certainty may in turn positively affect (future) employees' readiness for global mobility, as information provided via EB shapes the complexities related to global mobility more tangible and predictable.

We also discovered some notable differences in core themes and content patterns relative to MNC home countries. US-based MNCs post almost no messages related to global mobility; and while UK-based MNCs present postings related to global mobility in a quite high number, the postings concentrate on only two MNCs. This indicates that US- and UK-based MNCs put much less to no emphasis on the topic of global mobility, as compared to German MNCs, who strongly promote global mobility in their EB messages.

Institutional theory provides some avenues to interpret this finding. While MNCs, per definition, operate in a range of countries which differ in their regulative (e.g. laws), normative (e.g. norms) and cultural/cognitive (e.g. values) environments (Scott, 2014), they bring in a range of home country endowments, including routines, standardized practices and capabilities (Jackson and Deeg, 2008), which are highly influential on their HR practices (Brewster *et al.*, 2016). Home country endowments highly resonate with the economic system present in the MNC's home country (Ferner, 1997). The varieties of capitalism literature (Hall and Soskice, 2003) differentiate into liberal market economies (LMEs) and coordinated market economies (CMEs). In LMEs, such as the US and the UK, firms mainly rely on market-based forms of coordinating economic activity, including short-term industrial finance, competitive industrial relations (including loose employment protection laws and high employee mobility among firms), low levels of vocational and firm-specific training and little inter-firm relations in developing technologies and standards. By contrast, in CMEs, such as Germany, firms tend to utilize non-market forms for coordinating economic activity, including long-term industrial finance, cooperative industrial relations (including strict employment protection laws with low employee mobility among firms), highly specialized vocational and firm-specific training and cooperation on technology and standard-setting across companies.

Considering these notions can provide some explanation for the extreme low share of global mobility-postings in the US- and UK-based MNCs. As employee mobility is quite common in LMEs, US- and UK-based MNCs do not seem to see a need to promote this topic too much, as changing one's employer and one's location is far more common in these economic systems. German MNCs, by contrast, have a comparably high share of global mobility-postings. In accordance to the economic system in CMEs, companies make extensive

use of labor with highly industry-specific or firm-specific skills. Aiming at developing specialized workers for long-term employment in their organization, they develop “multidimensional employment relations”, including social as well as economic aspects and an according predominance of recruiting in internal labor markets (Ferner, 1997). This stark tendency toward retaining employees implies that labor mobility of employees between firms and countries remains comparably low and is not as common as in LMEs. Facilitating global mobility thus seems of high importance for German MNCs to meet their operational and strategic goals associated with global mobility (Caligiuri and Bonache, 2016). This seems to be especially the case for the mobility of German home country recruits, as six of the sample pages post EB messages in the German language. Considered through the lens of the psychological contract, the differences in how US-, UK- and Germany-based MNCs address global mobility also point to differences in psychological contracts within different institutional environments, i.e. suggesting that prevailing economic systems shape expectations of employers regarding the behavior of their employees.

6. Conclusions, implications and future research

In our paper, we gave insight into how MNCs promote global mobility in their EB messages. Guided by the concept of the psychological contract, we have suggested that EB provides an important organizational input in the formation phase of psychological contracts by which MNCs can provide critical information to reduce uncertainties in (pre-)recruiting processes (Berger and Calabrese, 1975; Walker *et al.*, 2013). Reducing uncertainty by shaping realistic expectations is of high relevance for MNCs aiming at attracting a globally mobile workforce because employees working in different national settings face a range of uncertainties stemming from the multitude of cultural and institutional contexts (home, host, third countries) they have to deal with.

While our findings support that MNCs only need a certain share of globally mobile employees, we also see that in the few messages addressing global mobility MNCs actively provide information tailored to reduce uncertainty associated with working internationally. MNCs mainly mobilize socio-emotional/relational contents, such as personal development, career opportunities and positive experiences, as well as inclusive work environments to promote global mobility as a value proposition to young populations. Our findings point to the potential importance of leveraging relational contents, particularly when firms attempt attracting employees ready for global mobility in countries where labor mobility is generally low according to the prevailing economic system. As our sample postings show, German MNCs provide many postings conveying the experiences and testimonials of their “internal globe trotters” first-hand. Relational contents of these kinds can increase relational certainty, which may in turn positively affect employees’ readiness for global mobility. These findings contribute to literatures on attracting globally mobile employees and provide less experienced firms and some heuristics on how to attract globally mobile employees.

Our findings also contribute to the overall EB literature by providing insights into EB messages on a macro level. EB research has mostly emphasized how EB messages are presented most effectively to potential candidates to increase attraction, mostly by leveraging research at the individual level (Theurer *et al.*, 2016; Ehrhart and Ziegert, 2005). By attending to EB from a macro perspective, our findings provide insights into the actual content MNCs communicate in their EB messages. Using psychological contract dimensions gave us the opportunity to aggregate the findings on a macro level and contribute to discussions about the future of work – especially in terms of employer–employee relationships. Leveraging this perspective, we can also contribute to the international (comparative) HRM literature, as our findings suggest that the institutional environment shapes EB messages contingent to the MNC’s home country. Companies should thus be

aware of how home country endowments shape their EB messages and how this affects the attraction of potential talents in other institutional contexts.

Our study comes with three important limitations, indicating some fruitful avenues for future research. First, despite building our approach on methods triangulation, it is qualitative in nature. Future research could combine qualitative and quantitative methods to leverage both structured and unstructured data for additionally enhancing the depth of insights into text-mining procedures provided to researchers. Second, our analysis is limited to the contents of EB messages of 30 MNCs on an aggregated level. Future research could explore the communication strategies of companies in need for globally mobile employees more deeply, have a look into how MNCs combine different contents in their messages and examine the implication this has on the side of the recipients. Third, our sample is limited to US- and European MNCs. Future research could include more countries, e.g. in the Asian region, to capture general trends in EB and employer–employee relationships more substantially. In these regards, a more careful sampling including national and international career pages could allow more careful differentiations between industries and more accurate dissections of contextual influences shaping the messages directed to potential employees ready for global mobility.

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