

ATTRACTING TOP TALENT AMONG FRESH GRADUATES: PERSPECTIVES FROM GRADUATE RECRUITERS

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ABSTRACT

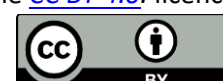
Attracting high-potential talent among fresh graduates remains a significant challenge for organizations, despite the critical role graduates play in sustaining long-term organizational growth. This study explores (1) the challenges faced by graduate recruiters in attracting top talent among fresh graduates, and (2) the strategies recruiters employ to differentiate themselves in a competitive labour market. The findings indicate that compensation packages, employer brand recognition, employee recommendations, and job stability are key factors influencing graduates' employment decisions. Thematic analysis further reveals three dominant themes: the digital labour market, alignment with millennial expectations, and supply-demand mismatches. The study provides practical insights for organizations seeking to position their employer brand effectively in the minds of graduates when considering career opportunities. These findings are particularly relevant for talent acquisition professionals aiming to enhance graduate recruitment strategies in increasingly competitive and digitally driven employment environments.

Keywords: Graduate recruitment; employer branding; fresh graduates; talent attraction; labour market dynamics

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Attracting top talent among fresh graduates is critical for graduate employers to remain competitive and achieve organizational goals. Top talent can bring innovative ideas, creative problem-solving skills, and fresh perspectives that help organizations stay ahead of their competitors (Sanders, 2021). Graduate recruitment is a key driver of organizational long-term success, as it ensures a steady supply of highly skilled workers who can contribute to growth and innovation. Effective recruitment of top talent enables organizations to achieve strategic objectives and maintain a competitive advantage (Harvard et al., 2017). By attracting top talent, graduate employers can also strengthen their employer brand and enhance their reputation as employers of choice. As the workforce becomes increasingly diverse and mobile, more individuals seek flexible employment arrangements, such as remote or contract-based

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work (Deloitte, 2017).

However, recruiting top talent in the current job market presents numerous challenges, including rising recruitment costs and changing workforce demographics. Competition for top talent is intense due to a shortage of highly skilled workers in many industries, forcing organizations to compete for a limited candidate pool. Evidently, many industries face a shortage of skilled labor, accompanied by persistent skills gaps and mismatches. This situation occurs at a time when academic qualifications are often valued more than skill-based competencies. Furthermore, the rapid digitization of business processes has increased demand for technology-related skills that many displaced or new job seekers do not possess (Statista Research Department, 2023).

In neighboring countries such as the Philippines, the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) reported that 7.9 million Filipinos were classified as underemployed in February 2021, representing an increase of approximately 20 percent compared to the number of unemployed individuals in January 2021 (Escoto et al., 2022). This trend is attributed to skills mismatches, lack of relevant experience, and market changes (Doyle, 2022). According to the International Labour Organization, the global decline in employment among young workers in 2020 was 2.5 times greater than that of adults. Kenny (2021) further noted that unemployment and underemployment issues were already evident in several regions even before the pandemic. Understanding the challenges and drivers of attracting top talent is therefore essential for organizations seeking to develop effective recruitment strategies and gain a competitive advantage (McKinsey & Company, 2018). Additionally, recruitment remains a costly process in terms of time and resources, making it important for organizations to optimize recruitment strategies to improve efficiency and reduce costs (Society for Human Resource Management, 2017).

Strong employer branding initiatives have enabled several companies in Malaysia to emerge as leading graduate recruiters in recent years. Employing fresh graduates can benefit organizations, although it may also present certain risks. Companies can reduce labor costs by hiring fresh graduates, as they generally do not demand high initial compensation (Pham, 2016). Moreover, fresh graduates are typically tech-savvy and up to date with current technological advancements, allowing them to contribute new ideas and perspectives to organizations (Hackfort & Schinke, 2020). They are often eager to learn, adaptable, and motivated to develop new skills. However, training and onboarding fresh graduates require significant time and financial investment, and their career preferences may evolve over time, making long-term retention challenging (Fulantelli et al., 2023).

Despite these advantages, many graduates lack the skills and practical experience required by the job market, leading employers to be hesitant in hiring them. Some employers also perceive fresh graduates as lacking professionalism, effective communication skills, and stable career aspirations. From a different perspective, Cabegin (2016) argued that attributing hiring difficulties solely to skills gaps unfairly places responsibility on graduates and educational institutions. Instead, the private sector should be examined for its limited willingness to invest in training new entrants according to higher job standards and competitive wages. Furthermore, many fresh graduates increasingly seek careers that contribute to social and environmental change, aiming for meaningful work that extends beyond personal achievement. This shift in mindset challenges organizations to proactively position themselves and communicate the broader societal impact of their industries to attract and retain talent. Studies examining graduate recruiters' strategies for attracting top talent among fresh graduates remain limited. Therefore, this study seeks to identify the challenges graduate recruiters face in attracting top talent among fresh graduates, and examine how graduate recruiters differentiate themselves to attract top talent.

This study investigated strategies for attracting top talent among fresh graduates from the perspectives of leading graduate recruiters in Malaysia, with contextual comparisons drawn from the Philippines. The unit of analysis comprised organizations actively recruiting fresh graduates. A qualitative research design was employed using semi-structured interviews, and the data were analyzed through thematic analysis. Theoretical significance lies in extending existing knowledge by identifying key challenges and drivers influencing graduate recruitment. Specifically, this study contributes to the literature by addressing gaps related to graduate recruiters' perspectives and provides practical recommendations to support more effective recruitment strategies and enhance recruiter productivity.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concept of Top Talent and Its Importance for Graduate Recruiters

There is no single agreed-upon definition of top talent; however, the term generally refers to individuals who exhibit the most valuable traits and make significant contributions to organizational success. Top talent is commonly associated with individuals who demonstrate high levels of competence, potential, and capability within their respective industries. Due to their ability to create substantial value for organizations, such individuals are highly sought after by employers. Top talent is often characterized by a combination of technical expertise, leadership abilities, creativity, and a strong work ethic. One key benefit of hiring top talent is the competitive advantage it provides, as these individuals contribute unique skills and perspectives that foster innovation, enhance productivity, and enable organizations to stay ahead of competitors (Reeves & Fuller, 2021).

Organizations typically identify top talent as employees who consistently receive high performance ratings or merit-based rewards. Identifying and developing top talent is critical for organizational success. A McKinsey study revealed that elite performers are approximately 400% more productive than average employees, with this gap widening as job complexity increases. In highly complex roles, top performers can be up to 800% more productive than their peers. For some organizations, analytical skills may be more critical than other attributes such as creativity and innovation (Thompson et al., 2013). Another important advantage of top talent is enhanced performance, as these individuals are recognized for their ability to deliver exceptional results. Their expertise and commitment can significantly improve individual, team, and organizational performance by increasing efficiency and effectiveness (Sylvia et al., 2009).

In addition, top talent often demonstrates strong leadership potential, making them valuable candidates for leadership development initiatives. By identifying and nurturing high-potential employees, organizations can establish a robust pipeline of future leaders to support long-term sustainability and succession planning (Murphy & Ringgo, 2003).

2.2 Challenges Faced by Graduate Recruiters in Attracting Top Talent Among Fresh Graduates

Graduate recruiters face increasing challenges in attracting top talent among fresh graduates due to heightened competition in an increasingly competitive labor market. As more employers target the same pool of graduates, attracting high-quality candidates has become more difficult (Block & Harris, 2021). In addition, recruiters often struggle to assess the true potential and capabilities of fresh graduates, as many lack substantial work experience. This lack of experience complicates the selection process and increases uncertainty in identifying suitable candidates (Harper, 2021). Furthermore, fresh graduates frequently have high expectations regarding salary and benefits, which may not align with the financial resources or compensation structures of graduate employers (Hudson & DeRuiter, 2021). To address these challenges, graduate recruiters employ various strategies aimed at identifying, engaging, and retaining high-potential graduates.

Employers with lower brand recognition or weaker reputations may face additional difficulties in attracting top talent (Kara Novic et al., 2021). To overcome this challenge, organizations can enhance their visibility and credibility through alumni networks, targeted marketing initiatives, and online employer branding. Establishing partnerships with reputable organizations or industry leaders may also strengthen employer reputation and improve graduate attraction. Athanasia Tziouvara, as cited in Education Sciences (2019), highlights challenges related to graduate employability assessment, particularly the difficulty of defining and measuring employability due to the absence of a universally accepted framework. Tziouvara advocates for a more holistic approach that considers not only academic qualifications but also individual attributes, experiences, and personal perspectives.

Traditional indicators of graduate employability, such as employment rates and earnings, may fail to capture the full range of competencies required in the contemporary labor market. Pollard (2017) argues that difficulties in recruiting top graduate talent reflect a mismatch between employer expectations and graduate preparedness, particularly in terms of practical skills and work readiness. He further suggests that universities' emphasis on theoretical knowledge over applied skills contributes to this disconnect between education and labor market demands.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

In this study, a qualitative research methodology was used. In contrast to quantitative data and statistical analysis, qualitative research places a greater emphasis on the interpretation, description, and

comprehension of underlying meanings, patterns, and relationships within a particular study setting. The minimum sample size was determined to ensure that the output can reach the targeted results. However, a larger sample may have a higher risk of repeated data. It is non-probability sampling by collecting representative data from a group. They are typically used as a research strategy to gather information about participants' experiences, views, and beliefs concerning a specific research question or phenomenon of interest (Lambert & Loiselle, 2007). The researcher designed the interview protocol based on the population of the study. The protocol was explained to the interviewees in terms of the research purpose, questions, consent to record the interview, and consent that the data were used for the purpose of the research only. Data on graduate recruiting were collected by using semi-structured interviews. In order to guarantee the precision and consistency of the findings, reliable and valid measuring instruments were utilized. Factors such as gaining informed permission, protecting confidentiality and anonymity, preventing damage, valuing diversity, and receiving ethical reviews were considered.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Demographic profile of informants' companies

No ID	Year Of Business	Nature Of Business
C1	157	Fast-moving consumer goods
C7	115	Insurance
C2	25	Assurance, advisory, and tax services
C6	18	Banking services
C1	60	Banking services
C8	91	Banking services
C9	26	Baking services
C3	34	Assurance, consulting, strategy, and transaction
C10	33	Electricity services
C4	36	Audit, tax, and advisory services

Table 2: The top ten Malaysian companies were interviewed

Theme	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10
The Digital Market	/		/		/					
Meeting Millennials Expectation						/	/			
Supply Demand Mismatch			/						/	

The results in Table 3 shows the first research question regarding challenges that graduate recruiters face when attracting graduates.

RQ 1: What are the challenges recruiters face in attracting top talent among fresh graduates?

Table 3: Codes and Themes for Research Question One

First Order Codes	Themes	Aggregated Thematic Categories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing market landscape and the digital revolution are reshaping the way we operate every day, and new trends are emerging every other moment. • Traditional businesses must contend with not only competition from other corporations. • Required to be flexible and adjust to these shifts smoothly and with ease. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruiter Compete for the Same Candidate Pool. • Graduates have Many Options. • Growing Startup Competition. • Forced To Be Adaptable, Finding Resilient Talent. • New Jobs in New Spaces. • Startups and E-Commerce Platforms are Competitors for Younger customers. 	The Digital Market
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR practitioners face in the present day is keeping up with the expectations of millennials toward an organization. • Looking for a dynamic organization to change by accommodating new working styles and a more distributed network of talent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping Pace with Millennial Demand. • Catering To Millennial Expectations. • Demand New Working Style. • More Flexible Hours. 	Meeting Millennials Expectations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being a graduate employer means that there seems to be a mismatch between supply and demand. • More prevalent as we move ahead with the 4th industrial revolution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding Locally Sourcing Soft-Skilled Talent. • Mismatch between Supply and Demand. 	Supply Demand Dismatch

Theme 1: The Digital Market Revolution

The digital market revolution has fundamentally transformed the way businesses operate, interact with consumers, and compete in the global economy. This revolution refers to the rapid and profound changes brought about by the widespread adoption of digital technologies, particularly the internet, mobile devices, and data analytics. These technologies have not only reshaped traditional business models but have also given rise to entirely new ways of conducting commerce.

For example, “*Changing market landscapes and the digital revolution are reshaping the way we operate every day, and new trends are emerging constantly; therefore, we need talent with the right skill sets not only to adapt to these changes but also to maximize their potential.*” (C5)

“*The challenge, as I see it, is that traditional businesses must contend not only with competition from other corporations, but also with increasing competition from start-ups and entrepreneurship. We see some graduates opting to become entrepreneurs, as barriers to entry are relatively low due to the availability of e-commerce opportunities.*” (C3)

“Our industry is constantly evolving at a rapid pace. We are required to be flexible and adjust to these shifts smoothly and efficiently. Our competitors include start-ups and e-commerce platforms that tend to appeal to younger demographics.” (C1)

Due to the complexity of digital properties such as openness, modifiability, generativity, and integration (Troise et al., 2022; Nambisan, 2017), digital marketplaces and digital entrepreneurs may encounter numerous opportunities while facing significant uncertainty. Entrepreneurs therefore need to develop new approaches to manage resources and capabilities in order to navigate these challenges and capitalize on the benefits of digital technologies (Troise et al., 2022; Chen & Tian, 2022).

Theme 2: Meeting Millennials’ Expectations

Meeting the expectations of millennials presents a significant challenge for contemporary organizations. Born between the early 1980s and mid-1990s, millennials represent an influential demographic whose preferences and values have shaped how products and services are consumed. As the first generation to mature in the digital era, millennials possess distinct expectations that organizations must understand and address to foster engagement and long-term commitment.

For example, *“I think the main challenge HR practitioners face today is keeping up with millennials’ expectations toward an organization. This group tends to have lower organizational loyalty, higher expectations, and actively seeks growth opportunities wherever they go.” (C7)*

“Graduates are looking for organizations to adapt by accommodating new working styles and more distributed networks of talent. Flexible working hours, remote or hybrid work arrangements, and an emphasis on productivity rather than time spent at work are increasingly valued.” (C6)

Theme 3: Supply-Demand Mismatch

Supply-demand mismatch is a critical labor market issue that occurs when the supply of available talent does not align with industry demand. This misalignment presents ongoing challenges for graduate employers.

For example, *“The key challenge for graduate employers is the apparent mismatch between supply and demand. The graduates entering the job market may not possess industry-relevant skills. This occurs when academic programs do not align with the competencies expected of graduate talent. The issue is likely to intensify as we move further into the Fourth Industrial Revolution, where skills such as coding, analytics, artificial intelligence, and big data are increasingly prioritized over generic degrees such as business, marketing, and finance.” (C9)*

“In this era of technological disruption, we require talent that is agile and possesses an innovative mindset, in addition to technical skills and digital knowledge. Creativity, adaptability, effective problem-solving skills, and emotional intelligence are essential, yet finding individuals with these qualities locally remains a significant challenge.” (C3)

Previous research initially focused on North American millennials; however, more recent studies have expanded to include European and Asian contexts, with increasing attention given to Chinese millennials (Leask et al., 2014; Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2016; Gardiner & Kwek, 2017).

Table 4: The 10 Malaysian companies were interviewed.

Theme	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10
Innovative recruitment technique										/
Boosting employer brand			/	/						
Versatile work opportunities								/		
Professional development pathways	/	/	/						/	
Meaningful work environment						/	/			
CSR-driven recruitment and retention						/				
Internship experience design					/				/	

The results below are to answer the second research question, which is how graduate recruiters stand out to attract top talent among fresh graduates.

RQ2: How does a graduate recruiter stand out to attract top talent among fresh graduates?

Table 5: Codes and Themes for Research Question Two

First Order Codes	Themes	Aggregated Thematic Categories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The best employers globally, we endeavour to maintain our leading position by building on our strong values and culture, our recognized and loved brands, our Creating Shared Value approach, and our quality and excellence in everything we do. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work closely with the Institute of higher learning to host a workshop 	Boosting Employer Brand
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Championing of health and wellness at the workplace encourages our employees to live great holistically, with many activities and incentives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain our leading position by building on our strong values and culture, our recognized and loved brand More student engagement sessions, banding of the bank, and showcasing its leader in publications. Flexible working hours 	Versatile Work Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support learning and growth through our Educational Assistance programme, and our championing of health and wellness at the workplace encourages our employees to live great holistically. With many activities and incentives in store for them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Championing of health and wellness at the workplace encourages our employees to live great holistically, with many activities and incentives 	Meaning Work Environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trainees participated in numerous CSR activities as diverse as volunteering in soup kitchens, creating month-long awareness programs around 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSR immersion activities 	CSR-Driven Recruitment and Retention

<p>health and wellness, and championing gender diversity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Also, a pipeline to our management associate programme, and it is not uncommon for a student to be invited to join RHB's." • Also invested in creating a seamless platform for both our internships and management associate programmes. • MGAC participants who are successfully hired become our Global Maybank Apprentices, and they, in turn, end up designing programmes to hire other Millennials. • This peer-to-peer recruitment model has worked very well for us. • Understanding what graduates want so that we can provide them with a unique experience that sets us apart from other companies. • We also challenge undergraduates to think about business issues from a broader perspective through our Trust Builders Challenge. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured internship is also a pipeline to our management associate programme • Graduate programme right after the completion of his or her internship 	Internship Experience Design	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crowdsourcing instead of individual interviews with the company • Remote college recruiting • Tenaga Electric Challenge in collaboration with a student body in the UK 	Innovative Recruitment Technique	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Award-winning industry explorer management trainee programme • Aspiring accountants programme • Trust builders challenge • Annual cyber challenge • Advisory aces • KPMG Asian Scholarship program • Graduate trainee: 18-month AmBank Graduate Management Trainee program • Design thinking workshops and worked on a project incubated in our digital labs – from idea generation to going live • OCBC Graduate Talent Programme (CTP) • Management associate programme. One cycle in either our AGILE or Digital office 	Professional Development Pathways	

Theme 1: Boosting Employer Brand

In today's competitive job market, attracting and retaining top talent is a priority for organizations seeking sustained success. One key strategy for achieving this goal is the deliberate cultivation and strengthening of the employer brand. Employer branding extends beyond recruitment activities; it involves creating a compelling and authentic organizational identity that resonates with both current and prospective employees, shaping perceptions of the organization as an attractive place to work.

For example, “*We work closely with institutes of higher learning to host workshops, training programs, lectures, and sharing sessions with students, where we emphasize the importance of lifelong learning and the continuous acquisition and application of new knowledge and skills to remain relevant.*” (C3)

“As one of the best employers globally, we endeavor to maintain our leading position by building on our strong values and culture, our recognized and well-loved brands, our Creating Shared Value approach, and our commitment to quality and excellence. In addition to aggressive social media efforts, our Tenaga Talent Acquisition Partners are fully certified recruiters with refined marketing and engagement skills to deliver an exceptional candidate experience.” (C4)

Employer branding is critical, as organizations incur substantial costs in acquiring, developing, and retaining employees. Short employee tenure further exacerbates these costs, as frequent recruitment cycles increase training and onboarding expenses. Although prior studies indicate that employees are more inclined to affiliate with organizations demonstrating strong environmental consciousness (Umrani et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2020), this contemporary issue has received limited scholarly attention, particularly in terms of comparative analyses across different economic contexts.

Theme 2: Versatile Work Opportunities

In the evolving landscape of work, versatile work opportunities have emerged as a transformative force, reshaping traditional employment arrangements. By embracing flexibility, adaptability, and innovation, versatile work opportunities cater to the diverse needs and preferences of the modern workforce.

For example, *“Employees who need to arrive later than standard office hours, such as those caring for a family member requiring medical attention, may opt to start and end work one hour later.” (C8)*

“We are gradually embarking on this new phase of work-life practices to enhance work-life balance in response to millennial workforce demands.” (C8)

Theme 3: Meaningful Work Environment

A meaningful work environment is characterized by purpose-driven goals, a positive organizational culture, opportunities for professional development, and a supportive community. These elements collectively contribute to employee engagement, satisfaction, and long-term commitment.

For example, *“This is why we support learning and growth through our Educational Assistance Programme, and our emphasis on health and wellness in the workplace encourages employees to thrive holistically, supported by various activities and incentives.” (C7)*

Theme 4: CSR-Driven Recruitment and Retention

CSR-driven recruitment and retention highlight the close relationship between corporate social responsibility initiatives and talent management practices. A genuine commitment to social responsibility can strengthen recruitment efforts, foster employee loyalty, and contribute to a positive organizational culture.

For example, *“Our graduate trainees participate in a wide range of CSR activities, from volunteering in soup kitchens to developing month-long health and wellness awareness programs and championing gender diversity.” (C6)*

The motivation for this study is multifaceted and exploratory in nature, particularly when examining the broader nomological network of related constructs. Prior research has identified various determinants of employer brand reputation, including perceived organizational support, organizational prestige, organizational trust, top management leadership, and CSR (Biswas & Suar, 2014). Additionally, earlier studies suggest that CSR may have a significant direct influence on employer branding outcomes (Ozcan & Elçi, 2020).

Theme 5: Internship Experience Design

Internship Experience Design focuses on key components such as mentorship, skill development, exposure to real-world projects, and a supportive work environment. As organizations increasingly

recognize the role of internships in talent acquisition and retention, the intentional design of internship experiences becomes essential for attracting high-potential graduates and developing future organizational leaders.

For example, *“Our structured internship program serves as a pipeline to our management associate program, and it is not uncommon for interns to receive invitations to join the organization upon completion.”* (C9)

“Graduates may enter the organization immediately after completing their internship. We have also invested in creating a seamless digital platform for both internship and management associate programs, allowing applicants to complete the entire application process online, including video interviews.” (C5)

Considering these developments, it is important to assess whether administrative preparation programs provide relevant and up-to-date practicum or internship experiences that adequately prepare interns for evolving organizational roles (Barnett, 2005; Cunningham & Sherman, 2008; Levine, 2005; Murphy, 2006; Murphy & Vriesenga, 2006).

Theme 6: Innovative Recruitment Techniques

Innovative recruitment techniques encompass emerging practices such as gamification, artificial intelligence-based candidate assessments, virtual reality experiences, and other technology-driven approaches. As organizations strive to remain competitive in the recruitment landscape, adopting innovative techniques is increasingly important for attracting and selecting candidates who best fit organizational needs.

For example, *“MGAC is one of the platforms through which we directly recruit. Successful MGAC participants become Global Maybank Apprentices and subsequently design recruitment programs for other millennials. This peer-to-peer recruitment model has proven highly effective.”* (C6)

“Tenaga also invites high-caliber fresh graduates to our office, providing them with opportunities to present themselves directly to the leadership team. Rather than relying on conventional individual interviews, we adopt a crowdsourcing approach.” (C10)

“Remote college recruiting is also used to expand the candidate pool. This marks our second consecutive year of launching the Tenaga Electric Challenge in collaboration with a student body in the UK to identify and assess high-potential fresh graduates.” (C10)

Theme 7: Professional Development Pathways

Professional development pathways emphasize the importance of structured career progression, mentorship, continuous learning, and skill diversification. As career trajectories become increasingly dynamic, well-designed development pathways play a crucial role in maintaining employee motivation, relevance, and long-term success.

For example, *“We differentiate ourselves by understanding what graduates want and providing unique experiences that set us apart from other organizations. One such initiative is our award-winning Industry Explorer program, which allows graduates to rotate across different industries before selecting a specialization.”* (C1)

“For individuals interested in a career in Tax, our Tax Management Trainee Program is specifically designed to develop skills through departmental rotations, coaching, and on-the-job training, offering a clear pathway toward future leadership roles.” (C2)

“The Aspiring Accountants Program is another distinctive initiative, designed for graduates from diverse academic backgrounds. It enables participants to pursue a career in accounting through a bridging program combined with on-the-job training.” (C9)

“Through our Trust Builders Challenge, we encourage undergraduates to address broader business issues by working in teams to develop solutions aimed at rebuilding trust in business. This early exposure helps cultivate values that graduates can carry into their professional careers.” (C3)

“For aspiring consultants, our Advisory Aces program offers a unique opportunity to experience management consulting through a structured two-year rotation across Management Consulting, Risk Consulting, Deals Advisory, and Audit, after which participants are placed in departments aligned with their interests and strengths.” (C2)

5.0 CONCLUSION

The preferences and expectations of recent graduates are continually evolving, presenting new challenges for recruiters who must adapt to changing labor market conditions. This study provides insights that can assist organizations in refining their recruitment strategies and enhancing their ability to attract and retain high-quality graduates by examining graduate recruiters' perspectives and identifying effective practices for attracting top talent. This study is theoretically significant as it explores how understanding the challenges and drivers of attracting top talent can contribute to the advancement of theories related to human capital, expectancy, social exchange, social identity, and goal setting. Examining these theoretical frameworks within the context of graduate recruitment offers a deeper understanding of their applicability in real-world settings and contributes to the broader body of knowledge. Furthermore, the findings highlight areas where existing theories may be limited and suggest potential directions for future theoretical development and research. From a practical perspective, the findings provide guidance for graduate recruiters in developing more effective strategies to attract top talent and enhance recruitment productivity. Organizations must continue to strengthen their employer positioning as part of ongoing efforts to attract, retain, and develop high-performing graduates. In the context of rapid technological advancement and an increasingly dynamic business environment, organizations should strive to remain employers of choice by offering meaningful work, continuous learning and development opportunities, and exposure to international or cross-functional experiences. By fostering a challenging yet supportive work environment and encouraging collaboration among like-minded peers, organizations can enhance their appeal to graduates and sustain their position as leading employers.

6.0 IMPLICATION

This study makes several important contributions to the literature on graduate recruitment and talent management. First, it provides empirical, qualitative evidence from leading Malaysian graduate recruiters, offering context-specific insights that extend prior studies, which have largely concentrated in Western and developed economies. Second, the study identifies contemporary challenges which namely the digital market shift, millennial expectations, and supply-demand mismatch, while simultaneously uncovering actionable employer strategies such as innovative recruitment techniques, CSR-driven recruitment, and structured internship experience design. Third, the findings advance employer branding and talent attraction literature by demonstrating how organizational values, meaningful work environments, and professional development pathways jointly influence graduate talent attraction. From a practical perspective, this study offers actionable guidance for graduate recruiters and policymakers to design more effective recruitment strategies aligned with evolving graduate expectations and labor market dynamics.

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