





“Attractiveness of the Lithuanian Armed Forces as an employer: An empirical perspective from the military sector”

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ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE LITHUANIAN ARMED FORCES AS AN EMPLOYER: AN EMPIRICAL PERSPECTIVE FROM THE MILITARY SECTOR

Abstract

Nowadays, the challenge of increasing personnel retention by aligning organizational values with the expectations of active-duty soldiers remains relevant in the Lithuanian Armed Forces. Using the parallel mediation modeling method, this study focuses on the value of interest as a symbolic component of employer attractiveness, reflecting the perception of meaningful, intellectually engaging, and purposeful work. The research hypotheses are tested using a sample of 276 Lithuanian active-duty soldiers. The mediation effects are checked using PROCESS v3.5 and bootstrap 5000. The results show that the value of interest significantly predicts the perception of four main employer attributes: social, economic, developmental, and application values. The validated theoretical framework showed that symbolic perceptions shape several aspects of employer attractiveness. Furthermore, the study shows that developmental value and economic value significantly mediated the relationship between interest value and intention to continue serving, demonstrating that symbolic engagement alone is not sufficient, as soldiers are more likely to remain in service when clear career growth opportunities and adequate financial rewards reinforce such engagement. Conversely, social and applied values did not show a significant mediating effect, suggesting that they are less important in shaping long-term decisions about personnel retention in the military. Overall, the findings offer practical implications for employer branding and human resources strategies, highlighting the need to integrate both symbolic meaning and instrumental benefits to meet the evolving expectations of military personnel.

Keywords

employer attractiveness, military retention, symbolic and instrumental values, employer branding, Lithuanian Armed Forces

JEL Classification I23, M53, H56

INTRODUCTION

Employer attractiveness is increasingly recognized as a crucial factor in contemporary talent management, influencing not only recruitment but also employee engagement and long-term retention (Mainali & Tantry, 2022; Pareek et al., 2019). The concept refers to the overall benefits, values, and experiences an organization offers to both current employees and potential candidates, which together shape their perception of the organization as a desirable place to work (Leitão et al., 2019). These offerings typically include both instrumental attributes, such as competitive salaries, job security, and career advancement opportunities, and symbolic attributes, such as organizational prestige, workplace culture, and meaningfulness of work (Schwaiger et al., 2022).

An employer that is perceived as attractive can create a psychological contract that aligns employee expectations with organizational goals, thereby enhancing satisfaction and retention (Sandeepanie et al., 2023). Moreover, employer attractiveness serves a dual function: it strengthens



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the employer brand in the external labor market while simultaneously reinforcing commitment among internal employees (Monteiro et al., 2020). In this way, it becomes a strategic lever for human resource management, especially in sectors where recruitment is challenging and workforce stability is essential. Therefore, a deep understanding of what constitutes employer attractiveness in a specific organizational and cultural context is fundamental to developing effective talent management practices. While extensive research has been conducted globally on what makes an employer attractive, much of this work has focused on the private sector, particularly in competitive industries such as information technology, finance, and marketing. In Lithuania, empirical studies have similarly centered on business organizations (Bakanauskienė et al., 2017), with findings highlighting the importance of both instrumental benefits (e.g., pay, development opportunities) and symbolic attributes (e.g., purpose, identity, reputation).

However, research on the attractiveness of employers in the public sector, and especially in the military, is still limited. Internationally, some scholars have addressed this gap by investigating how armed forces position themselves as employers (Kaur & Shah, 2020; Kurek, 2022). These studies emphasize the role of employer branding and the interplay of symbolic and instrumental values in shaping service members' perceptions. Despite these efforts, there is a lack of empirical studies that assess employer attractiveness from the perspective of active-duty military personnel, especially in smaller NATO member states such as Lithuania.

This research gap is critical given the unique demands of military service, which include high levels of physical and psychological stress, extended periods of family separation, and frequent relocations. In such environments, understanding what drives commitment and satisfaction among soldiers is essential for workforce sustainability. The Lithuanian Armed Forces (LAF), like many modern military organizations, face the dual challenge of maintaining operational readiness while competing for talent in a dynamic civilian labor market. Existing studies have not sufficiently addressed how professional soldiers perceive the attractiveness of the military as an employer, nor have they identified areas that require improvement.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Employer attractiveness has become a central topic in organizational and human resource management research, as it directly influences an organization's ability to attract, engage, and retain talented employees (Kilson, 2025; Gomes et al., 2023; Alves et al., 2020). In recent years, scholarly attention has increasingly emphasized that employer attractiveness is a multidimensional construct (Bakanauskienė et al., 2017), encompassing both instrumental and symbolic attributes. These dimensions jointly shape an organization's perceived value proposition and competitiveness in the labor market.

1.1. Factors essential to organizational competitiveness and performance

Instrumental attributes refer to tangible, utilitarian benefits that employees associate with their employer, such as competitive compensation, job stability, career advancement opportunities, train-

ing, and work-life balance (Kumari & Saini, 2018; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). These elements provide functional and material value and are often decisive in shaping initial employment decisions. Alshathry et al. (2017) define the employer value proposition as a set of both tangible and intangible benefits that represent what employees gain by being part of an organization. Similarly, Santiago (2019) distinguishes between material and immaterial components of employer value, noting that both are crucial to sustaining a positive employer image. Empirical evidence consistently supports that instrumental attributes are positively associated with organizational attractiveness and employee commitment (Kumari & Saini, 2018; Silva & Dias, 2023; de Waal, 2022).

In contrast, symbolic attributes represent the intangible, psychological, and emotional aspects of organizational identity (Kouamé et al., 2022; Schwaiger et al., 2022). These include perceptions of organizational values, ethical reputation, prestige, innovativeness, and emotional appeal. Symbolic attributes often shape how employees

interpret the “personality” of the organization and whether it aligns with their own values and self-concept (Moser et al., 2021). Kanwal and van Hoye (2024) found that symbolic dimensions such as sincerity, ethical reputation, and competence significantly enhance perceived employer attractiveness, particularly among individuals seeking value congruence and authenticity at work.

The interdependence of instrumental and symbolic dimensions has been widely acknowledged in the literature (Kumari & Saini, 2018; Bakanauskienė et al., 2017). While instrumental factors influence rational job choice behavior, symbolic attributes appeal to emotional and identity-driven motives (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). A balanced integration of both dimensions enhances employer attractiveness and contributes to sustainable competitive advantage, as organizations perceived as both rewarding and meaningful are more likely to retain committed employees and attract high-quality candidates (Buitek et al., 2025).

Employer attractiveness is also a critical determinant of organizational competitiveness and performance, influencing key outcomes such as recruitment success, employee engagement, job satisfaction, and retention (de Waal, 2022). As a result, organizations increasingly employ employer branding strategies to position themselves as desirable workplaces. Employer branding is defined as a strategic process aimed at differentiating an organization from its competitors through a coherent and compelling employment image (Kalinska-Kula & Staniec, 2021; Eger et al., 2019). It serves as a bridge between internal HRM practices and external perceptions, reinforcing the organization’s identity among current and prospective employees (Theurer et al., 2018; Kanwal et al., 2023).

However, recent studies emphasize that employer branding must be supported by internal realities. Bakanauskienė and Barkauskė (2021) argue that an attractive external image cannot compensate for inconsistencies in internal culture or poor employment practices. Authentic employer attractiveness emerges from aligned organizational values, supportive leadership, and effective HRM systems. Dassler et al. (2022) show that when employees perceive their organization as genuinely attractive, this perception enhances retention, job

satisfaction, organizational commitment, and advocacy behavior, while reducing turnover intentions and salary expectations.

Moreover, in today’s digitally connected environment, employer reputation is increasingly shaped by employee-generated content. Friebel et al. (2023) highlight that social media platforms amplify employees’ voices, making their experiences publicly visible and influential in shaping employer image. This transparency underscores the importance of ensuring employee well-being, fair treatment, and meaningful engagement, as internal perceptions quickly become external narratives. Consequently, maintaining genuine employer attractiveness has become not only an ethical imperative but also a strategic necessity for organizational sustainability and competitiveness.

1.2. Research focus and hypotheses

The purpose of this study is to systematically examine key aspects of the Lithuanian Armed Forces as an employer, focusing on how its value propositions align with the expectations of active duty soldiers, particularly during dynamic and challenging circumstances. Military service is inherently marked by exposure to disruptive, stressful, and complex events, such as frequent relocations, long working hours, and prolonged separation from family. In this context, researchers have emphasized the significance of interest value in shaping perceptions of employer attractiveness, especially in military organizations. Interest value encompasses the symbolic and intrinsic qualities of work that appeal to individuals seeking meaningful, intellectually stimulating, and purpose-driven careers. Prior studies have highlighted that the military profession offers a uniquely challenging and engaging environment, characterized by diverse operational tasks, leadership responsibilities, and decision-making in high-pressure situations (Bekesiene & Smaliukienė, 2022; Kanapeckaitė et al., 2022). These attributes, combined with the mission-driven nature of military service and its emphasis on duty, honor, and societal contribution, contribute to a strong symbolic appeal. By analyzing how the Lithuanian Armed Forces provide both instrumental and symbolic benefits to their personnel, this study aims to assess the effectiveness of the organization in adapting to evol-

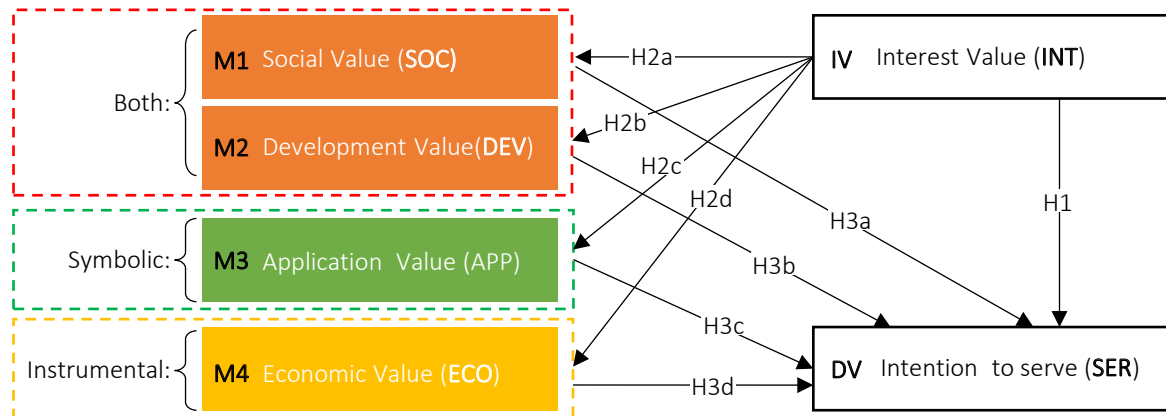


Figure 1. Conceptual model

ing labor market expectations and supporting soldiers in navigating the complexities of military life.

Considering the non-linear relationship between employer attractiveness covering both instrumental and symbolic values and the active duty soldiers' intention to serve in the Lithuanian Armed Forces (LAF), this study employs a parallel mediation model. The model is designed to examine the mediating roles of social value, economic value, development value, and application value in the relationship between active duty soldiers' perceived interest value and their intention to continue service in the LAF (see Figure 1).

Based on the theoretical framework and empirical findings from previous studies, the following research hypotheses of direct and indirect effects are proposed:

H1: Interest value can be directly associated with intention to serve in the Lithuanian Armed Forces.

H2a-d: Interest value can be associated with active-duty soldiers' perceived social value, economic value, development value, and application value.

H3a-d: The perceived employer attractiveness of the Lithuanian Armed Forces by symbolic and instrumental values (M1, M2, M3, and M4) can significantly mediate the relation between interest value and intention to continue service in the Lithuanian Armed Forces.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Participants and data collection procedure

Study participants were taken on through secure internal communication channels of the Lithuanian National Defence Volunteer Forces (NDVF) as a national defense organization, following approval from relevant authorities. The survey instrument was developed using a secure online platform to ensure standardized, anonymous, and efficient data collection. An invitation to participate, including a unique survey link, was distributed to professional service members across multiple units via an internal communication system. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, data confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any stage without any negative consequences. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all procedures adhered to ethical standards for research involving human subjects.

A total of 307 service members of the Lithuanian Armed Forces participated in the survey conducted at the end of January 2025. Of the collected questionnaires, 31 were excluded from further analysis as the respondents indicated that they were voluntary non-permanent service members rather than professional military personnel. Accordingly, 276 valid responses were retained for statistical analysis. All participants served within the structure of the National Defence Volunteer Forces and were provided with uniform conditions for participa-

tion. The survey was conducted anonymously and on a voluntary basis, ensuring that respondents could provide answers freely and without coercion. All responses were submitted electronically via the Google Forms platform and automatically recorded for subsequent analysis.

The collected sample represented a diverse cross-section of professional soldiers across various NDFV units. All participants were actively serving at the time of the survey, and their responses reflect the internal perspectives of currently engaged military personnel regarding the attractiveness of the Lithuanian Armed Forces as an employer. More detailed information on the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants is provided in Appendix A, Table A1.

2.2. Measurement instruments

This study applies the widely recognized “EmpAt” scale developed by Berthon et al. (2005), which identifies five core components of employer attractiveness: interest value, social value, economic value, development value, and application value. These five dimensions capture both instrumental and symbolic attributes that influence how individuals perceive an organization as an employer.

Interest value (INT) reflects the degree to which an organization offers an exciting, creative, and challenging work environment. This dimension reflects the symbolic attributes of the organization that refer to individuals seeking intellectually stimulating and meaningful work. This value was measured by eight items. The Cronbach’s alpha was 0.843; CR was 0.889; and AVE was 0.507.

Social value (SOC) refers to the quality of interpersonal relationships and the overall social climate within the organization. This dimension connects both instrumental and symbolic needs, particularly among employees who prioritize workplace harmony, social belonging, and emotional well-being. To measure this value, nine items were included. The Cronbach’s alpha was 0.896; CR was 0.923; and AVE was 0.574.

Economic value (ECO) encompasses financial rewards, job security, and compensation-related aspects. This dimension reflects instrumental con-

cerns, directly tied to an individual’s basic needs and long-term financial security. Four items measured this value. The Cronbach’s alpha was 0.853; CR was 0.901; and AVE was 0.695.

Development value (DEV) represents opportunities for personal growth, professional development, and career advancement. This component is critical for individuals with a strong orientation toward career progression and self-improvement, and relates to both instrumental and symbolic aspects. To measure this value, five items were included. The Cronbach’s alpha was 0.906; CR was 0.930; and AVE was 0.728.

Application value (APP) describes the ability to apply one’s skills and make meaningful contributions within the organization. This reflects symbolic value, appealing to people who seek purpose-driven work, self-expression, and a feeling of personal impact within the organization. Six items measured this value. The Cronbach’s alpha was 0.873; CR was 0.906; and AVE was 0.618.

Additionally, the intention to serve in the Lithuanian Armed Forces (SER) was assessed using a three-item scale designed to measure soldiers’ overall satisfaction and commitment to continued service. The items reflect both attitudinal and behavioral intentions related to retention, in line with employer branding and organizational commitment literature: SER1 “The Lithuanian Armed Forces is an attractive employer”, SER2 “I would recommend military service to others”, and SER3 “I am satisfied with my service in the Armed Forces.” The development of this scale is conceptually supported by Lievens (2007), who emphasized the significance of both symbolic and instrumental attributes in shaping organizational attractiveness and retention among military personnel. In his study of the Belgian Army, similar measures were used to evaluate the perceptions and intentions of current military employees, validating their relevance in the defense sector context.

In this study, each of these dimensions was measured using a set of statements assessed on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = Completely Disagree to 5 = Completely Agree), allowing respondents to express their level of agreement with statements related to each value area. This comprehensive

measurement approach enables a multidimensional assessment of how the Lithuanian Armed Forces are perceived as an employer, considering both symbolic benefits and instrumental organizational attributes that align with contemporary labor market expectations. Additional information about the measurement instruments is summarized in Appendix A, Table A2.

2.3. Analysis methods

The initial stage of data analysis involved calculating descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations for continuous variables and frequency distributions for demographic data. Relationships between variables were assessed using Pearson’s bivariate correlation coefficient. Correlation strength was interpreted based on conventional thresholds, with values around 0.10 indicating weak associations, approximately 0.30 suggesting moderate relationships, and values of 0.50 or above reflecting strong correlations (Byrne, 2013). To assess discriminant validity, confidence intervals and comparative measures between constructs were analyzed to ensure distinctiveness among variables.

In this study, a parallel mediation analysis was conducted to examine the theoretical model (see Figure 1), where the relationship between interest value and the intention to serve in the Lithuanian Armed Forces was assessed by indirect effects of four distinct dimensions of employer attractiveness: social value, economic value, development value, and application value. The analysis was carried out using PROCESS v3.5 macros (Model 4) developed by Hayes (2022) and SPSS 29v software. This approach determines the unique contribution of each mediator within the overall mediation model.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive data analysis was performed to measure the means and standard deviations for study variables. The correlation analysis lets us evaluate the relationships. In addition, a discriminant validity evaluation was conducted to ensure that the latent constructs used to measure the causal relationships under study were truly distinct from each other (see Table 1).

The analysis shows that the square roots of the average variance extracted (AVE) values for each construct exceeded the corresponding inter-construct correlation coefficients (see Table 2). This indicates that each construct demonstrated discriminant validity, meaning they were empirically distinct from one another (Kanapeckaitė et al., 2022).

3.1. Hypothesis testing using parallel mediation modeling

The data modeling analysis began from testing interest value (INT) effects on four dimensions of LAF as employer attractiveness (see H2a–d, Figure 1): social value (SOC), economic value (ECO), development value (DEV), and application value (APP). The conducted analysis allowed us to identify the high statistically significant and positive effect of interest value (INT) on the LAF employer attractiveness dimensions: SOC, $\beta = 0.697$, $t = 13.962$, $p < 0.01$ (see Hypothesis H2a, Table 2); DEV, $\beta = 0.903$, $t = 15.562$, $p < 0.01$ (see Hypothesis H2b, Table 2); APP, $\beta = 0.862$, $t = 19.466$, $p < 0.001$ (see Hypothesis H2c, Table 2); ECO, $\beta = 0.648$, $t = 9.153$, $p < 0.001$ (see Hypothesis H2d, Table 2).

The results of the hypothesis testing for H2a, H2b, H2c, and H2d provide empirical support for the

Table 1. Preliminary analysis results

Construct	Descriptive		Discriminant Validity		Correlations						
	M	SD	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	
1: SER	3.808	0.871	0.931	0.819	0.905						
2: INT	3.810	0.672	0.889	0.507	0.646**	0.712					
3: SOC	3.909	0.727	0.923	0.574	0.581**	0.645**	0.758				
4: ECO	3.530	0.900	0.901	0.695	0.644**	0.484**	0.469**	0.834			
5: DEV	3.600	0.886	0.930	0.728	0.666**	0.685**	0.682**	0.613**	0.853		
6: APP	3.799	0.761	0.906	0.618	0.651**	0.762**	0.745**	0.564**	0.725**	0.786	

Note: M – means; SD – standard deviations; CR – Composite Reliability; AVE – Average Variance Extracted. SER – intention to serve in the Lithuanian Armed Forces; INT – Interest Value; SOC – Social Value; ECO – Economic Value; DEV – Development Value; APP – Application Value. **Pearson’s correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2. The effect of interest value (INT) individually evaluated by regression models

Hypothesis	Description		Coeff.	SE	St. Coeff.	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
H2a	Model 1	Intercept	1.252	0.193		6.479	0.000	0.871	1.632
	INT → SOC	INT	0.697	0.050	0.645	13.962	0.000	0.599	0.796
	Summary	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p	
		0.645	0.416	0.310	194.934	1.000	274.000	0.000	
H2b	Model 2	Intercept	0.156	0.225		0.693	0.489	-0.286	0.598
	INT → DEV	INT	0.903	0.058	0.685	15.562	0.000	0.789	1.018
	Summary	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p	
		0.685	0.469	0.419	242.171	1.000	274.000	0.000	
H2c	Model 3	Intercept	0.505	0.171		2.945	0.004	0.167	0.842
	INT → APP	INT	0.862	0.044	0.762	19.466	0.000	0.775	0.950
	Summary	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p	
		0.762	0.580	0.244	378.927	1.000	274.000	0.000	
H2d	Model 4	Intercept	1.062	0.274		3.878	0.000	0.523	1.601
	INT → ECO	INT	0.648	0.071	0.484	9.153	0.000	0.509	0.787
	Summary	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p	
		0.484	0.234	0.622	83.778	1.000	274.000	0.000	

Note: Model 1 = outcome variable SOC; Model 2 = outcome variable DEV; Model 3 = outcome variable APP; Model 4 = outcome variable ECO; R = correlation coefficient and R-sq = correlation coefficient in square. LLCI = lower bound of 95% confidence interval; ULCI = upper bound of 95% confidence interval. INT – Interest Value; SOC – Social Value; ECO – Economic Value; DEV – Development Value; APP – Application Value.

proposed relationships by the conceptual model (see Figure 1), indicating that the effects of interest value (INT) on the four mediating variables are statistically significant. The findings reveal that interest value is positively associated with active-duty soldiers' perceptions of SOC, ECO, DEV, and APP values. These results confirm hypotheses H2a-H2d and prove the significance of interest value (INT) as a predictor of multiple dimensions of perceived employer attractiveness (see Table 2).

Continuing with the modeling analysis, we evaluated how five independent variables (INT, SOC, DEV, APP, and ECO) can predict intention to serve in the Lithuanian Armed Forces (SER) as an

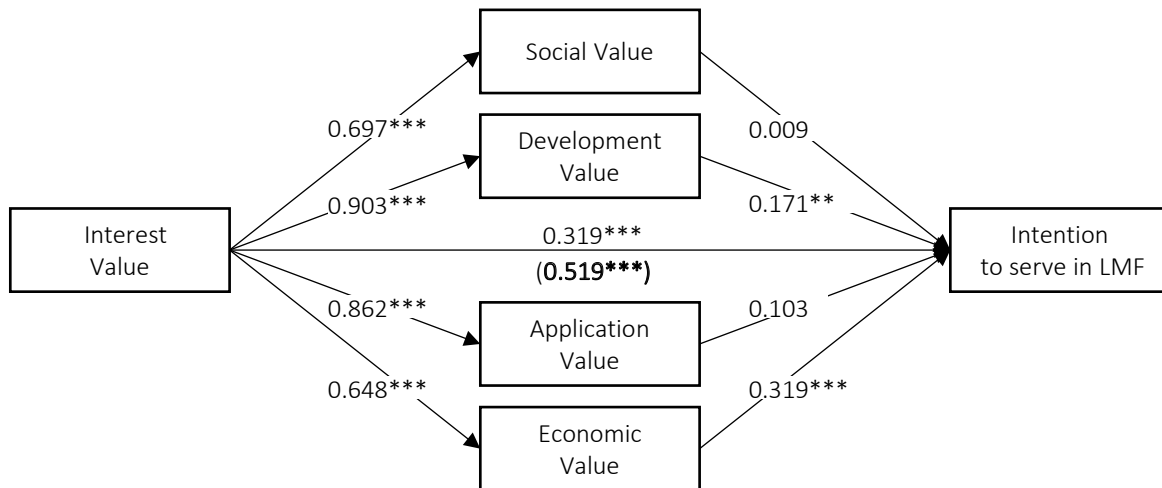
outcome variable. Table 3 presents detailed bootstrap results for the regression model parameters with SER as the outcome variable.

The results suggest that the intention to remain in the active-duty service (SER) is significantly predicted by two variables, such as interest value (INT), $\beta = 0.319, t = 3.899, p < 0.001$; and development value (DEV), $\beta = 0.171, t = 2.666, p < 0.01$. The direct effect of interest value (INT) was statistically significant, $p < 0.001$. The modeling results, based on unstandardized coefficients and their statistical significance indicated by ** $p < 0.01$ and *** $p < 0.001$, are schematically presented in Figure 2. The total effect of interest value (INT) is also shown in parentheses.

Table 3. Regression model parameters with the intention to serve in the Lithuanian Armed Forces as an outcome variable

Model Description		Coeff.	SE	St. Coeff	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Independent variables	Intercept	0.078	0.215		0.360	0.719	-0.346	0.501
	INT	0.319	0.082	0.246	3.899	0.000	0.158	0.479
	SOC	0.099	0.074	0.082	1.339	0.182	-0.046	0.244
	DEV	0.171	0.064	0.174	2.666	0.008	0.045	0.297
	APP	0.103	0.085	0.090	1.218	0.224	-0.063	0.269
	ECO	0.319	0.049	0.329	6.539	0.000	0.223	0.415
Model Summary	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p	
	0.770	0.593	0.314	78.728	5.000	270.000	0.000	

Note: outcome variable – intention to serve in the Lithuanian Armed Forces (SER); INT – Interest Value; SOC – Social Value; ECO – Economic Value; DEV – Development Value; APP – Application Value. R–correlation coefficient and R-sq. – correlation coefficient in square. LLCI – lower bound of 95% confidence interval; ULCI – upper bound of 95% confidence interval.



Note: *** means $p < 0.001$.

Figure 2. The modeling results based on unstandardized coefficients

The macro-model 4 of PROCESS v3.5 allowed us to test the indirect effects by the parallel mediation analysis. These modeling results validate that interest value (INT) indicates the impact on the decision of active duty soldiers to serve in LMF through two mediators, development value (DEV) and economic value (ECO). These results highlight how various aspects of the Lithuanian Armed Forces as an employer align with the expectations and perceptions of active duty soldiers. Additionally, the direct and indirect effects of the five factors that reflect key dimensions of employer attractiveness are presented in Table 4.

The analysis of Hypotheses H3a through H3d provides important insights into the mediating role of perceived employer attractiveness in the relationship between symbolic meaning (interest value) and the intention to continue service in the Lithuanian Armed Forces. The results confirm that the indirect effect of interest value on the in-

tention to serve in the Lithuanian Armed Forces through two mediators was not significant: social value (SOC, $\beta = 0.069$, SE = 0.054, 95% CI (-0.037, 0.177)); and application value (APP, $\beta = 0.089$, SE = 0.078, 95% CI (-0.062, 0.246)). This result leads to the rejection of two hypotheses: H3a and H3c.

However, the tested parallel mediation effects of development value (DEV) and economic value (ECO) in the relationship between interest value (INT) and the intention to continue service in the Lithuanian Armed Forces (SER) were statistically significant. This means that two hypotheses, H3b (DEV, $\beta = 0.154$, SE = 0.069, 95% CI (0.019, 0.292)) and H3d (ECO, $\beta = 0.207$, SE = 0.041, 95% CI (0.132, 0.290)), are confirmed.

This study aimed to investigate how the Lithuanian Armed Forces (LAF) function as an employer by examining the alignment between their value propositions and the expectations of active-du-

Table 4. The total, direct, and indirect effects of INT on SER

Hypothesis	Pathways	Effects (β)	Boot-SE	Bootstrapped CI (95%)	
				LLCI	ULCI
Direct effect					
	INT →SER	0.319	0.079	0.158	0.479
Indirect effects					
H3a	INT → SOC →SER	0.069	0.054	-0.037	0.177
H3b	INT →DEV →SER	0.154	0.069	0.019	0.292
H3c	INT → APP →SER	0.089	0.078	-0.062	0.246
H3d	INT → ECO →SER	0.207	0.041	0.132	0.290
Total indirect effect		0.519 ***	0.074	0.381	0.665

Note: SER – intention to serve in the Lithuanian Armed Forces; INT – Interest Value; SOC – Social Value; ECO – Economic Value; DEV – Development Value; APP – Application Value. Statistical significance: *** $p < 0.001$.

ty soldiers. Given the inherently demanding and stressful nature of military service, which is characterized by frequent relocations, long working hours, and extended separation from family, it is crucial to identify the organizational attributes that contribute to employer attractiveness and influence personnel retention.

At the center of this analysis was the construct of interest value, a symbolic dimension of employer attractiveness reflecting meaningful, intellectually stimulating, and purpose-driven work. Recognizing the importance of both symbolic and instrumental factors in shaping employment decisions, the study employed a parallel mediation model to examine whether four dimensions of perceived employer attractiveness, social value, economic value, development value, and application value, mediate the relationship between interest value and soldiers' intentions to continue service in the LAF.

The modeling results opened important insights. Two of the four indirect effects measured through development value and economic value were statistically significant, indicating that these mediators play a meaningful role in changing symbolic interest into long-term service intentions. Specifically, soldiers who perceive their service as meaningful and engaging are more likely to continue serving when they also recognize opportunities for career development and feel adequately compensated. These findings support Hypotheses H3b and H3d, reinforcing the importance of instrumental rewards in enhancing the symbolic appeal of employers.

In contrast, the indirect effects through social value and application value were not statistically significant, leading to the rejection of Hypotheses H3a and H3c. This suggests that, while social support and opportunities to apply one's skills are generally important aspects of job satisfaction, they may not significantly drive continued service in the military context. One explanation lies in the nature of military life: high levels of operational unpredictability, institutional hierarchy, and strict routines may elevate the perceived value of personal growth and financial stability over relational or task-based satisfiers. Social value, for example, may be less salient as a differentiating factor because relationship

is inherently built into the military environment. Similarly, application value might not strongly influence retention if soldiers place greater importance on gaining new skills and advancing rather than simply using existing ones.

These findings contribute to broader discussions on employer branding and retention strategies in high-stakes professions. They affirm the theoretical relevance of the employer attractiveness framework, which emphasizes the interplay between symbolic and instrumental value dimensions. Consistent with previous research (Cannon & Kreutzer, 2018; Smaliukienė et al., 2023), the study highlights that military organizations can cultivate symbolic appeal through mission-driven narratives, identity, and challenge. However, symbolic meaning alone is insufficient. As demonstrated here, it must be reinforced by tangible organizational benefits, particularly those linked to career development and financial compensation, in order to sustain commitment among service members.

From a practical perspective, the LAF, despite its traditionally rigid structure, has the potential to align with contemporary labor market expectations. As employer branding literature (Maurya & Agarwal, 2018) indicates, organizations that provide growth opportunities and support work-life integration are perceived as more attractive. The LAF already offers a range of such benefits, including individualized career planning, advanced training, participation in international missions, and social guarantees such as state-funded healthcare and extended annual leave. When communicated effectively as part of a cohesive employer value proposition, these offerings can enhance the LAF's competitiveness, both within the military sector and relative to civilian employers.

Additionally, the study reinforces the notion that employer attractiveness is a dynamic and multi-dimensional construct shaped by both organizational practices and individual perceptions. As Bakanauskienė et al. (2017) emphasize, there is no fixed template for employer appeal; responsiveness to evolving workforce expectations is key. In this respect, the LAF demonstrates promising adaptability by integrating purpose-driven messaging with practical incentives, thereby appealing to the dual motivations of its personnel.

CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence on how the Lithuanian Armed Forces (LAF), as a structured and mission-driven organization, can enhance its capacity to retain personnel by aligning its employer value propositions with the expectations of active-duty soldiers. By focusing on interest value as a symbolic dimension of employer attractiveness, we sought to understand how perceptions of meaningful, intellectually stimulating, and purpose-driven work relate to soldiers' intentions to continue service.

The use of a parallel mediation model enabled a detailed examination of the underlying mechanisms through which interest value influences retention. The results of hypothesis testing confirm that interest value is a significant and consistent predictor of soldiers' insights into social value, economic value, development value, and application value. These findings validate the conceptual model and underscore the multidimensional impact of symbolic meaning on how personnel perceive various instrumental and symbolic features of their employment. Thus, interest value plays a foundational role in shaping the broader construct of employer attractiveness within a military context.

Taken together, the findings support the conclusion that both symbolic and instrumental values must be strategically reinforced to sustain personnel engagement and commitment. While interest value establishes an emotional and cognitive connection with the organization, development and economic values serve as practical enablers that help translate this connection into continued service.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Svajone Bekesiene, Olga Navickienė.

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APPENDIX A

Table A1. Sociodemographic profiles of active-duty soldiers who participated in the research

Characteristics	Indicate Value
Age, average in years (+/-SD)	38.78 (+/-9.132)
Gender, n (%)	
Male	235 (85.1%)
Female	41 (14.9%)
Education, n (%)	
Secondary	40 (14.5%)
Vocational school	49 (17.8%)
High school (non-university)	53 (19.2%)
Higher university	134 (48.6%)
Has subordinates, n (%)	
Yes	143 (51.8%)
No	133 (48.2%)
Marital status, n (%)	
Single	87 (31.5%)
Married	189 (68.5%)

Note: N = 276 for all variables; SD – standard deviation.

Table A2. Background information on the variables included in the study

Model Variable	Code	Construct Measurement Description	Cronbach's Alpha
Dependent variable (DV)			
Intention to serve in the Lithuanian Armed Forces	SER	Three items concerning the respondent's insights about intention to serve in LMF. The insights of the active-duty soldiers were assessed using the Likert scale, ranging from 1, completely disagree, to 5, completely agree; the importance of the elements differed in the interval [0.89–0.92].	0.899
Independent variable (IV)			
Interest Value	INT	Eight items concerning the perceptions of employer attractiveness on a Likert scale ranging from 1, completely disagree, to 5, completely agree; study scores differ in the interval [1–5], and construct items' importance weights vary in the interval [0.55–0.83].	0.843
Mediators			
M1: Social Value	SOC	Nine items connect both instrumental and symbolic needs, measured by the Likert scale ranging from 1, completely disagree, to 5, completely agree; study scores differ in the interval [1–5], and construct items' importance weights vary in the interval [0.70–0.87].	0.896
M2: Development Value	DEV	Five items represent both instrumental and symbolic aspects measured by the Likert scale, ranging from 1, completely disagree, to 5, completely agree; study scores differ in the interval [1–5], and construct items' importance weights vary in the interval [0.84–0.88].	0.906
M3: Application Value	APP	Six items to assess the symbolic value using the Likert scale ranging from 1, completely disagree, to 5, completely agree; study values differ in the interval [1–5], and construct items' importance weights vary in the interval [0.67–0.85].	0.873
M4: Economic Value	ECO	Four items evaluating the instrumental concerns measured by the Likert scale, ranging from 1, completely disagree, to 5, completely agree; study values differ in the interval [1–5], and construct items' importance weights vary in the interval [0.79–0.88].	0.853

Note: N = 276 for all items.