EMPLOYER BRANDING - PERCEPTION OF GENERATION "Y" IN THE LIGHT OF OWN RESEARCH

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Abstract

The paper presents next, third group of results of research on the image of the employer have been conducted among the young generation. Previous studies contained the context of talent management (2014) and distinguishing the employer's by implementing the personnel function (2015). The assumption is that the tendency to Employer Branding (EB) strategic treatment intensifies with perception of this phenomenon by the Y generation. A synthetic presentation of the results in relation to the two previous studies was presented. Respondents were people up to 45 years old from the Wroclaw agglomeration. The obtained results confirmed this assumption. In subsequent studies conducted in 2019, the image of the employers evaluated through the prism of trust.

Key words: *image, employer, research, young generation*

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of the employer's branding (EB) is permanently fitted in the area of organization interests. In general, EB can be defined as the process of positioning and promoting enterprise, which is addressed to the desired group of recipients (talents). Many enterprises realize that building the positive image of the employer plays a key role in achieving the company's success [1]. EB is crucial because it relates to the individual character and features of the enterprise. In some sectors the labour market has already become an employee market that consciously chooses the employer. Employee expectations have risen significantly towards the employer. Currently, for employees who are changing their job, compensation level is not the only key driver. It is also important for them whether the employer has a positive reputation and what kind of atmosphere prevails at the workplace. Therefore, it is crucial that organizations keep consciously build their proper image as an employer. In Polish, as well as in foreign literature there are several publications related to building employer's branding. This paper is a part of current trend related to EB phenomenon. Based on authors previous researches, this paper is an attempt of assessment, which premises shape the EB in context of Human Resources (HR) function with particular focus on selection and development of potential, wage and non-wage motivation.

Acquiring employees for work is the first step in retention process. This process depends on many conditions, including image. It is noticed that on the one hand EB depends on methods and manners used by organization to keep employee on board. On the other hand, EB depends on the way the enterprise position itself at the market and how they inform potential candidates about new opportunities[1] [2], [3], [4], [5] and [6].

The study was carried out in 2017 gave an important EB insight from people getting into the labour market and also from young employees. The study target group was the community of the agglomeration (18 closed questions in the on-line formula)[2]. The findings of this study were referred to research conducted earlier in 2014 (talent management) and in 2015 (importance of HR components comparison), clearly stating that for younger generations EB's importance is increasing and it has become a challenge for the HR department of the enterprise. Currently

[1]Studies in these fields: image, employer branding are conducted in Infrastructure Management Department since 2010.

[2]https://www.ankietka.pl/ankieta/275833/wplyw-realizacji-funkcji-personalnej-na-wizerunek-pracodawcy.html (access: 02.10.2017)

conducted research (2019) is an attempt of the identification and assessment of sources of trust in the enterprise and it includes a field alluding to EB. Selected research subject is Auchan enterprise, which is positioned with other companies. One of the hypotheses in the studies was the assumption that global companies take care about EB in terms of creating sources of trust towards the employer. Selected enterprise is an example of this state.

2. THE ESSENCE OF BUILDING THE EMPLOYER'S IMAGE

The importance of the employer's image appeared in the literature and at the forum of practitioners in the late 90s of the XX century. Gradually, the topic gained more popularity in scientific publications and in media communication [7], as – employer's branding. A number of EB definitions have appeared, including defining that as the efforts undertaken by organizations in external and internal communication, in order to make themselves a desirable and outstanding employer [8]. The essence of EB is associated with acquiring talented individuals into the company and with engaging current and potential employees to identify themselves with the workplace and work environment in order to achieve set goals. EB is synthetically defined as *everything that is communicated (consciously or unconsciously) to current or future (potential) employee*. Some of the definitions only focus on the relation between the image of the employer and the activity of the HR department. The point of view that the key is to see its business aspect gradually prevails. It is noticed in an empirical way, that an increase in a (positive) position of the image as an employer, directly influence on a higher consumers and business partners rantings [9]. Result of interest of practitioners and researchers in EB field, was the attempt to create EB models. J. Dabrowska defines three groups of EB models: *outside-in* models, emphasizing the role of external factors in building EB process, *inside-out* models that are focused on internal factors which create the desired EB and *corporate brand* models that create the EB in an integrated way with the corporate brand [10]. One of the models from the second group (inside-out models) uses the notion – support the attractiveness of the employer. The support consists of building employees' sense of compliance (by the employer) with transparency and credibility principles as a result of internal consistence of personnel activities. One of the authors of this paper suggested his own approach [11]. The interference of the factors on mentioned employer attractiveness in recruitment process is shown in Figure 1.

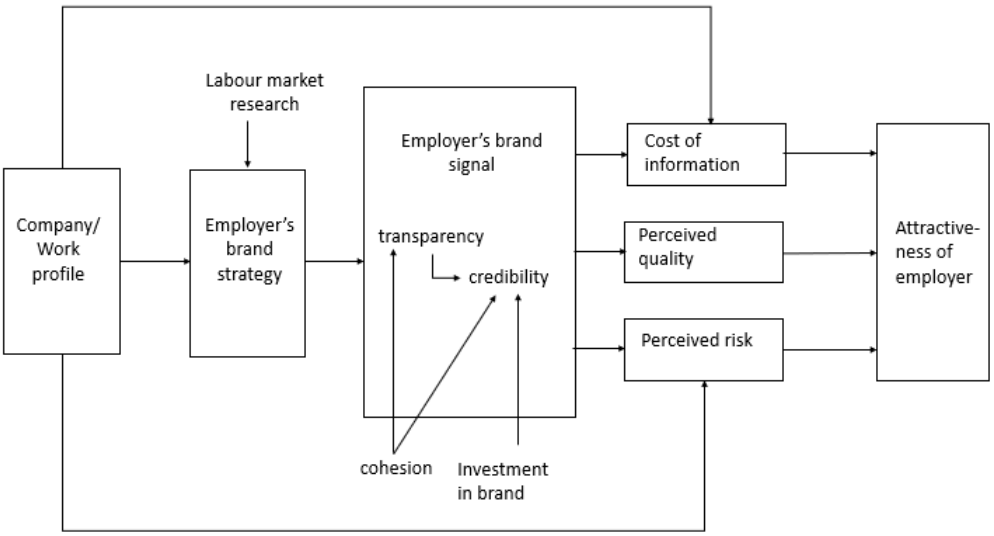

Fig. 1. Employer's attractiveness as a derivative of the employer's brand strategy (EB) corresponding with the result of personnel tasks practice.

Source: Ralph Wilden, Siggi Gudergan, Ian Lings, Employer branding: strategic implications for Staff recruitment, Journal of Marketing Management, vol.26, no 1-2 (2010) [12].

Personnel activities that create EB signals are elaborated in practice. These start at the stage of selection of employees, whose effectiveness determines the achievement of the company goals'. Employee retention is considered as a whole spectrum of motivational factors influencing their opportunities and development perspectives.

An integrated approach to bonding a corporate brand with an employer can also be found in many forms. One of them is presented in Figure 2. It refers to EB activities in organizations which have implemented the CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) program.

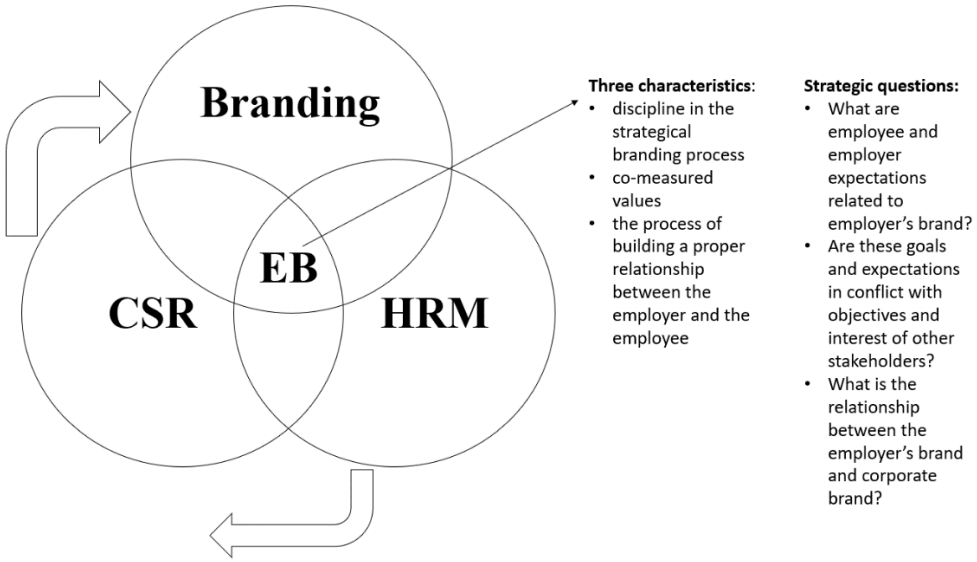

Fig. 2. An integrated approach to EB as a common field of three enterprise activity areas.

Source: Helle Aggerholm, Sophie Andersen, Christa Thomsenn, Conceptualizing employer branding in sustainable organizations, Corporate Communications: An International Journal, vol. 16, no. 2 (2011) [13].

Such approach to EB model should be imposed by the sociological contexts of labour market participants (supply-side) shaped by generation Y representatives [7]. All conducted studies (2014, 2015, 2017, 2019) have been addressed to this generation, which is characterized by set of specific attributes that influence on the perception of brand signals of the employer and the evaluation of its attractiveness.

3. SELECTION, POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT AND MOTIVATING EMPLOYEES FROM EMPLOYER'S BRANDING PERSPECTIVE

The extracted areas for studies are the basic source of building a positive image through the implementation of the personnel function within organization. Other areas, i.e. evaluation and organization of the work environment are less important, which was concluded in previous author's studies. Different classifications of the selection process only partially emphasize the image of EB. Using the Tadeusz Listwan's proposal [14], the authors estimated the intensity levels of shaping EB in the selection process. These are included in table 1.

Criteria for distinguishing selection method	Description of selection method	Description of premises for positive EB development
Public rules and criteria in candidate selection process	Open	It is a key EB premises due to the assumptions of employer's attractiveness model.
	Closed	It gives very limited or no premises at all in shaping EB.
Kind of labour market	Internal	It has very low impact on EB.
	External	It can be fundamental for EB.
Kind of recruitment sources	Niche	It has a contextual importance as it creates selective opportunities in building EB.
	General	It gives a wide field of EB development.
Current enterprise employment needs (demand)	Active	It is a necessary condition in strategic EB.
	Passive	There is no possibility for positive EB development.

Table 1. The conditions of selection process in shaping EB image.

Source: Prepared with the initial criteria according to Tadeusz Listwan, Zarządzanie kadrami, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo C. H. Beck, 2010, pp. 104. [14]

The situations given in Table 1 are relatively simple in drawing conclusions about the positive EB (the criteria are general and dichotomous). The choice of the context of personnel selection is driven by many factors, including **nature of the labour market**. In some industries this is essential to retain competitiveness [15].

The second area of EB shaping – **development**, gives enterprises a wider range of possibility. Organizations which would like to achieve a competitive advantage in the labour market, should invest in the development of their own employees. While choosing the employer, employees pay attention to development opportunities and reject those weaker organizations or these which do not fulfil promises. This state has been reflected in the communication for several years. They emphasize the importance of employees' potential development in order to achieve enterprise's goals. It leads to talent management programs and career paths creation, as well as training and loyalty systems introduction [7]. All mentioned above create a peculiar employee incentive package and also employer's ability for shaping the image. In addition to these, enterprise should continuously take care about its employees, invest in them and use their potential by making efficient organizational and strategic changes. Thanks to the constant acquisition of knowledge and skills, it is possible to move to higher (more responsible) positions within the organization. Currently, with flat organizational structures, making so-called careers should be associated with horizontal promotion [16]. Employees can develop in two dimensions: **professional** and **personal**. Personal development cannot be underestimated. Otherwise professional career is not treated as the main goal, but as the effect which accompanies self-development. Such people are enthusiastic, passionate and their greatest motivation is the desire to develop. Passion becomes the basic criterion of usefulness, especially in the industries that require creativity. With such preferences, it is easier to build engagement in the work process [17]. Trainings are the basic development tool. Numerous literatures analyse this process in detail. Many enterprises use external companies training services or dedicated units, serving the entire economic group (training centres). Training programs must focus

on current needs and proactively foresee future ones. In turbulent environment conditions, in constant competition, employees should receive ready-made, modern tools in order to assure fair competition. Small entrepreneurs are usually looking for a cheap offer, which is less effective. This has a significant impact on shaping the image. Thus, it can be assessed that reputable training partners can be considered as an opportunity to strengthen the image of the employer.

The third chosen EB research area – **motivating**, depends on the interpretation convention and it is associated with the two previously discussed areas, as part of the overall motivation system. Here, a narrow method of analysis was adopted and broken down into wage and non-wage factors of motivation. This is the most commonly used approach in the literature [18]. Papers about the image of EB shows an important role of non-wage motivating factors, indicating a number of benefits that may increase employee retention in the organization and influence the image of the employer's attractiveness [7].

4. STUDIES RESULTS AND ASSESSMENT OF THE INFLUENCE ON THE EMPLOYER'S IMAGE

In the studies conducted in 2017, the influence of the company's activity from three main areas of implementation on EB was expressed by respondents from two populations of 50 respondents each. The first group consisted of students and people with a low (up to two years) professional experience and up to 25 years old. The second group consisted of respondents with at least two years of experience and up to 45 years old. In this group, people in age range 26-35 and 36-45 have been separated. All respondents come from Wroclaw agglomeration, Poland.

The approximate distribution of groups of respondents have been used in surveys in 2013 (113 respondents) and in 2015 (200 respondents). Research results presented in 2017 were also contextually referenced to the earlier studies. A detailed comparison was not possible due to the fact that different aspect of EB have been adopted in individual studies (talent management, implementation of the personnel function).

Initially, general issues have been investigated, i.e. the influence of EB's image on the corporate brand of the organization and the importance of EB for the personnel strategy. Table 2 presents detailed data. It contains the framework of currently (2019) conducted research on the trust created during implementation of the personnel function with an empirical example in Auchan.

Issues	2014	2015	2017	2019 (in progress)
EB influence on corporate brand (3rd EB model)	Low or not specified opinion – 41%; High or very high – 59%	Average from several premises – 3.97	Lack or very low impact – 18%; High or very high impact – 82%	Indirect evaluation based on relations with level of trust.
Relation between EB and personnel strategy (2nd EB Model)	Yes, definitely yes – 59%. Evaluation based on practical preferences for talented employees	Average from all indicated personnel function instruments – 3.94;	Yes, definitely yes – 95%	Indirect evaluation based on coherence of internal trust (Auchan company) with externals.
Relationship between EB and trust	Lack of reference	Lack of reference	Intermediate ratings	Direct questions about image influence of EB, conducted with 100 respondents

Table 2. The assessment of EB's impact on the corporate brand and formulating the personnel strategy

Source: Prepared on the basis of surveys in 2014, 2015, 2017.

A close comparison of the three EB studies was very difficult due to different research context. Nevertheless, it can be noticed that imposing the convention of a talented employee sharpens the view of the case regarding the EB image. The first field of research from 2017 was related to selection process of employees including the evaluation of several elements that occurred during this process. It was related to recruitment techniques, the course of the selection phase and approaches to new workplace adaptation. The results from 2017 suggest quite average evaluation of the influence of these on EB. However, the results from previous years have had differentiated impact on EB. Data and comments are presented in table 3.

Selection instruments	2017	2015	2014
Recruitment techniques	Average of several activities at this stage described as: yes, definitely yes – 27.5%	Professional communication – 3.87 in scale 1-5	Yes, definitely yes - 34 %
Selection process	Average of several activities at this stage described as: yes, definitely yes – 36.5 %	Professionalization of instruments – 3.29 in scale 1-5	Yes, definitely yes - 44%
Introduction to the new position (role)	Average of several activities at this stage – career paths described as: yes, definitely yes - 43 %	General feelings (climate) at this stage – 3.95 in scale 1-5	Yes, definitely yes - 60 %

Table 3. The evaluation of selection process in shaping a positive employer's image.

Source: Prepared on the basis of surveys in 2014, 2015, 2017.

Context of talents (2014) imposes a different convention of EB image evaluation, which is relatively lower.

The area of development, as a premise for shaping EB is clearly perceived in all studies. It is crucial from talented employee perspective. In 2014, the source (and premises) of attitudes of talented employees have been described in detail. In 2015, the EB in implementation of personnel function issue has been addressed. The study in 2017 was related to selection of three key image factors. The assurance of proper employee development has been chosen (one of three chosen factors) by 48% of respondents. The development as a basis of professional promotion has been chosen by 24% of respondents. The synthetic image of development area in shaping EB is presented in table 4.

Development aspect	2017	2015	2014
Professional development tailored to position and aspiration	Selection among eight factors as one of the three most important for image – 48% of respondents	Training, organization support with development and other instruments have been assessed in range between 3.44 and 4.32 in scale 1-5.	As a possibility of standalone and supported way of solving issues and daily tasks – yes, definitely yes – 52%; as an investment in employee needs – 41%
Promotion possibility as a professional development derivative	Selection among nine factors as one of the three most important for making decision about new position – 48% of respondents	The development aspect was not identified in the study	Integrated with career paths – yes, definitely yes – 32%

Table 4. The evaluation of employees' development as an indication of building the employer's image.

Source: Prepared on the basis of surveys in 2014, 2015, 2017.

In many literature sources, the field of development is often associated with training. It is indicated as extremely attractive for young employees. They understand very high dynamics of the labour market and they are trying to build their position on one hand as *bargaining chip* and on the other hand as a source of business success.

The most extended field of shaping the EB image are a wage and non-wage motivation. In all three conducted studies, this aspect was further considered for EB. The key aspect in wage motivation was related to the rules, that the employer applied. This is in line with shaping EB model no. 2 and no. 3, where transparency, adequacy and fairness of remuneration influence on building the attractiveness of the employer. In non-wage motivation, the main focus was on climate at work, internal relations, supervisor's support etc. Table 5 presents the most important findings from studies for EB shaping in this field.

Motivation premises	2017	2015	2014
Salary level	Selection among eight factors as one of the three most important for image – 70% of respondents Selection among nine factors as one of the three most important for making decision about new position – 74%	Motivation through fair salary rules – 4,59 in scale 1-5	Salary which supports passion and engagement in completion ambitious tasks and goals – 54%
Relationship within the team and with superior	Building relationships and work environment. Selection among eight factors that influence the image – 60% of respondents. Atmosphere and work-life balance – 56%, selection among nine key factors (one of three key factors).	Creating propitious climate and relationship within organization – 3, 95 in scale 1-5	Creating relationship through mentoring and evaluation – average from 2 positive statements – 41%
Benefits package supporting salary	As an attractiveness of starting new job – 9%, selection among nine key factors (one of three key factors)	Additional benefits i.e. private medical care – 3,6 in scale 1-5	Professional development funding – 27% of positive statements.

Table 5. The premises of wage and non-wage motivation in building a positive image and attractiveness of the employer.

Source: Prepared on the basis of surveys in 2014, 2015, 2017.

The selection of specific threads which characterize wage and non-wage motivation did not ensure a close result comparison from three subsequent studies. Nevertheless, the results seem to be consistent with regards to the scale of the impact of these three elements of motivation presented in table 5. Adoption of the inside-out model by the company intensifies efforts with regards to all motivating premises of employees.

Out of the three areas of creating the EB image perceived by the young generation Y, there is an opinion that it is more and more important for the effective implementation of the company's personnel strategy.

5. IMAGE OF EMPLOYER'S BRANDING STUDIES IN 2019

As it was indicated in table 1, current (ongoing) study is oriented at multi-aspect evaluation of the influence of personnel function's implementation on shaping the employer's trust. Threads, that could have an impact in four main areas**: selection, evaluation, development and wage and non-**

wage motivation have been structured in detail. The image context was treated separately in these studies. The assumption, based on the literature, is that employer's image appears in internal and external perspective. Internal perspective is evaluated by young employees of Auchan enterprise, a well-known and recognized global trading company[3]. The external perspective is evaluated by approx. 100 respondents in the same age and it is related to EB, which was emphasized in table 1. The consistency of both approaches to the images is verified. It has been assumed that high consistency of the internal image and EB is a favourable situation for the functioning of the enterprise. Initial studies cover about 100 statements, qualified into 7 fields, including the aspect of the employer's image. The latter field includes 5 statements, which are addressed to the selected enterprise and external respondents. In others, several statements indirectly have been referred to the Auchan's image. This will be used in the final company's evaluation. Information gathered from respondents from other companies will help in development of the positioning, in context of the employer's trust and image. The final study results will be available in July 2019.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Studies on creating employer's image have been conducted in Infrastructure of Management Department for several years. These allow observing the tendency of the young generation's expectations as a result of employer's image. In each of these studies, the analysis has been done, taking into account the respondents' range of age. As an interesting result, it is worth to mention study's result from 2017, which was related to relation between employer's image and decision to make the effort to get a new job in the company. The group of people in the age of 36-45 with a higher seniority level has definitely indicated that employer's image influences a decision of employment. This means that the experience of these people indicates the value of the employer's image in a practical choice of people in the labour market. The continuation of the studies will be related to the comparison of the effects of this phenomenon (EB) within various enterprises and its perception by employees of the Y generation, which indicates research objectives adopted in 2019. Current results clearly indicate the increasing importance of EB, which should change into strengthening of personnel strategy for these image canons that allow to attract and to retain employees [19][4]. The question is, are smaller companies willing to (able to) implement such strategies? For the time-being, the answer is still unclear, while studies from 2014 [5], indicate that small enterprises (10-50 employees) approached to talent management relatively well and actively. In general, large global enterprises take care of the image of the employer, which depends on the consistency of the personnel strategy [20].

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