

Employer brand: key values influencing the intention to join a company

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Abstract. *Among the efforts to create a company brand, the development of a successful employer brand is today not only a sign of a socially responsible business, but also a tool to achieve competitive advantages in the labour market, expand employment opportunities, and retain the best employees. The key values that influence the intention to join a company vary among different groups of employees, which must be taken into account when creating a successful employer value proposition (EVP). The purpose of this study is to assess the differences between the key values of employed and potential workers whose work is most on demand in the labour market (generations Y and Z, with higher education and those who obtain higher education). The research was conducted on the basis of a sociological survey of a representative sample of respondents (510 respondents). The main differences in the perception of the employer's brand are identified by gender (higher value of safety in the workplace for women, and opportunities for personal development for men), as well as in the groups selected by the availability of experience: pay is valued highest by respondents with work experience; for those who have no work experience, the employer's brand reputation is a more important factor. There are also significant differences in assessments of the importance of workplace safety, professional development, comfortable environment, and work-life balance.*

Keywords: employer brand, employer value proposition, values, human resources management, labour market.

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Introduction

The employer brand (EB) has emerged in the professional terminology of HR managers relatively recently, with the publication of a scientific paper by Ambler and Barrow (1996). Today, it has been proven that the employer brand fully mediates the relationship between the corporate brand and the intention to apply (Banerjee et al., 2020), so organizations make significant efforts to create a successful employer value proposition (EVP), realizing that along with choosing the best employees, the organization gains a competitive advantage and strengthens its position through better organization of all business processes. At the same time, estimates of the capital of the employer's brand have not yet gained much popularity – studies of the motives for choosing employers, i.e. components of EB, which should be developed to obtain and retain talents are more widespread. However, according to some representative surveys, strong employer branding can be found to lead to a 28% reduction in turnover, 50% reduction in cost per hire, and 50% more qualified applicants (LinkedIn, 2016). Of course, such a significant impact of the employer's strong brand on the results in the field of personnel management, and hence the financial benefits of the whole company, leads to an increased interest in developing the EB. As a result, the task of developing EB has become one of the top priorities in the strategy list for companies (Itam et al., 2020), and the efforts to build a successful EB require constant monitoring of attitudes and values of potential applicants and staff involved. In this regard, the development of a methodology for researching values and analysis of changes in the behavioural attitudes of employees from different groups is becoming increasingly important. First of all, it is important to take into account the differences in the perception of EB by different generations, because such differences are the most important in terms of building employer long-term strategies.

With this in mind, our study aims to assess the differences between the key values of employees and potential workers whose work is most in demand on the labour market (generations Y and Z, having or doing a degree). Such results are important for the creation of successful EVPs and the development of a strong competitive brand of the employer in the management system of the organization.

Literature review

Among the tasks of organization management, brand value creation is a key issue of modern marketing strategies (Stukalina & Pavlyuk, 2021). Achieving market advantages in the selection and retention of talent is rather difficult without coherent brand management based on constant research components of “benefits” and “imageries” throughout the life cycle of EB, in contrast to the traditional monistic concept of brand value building and managing (Majerova, 2020). At the same time, the creation of a successful EB is important not only for the purpose of recruiting and maintaining the quality of internal business processes. As proven, a positive candidate experience regarding the EB will result in the strengthening of business outcomes, including strengthening relationships with customers and investors, referring friends to the company, and participating in future searches conducted by the organization (Miles & McCamey, 2018).

Understanding these links, companies develop the employer brand in different directions, trying to strengthen corporate identity, form strong relationships with staff, and improve their image as a potential employer. Among such efforts are those aimed at eliminating discrimination, in particular gender discrimination (Hedija & Němec, 2021),

which significantly reduces employee loyalty and worsens the performance of organizations (Bilan et al., 2020; Gallo et al., 2021); at taking into account gender differences in the perception of the strategy of organizations, in particular, on sustainable development and corporate social responsibility (Kumar et al., 2021; Rzemieniak & Wawer, 2021); at using social media to maintain a positive image of the organization and interaction with applicants of certain age groups (Mičík & Mičudová, 2018); at implementing vocational training programs within the compensation and benefits package for employees (Samoliuk et al., 2021); at emphasizing certain EB components, taking into account the differences in the perception of the company by its potential customers and employees, e.g., special strategies for small and medium-sized enterprises (Bite & Konczos-Szombathelyi, 2020; Monteiro et al., 2020) etc. Among the useful consequences of EB development are, in particular, a positive relationship between engagement, employer brand, perceived organizational support, and internal communication satisfaction (Verčič, 2021).

At the same time, the main purpose of EB is to emphasize the advantages of the company as an employer, which should be unique and distinct to both potential and existing employees – this can be achieved through the combined effect of branding and human resource development practices of a company (Itam et al., 2020).

To emphasize the features of the employer's brand, companies can use the following dimensions of EB as a growth and development opportunity: company reputation, acceptance and belongingness, work-life balance and ethics, and CSR (Sharma & Prasad, 2018). And, as proved in the same study, EB is an effective contributor to intend to join an organization. Similar results were obtained in the study by Staniec & Kalińska-Kula (2021).

The formation of a positive intention to join the company is a key process in the personnel management of the organization, because it depends on the effectiveness of recruitment and the further effectiveness of the company.

Therefore, in forming the intention to join the best candidates, the practical tasks of organizational management are realized through the research of behavioural economics. At the same time, it is important to form ideas about behaviours and, most importantly, the values that determine the choice of workplace, as well as the motives of the employed to keep the job. Based on large-scale research in this area, it has been proven that the main features of a competitive employer brand are EVP formed on the basis of the following components: salary and benefits offering (cited by 62% of respondents), followed by a good work-life balance (58%) and job security (56%). Such results were obtained in the Randstad Employer Brand Research case study - an extensive survey of sentiments among 190,000 respondents across 34 markets (Randstat, 2021). At the same time, key values have not changed during the pandemic period.

In the areas of activity where the employment of young people with high intellectual and creative potential is important, the priorities have certain features. Thus, the Universum study examined the motivations of university graduates as they enter the global workforce in popular employment areas such as Business and Engineering/IT. Within each group of respondents (a total of 235,273 business, engineering, and IT students in the world's 12 largest economies), the first priority is high future earnings, followed by a friendly work environment, secure employment, professional training and development (for business students), innovation, a friendly work environment (Universum, 2020). Other values also play an important role, such as opportunities for professional development or maintenance

of corporate culture, which, according to the organizers of the survey, is a challenge for the employer at the time of rapid spread of remote work.

Such values of young people, which are essential when choosing a job, are important in their general perception of well-being among other economic and social factors (Tvaronavičienė et al., 2021). Dissatisfaction with such needs can be a trigger not only for specific organizations, but also for the country, if the needs for development, high earnings, and others are not met (Oliinyk et al., 2021). It can especially shift employment patterns regarding the possibilities of work in knowledge-intensive activities (Dima et al., 2020).

Meeting employees' needs based on their values has two-way links with branding: Bharadwaj et al. (2021) prove the mediating effects on employee retention of employer branding through job satisfaction and organizational identification. In addition, the results also provide support for the serial mediation model. The abundance of evidence for the positive interaction of EB and meeting employee's needs through building and maintaining a successful EVP contributes to the fact that modern employer branding is based on labour market research and increasing consideration of differences in personality traits and most of the work values within generations, including the behaviour of generations X and Y (Kaleli & Yalçın, 2021), millennial generation (Kim & Chao, 2019), generations Y and Z (Azimi et al., 2021).

In addition to the fact that there are certain behavioural and value characteristics that are typical of different generations, it is also important in the development of the organization's brand to take into account the peculiarities of the manifestation of values in certain countries. Given that our empirical study was conducted on the example of Ukraine, such features can be taken into account on the basis of the grouping of values developed by the Academy DTEK together with hh.ua|grc (GRC, 2019). This approach was tested in the process of researching the values of 2182 visitors of the job portal of Facebook and Telegram aged 15 to 72 years, i.e. covering all three generations represented in the labour market today.

Research methodology

The values of generations that should be taken into account in the construction of EB for the purposes of our study are selected based on the system of generational values substantiated in GRC (2019).

However, in the light of our research aim, we conduct a survey using this approach with certain changes, fulfilled according to the advice of one of the most powerful recruitment agencies in Ukraine: "Imperia-HR". Regarding the experience of this company in employer brand development, we transform a set of values important for employees and jobseekers as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Core values important for EVP design

Authors' suggestion of values	Values conducted by GRC
1. Status criteria	1. Status criteria
The company's reputation as a manufacturer	-
The company's reputation as an employer	-
Social responsibility of the company	Social responsibility of the company

Authors' suggestion of values	Values conducted by GRC
International relations of the company	International relations of the company, possibilities to communicate with foreign colleagues
2. Material criteria	2. Material criteria
Salary size	Remuneration level
Availability of a compensation package	
3. Criteria for self-realization, development and recognition	3. Criteria for self-realization
Opportunities for training and personal development	Opportunities for training
Career opportunities	Career and personal growth
4. Criteria of professional environment / socio-psychological climate	4. Criteria of professional environment
Colleagues comfortable to work with	Colleagues comfortable to work with
A leader with a good reputation	A leader comfortable to work with
5. Security and stability	5. Security and stability
Official employment	Official employment
Official salary	-
Safe workplace/environment	-
6. Flexibility of employment conditions	6. Timing criteria
Maintaining a healthy work-life balance	Maintaining a healthy work-life balance
Convenient work schedule	Convenient work schedule
	7. Organizational aspects
	Safe workplace and vacation
	Absence or minimal overtime work

Source: Authors' elaboration based on (GRC, 2019).

The values of the generations that are manifested in the choice of the employer's brand were transformed into six groups of criteria for choosing EB: status; material; criteria for self-realization, development and recognition; criteria of professional environment/ socio-psychological climate; security and stability; flexibility of employment conditions.

Organizational aspects are included in groups of criteria more relevant by their essence (security and stability). Besides, according to the esteems of the experts of the recruiting agency, values such as 'Absence or minimal overtime work' are not typical for the current labour market in Ukraine, instead, overtime work can be appropriate in the case of decent benefits and compensation. Some other improvements of the GRC value system are fulfilled due to the increasing role of reputational factors for the employees and job seekers (they are added into Status criteria) as well as the official salary among Security and stability criteria.

Using our approach, the study was conducted in one of the regional centers of Ukraine (Rivne) using Google Forms in October and November 2021. The design of the developed questionnaire contained 15 criteria for choosing a job that were grouped into six categories

and with a rating scale from 1 to 3, which allowed the respondents to provide for their own assessment of the criteria-statements, where: 1 – “absolutely not important”; 2 – “important, but not decisive when choosing a job”; 3 – “very important”. This modification of the Likert scale has been used due to its relative simplicity. Besides, in this case, we deal with a sociological review, not with an expert evaluation. Testing the draft version of the questionnaire, we received feedback from the recruiting agency to simplify the scale.

The sample of respondents is made up of a population aged 18 to 40 (generations Y and Z), taking into account that workers of this age today are the most in demand in the labour market, based on vacancies published on job portals. As a result of the survey, valid questionnaires were received from 510 respondents. The authors reached this number of responses using the network of the professional recruitment agency “Imperia-HR”. Our survey is based on the non-probability sampling. Given that the total population of the region of these age groups is 371,635 (according to the State Statistics Service - (SSSU, 2021), the sample is representative: with a confidence level of 95%, the margin of error is 4.34% according to the Cochran formula (Cochran, 1977). The non-responsive rate was higher for male respondents (38%) compared to the female (11%).

Our study included the analysis and ranking of the respondents’ answers on the basis of gender (32% - male, 68% - female), and on the basis of their presence or absence of work experience (65% - experienced, 35% - unexperienced). Considering the structure of the target group, this sample reflects the total population of the region. The higher number of female responses is achieved due to their higher response rate.

Results

The results of our study are provided in Table 2 and Figure 1.

Table 2 shows the detailed results of all the criteria for selecting EB, which are included in the formed 6 groups.

Table 2. The importance of the EB components according to the main criteria for its evaluation for different sexes (respondents’ self-assessment)

EB components	Distribution of answers according to the importance of criteria, %						Rank	
	absolutely not important		important, but not decisive when choosing a job		very important			
	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f
Status Criteria								
The company’s reputation as a manufacturer	8.9	3.4	46.8	50.3	44.3	46.3	11	13
The company’s reputation as an employer	7.6	2.3	17.7	16.6	74.7	81.1	2	4
Social responsibility of the company	10.1	5.7	38.0	34.9	51.9	59.4	9	10
International relations of the company	20.3	16.6	49.4	62.3	30.4	21.1	15	15
Material Criteria								
Salary size	7.6	2.9	17.7	14.3	74.7	82.9	3	2
Availability of a compensation package	17.7	4.6	41.8	50.3	40.5	45.1	13	14
Criteria for Self-Realization, Development and Recognition								

EB components	Distribution of answers according to the importance of criteria, %						Rank	
	absolutely not important		important, but not decisive when choosing a job		very important			
	m	f	m	f	m	f	m	f
Opportunities for training and personal development	5.1	2.9	30.4	26.9	64.6	70.3	4	6
Career opportunities	2.5	3.4	22.8	10.9	74.7	85.7	1	1
Criteria for Professional Environment / Socio-Psychological Climate								
Colleagues comfortable to work with	2.5	1.7	44.3	36.0	53.2	62.3	6	8
A leader with a good reputation	7.6	2.9	48.1	36.0	44.3	61.1	10	9
Criteria for Safety and Stability								
Official employment	19.0	9.1	27.8	38.3	53.2	52.6	12	12
Official salary	21.5	9.1	36.7	35.4	41.8	55.4	14	11
Safe workplace/environment	10.1	3.4	30.4	13.7	59.5	82.9	7	3
Criteria for Flexibility of Employment conditions								
Maintaining a healthy work-life balance	7.6	2.9	34.2	2.7	58.2	67.4	5	7
Convenient work schedule	10.1	2.9	36.7	22.3	53.2	74.9	8	5

Source: Authors' original research.

The status group included 4 criteria that characterize the company's reputation and its connections. It is to see that the "reputation of the company as a manufacturer" is very important when choosing a job for 44.3% of men and 46.3% of women, and important but not decisive for 46.8% of men and 50.3% of women, i.e. according to the criterion, there are no significant gender differences. At the same time, the "reputation of the company as an employer" is a very important factor for the majority of respondents of both sexes, namely for 81.1% of women and 74.7% of men. As for the social responsibility of the company, it is important for more than 50% of respondents of both sexes. At the same time, the presence of international connections by the future employer is much less decisive in making decisions for both sexes, especially for women.

The analysis of the survey results showed the importance of the "salary size" criterion, which is very important for the majority of respondents of both sexes. At the same time, there is a gap (over 8%) on the basis of gender - it is decisive for 82.9% of women and only 74.7% of men when choosing a job. Much less important is another criterion from the material section - a compensation package, which is very important only for 45.1% of women and 40.5% of men. At the same time, 17.7% of men claimed that the social package is not important to them, and among women, there were only 4.6% who chose this.

It should be noted that certain criteria of self-realization also play a significant role in choosing a future employer. As it can be seen in Table 2, "Opportunities for training and personal development" are very important for about 65% of respondents regardless of gender. However, career opportunities, although very important for both sexes, are more important for women (85.7% vs. 74.7%). At the same time, the opportunity to make a career is desirable but not decisive for 20.4% of men at this stage of life.

Table 2 also shows that the professional environment when choosing a job is more important and decisive for women. In particular, the reputation of the future leader is very important for 61.1% of women and only for 44.3% of men. However, 65.3% of male

respondents noted the desirability but not the decisive role of this criterion in employment decisions. A much smaller gender gap is observed in the distribution of the respondents' answers according to the criterion of the presence of colleagues with whom it is comfortable to work. This factor, which is the basis for a positive socio-psychological climate in the team, is very important for 62.3% of women and 53.2% of men.

The most important among the criteria that characterize the safety and stability of future work is the criterion of a "safe working environment". According to the same criterion, there is the largest gender gap in this group, as it is very important for 82.9% of the women surveyed and only for 59.5% of the men. Therefore, it can be concluded that if the company that offers the vacancy will satisfy the candidate according to all criteria except this one, then the man will choose it as a place of work, and the woman will not be likely to do this.

A similar situation has developed with the criterion of "official salary", which is also more important for women - the gap between the answers of the respondents on the basis of gender is 13.6%. At the same time, according to the criterion of "official employment", there is almost no gap in the answers of men and women. However, it should be noted that the fact of payment of "white" salary is important but not decisive for 27.8% of men and 38.3% of women.

The gap in the significance of the criteria of flexibility of employment conditions is quite crucial on the basis of gender. In particular, a comfortable work schedule is very important for 74.9% of women and only for 53.2% of men. A similar situation is observed with the criterion of "Maintaining of a healthy work-life balance", which is also more important and decisive in choosing a place of work for women.

Based on these results, we ranked the criteria for choosing a job depending on its attractiveness and importance to respondents. According to Table 2, the top priority for choosing a job is a "career opportunity" for both men and women, followed by the criterion of "the company's reputation as an employer" that is important for men, and "salary size" was ranked third. The criteria "Opportunities for training and personal development" and "maintaining a healthy work-life balance", which can be provided by the future employer, are quite important for men. These criteria are included in the top 5 priorities of men, but not women. For women, the top 5 included "the company's reputation as an employer" and "convenient work schedule", which took the fourth and fifth places, respectively. At the same time, the "presence of international relations in the company" has the least influence on the choice of workplace for men and for women.

Similarly, we analysed the importance of the EB components according to the main criteria for the groups of respondents with or without work experience. Figure 1 illustrates the results of the ranking made on the basis of the analysis.

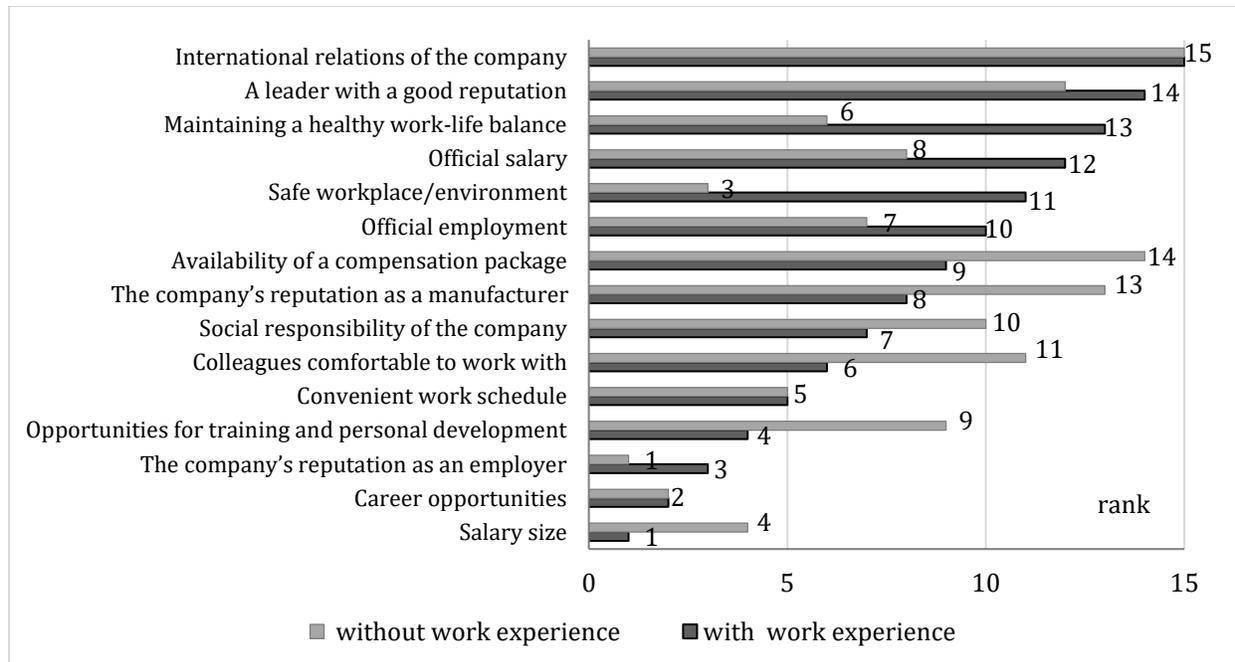


Figure 1. Ranking of job selection criteria depending on their importance for groups of respondents with or without work experience

Source: Authors' original research.

As one can see, there are significant differences in the criteria for choosing EB by respondents with different work experience. We found that the size of the salary is of paramount importance for respondents with work experience when choosing a job. At the same time, the criterion of "salary size" is less important for respondents without work experience, and although it is in the top 5, it holds only the fourth place. For people without any work experience, the company's reputation in the labour market is decisive when choosing an employer.

The opportunity for career growth is ranked second by the representatives of both groups of respondents. There is another important criterion for both groups within top-5, i.e. "convenient work schedule". Yet there are some differences. In particular, the "opportunities for training and professional development" is more important for people with work experience, and a "safe working environment" is more important for the unexperienced ones.

Conclusion

In the conditions of scarcity of qualified personnel, the employer's brand becomes a tool for differentiating the company in the labour market and allows achieving the necessary competitive advantages in attracting the talented. At the same time, a strong HR brand must correspond to the image of the ideal workplace, which is formed in the mind of the employee of the company or a candidate on the labour market. However, due to differences in age, gender, education, and work experience, their expectations may differ. Some authors stress these differences by exploring the preferences in leadership style (Bălan et al., 2019). Similar findings are obtained in our research on the value of "A leader with a good reputation" – its importance is high for both gender groups, however, it is higher for the female respondents.

Therefore, forming an HR-brand you need to understand that it is impossible to attract everyone with only one value proposition, i.e., EVP must be specific according to the expectations of each target segment. Due to this reason, EVP design based on different age and gender groups needs becomes an important direction of HR management (Bejtkovský & Copca, 2020; Itam et al., 2020) increasing the role of the relevant research. Following the hypotheses checked by other authors, particularly (Bite & Konczos-Szombathelyi, 2020; Sharma & Prasad, 2018; Staniec & Kalińska-Kula, 2021; Monteiro et al., 2020), we confirm differences in the importance of the criteria for selecting a potential job on the basis of gender. In particular, the value of “salary size” and “safe workplace” is much higher for women, which may reflect their higher discrimination in this aspect, which is a well-known fact on the Ukrainian labour market (Bilan et al., 2020). At the same time, the company's status criteria are much more important for men, in particular its reputation as a manufacturer and as an employer, as well as the opportunity for personal and professional development.

Therefore, if a company seeks to be competitive in the labour market and form a positive HP brand, it is worth differentiating the criteria that will make it attractive among different applicants.

However, when developing attractive EVPs, it is important to take into account the experience of different target groups. After all, among the proposals addressed to applicants with work experience, considerable attention should be paid to the salary size, which is the most important criterion when choosing an employer. At the same time, for graduates entering the labour market and having no job experience, it is important that the company's reputation is established and communicated to them by various means.

Thus, the employer's brand, which is formed and developed taking into account the value-motivational characteristics of both its own staff and external target audiences, will allow the company to remain competitive in the labour market by attracting and retaining qualified professionals, increasing their loyalty and efficiency.

To design the successful EVP similar researches should be conducted periodically due to changes in values of different generations. However, in this regard, we had an essential limitation in conducting our research. Particularly, we could achieve significant feedback for our survey, but it became possible only due to support of the powerful recruitment agency. The availability of respondents without such support from the professional network is mainly low, as we can conclude from the similar national survey (GRC, 2019). These difficulties in the availability of the data set complicate future comparisons.

The future research can look into the trends in EVP design by employers and their alignment with the employees' values.

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