



EMPLOYER BRANDING AS A MODERN FORM OF BUILDING THE EMPLOYER'S IMAGE – STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE AS FUTURE EMPLOYEES

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Abstract

Under the conditions underlying the contemporary work market, the brand of an organisation as an attractive employer, especially in the opinion of young, talented people, can be a key factor leading to the success of the company in a longer perspective. From this standpoint, the concept of employer branding is gaining importance as a modern way of creating an image of an employer among the current and future employees.

The aim of this study has been to evaluate the effectiveness of employer branding activities implemented by organisations operating on the labour market in the eyes of students as potential employees. The study included students in the second cycle of studies at the Faculty of Economic Sciences, the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn. The study was carried out as a survey in the first quarter of year 2022.

The study has verified that a positive image of an employer has a significant influence on prospective applicants searching for employment in a given company. The most important role in this regard is played by employer branding activities conducted online, and creating the employer's profile in social media seems to be particularly valid. For raising the awareness of organisations active on the job market, it also turned out to be significant to participate in in-person job fairs and all other types of events held at universities to promote employment opportunities. Companies which wish to build an employer brand among representatives of the young generation, including university students, soon to be university graduates, should pay attention to using the mentioned solutions in their management practice.

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**EMPLOYER BRANDING JAKO NOWOCZESNA FORMA BUDOWANIA
WIZERUNKU PRACODAWCY – PERSPEKTYWA STUDENTÓW
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A b s t r a k t

W uwarunkowaniach współczesnego rynku pracy zbudowana marka organizacji jako atrakcyjnego pracodawcy, szczególnie dla młodych utalentowanych osób, może się stać głównym czynnikiem, mającym wpływ na sukces firmy w dłuższej perspektywie. Z tego punktu widzenia coraz większego znaczenia nabiera wykorzystanie koncepcji *employer branding* jako nowoczesnej formy budowania wizerunku pracodawcy, zarówno wśród obecnych, jak i przyszłych pracowników.

Celem prezentowanych badań była ocena skuteczności działań employer brandingowych podejmowanych przez funkcjonujące na rynku organizacje z perspektywy studentów jako grupy potencjalnych pracowników. Objęto nimi osoby realizujące studia stacjonarne II stopnia na Wydziale Nauk Ekonomicznych Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego w Olsztynie. Badania przeprowadzono metodą ankietową w I kwartale 2022 roku.

Wyniki badań potwierdziły, że pozytywny wizerunek pracodawcy ma istotny wpływ na chęć do ubiegania się o zatrudnienie w danej firmie. Najważniejszą rolę w tym zakresie odgrywają działania employer brandingowe prowadzone w sieci, w tym szczególnie ważne okazało się prowadzenie profilu pracodawcy w mediach społecznościowych. Istotne znaczenie z punktu widzenia zwiększania świadomości o istniejących na rynku pracy organizacjach okazały się także mieć stacjonarne targi pracy i różnego rodzaju akcje przeprowadzane na uczelniach. Firmy chcące budować wśród przedstawicieli młodego pokolenia, do których należą studenci, a niebawem – absolwenci szkół wyższych, powinny zwrócić uwagę na wykorzystanie tych rozwiązań w praktyce zarządzania.

Introduction

For an organisation to operate in the contemporary, changeable environment, it is necessary to develop an effective form of human capital management, especially in terms of acquiring and retaining competent and valuable employees. This is becoming an ever growing challenge in the current social and demographic situation, particularly because of the important position of an employee on the labour market, where an interest in a company and motivating prospective

employees to apply for work are associated with the company's positive image in the environment. In such circumstances, an organisation's brand created as an attractive employer, especially in the opinion of young, talented persons, can be a key factor leading to the company's success in a longer perspective.

Employer branding is indicated as an up-to-date current that enables companies to be supported in their attempts to attract and retain most talented employees. This concept is gaining importance, and many authors agree that employer branding can affect the operation of a company quite substantially (Ahmad & Daud, 2016, p. 691, 692). Among the main reasons in favour of employer branding, the following are mentioned: brand strength, growing pressure on greater engagement of employees, war for talents, and the impact of HR practices on business (Biswas & Suar, 2016, p. 58).

As regards the theory, the concept of employer branding has evolved in the science of organisation and management, which amalgamates knowledge from different domains. In this case, the idea of employer branding refers mostly to the achievements of human resources management and marketing. However, scholars also indicate connections with the concept of psychological contract or with the management of client relations (Dunmore, 2002, p. 195; Beaumont & Graeme, 2003, p. VII; Berthon *et al.*, 2005, p. 153; Rosethorn, 2009, p. 4).

The relevant literature provides several different definitions of employer branding, where it is understood as:

- everything that is communicated (intentionally or not) to every present or future employee (Mayo, 2001, p. 123);
- all communication efforts of an organisation carried out on the internal and external labour market, owing to which the organisation is seen as a desirable work place (Lloyd, 2002, p. 64-66);
- the process of creating, identifying and managing the image of an organisation as an employer (Spitzmüller *et al.*, 2002, p. 27, 28);
- the way in which present and potential employees see the promise made by the employer (Burke, 2007, p. 21);
- the sum of functional, economic and psychological benefits from being employed, and the sense of identity with the organisation (Barrow & Mosley, 2005, p. XV);
- the process of creating an organisation's identity and managing its image as an employer (Gillis, 2006, p. 271);
- the reason why people decide to become members of an organisation and stay in it (Rosethorn, 2009, p. 19, 20).

Building the employer brand is nowadays thought to be a long-term strategy of attracting, engaging and retaining talented, valuable employees in a company, aimed to create a coherent, positive image of the company as an employer in the eyes of both present employees and candidates on the labour market as well as business partners, clients and other groups of stakeholders. In other words, this is the process of creating values for stakeholders, which emerge as a result of the

organisation's strong employer brand, understood as the sum of benefits it brings to all subjects involved as senders and recipients in the process of building employer brand (Wojtaszczyk, 2012, p. 86). In general terms, they are 'all efforts made by an organisation addressed to current and potential employees, with the aim to build the organisation's image as an attractive employer, and supporting the organisation's business aims' (Kozłowski, 2016, p. 13).

Building the employer brand, seen as a package of functional, economic and psychological benefits from employment, and associated with a given organisation, focuses on an analysis of employees' needs, based of which they are presented with an offer of values that are intended to attract or keep the employees, and to increase their satisfaction and dedication (Lewicka, 2010, p. 266). Considering the scope of effects, two types of employer branding can be distinguished (Stachowska, 2020, p. 79):

- internal – composed of activities addressed to people already employed in a given company, mostly to create a friendly atmosphere at work and opportunities for development;

- external – including activities undertaken outside a given organisation, addressed to potential employees, where the aim is to create an image of the company as an attractive employer.

These days, many companies focus on internal employer branding, wishing to enhance the engagement of their employees, and undertaking activities in order to raise their motivation and to maintain the best employees (Maurya & Agarwal, 2018, p. 313). Employer branding perceived as the building and offering of an organisation's identity in order to form emotional bonds with employees is associated with the system of motivating employees and shaping the work conditions (Sartain & Schumann, 2006, p. VI). This applies to all aspects of an organisation's personnel policy, including remunerations and benefits, work conditions, trainings and development, flow of information, possibilities of developing one's professional career, talent management, taking care of the work-life balance, or the social responsibility of business.

In turn, activities pursued within the employer branding addressed to external audience can be divided into two main categories (Kubiak, 2014, p. 8):

- image-related activities – with the aim to raise the awareness of potential employees of the brand, and to pass the information about the benefits to be gained by taking employment in a given company – often these are carried out as long-term campaigns addressed to the widest possible audience;

- recruitment activities – where the main goal is to acquire the best, most talented and valuable candidates from the standpoint of a given company, and to encourage them to apply for employment.

New technologies, innovative solutions and social media are now leading tools in the building of the brand of an employer outside a company, in addition to activities classified as 'word-of-mouth marketing', which make opinions about the company circulate among possible job applicants (Kozłowski, 2016, p. 92, 93).

The major areas where external employer branding instruments are used include the virtual environment (online activities) and the environment outside the Internet.

The online activities promoting an employer can be carried out using such online tools as a search engine in the SEM (Search Engine Marketing) and SEO (Search Engine Optimization) applications, which provide greater visibility of an employer's website. Other tools are: an updated „Career' tab on a company's website, seen as the company's showcase, and attractive job advertisements, coherent with the company's visual identity, as well as social networking sites, both professional (Goldenline, LinkedIn), and relations-building ones (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.), which are an excellent tool for communication with professionals and with young people, in addition to company blogs, newsletters, chats, etc., or online (virtual) job fairs.

Considering the fact that the Internet has become one of the most popular sources of information for all persons searching for employment (Eger *et al.*, 2018, p. 226), it is recommendable to include integrated online activities in the strategic plans of every company which intends to build its brand as an employer of choice (Nelke, 2021, p. 390). It is worth remembering that social media, which are currently used for business purposes all the time, are believed to be very effective in raising public knowledge of existing organisations, and in recruiting new employees; they are also key instruments for creating an attractive image of the employer (Samson & Rathee, 2017, p. 1).

Classic, offline employer branding activities include: job fairs, open doors day, presence of a company at colleges and universities (lectures, presentations, workshops, meetings with students, dual studies, or ambassador programmes), special educational projects or programmes of training placements and internships, competitions, as well as leaflets, brochures, posters or advertisements in newspapers and magazines. It is worth noting that in-house job fairs as well as all kinds of campaigns carried out at colleges and universities are important for raising the awareness about companies available on the labour market. Although young people entering the labour market now are the generation of the Internet, it turns out that offline, face-to-face meetings are still appreciated as they ensure better opportunities for starting social interactions (Budzanowska-Drzewiecka & Proszowska, 2015, p. 279-280).

Employer branding is now thought to be the key factor enabling a company to achieve success. Its use is associated many benefits for both the current and future employees (Figurska & Matuska, 2013, p. 39-41). The subject literature highlights the fact that an attractive image of a company has an immense influence on potential employees and on their willingness to apply for work in a given company (Kumari *et al.*, 2020, p. 90), and well-designed activities as well as the proper implementation of an employer branding strategy in a company can contribute to attracting and retaining valuable employees (Poonam, 2019, p. 669). Building an attractive image of a company is associated with an easier task

of finding and hiring talents, greater engagement of employees, and much easier recruitment processes (Krawczyk, 2015, p. 311).

The opinion that is gaining popularity is the one that employees' motivation, which translates into their close bond with a given organisation or involvement in the tasks performed, can be reinforced by creating a strong brand of the company as a good employer (cf. Berthon *et al.*, 2005, p. 151-172). A strong employer brand brings about several benefits, including lower costs, stronger employee bonds, and improved employee-employer relationship (Collins & Stevens, 2002, p. 24-34). „A good employee wants to work in a good company” (Davis *et al.*, 2010, p. 54), and employer branding helps to recruit and retain talented persons for a longer time (Davenport & Barrow, 2009, p. 146). An organisation which is an employer of choice is better at attracting talents and preventing talent loss (Leary-Joyce, 2007, p. 16), which is why employer branding is often referred to as a product of the war for talents (Martin, 2007, p. 18), and is thought to be a complex approach to the management of talents in a company (Herman & Gioia, 2001, p. 63-78).

The role of employer branding as a communication instrument is also highlighted. As such, it enables a company to show its attributes, and can make persons from the target group wish to join the company (Gregorka, Silva, 2020, p. 1). One of the most important groups to which companies addressed their ongoing activities in the scope of employer branding are students. These activities are treated as an investment because a student will become a professional in their domain and can be a valuable employee, client or business partner of a company. It is worth drawing attention to the question of how effective employer branding activities are from the viewpoint of this group.

The purpose of this study has been to evaluate the effectiveness of employer branding activities undertaken by organisations operating on the market from the point of view of students as a group of potential employees. The study included persons in the second cycle of full-time studies at the Faculty of Economic Sciences, the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn.

Research methodology

A survey method was employed to achieve the assumed research aim. A questionnaire was addressed to all students in the second-cycle full-time studies at the Faculty of Economic Sciences, the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn (in total, 324 persons). 201 correctly completed questionnaires were received (62% of the research group). The study was carried out in the first quarter of year 2022.

In the studied population, 60.2% of the respondents were women, and 39.8% were men. The vast majority (93%) were 23-25 years old, while 6% were over 25 years of age and 1% – less than 23 years old.

In the population covered by the study, 78.1% were students in the course of studies Management (including 1st year students – 29.9% of the population, and 2nd year students – 48.3%), while 21.4% were students in the course of Economics (including 11.4% of 1st year students and 10% of 2nd year students).

The vast majority of respondents (89.1%) lived in towns, including 18.4% – living in towns with the population of up to 25 thousand, 4% – towns with 25 to 50 thousand population, and 7% – towns with 50 to 100 thousand people, 58.7% – towns with the population over 100 thousand. 11.9% lived in villages.

Most of the research participants (90.5%) had some professional experience, of which 52.2% – had worked for less than a year (including 10.4% – up to 6 months, and 41.8% – between 6 and 12 months). The seniority of 1 to 3 year was reported by 35.8% of the respondents, and over 3 years – by 2.5%. over, 9.5% of the surveyed population had not worked so far.

At the time of conducting the study, 57.7% of respondents were not in employment, and 42.3% were employed (of which 27.9% were employed in manual/physical jobs, 13.4% – in administrative/office jobs and 1% represented the management staff). Among the working students, most persons declared they were currently working in commerce (13% of the studied population), 10% worked in catering, 9% – in banking and finance, 5.5% – in culture and entertainment, and the others (in total 5%) in other sectors. A large percentage of the students currently in employment (30.8%) worked in towns with the population of over 100,000; 6.5% found employment in towns with up to 25 thousand residents; 3.5% – in towns with 25 to 100 thousand people, and 1.5% – in villages.

Research results

The survey results show that more than half of the students (51.3%) had not encountered the term 'employer branding' before, while the respondents who confirmed knowing the concept mainly associated it with the management of the employer's image (65.3%) and building the company's brand (29.7% of indications).

The survey contained questions about the effectiveness of activities undertaken by employers within internal and external employer branding. Among the solutions which – according to the respondents – most significantly contribute to the creation of a positive image of an employer in the eyes of employees were: an attractive package of benefits (74.1%), an objective remuneration system (68.7%), opportunities for professional training and development (62.7%), programmes helping to maintain a healthy balance between work and personal life (59.2%), and integration meetings (46.3%). As for the practices the students had encountered in their work places so far, the ones mentioned most often were: opportunities for professional training and development (54.7%) and an objective system of remuneration (42.3%).

The most evident differences in the replies regarding the solutions thought to be most effective versus the ones most often seen in practice concerned the activities aiming to maintain the work-life balance (39.3 percent points), additional benefits offered by the employer (43.8 percent points) and objective remuneration system (26.4 percent points) – Figure 1. It seems that companies should pay more attention to the implementation of these measures, and the role they play in building a brand of an attractive employer.

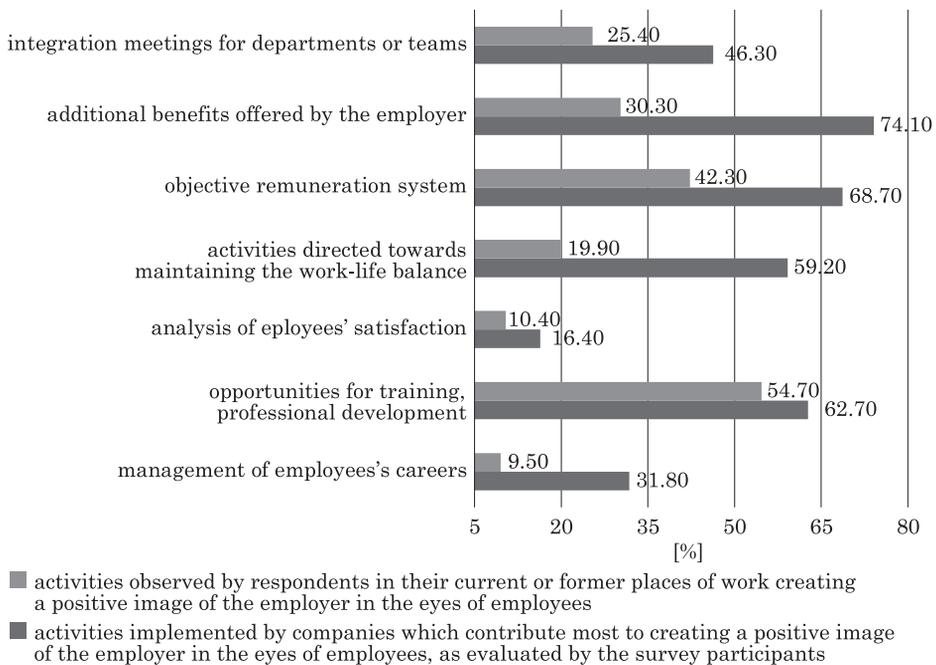


Fig. 1. Activities aiming to create an attractive image of the employer in the eyes of employees, according to the respondents

Source: the authors, based on the survey.

The external employer branding activities performed outside the Internet (offline) which were most often observed by the students proved to be campaigns held at colleges and universities – this answer was indicated by 79.6% of respondents. Subsequently, the following replies were chosen: training placements/internships (75.1%) and in-house job fairs (57.7%). Despite the relatively broad knowledge of such activities demonstrated by the students, their active participation is much less common. In-house job fairs were attended by 39.3% of the respondents, campaigns at colleges and universities – by 38.8%, and training placements and internships – by 36.6%. It is worth noting that 9.5% of the respondents had never taken part in employer branding activities held outside the Internet.

The activities which most significantly raise the awareness about employers operating on the labour market, according to the survey respondents, were: in-house job fairs (49.8%) and campaigns launched at higher education institutions (49.3%). These activities were evaluated as the most effective ones among offline employer branding activities conducted by employers (they were evaluated as such by around 44% of the respondents). In light of this finding, it seems that employers should consider more effective promotion of such activities in order to encourage the participation of larger groups of students.

Noteworthy is also the fact that the biggest discrepancies in the answers given in this part of the survey concerned training placements and internships, which are the form most often encountered by students but thought to be effective in terms of employer branding only to a small degree – Figure 2.

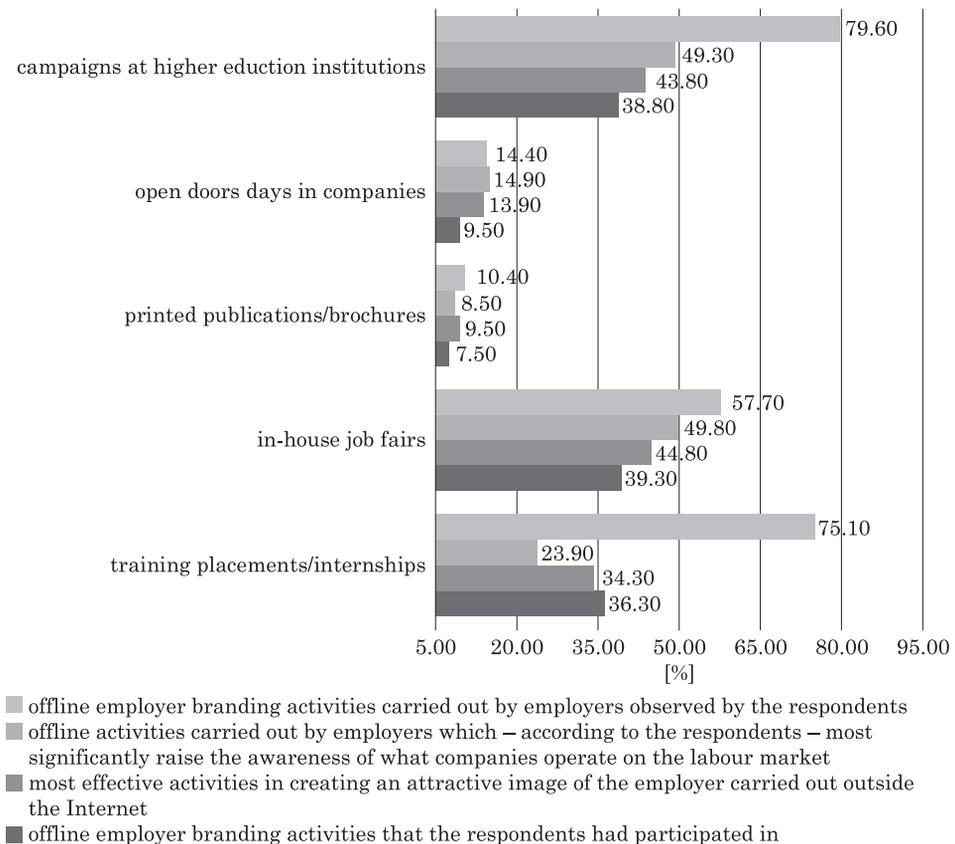


Fig. 2. Employer branding activities carried out offline by employers, from the viewpoint of respondents

Source: the authors, based on the survey.

Among the employer branding activities carried out at colleges and universities most often noticed by students, there are dual studies (69.7% of indications). Other options, like workshops (26.9%), talks and lectures conducted by companies (22.9%) or promotional recruitment meetings (25.9%), are indicated far less often. Although most of the students acknowledge an offer of dual studies, only 9% took part in such courses. Students are not very active either in other forms of employers' presence at higher education institutions. It is worth noting that little interest is raised among students by ambassador programmes or competitions held by companies. Special attention should be drawn to significant differences in the replies concerning promotional and recruitment meetings. They were considered to be the most effective employer branding tool among students by the majority of the surveyed population (75.1%), with a small percentage of respondents who indicated they had not come across such meetings in their university (25.9%) or had not taken part in them (7.4%) – Figure 3. It appears that employers should be advised to pay more attention to organising such meetings.

The employer branding tools used by companies on the Internet (online) that were most often noticed by the survey participants were: branding recruitment

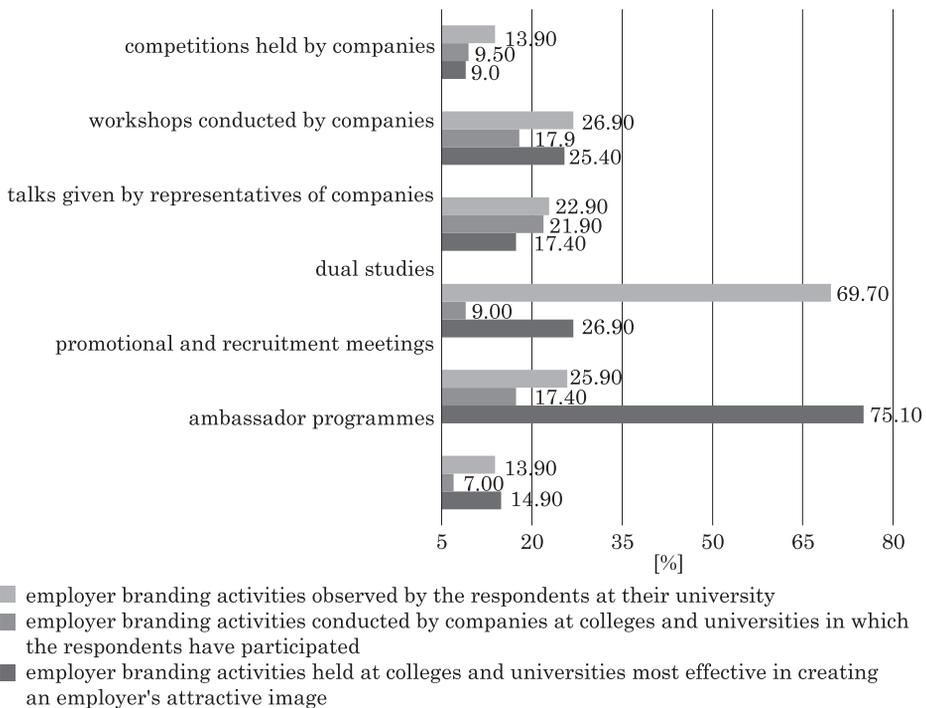
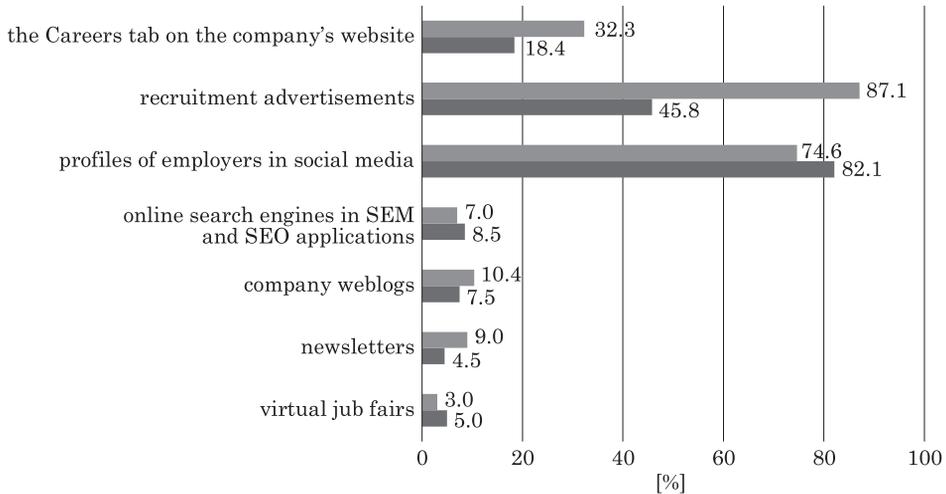


Fig. 3. Employer branding activities carried out by employers at colleges and universities, from the viewpoint of respondents

Source: the authors, based on the survey.

advertisements (87.1%) and profiles of employers in social media (82.1%). Virtual job fairs were followed the least often (3%).

The most effective form of online external employer branding, according to the respondents, consisted of employers' profiles in social media – this reply was selected by 82.1% of the surveyed population. The effectiveness of recruitment advertisements was ranked the highest by 45.8% of the respondents. It is worth noting that there was the biggest difference in the values attached to this item. Branding recruitment advertisements were noticed by the vast majority of the surveyed students, but less than half of them considered this as an effective online tool in terms of creating an employer's attractive image. A similar finding emerged in the case of the Careers tab on employers' websites – 32.3% of the respondents were aware of this tool, but only half of them believed it is an effective measure – Figure 4.



■ employer branding activities observed by the respondents on the Internet
 ■ the most effective employer branding activities on the Internet, according to the respondents

Fig. 4. Employer branding online tools used by employers from the viewpoint of respondents
 Source: the authors, based on the survey.

The vast majority of the respondents (93.5%) agreed (of which 37.3% agreed strongly) that companies should use social media profiles to build their image as an employer. A considerable percentage of the surveyed population indicated that they followed employers in social media (74.6%), mostly on Facebook (66.2%), Instagram (43.8%) and LinkedIn (27.4%). Most of the respondents (83.6%) also agreed (of which 35.3% agreed strongly) that the information a potential employer provides in social media could have a significant influence on their decision to apply for a job in a given organisation. More than half of the respondents

maintained that the profiles of companies in social media should include such basic elements as current job advertisements (62.7%), description of the company (59.7%) and description of work in specific posts (52.7%). The survey results confirm that social media have become a very important tool in employer branding, to which companies should pay special attention.

The majority of the respondents (81.1%) declared that they browse employers' websites. The components which are most often visited include current job advertisements (71.6%), announcements about internship programmes (46.8%) and the Careers tab (40.8%). Announcements about open doors days (17.9%) or the company's participation in job fairs (14.4%) were far less frequently indicated.

More than half of the respondents (58.7%) declared using the Careers tab on an employer's website, and the following were considered as its most important elements: a list of current employment vacancies (42.8%), information about benefits offered by employers (32.3%) and the section addressed to students (31.8%).

The vast majority of the respondents (98%) agreed (of which 43.3% agreed strongly) that opinions of people employed in a company were important in the context of creating an employer brand outside the company. Most respondents check opinions on the Internet about a potential employer before applying for a job (93%) and admit that such comments have a significant influence on their decision (94.5%). The survey results confirm the importance of the so-called 'word-of-mouth' marketing in employer branding.

According to most of the surveyed population (72.1%), employer branding activities carried out on the Internet play a more important role in creating an employer's image than the ones conducted outside the Internet. Importantly, the Internet tools, including social media, are gaining popularity, especially among representatives of the young generation. This may have been also a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which made people become used to surfing the virtual world.

Finally, 92.6% of the respondents agreed (of which 28.9% agreed strongly) that employer branding was necessary for building an attractive image of an employer in the eyes of potential employees, which could encourage them to apply for work in a given company. The vast majority (97.5%) of the surveyed population of students agreed (of which 34.8% agreed strongly) that a positive image of an employer was important for them as people looking for employment.

Summary

An attractive image of an organisation as an employer plays an extremely important role on the contemporary labour market. It helps companies build a competitive advantage, acquire valuable talents, and retain the current, valuable employees. The foundation for building an employer brand is an analysis of the

needs of potential or current employees made in order to create an offer of values. An important role in this regard is played by activities within internal employer branding, focusing on the persons already employed in a given organisation, and the ones within external employer branding, addressed to future employees, which can be carried out on the Internet (online) and outside it (offline).

The survey completed for this study dealt with the effectiveness of employer branding undertaken by organisations operating on the labour market, according to students as potential employees. Based on the results of the questionnaire, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1) Over half of the respondents did not know the term 'employer branding', although most of them had come across activities aiming to create a positive image of a company as an employer.

2) Building a positive image of an employer in the eyes of persons employed in a given company, according to the survey participants, is mostly affected by such elements as an attractive package of additional benefits, an objective system of remuneration, opportunities for professional trainings and development, and solutions which help to maintain work-life balance – they are the issues that employers should pay more attention to, as suggested by this study.

3) The activities most often observed by the respondents that employers undertake in the scope of employer branding outside the Internet (offline) are campaigns at colleges and universities, training placements and internships, as well as in-house job fairs. Few students, however, participate in such activities despite being aware of them. Considering the high value attributed by the survey participants to the effectiveness of the mentioned activities, it is worth recommending employers to pay more attention to the promotion of these activities, using various ways to stimulate greater participation of prospective employees.

4) According to the majority of respondents, the most important role in employer branding is played by activities carried out on the Internet. The most effective form of external online employer branding – according to the majority of respondents – is the presence of employers in social media. Most of the students participating in the survey followed profiles of employers in social media, at the same time indicating that the contents found there could significantly affect their decision to apply for work in a given company. The respondents also paid attention to companies' websites, looking for the information that was important for them as prospective employees. They also check opinions shared online about companies as potential employers, which were very important for them.

5) The overwhelming majority of the respondents acknowledge the validity of employer branding activities, indicating that a positive image of an employer is important for them from the standpoint of someone looking for employment.

The results of our study have confirmed that an attractive image of a company as an employer has a significant influence on prospective employees willing to apply for work in a given organisation. It is worth underlining that the Internet tools, including social media, play an important role in employer branding.

Implementing integrated activities in this area should be incorporated into strategic plans of every company which wishes to build their brand as a desirable employer on the labour market. As regards the effectiveness of activities addressed to students as a group of prospective employees, special attention ought to be drawn to the presence of companies as potential employers at colleges and universities during different types of events. It should be remembered that an effective implementation of thoroughly designed employer branding activities is a key to the success of an organisation in its efforts to build own market position, and to use the value of human capital for this purpose.

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