

EMPLOYER BRANDING FRAMEWORK USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR ATTRACTING TALENTS

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Abstract—In contemporary dynamic environment having an attractive employer brand is pivotal to achieve competitive advantage of hiring and retaining the best talents. This paper suggests a framework for employer branding, and emphasizes social media as a significant channel of employer's brand communication, particularly in targeting young generation. In addition, we propose the principles of communication via social media that should be followed in order to create employer image and attractiveness. The outcomes of this study can be used by companies in the process of recruitment of talented young people looking for jobs opportunities.

Keywords - Employer branding, Framework, Communication principles, Social media, Young talents

I. INTRODUCTION

The digital age calls for digital Human Resource Management (HRM) approaches, as the "digitized" workforce changes requirements regarding HR practices [1]. It follows the trend of greater expectations for more open access to companies' information.

The power and convenience of social media in the domain of HR can serve to various purposes. As social media are widely used, particularly by young generation, they offer a myriad of possibilities for direct communication. Thus, they bring powerful tools for communication employer brand, as well.

Being firstly conceptualized by Ambler and Barrow in 1996, the concept of employer brand has recently become a notable topic in HRM [2]. As Backhaus and Tikoo [3] explain, it refers to the unique characteristics of the company's employment offering, the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment - employer value proposition, that differentiates it from competitors, by attracting and retaining potential employees [4]. Employer branding is a set of specific strategies and activities that company applies in order to convey the message to future and existing employees that it is a desirable place to work [5]. Thus, the concept has appeared as an outcome of the application of marketing and

branding principles to HRM, and provides the possibility for HR professionals to strategically promote the company as desirable employer in the process of recruitment [4].

Shabanabi and Kesavaraj [2] elaborate that the essential part of employer branding process is to communicate an employer brand in the marketplace. Furthermore, social media is seen as a significant channel of employer brand communication, particularly in targeting young generation, in order to raise awareness, strengthen an employer image as a good place to work, and consequently, attract talented candidates [4]. In this paper, we are focusing on social media, peculiarly on company-controlled social networking sites which give potential applicants the opportunity to acquire a large quantity of information about the company (not only about job offers, but more - about organizational culture as well)[6].

The paper aims to integrate existing theoretical and empirical approaches and create a clear view of employer branding framework, as well as principles of employer branding communication via company-owned social media. In addition, we proposed the principles of communication via social media, that companies can use in order to effectively attract talents.

II. METHODOLOGY

In this study, we used a conceptual research by observing and analyzing already available both research and case studies on employer branding and its communication via social media. We used both scholarly and practitioner researches and articles from the fields of HRM, branding, and social media communication. Based on extant resources, we comprehensively systematized employer branding framework, with special attention given to social media communication for creating employer image and attractiveness.

III. EMPLOYER BRANDING FRAMEWORK

As Aldousari et al. [7] explain, there is a difference between external and internal employer brands. The external

employer brand refers to the attractiveness to job applicants, whilst the internal employer brand refers to an image that an employer has among the actual employees. This study will focus on building the external employer brand, particularly via company-controlled social media, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Youtube, Twitter and Instagram.

By integrating existing theoretical and empirical approaches, we propose the employer branding framework, shown in Fig. 1. The determinants relevant for understanding the external employer branding and what should be communicated via social media are briefly explained below.

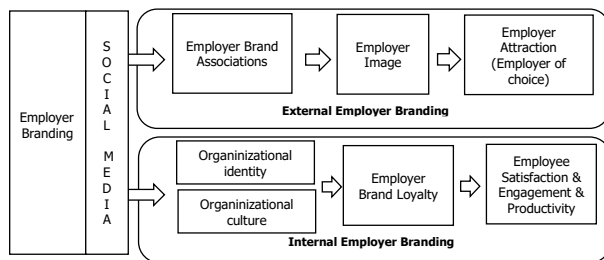


Fig. 1. Employer Branding Framework (based on [2])

An employer image refers to how potential employees receive and perceive the employer brand [2], and it reflects their beliefs [8], and types of associations [4]. Lievens [9] proposed that employer attractiveness assumes not only instrumental aspects of the job, what a company offers (such as a job salary), but also the symbolic attributes, as intangible and subjective aspects of a job. Thus, these symbolic attributes should be used in communication via social media [10]. To summarize, employer branding activities are related to positioning employer brand and targeting potential employees with attractive job offering, that should be communicated through various channels, but also via social media. Consequently, together with other employer branding activities, communication via social media can make an impact on what job applicants think, feel and do [4].

A plethora of companies has been recognized and leveraged the potential of digital and social media (such as LinkedIn, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), to communicate employer brand and attract talents. Social media ensures companies to easily and directly communicate what they stand for. Additionally, the rise of “gig economy”, as well as COVID-19 pandemic, have created an increasing need for online organisational support in the context of employer branding and becoming the employer of choice for young talents [11].

The advantages of using company-controlled social media in the first phases of recruitment are numerous, from possibility to post more in-depth information at almost no cost, over widening visibility through transcending geographical and cultural boundaries, to offering various conveniences for job applicants who can come across and use relevant information whenever they want [12]. Additionally, social media platforms allow users to share their opinions, views and experiences, which is actually an electronic type of word of mouth – eWOM [13].

IV. COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES AND BUILDING EMPLOYER BRAND WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

The paper suggests that an essential part of the communication in employer branding should be conveying effective and powerful messages. Here we had to consider not only marketing and communication strategies that are pivotal for conveying the purposeful message, but also the unique characteristics of social media as the tool and the medium of spreading desired reflection (representation). To create the effective and powerful messages, the main communication principles regarding the content of the messages are proposed:

- Content should be relevant for presenting the genuine and desirable values of the companies (for instance, a company has good relations with community which means that it gives some status and pride to work for it) [12] and in accordance with the potential employees’ interests. For example, if a company thinks about environmental issues and takes care of the social and natural environment [14] or marginalized social groups [15], consequently it might take care of their employees as well. The information given in the content should target the right audience, showing that an employer’s values are fit to the candidates ones [16]. Finally, information has to be genuine and consistent with the real workplace experience, as an employer’s brand is a promise to employees that needs to be kept [17]. Otherwise, there is a serious risk of negative employer brand effect.
- The amount of relevant information should be proper, according to good ergonomic practices when posting information online [18]. The quality, diversity, as well as the quantity of information is of great importance [16]. These authors explain that the more and better information is available the better perception is created among potential employees. Diversity and the quality of information is covered by the specific content, but the capacity to receive the information and to form the impression toward the company could be undermined by the amount of information given in one frame of time. Sometimes the information could be overwhelming and thus create negative impression elicited by the excessive arousal [19].
- The information should be well visually structured [12]. It might be accomplished by confining to the well-known gestalt principles, which include the principles of similarity, proximity, connection, enclosure, followed by visual completion, figure-ground segregation, common fate and continuity [20]. Over the years, some new principles of design emerged and proved to be of importance in this context [21]. Although Gestalt principles are concepts related to the basic researches in the domain of visual perception, it is widely used in marketing [22] and advertising [23], as well as in the studies of human-computer interaction [24] and web design [25]. At the beginning of the 20th century German psychologists recognized today’s well known fact that the wholeness is lot more than the simple sum of its components and that visual experience might be altered by perceptual organization of visual information into larger units [20]. In social media platforms information about organizations are presented visually at the screen

and it is expected they evoke specific meanings. If the arrangements of the units of information form meaningful structure, it helps. The visual experience with the relevant text might provoke attention and affects understanding and memorizing particular information making audience aware of some aspects of organization, as well as leading them to desired or less desired conclusion about it. Knowing the rules of perception and implications of different order and shape of information presented, we could help or hinder organization to convey the right message, as some researches consider this issue [26]. The well structured information might provide the clues for better understanding and visibility of key points, eliciting the right cognitive reception. Also, it is not independent on the emotional evaluation of the data provided [27].

- The whole new domain of research exists considering the affective product design [28], striking the emotions as well as providing information – provoking positive emotions (positive emotional experience) leading toward positive emotional evaluation of the company [1] and spreading positive eWOM among young talents. Kashive et al. [29] have great expectations from understanding the sentiments of employees. It seems that the employer brand, considering to be attractive, has the same effect on the brain activation of regions connected with positive emotions, as it was shown in studies of unexpected rewards [30]. The effect of emotional states provoked by different stimuli on cognitive processing is corroborated in many studies [27], and it is no surprise that it could have been extrapolated in the domain of attitudes toward the employer images. Interesting study of Rampl and colleagues [30] applies fMRI methodology tracking the brain activity evoked by emotional reactions to employer brand. They found the different neural mechanisms engaged when exposed to attractive and less attractive brands, affecting the decision-making process. It was hypothesized that “decision-making on attractive employer brands will be accompanied by decreased activity in brain areas that are associated with cognitive reasoning and working memory, as compared to less attractive brands” [30, p. 364]. The conclusion was that the first choice employer brand that carries positive emotional connotation is linked with activation of the brain regions in charge of emotional processing and the, so called, reward system. Results they provided are in line with previous studies showing that in the situation of higher cognitive load emotions become prevalent in decision-making process [31]. According to authors, it could explain the fact that it is not uncommon for potential employees to trade higher wages for better image accepting to work for less material gain giving advantage to more attractive employer brand [32].

Bearing in mind these principles, we would like to provide guidelines for effective communication of an employer brand via social media, based not only on theoretical considerations, but also on empirical evidence. Thus, we believe that it is possible to overcome potential pitfalls of building employer brand in virtual setting that can be used for attracting young talents.

V. BEYOND PUZZLE PIECES: ASSEMBLING PARTS OF THE EMPLOYER BRAND FRAMEWORK

This paper is an attempt to find the framework, enough comprehensive and flexible to incorporate all aspects consider to be relevant for the right impression while applying to different organizational features. This framework should consider the target audience - young talents, the characteristics of the medium and organizations itself.

Although some factors influencing young talents` experience are common for all the humans, some of them are generation`s exclusive. For example, Gestalt principles are common but some motivational messages and contents might be interpreted differently

It is the same with the chosen media. Brands and branding confine to some general rules of marketing but social media platforms have their particularities that have to be taken into a consideration. As a matter of fact, employer branding has their compared to consumer brands, finding the insignificant overlapping between employer and consumer brand and explaining it by the different relation to the concept of payment (paying for consumer brand and getting paid by employer) [30]. Potential employees are more prone to some media and others to other ones.

Finally, organizations want to convey different image and messages to potential employees concerning their organizational culture and agenda. It is not possible to have unique recommendations and unique, ready and “prêt-à-porter” memos to share. This framework should offer some general guidelines based on theoretical considerations and empirical evidence.

One possible integrator of these guidelines might be seen in storytelling practice of organizational creating their brand image [33]. In these “testimonials” some basic rules of structure, content and emotional experience are incorporated [34]. Some researchers tried to test the efficiency of storytelling via social media [35], as a tool for external employer branding and attracting potential talents [36]. Nevertheless, is it possible to apply our ideas given in the framework structure into the storytelling form, is yet to see, as well as the feasibility of the framework itself. In order to achieve it we have to strive toward principles` integration and finding the right form to use it.

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