The Place and Role of the Employer Brand in Building an Employee’s Career

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Abstract: The notion of career has been intensely debated in the literature, being an interdisciplinary topic. However, the challenges that organizations currently face are becoming much more numerous and different, as new generations of employees have significantly different characteristics from those of employees from previous generations. Organisations, on the other hand, no longer aim to simply recruit employees; they aim to attract talent, and the image built on the market often decisively influences the recruitment process. However, what is the situation in the Romanian market, what role does it play, and how important is building an employer brand? Is it a decisive factor in the evolution of employees’ careers? This paper tries to answer these questions, placing them in a double context - through a theoretical approach, presenting the opinions already formulated by researchers in the field, respectively, through an applied approach, studying through our research what the attitude of employees is towards this subject.

1. INTRODUCTION

The issue regarding the career is a subject of great interest, both from the point of view of specialised literature and especially from a practical perspective. The desire to build a professional path as attractive, complex, and successful as possible can be observed in the case of a large number of individuals, regardless of gender, age, or field of activity.

According to the Randstad report (2021), career progression is one of the top 5 reasons why people choose a certain employer, along with “attractive salary and benefits”, “job security”, “work-life balance”, and “a pleasant work atmosphere”.

Perhaps less debated at the individual level is the impact that the image of one's current employer may have in the future on a person's career path. There are, however, specific elements that usually attract a candidate to a certain company, whether it is a rich history of success on the market, whether talking about the material (Andreș, 2020), or non-material advantages offered to employees. As we can rarely talk about a single job throughout one’s life, some organisations can become launching pads for employees due to their reputation, the experience they have gained, and the advantage brought to the CV through a strong brand. Although in some cases we can talk about mirages, the external image of the organisation in question does not necessarily reflect the real internal situation or not necessarily being a mirror image of reality, the idea of an employer brand construction gradually took shape in the labour market.

As we often approach the concept of career from an interdisciplinary point of view, the notion of "employer brand" is positioned at the confluence of management and marketing, better said, human resources management and human resources marketing, the "product" which sells and at
the same time is sold in this case being, in fact, the organisation. We are therefore talking about the complexity of the approach, the concept itself not being a new one, and the history of literature positioning it as its origin in the early 1990s (Babcanova et al., 2010). Therefore, the first authors to approach this concept, namely Ambler and Barrow, define it as "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employer" (Ergun & Tatar, 2018). In addition, Mokina (2014) indicates the existence of three approaches regarding the employer brand, namely: a labour market approach connecting with the internal marketing (Backhaus, 2016) of the organisation, an approach based on the theory of "internal branding" as part of corporate branding, respectively, an approach that presents the link between psychological contract and organisational relationships.

The question thus arises: What exactly contributes to the creation of an employer brand? What determines the ability to be easily recognized by a large number of people, but also what causes future candidates to want to be a part of that organisation?

Customers, from the perspective of a significant microenvironmental factor, always influence the organisation's activity through the feedback provided and implicitly, the creation of a certain image of it. As Sokro mentions, branding is often used by companies as a "strategic tool" (Sokro, 2012). However, the creation of a strong brand of the organisation, more specifically, the creation of an employer brand, requires the outline of a complex strategy (Chacko & Zacharias, 2020), respectively, very good management of the respective organisation's image on the market. The ability to respect the declared values, as well as employee reward systems, how communication takes place in the organisation, and the ability to integrate them and offer them constant opportunities for professional development contribute to this.

The first term with which we may associate the concept of "employer brand" is that of a company's reputation, but human resources marketing explains it as the notion that "defines the personality of a company as a preferred employer" (Babcanova et al., 2010; Radford, 2009). If the concept of "reputation" refers more to how the "external public" evaluates the organisation in question (App et al., 2012), some authors present the concept of employer brand from the perspective of its purpose, namely "to attract, engage and retain employees" (Sokro, 2012; Sultana, 2020), it is necessary, however, that in this process, under the conditions of a "competitive business environment", organisations show intelligence in the marketing process in order to be able to attract the most suitable candidates (Shukla & Shrivastava, 2013). This is because the idea of the need to build an employer brand is based on the fact that "human capital brings value to the firm" (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

The need for skilled employees (Rana & Sharma, 2019) is continuing. Bărbulescu and Ţeţeănescu (2021) in this sense, indicate the start of a "war for talent" (Aboul-Ela, 2016), in which differentiation on the market (Reis et al., 2021) becomes necessary to achieve a certain level of attractiveness for potential employees, especially if we are talking about the new generations (Randstad, 2020), much more selective in choosing their employer. Ensuring a high level of "transparency of information and communication" (Hepburn, 2018; Santos et al., 2018) thus becomes necessary.

Priya and Raman (2021) list many benefits that the employer brand brings to a company, among them cost efficiency regarding the hiring process, attracting the most qualified candidates, savings made by hiring the right people for a specific job, avoiding high staff turnover, while also offering employees the prospect of career development (Ibrahim et al., 2018).
2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to study the link between the employer brand and an employee's career development, we conducted a study using an online questionnaire as a working tool. The main objective of the research consisted of determining the influence that the employer brand manifests on the career path of an employee, while the secondary research directions aimed at:

Table 1. Objectives of the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secondary objectives</th>
<th>Subordinate questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Studying the level of importance perceived by employees regarding the image of the organization in which they work</td>
<td>Q1, Q2, Q3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying the link between the promotional actions undertaken by the organization and its image</td>
<td>Q4, Q5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying employees' perception of the impact of the organisation's image on employees' careers</td>
<td>Q6, Q7, Q8, Q11, Q13, Q14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying the elements that contribute to the creation of an employer brand</td>
<td>Q9, Q10, Q15, Q16, Q17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author

The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions, of which 17 were about content and 3 about identifying the sample respondent, the study consisted of 144 respondents. Of these, 72.2% were women, and 27.8% were male, all between 20 and 65 years old. The period of the study was March - April 2022, and the selection of respondents was carried out randomly. However, the significance of the variables and the level of representativeness can be tested by calculating the statistical indicators: average, mean square deviation, dispersion and coefficient of variation, according to the relationships presented below.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

To answer the first objective, namely *Studying the level of importance perceived by employees regarding the image of the organisation in which they work*, following the centralisation of the answers given by the subjects to the questions in the questionnaire, we note the fact that most of the respondents (38.88%) are familiar at an average level with the notion of "employer brand", the percentage of those who believe they are familiar to a great or very great extent being 34.72%. However, regardless of the answer given to the previous question, the image of the employer becomes important to a large extent for a significant percentage of the subjects surveyed (79.17%).

In this sense, when studying an organisation in the idea of employment, the most significant criterion for candidates turns out to be the reputation of the respective organisation, with 72.22% of respondents mentioning this aspect as important. However, it is not a single element, and close percentages of respondents mention that they are interested in the duration of existence on the market of the organisation in question (56.94%), as well as the level of salary offered in the case of employment (54.17%). Other elements that matter to an average or lesser extent for the respondents are represented by: the information published on the company's website (27.78%), the company's name (23.61%), or its logo (13.88%).

If we address the issue of the existence of a *link between the promotional actions undertaken by the organisation and its image*, we observe a divergence in the respondents' perception of how the promotional actions contribute to the foundation of the organisation's brand. Therefore,
a significant proportion of people who answered the questions in the questionnaire (62.5%) believe that the most powerful tool in the process of shaping the image of an organisation is promotion through current and former employees. Through the experience gained within the company, they become messengers of high credibility in front of the general public, the reviews offered online or by word of mouth can increase the prestige of a company or, on the contrary, damage its image. Investments in the promotion are also considered important, with 40.28% of the surveyed subjects appreciating them as indispensable for supporting the image of an organisation, while 16.67% of respondents identify a direct link between the development of an organisation’s brand and the efficiency of the managerial process.

In an attempt to identify the elements that contribute to the creation of an employer brand, the respondents identify as a decisive aspect in this regard: knowing the target audience (29.13%), providing truthful and clear information about the organisation (27.33%), periodic analysis of the image deficit and taking measures in time (25.23%), understanding the profile of potential employees (18.33%). In the view of the respondents, organisational culture, in turn, largely influences the employer brand, with more than 60% of the respondents indicating an increased level of influence.

To determine the employees’ perceptions of the impact that the image of the organisation in which they work has had on their careers to date, we started by determining the extent to which the employer’s reputation matters to respondents. Thus, for 6.95% of the subjects, the reputation of the employer matters to a small extent, with an average level of importance perceived by 19.44% of the respondents. 40.28% indicate that the employer’s reputation matters a lot, while 33.33% consider it decisive for employees.

A percentage of 62.5% of the respondents believe that the impact was great, even very great in some cases. An average impact is perceived by 27.78% of the respondents, with the remaining 9.72% identifying a low impact in this sense. However, it should be noted that this impact felt to a greater or lesser extent can be both positive and negative. In this sense, of the 144 respondents, a percentage of 59.72% believe that the image of the employer positively influenced their career, representing a plus in the CV. 19.44% of the subjects surveyed indicated a low positive influence, a similar percentage indicating that the employer’s image has not significantly influenced their professional path so far. Those who identify a negative influence represent a smaller percentage, 1.4%.

The respondents were presented with three professional attributes, namely credibility, involvement, and professional capacity, and were asked to choose the one they considered the most important. 45.83% opted for professional credibility, while participation was identified as the most important by 26.39% of the respondents, with the remaining 27.78% indicating professional ability as essential.

When asked at what level are they currently satisfied with their career and, respectively, with their professional path, more than half of the respondents (56.94%) declare themselves satisfied, while an average level of satisfaction is indicated by 27.78% and 15.28% of the surveyed individuals consider themselves dissatisfied. In this sense, 76.39% of the surveyed individuals identify themselves as insiders in the organisation in which they work, while the remaining 23.61% of the respondents position themselves as outsiders.

The fact that respondents currently work within an organisation can help them in a future career or, on the contrary, create difficulties for them in accessing a new job. The percentage of people
who believe that their current job will help them to a great extent in a future career is relatively small (19.44%), with 40.28% stating that it will help them to a great extent. The rest 40.28% are positioned by the opinions expressed at the opposite pole.

To check the level at which the collected answers are also representative of the global population, we further checked the level of homogeneity, by calculating some descriptive statistical indicators, namely arithmetic mean, mean square deviation, dispersion, and coefficient of variation. In this sense, the calculation formulas below were used:

\[ \bar{x} = \frac{\sum x_i f_i}{\sum f_i} \]  
\[ \sigma = \sqrt{\frac{\sum (x_i - \bar{x})^2 f_i}{\sum f_i}} \]  
\[ V = \frac{\sigma}{\bar{x}} \times 100 \]

The test of the proposed hypothesis was carried out using the Chi-square test to measure the association between the variables under analysis and to determine the existence of a relationship between them.

The variables considered relevant and addressed in the content of the research were in this sense:

V1 – the level of importance of the employer's image perceived by employees
V2 – the level of impact manifested by the employer's image on the respondents' career
V3 – the current degree of satisfaction felt by the respondents about their career / their professional path
V4 – the degree of importance attributed by the respondents to the reputation of the employer.
V5 – the degree to which the current quality of being an employee in a company will help in a future career.

These were evaluated using a 5-step scale ranging from 1 (minimum value) to 5 (maximum value), or predefined options were proposed regarding the answers, through attributes equivalent to these five steps mentioned above. The calculated values are presented in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Corresponding objective</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Dispersion</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
<th>Coefficient of variation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V1</td>
<td>OS1</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>0.7152</td>
<td>0.8457</td>
<td>20.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V2</td>
<td>OS3</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>0.8470</td>
<td>0.9203</td>
<td>24.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V3</td>
<td>OS3</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>0.9166</td>
<td>0.9574</td>
<td>26.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V4</td>
<td>OS3</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.8055</td>
<td>0.8975</td>
<td>22.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V5</td>
<td>OS3</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>0.8563</td>
<td>0.9253</td>
<td>25.14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale: 1 – total disagreement, 2 – partial disagreement, 3 – neutral, 4 – partial agreement, 5 – total agreement

Source: Author

From the calculations, we observe a level of the coefficient of variation included in the interval [0%; 35%], which indicates a high degree of homogeneity, respectively, representativeness of the responses given by the respondents.
In order to measure the association between the variables under analysis and to determine the existence of a relationship between them, a null hypothesis and an alternative hypothesis were proposed, testing is done using the Chi-square independence test.

$H_0$ – the employer's reputation/image has no significant influence on the employee's career

$H_1$ – the employer's reputation/image has a significant influence on the employee's career

The distribution of the answers given was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Partial agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q11</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q13</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q14</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>720</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author

Taking into account the attribute fact that the "totally disagree" in most cases did not register any response, or the frequency was below 5, the last two columns were merged in the form of the attribute „disagree”.

A significance level of the test $\alpha = 0.05$ (5%) is considered.

The calculated value will be compared with the tabular value as follows:
- If $\chi^2$ is greater than the tabular value, $H_0$ is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted;
- If $\chi^2$ is lower than the tabular value, the null hypothesis is accepted and $H_1$ is rejected.

For the calculation of the value of $\chi^2$, the following relation will be used:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O_{ij} - E_{ij})^2}{E_{ij}}$$

where $O_{ij}$ represents the frequency related to row $i$ and column $j$, obtained by carrying out the study, and $E_{ij}$, the frequency related to row $i$ and column $j$ expected to result, according to the null hypothesis, $E_{ij}$ being determined according to the formula:

$$E_{ij} = \frac{\text{Total row} \times \text{total column}}{\text{Total global}}$$

In our analysis, to be able to compare the value obtained from the calculations with the table value, we determine the number of degrees of freedom as follows:

$$df = (n_{r1}) \times (n_{c1}) = (5-1) \times (4-1) = 4 \times 3 = 12$$

Table 4. Calculation of $\chi^2$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$R &amp; C$</th>
<th>$O_{ij}$</th>
<th>$E_{ij}$</th>
<th>$(O_{ij} - E_{ij})^2$</th>
<th>$(O_{ij} - E_{ij})^2 / E_{ij}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$R_1C_1$</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>5,4444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R_1C_2$</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R_1C_3$</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>2,6129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R_1C_4$</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1,9231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R_2C_1$</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0,1111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The calculated value of $\chi^2$ is equal to 49.7591, while the tabular value identified from the chi-square distribution table, related to df = 12 degrees of freedom, is 21.03.

Thus, $\chi^2_{\text{calculated}} > \chi^2_{\text{critical}}$, so 49.7591 > 21.03, thus the null hypothesis is rejected and $H_1$ is accepted. At a test significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ (5%), the calculated P-value is < .00001, the result being representative. At a P-value < .05, the statistical link is perceived as significant between the variables proposed for analysis.

$$\chi^2 (12, N = 144) = 49.75, P < .00001$$

We therefore find that the hypothesis that the employer's reputation/image has a significant influence on the employee's career is confirmed.

4. CONCLUSION

The study carried out through the application of the questionnaire helped us determine the perception of the respondents about the research topic. We thus concluded that the way in which the organisation manages its image on the market and, respectively, the way in which it builds a positive reputation, manifests a significant influence on the evolution of human resources.

Although the concept of "employer brand" is not necessarily known at an in-depth level by all respondents, prevailing, as we observed, rather an average level of knowledge in this regard, employees largely intuit the importance that an employment history in a reputable company can have it for their future career path.

This is also proven by the elements of interest pursued in the process of studying a company with a view to employment, the reputation of the organisation ranking at the top as the importance for candidates. The credibility of the organisation, namely the transparency of the information provided and communication, are also decisive aspects in choosing a potential employer.
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