Employer branding strategies used in the IT sector Cluj. Analysis on methods of building employer brand and loyalty in IT companies in Cluj-Napoca

Summary

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Content

The research examines the actors of the IT sector in Cluj-Napoca with the help of a semi-structured interview, a content analysis and two questionnaire surveys. The aim of the study is to map the strategies for building the employer brand and the communication of the brand. During the research will be examined, how employer branding techniques appear in human resource management and in external and internal company communication.

Companies and the labour market have to cope with new challenges as the economy develops. Well-functioning companies have to devote more and more attention and resources to recruitment, as sometimes there is a real struggle to acquire the best professionals and later to retain them. Therefore, companies are forced to do everything possible to make themselves more attractive as an employer to potential and current employees, so they have to be very conscious about their own brand, perception, image and employer branding strategy. The main way to attract the attention of job seekers is to talk about the given job as good to work in, of course the company's offer is important, but high salary will not be the primary decisive factor. If the reputation of the employer is good, the number of applicants to the company can increase even without direct recruitment, so the company can gain a competitive advantage by attracting top talents.

The term employer brand was used by authors Ambler &; Barrow to describe the "*package of functional, economic and psychological benefits"* provided by employment and identified with the employing company (Ambler & Barrow, 1996: 187p). Initially, employer branding was the alignment of marketing and human resource management (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Edwards, 2010). The concept is discussed in several disciplines, emphasizing the importance of the topic. In business administration, employer branding is dealt with in the field of marketing, human behavior, human resource management and corporate communication. Similarly, professionals or expert groups engaged in the strategic planning and implementation of employer branding in an organization belong to different departments such as marketing, human resources, or communication (Minchington, 2014). Regardless of what field they belong to, they all see employer branding as a kind of competitive advantage and value creation process (Aggerholm, 2011).

Thus, employer branding is the branding of the organization, the company as an employer. In this case, the concept of employer branding can be placed on the border between human resource management and marketing. The aim of employer branding is to build a unique, positive and recognizable position that becomes attractive to both current and future employees (Seldorf, 2008 in Mortense 2010).

Information technology (IT) is an important and rapidly developing industry in Romania. According to a 2019 report focusing on national initiatives to digitise industry, Romania is doing very well, ranking second in the EU in ultrafast broadband internet subscriptions, and further positive development in the IT sector, which amounts to 6-7% of the country's GDP in 2019. In addition, there are so-called cluster organisations in Romania, which bring together digital-related companies, thereby significantly increasing the competitiveness of industry (VVA, 2019).

This inductive research aims to draw conclusions from practical experience regarding employer branding strategies used by IT companies in Cluj. The aim of the research is to identify employer branding trends and strategies in the IT market of Cluj in the period before the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the research aims to explore the loyalty building tools used by companies. The research is an exploratory study, no preliminary literature examples or empirical research have been found in relation to Romania.

First, I would like to describe the methodology of the theoretical review of the study. The aim of the present study was exploration, so I used the method of semi-systematic literature search to review the literature. After defining the research task, keywords related to the topic were defined, and the systematic exploration of the literature continued along these keywords. During the literature review, I reviewed databases, previous literature and grey literature, using the defined keywords as search terms. I also studied the bibliography of studies related to this topic in order to find further relevant literature.

The research focuses on the IT sector in Cluj-Napoca and the examination of employer branding trends used in the sector. Since there are more than 1600 registered IT companies in Cluj-Napoca, the study is based on a shortlist that only aggregates companies with an average of at least fifty-one employees per year, because here it can be assumed that there is an HR

department who can be interviewed. The shortlist was based on data from www.listafirmei.ro company's summary website, the condition was that their work codes included CAEN code 62, which is the code for computer programming, consulting and related activities. Since some of the interviews were conducted in 2018, sampling is based on 2017 data. Most of the companies contacted refused to participate in the research, citing confidence, even if in the study they would be completely anonymous. The research does not strive for representativeness, during the random contacting, we managed to interview seven IT companies operating in Cluj-Napoca with an average of at least fifty-one employees per year.

The empirical research uses a mixed methodology, using both qualitative and quantitative analysis methods. The research can be divided into four studies: the first part uses a qualitative method in the form of a semi-structured interview to explore how employer branding works within the selected companies. The second study is partly quantitative, based on website and social media content analysis of the companies interviewed. This is complemented by an online questionnaire that seeks answers to questions about how future employees choose jobs and what they consider important in terms of communication between IT companies. In addition, within the framework of the research, a questionnaire survey was conducted among employees within one of the companies participating in the research, which tries to detect employee satisfaction and how much they feel or become aware of the company's employer branding attempts.

The limitations of the research include low participation, absenteeism due to confidence, and completely anonymous, encrypted disclosure of data.

Applicability of the research: the results of the studies help to map the employer branding strategies that work in practice, so they serve as a basis for new designs that help increase efficiency. The studies also shed light on how IT students are informed when looking for a job, what channels they follow and what their preferences are, so it can also help IT companies review and modernize recruitment processes. From the point of view of employees, the research was intended to assess satisfaction, motivation and the effectiveness of company communication, therefore the results can be applied to deepen commitment and increase satisfaction.

Furthermore, questionnaire research for employees and research conducted with HR managers can be carried out at other companies, thereby getting an idea of the company's employer brand activities.

For the future, the research should be repeated to examine how the COVID-19 pandemic has reorganized companies, what has changed during quarantine and online working, what steps the company has taken to further strengthen its employer brand and increase/maintain loyalty among employees. After the COVID-19 pandemic, all seven companies are currently still present in the market, so we would probably get some interesting results researching their employer branding strategies. To examine this, it would be worth observing fluctuation during the COVID-19 pandemic, how much the crisis affected the company economically, and how they were able to recover or develop and expand. Furthermore, it would be worthwhile to conduct a perception research to examine what communication target groups understand from the employer branding carried out by companies, and then compare these results with the planned and transmitted brand.