Employer Branding Strategies through the Eyes of Generation Z Based on Qualitative Findings

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Abstract: Companies are increasingly focusing on employer branding in the face of changing labour market conditions. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find and retain the right workforce and to create a workplace climate and motivational systems that meet the different needs of different generations. Successful recruitment and retention of staff is increasingly driven by the HR marketing toolbox, of which conscious branding is an important pillar. In the case of employer branding, too, we are seeing that differentiated, often generation-specific, solutions rather than standardised ones can be effective. The focus of our research is on Generation Z. We conducted qualitative research to analyse which employer branding strategies are considered attractive by young people. What are the good solutions and practices that they see, what are the activities that appeal to them, that make a workplace attractive to them. In the same way, we analysed which activities and branding practices are particularly unappealing to young people. The research involved 20 mini focus group interviews using a semi-structured interview schedule. The results were evaluated using a traditional content analysis method.

Keywords: Employer branding, Generation Z, Qualitative research

Introduction

Employer branding is now essential for any company looking to attract and retain talented employees. A strong employer brand not only enhances a company's reputation, but also contributes to employee engagement and long-term satisfaction. Clear values, a positive corporate culture and a commitment to sustainability are increasingly attractive to employees. Generation Z is particularly critical of employer branding, as they consciously seek employers whose values are in line with their own. They value corporate social responsibility, support for diversity and an open and supportive working environment. Generation Z, which is active in the online space, is particularly attentive to the communication and credibility of companies on social media.

When choosing a job, Generation Z is particularly interested in work-life balance, flexibility and an innovative working environment. They value the opportunity for continuous learning and development and a sense of personal contribution to the company's goals. Transparency, open communication and a sense of social responsibility are all important aspects in their choice. Employers must therefore not only offer attractive benefits packages, but also credibly represent the values that Generation Z values. Building a strong employer brand is key to attracting and retaining young talent.

Theoretical Background

The Gallup Workplace 2022 research highlights that labour market processes have changed and companies need to adapt to this new reality (Garai-Fodor & Jackel, 2024; Garai-Fodor et al., 2023; Madduma et al., 2023). Engaged employees have also become a target in recruitment, so it is important that managers are proactive in retaining and increasing employee satisfaction. Organisations that successfully respond to this challenge and re-engage their employees can gain a competitive advantage in the labour market (Reis et al., 2021).

Key Findings

Employee Recruitment

A quarter of workers in the US say they have been approached with a new job opportunity in the last three months. Even among employees who are not actively looking for a job, 10% say they have been approached, a 57% increase since 2015.

New Recruitment Rules

Competitors are able to make more attractive offers, making inactive workers a target.

Employee Engagement

Research confirms that engaged workers are also becoming targets. Employees who are actively engaged are three times more likely to be looking for new opportunities than those who are not engaged.
The above has two possible effects:

Employees who are approached often leave their current job, even if they feel comfortable there. Even if the employee stays with the company, the recruitment experience can give them a new perspective on their value and expectations of the workplace. So managers need to be proactive about how to retain engaged employees. Competitive salaries, career development and work-life balance are key factors. Firms should not only attract new talent, but also focus on attracting existing employees back (Boldizsár et al., 2020). It is important to emphasise the values and benefits that made employees join the organisation in the first place (reattraction).

According to MIT research, the decision to stay in a job or quit is no longer based primarily on professional and career considerations - not on *what* we do for a living, but on whether our working conditions match *how* we want to live. Happiness is high on the list of employee preferences. But what makes workers happy and engaged? The International Labour Organization's 2023 report found that greater flexibility - from the ability to choose when to start work to the possibility of telecommuting, for example - leads to more efficient working practices and a better work-life balance.

This is confirmed by Cisco's global survey of 28,000 full-time employees, in which 82% of respondents said that being able to work from anywhere makes them happier. But can flexible working and remote working really be a complete solution when it comes to colleague satisfaction? Flexible working hours and working location are important, but employees' sense of freedom and happiness does not depend on this alone. If we want to retain a good workforce, it is crucial to provide them with the tools and systems to work independently, without problems and stress, and to solve their daily problems. The key to both teleworking and flexible working is freedom of choice: the ability to decide when and where to work. We can give colleagues the same freedom to manage their workflow.

In the long term, it can increase engagement if employees can use a common platform, a service management system, to solve issues that arise in their daily work. In a self-service portal, employers can create their own knowledge base, where colleagues can find answers to questions they have previously raised, leading not only to more efficient working, but also to greater satisfaction and more freedom to work.

Moreover, in such a digital system, employees can report new problems to their colleagues online, without having to call or visit them in person, which makes remote working much easier. In addition to self-service and the knowledge base, a service management system also offers many opportunities to increase employee

satisfaction: companies can conduct a quick online survey of colleagues on current business issues, or create a platform for remote resolution of IT problems.

By tracking all corporate assets, whether in-house or outsourced, from both hardware and software perspectives, such a system allows employees to use the software provided by their employer securely and efficiently wherever they are. This gives them virtually complete online freedom in their daily lives. Ward (2022), research examines the relationship between happiness at work and job-seeking behaviour, with a particular focus on Generation Z. The aim of the research is to explore how happiness at work affects workers' competitiveness and attractiveness in the labour market (Ward, 2022).

The main findings were that *happiness at work* increases employee engagement and reduces job search propensity. Generation Z members, for whom emotional well-being is a priority, are more likely to stay in jobs where they are satisfied. This generation focuses not only on financial rewards, but also on the environment in which they work. Generation Z members seek jobs where they are valued and where they have the opportunity to grow and learn. Happiness at work plays a key role in building an employer brand. Generation Z members are well informed about their potential employers, and companies that create a positive workplace culture are more attractive to them.

The research shows that Generation Z relies heavily on *social media platforms* to find a job. Sharing positive feedback and experiences increases the attractiveness of a company. For Generation Z, *work-life balance* is essential. Companies that offer flexible working conditions are more likely to attract this young generation. The research shows that this generation is not willing to sacrifice their personal life for work; they prefer to look for jobs that respect this balance. Companies that offer flexible working conditions and support employee well-being are more likely to attract this generation.

Research shows that Generation Z members *are looking for meaningful work* that contributes to society. Jobs that offer them the opportunity to work on meaningful projects are more likely to attract them. The research highlights that *leadership styles* have a significant impact on happiness at work. Inclusive leadership promotes employee satisfaction and reduces turnover. Generation Z are highly tech-savvy, *having* grown up *in a digital environment.* Research shows that this generation expects their workplace to be equipped with modern technologies that make it easier to work. Using digital tools not only increases efficiency, but also contributes to job satisfaction.

The research also showed that this generation performs better in an environment where they have the freedom to choose *their working patterns* and where they can telework or work flexible hours. These types of working environments foster creativity and innovation. Generation Z members place a high priority on *career development.* They are looking for jobs where they can learn and grow. Companies that offer mentoring programmes and support employees' professional development are more attractive to them.

Generation Z members place a strong emphasis on *diversity and inclusion.* Research has shown that this generation expects their workplace to support these values and actively participate in such initiatives. Companies that are committed to diversity and provide an inclusive environment are more attractive to them Ward's research provides important insights into how happiness at work influences the preferences and behaviours of Generation Z workers. Companies need to prioritise workplace culture and employee wellbeing to become more attractive to these young workers. Promoting emotional well-being not only increases employee satisfaction, but also contributes to the long-term success of companies.

Bellet et al. (2024), in their study examine the relationship between happiness at work and productivity. The aim of the research was to provide empirical evidence on how employee satisfaction affects job performance (Clement et al., 20214). The results of the research show that *increasing happiness at work* directly contributes *to improved productivity*. A 12% increase in productivity was observed among happy workers, indicating that positive emotional states promote more productive work. Happy workers are not only more productive, they also organise their time better, work faster and convert interactions with potential customers into sales more effectively. This is particularly noticeable in sales positions, but generally speaking, a good mood also improves teamwork and collaboration.

The study stresses that managers should invest in the well-being and happiness of their employees, as this not only increases employee satisfaction but also improves the company's performance in the long run. The data clearly shows that happy employees not only perform better, but also have higher loyalty, which reduces

turnover. The research also points out that *improving workplace culture* can be a key factor in increasing employee happiness. Providing autonomy, a sense of community and meaningful work can help employees feel better at work.

Method

19 mini focus group surveys were conducted among Generation Z students at BGE KKK and Obuda University. We discussed with the groups of four people which company's Employer Brandig strategy is attractive to them and we also focused on what elements and factors they miss in the EB strategy of the company in question. Generation Z's employee preferences are bringing significant changes to the labour market This generation is not just focused on material rewards; rather, they are looking for an environment that supports their development and happiness. Their affinity for technology, their need for autonomy, and their expectations for career development and diversity are creating new challenges for companies. The interview results were evaluated using a traditional content analysis method

Results and Discussion

Respondents mentioned the following companies that they would like to work for: Spotify, Netflix, Google, IKEA, Nike, SPAR, Metro-Cash and Carry, Thermo Fisher Scientific, H and M, Audi Hungaria, MOL, Telekom, Sephora, Procter and Gamble, Coca-Cola. Netflix, Spotify and Google received the most mentions.

Google

Innovative company culture, benefits and work-life balance were highlighted as positive aspects of the EB strategy. On the negative side, career and development opportunities, as one of the world's largest companies has a huge workforce, which can leave employees feeling that there is not enough room to grow because there is too much competition for relatively few opportunities for advancement. Stress and expectations were also mentioned as a negative. Interviewees said that they believe that a comfortable working environment is overshadowed by too high expectations, that this can become demotivating for workers over time, and that morale can deteriorate. What they missed at Google was diversity.

To date, they know that there are still significant gender and ethnic imbalances, especially in management positions. Among the weaknesses was the lengthy and complex recruitment process. For many candidates, the waiting process can be exhausting and frustrating, lasting several years. Talent in other companies gets feedback more quickly. Another problem is that they often hire overqualified people for simpler jobs, which can lead to frustration. Many employees feel that their skills are undervalued and that they are not given enough opportunities to develop or progress. 'Temporary workers' at Google are often treated as inferior to full-time employees.

As a suggestion to the company, they suggested that the company should pay more attention to organising campaigns and programmes, which would help to mitigate the resulting conflicts. They should make career paths more transparent, i.e. on the first day the employee could be given a clearer, more understandable vision of how he or she could develop step by step in the future, and also a goal to aim for, thus motivating him or her.

Netflix

Respondents would choose *Netflix* because of the company's emphasis on freedom, which offers opportunities for growth, development and personal fulfilment. Meanwhile, work-life balance is also easy to maintain, for example because of hybrid working and holidays. They said that, for them, as Generation Z members, it is important to feel in control of their own time, so that their workplace is not just a source of money, but a place where they matter, especially their freedom and values. Diversity and diversity were highlighted as a positive. As young people, they value the diversity of our world, so they are happy to see a workplace that promotes inclusion and heterogeneous employee groups. They highlighted the transparency of Netflix as a major positive, because it helps them to understand the company culture and values, so that those who are here know exactly what is important and the main framework.

Also mentioned was Netflix's podcast, which was considered brilliant for the employee experience. On the negative side, they mentioned that there is a strong emphasis on autonomy and performance, and that this can create a competitive working atmosphere in many cases, which is not ideal for everyone. Another factor cited was that Netflix often works on short-term contracts, thus maintaining high performance. However, this is not attractive for those who want stability. Another negative was Netflix's total focus on performance, "high performance or leave", which is a major source of stress.

Another group mentioned "maintaining a high performance culture" as a weakness of Netflix's EB strategy, as it can easily remind job seekers not to expect too many days off because they have to work all the time. There is a lack of "plus", as there is no specific recommendation of what Netflixm wants to offer that is more than average. Other jobs offer health benefits, bonuses, dream team. Another negative was that the company asks for everything and offers everything, which seems unattainable and can be fake. Students reflected that they could not find any career information that demotivated them.

Spotify

On a positive note, listeners have welcomed Spotify's introduction of a work-from-anywhere strategy, which allows employees to choose where they work. This flexibility makes the company attractive to younger generations, especially Generation Z, who value work-life balance. A strong online presence is another positive. Spotify actively communicates its employer brand on its social media platforms, such as its @lifeatspotify account on Instagram, where they showcase their employees and company culture. This helps to give potential employees a true picture of the company.

Spotify's company culture is defined by the principle of "freedom and responsability", which means that while they expect you to perform your duties responsibly, they give you freedom in how and where you work. They also highlighted their well-being programmes, which offer a range of opportunities to maintain mental and physical health- sports programmes and wellness initiatives. The company's commitment to diversity and inclusion was highlighted, with the company launching various internal groups to support differentiated communities. It also actively supports the professional development of its employees.

They highlighted Spotify's careers page, which has a wealth of information about what they offer employees. The site also features blog posts where employees share their own experiences, as well as a description of the hiring process and the company itself from the company's management. This gives a transparent, honest picture of life in the company. The "Join the Band" campaign emphasises that working at Spotify is more than a job, it's a way of life. On the negative side, the excessive focus on young generations was highlighted. Although Spotify is successful in attracting younger workers, they may not be paying enough attention to the needs and expectations of older generations. This could be detrimental in the long term, as many experienced professionals could contribute to the success of the company, sharing their experience and knowledge with Generation Z. The following suggestion was made for Spotify: It would be important for Spotify to take more account of the needs of older generations, for example by offering flexible pension schemes or career advice.

Nike

One of the biggest positives is that Nike is a globally known and respected brand built on innovation and passion for sport. The message "If you have a body, you are an athlete" reinforces the company's identity and makes it attractive to younger generations who can identify with this value system. In addition, Nike is committed to diversity and inclusion, with a range of programmes designed to support people from different backgrounds. The company openly communicates its policies, including the inclusion of disabled and indigenous communities. Nike actively communicates its employer brand on its social media platforms, where they showcase the stories and experiences of their employees. This helps to give potential employees a true picture of the company.

It can be a challenge that Nike's consumer brand is stronger than its employer brand, which can cause confusion among potential employees. It would therefore be important to ensure that both brands are in line with each other. It would also be important for them to proactively address the issue of sexual harassment. (In a 2018 internal survey called "Project Starfish", several female employees reported sexual harassment and

discrimination.) Nike has also faced a serious gender discrimination lawsuit in the past, in which female employees claimed they received lower pay and fewer promotions than their male colleagues.

Mol

One of the opportunities for improvement would be for MOL to place more emphasis on its initiatives for the well-being and development of its employees. For example, mentoring programmes and professional development opportunities could be expanded to make them more attractive to young talent. They should also clearly communicate the values and benefits that differentiate them from their competitors.

Conclusion

The results of the research shed light on what Generation Z considers to be the ideal workplace, and which employers they see as a valuable brand. What they think about their career prospects. We think the results can be a good guide for employers in their own branding strategies. A limitation of the research is that the methodology means that the results are local and not representative. In the continuation of the research, quantitative data collection is planned with the aim of looking at which potential employee segments can be characterised in terms of individual career path expectations and employer brand perceptions among Generation Z.

Scientific Ethics Declaration

The authors declare that the scientific ethical and legal responsibility of this article published in EPESS Journal belongs to the authors.

Acknowledgements or Notes

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