

EMPLOYER BRAND AS A KEY MANAGERIAL TOOL FOR ACHIEVING SUCCESS OF THE TOURIST COMPANY

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Abstract: *Having in mind the complexity of the tourism business, the specific characteristics of the employees in this domain, and the practice of managing them, the goal of this paper is to establish the employer brand as one of the efficient managerial tools for overcoming the problem of attracting and keeping employees in tourist companies. Taking into account the insufficient research regarding this issue in our practice, the intention of this paper is to clearly highlight this issue and show how greatly important it is for improving success of tourist companies.*

Keywords: *Employer brand, tourist organization, competition advantage, human resources*

1. INTRODUCTION

The main challenges with which tourist companies are faced daily are: how to attract and keep good-quality employees; how to continuously improve their skills and update their knowledge, which quickly becomes out of date; how to have motivated and satisfied employees, which is what clients' satisfaction depends on. The challenges become even more complex when it is the question of competent managerial staff capable of creating and implementing efficient strategies for managing human resources, and who also must be attracted to and kept in the company. In order to tackle the above mentioned challenges as efficiently as possible, tourist companies must first and foremost have a developed organizational culture which promotes the development and importance of the human factor for achieving competitiveness on the market i.e. corporative values, attitude and position that see a good-quality worker as a condition for realization of good-quality tourist service and achieving success of the tourist company, and then to use such culture as the basis for creating programs for attracting, developing and keeping managerial and other staff. By making great investments into such programs, by creating and implementing innovations into these processes, many tourist companies have become desired employers: Ritz-Carlton, Marriott, TripAdvisor, Airbnb.com. Employer branding has become a proven efficient means, tool for attracting, developing and keeping good-quality employees, and it significantly contributes to the business success of tourist companies.

Starting from the strategic importance of employer branding, the main goal of this paper is a comprehensive view and conception of employer brand as an important tool for achieving business success of tourist companies. The primary goal of this paper is to perceive and establish the importance and currentness of employer brand, complexity of its connection to business success, ways of measuring, key activities and instruments for its strengthening, problems and level of development of this practice among tourist businesses. Employer branding in the domain of tourism is not a sufficiently researched issue, hence this paper presents an attempt not only to validly highlight this problem but also to offer purposeful revelations based on which it will be possible to change the approach to this problem in our country.

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2. THEORETICAL APPROACH TO EMPLOYER BRANDING IN TOURISM

Employer branding is a relatively new method whose essential idea is to apply the principles of product and service branding to employer branding. Among the first authors who analyzed this problem are Ambler and Barrow, who analyzed it on the examples of 27 companies in Great Britain. They indicated the possibility of applying the techniques of product and service branding in the concept of human resources management, and they indicated that employer branding is as important as product and service branding for achieving competitiveness [1]. Ambler and Barrow point out the fact that employer brand is connected to developed corporate culture, which influences the loyalty of the employees and their intention to stay in the organization. They define the term employer brand as a package of functional, psychological and economic benefits which an individual gets by becoming an employee of a certain company [1 p.187]. In their work "Conceptualizing and Researching Employer Branding", the authors Backhaus and Tikoo define employer branding as the process of creating unique and recognizable employer identity, and employer brand as the concept which sets the employer apart from other employers, from competition [3 p.502]. The author Edwards Martin defines employer brand as the process of identifying an employer as a desired one when one is looking for employment, taking into account both material and nonmaterial awards and possibilities which the company offers its employees [6 p.7]. The theoreticians Zhu Fei, Zhen Wang, Qiushi Yu, and Yu Li define it as the process of presenting the organization as an employer on the work market by establishing a recognizable image among the potential and current employees [11 p.934]. The theoreticians Berthon, Ewing, Hah [5 p.153], Reis and Braga [9] say that it is the process of presenting a company as a desired workplace. Ahmand and Daud [2] define it as something that represents an organization's striving to present a company to its current and potential employees as a tempting workplace. The authors Srivastava and Bhatnagar [10 p.26] define this term as a long-term strategy designed to maintain a steady flow of skills within a company. Barrow and Mosley [4] sum it up as the company's reputation as an employer and the definition of its value postulates that it offers its employees. Fernandez Lores, Gavilan, Avello, Blasco [7] define it as the process of employer's differentiation on the work market with the goal of becoming competitive, as well as the actions taken in order to attract, recruit, select and keep the employees.

The common denominator in all definitions of employer branding can be summed up in the following: it is the ability of a company to attract, engage and keep good-quality employees in order to secure the growth and the realization of future strategic goals. When considering different authors' definitions, it can be noticed that employer branding is a process that goes in two directions. One is turned inwardly, towards the current employees, and its goal is to keep them, to ensure their satisfaction, motivation, productivity, seeing them as the best and biggest promoters of the company they work for; while other is turned outwardly, towards potential employees. The essential goal of employer branding is to create the idea that the company is a good-quality workplace, in the minds of both the employees and the potential candidates on the work market. Considering the relevant literature from this domain, it can be concluded that the research of the concept of employer brand can be categorized into several frames: marketing frames [1], human resources management frames [19], the frames of the theory of human capital [22], and approach based on resources [20], [21].

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPLOYER BRANDING IN TOURISM

The theoreticians and practitioners in this domain explain the enormous importance of this tool by indicating numerous benefits which companies get from having a developed employer brand: fewer employees want to leave the organization, bigger value of human capital and bigger motivation of workers [8]; attracting and keeping talented human resources becomes an important source of sustainable competitive advantage, easier management, focusing on priorities, it contributes to the productivity increase and constant flow of talented candidates through the company [9], bigger rate of keeping the employees, especially those with developed skills, ability to attract the best candidates on the work market [1]; built trust in management and better interpersonal relationships within the company, lesser employees fluctuation and lower costs of employment, which reduces the total business costs and increases the possibilities for investing into human resources and further development of employer brand.

According to the leader in the domain of employer branding, the company Universum, the importance of the developed employer brand for an organization consists of: greater possibility to choose good-quality candidates, greater possibility for simpler placement of products and services, easier growth and progress in future, 50 % lower costs of employing new workers and 28 % lower number of resignations. Through the concept of employer brand development a company has the possibility to define its position on work market in order to improve itself, to obtain the key information for employer brand development: why would the candidates want to work for us, and not for someone else; what does the company need to do in order to become recognized as a good employer; where do we stand compared to the competition; how can we improve our offer to the employee; how does attracting talents and good-quality employees influence our productivity? The research done within the company Universum in 2018, which included over 1000 HR managers, marketing managers, recruitment managers in over 41 countries, indicated the key trends in the domain of employer branding [13]: There has been a notable increase in the number of leading employers including 'Inspiring Purpose' and 'Innovation' in their Employer Value Proposition; Employer brand differentiation is the most commonly stated objective among the World's Most Attractive Employers; Social media and digital advertising are still the two leading areas receiving increased investment.

The enormous importance of the employer brand concept was also indicated by the LinkedIn research from 2016 [14] on attracting and keeping employees, "Global Recruiting Trends". When it comes to attracting employees, the research shows that 75% of candidates research the potential employer's reputation and brand before they apply for a job, 83% of employers have a high awareness of the importance of employer brand and think that the brand highly influences the ability to employ talented candidates. Also, 83% of employers categorize employer brand as a business strategic activity and priority. 69% of candidates would not accept a job within a company with a bad reputation even if they were unemployed. When it comes to keeping employees, the research shows that the rate of leaving the company after 6 months of work is 40% lower if a company has a developed employer brand. 83% of candidates would leave their current position in case they were offered a job within a company with a better reputation and organizational culture. According to this LinkedIn research, a special importance of employer branding lies in the fact that globally not many people are looking for work. According to the LinkedIn analysis, in the last 10 years there have been major changes on the work market: the unemployment rate has decreased, the satisfaction with workplace has increased, (according to their analysis, out of the total number of the users of their network 15% are satisfied with their job, while only 12% are actively looking for a job; the remaining 73% are passive job hunters),

the arrival of the Millennials (born in the 1990s) in the business world (by 2025 they will make up 85% of workforce), who, compared with the other generations, demand completely different things and have completely different expectations from their employers, the heightened competition and “war for talent”, the application of new technologies for attracting talents, a big number of people inform themselves and ask about the employer’s reputation on social networks and sites, there is a big number (73%) of passive job hunters – people who are not really looking for a job, but if they got an attractive offer from an employer, they would accept it.

An example of good practice in our country is the research by the company Infostud, “The Most Desired Employer”, which is conducted every year and that shows which companies are the most desired employers in our country and what qualities the surveyed value most about them. The results of the research “The Most Desired Employer 2018”, which included 10, 157 subjects, listed the following 10 best companies in our country: Coca-Cola HBC – Srbija d.o.o. Zemun, Telenor d.o.o., NIS A.D. Novi Sad, Nordeus d.o.o. Beograd, Microsoft Software d.o.o. Beograd, Philip Morris Services d.o.o. Beograd, Telekom Srbija a.d. Beograd, EPS JP Beograd, LIDL Srbija KD, Robert Bosch d.o.o. Beograd. What the subject’s value most about the employer are good interpersonal relationships and workplace atmosphere (listed by 76% of the subjects). The treatment of the employees by the management is in the second place, while the salary, i.e. financial benefits, is in the third place [12].

The essential importance of the concept of employer brand for a tourist company derives first and foremost from the specific characteristics of human resources in this domain. When it comes to human resources, tourism industry has some distinctive traits that differ it from other service industries. Most of the employees who work in tourist companies in our country are not sufficiently educated (although it is also the case abroad). Secondly, short-term contacts and free-lance jobs are very common, often because the work is seasonal. In most cases salaries are low, and workhours are not always convenient. Consequently, the flow of workforce in this domain is far greater that it is usual in other industries. The quality of tourist services depends on the workers in tourist industry. There are several factors which determine the quality of services in tourism industry, and the most important ones are human resources and satisfaction at work. The crucial indicator of employees’ satisfaction is assured employment. Ensuring permanent employment in tourism is very problematic due to the seasonal aspect of work activities, which causes seasonal employment. Thirdly, it is very hard to build a career in tourism in the traditional sense. Everything mentioned above influences the level of novelty, since it is unlikely that someone who has not been committed to a company for a long time will have enough motivation, knowledge or experience to contribute to the development process of the given tourist company. On the other hand, this can also be an advantage. Great flow of workforce leads to exchange of employees among companies in the same region, which can increase knowledge transfer. Naturally, this requires the ability of company managers to readily accept new ideas which their employees could suggest [15 p.458].

4. THE EFFICIENCY OF EMPLOYER BRANDING PROCESS IN TOURISM

Since the employer branding process consists of several key stages – defining the branding goals, defining candidate persona, defining employer value proposition, inbound recruiting, candidate touch points, measuring the process efficiency – the efficiency of the entire process depends on the quality of the activities within each of these stages.

Defining measurable goals is essential for the success of every Employer Branding strategy. Goals can differ and are based on the company's strategic goals. After defining the goals well, it is important to define a target group or candidate persona. Candidate persona is a candidate who can fulfill the requirements of the job they are supposed to do and the requirements of the organization (value system, culture, attitude, potential for development for future jobs etc.). That is why the first step in defining candidate persona should be defining clearly the job and tasks which the candidate will have to perform, as well as defining clearly the requirements which derive from these tasks. This requires a professional approach to job analysis. All specifications of candidate persona which are not justified by the requirements of the given job position are problematic and can endanger the efficiency of the entire employer branding process [16 p.25].

After specifying the candidate persona, it is necessary to get as much information about them: why they would change their job, how they look for and apply for a job, what motivates and stimulates them at work, what represents a problem for them, what their expectations and demands are concerning their work and employer, how they make decisions, what their key values are, what is important to them at work and in the company. This information represents the basis of the essentials of employer branding process, i.e. employer value proposition – EVP. Employer value proposition represents everything an employee gets in exchange for their work. It should be emphasized that it is not only the question of material values, the system of compensations and benefits, bonuses and stimulations, paid overtime etc., but also of an entire set of non-material things, such as organizational culture and atmosphere, the management's quality and style, interpersonal relationships, possibilities for professional development and improvement, dynamical and challenging aspect of the job, and similar. Hence, it represents a set of values that the employer offers the employees. The differentiation of this set of values strengthens the employer brand power, but under the condition that it is valid, because the credible brand must not be false and must reflect the company's reality in the attributes that have the power to attract.

According to the research (conducted every year) by the company Universum “The Most Attractive Employer 2018”, which included 225, 000 students from over 12 countries, the most important criterion for defining a good employer is the possibility for professional development and training, investing into knowledge and potentials of the employee so that they can become as competitive as possible on the work market. This is especially characteristic for the Millennials generation, whose attitude is “we prefer to be built rather than bought”. Another specific characteristic of his generation is that its members greatly value the feeling of having a purpose at work, good work environment, and the balance between their professional and private lives; material values and the salary level are in the fourth place. The most attractive employers in 2018 are, among others, the following companies: Google, Goldman Sach, Ernst&Young, Delloite, and KPMG. [17] According to the research conducted in 2016 at LinkedIn, “Global Recruiting Trends Survey”, what the candidates see as important in relation to the employer are the following: work-life balance – 59% of the candidates; good relationship with colleagues – 52%; the salary level – 47%; challenging job – 45%; a company must have a business vision and stability – 39%; feeling of pride because they are working for a certain company – 32%; the possibility to make decisions and influence what is happening with the company – 32%.

The next stage in employer branding process is inbound recruiting in accordance with the defined branding goal, candidate persona and employer value proposition. It can be: career advice, interviews with the current employees, blogs, video content (for example, the presentation of the company's working premises, atmosphere during team building events or during celebrations etc.), online webinars, organizing various workshops and events, trainings, seminars and

conferences, visits to other companies, news and events at the company, reporting about the company's successes and current projects.

The efficiency of the branding process presupposes developing and investing resources in the usage of such communication channels which the defined target group uses. The way in which the target group (candidate persona) looks for and finds employers represents the key communication tool in establishing a relationship with them and brand building. This again confirms the importance of targeting the target group for the success of employer branding process. The most efficient channels for communicating the employer brand are: the employer's site, job adverts, employment portal, pages about career development, social networks, lectures and workshops, the current employees – the company's ambassadors, the application process and the attitude towards the candidates during the selection process.

Global Staffing Agency Kelly Services suggest that the current employees are the most important link in the process of employer brand building and strengthening, since the data show that 69% of the people looking for work would not accept a job within a company about which they have heard something bad even if they were unemployed at that moment. The employees' level of satisfaction with the work in the company is a factor which affects the strength of employer brand the most. Satisfied employees do not only perform better-quality services and attract new clients, but also become the company's ambassadors, recruiters of new people with competitive knowledge and skills the company needs.

Although there is a direct correlation between employer brand strength and product or service brand, organizational performance and the company's competitiveness, employers do not understand its nature and value. The measuring system provides indicators which help the management to monitor and control results, to identify problems and take corrective measures, and provides the employees with the feedback information about results with the goal to motivate them. When we are talking about employer brand measuring and assessing, it is necessary to have in mind that it is a very complex, nonmaterial asset of the company, with different elements to measure which are defined first and foremost on the basis of the branding process goals. Generally speaking, in developed companies the following indicators for employer brand strength assessment are used: annual rate of fluctuation and absenteeism, employee satisfaction, number of recommendations that the employees made to others, costs of recruitment and selection, number of candidates who applied, number of qualified candidates who applied, number of candidates who accepted the position, candidate satisfaction with the hiring process, number of visits on career-oriented sites, number of visits to the employer's profile on social networks.

5. CURRENT EXPERIENCE EMPLOYER BRANDING PRACTICE AMONG TOURIST BUSINESSES

Scientific valorization of employer brand importance for the success of companies in the domain of tourism that we have presented in the paper points to the interest in the research of the development of employer branding practice among tourist businesses. The intention of this research was to analyze the existence and quality of the key activities for employer branding process in surveyed companies from the tourism branch. The main goal of the research was to answer the following questions: how developed is the employer branding practice among tourist businesses, do they invest in that practice and how much, and what are the key challenges they come across in that practice?

The research included 120 employed managers from the domain of marketing and human resources (the starting point was the assumption that managers of this type are the ones who do the work linked to employer branding) in 46 tourist businesses (hotels, agencies, organizations and hospitality units). Most of the companies included in the research are from Novi Sad (53%), while the rest have headquarters in 12 cities across Serbia (Belgrade, Subotica, Bačka Topola, Zrenjanin, Apatin, Sombor, Niš, Vranje, Kragujevac, Čačak, Leskovac, Užice). The research used the survey technique, and the instrument used was a survey with multiple choice questions. The survey was conducted in electronic way, based on anonymous questionnaire made up of 17 questions, which represent the indicators of the development of employer branding practice. The survey is descriptive. The description of the subjects' personal characteristics is shown in the Table 1, and the description of the presence of the indicators of the development of employer branding practice in the Table 2.

Category	Personal characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	74	62%
	Female	46	38%
Age structure	18-30 years old	11	9%
	31-40 years old	21	18%
	41-50 years old	42	35%
	51-60 years old	33	28%
	Over 60 years old	13	11%
Years of Service In the Company	Up to 5 years	85	65%
	6-15 years	30	23%
	16 -25 years	13	10%
	25-30 years	1	1%
	Over 30 years	1	1%
Education Level	Secondary School	12	9%
	Higher School	38	29%
	Graduate Studies	56	43%
	Master Studies	23	18%
	PhD Degree	1	1%
Position In the Company	Low-level manager	30	25%
	Mid-level manager	82	68%
	High-level manager	8	7%

Table 1: The subjects' personal characteristics

Since researchers and practitioners in human resources defined different indicators of the quality of human potentials, such as the knowledge and skills of employees (Tintor, 1995; Cascio, 2000), their demographic characteristics, age (Sveiby, 1997), years of service (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990 – according to Collins, Smith and Stevens, 2001), sex (Stewart, 1999; Fitz-enz, 2000), investing in education and development (Mayo, 2001) and similar [23], and since the developed employer branding practice requires competitive, good-quality employees from this domain, the personal characteristics of the surveyed managers were used to assess their competitiveness. The results obtained point to low competitiveness, low quality of human resources and managerial staff in tourist companies: one sex predominance (male), big percentage of older managers, big percentage of managers with low number of years of service spent in the company where they are currently employed, a percentage of managers without university education, a big number of managers who do these jobs are not in top-management.

<i>Development of employer branding practice</i>	<i>Type of indicator</i>	<i>Presence of indicator in %</i>	
		<i>YES</i>	<i>NO</i>
Strategic importance	Do the goals of employer branding arise from the company's strategic goals?	15	85
	Is the person doing these tasks in the top management?	10	90
	Do you think that employer branding is linked to business success?	90	10
	Do the main decision-makers in your company think that employer branding is linked to business success?	85	15
Measuring the brand strength	Do you continuously monitor employee satisfaction?	75	25
	Do you interview candidates about their satisfaction with the recruitment and selection process in the company?	15	85
	Do you continuously monitor the ratio between the number of applications and the number of job offers?	65	35
	Has the number of people employed via the current employees' recommendation increased in the last three years?	75	25
	Do you have the formal report for measuring employer brand strength?	10	90
Investing in the brand	Do you have a budget intended for the development of employer brand?	10	90
	Are you planning to increase the budget intended for the development of employer brand in the next three years?	50	50
	Does your company invest in training and education in this domain?	50	50
	Does your company hire specialized agencies to perform employer branding tasks?	25	75
	Do you have a separate function which deals with the hiring process?	15	85
Employer branding activities	Do you have the defined candidate persona for the key positions within the company?	25	75
	Do you have a defined employer value proposition?	10	90
	Is there information on your site about how it is to work for your company and what is the work atmosphere like?	10	90
The most frequently used channels of communication with the target group	Using the site to employ and attract specialists	10	90
	Using the employer's profile on social networks to employ and attract specialists	15	85
	Cooperation with educational institutions	15	85
	Cooperation with employment agencies	90	10
	Via online channels	10	90
	Seminars, conferences, business events	20	80
	Job advertisements	90	10

Table 2: The description of indicators

Although in recent years we have witnessed the trend of lowering the average age of managerial structures, that trend is not characteristic for tourist companies in Serbia. This piece of data is important from the aspect of the development of employer branding practice since it is a recent

practice, which means that older managers have not had the opportunity to learn about it within the formal education system. This is also important because the domain of employer branding requires fast learning, adopting new tools and techniques, speaking foreign languages, flexibility, mobility, creativity, continuously attending online seminars, specialization, all which is considered less present when older employees are in question. The number of years of service spent in the company is also a good indicator for assessing the possibility for the development of employer branding in these companies because it is believed that the higher number of years of service means greater loyalty to the company, satisfaction and interest in its progress. The analysis also shows that the biggest number of managers have university education, however, the problem of the development of employer branding practice is not linked to formal education, which is high, but to having real professional and managerial knowledge which this domain requires, and which is often less present than formal education. The piece of data showing that the percentage of high-level managers is the lowest indicates that in tourist companies the marketing and human resources tasks, and also tasks concerning employer branding, are not seen as strategically important.

The indicators for the descriptive analysis of the development of employer branding in surveyed companies from the tourism branch are grouped in five units: strategic importance, measuring the brand strength, investing in the brand, employer branding activities, and the most frequently used channels of communication with the target group. Although the managers surveyed in the research acknowledged the importance of this domain for the success of their company, a big percentage said that their supervisors have a developed awareness of the importance of employer brand and intend to invest resources in this domain, the presented obtained results of the analysis show insufficient development of this practice in all five indicator units: the absence of strategic treatment of employer brand, the absence of measuring efficiency of working on the brand, insufficient investing in undeveloped activities of this process. Although the majority of the tourist companies have their web pages and profiles on social networks, they are used to attract clients and not to attract high-quality employees. Their sites do not contain special parts with employment offers or content that promotes working in the company. The channels most frequently used to influence the target group are cooperation with employment and advertising agencies, while channels such as seminars, online content, educational institutions, practice and similar are almost never used. A big percentage of the surveyed do not have the practice of defining candidate persona and their needs and values, and defining employer value proposition, which represents the essential part of the employer brand strategy.

6. CONCLUSION

In the present turbulent business conditions, characterized by globalization, increase in competition, development of informational technologies, knowledge era, more sophisticated client demands, demand for continuous innovation, lack of adequate managers and employees, big “brain drain” (many specialists leaving the country), ever increasing gap between formal education and work demands which require big investments in employee development, decrease in secure and permanent employment, low loyalty to and trust in the company, good employer reputation is essential for attracting good-quality employees and keeping them in the company. Employer as a brand is actually the current employees’ and potential candidates’ idea of the organization as a desired place of work. It is a set of organizational measures and activities which are performed with the goal of presenting the company to the potential and the current employees as a desired place of work.

In conclusion, it must be emphasized that employer brand is not just a mere means for attracting, hiring and keeping employees, but it also reflects the organization's key values and vision, its basic values and attitudes, its unique offer that is different from its competition's, and the message that it is sending to its employees and potential candidates in order to promote finding employment and staying in the company.

Employer brand should reflect the company's organizational culture. If the brand does not match the organizational culture, the employees will be attracted based on a distorted image and false promises, which will result in their disappointment, absenteeism, and finally in their departure from the company. Employer brand must not be based primarily on the company's aspirations, but first and foremost on what it is, because that is where the ability of the employer to fulfill their promises lies. In short, the employer must understand their organizational culture, translate it into a brand and manage the employees in accordance with it.

The descriptive analysis of current experience in surveyed companies from the tourism branch has shown that it is an insufficiently developed activity in tourism industry, that managers from this domain must be educated about it, and that it can be an efficient tool which, if invested in and used properly, can significantly contribute to the improvement of tourist companies' businesses. An important scientific contribution of this descriptive research is the fact that it suggests a group of indicators for the analysis of the development of employer branding practice, which can serve as a useful tool with which managers in these companies could diagnose and assess the real state of things, which is necessary to do in order to start a good-quality branding process, i.e. to define goals.

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