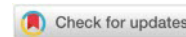


# EMPLOYER BRAND PROMOTION: DOES IT REALLY MATTER IN TRANSITION COUNTRIES?

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**Abstract:** The employer brand refers to the reputation that an organisation has as an employer. The employer brand can be influenced by all the information that the organisation puts out about itself, as well as by all the actions it takes. A positive and strong employer brand has a direct impact on the attraction of quality candidates, their engagement, and retention of current employees. That is why contemporary organisations use all available communication channels to promote their employer brand, i.e. their values and unique culture. In contemporary business environment, the internet and social media represents the primary channel of communication with stakeholders, including job candidates. Additionally, continuous use of the organisation's website can enhance employer attractiveness, support the recruitment process, deliver job-related information, and strengthen their image. The main purpose of this research is to explore the level of employer brand promotion via company websites in the context of transition countries. The aim of the conducted empirical research is to acquire new empirical insights in the fields of human resource management and employer branding. A total of 303 large companies from Bosnia and Herzegovina were included in the empirical research. The analysis was performed through a targeted search of the official websites of the observed companies. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics and analysis of variance. As expected, the data analysis indicated that organisations operating in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not recognize the importance of the organisation's website in promoting the employer brand and establishing two-way communication with potential job candidates. Regardless of the fact that in the structure of large companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina dominated companies that require lower-skilled labour, employer branding is a useful management tool that contemporary organisations use in the labour market competition. In this context, the use of all available means of communication, including the company website, is the right approach that can attract quality job candidates.

**Keywords:** employer branding, employer attractiveness, hiring process, transition countries

**Field:** Social Science

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Greater competition on the labour market, increased demand for candidates with specialized knowledge and skills, and the increased significance of intellectual capital for building a sustainable competitive advantage, are just some of the factors that requires organisations to become recognizable and attractive to job candidates. In order to distinguish themselves from the competition, organisations must continuously work on creating the perception of an attractive employer (Eger et al., 2019), and this can be achieved through the branding process. Employer branding is the process of creating the organisation's unique identity as a desirable place to work (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Dabirian, 2021; Saničanin, 2021). Employer branding can also be described as the establishing of sustainable and long-term relationships between the employer, current and potential employees (Ognjanović, 2019). Successful employer brands have two key dimensions which are attractiveness and accuracy, meaning consistency between the brand and employment experience, company culture, and company values (Moroko & Uncles, 2008). In many contemporary organisations employer branding represent the centre of the employment strategy. Employer branding aims to create a positive image of the organisation as a great place for work and career development in the minds of potential job candidates (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016).

The development of employer brand provides numerous benefits for the organisation. For instance, employer branding helps organisations attract qualified and skilled employees (Ruchika & Prasad, 2019; Dabirian et al., 2019). There is often a reduction in recruitment costs (Mishra & Mishra, 2023; Gupta et al, 2019) because candidates proactively apply and express a desire to work for an organisation that recognizes their expectations and provides conditions in which those expectations can be realized. The emotional experience that employees have when building a relationship with the organisation and its brand is of great importance for achieving loyalty and retaining employees in the organisation. Furthermore, employer branding strategies, such as professional development or work-life balance, positively impact employee commitment dimensions (Botella-Carrubi et al, 2019).

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Development of employer brand is a two-fold process that involves both current and future employees. While a company creates a reputation to attract qualified and skilled employees, it must meet business standards and create a suitable work environment, fostering respect and trust among current employees. From this statement, it can be concluded that there are two approaches in the branding process, which can be characterized as internal and external.

Internal branding is focused on current employees and involves an 'inside-out' approach (Barros-Arrieta & García-Cali, 2020). Internal branding refers to all activities of an organisation that aim to improve the treatment and experience of employees, in order to make them ambassadors of the employer's brand. External branding is focused on the visibility of the organisation on the target market of human resources, through well-designed internet presentations, i.e. all available platforms that contain a description of the organisational culture, reward system, opportunities for career development and other reasons that make the organisation a 'great place to work' (Slavić & Berber, 2022). Therefore, external branding implies the dissemination of information about the organisation via the Internet and other media. It is also referred to as the 'outside-in' approach. Just as corporate brands offer customers a promise regarding a product or service, employer branding also provides a form of commitment to current and future employees about the experience they will have through employment and work within the company. In this process, the employer must be careful and be able to fulfill the promises made in the process of external branding (Lukić et al, 2019).

The employer branding process typically involves several key phases, and the promotion of the employer's brand through all available media represents the final stage. Communicating a 'Great Place to Work' label improves organisational attractiveness to candidates by increasing their perceptions of its prestige and person-organisation fit (Guillot-Soulez et al, 2019). The choice of appropriate communication media undoubtedly depends on the target audience of potential and existing employees and their characteristics, such as age, level of education, occupation, and similar factors. However, in contemporary business conditions, the internet and social media (Kuşçu, 2020) represents the primary channel of communication. Most organisations have their own website, so it is logical that this medium is also used for the purpose of promoting the employer's brand to potential job candidates. Organisations can provide a lot of useful information on their websites, which are available to potential candidates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year. However, in order for the organisation's website to fulfill its purpose, that data needs to be adequately managed (Cober et al., 2003). Outdated information has a negative impact on website users, so it is necessary to update it regularly. In terms of design, the website should be transparent and easy navigated. For example, job candidates should be able to easily access the hiring sections. The possibility of interaction between potential candidates and organisation via e-mail, online forms, chat and the like is another desirable feature of the website.

Although employer branding has been present in practice for more than two decades, some researches in the field of human resources management showed that the hiring practice is not fully developed in transition regions, including Bosnia and Herzegovina. Considering that in Bosnia and Herzegovina there are no studies related to the level of development of employer branding as a hiring strategy, including the promotion of the employer brand, empirical research has been conducted. Research is conducted on a sample of 303 large companies from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The aim of the conducted empirical research is to acquire new empirical insights in the fields of human resource management and employer branding, and to estimate the level of use of the organisation's website for the purpose of the employer's brand promotion to external stakeholders. Data are collected in the period of two months (November - December, 2023). In addition to descriptive statistics, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test hypotheses.

The structure of this paper follows the standard IMRAD form. The first section, following the introduction, provides information about research methodology and the research sample. Subsequently, the research results, their discussion, and conclusions are presented.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The subject of empirical research in this paper is large companies and financial organisations that operate in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Large companies were selected for the reason that they have the necessary resources, organisational and information infrastructure, and other prerequisites for building employer's brand and communicating it to the external stakeholders. The total number of organisations included in the research was 321. The sample structure was analysed from the perspective of industry sectors and ownership structure. Production sector include companies from primary and secondary sectors. Those are companies that participate in the extraction and harvesting of natural resources, and

companies that participate in the extraction processing, manufacturing, and construction of some goods. In Bosnia and Herzegovina there are 146 large organisations that belong to this category. The next category consists of 160 large serviced companies. In the structure of service companies, there are sales companies (66), companies dealing with insurance and banking (12), and other serviced companies (82).

A more detailed analysis of the observed companies suggests that they are mostly in industries that require lower-skilled labour, with the exception of the financial sector. In terms of ownership structure, private companies are the most represented, making up 72.28% of the sample. The remaining segment of the sample consists of organisations from the public sector, which are divided into two groups. The first group consists of profit-oriented public companies and institutions, which participate in the total sample with 18.48%, and the second group consists of non-profit public institutions and organisations, which participate in the sample with 9.24%.

Although the employer brand is created by internal human resources management policies and practices, it is most often communicated to external interest groups, which include, among other things, potential job candidates. The main goal of this paper is the presentation of empirical data regarding the level of employer brand promotion through the company's website. As already mentioned in the introduction, the research subject consists of large companies operating in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and empirical data were collected through targeted search of the company's websites. In this research it was analysed the prevalence of elements used for promoting the employer brand through the company's website, including following promotion elements:

1. Website segment dedicated to employment and career development (Ind1);
2. EVP (Employer Value Proposition) and/or a statement on the importance of human resources (Ind2);
3. Described hiring policy and recruitment process (Ind3);
4. Possibility of two-way communication via email, chat or virtual assistants with job candidates (Ind4);
5. The availability of job vacancies (Ind5);
6. Creation and management of the database of potential job candidates (Ind6);
7. Establishing a network of potential candidates through internship programs for students and students (Ind7).

The research was based on the assumptions expressed in the following hypotheses.

H1. Overall, the promotion of the employer brand via the company website is insufficiently represented among large organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina

H2. There is no a statistically significant difference in the promotion of employer brand via company website among different sectors in Bosnia and Herzegovina

H3. There is no a statistically significant difference in the promotion of employer brand via company website among companies with different ownership structure

The hypotheses were tested by descriptive statistics and analysis of variance (ANOVA). The data were processed using the statistical software SPSS and the results are presented below.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Overall, 92.74% of the observed companies have their own website. Among them, 92.88% of companies use this communication channel to promote their products and services. Therefore, almost all observed companies use the company's website to communicate with consumers in order to gain better market position. However, when it comes to the labour market, a significantly smaller number of observed companies use a website to communicate with potential job candidates, although the way an organisation presents itself as an employer and the way it communicates with job candidates has a significant impact on its overall image. The research results showed that less than half of the observed companies (42.57%) have a website section dedicated to attracting potential candidates. Unlike the promotion of the company's products and services, which are prominently displayed, the section called "Career" is usually not directly highlighted on the homepage of the company's website. Usually it is located within a drop-down menu that talks about the company's history, mission, vision and other general information. In addition to the fact that potential job candidates may have difficult access to information in this way, the company sends a message that positioning its products and services on the market takes priority over positioning itself in the labour market. This statement is supported by the fact that only 20.13% of the observed companies have EVP and/or a statement on the importance of human resources highlighted on their website. Only 7.26% of the observed organisations have a described hiring policy and recruitment process on their website. Only 11.22% of observed organisations have a prominent email address for communication of potential

job candidates with the company's HR service, and 1.98% of the observed companies offer two-way communication option via a chat option or virtual assistants. Research results showed that only 35.64% of the observed companies use a website to advertise open job positions. At the same time, 38.28% of the observed organisations have the option of continuously open candidate applications, which is in line with modern recruitment approaches involving ongoing searches for quality candidates regardless of current job openings within the organisation. Finally, only 11.55% of companies use the organisation's website to establish a network of potential candidates through internship programs for students. The analysed data showed that employers in Bosnia and Herzegovina still approach the recruitment process from a position of power on the labour market, which is reflected in one-sided communication with potential employees or a complete absence of communication, at least when it comes to the company's website, as one of the channels of communication. All presented research results confirm the first hypothesis (H1).

As explained in the Methodology section, large companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina are divided into four categories: production, sales, insurance and banking, and other service companies. Using analysis of variance, it was tested whether there is a statistically significant difference between the observed groups of companies from the aspect of promotion of employer brand via company website. The test results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Promotion of employer brand via company website - differences between different sectors

ANOVA		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Ind1	Between Groups	6.595	3	2.198	9.740	.000
	Within Groups	67.484	299	.226		
	Total	74.079	302			
Ind2	Between Groups	1.054	3	.351	2.205	.088
	Within Groups	47.665	299	.159		
	Total	48.719	302			
Ind3	Between Groups	.043	3	.014	.210	.889
	Within Groups	20.360	299	.068		
	Total	20.403	302			
Ind4	Between Groups	2.029	3	.676	7.182	.000
	Within Groups	28.156	299	.094		
	Total	30.185	302			
Ind5	Between Groups	3.825	3	1.275	5.732	.001
	Within Groups	66.511	299	.222		
	Total	70.337	302			
Ind6	Between Groups	6.915	3	2.305	10.656	.000
	Within Groups	64.676	299	.216		
	Total	71.591	302			
Ind7	Between Groups	.275	3	.092	.870	.457
	Within Groups	31.448	299	.105		
	Total	31.723	302			

Source: Author

Of the seven observed indicators of employer brand promotion through the company website, the results indicated a statistically significant difference between companies from different industries in terms of three indicators, namely: EVP and/or a statement on the importance of human resources ( $p=0.088$ ;  $p>0.05$ ), hiring policy and recruitment process ( $p=0.889$ ;  $p>0.05$ ) and establishment of a network of potential candidates through internship programs for students ( $p=0.457$ ;  $p>0.05$ ). Based on the obtained results, it can be concluded that there is not enough evidence to fully confirm hypothesis (H2), but only those segments related to indicators 1, 4, 5, and 6.

From the perspective of ownership structure, companies are divided into three groups: private, profit-oriented public enterprises, and non-profit public institutions. In the data analysis, the same procedure was applied as the previous hypothesis. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Promotion of employer brand via company website - differences between different ownership structures

ANOVA		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Ind1	Between Groups	14.644	2	7.322	36.956	.000
	Within Groups	59.436	300	.198		
	Total	74.079	302			
Ind2	Between Groups	2.841	2	1.420	9.288	.000
	Within Groups	45.879	300	.153		
	Total	48.719	302			
Ind3	Between Groups	.212	2	.106	1.573	.209
	Within Groups	20.191	300	.067		
	Total	20.403	302			
Ind4	Between Groups	.491	2	.245	2.479	.086
	Within Groups	29.694	300	.099		
	Total	30.185	302			
Ind5	Between Groups	1.935	2	.968	4.244	.015
	Within Groups	68.402	300	.228		
	Total	70.337	302			
Ind6	Between Groups	13.155	2	6.578	33.768	.000
	Within Groups	58.436	300	.195		
	Total	71.591	302			
Ind7	Between Groups	.684	2	.342	3.307	.038
	Within Groups	31.038	300	.103		
	Total	31.723	302			

Source: Author

Of the seven observed indicators of employer brand promotion through the company website, the results showed a statistically significant difference between companies with different ownership structures in terms of two indicators, namely: hiring policy and recruitment process ( $p=0.209$ ;  $p>0.05$ ) and the possibility of two-way communication through mail, chat or virtual assistants ( $p=0.086$ ;  $p>0.05$ ). Based on the obtained results, it can be stated that there is not enough evidence to fully confirm hypothesis (H3), but only those segments related to indicators 1, 2, 5, 6 and 7.

Employer branding is “a valuable tool for firms to promote their unique qualities and attract top talent” (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Contemporary organisations utilize all available communication channels for the purpose of promoting their employer brand, with a particular emphasis on websites, social media, or recruitment platforms, which can help employers, deliver job-related information and enhance their image. Previous research indicates that organisations can enhance their employer attractiveness through the consistent use of social media and websites (Gunesh & Maheshwari, 2019; Kissel & Büttgen, 2015). Moreover, the use of websites can support the recruitment process, provide relevant information for job seekers, and help candidates better understand the organisation’s values and culture (Dalvi, 2021; Stuss et al, 2018). Such results are entirely expected because younger workforce generations expect a personalized approach, prompt responses from employers, and modern communication channels during the hiring process. Therefore, employers must use both the website and new media tools to effectively reach potential job candidates (Adam, 2009). However, the results of this research show that, in general, observed companies do not use the website as a tool for attracting candidates and promoting the employer’s brand. According to available information, such research has not been conducted in the Bosnia and Herzegovina. Therefore, these empirical findings can be used as a starting point for understanding the reasons leading to the low levels of employer branding.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Historically, in most organisations, job candidates have not been viewed in the same way as clients, customers, or consumers. However, numerous factors such as economic migration of the workforce, a shortage of specialized skills, and changes in the value systems of younger generations and their attitudes towards work have influenced a shift in the balance of power in the labour market. Consequently, this has led to a change in employment strategies and approaches to job candidates. Today, on the global labour market, the advantage is not on the side of employers, but on experts who possess specialist skills and have clear expectations from job and employers. In recent years, we have witnessed organisations from developed European countries successfully recruiting human resources from the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the other hand, many organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina are still entrenched in the mindset of high unemployment rates, which has allowed employers for years to manipulate the fear

of job loss and create a sense of replaceability among employees, in order to control them more easily and pay less. Today, such organisations are facing the painful reality that the labour market is changing, and simply increasing wages no longer represents a “magic wand” for attracting quality candidates. From the above, it follows that organisations should analyse key stages of the hiring process from the candidates’ perspective.

The results of the research conducted for the purpose of writing this paper show that promotion of the employer’s brand via company website is insufficiently represented among large organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In other words, it may take some time for organisations to learn that the employer brand, as a set of functional, economic, and psychological benefits that the employer offers, is not just a “fad from the West” but a management tool that modern organisations use in the battle against competition in the labour market. Standing out from the multitude of organisations by using all available communication tools is the only correct approach that can attract quality candidates who are in a position to choose their job.

Although the results of this research provide insight into the level of representation of certain elements of employer brand promotion through websites, they do not allow a deeper analysis of the reasons that have led to a low level of employer brand promotion, which represents the biggest limitation of this study. The limitation in this study is also reflected in the use of simple statistical techniques to observe differences among countries. As the structure of large companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina is dominated by companies that require lower-skilled labour, in future research it would be desirable to expand the sample to organizations that employ different profiles of the workforce, in order to examine whether this is a factor that makes a difference in promotion of the employer’s brand.

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