



Employer Branding in the Digital Age: Leveraging Social Media for Talent Attraction

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Abstract: *The role of employer branding in the 4th industrial revolution, characterized by rapid technological advancements and the rise of social media, is becoming increasingly vital. As the pace of information dissemination accelerates, employer branding is crucial for attracting talent, particularly amid workforce shortages and the “war for talent.” A central question addressed in this paper is: how can employer branding be developed through social media, and where should companies begin? A case study from an FMCG company illustrates a strategic approach to building employer branding via social media platforms, highlighting its impact on talent attraction. The findings offer actionable insights for companies looking to implement effective employer branding initiatives, ultimately improving recruitment outcomes and enhancing organizational reputation in a competitive labor market.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid technological disruption driven by the Fourth Industrial Revolution is profoundly reshaping how organizations approach talent acquisition (TA). With the rise of social media and a global talent shortage, companies face mounting pressure not only to attract top talent but also to position themselves as employers of choice in a fiercely competitive labor market. In this increasingly digital and interconnected landscape, effective employer branding has become paramount, as it reflects an organization’s values, culture, and overall employee experience. Much like consumer brands differentiate products, employer branding helps organizations distinguish themselves in the labor market, shaping potential candidates’ perceptions and enabling informed career decisions.

This emphasis on differentiation highlights the evolving nature of hiring strategies. While the terms “talent acquisition” and “recruitment” are often used interchangeably, they represent distinct approaches. Recruitment typically addresses immediate, reactive hiring needs, while talent acquisition involves a proactive, long-term strategy to identify, attract, and retain top talent. This broader perspective encompasses activities such as sourcing, screening, interviewing, and candidate selection, sometimes extending to early onboarding. By treating talent acquisition as a comprehensive and strategic function, organizations are better equipped to address both current and future workforce needs. Research underscores the importance of a strong employer brand in this process. As Štokić and Gardašević-Živanov (2023) highlight, “a strong employer brand has a significant positive impact on the organization, including an influence on talent attraction and retention” (p. 112).

The evolving expectations of the modern workforce add complexity to talent acquisition strategies. Millennials, born between 1981 and 1999, or Gen Y (Bolton et al., 2013, p. 8), and Generation Z, characterized as “the most diverse and career-oriented individuals” (Lopez et al., 2023, p. 770), increasingly dominate the labor market. These generations prioritize roles that “align with their

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values and provide opportunities for personal growth and contribution to a greater cause” (Rampen et al., 2023, p. 672). To meet these expectations, organizations must move beyond transactional recruitment and develop relationship-driven strategies focused on long-term engagement and development.

This shift requires adopting a cyclical model of talent acquisition, which emphasizes building lasting relationships with potential candidates and maintaining a sustainable talent pipeline. Organizations must anticipate future hiring needs and proactively prepare to meet evolving workforce requirements. Practically, this involves leveraging social media and digital platforms to continuously engage with talent and developing brand ambassadors among current employees to promote the organization’s culture and values authentically. Social media, in particular, plays a pivotal role in shaping employer branding. As Tewary (2015) notes, “there is a significant increase of presence in the area of social media landscape” (p. 53). Platforms such as LinkedIn and Facebook have been shown to positively influence key employer brand dimensions, enhancing an organization’s image and attractiveness to potential employees (Carpentier et al., 2019).

Despite these advancements, today’s labor market remains challenging. Eurofound (2023) reports that “labour market slack was at the lowest level in a decade in late 2022” (p. 1), making the “war for talent” a pressing reality for organizations worldwide. In this competitive environment, companies that fail to invest in employer branding risk losing out on top candidates. Job seekers increasingly evaluate potential employers based on their alignment with personal values, organizational culture, and reputation.

The strength of an employer brand not only impacts talent acquisition but also plays a crucial role in employee retention. As Azura et al. (2023) observe, “employer branding shapes the overall perception of the organization as a desirable place to work, helping to attract and retain the right talent” (p. 106). A strong employer brand fosters employee satisfaction and loyalty, as Pavlović and Zdravković (2019) note, creating a sense of belonging and emotional connection between employees and the organization (Nizar et al., 2024). This alignment between employees’ personal values and the company’s mission reinforces internal branding, “which can improve employee retention, engagement, and overall job satisfaction, thereby fostering a more productive and committed workforce” (Nizar et al., 2024, p. 2), while at the same time sending consistent external signals to potential candidates about why the organization is an employer of choice.

Effective employer branding involves three interconnected components. The first is cultivating a strong internal culture, which centers on the organization’s values and management style. It answers questions like: How does it feel to be part of a company like X? Does management walk the talk? Do their actions align with their words? The second component is communicating the employer’s value proposition to potential employees, which represents the employer’s promise to candidates. The third component is aligning internal and external perceptions of the brand, essentially creating a consistent employee and candidate experience. Inconsistent messaging between these elements can undermine an organization’s credibility and attractiveness, ultimately harming talent acquisition efforts. Personal networks and word-of-mouth remain critical sources of information for prospective candidates, who often seek insights into company culture from current or former employees to reduce the perceived risk of joining a new organization (Wilden et al., 2010). Companies that “maintain transparent and authentic communication..via employee advocacy.” (Mirović & Stanišić, 2023, p. 102) are better positioned to attract top talent. Clearly, misalignments between an organization’s public image and employees’ actual experiences can present significant challenges.

Organizations that prioritize employer branding can achieve tangible benefits, including reduced hiring costs, enhanced employee advocacy, and a stronger company culture. As [Krušković et al. \(2023\)](#) emphasize, “employer branding will contribute to hiring new employees, creating a strong company culture, and even reducing marketing costs” (p. 1203). Long-term strategies, such as the recruiting wheel, focus on retaining and engaging talent—“new hires as well as potential candidates—and focus on turning talent leads into applicants and making permanent employees advocates for the company” ([Talentry, 2020, p. 7](#)).

Given all this, the importance of employer branding in talent acquisition cannot be overstated. By integrating employer branding into long-term strategies and leveraging tools like social media, organizations can effectively attract and retain top talent. This alignment between organizational values and employee expectations ensures not only short-term success but also long-term sustainability in an increasingly competitive labor market. However, a key question remains: How can employer branding be developed through social media, and where should companies begin? The case study presented in this paper, focused on an FMCG company, illustrates a strategic approach to building employer branding via social media platforms, highlighting a step-by-step process.

2. THE CASE STUDY

The study focuses on the efforts of AB Company (a fictitious name known to the author) in Serbia, which is an affiliate of a global player in the FMCG sector, to establish an effective employer branding and talent acquisition process aimed at attracting talent from Generations Y and Z.

While the company had well-established recruitment and selection procedures, as well as a strong global employer branding strategy, it struggled to connect with and attract candidates from these younger generational cohorts.

In response to this challenge, AB initiated the development of a new employer branding strategy targeting Generations Y and Z. The goal was not only to attract highly qualified candidates from these generations but also to establish a robust talent pipeline that could meet the company’s long-term business needs. Achieving this required a shift from traditional recruitment practices to a more strategic talent acquisition approach. This transformation involved broadening the scope of recruitment, moving from a linear process to a cyclical one that emphasizes relationship-building, anticipates future hiring demands, and focuses on creating a sustainable pool of candidates.

The strategy was structured in three key phases:

Step 1: Identifying Priorities – The first phase involved understanding the specific needs and preferences of Generation Y and Z in the context of employer branding.

In the first phase of building the strategy, AB started analyzing the key factors that could enhance its appeal to Generations Z and Y. As these cohorts are composed of younger individuals who are highly engaged with digital platforms, it made sense to gather insights directly from them. This phase focused on employer branding, specifically on how AB could improve its attractiveness to this demographic.

To achieve this, AB organized a hackathon for university students in collaboration with faculty members from selected institutions. Hackathons are defined as “time-bounded events where participants gather in teams to develop projects that interest them” ([Medina Angarita & Nolte, 2020, p. 50](#)). The students were divided into groups and tasked with understanding what the key

professional drives and motives are for this group, where AB stands vis-à-vis the competition, and what areas for improvement or gaps AB has, as well as proposing strategies to make AB more appealing to Generations Y and Z. This event, hosted at AB's headquarters, functioned as both a strategic initiative and an opportunity to engage with potential future employees. Research suggests that such direct, experiential interactions are particularly effective in shaping perceptions of an employer's brand. For example, [Sirojuddin and Sopiah \(2022\)](#) found that "potential applicants seem to be drawn to businesses based on their past interactions with them" (p. 247).

The students presented their findings to a panel of judges, which included several senior managers from AB. Their analysis indicated that while AB was perceived as a company with a strong reputation for ethical values and business success, its social media presence was notably less visible compared to other global companies.

The Hackathon results also showed that Generation Y and Z are particularly interested in companies that emphasize innovation, career growth opportunities, and international mobility. However, it was apparent that while AB offered these features, it was not as active in showcasing them online, especially compared to its competitors. For AB, the opportunity was clear: to strengthen its online presence and better communicate its employer brand to younger generations.

Step 2: Developing and Implementing an Action Plan – The second phase of the strategy focused on creating targeted initiatives to enhance AB's appeal to Generations Y and Z, with a special emphasis on social media engagement. Given the importance of digital platforms in reaching this cohort, AB recognized the need to improve its online visibility to connect with this demographic.

AB's response involved launching a dedicated Facebook page focused on engaging young, less-experienced job seekers. The decision to use Facebook was based on recent research suggesting that it provides the best balance between a large, young user base and remains the primary source of information for young adults. For instance, [Russmann and Hess \(2020\)](#) found that "social media was a main source of news for the interviewed young adults, with many expressing that they felt well-informed via Facebook in particular" (p. 3193). Despite some legal limitations on promoting specific products on this platform, AB used the page to highlight its commitment to corporate social responsibility, employee training/development, and flexible work arrangements—features that align with the values of younger generations.

Step 3: Monitoring Progress and Making Improvements – The final phase involved tracking the effectiveness of the implemented strategies, gathering feedback, and making adjustments as needed to ensure continuous improvement.

HR professionals from AB quickly realized that simply having a presence on social media does not automatically guarantee visibility. Shortly after launching their Facebook page, the company faced the challenge of not achieving the desired traction. AB's limited presence on Facebook and lack of presence on other social platforms failed to capture the attention they had hoped for. As a result, the company was confronted with a new question: How could AB increase traffic and engagement on its chosen social media platform?

The solution came through the identification of two themes that resonated strongly with Generation Y and Z: innovation and international travel. With this insight, AB launched the on line campaign titled "Your Index (University Pass) is Your Passport (Travel Document)." The campaign invited students to submit personal stories, photos, or videos that aligned with AB's core values. Those

whose submissions were selected would win an international trip—a highly attractive incentive for the target demographic. These young individuals value experiences that expand their horizons, making the promise of travel compelling, as supported by previous research.

A key element of the campaign involved empowering students to engage their own communities (e.g., friends and followers) to vote online, directly on Facebook, for their submissions. This feature gave participants a sense of control and transparency in the voting process, as one participant explained: “The possibility of inviting my crowd to vote for my video was great because I could transparently see where my votes stood compared to others and actively act upon it. It’s empowerment with transparency.”

The 50 participants with the most votes were awarded an all-expenses-paid trip to AB’s newly built, state-of-the-art global factory. Once there, the winners shared their experiences online, amplifying AB’s visibility and helping the company appear more appealing to the target demographic. Some of the participants, driven by an interest in internships or job opportunities, were also given the chance to start in these roles within AB, provided there was a good fit.

For many of the participants from Generation Y and Z, this was their first international trip. AB covered all costs, including passport fees, which was particularly important given the financial limitations many face. The competition’s viral nature, combined with the students’ ability to invite their followers to vote, led to rapid engagement across social media platforms. In less than six months, AB’s Facebook page gained over 20,000 new followers, predominantly from Generation Y and Z. This surge in visibility not only boosted AB’s online presence but also created a quantum leap in the attractiveness of AB and positioned it as an employer of choice among Generations Y and Z.

The results were also evident in the year following the campaign. AB was ranked among the top five employers in Serbia, and the strength of the company’s external talent pipeline significantly improved. The company no longer struggled to find qualified candidates for entry-level positions, which was a direct result of the campaign’s success in building awareness and engagement with younger talent.

Three years later, the global impact of this initiative became clear. Over 30 young professionals from AB in Serbia were selected for international developmental assignments, compared to just 5-10 in previous years. This increase in global opportunities not only enhanced AB’s talent pool but also further bolstered its employer brand. The success stories of employees on international assignments became a powerful TA tool, making the company even more appealing to candidates from Generation Y and Z.

3. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

While this case highlights the success of AB’s efforts in connecting with Generation Z, it opens several avenues for future research to further enrich the understanding of employer branding strategies.

First, future studies could explore the long-term effects of social media engagement on employer branding and talent acquisition. Research could investigate how sustained social media interaction impacts an organization’s reputation, talent pool, and overall success in attracting candidates over time.

Second, it would be valuable to examine how different generational cohorts respond to employer branding efforts. Comparing the responses of Generation Y and Z with those of older generations, such as Generation X and Baby Boomers, could provide insights into varying preferences

for communication, brand perceptions, and the effectiveness of different engagement strategies across age groups. This would help tailor employer branding strategies to specific demographics more effectively.

Third, the case study illustrated how empowering candidates to influence the outcome through voting and social sharing created a viral effect. Future research could investigate the impact of personal empowerment on the success of recruitment campaigns. Studies could explore whether this form of engagement leads to higher-quality candidates or better cultural fit within organizations.

Another promising direction for future research is to compare global employer branding strategies with local ones. Investigating the differences in strategies and outcomes between global and localized campaigns could provide valuable insights into the challenges and benefits of tailoring employer branding for different regions or cultural contexts.

Lastly, the case highlights the incorporation of gamification—such as voting and social sharing—into employer branding efforts. Future studies could expand on this by examining the broader application of gamification in employer branding and recruitment. Research could explore whether these strategies are effective across different industries or if certain job types require tailored approaches to engage candidates.

By exploring these areas, future research can provide a deeper understanding of how employer branding strategies can evolve and adapt to the changing needs of companies and job seekers, particularly in the digital era.

4. CONCLUSION

This case demonstrates the power of a well-executed, iterative approach to employer branding. Through consistent monitoring, feedback, and adaptation, AB was able to turn a social media challenge into an opportunity to connect with its target audience. By aligning its campaign with the values and aspirations of Generation Y and Z—innovation, career development, and international exposure—the company was able to significantly improve its talent acquisition efforts and strengthen its reputation as an employer of choice.

The case of AB's employer branding campaign illustrates the critical role that targeted, innovative strategies play in connecting with younger generations—particularly Generation Z. By leveraging social media and aligning the campaign with core values, AB was able to significantly increase its visibility and attractiveness to this key demographic. The campaign's success, amplified by the student's ability to invite their followers to vote for their submissions, turned what could have been a simple contest into a viral event that not only engaged participants but also extended the company's reach well beyond its immediate audience.

As a result, AB not only improved its external talent pipeline but also strengthened its employer brand, leading to an increase in the number of qualified applicants for entry-level positions. The long-term impact of the initiative was further reflected in the company's ability to attract top talent for international assignments, enhancing its global talent pool and fostering a more dynamic organizational culture.

This case demonstrates the value of continuous feedback, iteration, and adaptation in employer branding efforts. AB's commitment to addressing the needs and preferences of its target demographic,

coupled with a strategic and transparent approach to engagement, was key to its success. For AB, and similar companies, this approach shows that building a strong employer brand requires not just visibility but also meaningful engagement with the right audience, leveraging digital tools that resonate with their values and lifestyle.

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