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EFFECTIVE CONTENT FOR DIGITAL EMPLOYER BRANDING

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ABSTRACT

The significance of the employer brand during the 'global war for talent' has been undeniable. Organizations have applied marketing principles of brand management to talent management in the attempt to attract and employ adept and motivated workers. However, just as successful marketing has switched from being transactional to relationship oriented, the same in-depth shift needs to happen regarding employer branding, transferring it from traditional communication tools and messages usage to continuous communication based on customized value proposition.

Communicating and promoting the image of an employer as generally 'a great place to work' has been proven not to be enough. Moreover, as job-hopping Millennials have entered the workforce, it is imperative that employee value proposition (EVP) in employer branding campaigns is determined by potential employees' actual needs and delivered through communication channels of their choice. This paper proposes the most effective content for employer branding and marketing campaigns based on the results of the empirical research using the Herzberg's theory of work motivation, including 528 Millennials. The results show a substantial change in the expectations this generation has from work and the workplace, which should be included in digital employer branding and content marketing, and used to build long-term employer reputation.

KEYWORDS: employer brand, employer branding, digital communication, content marketing, Millennials, EVP, motivation

1. INTRODUCTION

Technological advance marking the turn of the 21st century has changed the characteristics both of the work environment and the workforce [Arriscado et al., 2019]. In parallel, the approach to business has started to change, shifting from being product-centric to customer-centric and

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then to employee-centric [Ronda et al., 2018]. People have become the most important assets of companies leveraging their competitive advantages and deciding on their existence in the marketplace [Ha & Luan, 2018]. The updated digital workplace has been saying goodbye to the retiring members of the Baby Boomer generation and welcoming the first digital natives, job-hopping Millennials who are loyal to their careers rather than to employers and who desire completely different things from work and the workplace in comparison to their predecessors [Tulgan, 2015]. Thus, the global 'war for talents' has appeared, with numerous industries competing fiercely to attract, motivate and retain adept employees [ManpowerGroup, 2021]. The key weapon that companies use in the ongoing battles for the employees is employer branding [Ha & Luan, 2018]. By connecting their two core functions, marketing and human resources, organizations are creating strategies to promote themselves as desirable employers to both current and potential employees [Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004].

Building strong employer brands demands thorough analysis and the choice of the factors that satisfy multiple needs of a target employee population, which would then be incorporated into a brand identity and offered within an employee value proposition (EVP). The content of such EVP can subsequently be communicated to both potential and current employees to attract and retain them [Arriscado et al., 2019]. Over the last three decades, both researchers and practitioners tried to determine and categorize employer attractiveness factors (attributes) into categories reflecting different dimensions of work-related benefits, values or needs [Daniel et al., 2020]. Ambler and Barrow (1996) categorized them into functional, psychological and economic benefits, Berthon et al. (2005) grouped them into development, application, social, interest and economic values, and Daniel, Patrick and Alex (2020) identified and assigned employer attractiveness factors into ERG categories – existence, relatedness and growth needs – applying Alderfer's (1969) theory that was based on Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs.

In order to conceptualize and propose a new employer attractiveness model framework as basis for customized communication with the Millennial generation, we conducted research based on the Herzberg's two-factor theory of work motivation [Herzberg, 1968], starting from the premise that perceived employer attractiveness is multidimensional and consists of organizational as well as job aspects [Ambler & Barrow, 1996].

As employer branding has evolved dramatically over the last two and a half decades, and as the Millennial generation, which comprises the majority of the current workforce, is very specific in comparison to previous ones, the first part of the paper is devoted to the theoretical overview of the employer branding and the Millennial generation literature. Following that, the results of the empirical research are proposed. Both the theory and the research data should provide guidelines and help practitioners create appropriate Millennial-friendly content for their employer branding campaigns.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. EMPLOYER BRAND, EMPLOYER BRANDING AND EVP

The term 'employer brand' (EB) was formulated by Simon Barrow and Tim Ambler, and first introduced to the human resources and marketing literature in 1996, being defined as 'the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company' [Ambler & Barrow, 1996; p.187]. Its goal is to create

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a framework of priorities and values management will focus on in its attempt to raise productivity and enhance the recruitment, commitment and retention of their employees [Ambler and Barrow, 1996]. Over the last two decades, this concept has become very popular among managers trying to promote their organizations' competitiveness [Cascio, 2019]. Hence, similar definitions of EB appeared describing it as the image reflected by an organization as an employer, consisting of all the benefits and the advantages it can offer to its target employee population [Lissaneddine et al., 2021]. In line with this, 'employer branding' is defined as 'firm's efforts to promote, both within and outside the firm, a clear view of what makes it different and desirable as an employer' [Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; p.502]. It is a long-term process that should provide a constant inflow of applicants, by developing and positioning the image of a company in the target candidates' minds [Kapoor, 2010]. More specifically, this process consists of three main stages/activities: the creation of the employer brand's content (EVP), the promotion of such employer brand to external stakeholders (external HR marketing) in order to attract potential applicants, and the retention of the recruits with the fulfilment of the employer brand promises (internal HR marketing) [Lissaneddine et al., 2021]. In regard to EVP or employee value proposition, it is considered to be the heart of what a company would like to represent in the minds of both current and potential workers [Benz, 2014]; a set of distinctive qualities offered by an employer inducing individuals' desire to be part of its workforce [Vaijayanthi et al., 2011].

Employer branding activities are confirmed to positively impact potential candidates' intention and decision to apply, but also to increase the motivation and retention of current employees [Collins & Stevens, 2002]. They are also proven to be connected to lower employee turnover as well as the decreased recruitment costs for up to 43% [Lybrand, 2018]. In addition, statistics show that organizations that have a strong TBI (Talent Brand Index) on the platforms such as Linkedin grow 20% more rapidly than those with weaker talent brands [The Ultimate List of Employer Brand Statistics, 2016]. Due to the 'global war for talent' and the fact that 69% of companies worldwide are struggling to fill their positions with skilled employees of the new generation [ManpowerGroup, 2021], numerous organizations, such as Deloitte and Henkel, have opened departments solely devoted to reinforcing their employer brands [Küpper et al., 2019].

2.2. DIGITAL EMPLOYER BRANDING

Data presented in the *Digital 2021 report* showing that 53.6% of the global population are active social media users, with almost 60% using the Internet, reflect the changes in how people communicate, how they search for information and brands, and also how they look for work - online [Lissaneddine et al., 2021]. As the digital workforce feels the need for digitalized information, digital communication has become a norm in the business world as well [Küpper et al., 2019] and companies have utilized this transfer to ICT to improve their reputation management [Vlastelica, 2016]. Namely, digital channels and online communication, unlike traditional communication channels, have enabled organisations to establish a dialogue with their stakeholders and convey personalized messages with relevant content at time and place that suit the recipients [Vlastelica, 2016]. Even though there are differences in the use of specific digital communication channels in regard to the types of organisations [Veselinovic et al., 2016], most companies use social media, such as social networking websites, blogs, career and corporate websites, Wikis, video-sharing websites, podcasts and the like, to promote their employer brand by sharing work-related content and communicating with their target populations [Lissaneddine et al., 2021].

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Simultaneously, the rise of digital platforms stimulated another trend – the increasing tendency of employees to use different social media platforms to express their voice [Jeske & Holland, 2019]. Employee-made job-related narratives that were once typically posted on organizational websites [Maagaard, 2014], are now all over social platforms such as Instagram, Linkedin, Facebook and Twitter, as well as employer review platforms such as Glassdoor, Monster, Vault, CareerLeak, Hallway and Indeed - either strengthening their employers' brands or ruining their reputations [Jeske & Holland, 2019]. For instance, in 2018, on Glassdoor, there were more than 40 million reviews of around 700,000 companies [Heath, 2018]. The impact of these websites is confirmed by a study showing that 50% of job seekers use Glassdoor during their job search, while 75% of Americans would not accept a job offer with an organization that has a bad reputation, even if unemployed [Naravan, 2021]. Today, people trust people more than they trust companies and advertisements, and brand advocacy has become the holy grail of employer branding activities [Naravan, 2021] and employee testimonials pivotal for employer brand perception [Maagaard, 2014]. Thus, the only way companies can benefit from this trend is 1) to carefully analyze what their employees need and value, 2) to deliver the promised values on a day-to-day basis, and, by doing so, 3) transform them into their brand advocates organically promoting their values, beliefs and their job-related experiences with the online community [Kuscu, 2020]. Indeed, some companies have become very successful in harnessing employee advocacy for their employer branding campaigns, such as 'Microsoft Life', Accenture's '#InclusionStartsWithI' or 'Life At Nordeus' videos, which can result in significantly increased employee acquisition.

However, if these campaigns are to be successful, companies need to live the content defined by their EVPs, which cannot be shaped properly without a deep understanding of the motives, aspirations, values and priorities of their target employees [Kapoor, 2010]. Indeed, the process of employer branding resembles the creation of an advertising strategy. Firstly, advertisers explore if their potential message recipients have got any particular desires or needs which could be triggered by rational or emotional marketing appeals, and then, accordingly, they create advertising messages [Jovanovic et al., 2016]. Subsequently, such messages are used to impact the ways in which consumers perceive products, which should result in enhancing their purchase intention and, finally, influence them to make a purchase decision [Jovanovic et al., 2016]. Similarly, distinguishing values of companies' target candidates should be incorporated into their EVPs, and then communicated through appropriate channels within their employer branding campaigns, influencing potential applicants' intention and decision to apply for a job.

2.3. NEW RULES FOR THE FIRST GENERATION OF DIGITAL NATIVES

Kupperschmidt's (2000) definition describes a generation as a group of people of a similar age who have experienced the same common, crucial socio-political and historical events during the formative years of their lives (their childhood and early adolescence). Due to these key factors' influence, they share the same values, beliefs, norms and expectations and adopt specific behavioural patterns which differentiate them from preceding generations [Inglehart, 1997].

Generation Y, widely known as the Millennial generation, is the generation that comes after Generation X, encompassing individuals born between 1980 and 2000 [Arriscado et al., 2019]. They are also known as 'Trophy kids', 'Internet generation', 'Txt generation' or 'Generation Me' [Zemke et al., 2013; Ivanovic & Ivancevic, 2019]. Being the first generation born in the Internet era and 'speaking the native language' of digital communication technologies (DCT), they are called digital natives [Ivanović & Ivancevic, 2019]. The Millennials make around one-

fourth of the global population and will soon comprise approximately 75% of the world's workforce [Rey-Ares et al., 2021]. According to the literature and research data, the problems caused by this generation of employees are unprecedented as the workplace environment created by the Baby Boomer generation does not fit their needs [Tulgan, 2015]. Employers have immense difficulty attracting, engaging and retaining them [ManpowerGroup, 2021]. In addition, Millennials' turnover intention and actual turnover rates are significantly higher than those of previous generations [Ivanovic & Ivancevic, 2019], generating additional costs of hiring, onboarding and training of new employees [Acharya et al., 2021]. Thus, they are perceived negatively by both employers and supervisors belonging to older generations [Zemke et al., 2013]. Nevertheless, as they make the majority of the workforce, business owners have realized that the only way to keep their businesses on the marketplace is to adjust to this generation, as the reverse is not happening, and to offer them what they need in the long run [Caraher, 2016]. To do that, employers need to understand their unique traits as well as their values, aims and priorities regarding work and the workplace, so that they can customize their value proposition for the Millennial generation.

Creating a general framework for understanding the Millennial generation may start with the main factors that influenced them during their growing up: technology and digital environment, globalization, diversity and the uncertainty of institutions, with additional attention being paid to two specific 'micro trends' that shaped and distinguished them from other generations: virtual reality and helicopter parenting [Tulgan, 2015]. These factors have shaped the following behavioural patterns and characteristics of the Millennials: they are always connected and always communicate [Caraher, 2016], they are 'hierarchically blind' [Caraher, 2016; Arriscado et al., 2019], they are used to change and uncertainty [Tulgan, 2015] having thus become job hoppers [dos Reis, 2018], they lack patience and desire immediate and constant feedback [Tulgan, 2015], they value team work and appreciate diversity and inclusion [Ivanović & Ivancevic, 2019]; they desire servant leadership at work and enjoy fun and interactive work environment resembling the virtual world where they constantly sojourn [Caraher, 2016]. This framework provides the guidelines for the creation of Millennial-friendly EVP content. More specific work-related priorities will be determined by the empirical research which is presented in the rest of the paper.

3. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

3.1. BACKGROUND

To determine the relevance of specific organizational and job aspects to the Millennial generation, we applied Herzberg's two-factor theory of work motivation. First published in 1968 [Herzberg, 1968] and re-published in 2003 by Harvard Business Review, this theory represents one of the most influential concepts in respect to employee motivation, equally used today as it was used decades ago [Mehrad, 2020; Thant & Chang, 2021].

Herzberg proposes that there are two kinds of work-related factors [Herzberg, 1968]. The first are called growth or motivator factors, they are intrinsic to the job and, if present, cause job satisfaction and motivation. The second are called hygiene factors, which are extrinsic to the job, and, if absent, lead to job dissatisfaction. Before they were published, the results of the original study had been confirmed with 12 other studies [Herzberg, 1968]. However, their results showed that not all the motivators and hygiene factors had the same impact on causing

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job satisfaction and dissatisfaction respectively, and the left column in Table 1 shows the relevance of each motivator/hygiene factor to the examined population.

The aforementioned studies were conducted at the end of the 1960s and the examined workforce was comprised of the members of the Greatest generation (1901-1924), the Silent generation (1925-1945) and the older members of the Baby Boomer generation (1946-1964). As the literature shows that there are dramatic differences between generations, we investigated the relevance of Herzberg's factors to the Millennial generation. Specifically, the study aimed to determine the importance of both motivator and hygiene factors proposed by Herzberg's two-factor theory and to compare the results to those obtained in the original study. Thus, we would propose a content framework for an EVP consisted of desirable work-related attributes in respect to the Millennial generation.

3.2. METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS

A cross-sectional study included 528 Millennials from Serbia, willing to participate [Ivancevic, 2016]. The survey was anonymous and was conducted by filling in provided online questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of socio-demographic questions and the second part of the questionnaire consisted of the questions related to six motivator factors (Advancement, Achievement, Work itself, Recognition, Growth and Responsibility) and eight hygiene factors (Security, Status, Work conditions, Company policy and administration, Salary, Personal life, Relationship with peers and Supervision/Relationship with supervisor). Two of the hygiene factors that were in the original study examined separately - Supervision and Relationship with supervisor - were, herein, examined as one factor, and the factor Relationship with subordinates was not examined. The participants answered questions measuring the relevance of the above-mentioned 14 factors (approximately two questions per factor) on a five-point Likert-type scale. The importance of each factor was calculated by determining its mean. Both motivators and hygiene factors were then sequenced in the order of relevance. We checked the validity of the procedure by sequencing the factors according to the percentage of positive responses each factor has received (being marked with four or five points on the Likert scale), and the same order of the factors was obtained.

3.3. RESULTS

3.3.1. Sample characteristics

With regard to gender, 54% of the sample is female Millennials. Most respondents, 39.2%, have a bachelor degree, followed by 37.9% having a master degree, 13.8% having a high school diploma, 6.6% having a higher school (college) diploma, and 2.5% of the sample having a PhD degree. In addition, 9.5% of the respondents are not employed and 25.4% of them are on their first job, while 28.2% are in managerial positions. Most of the respondents, 67.9%, work in the private sector, while 21.4% work in the public sector. Most of the sample, 35.5%, has between 5 and 10 years of work experience.

3.3.2. Exploration of the relevance of motivator and hygiene factors

The results of the research show differences regarding both motivators' and hygiene factors' relevance between the employees who participated in Herzberg's study and the Millennial employees. The differences are shown in Table 1.

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Table 1. Compared importance of work-related factors between previous generations and the
Millennial generation

Generations who participated in Herzberg's study (1968)	Millennial generation
MOTIVATORS	
1. Achievement	1. Growth
2. Recognition	2. Work itself
3. Work itself	3. Achievement
4. Responsibility	4. Responsibility
5. Advancement	5. Recognition
6. Growth	6. Advancement
HYGIENE FACTORS	
1. Company policy and administration	1. Personal life
2. Supervision	2. Relationship with peers
3. Relationship with supervisor	3. Supervision/ Relationship with supervisor
4. Work conditions	4. -
5. Salary	5. Salary
6. Relationship with peers	6. Security
7. Personal life	7. Work conditions
8. Relationship with subordinates	8. -
9. Status	9. Status
10. Security	10. Company policy and administration

Source: Original ranking of work-related factors [Herzberg, 1968] complemented with the ranking from the Millenials survey results

Obtained means for the motivators are: Growth 4.5, Work itself 4.35, Achievement 4.2, Responsibility 4.2, Recognition 4.05, Advancement 3.75. Obtained means for the hygiene factors are: Personal life 4.4, Relationship with peers 4.3, Supervision/Relationship with supervisor 4.125, Salary 4.05, Security 4.0, Work conditions 3.825, Status 3.7, Company policy and administration 3.65.

4. DISCUSSION

As motivators are confirmed to increase job satisfaction and productivity [Herzberg, 1986] while hygiene factors, if not present in the workplace, are proven to cause job dissatisfaction and simultaneously increase employee turnover intention [Ivanović & Ivancevic, 2019], it is important to analyze both groups of the factors. Even though the results suggest that all the factors are important for the Millennials as well, the shift of their priorities in comparison to other generations' is evident and important for content and messages definition in employer branding campaigns.

In respect to the motivators, the most conspicuous change is that of the importance of the Growth factor, which rose from being the least important to becoming the most important motivating factor for the Millennial generation. The explanation might be found in the literature. As said, one of the key factors influencing their adolescence was the uncertainty of institutions [Tulgan, 2015]. The Millennials learnt that they can rely only on themselves and were trained to expect the change, perceiving the entire concept of their working life from that standpoint [dos Reis, 2018]. They have become loyal to their careers rather than to employers

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[Zemke et al., 2013] from whom they expect to be given opportunities to learn, develop and grow, as they do not plan to stay long with the organization and advance hierarchically. Thus, the obtained result confirms that lifelong learning and constant development are the Millennials' priority, but also provides an explanation why Advancement is the least important motivator for this generation. The second most important motivator is Work itself, which is congruent with previous findings showing that interesting, fulfilling and challenging work is of the utmost significance to the Millennials [Bibby, 2014]. As for Achievement, it is not as important to them as it was to previous generations, and the possible explanation is the fact that Growth has gained immense value. Still, Achievement is as significant as Responsibility, which confirms the literature data that show that increased responsibility and success in their work make the Millennials happy upholding their generational belief that they are capable and contributors [Caraher, 2016]. Finally, the decrease in the importance of the Recognition motivator is slightly unexpected as the Millennials want their work to be recognized and rewarded by their superiors and the company they work for [Caraher, 2016]. However, if Recognition is perceived as their hierarchical position and the 'status' in the society (Status being the second least significant hygiene factor for them), then it becomes clear why it is not so important to them.

As for the hygiene factors, the rise of Personal life or the work-life balance factor is utterly expected and in congruence with prior literature data [Zemke et al., 2013]. Unlike previous generations, they work to live and not vice versa, and family and social life are as important to them as their working life [DeChane, 2014]. Thus, employers should give them enough flexibility to balance those [Caraher, 2016]. In contrast to previous generations, relationship with peers is more important to Millennials than the relationship with their superiors, but both mean a lot to them. Having a very close relationship with their parents, the Millennials extremely value similar bonds both with their co-workers and managers, and they appreciate the support, guidance and open communication [Caraher, 2016]. Instead of traditional leadership, they want to be coached and mentored, and guided through the business world with day-to-day feedback [Ivancevic, 2016]. According to the research results, Salary is as important to them as it was to previous generations, a welcomed by not a decisive factor for accepting a job offer [Ivancevic, 2016]. However, the obtained relatively high value for the factor Security is somewhat unexpected and in contrast to them being job hoppers. Still, several authors observe that even though the Millennials are used to change and more accustomed to it than previous generations, they do appreciate stability in the workplace if it exists [Kohen, 2002]. Despite the omnipresent narrative that Millennial employees value special work conditions the most, our study has shown that work-life balance and relationships at work are more significant to them than everything else. As they are 'hierarchically blind' and tend to treat their superiors as their equals [Caraher, 2016], it is expected that Status is of no great importance to them. Finally, the most significant factor for the previous generations, Company policy and administration, is of the least importance to the Millennials. This is also expected as they perceive work as something that should be very interesting and fun, and, in their minds, there is little place for policy and administration [Ivancevic, 2016].

5. CONCLUSION

As the key tool for employee attraction and retention, employer branding, has gone digital and social media have become the main channels for the promotion of organizational values, it is crucial that the content of the campaigns is based on the real needs and interests of their target employees. In addition, as brand advocacy has become pivotal for employer reputation, it is of

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the utmost importance that the expectations of the current employees are met or exceeded. In respect to this, we attempted to determine the values and needs of the Millennial generation and thus provide general content for employer branding campaigns, which could be further customized depending on the target population of specific companies.

The results of our study suggest that the Millennial generation's primary values that motivate them and make them more productive are the possibilities to learn, grow and develop and to be offered to do an interesting and fulfiling job. On the other hand, they will stay longer with an organization if it offers them the possibility to balance their work and private life, but also nurtures the relations between its employees. Additionally, the theoretical overview of the main characteristics of the generation suggests that they prefer a digital, interactive, diverse and fun work environment, where they will constantly be connected, supported and engaged. They prefer horizontal to vertical organizational structures and want their superiors to be their coaches and mentors as opposite to traditional 'bosses'.

If these distinguished values are included in their EVPs and delivered accordingly, dominantly through digital communication channels and platforms, companies will have satisfied and engaged employees and, with such advocates, their employer branding campaigns will have a long-term success.

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