

External Employer Branding in the IT Sector in Poland: Employee Perspective on Employer Attractiveness

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Abstract: This article concerns employer branding in the IT sector in Poland and focuses on EVP elements as well as employer attributes. The paper aims to investigate employer attractiveness in relation to contemporary factors like employees' expectations, the COVID-19 pandemic, sex-based views and new generations in the labor market. The hypotheses are verified with the use of ANOVA, student's t-test and non-parametrical statistical tests. The results of empirical research (author's questionnaire, CAWI method) confirm that there is a difference between men/women' as well as Generation Z/older generations' view on the importance of individual EVP elements. The research also proves that in the IT sector in Poland, the COVID-19 outbreak resulted in a larger employee focus on certain EVP elements and employer attributes. The findings may be applicable for IT companies in the Polish IT market which aim to build a unique and attractive employer brand.

Keywords: employer branding; employer image; EVP; IT sector; COVID-19

JEL Classification: M12; M54; O15

1. Introduction

The demand for employees in the IT sector in Poland has remained high for the last several years. In contrast to the general labor market situation in Poland, where the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a higher level of unemployment (Fraczyk, 2021), the demand for IT professionals increased (Antal, 2020). The demand for employees boomed due to the rapidly growing demand for IT services. Companies across all economic sectors impacted by the coronavirus pandemic required assistance from IT companies in digitalization, e-commerce, optimization of web pages, communication channels, remote work, telecommuting etc. Therefore, the technology specialists from infrastructure, cybersecurity, cloud solutions, customer support and consulting areas of expertise are highly sought-after (Grzeszczyk, 2020). On the other hand, the in-demand employees, whose technical qualifications, soft skills and personality traits fulfill the employers' requirements, also set certain expectations for the potential and current employers (Paluch, 2020).

In order to achieve the organization's goal by building a competitive advantage based on human resources, the employers need to attract the best candidates. Taking into consideration the employees' expectations, this task requires a deliberate, well-planned employer branding strategy and processes (Kampioni-Zawadka, 2018). Although some of the employees' expectations towards (potential) employers have already been researched as a key factor

influencing effective external employer branding, it seems that so far a comprehensive research determining specific elements that have an impact on employer attractiveness in the IT sector in Poland has not been carried out. Considering the identified research gap, this paper aims to investigate employer branding in the IT sector in Poland in relation to contemporary factors like employee expectations, the COVID-19 pandemic and new generations in the labor market. Thereby, the findings of this paper can be beneficial for organizations seeking a competitive edge through their personnel.

1.1. Employer Branding Definition

According to one of the well-known definitions, employer branding is “the process of building an identifiable and unique employer identity” and the employer brand is “a concept of the firm that differentiates it from its competitors” (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 502). Lloyd defined employer branding as “the sum of a company's efforts to communicate to existing and prospective staff that it is a desirable place to work” (Lloyd, 2002, p. 65). Some of the researchers characterize employer branding in terms of a strategy rather than a process: “a targeted, long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm” (Sullivan, 2004). Regardless of the differences between the approaches, from the beginning the common understanding is that employer branding incorporates the disciplines of human resources and management in one conceptual frame (Ambler & Barrow, 1996) to provide benefits at the employer’s level (employee loyalty, employee development, recruitment process, employee engagement) as well as the organizational level (corporate brand, organizational culture) (Melde & Benz, 2014). Recent studies prove that employer branding positively relates to job satisfaction (Bharadwaj et al., 2021), employee involvement and commitment (Botella-Carrubi et al., 2021), internal communication satisfaction (Tkalac Verčič, 2021).

1.2. Employer Branding Process and Models

The researchers distinguish three main steps of the employer branding process:

- Creating Employer Value Proposition (EVP), which represents the organization’s offer for its employees and provides the central message of the employer brand (Eisenberg et al., 2001). Creating EVP is a starting point for all measures taken by the organization to improve the employer brand image (Melde & Benz, 2014).
- External marketing of the employer brand, which attracts the best employees by shaping an image of an employer of choice (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Lately, an additional role of external marketing of the employer brand has been emphasized, namely the employer brand should also support the brand of the company’s products and services. This means that the employer brand must align with the corporate brand (Zajac-Paldyna, 2020).
- Internal marketing, which contributes to employee intention to stay and creation of a unique workforce that is hard to imitate or duplicate by the competitors (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

A systematic literature review (Dabrowska, 2014) shows that the employer branding models created by researchers can be divided into three main categories:

- Outside-in (employer branding) frameworks, focused on external factors in building employer's brand and image, e.g. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) or Martin (2008).
- Inside-out (employee branding) frameworks, focused on internal factors in building employer's brand and employer of choice, e.g. Miles and Mangold (2004), Wilden et al. (2010).
- Corporate brand frameworks, treating employer brand and corporate brand as inseparably linked, e.g. Vision-Culture-Image (VCI) model by Hatch and Schultz (2008), Aggerholm et al. (2011).

However, in the practice of effective employer branding it is crucial to focus simultaneously on all the mentioned aspects (external, internal, corporate) by building one cohesive brand image in order to attract the best candidates and shape the intention to stay of current employees (Rzewuska et al., 2013).

1.3. Factors Influencing Employer's Attractiveness

Employer Value Proposition (EVP) created in the first step of the employer branding process should be real, achievable, stable, unique and attractive (Zajac-Paldyna, 2020). Such EVP is data-driven, based on legal and ethical requirements, competitors in sector, market trends as well as candidates' expectations (Dabrowska, 2014). The candidate's expectations, along with current employees' expectations, determine the employer attractiveness. Based on data collected from various sources, Charak and Zaware confirm five groups of EVP factors: rewards, career, institutional, work, and people (Charak & Zaware, 2020). As proposed by Sengupta and colleagues in their value proposition model for external employer branding in India (Sengupta et al., 2015), the values building employer attractiveness belong to five groups:

- Image and fundamental values like competitive pay and facilities, scope of balancing work and personal lives, the nature of job advertisement given by the company, moral practices of managers, working environment – relationship with peers and supervisor, scope of diversified learning, company brand, duty hours;
- Job structure values like information about continual training and development, job security – permanent or temporary, challenging and interesting job details;
- Work culture values – attrition rate, duration of assignment in case of project-based job, quick growth, office infrastructure;
- Reference values like referred by employee of the organization – present or past, referred by somebody whom you trust, location of the posting;
- Pride values like recognition or reward policy, position (Sengupta et al., 2015).

Despite cultural differences, a similar set of values seems to be applicable for Polish IT specialists. Due to a research carried out by Bulldog Job company under the auspices of the Ministry of Development and the Polish IT Association shortly before the COVID-19

pandemic outbreak, Polish IT specialists highly value: development possibilities (38% of subjects), competitive salary (24%), colleagues and managers (21%) and a quiet, steady job (16%). They are motivated to stay with the same employer for a longer time mostly by work atmosphere (more than 50%), competitive salary and flexible working hours (ca. 40%), possibility of technical development (28%), initiative and friends (ca. 20%), remote work (16%), new technologies, permanent contract and promotion possibility (ca. 10%) (BulldogJob, 2020). Due to the report, the main factor that could have an impact on job change is better salary (87% of subjects), but also possibility of technical development (42%), new technologies, remote work, promotion possibility, work atmosphere, flexible working hours and other (less than 25%). To decide whether to apply for a concrete position, more than 90% of respondents would like to get to know the potential employer's company from the inside and salary range. Moreover, they would like to know the technologies (49%), office location (36%), form of employment (34%), detailed information of the project (32%), description of required experience (32%), benefits, information about co-workers, office facilities or employer status as an industry leader (4%) (BulldogJob, 2020).

As shown in several studies, the factors influencing employer attractiveness can also be prioritized differently depending on generation or sex (Reis & Beatriz, 2016; Randstad, 2020). Due to Randstad's report, in Poland women and men attach the same or similar importance to payroll and benefits, job stability, clear promotion rules, work-life balance, office location, employer brand, high product quality, gender diversity, CSR and competent management. The differences are visible in areas of enjoyable work atmosphere, trainings and flexible working hours (men are less interested in this point) as well as a strong financial situation of the company, an interesting job and the newest technologies (men are more interested in this requirement) (Randstad, 2020).

Taking into consideration the results of previous research and the COVID-19 outbreak (which resulted in faster digitalization, popularization of remote work, growing phenomenon of job insecurity), a question arises, which factors are currently most valued by employees in the IT sector in Poland, if the discrepancies between the sexes' points of view are apparent and how the coronavirus pandemic outbreak has changed candidates' preferences towards values offered by employers.

In the context of the literature review, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

Hypothesis No. 1:

H0. In the IT sector in Poland, the average rating of various EVP elements and employer attributes does not differ depending on sex.

H1. In the IT sector in Poland, the average rating of various EVP elements and employer attributes differs depending on sex.

Hypothesis No. 2:

H0. In the IT sector in Poland, the average rating of various EVP elements and employer attributes is the same for the representatives of different generations.

H2. In the IT sector in Poland, the average rating of various EVP elements and employer attributes differs for the representatives of different generations.

Hypothesis No. 3:

H0. *In the IT sector in Poland, the COVID-19 pandemic has not resulted in higher interest in the EVP elements which guarantee job stability, remote work possibility, competitive salary, permanent contract, medical care, sports package/card, wide selection of training opportunities and flexible working hours.*

H3. *In the IT sector in Poland, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in higher interest in the EVP elements which guarantee job stability, remote work possibility, competitive salary, permanent contract, medical care, sports package/card, wide selection of training opportunities and flexible working hours.*

2. Methodology

Quantitative research was conducted with the CAWI method. A research tool chosen for the research was a questionnaire prepared by the researcher in the Google Forms tool. The questionnaire content was verified by the author's supervisor and EB specialists in one of the IT corporations in Wroclaw. A pilot survey was conducted among five employees from various organizations, who did not take part in further stages. After eliminating ambiguities reported by the subjects of the pilot survey, the main survey was conducted on the 16th of March – 10th of April 2021 among the IT organizations' employees in Wroclaw, Lodz and Warsaw (targeted sample of companies). The return rate of the questionnaire is not possible to assess, because the final number of employees who received the survey is unknown.

The questionnaire consisted of three parts:(1) demographics (sex, age, seniority, job position, organization size), (2) employer branding and EVP, where the subjects decided how important when choosing an employer are the given EVP elements and employer attributes

Table 1. Research sample characteristics

Characteristics	Value	n	%
Sex	Female	42	36.5
	Male	73	63.5
Age (yrs.)	< 25	26	22.6
	26-30	32	27.8
	31-35	24	20.9
	35-40	23	20.0
	> 40	10	8.7
Tenure (yrs.)	0-3	32	27.8
	4-6	31	27.0
	7-10	18	15.7
	10-15	22	19.1
	> 15	12	10.4
Organization size	Micro	1	0.9
	Small	13	11.3
	Medium	2	0.9
	Big	99	86.1
Position	Developer / software engineer	56	48.7
	Application consultant / IT Support	20	17.4
	Manager / leader	17	14.8
	Software tester	14	12.2
	Other	8	7.0
Knowledge of EB	Yes	91	79.1
	No	24	20.9

as well as (3) employer branding in relation to COVID-19, where the subjects decided to what extent the given EVP elements are more important than before the COVID-19 outbreak. In both parts, the 5-point Likert scale was used, and the factors were limited without possibility to add additional, non-listed options. All variables were measured with single-item scales.

The research sample covers the employees working in IT organizations in Poland. There were 115 valid responses, but the sample cannot be considered as representative. Although efforts were made to ensure that the sample is sufficiently diversified considering the characteristics of subjects, more than 86% of subjects are employed in a big organization (more than 250 employees). Other sample characteristics are presented in Table 1.

3. Results

In the first step, the collected data has been analyzed using descriptive statistics. The basic analysis showed which EVP elements and attributes are the most important in the opinion of the subjects. The statistical analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics.

3.1. EVP Elements and Employer Attributes

The analysis of the answers on EVP elements shows that the first five factors rated as “(very) important” are: development and salary (97%), interesting tasks (95%), employment stability (94%) and flexible working hours (89%). The detailed results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. EVP elements – descriptive statistics

No.	Factor	Average grade (scale 1-5)	σ
1	Development	4.60	0.57
2	Employment stability	4.57	0.64
3	Salary	4.56	0.58
4	Interesting tasks	4.51	0.65
5	Flexible working hours	4.47	0.79
6	Casual atmosphere	4.23	0.81
7	Office facilities	4.14	0.76
8	Employer reputation (current employees)	4.13	0.84
9	New technologies	4.10	0.88
10	Salary range listed in job offer	4.09	0.79
11	Remote work	4.09	1.09
12	Clear promotion rules	3.99	0.87
13	Office location	3.88	0.97
14	Person-organization fit	3.79	1.03
15	Rapid promotion possibility	3.63	0.92
16	Benefits	3.55	0.98
17	Employer reputation (on Internet)	3.03	0.96
18	Organization size	2.87	1.00
19	Employer reputation (friends from other companies)	2.75	1.02
20	Company events	2.61	1.08

Due to the participants, the most important employer attributes are: professionalism (“very important” or “important” for 86% of subjects), ensuring work-life balance (84%),

company stability (77%), supporting teamwork (65%), social responsibility (53%), industry leadership (51%) and family friendliness (48%). Less important attributes are supporting diversity and individuality (44% and 32%) as well as best employer awards (22%).

Table 3. EVP elements and employer attributes – average grade in groups and Mann-Whitney U test

No.	Factor	M (women) n=42	M (men) n=73	ΔM	Mann-Whitney U test			
					Mean rank (women)	Mean rank (men)	U	p
1	Salary	4.55	4.56	0.01				
2	Employer reputation (current employees)	4.21	4.08	0.13				
3	Employer reputation (friends from other companies)	2.67	2.79	0.12				
4	Employer reputation (on Internet)	3.00	3.04	0.04				
5	Salary range listed in job offer	4.12	4.07	0.05				
6	Person-organization fit	3.98	3.68	0.30	64.93	54.01	1242.0	0.077
7	Benefits	3.76	3.42	0.34	63.76	54.68	1291.0	0.133
8	Company events	2.76	2.52	0.24				
9	Organization size	3.05	2.77	0.28	63.64	54.75	1296.0	0.148
10	Clear promotion rules	4.26	3.84	0.42	68.12	52.18	1108.0	0.007
11	Interesting tasks	4.67	4.42	0.25	66.56	52.08	1173.5	0.016
12	Development	4.69	4.55	0.14				
13	Remote work	4.17	4.04	0.13				
14	Rapid promotion possibility	3.60	3.66	0.06				
15	Flexible working hours	4.57	4.41	0.16				
16	Casual atmosphere	4.26	4.22	0.04				
17	New technologies	3.95	4.19	0.24				
18	Office facilities	4.24	4.08	0.16				
19	Employment stability	4.62	4.55	0.07				
20	Office location	3.76	3.95	0.19				
21	Company stability	4.10	3.84	0.26	64.90	54.03	1243.0	0.071
22	Family friendliness	3.57	2.82	0.75	68.39	52.02	1096.5	0.009
23	Social responsibility	3.43	3.30	0.13				
24	Supporting individuality	3.21	2.89	0.32	64.70	54.14	1251.5	0.089
25	Supporting teamwork	3.76	3.77	0.01				
26	Best employer awards	3.00	2.37	0.63	69.18	51.57	1063.5	0.005
27	Ensuring work-life balance	4.26	4.22	0.04				
28	Supporting diversity	3.43	2.92	0.51	65.29	53.81	1227.0	0.069
29	Professionalism	4.36	4.22	0.14				
30	Industry leadership	3.71	3.22	0.49	67.02	52.81	1154.0	0.022

3.2. EVP Elements and Employer Attributes – Sex Differences

The hypothesis H1. “In the IT sector in Poland, the average rating of various EVP elements and employer attributes differs depending on sex” has been verified for those of the factors mentioned above, which are rated differently by men and women (i.e. only when the difference in rating exceeds 0.24). Due to the fact that the sample size for both groups is not equal (women – 42 answers, men – 73 answers) and the collected data tested with the Shapiro-Wilk test does not have a normal distribution ($p < 0.05$), the hypothesis was checked with the Mann-Whitney U test. The test results are presented in Table 3 above.

Based on the test results, the hypothesis H1 can be accepted in detailed form: in the IT sector in Poland, the average rating of importance of clear promotion rules, interesting tasks, family friendliness, best employer awards and industry leader status is statistically higher in the group of women.

3.3. Generational Differences

The hypothesis **H2**. “In the IT sector in Poland, the average rating of various EVP elements and employer attributes differs for the representatives of different generations” has been tested for three groups of generations in the labor market: (1) Z – digital natives, (2) Y – millennials and (3) – X and baby boomers, with the One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) after checking the theoretical assumptions of ANOVA (Bedyńska & Cypryńska, 2013):

- The dependent variable must be a continuous (interval or ratio) level of measurement – this assumption is fulfilled due to measuring EVP elements and employer attributes with the Likert scale.
- No significant difference among the groups – to meet this assumption, from the whole sample (26 digital natives, 56 millennials, 33 X and baby boomers), only some answers have been randomly drawn (26 digital natives, 30 millennials, 30 X and baby boomers). The χ^2 for the chosen answers shows no significant difference among the groups.
- Assumption of normality – due to the Shapiro-Wilk test results, this assumption is not fulfilled. However, considering the sample size, the analysis can be further carried out as in this case ANOVA should be robust against violations of assumptions of normality.
- Homogeneity of variance – Levene's test showed that this assumption is violated ($p < 0.05$) for the following variables: salary range listed in job offer, clear promotion rules, interesting tasks, development, rapid promotion possibility, casual atmosphere, employment stability, company stability and family friendliness. For those factors additionally Brown-Forsythe and Welch tests have been performed. For all other factors, ANOVA analysis is sufficient.

Statistically significant differences were noted for clear promotion rules, rapid promotion possibility, family friendliness, new technologies, supporting individuality, and professionalism ($p < 0.05$). Descriptive statistics for those factors are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of variables with statistically significant differences for generations

No.	Factor	Statistics					95% confidence interval		Rating (scale 1-5)	
		Gen.	n	M	σ	SE	Lower limit	Upper limit	Min.	Max.
1	Clear promotion rules	Z	26	4.31	0.68	0.13	4.03	4.58	3	5
		Y	30	3.47	1.04	0.19	3.08	3.86	1	5
		X	30	4.03	0.81	0.15	3.73	4.34	2	5
		All	86	3.92	0.92	0.10	3.72	4.12	1	5
2	Rapid promotion possibility	Z	26	4.04	0.66	0.13	3.77	4.31	3	5
		Y	30	3.40	1.04	0.19	3.01	3.79	1	5
		X	30	3.50	0.97	0.18	3.14	3.86	1	5
		All	86	3.63	0.95	0.10	3.43	3.83	1	5
3	Family friendliness	Z	26	2.27	1.25	0.25	1.76	2.77	1	5
		Y	30	3.20	1.67	0.30	2.58	3.82	1	5
		X	30	3.50	1.38	0.25	2.98	4.02	1	5
		All	86	3.02	1.53	0.16	2.70	3.35	1	5
4	New technologies	Z	26	4.42	0.70	0.14	4.14	4.71	3	5
		Y	30	4.20	0.96	0.18	3.84	4.56	1	5
		X	30	3.73	1.01	0.19	3.35	4.11	1	5
		All	86	4.10	0.95	0.10	3.90	4.31	1	5
5	Supporting individuality	Z	26	2.58	1.03	0.20	2.16	2.99	1	5
		Y	30	2.87	1.11	0.20	2.45	3.28	1	5
		X	30	3.37	1.10	0.20	2.96	3.78	1	5
		All	86	2.95	1.12	0.12	2.71	3.19	1	5
6	Professionalism	Z	26	4.54	0.71	0.14	4.25	4.82	3	5
		Y	30	4.00	0.91	0.17	3.66	4.34	1	5
		X	30	4.30	0.65	0.12	4.06	4.54	3	5
		All	86	4.27	0.79	0.09	4.10	4.44	1	5

Post Hoc Tamhane's and C Dunett's tests showed:

- statically significant differences ($p < 0,01$) between Generations Z ($M = 4.31$; $SE = 0.68$) and Y ($M = 3.47$; $SE = 1.04$) for clear promotion rules,
- statically significant differences ($p < 0,05$) between Generations Z ($M = 4.04$; $SE = 0.66$) and Y ($M = 3.40$; $SE = 1.04$) for rapid promotion possibilities,
- statically significant differences ($p < 0,05$) between Generations Z ($M = 2.27$; $SE = 1.25$) and X ($M = 3.50$; $SE = 1.38$) for family friendliness.

Post hoc Student–Newman–Keuls and Bonferroni tests showed:

- statically significant differences ($p < 0,05$) between Generations Z ($M = 4.42$; $SE = 0.70$) and X ($M = 3.73$; $SE = 1.01$) for new technologies,
- statically significant differences ($p < 0,05$) between Generations Z ($M = 2.58$; $SE = 1.03$) and X ($M = 3.37$; $SE = 1,10$) for supporting individuality,
- statically significant differences ($p < 0,05$) between Generations Z ($M = 4.54$; $SD = 0.71$) and Y ($M = 4.00$; $SD = 0.91$) for professionalism.

Based on the above analysis, the hypothesis H2 can be accepted in the detailed form: In the IT sector in Poland, the average rating of various EVP elements and employer attributes among the representatives of Generation Z is:

- for clear promotion rules, rapid promotion possibility and employer professionalism: higher than among the representatives of Generation Y,
- for new technologies: higher than among the representatives of Generation X and baby boomers,
- for family friendliness of the employer and supporting individuality: lower than among the representatives of Generation X and baby boomers.

3.4. COVID-19 Pandemic

In the questionnaire, the subjects were also asked to what extent the given EVP elements are more important than before the COVID-19 outbreak on the 5-point Likert scale (1 – to a very small extent; 2 – to a small extent, 3 – to a moderate extent, 4 – to a large extent, 5 – to a very large extent). The data was tested with the student's t-test to find the factors whose importance is statistically significantly higher than before the COVID-19 outbreak. Table 5 shows mean values of individual factors and the detailed t-test results.

Table 5. Student's t-test for the factors after COVID-19 outbreak (N=115)

No.	Factor	M	Student's t-test df = 114, tested value = 3					Student's t-test df = 114, tested value = 4				
			t	p	ΔM	95% CI		t	p	ΔM	95% CI	
						LL	UL				LL	UL
1	Job stability	4.08	9.727	0.000	1.078	0.86	10.00	0.726	0.469	0.078	-0.14	0.29
2	Perm. contract	3.77	5.292	0.000	0.765	0.51	6.01	1.843	0.068	0.235	-0.49	0.02
3	Salary	4.01	7.990	0.000	1.009	0.80	9.73	0.084	0.933	0.009	-0.20	0.21
4	Medical care	3.63	7.446	0.000	0.635	0.40	5.29	3.044	0.003	0.365	-0.60	-0.13
5	Sports card	2.10	12.78	0.000	0.904	1.13	-7.99	16.83	0.000	1.904	-2.13	-1.68
6	Flexible hours	3.91	2.259	0.000	0.913	0.67	7.45	0.709	0.480	0.087	-0.33	0.16
7	Remote work	4.39	9.727	0.000	1.391	1.18	12.78	3.594	0.000	0.391	0.18	0.61
8	Training	3.27	5.292	0.026	0.270	0.03	2.26	6.122	0.000	0.730	-0.97	-0.49

The analysis showed that the hypothesis H3. can be accepted as follows: In the IT sector in Poland, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in higher interest in the EVP elements which guarantee remote work possibility, job stability, permanent contract, competitive salary and flexible working hours.

4. Discussion

The research results report statistically significant differences in higher importance of selected EVP elements for women. In those terms, the findings also show statistically significant differences between Generation Z and Y as well as between Generation Z and generations older than Y. A comparison between current and previous empirical studies on EVP elements shows some differences in results (e.g. in this study sample, women are more interested in clear promotion rules than men, whereas previous studies show that there are not any significant differences between sexes). However, the findings of this study generally remain in line with theoretical approach presented in the literature, which underlines the need of creating an individual, targeted EVP based on adjusting a set of values building employer attractiveness (Dąbrowska 2014; Sengupta et al., 2015; Zajac-Paldyna, 2020). The

research results confirm also the results of an empirical study conducted in the Polish IT market shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak (BulldogJob, 2020) in terms of the most valued EVP elements among all groups: job stability, competitive salary, development possibility, flexible working hours. Moreover, according to the current study results, the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak strengthened the importance of the top-valued elements that guarantee job stability and employees' comfort in the new, pandemic reality.

4.1. Limitations

The main identified limitation of this study is the non-representative sample in the context of the organization's size, which can serve as a basis for further studies. Moreover, in all data series a skewness of distribution can be observed. This shows that the subjects rated almost all factors optimistically (above average) and may mean that the questions should be formulated differently. Due to the high grading of the questions by the participants, it is also very difficult to compare the results of the study with the previous research.

4.2. Study Implications

Regardless of the identified limitations, the conducted research has some practical and theoretical implications. Although the study shows that certain differences between sex and generational groups can be proven, it does not indicate possible reasons for those differences. In further studies, a detailed analysis could determine which factors showing statistical differences can have the most significant practical meaning in creating a targeted EVP. Another theoretical implication of this study is that the employers' views on EVP values cannot be considered as constant, which means that after some time, further analysis may be conducted to prove if the COVID-19 pandemic influence on employer expectations abates.

5. Conclusions

The research gap was filled by the literature review and the empirical study, which allowed to fulfill the aim of the paper, i.e. to investigate employer attractiveness in relation to the COVID-19 outbreak or target group characteristics (sex, generation). The research shows high expectations of specialists in the Polish IT market. Therefore, the study proves that in practice the EVP must be shaped cautiously and flexibly, considering not only the best and most well-known employer branding practices, but also employer expectations in the constantly changing world. A good start for creating such an individual EVP in the Polish IT sector can be the factors identified in this paper as important for certain target groups.

Conflict of interest: none

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