Synergies between Social Responsibility and Recruiting for Effective Employer Branding

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Abstract

This study employed a quantitative survey methodology to examine the recruitment practices and social responsibility measures integrated into human resource management in small businesses across four European countries. A survey questionnaire was used to collect data from 84 individuals in Denmark, Greece, Norway, and Slovenia. Descriptive statistics and the Kruskal-Wallis test were used to analyse the data. In contrast, correlation and linear regression analyses were used to investigate the relationships between employer branding, recruitment practices, and social responsibility measures. The study found that small businesses have favourable views of HR practices and social responsibility measures but identified areas for improvement. Cultural and contextual factors affected how HR practices were implemented across countries. Developing a positive company culture and a clear and consistent employer brand message were perceived as the most effective employer branding strategies, while an employee recognition and rewards program supporting the employer brand was considered the least effective. Limitations of the study include using a quantitative survey and a lack of investigation into the impact of HR practices on employee outcomes. The paper was written with the support of ChatGPT.

Keywords: recruitment practices, social responsibility, employer branding, Erasmus+ project ReCrew

INTRODUCTION

Recruitment practices are critical in shaping companies' organisational culture and branding. In recent years, there has been a growing focus on social responsibility and its integration into business practices, including recruitment. The Erasmus+ project ReCrew aims to explore and develop innovative recruitment practices focusing on social responsibility. As a part of this project, a qualitative study was conducted to investigate the recruitment practices of several organisations and examine how social

responsibility is embedded in these practices. This paper presents the results of this study, focusing on the influences of social responsibility embedded in recruitment practices on employer branding. The study sheds light on how social responsibility can enhance employer branding and attract top talent, ultimately contributing to the organisation's overall success.

The paper is organised into three parts. The first part describes the theoretical concepts (recruitment practices, social responsibility and employer branding) and their relationships. In the second part of the paper, empirical research methodology is defined, as well as the analysis and discussion of the results. Finally, the paper concludes with a short conclusion with the key findings, research limitations, and suggestions for further research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Recruitment Practices: Evolution and Current Trends

Recruitment is the process of identifying, attracting, and selecting suitable candidates for a job position in an organisation. This process can be carried out by the company itself or outsourced to external employment agencies (Deb, 2006). The objective of recruitment is to follow the candidate's recruitment process from the launch of the job offer to the actual deployment of the personnel in the company.

The recruitment process has evolved over the years. The first evolution of the recruiting process occurred during the industrial revolution when there was an exponential rise in large factories, new production methods, and a radical increase in population (Deering, 2015). The use of Assessment Centre, an evaluation methodology that uses various tests, exercises, and assessments to find out whether candidates possess the personal skills and competencies required for a particular job position, was first introduced in Germany during the First World War and was later transferred to the civilian sphere (Woodruffe, 2000).

From 1950 to 1980, there was a shift from an approach based exclusively on subjective criteria set by the recruiter himself to a competence-oriented approach that sought to make the process as objective as possible (Lievens & Chapman, 2019). However, this approach turned out to be too unbalanced. Therefore, in the 2000s, companies began to move towards a new way of approaching selection that was somewhere in between the subjective and the objective method. Today, recruiters focus on a mix of technical, behavioural, and potential skills of the individual because only these can ensure the success of companies over time with effective responses to the demands of society.

The way of looking for work has also changed over the years. Digital tools have gradually replaced the traditional approach, including social media (such as LinkedIn and Indeed) and web portals (Blacksmith et al., 2016).

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to profound changes in the world of work, particularly in selection and recruitment processes. Virtual job interviews have become the new normal, making the selection process quick and effective while saving time and money for both the employer and the candidate (Sigahi et al., 2021). The pandemic has also led to more flexible labour policies, allowing companies to choose the most suitable person for the position required from an ever-wider pool of candidates. As a result, job seekers are more likely to apply for positions in larger, more stable companies that can provide secure employment, while IT has experienced substantial growth (Lee et al. 2020).

In terms of recruitment, the first phase is job analysis, where an in-depth internal analysis of the company is carried out to identify the job profile required in the labour market. The second phase is publishing the job offer, where a clear and effective job advertisement is created. The third phase is curriculum screening, where the recruiter skims the resumes received and decides which ones are worthy of a personal interview. The fourth and final phase is candidate placement, where the chosen candidate is introduced to the company, and the 'Onboarding' phase begins (Roberson et al., 2005).

In conclusion, whether it is a small company or a large multinational, the recruitment process plays a vital role in the growth and success of an organisation. Therefore, companies must keep up with the current trends and practices in the recruitment process to attract and retain the best talent in the industry.

Social Responsibility in Recruitment Process

Social responsibility policies can play a critical role in the recruitment process in small companies. These policies can cover various topics, including workplace policies that ensure employees' safety and well-being (Nel et al., 2012). For instance, attendance and punctuality policies, confidentiality and data protection policies, harassment and discrimination policies, health and safety policies, use of company equipment and resources policies, performance expectations and evaluations policies, and leave policies (e.g., vacation, sick leave) can help establish a fair and productive work environment.

Environmental policies, on the other hand, can address a wide range of environmental issues such as air quality, water quality and management, waste management and recycling, biodiversity and habitat conservation, climate change and greenhouse gas emissions, and use and management of natural resources (e.g., forests, minerals) (Linnenluecke & Griffiths, 2010). These policies aim to preserve and protect the natural environment from harm while supporting the sustainable use of natural resources.

Regarding marketplace policies, it is essential for marketplace operators to communicate their policies to all participants clearly and enforce them consistently (Veltri et al., 2020). This helps create a fair and trustworthy environment for buyers and sellers to interact and protects the integrity of the marketplace. In addition, by publishing transparent, honest, and inclusive marketplace policies, companies can build a solid foundation of trust amongst customers, stakeholders, partners, and employees.

Lastly, local community policies can help foster a positive relationship between the company and the community in which they operate (Bikefe et al., 2020). These policies can cover various topics, such as community engagement and involvement, environmental protection and sustainability, social responsibility and philanthropy, employee involvement in the community, partnerships with local organisations and businesses, and support for local economic development. Companies need to engage with and listen to the needs and concerns of the local community to develop effective and meaningful policies.

Employer branding

Employer branding has become increasingly important for large and small businesses to attract and retain top talent. Building a strong employer brand can be especially important for small companies to compete with larger companies for talent. In this section, we will explore the concept of employer branding and how small companies can develop and promote their employer brand.

Employer branding refers to the perception that potential and current employees have of a company as an employer. It includes the company's reputation, values, culture, and employee experience. A strong employer brand can help a company attract top talent, increase employee engagement and retention, and improve overall business performance (Theurer et al., 2018).

Building a strong employer brand can be challenging for small companies due to limited resources and visibility. However, there are several strategies that small companies can use to develop and promote their employer brand. Firstly, small companies should focus on creating a positive employee experience by offering competitive salaries and benefits, a supportive and inclusive work environment, and opportunities for professional growth and development (Mikulasev, 2022).

Secondly, small companies can leverage their unique characteristics and values to differentiate themselves from larger competitors. This can include highlighting the company's mission and vision, community involvement, and commitment to sustainability and social responsibility (Brothwel, n.d).

Thirdly, small companies can use social media and other digital channels to increase visibility and promote their employer brand. This can include sharing employee testimonials, posting job openings, and showcasing the company's culture and values (Theurer et al., 2018).

In conclusion, developing a strong employer brand is essential for small companies to attract and retain top talent in a competitive job market. Small companies can build a reputation as an employer of choice by focusing on creating a positive employee experience, leveraging unique characteristics and values, and using digital channels to promote their brand.

Relationships between recruitment practices, social responsibility measures and employer branding

In recent years, there has been an increasing awareness of the importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and its impact on employer branding. CSR refers to the ethical and sustainable practices companies adopt to minimise their adverse effects on society and the environment. On the other hand, employer branding is the process of establishing a company's reputation as an employer of choice in the minds of potential and current employees. In this section, we will explore the relationship between recruitment practices, social responsibility, and employer branding in the context of small companies.

Research has shown that social responsibility practices can positively impact employer branding. For example, a study by Deloitte found that 70% of millennials are influenced by a company's commitment to social responsibility when deciding where to work (Deloitte, 2017). Therefore, small companies that incorporate CSR into their recruitment practices are more likely to attract and retain top talent. This is particularly important for small companies that may not have the same resources as larger companies to offer competitive salaries or benefits packages.

Recruitment practices are also closely linked to social responsibility and employer branding. Small companies prioritising ethical and sustainable practices in their recruitment process are likelier to attract candidates who share their values. For example, a company that values diversity and inclusion may incorporate these values into their recruitment process by actively seeking candidates from diverse

backgrounds. By doing so, they can improve their social responsibility practices and enhance their employer brand by positioning themselves as an inclusive and diverse workplace.

Moreover, a company's recruitment practices can also impact its social responsibility practices. For example, small companies can create a culture that prioritises social responsibility by hiring candidates who share their values and are committed to ethical and sustainable practices. This, in turn, can enhance their employer brand by demonstrating their commitment to positively impacting society and the environment.

In conclusion, there is a strong relationship between recruitment practices, social responsibility, and employer branding. Small companies prioritising ethical and sustainable practices in their recruitment process can attract and retain top talent while enhancing their reputation as responsible and attractive employers. Therefore, small companies should incorporate social responsibility into their recruitment practices to positively impact society and the environment while improving their employer brand.

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Research Methodology

The methodology used in this study is a quantitative survey. The study examines two aspects of human resource management: recruitment practices and social responsibility integrated into recruitment policies. The data for the analysis was collected using a survey questionnaire distributed to small businesses in four European countries: Denmark, Greece, Norway, and Slovenia.

The questionnaire assessed the frequency and effectiveness of various HR practices related to recruitment, selection, onboarding, succession planning, and record-keeping. The respondents rated each practice on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicated "not at all" and 5 indicated "to a great extent."

The qualitative online survey was conducted in all project countries. An online tool of 1KA One-click Survey was used to execute the survey. The questionnaire was developed based on the findings form the interviews. The survey was conducted between February 1, 2023, and March 14, 2023. Altogether, we received responses from 84 individuals (11 from Denmark, 21 from Greece, 10 from Italy, 17 from Spain, 20 from Slovenia, and 5 from Norway). For statistical analysis, we used SPSS software.

In the first part of the analysis, the data collected from the survey were analysed using descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation. The mean ratings were used to determine the overall effectiveness of each HR practice, while the standard deviation was used to identify variations in the respondents' ratings.

In addition, the Kruskal-Wallis test was used to test for statistically significant differences between the countries regarding their HR practices. This test compares the median ratings for each practice across the different countries to determine if there are any significant differences.

In the second part of the analysis, the research methodology involved a combination of quantitative analysis techniques, including correlation analysis and linear regression analysis. The study aimed to investigate the relationships between three main concepts: employer branding (EB), recruitment practices (RP), and social responsibility (SR) measures integrated into the HR function. The variables EB, RP, and SR were calculated as mean values of corresponding measurement scales, and their

Cronbach alpha values were checked to ensure internal consistency. In the analysis, we also used the PROCESS algorithm by Andrew F. Hayes to test possible mediating relationships. Still, we ultimately concluded with a simple linear regression analysis that included two predictors (RP and SR) and one dependent variable (EB).

Results of the analysis with discussion

Recruitment practices and social responsibility

The study provides information on the HR practices related to job analysis, recruitment, selection, onboarding, succession planning, and record-keeping in small businesses and the social responsibility embedded in those practices. The findings are based on a quantitative survey, and the results are presented in two tables (Table 1 and Table 2).

Table 1: Use of recruitment practices (1-not at all...5-to a great extent)

Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Job analysis and job design to determine job requirements and responsibilities.	73	3.62	0.995	0.08
Sourcing and attracting job candidates through job postings, employee referrals, and recruitment events.	73	3.41	1.177	0.99
Screening and shortlisting of job candidates.	72	3.9	1.128	0.17
Interviewing and selection of job candidates.	73	4.15	0.861	0.03
Onboarding and orientation of new employees.	73	4.04	0.92	0.02
Succession planning and talent management.	71	3.34	1.082	0.01
Maintaining accurate and up-to-date employee records.	72	3.57	1.197	0.00

Table 1 shows the frequency of recruitment practices in small businesses, with mean ratings ranging from 3.34 to 4.15. The highest mean rating is for "Interviewing and selecting job candidates," indicating that the respondents feel positive about this practice. However, the standard deviations suggest a significant variation in how the respondents rate these practices, especially for "sourcing and attracting job candidates" and "maintaining accurate and up-to-date employee records." In addition, the Kruskal Wallis test suggests that statistically significant differences (see the last column in Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3) between countries exist in the case of four HR practices: »Interviewing and selection of job candidates«, »onboarding and orientation of new employees«, »succession planning and talent management«, and »maintaining accurate and up-to-date employee records«.

Table 2: Use of social responsibility in recruitment practices (1-not at all...5-to a great extent)

Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Ensuring equal employment opportunity and compliance with anti-discrimination laws.	70	4.03	1.09	0.08
Implementing fair and transparent selection procedures.	70	4.01	1.083	0.01
Encouraging diversity and inclusion in the recruitment process and workplace.	68	3.75	1.111	0.14

Implementing environmentally friendly and sustainable practices in the workplace.	69	3.75	1.049	0.04
Providing a safe and healthy work environment for all employees.	69	4.35	0.837	0.28
Promoting employee well-being and preventing burnout.	70	4.01	0.893	0.004
Providing training and development opportunities for all employees.	69	3.93	1.075	0.02
Encouraging work-life balance for employees.	69	3.9	0.942	0.42

Table 2 shows the frequency of social responsibility measures in recruiting, with mean ratings ranging from 3.75 to 4.35. The highest mean rating is for "providing a safe and healthy work environment for all employees," indicating that the respondents feel positive about this measure. "Ensuring equal employment opportunity and compliance with anti-discrimination laws" and "implementing fair and transparent selection procedures" also have high mean ratings, suggesting that the organisation is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion and follows fair hiring practices. However, "encouraging diversity and inclusion in the recruitment process and workplace" and "implementing environmentally friendly and sustainable practices in the workplace" have lower mean ratings, indicating that the organisation may need to take additional steps to promote these values. The mean ratings also suggest that the organisation is somewhat successful in promoting work-life balance among its employees, but there is room for improvement in preventing burnout.

The findings suggest that small businesses positively view HR practices and social responsibility measures. Still, there is room for improvement in certain areas, such as sourcing and attracting job candidates, maintaining accurate employee records, and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace. The results also suggest that there are differences between countries in how HR practices are implemented, indicating that cultural and contextual factors may play a role in HR management in small businesses.

Employer branding

The study also analyses the effectiveness of various employer branding strategies used by small companies. As seen from Table 3, the findings reveal that developing a positive company culture that aligns with employer brand values is perceived as the most effective strategy, followed closely by developing a clear and consistent employer brand message and image. Conversely, implementing an employee recognition and rewards program that supports the employer brand is perceived as the least effective strategy.

The results also suggest that offering competitive benefits and compensation packages and creating employee-centred branding initiatives, such as referral programs and employee advocacy, have a more significant variation in responses, indicating that these strategies may not be universally effective and may require customisation based on each organisation's unique needs and circumstances.

The study finds statistically significant differences between the countries regarding the frequency of use of various employer branding strategies. For instance, respondents from Greece and Spain reported more frequent use of the listed practices. In contrast, Norway's signalled lower frequencies of developing a clear and consistent employer brand message and image and building a solid online presence through

social media, websites, and other digital platforms. In addition, respondents from Denmark indicated that developing partnerships with industry influencers and organisations and implementing an employee recognition and rewards program that supports the employer brand are less frequently present in companies.

The study suggests that small companies should focus on building a positive company culture that aligns with their employer brand values and developing a clear and consistent employer brand message and image. However, they should also be mindful of tailoring their strategies to their unique needs and circumstances and be willing to experiment with different approaches.

Table 3: Use of employer branding measures (1-not at all...5-to a great extent)

Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Developing a clear and consistent employer brand message and image.	68	3,79	1,001	0,01
Building a strong online presence through social media, website, and other digital platforms.	68	3,43	1,213	0,03
Offering competitive benefits and compensation packages to attract top talent.	67	2,79	1,122	0,06
Creating employee-centred branding initiatives, such as referral programs and employee advocacy.	67	2,66	1,238	0,003
Developing partnerships with industry influencers and organisations.	67	2,73	1,25	0,006
Participating in industry events and job fairs to increase employer brand awareness.	68	2,75	1,098	0,27
Building a positive company culture that aligns with employer brand values.	68	3,72	0,975	0,09
Implementing an employee recognition and rewards program that supports the employer brand.	68	3,01	1,264	0,00

Relationships between recruitment practices, social responsibility and employer branding

The study also analysed the relationships between employer branding (EB), recruitment practices (RP), and social responsibility (SR) measures integrated into the HR function as part of corporate responsibility policy. The researchers conducted correlation and linear regression analysis to investigate the dependencies between the three main concepts.

As can be seen from Table 4, the findings suggest a strong positive relationship between RP, SR, and EB, with all correlations significant at the 0.01 level. Furthermore, the correlation analysis showed that the SR-EB relationship was the strongest, followed by the SR-RP relationship and then the RP-EB relationship. These results are consistent with the existing literature, which suggests that CSR initiatives positively impact a company's employer branding and recruiting practices.

Table 4: Correlations between RP, SR and EB

	RP	SR	EB
RP	1	0.526**	0.483**
SR	0.526**	1	0.665**
EB	0.483**	0.665**	1

The researchers also performed a mediation analysis to identify possible mediating relationships between the variables. However, the analysis showed no evidence of mediation, and therefore a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. The regression analysis showed that the overall model was statistically significant in predicting EB ($F(2, 65) = 28.199$, $p < 0.001$), with an R-squared of 0.465 and an adjusted R-squared of 0.448, which means the predictors together explain 46.5% of the variance in EB, with SR being a significant predictor while RP was not a significant predictor.

As the analysis showed, SR significantly affects EB (B = 0.579, $p < 0.001$), with a standardised coefficient of 0.570, meaning that for every one-unit increase in SR, EB increases by 0.579 units, holding all other variables constant. Conversely, RP is not a significant predictor of EB (B = .204, p = .106), with a standardised coefficient of .176.

The study's findings suggest that companies with CSR initiatives and strong employer branding will likely have a more engaged and committed workforce, attract and retain top talent, and enhance their overall reputation as socially responsible employers. The results also suggest integrating CSR measures into recruitment practices can improve a company's employer branding and recruiting practices. However, the study's limitations should also be considered, and further research is needed to confirm the findings.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study provides insights into recruitment practices, social responsibility measures, and employer branding strategies used by small businesses. The results indicate that small firms view HR practices and social responsibility measures positively. Still, there is room for improvement in certain areas, such as sourcing and attracting job candidates, maintaining accurate employee records, and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace. Additionally, the study shows that cultural and contextual factors may play a role in HR management in small businesses, as there are differences between countries in how HR practices are implemented.

Regarding employer branding strategies, the study reveals that developing a positive company culture that aligns with employer brand values is perceived as the most effective strategy, followed closely by developing a clear and consistent employer brand message and image. However, implementing an employee recognition and rewards program that supports the employer brand is perceived as the least effective strategy.

The study's limitations include using a quantitative survey, which may not capture the complexities of recruitment practices and social responsibility measures in small businesses. Future research could use qualitative methods to gain a more in-depth understanding of these practices. Additionally, the study did not investigate the impact of HR practices and social responsibility measures on employee outcomes, such as job satisfaction and turnover, which could be an area for future research.

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