

SEGMENTING POTENTIAL EMPLOYEES ACCORDING TO FIRMS' EMPLOYER ATTRACTIVENESS DIMENSIONS IN THE EMPLOYER BRANDING CONCEPT

V. Lale Tüzüner & Cenk Arsun Yüksel
İstanbul Üniversitesi, İşletme Fakültesi, Turkey

ABSTRACT

Brands are among firms' most valuable assets; consequently brand management is a key activity in many firms. Although firms commonly focus their branding efforts toward developing product and corporate brands, branding can also be used in the area of human resource management. The application of branding principles to human resource management has been termed "employer branding". Increasingly, firms are using employer branding to attract recruits and assure that current employees are engaged in the culture and the strategy of the firm. The employer brand puts forth an image showing the organization a "good place to work." The purpose of this paper is to determine the components of employer attractiveness from the perspective of potential employees. Throughout this study, the potential employee segments that are related to the attractiveness components and their demographic characteristics are also examined. 475 respondents were given a questionnaire of employer attractiveness scale and demographic questions. Final-year undergraduate Business Administration Faculty's students at Istanbul University were segmented according to two employer attractiveness components clusters with each cluster acquiring its own demographic characteristics.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Employer Branding is one of the most significant developments in recent times. Organisations are increasingly recognizing that most brand promises are delivered by people not products. The people offer behind the product has to be consistent with the brand and the commitment has to be reflected from top of the organization to the newest recruit. To achieve this, organizations have to consider all aspects of their business to ensure consistency in messages, values and behaviours (Thorne, 2007, p. 1). The internal marketing concept argues that the organizations' personnel are the first market of any company; the rationale being that employees are internal customers and jobs are internal products (Gronroos, 2000, p. 331, 334). Job products must attract, develop and motivate employees, thereby satisfying the needs and wants of these internal customers, while addressing the overall objectives of the organization (Rafiq, Ahmed, 2000, p. 451). In fact, Kotler (1991) defines internal marketing as "the task of

successfully hiring, training and motivating employees to serve the customer well". The first step in developing competitive intellectual and human capital in a firm is, attracting the appropriate applicants. Unfortunately, applicant attraction is an inexact science, despite numerous studies examining the process by which job seekers choose an employer, and employers seek to attract viable candidates. (e.g., Barber, 1998; Schneider, 1987 cited in Backhaus, 2004, p. 115; Breaugh & Starke, 2000, pp. 405-434). Attention to the issue of effective and appropriate applicant attraction is justified for a number of reasons. First, an appropriate match between the parties is critical to the well-being and productivity of individuals and organizations. Second, organizations spend a great deal of money in the recruitment process and, without the right applicants, can not hope to develop the level of competitive advantage necessary to compete in a volatile economy (Backhaus, 2004, p. 115). Recruitment is also part of the public relations of the organization and should and therefore be included as such within the organization's recruitment policy. There should be consistency between the organization's perception of itself and those it projects and this can be done through the media and the current workforce (Maund L., 2001, p. 166). Schneider's (1987) attraction- selection- attrition (ASA) model conceptually grounds this research stream (Lievens, Decaesteker, Coetsier, Geirnaert, 2001, p. 31). A premise underlying the ASA model is that "people in any organization are unique in that they are the ones attracted to, chosen by, and who choose to remain with an organization" (Schneider, Smith, Taylor, Fleenor, 1998, p. 463) Both the individual and the organization are making decisions about one another based their needs, expectations, preferences. In other words for the best placement there should be person- organization fit.

The concept of employer branding has become one of the most significant developments in recent times, and for some companies its importance has been recognized since the early 1990s. Simon Borrow, is acknowledged as the creator of the term "employer brand" as early as 1990 (Thorne, 2004, p. 18). Ambler and Barrow (1996, p. 187) defined employer branding as "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company. The authors go on to suggest that, just like a traditional brand, an employer brand has both personality and positioning. Employment branding is therefore concerned with building an image in the minds of the potential labor market that the company, above all others, is a "greater place to work" (Ewing, Pitt, de Bussy, Berthon, 2002, p. 12). The Conference Board, in its 2001 study of employer branding practices, proposed that "the employer brand establishes the identity of firm as an employer. It encompasses the firms' values, system, policies and behaviors toward the objectives of attracting, motivating, and retaining the firms' current and potential employees" (The Conference Board, 2001, p. 3 cited in Backhaus, 2004, p. 119-120; Backhaus, Tikoo, 2004, p. 501). These definitions indicate that employer branding involves promoting, both within and outside the firm, a clear view of what makes a firm different and desirable as an employer.

Employer branding's foundations are in marketing practices, employing product branding principles to marketing employer brands. The brand is all about how a business builds and packages its identity, origins, and values and what it promises to deliver in order to emotionally connect with its employees so they in turn deliver what the business promises to its customers. Brands create emotional connections. They simplify value, influence customer choices at each touch point, define customer experience and connect people to a big idea. In effect brands create advocates

of customers and ambassadors of employees (Sartain, 2006, p.18). So there should be a match between the values, work styles and objectives of both employees and companies in order to select and retain them. This is highly similar to the person-organization fit construct, but it represents a stronger effort on the part of the employer to exploit the “fit-drive” of potential employees and to position the employer brand image appropriately to recruit the desired applicants. Branding suggests that recruitment messages are differentiated by organizations to attract the applicants that fit the organization’s image of itself (Backhaus, 2004, p. 120).

The purpose of the study is to examine employer branding concept and thereby employer attractiveness which is a component of the internal marketing. Employer attractiveness which is a still evolving concept in the field of management. In the paper that follows we provide research on employer branding in the context of employer attractiveness. This is not thoroughgoing research, but we elaborate on what we consider as relevant components of employer branding. Before examining employer branding we focus on internal marketing which is the most widely discussed concept at the intersection points of marketing and human resource management. Managerial implications appearing from the the findings of the study and the literature reviews are also discussed.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

According to the American Marketing Association, a brand is “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors”. Thus, the key to creating a brand, according to this definition, is to choose a name, logo, symbol, package design, or other attribute that identifies a product and distinguishes it from others (Keller, 1998, p. 2). Brands are among firms’ most valuable assets; consequently brand management is a key activity in many firms. Although firms commonly focus on their branding efforts toward developing product and corporate brands, branding can also be used in the area of human resource management (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 501). Employees can reinforce, strengthen, and even create a brand image for their products and organizations (Miles & Mangold, 2004, p. 66). Employee brand-building behaviors may include courtesy, responsiveness, reliability, helpfulness, and empathy, among others. Such behaviors have been shown to contribute to consumers’ perceptions of service quality and may result in higher levels of customer retention and loyalty (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988, p. 12-39).

The employer brand concept is borrowed from marketing. It helps organizations focus on how they can identify themselves within their market as an employer of current staff, as a potential employer to new recruits and as a supplier or partner to customers (Harding, 2003 cited in Melin, 2005, p. 9). Employer branding is a relatively new idea that has to be examined by Human Resources and Marketing academicians. The term employer branding suggests the differentiation of a firms’ characteristics as an employer from those of its competitors. The employment brand highlights the unique aspects of the firm’s employment offerings or environment (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 502).

The application of branding principles to human resource management has been termed “employer branding”. Increasingly, firms are using employer branding to attract recruits and

assure that current employees are engaged in the culture and the strategy of the firm. Employer branding is defined as “a targeted, long term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm” (Sullivan, 2004 cited in Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 501). The employer brand puts forth an image showing the organization a “good place to work”(Lloyd, 2002 cited in Berthon, Ewing, Hah, 2005, p. 15; Sullivan, 2004 cited in Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p.501). Many firms have developed formal employer branding or are interested in developing such a program (Conference Board, 2001 in Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 501).

Employer branding, or employer brand management, involves internally and externally promoting a clear view of what makes a firm different and desirable as an employer (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 502; Cable & Turban, 2001 cited in Lievens, F. 2007, p. 51). Employer branding is essentially a three step process. First, a firm develops a concept of the particular value it offers to prospective and current employees. This value proposition provides the central message that is conveyed by the employer brand. It is of key importance that this value proposition derives from a thorough audit of the characteristics that make firm a great place to work. Once the value proposition determined, the second step in employer branding consists of externally marketing this value proposition to attract the targeted applicant population. The third step of employer branding involves carrying the brand “promise” made to recruits into the firm and incorporating it as part of the organizational culture. In other words, this last step consists of internally marketing the employer brand (Lievens, 2007, p. 52).

Employer brands are developed to be consistent with the firm’s product and corporate brand, but there are also two key differences. One, the employer brand is employment specific, characterizing the firm’s identity as an employer. Two, it is directed at both internal and external audiences whereas product and corporate branding efforts are primarily directed an external audience. In some cases, the employer branding process can be rolled together with the product and corporate brand campaign (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 503).

External marketing of the employer brand establishes the firm as an employer of choice and thereby enables it to attract the best possible workers. The assumption is that the distinctiveness of the brand allows the firm to acquire distinctive human capital. Further, once recruits have been attracted by the brand, they develop a set of assumptions about employment with the firm that they will carry into the firm, thereby supporting the firm’s values and enhancing their commitment to the firm (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, p. 503).

Employer attractiveness is defined as the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization. It constitutes an important concept in knowledge-intensive contexts where attracting employees with superior skills and knowledge comprises a primary source of competitive advantage. The more attractive an employer is perceived to be by potential employees, the stronger that particular organization’s employer brand equity (Berthon, Ewing, Hah, 2005, p. 156).

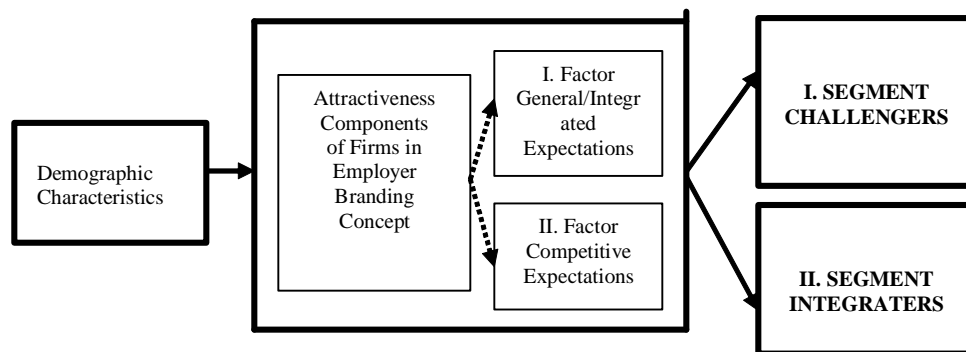
3. METHODOLOGY

Over the past few years, the concept of employment branding has entered in the lexicon of HR specialists and particularly consultants (Martin, *et all.* 2004, p.78). Employer and employee

branding is an important activity that a modern HR department should focus for the organization to be competitive and help to ensure that HR function becomes more of a strategic force in a company's business activities (Edwards, 2005, p. 266). Employer branding focuses on how the company is seen by current and potential employees with the aim of "winning the war on talent" (Ulrich, 1997, p. 110). This has important implications for how HR departments recruit and retain staff (Edwards, 2005, p. 266). An employer brand has been defined as the "company's image as seen through the eyes of its associates and potential hires" and is intimately linked to the "employment experience" of "what it is like to work at a company, including tangibles such as salary and intangibles such as company's culture and values" (Ruch, 2002, p. 3). Although employer branding has become a popular topic in the HR practitioner literature, empirical research is still relatively scarce. A first group of studies focused on the first step in "employer branding". Generally, these studies documented the importance of carefully determining and auditing the factors that make firms attractive employers.

This particular study focused on the first step of employer branding concept, which is also called "employer attractiveness" phase. In this study the components of employer attractiveness examined from the perspective of potential employees. Throughout this study, the potential employees segments that are related to the attractiveness components and their demographic characteristics are also examined. The variables of this descriptive study, as shown in Figure 1, are demographic characteristics, attractiveness components of firms in employer branding concept and the clusters that were drawn from potential employees' expectations.

Figure 1: Research Model



3.2. Hypotheses and Limitations of the Study

The related hypotheses of the study are as follows:

- H1: Potential employees' expectations in employer attractiveness are categorized under various dimensions.
- H2: Potential employees are clustered differently in relation to their employer attractiveness dimensions' expectations.
- H3: Potential employees who are clustered in different segments in relation to their employer attractiveness dimensions have different demographic characteristics.

This study was carried out among 516 respondents only in Istanbul University, Faculty of Business Administration since there have been such limitations as the cost of time and budget.

3.3. Population of the Study

The population consists of 516 respondents who are final year undergraduate students of Business Administration Faculty of Istanbul University. The questionnaires were distributed during the final exam period and answered by the students who are taking the exams, therefore 475 questionnaires were collected. The final year students in our population, would be in a three to six months in the labor market, so they are the prime candidates of the employer branding activities.

3.4. Data Collection Technique

The research illustrated in this paper investigates the components of the employer attractiveness and identifying the characteristics of the the potential employees. To this end, an instrument containing employer attractiveness items were developed. These items were generated from Melin's master thesis (2005, p. 61), and from the literature reviews. This particular questionnaire consists of two sections. The first section of the questionnaire contains items related employer attractiveness scale and the second section of the questionnaire is composed of items about demographic characteristics such as gender and age and other socio-cultural variables. Reliability analysis show 0,978 Cronbach Alpha for the scale. The responses to attractiveness components of firms in employer branding concept scale were given on a five point Likert type of scale, anchored on 1 = strongly disagree, through 5 = strongly agree.

3.5. Statistical Analyses

The data was analyzed using SPSS for Windows 15.0 statistical package. The first analysis focused on descriptive statistics and instrumental reliability, then the structure of the model was considered. Factor analysis was used for determining the components of potential employees' expectations in employer attractiveness. Potential employee segments in relation to their expectations about employer attractiveness dimensions were determined by k- means cluster analysis. In order to examine demographic differences (age, gender, socio- cultural variables) between potential employee segments, chi-square analyses were also performed.

4. THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

4.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents show the frequency of gender and age. The majority of the sample group consists of male respondents. The dominant age group is between 22 and 23 (Table 1).

4.2. The Findings of the Related Hypotheses

As a result of factor analysis to examine potential employees' expectations regarding employer attractiveness variables, it was found that attractiveness expectation variables were

Table 1
Population Characteristics

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Female	208	43,8
Male	256	53,9
Total	464	97,7
Missing system	11	2,3
Total	475	100
<i>Age</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
20	5	1,1
21	36	7,6
22	178	37,5
23	162	34,1
24	54	11,4
25	14	2,9
26	6	1,3
27	5	1,1
28	2	,4
29	1	,2
Total	463	97,5
Missing system	12	2,5
Total	475	100

grouped under two groups. From the rotated factor matrix in Table 2 it can be seen that items 1-25 load on Factor 1; items 26-28 load on Factor 2.

Factor 1, labelled “Integrated employer branding” assesses the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer that provides many integrating alternatives in working environment. The variables related to the first factor which is titled as integrated employer branding factor are as follows: Possibilities for advancement/promotion, tasks that mean bigger challenges, a good reference for your future carrier, ynnovative solutions, strong clear company culture, good ethic, good leadership/management, market success, internal further education, inspiring colleques, dynamic organisation, balance between private life and carrier, environmental friendly policy, international carrier opportunities, good reputation and highly thought of, safe employment, project based work, continuous reconnection and follow-up of your work, varying work, attractively geographically situated, employees with varying background, only recruiting the best, few hours overtime, exciting products and/or services, flexible working hours.

Factor 2, labelled “competitiveness”, assesses the extent to which an individual is attracted to an employer that provides competitive work environment that provides competitive working environment, competitive compensation package and possibilities to work from home. Accordingly, “ H1: Potential employees’ expectations in employer attractiveness are categorized under various dimensions.” is accepted.

Table 2
Rotated Component Matrix(a)

	<i>Component Integrated Employer Branding</i>	<i>Competitiveness</i>
Possibilities for advancement/promotion	,869	,269
Tasks that mean bigger challenges	,859	,248
A good reference for your future carrier	,854	,217
Innovative solutions	,843	,316
Strong clear company culture	,834	,314
Good ethic	,832	,268
Good leadership/management	,832	,275
Market success	,826	,336
Internal further education	,823	,337
Inspiring colleques	,817	,285
Dynamic organisation	,816	,317
Balance between private life and carrier	,816	,269
Environmental friendly policy	,788	,316
International carrier opportunities	,780	,356
Good reputation and highly thought of	,780	,339
Safe employment	,759	,229
Project based work	,745	,347
Continuous reconnection and follow-up of your work	,732	,355
Varying work	,704	,374
Attractively geographically situated	,701	,422
Employees with varying background	,700	,409
Only recruiting the best	,673	,420
Few hours overtime	,614	,337
Exciting products/services	,569	,461
Flexible working hours	,498	,412
Too competitive working environment	,125	,794
Competitive compensation	,262	,682
Possibilities to work from home	,236	,505

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Cumulative Variance %68,044 a Rotation converged in 3 iterations. Percentage of variance extracted by the two factors was % 68,0446

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy,.984

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Approx. Chi-Square 10665,351

df: 378

Sig: ,000

For testing the second hypothesis of the study, “H2: Potential employees are clustered differently in relation to their employer attractiveness dimensions’ expectations”, a k-means cluster analysis was performed. To eliminate systematic error for determining cluster numbers in k-means method, several attempts has been made in relation to k numbers and finally it was decided to select the k number as two. With the use of the selected k number, the appropriate findings for interpreting the data as well as for clustering have been achieved. As shown in Table 3, from a total of 475 respondents, 207 of them were placed in the first cluster, and 177 in the second. In table 3, F values in the content of cluster analysis, significance levels and final cluster centers can also be seen. The variables that were involved in cluster analysis were

evaluated at $\alpha = 0,005$. According to the results of the analysis, each cluster represents significant differences from statistical point of view.

As final cluster centers are interpreted in Table 3, respondents in the first cluster reach the highest value for the second factor titled as competitiveness factor while their lowest score is in the first factor titled as integrated employer branding factor. Therefore, the name “challengers” was given to the first cluster.

The respondents in the second cluster are the lowest in the competitiveness factor. They reach the highest value for integrated employer branding factor. The name “integrators” was given to the second cluster according to their expectation factor.

Table 3
Final Cluster Centers, Number of Cases in Each Cluster and ANOVA

<i>Anova</i>			<i>Cluster Analysis</i>	
			<i>Final Cluster Centers</i>	
Sig.	F	Components	1 Cluster	2 Cluster
			Challengers	Integrators
,000	151,383	“Integrated Employer Branding”	-,49199	,57538
,000	222,530	“Competitiveness”	,56030	-,65527
Number of Cases in each Cluster			1 Segment	2 Segment
Valid: 384	Missing: 91		207	177

By examining all of these findings, the respondents in the first cluster can be named as “challenger” ones while the second cluster can be titled as “integrators” Therefore, it can be concluded that “**H2**: Potential employees are clustered differently in relation to their employer attractiveness dimensions’ expectations.” is accepted.

In order to test are any differences between the “challengers” and “integrators” in relation to the demographic characteristics chi- square test was conducted.. Consequently, no significant difference was found between these two groups in terms of demographic characteristics such as age groups, income levels, class groups and programmes. However, gender is the only demographic variable that distinguishes the clusters of respondents. The first cluster that was called challengers mostly consists of males (Table 4). Eventhough integrator respondents in the second cluster are almost equally males and females, the number of females is slightly higher than males. Therefore, “**H3**: Potential employees who are clustered in different segments in relation to their employer attractiveness dimensions have different demographic characteristics” can only be accepted in the boundaries of gender.

Table 4
Demographic Characteristics of the Challengers and Integrators

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Challengers</i>	<i>Integrators</i>	<i>Total</i>
Female	80	87	167
Male	123	86	209
Total	203	173	376

Chi-Square Tests

Pearson Chi-Square: 4.479 df: 1 Sig.: 0.22

a 0 cells (,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 76.84

5. CONCLUSION

Finally, in this research there are two different dimensions of employer attractiveness, which have been named “integrated employer branding” and “competitiveness”. Potential employees were grouped in two clusters according to their expectation dimensions called “integrators” and “challengers”. The male dominant *first cluster* (challengers) of potential employees want to work in a competitive environment and with the competitive compensation conditions. The desire of working at home even though seems to be contradictory with being “challengers”, in reality is not. The companies who want to recruit “challengers” should pay attention to telecommuting arrangements. In telecommuting employees work at home usually with computers, and use phones & the internet to transmit letters, data (Dessler, 2005, p. 505). Thus, is a really customer- oriented approach. For employers, workplace flexibility can be a key strategic factor in attracting and retaining the most talented employees (Mondy, Noe and Premeaux, 2002, p. 373). In 2006, 44 per cent of Intel’s staff regularly worked from home (Koeppel, 2006, p. 3). In the long- term telecommuting arrangements can create competitive advantage for the company over its competitors.

The second cluster which seems to be distributed by gender equally, relatively more women respondents, paying attention to integrated employer branding. As mentioned earlier, the respondents in this cluster want to work in a non-competitive work environment, however in a more brand- oriented working place. The place that they want to work in should create a value for the potential applicants. In other words they want to see the relation between the communicated brand identity and employer brand identity.

6. FUTURE RESEARCH AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This study has various implications for HR professionals. HR professionals must pay attention to various needs of employees. Some of them want to see clear picture of the company. There should be a consistency between the brand image of the company and the reality. If not, the turnover will increase, the job satisfaction will decrease.

The old social contract of the employee being loyal to the company and the company taking care of the employee until retirement no longer holds. Employees are more responsible for managing their own careers. According to this study, potential employees are still want to see the advancement opportunities in the companies (Daft, 2007, p. 362). Though, companies in order to be attracted by the employees or to eliminate the negative perceptions of this new employment reality they should focus on advertising the internal culture.

Another implication for HR practitioners is, they should assess periodically their brand’ strength in labor market. Employer branding an integral activity will be to establish an image of the organization and communicate this in a number of different ways to either current or potential employees. So the corporations who want to attract integrators should identify organizational values, by clarifying the advantages and the benefits of work place. As well as conversations with the employees to clarify what the organization needs in terms of values, attributes and characteristics is needed. Once the corporate branding image or employer profile has been established an organization will then consistently use this in its communication to both current employees and in its advertising or recruitment material (Edwards, 2005, 273).

The intersection point between marketing and human resources management disciplines occurs throughout the employer branding process. So both managers should be careful of creating value proposition for its brand/brands and transfer it to employees and identifying potential employees' requirements and their characteristics. Finally they should keep track of what their competitors offer in other words, benchmarking.

For further research we have some suggestions to the academicians and practitioners who are interested in the employer branding concept. In this study final year students expectations regarding employer attractiveness are examined. In another research the longitudinal study of the perceptions of final- year students before and after entering the workforce would help in determining their perceptions of employer attractiveness.

As it is mentioned in the paper, this research has been conducted with the potential employees who are not part of the labor market yet. So this study was focused on the first step of employer branding. The third step of employer branding involves carrying the brand "promise" made to recruits into the firm. In other words, this last step consists of internally marketing the employer brand (Lievens, 2007, p. 52). Further studies concentrate on the current employees in the context of internal marketing.

Another related study could be the link between corporate social responsibility and branding activities. The studies show that new graduates are becoming increasingly concerned about a company's values and how socially responsible they are when considering where to work (Edwards, 2005, p. 268; Backhaus, Stone, Heiner, 2002, pp. 292-318).

Finally, several authors highlight the importance employer branding in the context of human resource management and marketing. The aim of the scholars and practitioners should be finding the integration points of these two disciplines in companies. Further studies should emphasize, how HR and marketing managers would work together to become "best place to work in".

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