



© 2024 Szkudlarek. This is an open access article licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>).

Journal of Intercultural
Management

Vol. **16** | No. **2** | **2024**

pp. **97–114**

DOI **DOI 10.2478/joim-2024-0008**

Ewa Szkudlarek

Faculty of Management and Safety Sciences

University of Social Sciences, Poland

eszkudlarek@san.edu.pl

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-9893-6581

Exploring the Role of Employer Branding in Promoting Diversity Management: A Study on IT Companies in Poland

ABSTRACT

Objective: The main goal of this research paper is to investigate the role of employer branding in endorsing diversity management among IT companies in Poland.

Methodology: Using a combination of research methods such as a critical review of literature and secondary data analysis, the author investigated the interconnection between employer branding and its influence on policies and practices related to diversity management.

Findings: The research shows a strong link between employer branding and diversity and inclusion management. However, the study found that awareness and engagement level among employees from the Polish IT industry toward diversity management initiatives are relatively low.

Value Added: The research findings provide critical insight into the increasingly essential area of diversity management, underlining the strategic importance of an effective employer brand within the IT industry.

Recommendations: Research results suggest a need for improved communication strategies to help employees understand the importance and benefits of workplace diversity. When correctly implemented, employer branding can promote diversity and inclusion, contributing to the company's overall success. Future research is suggested to further understand the relationship between employer branding and diversity management in various sectors and countries.

Key words: diversity management, employer branding, IT companies, employer brand, corporate identity

JEL codes: J24, L86

Introduction

The IT sector stands in a unique position in both globalization and technological advancements, which implies special needs for implementing the diversity management and employer branding strategies. Researchers show significant interest in the topic of diversity management within the IT industry (Yadav & Lenka, 2020). The main region of interest of this research paper – Poland – provides an excellent case study due to its rapidly evolving IT sector, which is grabbing attention on the global stage.

Both employer branding and diversity management became an increasingly pertinent areas of focus as companies enhance their efforts to attract and retain a diverse workforce, which brings along a wide array of benefits including varied perspectives, innovation, and wider talent pool. Moreover, researchers have highlighted that the strategic management of diversity supported by employer branding is a crucial component in establishing a competitive advantage (Jonsen et al., 2021; Kele & Cassel, 2023). According to Przytuła, workers are often in search of employment where their unique qualities are appreciated. They desire an environment that encourages their growth without threatening their self-identity (Przytuła, 2020). However, even with a plethora of theoretical research, diversity management is often perceived more as a tool for enhancing a company's reputation than an essential component of its strategic planning. Some of the organizations make a clear and deliberate effort toward an innovative strategy for managing diversity. However, as the HR Research Institute's world-wide report for 2020, 'The State of Diversity & Inclusion 2020', shows, less than a quarter of businesses have employed advanced strategies involving diversity management (HR Research Institute, 2020).

This paper aims to scrutinize the interconnection between employer branding and its influence on policies and practices related to diversity management. The research is expected to provide valuable insights into the current state of affairs regarding employer branding, diversity, and inclusion in Polish IT companies and potentially provide useful implications for HR management and organizational behavior.

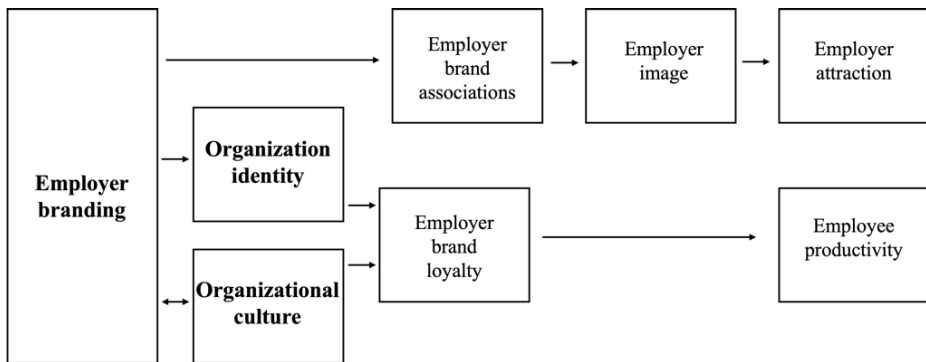
Enhancing Diversity through Employer Branding

In-depth analysis shows that employer branding is not only an identifier but also an attractor and retainer of diverse talents. Well-designed employer branding strategies have the potential to illustrate an organization's diversity and inclusion climate, subsequently attracting individuals who value these aspects. Building an employer brand that celebrates diversity could portray a company as an inclusive environment where all employees feel valued.

Many researchers already at the level of defining the concept of employer branding emphasize its relational and identity aspects. Rosethorn defines EB as a bilateral contract between an organization and its members – the reason why people decide to become members of the organization and stay there (Rosethorn, 2009). Aggerholm et al. point out that employer branding is “(...) communication, relational and interdisciplinary processes that create, negotiate and implement lasting employer-employee relationships, i.e. long-term relationships between the organization and its current and potential employees” (Aggerholm et al., 2011). The aspect of identity as an integral part of the employer branding strategy is also highlighted by Gillis (2006). Debarliev et al. indicate that the employer branding is a comprehensive process, requiring interdepartmental involvement and a holistic approach. They also draw attention to the fact that the strategic perception of EB increases employee engagement and their emotional connection with the employer's brand (Debarliev et al., 2019). Such an approach provides space for effective promotion of diversity in organizations and encourages a wide range of employees to engage in activities related to diversity management. Mölk and Auer, in their research on the essence of employer branding, confirm that building an employer brand constitutes a functional management process, which is deeply embedded in the organizational policy of a given enterprise (Mölk & Auer, 2018). In this context, consistent actions in many interdisciplinary areas of the organization's functioning are important, especially adapting managerial practices to the assumptions of the employer's brand, which should include diversity and inclusion. Figure 1 presents a model approach to employer branding by Backhaus and

Tikoo, which derives from the company's organizational culture and shapes its identity (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Figure 1. Employer branding model by Backhaus and Tikoo



Source: Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, pp. 501–517.

In the model proposed by the researchers, the primary emphasis has been placed on the significant impact that a strategic approach to employer branding can potentially have. The anticipated outcome of applying such a strategy includes two key results: enhancing the overall attractiveness of the employer in the eyes of current and prospective employees, and boosting the productivity levels of the existing workforce, thereby making a positive impact on the organization's bottom line. At the heart of this conceptual model are pivotal ideas of an organization's identity and culture. This identity is influenced by the employer branding. In essence, how an organization is perceived as an employer, its reputation, and the unique value proposition it offers to its employees, collectively contribute to shaping its organizational identity. Furthermore, the model underscores the role of EB in forming and influencing this identity. Simultaneously, organizational culture also impacts the employer brand. This culture encapsulates the shared values, beliefs, and practices within an organization. It drives the way the organization operates and behaves, and can significantly impact the manner in which employer branding efforts are perceived, interpreted, and responded to by both

employees and potential candidates. The two critical areas of organizational identity and culture present a unique, synergistic landscape for implementing diversity management initiatives.

Harnessing Diversity for IT Innovation

The fusion of diverse minds leading to innovation is a crucial aspect in the IT industry. Notably, diversity and inclusion provide companies with a competitive edge, attracting different talents, fostering creativity, and promoting organizational growth (Tajeddini et al., 2023). A diverse workforce portrays a positive employer brand, which, in turn, attracts a diverse talent pool.

According to Kandola and Fullerton, effective management of diversity requires acknowledging that different visible and invisible traits distinguish the workforce. These attributes encompass factors such as gender, age, heritage, race, disability, personality, and working style. The researchers advocate for an approach that harnesses these differences, resulting in an environment that boosts efficiency where every individual feels valued, and talents are maximized in the pursuit of organizational goals (Kandola & Fullerton, 1998). In a similar vein, Torrington et al. view diversity management in the context of actions implemented for five socially recognized minority groups – women, ethnic and racial minorities, those living with disabilities, the elderly, and those of diverse sexual preferences (Torrington et al., 2022). Gross-Gołacka puts forth a holistic strategy for diversity management. The approach underlines the necessity of making the most of every talent present within an entity, steering clear of ethnocentrism and stereotypes. These principles apply not only to the workforce but also to the enactment of policies that encourage diversity. Such policies are crucial in driving innovation and creativity, filling skills gaps, and enhancing customer service quality (Gross-Gołacka, 2018). Arredondo presents a comprehensive approach toward the planning and managing of diversity within the model. This expanded blueprint centers on deeper and more detailed involvement, focusing on six major areas that should be addressed and developed as part of any initiatives related to diversity (Arredondo, 1996):

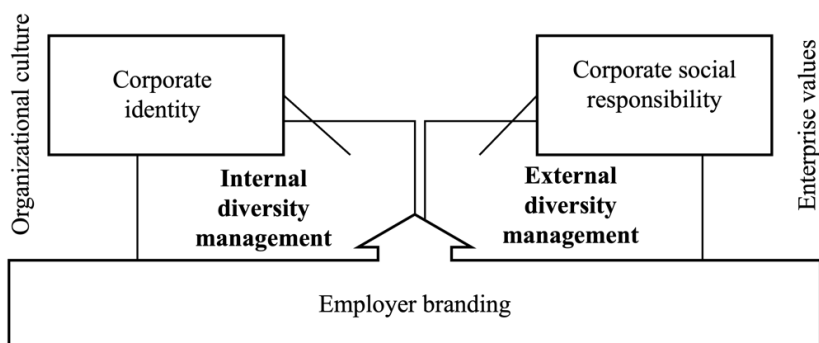
- Vision/goal setting – this involves crafting a mission statement, laying out concrete business objectives, designing strategic plans, and defining essential competencies. A well-defined vision can serve as a roadmap, guiding every step of the journey toward achieving diversity,
- Motivators – for policies to work, it is crucial to identify and understand what motivates individuals and organizations to strive for diversity. This can range from a desire to foster inclusivity within the organization to pressures from external bodies or societal expectations,
- Prioritizing strategies – this involves developing management, planning career paths, addressing work and family issues, and considering global marketing. These strategies must be prioritized according to their immediate relevance and impact on building company's diversity,
- Data gathering – the model emphasizes the importance of gathering both external and internal insights. By collecting and analyzing data, decision makers can better understand the challenges and opportunities facing their organization. This step enables a more informed and data-driven approach to managing diversity.
- Recognizing the progress – it is essential to acknowledge and reward steps taken toward diversity, whether through awards, career promotions, or becoming the employer of choice. Recognizing progress not only validates the efforts made but also serves as a motivator for continued commitment to embracing diversity.
- Assessing progress – this involves measuring the impact of diversity initiatives on changing individual behavior and on the communication and institutionalization of diversity within the organization. Regular assessments can provide valuable insights into how well the initiatives are working and can inform adjustments to strategies as needed.

Arredondo's comprehensive model provides a multifaceted approach to planning and managing diversity. By focusing on vision setting, motivators, priority strategies, data gathering, progress recognition, and progress assessment, it offers a robust framework for promoting and maintaining diversity within organizations.

Integrating Diversity with Employer Branding

Diversity management requires both a holistic and strategic approach, closely aligned with the general organization's strategy as well as strategies used for managing an employer's reputation and brand. This relationship is highlighted in the work of Matuska and Sałek-Imińska, presented in Figure 2. Researchers emphasize the connection between diversity management and employer branding, particularly in the context of an organization's identity and values (Matuska & Sałek-Imińska, 2014). The organization's principles, which are centered on diversity, should also be mirrored within the employer branding strategy. The objective of these joint efforts is to foster appropriate employee-organizational relationships, taking full advantage of the company's potential and creating a competitive edge (Edwards & Kelan, 2011). Activities for managing diversity and image should be in sync with the company's organizational culture and exhibited principles.

Figure 2. Mutual relationships between employer image management and diversity management



Source: Own study based on Matuska and Sałek-Imińska, 2014, pp. 72–87.

The connection between managing diversity and employer branding is also discussed by Edwards and Kelan (2011). They argue that complete employer branding strategies, which incorporate diversity management initiatives, can effectively communicate with all employees and various target segments in a company. As a consequence of this approach, the company can successfully build its image among stakeholders. Kele and Cassell indicate an important aspect,

emphasizing that in building cohesion between employer branding and diversity management programs, the focus should be on developing organizational social justice, where diversity becomes an element of the organizational culture, rather than just a strategy to attract the best employees or to fulfil legal compliance requirements (Kele & Cassell, 2023). Furthermore, it poses an issue when diversity branding strategies, meant to foster an air of fairness and inclusivity within organizational culture, neglect to address social justice issues. Such instances may inadvertently hide organizational prejudice and adversarial behavior that negatively impact marginalized communities (Burgess et al., 2021). Researchers point to the key role of corporate values established in the company as drivers for employer branding strategy (Edwards & Kelan, 2011).

Materials & Methods

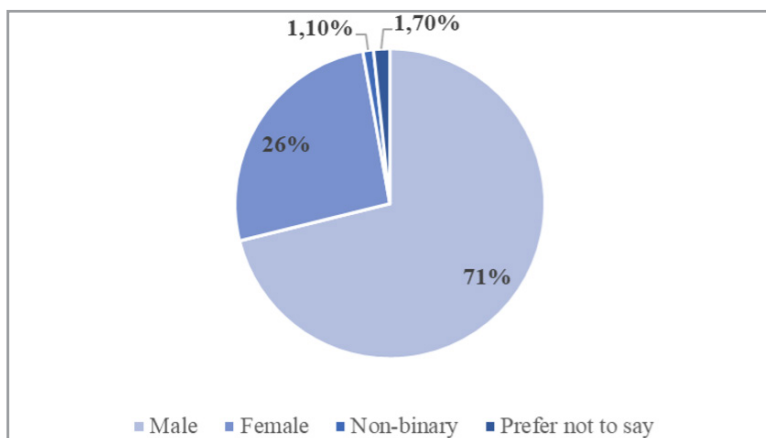
The main objective of the research was the analysis of the interconnection between employer branding and diversity management initiatives in IT companies in Poland. In order to achieve such a defined research goal, the following research methods were applied:

- A critical review of the literature on the subject of employer branding and diversity management,
- Secondary data analysis based on Diversity in Polish IT Report 2023.

Bulldogjob, one of the largest platforms in Poland that brings together IT communities and fosters their growth, conducted a comprehensive diversity report on the Polish IT industry. The survey was administered from August 2, 2023, to August 31, 2023, among a group of 1325 IT employees, in a form of the Computer Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) method. This report provides insights into the level of awareness of diversity management initiatives among employees of the Polish IT industry.

The gender breakdown of the respondents is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3. The gender breakdown of the respondents

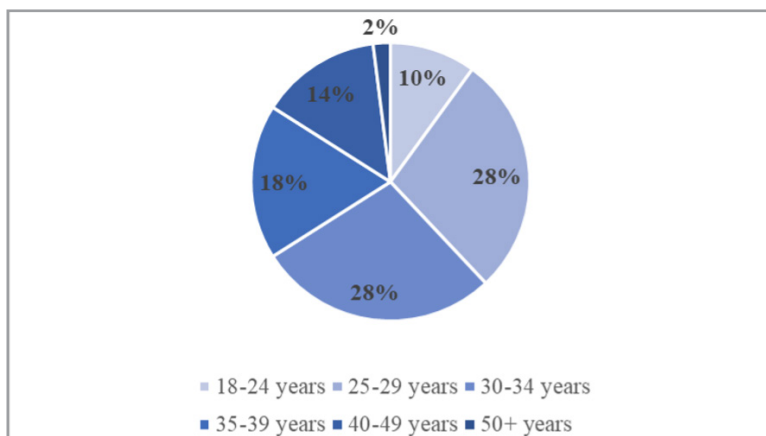


Source: Own study based on *Diversity in Polish IT Report 2023*, Bulldogjob, <https://bulldogjob.com/it-report/diversity#navbar>, access: 24.10.2023.

71% of the respondents were men and 26% were women. Such a gender distribution confirms the prevailing trend in the Polish IT industry, which indicates a low representation of women in this sector.

The age distribution of respondents is presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4. The age distribution of the respondents

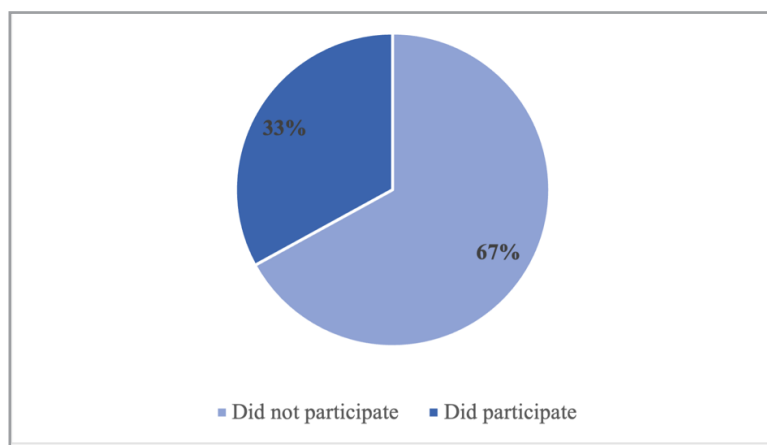


Source: Own study based on *Diversity in Polish IT Report 2023*, Bulldogjob, <https://bulldogjob.com/it-report/diversity#navbar>, access: 24.10.2023.

Employees in the Polish IT industry are relatively young – 56% are aged between 25-34 years old. When looking at the demographic distribution in terms of gender and age, it becomes apparent that there are significant disparities present. These inequalities suggest that there is substantial room for enhancement and greater focus on diversity strategies in the sector. Thus, intensifying the efforts toward implementing robust diversity management initiatives should be considered a priority. Such proactive actions will not only help in addressing the existing gender and age disparities but will also contribute to harnessing the potential benefits of a diverse workforce in many other dimensions.

Figure 5 presents the responses of respondents to the question: Have you participated in a diversity and inclusion program(s)?

Figure 5. Distribution of answers on the question: have you taken part in diversity and inclusion program(s)?



Source: Own study based on *Diversity in Polish IT Report 2023*, Bulldogjob, <https://bulldogjob.com/it-report/diversity#navbar>, access: 24.10.2023.

Data from the report indicate that as many as 67% of employees did not participate in any diversity and inclusion activities.

Table 1 presents the distribution of answers to the question: Does the company you work for carry out a diversity and inclusion program(s)? The answers are divided by the size of the companies that the respondents work for.

Table 1. Distribution of answers on the question: does the company you work for carry out a diversity and inclusion program(s)?

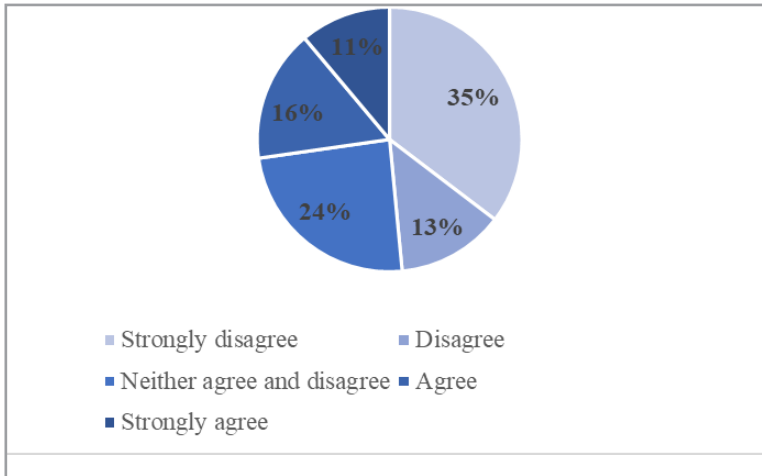
Company size	Don't know (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)
Up to 9 employees	14	9	77
10–49 employees	19	8	73
50–249 employees	25	18	57
250–999 employees	36	30	34
1000–10 000 employees	32	50	18
More than 10 000 employees	22	72	6

Source: Own study based on *Diversity in Polish IT Report 2023*, Bulldogjob, <https://bulldogjob.com/it-report/diversity#navbar>, access: 24.10.2023.

However, it should be emphasized that according to the data presented in the report, the larger the company, the more knowledge the employees have about diversity and inclusion programs. 72% of employees from companies with over 10,000 employees confirmed that such programs are implemented in their companies. As for the smallest companies (up to 9 employees), 77% of them indicated that similar activities are not conducted in their companies.

Figure 6 presents the distribution of responses to the statement: Initiatives related to diversity and inclusion are needed in my company.

Figure 6. Distribution of answers on the statement: initiatives related to diversity and inclusion are needed in my company

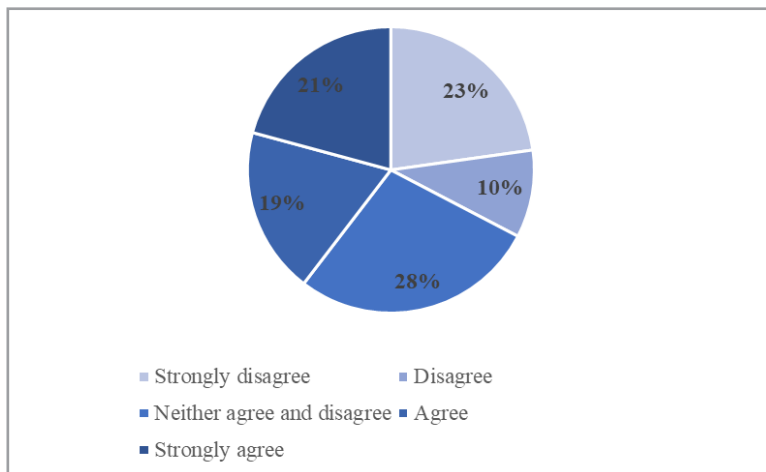


Source: Own study based on *Diversity in Polish IT Report 2023*, Bulldogjob, <https://bulldogjob.com/it-report/diversity#navbar>, access: 24.10.2023.

An intriguing finding in the survey was that a significant proportion of respondents, specifically 48%, highlighted that, in the context of their companies, there is no perceivable necessity to implement diversity management initiatives. It suggests that their firms are either sufficiently diverse, or that diversity, in their specific circumstances, is not perceived as an important element of the company's strategy.

Figure 7 presents the distribution of responses to the statement: diversity in the team affects the company's results.

Figure 7. Distribution of answers on the statement: diversity in the team impacts the company's results



Source: Own study based on *Diversity in Polish IT Report 2023*, Bulldogjob, <https://bulldogjob.com/it-report/diversity#navbar>, access: 24.10.2023.

However, providing another perspective on the matter, it was noted that a considerable proportion, precisely 40%, of those who responded to the survey acknowledged the importance of diversity within a team. It may lead to the conclusion that they firmly believe that a diverse team composition directly influences and contributes to the overall performance and results of the company.

Results

The conducted literature analysis in the field of employer branding and diversity management revealed substantial evidence to suggest a strong correlation between employer branding and diversity and inclusion. As demonstrated by the analysis of theoretical models, employer branding strategies that highlight an organization's commitment to diversity significantly influenced the perceptions of potential employees and the existing workforce, stimulating a sense of belonging and inclusion.

On the other hand, an analysis of the data available in the Diversity in Polish IT Report 2023, revealed that the level of awareness among employees regarding diversity management initiatives remains significantly low. This low level of awareness is coupled with a lack of employee engagement in these kind of initiatives. In other words, employees are not only unaware of the strategies and activities that are part of the company's diversity management program, but they are also not actively participating or showing interest in them. These findings underscore the need for urgent and robust communication strategies designed to enhance employees' understanding of the importance and benefits of diversity in the workplace, as well as strategies aimed at motivating them to actively participate in related initiatives. Ensuring that employees are fully engaged in diversity management initiatives is crucial, as it not only directly contributes to the creation of an inclusive and harmonious workplace environment but also performs a key role in the company's overall performance and success.

To drive diversity and inclusion, companies should proactively position their employer brand to reflect values of equality, inclusivity, and respect. Leveraging employer branding strategies to communicate a company's commitment to diversity and inclusion can have a significant impact on the company's overall success.

Final Remarks

In conclusion, this research paper provides compelling evidence that there is a significant relationship between employer branding and diversity and inclusion from a theoretical perspective. It highlights the crucial role that employer branding has in promoting workplace diversity and fostering an inclusive environment. However, the study also identifies a gap in practical implementation, indicating a lack of sufficient awareness and employee engagement regarding these concepts in many organizations.

Employer branding, when effectively leveraged, can serve as a powerful tool to attract and retain a diverse workforce, thereby creating a more inclusive and dynamic work environment. This is particularly important in the IT industry,

where businesses are increasingly recognizing the value of diversity and inclusion in driving innovation, enhancing performance, and achieving sustainable growth.

The findings of this paper underscore the need for organizations to not only develop strong employer branding strategies that emphasize diversity and inclusion but also to ensure that these strategies are effectively communicated and embraced by all employees. This involves ongoing education, training, and engagement initiatives to foster a culture of inclusivity and to raise awareness about the benefits of a diverse workplace.

In summary, the relationship between employer branding and diversity and inclusion is well-established in theory, but there is a clear need for increased practical application and employee engagement to fully realize the potential benefits. By prioritizing these elements, organizations can enhance their competitive edge, drive business success, and contribute to a more equitable and inclusive working environments.

Further research is encouraged to illuminate the detailed dynamics of the relation between employer branding and diversity management across different sectors and countries.

References

- Aggerholm, H., Andersen, S. E., & Thomsen, C. (2011).** Conceptualizing employer branding in sustainable organizations. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 16(2), 105–123.
- Arredondo, P. (1996).** *Successful diversity management initiatives: A blueprint for planning and implementation*. Boston: Sage.
- Backhaus, K., & Tikoo, S. (2004).** Conceptualizing and researching employer branding. *Career Development International*, 9(5), 501–517.
- Bulldogjob (2023).** *Diversity in Polish IT Report 2023*. <https://bulldogjob.com/it-report/diversity#navbar>. Access: 24.10.2023.
- Burgess, A. J., Wilkie, D. C., & Dolan, R. (2021).** Towards successful diversity initiatives: the importance of building audience connectedness. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 37(1–2), 144–161.
- Debarliev, S., Brzovska, E., & Janeska-Iliev, A. (2019).** HR branding and the potential value: empirical evidence and practical implications. *Dynamic Relationships Management Journal*, 8(1), 41–53.
- Edwards, M. R., & Kelan, E. K. (2011).** Employer branding and diversity: foes or friends. In Brannan, M. J., Parsons, E., & Priola, V. (Eds.), *Branded lives: The production and consumption of meaning at work*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Gillis, T. L. (2006).** *The IABC Handbook of Organizational Communication: A Guide to Internal Communication. Public Relation, Marketing, and Leadership*. San Francisco: Wiley Default.
- Gross-Gołacka, E. (2018).** *Zarządzanie różnorodnością w kierunku zróżnicowanych zasobów ludzkich w organizacji*. Warszawa: Difin.
- HR Research Institute (2020).** *The State of Diversity & Inclusion 2020*.
- Jonsen, K., Point, S., Kelan, E. K., & Griebble, A. (2021).** Diversity and inclusion branding: a five-country comparison of corporate websites. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 32(3), 616–649.
- Kandola, R. S., & Fullerton, J. (1998).** *Diversity in action: Managing the mosaic*. London: CIPD Publishing.
- Kele, J. E., & Cassell, C. M. (2023).** The face of the firm: the impact of employer branding on diversity. *British Journal of Management*, 34(2), 692–708.

- Matuska, E., & Sałek-Imińska, A. (2014).** Diversity management as employer branding strategy – Theory and practice. *Human Resources Management & Ergonomics*, 8(2), 72–87.
- Mölk, A., & Auer, M. (2018).** Designing brands and managing organizational politics: A qualitative case study of employer brand creation. *European Management Journal*, 36(4), 1–12.
- Przytuła, S. (2020).** Zarządzanie różnorodnością a organizacja włączająca. In *Odwaga i równowaga, czyli Work-life balance po polsku* (pp. 8–19). Warszawa: Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu.
- Rosethorn, H. (2009).** *The Employer Brand. Keeping Faith with the Deal*. Farnham and Burlington: Gower Publishing Limited.
- Tajeddini, K., Budur, T., Gamage, T. C., Demir, A., Zaim, H., & Topal, R. (2023).** Impact of diversity management on innovative work behavior: mediating role of human resource management and affective commitment. *Journal of Management Development*, 42(1), 29–53.
- Torrington, D., Hall, L., & Taylor, S. (2002).** *Human Resource Management*. London: Pearson Education Limited.
- Yadav, S., & Lenka, U. (2020).** Diversity management: a systematic review. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 39(8), 901–929.