

## **Green employer branding and company attractiveness for customers in the digital age**

### **Zeleno brendiranje poslodavaca i atraktivnost kompanije za kupce u digitalnom dobu**

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**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to determine the impact of green employer branding on a company's attraction to customers in the digital age. Customers in the digital age have high demands and expectations from businesses, particularly in terms of sustainability and environmentally friendly behaviour. Companies must develop and maintain the concept of green employer brand in order to attract customers who are well informed in the digital age as a result of advancements and widespread use of modern information technologies and tools. Green employer branding encompasses an organization's positive attitude toward environmental protection. It is a collection of various practices and policies concerning the sustainable use of natural resources and energy, waste management, and pollution prevention, which improves the company's image and reputation, increases its attractiveness in the customer's view, and influences their decision to purchase a product or use a service. Companies can gain and maintain a long-term competitive advantage in this manner, while also respecting the environment and the principles of sustainable business.

**Keywords:** green employer brand, sustainability, eco-friendly behaviour, consumer behaviour.

**Sažetak:** Cilj ovog rada je da ukaže kako u digitalnom dobu izgradnja brenda zelenog poslodavca utiče na atraktivnost kompanija za kupce. U digitalnom dobu, kupci imaju visoke zahteve i očekivanja od kompanija, posebno u pogledu održivosti i zaštite životne sredine. Kompanije moraju da izgrade i neguju brend zelenog poslodavca kako bi postale atraktivne u očima kupaca koji su sve informisaniji u digitalnom dobu zahvaljujući razvoju i masovnoj primeni modernih informacionih tehnologija i alata. Brend zelenog poslodavca obuhvata pozitivnu orijentisanost organizacija ka zaštiti životne sredine i okruženja. To je skup različitih praksi i politika koje se odnose na održivu upotrebu prirodnih resursa i energije, upravljanje otpadom i sprečavanje zagađenja, što posledično donosi poboljšanje imidža i ugleda kompanije, povećava stepen njene privlačnosti u očima kupaca i utiče na njihovu odluku o kupovini proizvoda ili korišćenju usluga. Na taj način kompanije mogu da steknu i izgrade konkurentsku prednost u dugom roku, uvažavajući životnu sredinu i principe održivog poslovanja.

**Ključne reči:** zeleno brendiranje poslodavaca, održivost, očuvanje životne sredine, ponašanje potrošača.

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## INTRODUCTION

The number of temperature, weather, and water extremes caused by climate change is a global indicator of environmental problems (Bernard & Smith, 2021). Desertification, deforestation, pollution, and loss of biodiversity are all major environmental issues (Dombey, 2021; Kinver, 2021). The data from Statista showed that global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in 2020 reached 38.81 Gt CO<sub>2</sub>, while the average CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per capita worldwide was 4.47 mt (Statista, 2022). Furthermore, the data from Climate Trace showed that half of the 50 largest sources of emissions are oil and gas production fields (Climate Trace, 2022). Various studies have shown that humans and their activities are responsible for a substantial portion of climate change (The Economist, 2021). People can exert significant influence on corporations in a variety of ways, including as consumers of goods and services, members of organizations and communities, citizens who participate in social movements, and owners of assets and investments (Capstick et al., 2020). Managers have understood over the last few decades that operating business in a highly competitive global economy necessitates not only efficiency and effectiveness, but also environmental responsibility. As a result, the process of "greening organizations" got underway. This means that many organizations have implemented various green manufacturing techniques such as Kaizen, Six-sigma, and Lean-Manufacturing in order to reduce inefficient resource usage, hazardous gas emissions, and waste materials. Greening organizations has developed over time to include green marketing, green supply chain, green accounting, green innovation, green information technology, and green human resource management (Lukić Nikolić, 2021). As a management philosophy, green behavior promotes organizations to implement sustainable and ecological solutions, which leads to an increase in their overall economic results (Dimić et al., 2023). Organizations are increasingly attempting to represent themselves as environmentally responsible and to develop a green employer brand in order to recruit the top candidates from the labor market who are equally concerned about environmental protection. Simultaneously, organizations are devoting major resources to better understanding their customers in the digital age, as well as their preferences for environmental preservation and usage of green products and services.

An employer brand can be described in a variety of ways. An employer's brand, according to some definitions, is a promise, that is, a combination of features and qualities that make an organization identifiable in the market and guarantee employees

a great work experience. Other definitions focus on the employer's brand as a desired image and reputation, where the brand is the organization's image as an outstanding place to work for current employees and key stakeholders, including customers. Similarly, there are definitions of the employer brand as a set of thoughts and feelings that connect employees with the employer and pertain to positive and negative, truthful and false thoughts and feelings. Every employer, according to this set of definitions, has an employer brand that is established by people's perceptions. In this way, the employer brand can be viewed as a collection of practical, economic, and psychological benefits supplied to employees (Mosley, 2014). Employer brand is defined by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) as the method organizations differentiate themselves in the labor market in order to attract talent - the appropriate human resources. A strong employer brand enables organizations to compete for top human resources while also establishing respectable reputation (CIPD, 2018).

Focus on quality and customer service, attention to detail, courage, striving to be the best, innovation, treating others with respect, celebrating triumphs, enthusiasm and fun at work are a few examples of these characteristics (Mosley, 2014). A green employer brand is the best indicator of an organization's attractiveness for potential employees (Stringer, 2009; Renwick et al., 2013), so during the recruitment process it can attract candidates committed to improving environmental management (Tang et al., 2018). The battle for talent becomes even more pronounced when it is necessary to attract the best candidates from the labour market who practice socially responsible and eco-friendly behaviour. Therefore, the employer's socially responsible behaviour is positioned as an important factor when making a candidate's decision whether to apply for an advertised position. Socially responsible behaviour is especially important for members of generation Z, which is characterized by a strong desire to leave their stamp and mark on society. Research has pointed to certain attitudes and thoughts of Generation Z about environmental protection, according to which most believe that all should care about the environment and climate change (Semiller & Grace 2019) and are engaged in a variety of ecological issues (Macalik & Sulich, 2019). Therefore, the green employer brand is often used as a technique to attract candidates who have high environmental values and standards (Shah, 2019), as such organizations emphasize their environmental activities during the recruitment process (App et al., 2012).

The marketing concept by which products that do not contain harmful substances and do not harm nature are placed on the market is known as green marketing. In addition to green marketing, environmental marketing is a new development trend in the marketing discipline. Within that trend, strategic and potential opportunities are opening up for customers and business consumers in the current macro and micro environment, which is characterized by green consumerism. Given that at the end of the 20th century the concept of green marketing experienced mass use by a large number of companies and individuals, we should be more careful with the concept of environmental marketing, because it implies more than the placement of products and services that are not harmful to the environment. This includes the method of production and delivery of the observed products, and the entire sustainable business of the company (Munir et al., 2020). The impact of a company's sustainable marketing on its image, that is, the image of the products it markets, can be of crucial importance at times when consumer behavior and consumption are directly stimulated by sustainability and environmental protection. As an external factor influencing consumer behavior, the impact of sustainability on consumer's consumption activities is easier to evaluate, and it is possible to define it more precisely. Cheng et al., in their research, confirmed that green marketing affects the company's green image and perceived green value, that green innovation and perceived value affect green image, and that green innovation, green image and green perceived value affect green consumer behavior intention (2022).

According to the authors Gelderman et al. (2021) the concepts of green consumer satisfaction and green consumer loyalty are presented in the work of two authors Chang and Fong in 2010. These concepts have proven useful in research on green consumer behavior. Green consumer loyalty refers to the consumer's desire to maintain a relationship with a company or brand that is driven by environmental or green concerns, as well as the consumer's commitment to repurchase preferred products on a regular basis in the future. In addition, the concept of green consumer satisfaction can be defined as the overall satisfactory fulfillment of consumer needs, goals or desires related to environmental or green concerns (Gelderman et al., 2021). As in the case of the concept of consumer satisfaction, within the concept of green satisfaction it is necessary for the company to equal or exceed the expectations of consumers on the green issues.

Obviously, satisfied consumers are more likely to buy more often than those who are not, and the identical result was confirmed by Gelderman et al., in their research on the impact of green satisfaction and green consumer loyalty (2021).

Increasingly, consumers show concern for the well-being of future generations in their behavior. In this light, the decisions they make when purchasing products and services are strongly influenced by the awareness of preserving the environment and leaving as little ecological footprint as possible. Trends in recent decades, environmental protection and green marketing, have led to an increase in consumer awareness of the problems our natural environment faces, and thus to a change in behavior before, during and after purchasing products and services. In order to be competitive on the market, modern products must almost necessarily contain elements of green concepts, in order to be positioned in the best possible manner in the eyes and consciousness of consumers. One of the results of the impact of environmental awareness and green marketing on consumer behavior is their increased insistence on the consumption of products that are adapted and tailored exclusively to their individual needs, but in a way that respects all green concepts and business principles (Amberg & Fogarassy, 2019). Green marketing techniques, such as environmental advertising, make it easier for consumers to understand and become aware of the features and characteristics of green products and therefore buy them to a greater extent (Tan et al., 2022). It has been shown that consumers are more likely to buy products with "green" packaging if they perform a cost-benefit analysis beforehand (Tan et al., 2022). The more consumers are aware of the impact of their consumption on the environment, the more significant is the impact of the green image of companies and green products on the consumer's purchasing decision.

The aim of this paper is to determine the impact of green employer branding on a company's attraction to customers in the digital age. The paper is structured as follows. The first part of the paper is devoted to green employer branding and its importance in the digital age. The second part of the paper is focused on customers' behavior in the digital age and their orientation towards green companies. The third part of the paper is focused on applied research methodology, while the fourth part of the paper deals with the results and discussion of research findings. In conclusion are given the key implications of the paper, as well as benefits, limitations and propositions for future research.

## 1. MATERIALS AND METHODS

One of the pressing questions facing modern society is whether or not organizations will act to reduce environmental problems just in reaction to customer demand and market forces, or whether they will be compelled to do so for a variety of reasons. There are many unfavorable effects of climate change that have an impact on people's health, happiness, and general quality of life. Furthermore, the behavior of organizations, which is focused on increasing profit, justifies the growing worry regarding their impact on environmental issues. As a result, numerous writers, consultants, organizations, and consulting firms have made an effort to investigate how businesses affect environmental issues as well as to evaluate how the market and consumer behavior have an impact.

The desk research method was applied in this paper with the aim to investigate and analyze the impact of green employer branding on corporate attractiveness to customers in the digital age. During a comprehensive study of published papers and reports from several consulting organizations, the induction and deduction method was applied.

## 2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research on customer behavior and their preferences for environmentally friendly and sustainable products and services has been conducted by a number of consulting firms and research organizations.

The Path to Purchase Institute conducted research on more than 241 million consumers and 118 million homes nationwide, and the results were as follows (Barba, 2022):

- Almost 75% of all consumers choose eco-friendly brands;
- Although 75% of consumers prefer eco-friendly brands, 60% are unwilling to pay more money for them;
- Green buyers in particular spend 23% more on discretionary items than the average consumer each year.

McKinsey and NielsenIQ worked on a study that examined five years of US sales data from 2017 to June 2022. The data set included 600.000 individual product SKUs representing \$400 billion in annual retail revenue. The findings revealed the following (Frey et al., 2023):

- Consumers are changing their buying habits toward items that make environmental, social, and governance - ESG claims.

Products making ESG-related claims accounted for 56% of all growth during the last five years.

- Environmental, social, and governance-related claims accomplished differential growth for brands of all sizes - those claims can help improve growth for a variety of brand kinds.
- Companies that include high-impact ESG-related claims across several categories and products are likely to have a stronger ESG effect and a better chance of attaining outsized growth.

According to the Global Consumer Insight Pulse Survey for 2021 (Emmert, 2021):

- 49% of Generation Z members buy from companies that are environmentally sensitive and supportive.
- 60% of young millennials (aged 23 to 26) and core millennials (aged 27 to 32 years) buy from companies that are environmentally sensitive and supportive.
- 53% of Generation X members buy from companies that are environmentally sensitive and supportive;
- 47% of baby boomer members buy from companies that are environmentally sensitive and supportive.

The Deloitte analysis is based on an online consumer survey of over 2,000 UK consumers aged 18+ performed by Deloitte between June 1-2, 2022. Customers were asked if they would be willing to pay extra for products and services if the brands that make them committed to any of the following ecologically sustainable or ethical activities. The following were the findings (Archer et al., 2022):

- 26% said they would be willing to pay more for products and services that maintain and support biodiversity (for example, ensuring products and services do not harm forests, rivers, and oceans; planting trees; avoiding overfishing; safeguarding animals; animal welfare, and so on).
- 24% said they would be willing to pay more for sustainable packaging and products (for example, recycled products, biodegradable products, and so on).
- 23% said they would be willing to pay more for products with a lower carbon footprint (for example, offsetting and lowering carbon emissions, embracing sustainable energy, and minimizing plastic use).

- 23% said they would be willing to pay more for products that promote circular habits (e.g., encouraging reuse, recycling, refurbishing or repairing of things, and alternatives to return products at the end of their life).
- 22% said they would be willing to pay more for products that reduce waste during their manufacturing process;
- 21% said they would be willing to pay more for products that conserve water and other natural resources during their manufacturing process.

For 35% of respondents, a company will gain customer trust if it has a transparent, accountable, and socially and environmentally responsible supply chain; for 29% of respondents, a company will gain customer trust if it has a strong public perception, record, and reputation around climate change and sustainability, as well as a public commitment and positioning around sustainability and climate change, including net zero commitments and greenhouse gas reduction (Archer et al., 2022).

Business of Sustainability Index, by GreenPrint, a PDI company showed the following (Sustainable Brands Staff, 2022):

- 75% of US customers surveyed are worried about the environmental impact of products they purchase.
- 64% would be willing to pay more for gas if the carbon emissions from their purchases were offset by sustainability measures; this rises to 75% among younger persons, aged 18-34.
- 69% say the environmental effect of a product influences their purchasing decision.
- 70% agree that recent climate catastrophes (wildfires, floods, air-quality threats, excessive heat, drought, and so on) have made people more likely to seek out more sustainable items. 38% of this demographic did not previously purchase these types of products, but recent climatic events have motivated them to do so.
- 45% of respondents think it's challenging to keep up sustainable buying habits.
- 73% of consumers said they would join a business's loyalty or voluntary rewards program if it helped them lessen the environmental impact of their purchases.
- 64% of people say they'd want to have a credit card that automatically offsets a portion of their transactions' environmental impact.

Results from all studies have similar conclusion: customers are interested in sustainable and eco-friendly products and services. In certain percentage, they are ready and willing to pay more for such products and services, and to become actively engaged in environmental protection.

### 2.1. Recommendations for improvements

Nature should be observed like any other asset – education, health, produced capital, human capital (Dasgupta Review, 2021). Unfortunately, the main objective of most organizations is still oriented toward profit maximization while respecting only law and social norms (Meyer, 2018), forgetting the nature and environment. There should be change in the way organizations measure their success. Organizations often omit information regarding climate-related risks of their activities. More than 70% of 107 worldwide organizations that operate in carbon-intensive industries including energy, cement, and transportation failed to say if they had taken climate change into account while preparing their financial statements for 2020, according to the study (Hodgson, 2021).

The primary objectives of organizations that implement green practices and try to develop a green employer brand are as follows (Lukić Nikolić, 2021):

- to preserve the environment from global warming, climate change, energy crises;
- to educate, train and motivate employees to carry out their activities in a way that is more suitable for the environment, i.e. in a way that does not lead to environmental pollution and damage;
- to produce goods and services that do not harm the environment;
- to build a sustainable and eco-friendly, green organization;
- to motivate employees to get involved in processes and activities aimed at environmental protection;
- to stimulate green innovation and green ideas.

Organizations become "greener" and boost their market brand by attracting candidates that care about the environment and practice socially responsible behavior.

On the other hand, customers should have access to more environmentally friendly options for products and services. Among the things that organizations should do are (Schneider, 2023):

1) *To provide clear and credible information* - At the time of purchase, customers do not always have access to enough accurate information or sufficient time to make more sustainable choices. According to studies, eco-labelling can influence customers to make more eco-friendly purchases.

2) *To provide affordability and availability* - According to data, one in two customers identify cost as the biggest impediment to adopting more environmentally friendly decisions. Offering premium items to early adopters can sometimes be the first step in creating new and inventive solutions.

3) *To build and maintain attractiveness* - Only half of the problem can be solved by removing the obvious restrictions of cost and accessibility while fostering the transparency necessary for educated choice-making. Making sustainable alternatives as pleasant and enticing as less sustainable alternatives is also crucial. For that, it's necessary to innovate, reformulate, use high-quality ingredients, and pay close attention to what customers desire.

As a result of global climate change and the current state of the environment, it is obvious that business models must be rebuilt and repositioned to be more sustainable and environmentally friendly (Luknar et al., 2023).

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to identify the impact of green employer brand on the company attractiveness to customers in the digital age. Organizations are increasingly attempting to represent themselves as environmentally responsible and to develop a green employer brand in order to recruit the top candidates from the labor market who are equally concerned about environmental protection. Simultaneously, organizations are devoting major resources to better understanding their customers in the digital age, as well as their preferences for environmental preservation and usage of green products and services.

The desk research method was applied in this paper with the aim to investigate and analyze the impact of green employer branding on company attractiveness to customers in the digital age. Results from all studies have similar conclusion: customers are interested in sustainable and eco-friendly products and services. In certain percentage, they are ready and willing to pay more for such products and services, and to become actively engaged in environmental protection.

Obtained results can be of importance for organizations and decision makers. Organizations need to become oriented to preserve the environment from global warming, climate change, energy crises, to educate, train and motivate employees to carry out

their activities in a way that is more suitable for the environment, to produce goods and services that do not harm the environment, to build a sustainable and eco-friendly, green organizations, to motivate employees to get involved in processes and activities aimed at environmental protection, and to stimulate green innovation and green ideas.

In addition to the purpose and vision, every organization should identify its core values, which should provide clear instructions for achieving the set goals regarding sustainability and eco-friendly behavior. They should set broad limits within which corporate strategy will be developed, as well as more precise instructions on individual behaviors that shape the organization's day-to-day green culture. Core values should inform how an organization positions itself and behaves towards everyone it comes into contact with, including investors, customers, consumers, employees, business partners and suppliers, local communities, governments, and anyone who influences the formation of opinions. Theoretically, basic values ought to correspond to a particular ideology of an organization. This has been observed to occur in practice only when the founder's substantial influence, personal preferences, and beliefs are strongly reflected in the values. The growth of competition in the market has led to an increase in the variety of choices of products and services for consumers. Such trend enables consumers to keep the "negotiating" power in the exchange with companies on their side and thus conditions companies to respond to their needs and wants, that is, to proactively solve consumer problems. In order to keep their customers and create long-term loyalty, companies invest in the development of various distribution channels, among which the digital environment occupies a very important place in contemporary frameworks.

Future research on this topic should be oriented towards empirical research in the Republic of Serbia, with the aim to identify customer buying habits and preferences on the one hand, and to analyze and identify the organizations which build and maintain green employer branding on the other hand.

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