

Employer branding on the Building Materials Market in Romania

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Abstract

In an economic context characterized by tough competition for recruiting and keeping talent, employer branding is crucial, and the building materials sector in Romania is no different. This paper explores the importance of employer branding for companies in this sector, analyzing how large companies in the sector integrate these strategies into their organizational activities. The research methodology employed is to analyze the websites of the main players in the Romanian building materials market, in order to identify whether and how these companies include employer branding initiatives in their public strategy. The aim of this paper is to investigate the core elements of employer branding strategies promoted on their websites, such as organizational culture, employee benefits and professional development opportunities. The results will contribute both to the literature and to the business environment.

Keywords: Employer branding, human resources marketing, recruiting.

JEL classification: M31, O15.

Introduction

On the building materials market, manufacturers of insulation materials such as basaltic mineral wool and glass wool are in fierce competition. In Romania, there are three big players in this market: Knauf Insulation, Saint-Gobain Isover and Rockwool Romania. Small market in need of professionals with dedicated skills create fierce competition for employees. Added to these special conditions is the situation that the labor market has been in for several years, especially since the beginning of the pandemic (Krušković, Ilić and Anđelić, 2023) in which there is a war for talent among companies, regardless of industry. Thus, one of the most handy tools for employers is to build an employer image that ensures attracting the best talent and keeping them in the company for the longest period of time.

In the today's highly competitive business environment, the notion of employer branding is an essential tool for companies that can significantly aid in attracting and retaining talented employees, and its most common definition is 'the process of creating and communicating a unique image of the organization as an employer that can differentiate it from competitors and retain the most talented and motivated employees' (Azhar et al., 2021). As Backhaus (2016) pointed out, employer brands can shape the image that will make the organization an employer of choice for both existing employees and potential candidates and it is a key factor that can help in keeping the employees engaged with their work (Yousf and Khurshid, 2021).

When it comes of the dimension of employer branding, a healthy work environment is mandatory for employees' energy nurturing, adaptability and resilience. A healthy work environment not only helps employees cope with stress, but also enhances creativity, collaboration and teamwork, all of which lead to increased productivity and better results. Corporate social responsibility initiatives also contribute significantly to workplace attractiveness, attracting more suitable employees, but also facilitating loyalty and motivation of existing employees (Gandasari et al., 2024). Healthy work-life balance is also important for creating an employer image. Through it, employees are able to allocate sufficient time and

energy between personal and office activities (Dabirian, Berthon and Kietzmann, 2019). Finally, development programs and trainings play a crucial role in career advancement. Through them, organizations provide growth opportunities for employees that are fundamental to a productive work environment (Krušković, Ilić and Anđelić, 2023).

1. Research question

Taking into account the fact that the market for insulation materials in Romania is niche and that the global labor market is currently undergoing a transformation and companies are in a continuous and tough "war for talent", building an employer brand can be one of the right solutions to attract and retain staff. Thus, the present study aims to find out how the most important players in the Romanian insulating materials market are making efforts in building their employer brand, aimed at creating benefits in the competition for talent. The question to which this study answers is *What efforts are made by the major insulation manufacturers on the Romanian market in shaping their employer brand, taking into account these non-financial dimensions?*

2. Methodology

The research method used for the realization of this paper consisted in an investigation on the employer brand in order to extract the most important aspects related to it, as well as an analysis of secondary data. The secondary data analysis was based on the presentation web pages of the most important producers of mineral wool and basaltic wool in Romania, being analyzed the most relevant sections for our study. This analysis will help to identify the most used practices when it comes to the concept of employer branding.

3. Data examination and findings

With a turnover of approximately 14 million euros, Knauf Insulation has emerged on the Romanian market in 2008, following a strategy that took into account the growth strength the construction market and the interest shown by individuals in insulating materials, according to Dominique Bossan, managing director of Knauf Insulation Eastern Europe, told Capital newspaper. The company's mission is based on offering sustainable insulation products and solutions that positively influence consumers' lifestyles in the long term. It also vision, the company aims to become a reliable partner offering performance in thermal and acoustic insulation (Knauf Insulation, 2019). Products developed by Knauf Insulation, such as basaltic mineral wool and mineral wool are in a continuous "battle" to convince qualified construction personnel, and ultimately the home consumer, that they offer numerous benefits over classic polystyrene. The both have unique advantages such as: non-combustibility, sound insulation up to 65dB or light weight. Of course, there are differences between the two products, but choosing one of them depending on the needs of each insulation. Knauf offers advice and consultancy to be sure that insulation is done with the right product. Knauf Insulation's careers page is structured to attract candidates through several key sections that include the company's introduction, its values and mission, its organizational culture, details about its corporate social responsibility initiatives and employee development programs. The company uses a message that emphasizes modern values, sustainability, continuous development and its need for employees who share the same principles.

One of Knauf Insulation's competitors, Saint-Gobain Isover, with over 350 years of tradition, combines expertise and innovation to address global challenges such as climate change and sustainable development. Saint-Gobain ISOVER manufactures and distributes mineral wool-based insulation solutions for construction, transportation and industrial applications, solutions for NZEB "near-zero energy" buildings, offering thermal comfort,

energy savings and fire safety, while contributing to increased acoustic comfort and environmental protection. Saint-Gobain career page focuses on core sections such as values and mission, employee professional development and work-life balance. The company emphasizes an inclusive work environment as well as growth opportunities for employees through various training programs, while also focusing on promoting a collaborative culture, diversity and opportunities for students. In addition, the contribution made in sustainability through green actions is highlighted (Saint-Gobain Isover, 2023).

Another major player in the insulation market is Rockwool. The company aims to increase energy efficiency, building comfort and sustainability and is recognized for its environmentally friendly products that reduce carbon emissions and help improve fire resistance and acoustic insulation. Rockwool's careers page promotes the image of a company focused on sustainability, employee professional development, innovation and environmental impact. The main sections of the page emphasize career opportunities, employee testimonials, company values, social responsibility and sustainability. In addition, the company offers various opportunities for employees and promises a positive atmosphere (Rockwool, 2022).

Employer branding

The concept of employer branding was firstly introduced at London Business School and by Amble and Barrow, 28 years ago (Kumar et al., 2021) and it has a crucial role in businesses' strategies, having the power to attract and to retain talent (Reis, Sousa and Dionisio, 2021). Another important role that employer branding is associated with is employer attractiveness which, in the end, is nothing but the sum of extra-benefits that employees are receiving from the employer company (Vercic, 2021). Previous studies shed light on the dimensions of employer branding. Tanwar and Prasad (2016) discussed in their study about work-life balance, social responsibility and development as being some of the employer branding dimensions. More than that, Purosottama and Ardianto (2019) shown in their research that also work climate is part of employer branding dimensions.

Tabel 1. Employer Branding dimensions

Dimension of employer Branding	Previous studies
Work climate	Purosottama and Ardianto, 2019; Boahmah and Laschinger; 2016
CSR commitment	Tanwar and Prasad, 2016; Biswas and Suar, 2016
Development programs	Tanwar and Prasad, 2016; Berthon, Ewing and Han, 2005
Work-life balance	Tanwar and Prasad, 2016;

Source: Author own work based on literature review

Therefore, we further analyzed the websites of the three major players on the insulating materials market, taking into account the 4 dimensions of employer branding proposed, focusing mainly on the career page. We extracted all the information reflecting the attitude and actions of the companies regarding the dimensions: work climate, CSR commitment, development programs and work-life balance.

Table 2. The websites analysis of insulation materials competitors in Romania

Competitors	Knauf Insulation	Saint-Gobain Isover	Rockwool Romania
Dimensions			
Work Climate	„Safe and friendly workplace atmosphere”; „Decency, humanity, and respect”	„Develop your career through mutual trust”; „More than employees, a real community”	„Respectful and welcoming culture”

	„Establish and retain mutual trust and inclusivity”		
CSR commitment	„Make tomorrow a home for all of us”; „Safe and durable future”	„Innovate for a more sustainable world”; „Inclusion and diversity”; „A company committed to sustainability”	„Helping to improve the environment and quality of life”; „We pride ourselves on a people-based and inclusive culture” „Equal opportunities and non-discrimination”
Development Programs	„Learning is part of your career”; „Safe and stable career”	„Career development and international mobility”	„Excellent opportunities for people who are prepared to develop and adapt as they work”; „Several different career options”
Work-life balance	„Job security” „Well-being Initiatives and Mental Health First Aiders” „Enhanced Maternity, Paternity and Adoption packages”	„Flexibility and home offices”; „Work-life harmony”	„Paid Time Off and Paid Holidays” „Life and Disability Programs” „Fitness Reimbursement”

Source: Author own work based on analyzed websites

Healthy work climate

One of the first non-financial dimension of employer branding is work climate which contributes in shaping the environment for employees’ professional activity performing and it is also seen as a key factor in employees’ decision to not leave the company (Islam et al., 2020), and maintaining the workforce stable (Taheri, Miah and Kamaruzzaman, 2020). Work climate also refers to the working relationships that are born between colleagues and between managers and subordinates (Iis, 2022) and the `sum of the interrelationships that exists within the employees and the environment in which they work`. A company’s work climate is essential for employees’ engagement and performance – a healthy workplace environment has the potential to create good business, supports employee’s engagement, innovation and creativity (Kodarlikdar and Umale, 2020).

In terms of work climate, every player on the Romanian insulation materials market pointed out their positive environment. For instance, Knauf Insulation Romania promotes a family-oriented culture that prioritizes fairness, a collaborative environment and unity of employees. Knauf’s employees characterized the climate as being positive and satisfying. Similarly, Saint-Gobain Isover supports a collaborative work climate where talents are inspired to present their ideas and thoughts for their contribution at company’s values. Last, but not least, Rockwool Romania stress out the teamwork and trust spirit, with a focus on a respectful work climate, diversity and also inclusion.

CSR commitment

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) represents the responsibility that an organization have towards its various stakeholders (customers, employees, natural environment and community). Avoidance of social involvement leads also to the progressive destruction of social power (Postel and Sobel, 2019). One of the most important roles that CSR has for employees is the change of their attitudes and behaviors. CSR enhance confidence,

organizational identification & commitment and citizenship behavior (Bouraoui, Bensemmane and Ohana, 2020). Also, Ozcan and Elci highlighted the impact on brand awareness and brand image that CSR can improve (Ozcan and Elci, 2020). Companies' involvement in CSR initiatives can attract potential candidates who share the same value system and it can enhance the companies' image among them (Kumar et al., 2021).

When it comes to CSR commitment, all three companies seems to share the same values. Knauf Insulation present on the website an image associated with sustainability which has a focus on reduced impact that its products have on the environment. Among the activities that the company conducted, the website shows that Knauf offer paid leave for volunteers' employees and also hire people in the respect on diversity and inclusion. In the same vein, Saint-Gobain Isover creates products that are energy-efficient and also promotes diversity. Additionally, the company speaks about building a sustainable future for the local community. Rockwool Romania shares the same sustainability values as the first two companies, but it also declares that supports education, besides community projects it is involved in or local development.

Development programs

As Noe (2020) pointed out, employee development initiatives actions related to learning that organization need to look for in order to reach its short- and long-term business goals. Formal education, job experiences, skills and abilities can be included in development activities of a company which can offer employees the possibility to have a career growth. Programs for employees can include classroom instruction, courses, workshops, mentorship programs (Dachner, 2019) and investing in such career programs is crucial for employee retention. At the same time, involving in this kind of initiative is also a responsibility of companies to ensure that their talents are continuously developing (Ghani et al., 2022).

Regarding development programs, all of the analyzed companies declare that are continuously offering various programs for their employees. Knauf Insulation mention on the career page that employee growth represents a priority for the company, having both external and internal learning opportunities. Among these opportunities they mention about several training and workshops sessions. Saint-Gobain Isovers also talks about employee's development investments, offering customized mentoring & career paths. Additionally, they declare that also have some international mobilities opportunities, which of course help employees to grow on their career path. Rockwool Romania is focused on both leadership and more technical skills development programs, employees having the possibility to take part in global exchange programs.

Work-life balance

Work life balance means the equilibrium that an individual managed to have between his personal life and family and work (Oludayo et al., 2018). As Hendriana et al., (2023) explained, busy workloads and longer working hours will definitely affect the employees' personal life, making them experience negative psychological feeling, dropping their performance and productivity. Consequently, a balance between the professional life and personal life helps employees feel less stress at job, which lead in the end at job satisfaction and life satisfaction, in general (Aruldoss, Kowalski and Parayitam, 2021). Also, work-life balance may have a positive impact for potential job candidates, communicating that the employer cares about they and their families and this can lead to improved attraction for employers (Ahamad, Saini and Jawahar, 2022; Aruldoss, Kowalski and Parayitam, 2021).

Concerning the work-life balance, all organizations presents themselves as taking care of this equilibrium between personal and professional life of their employees. On the website,

Knauf Insulation declares that is open to accept flexibility, with an accent on flexible arrangements of employees. Also, employees have the possibility to have days off on their birthdays. Similarly, the second one company, Saint-Gobain Isover, offers flexible working hours. Last, but not least, Rockwool Romania position itself as a support of employees' physical and mental health, offering customized benefits that are fitting for every employee's lifestyle.

Conclusions, limitations and further research

The concept of employer branding is becoming more and more important among companies when it comes to strategies to attract and retain employees. Building the employer brand meets the special conditions of the labor market, which in recent years has been in a continuous transformation. The labor market has recently transformed from an employers' market into an employees' market, where employees have the power to impose their rules and preferences. The Coronavirus pandemic has also contributed to changes in employee behavior and preferences. To all this, for the insulating materials market in Romania, we can add the tight number of competitors and the need for specialized personnel. In these conditions, a well-defined employer image responds to the challenges of the big players on this market when it comes to attracting and retaining employees.

Among the non-financial dimensions of the employer branding concept are a focus on sustainability, development programs created for employees, as well as a special concern for work-life balance and a healthy work environment. An analysis of the websites of the three major players on the Romanian insulating materials market reveals the strategies used by them to shape their employer image. All companies analyzed declare on their websites that they are involved in projects aimed at social responsibility. Also, each of the three companies claims to offer a healthy work environment where work-life balance is paramount. In addition, all three competitors take actions to help the continuous professional development of their employees.

To sum it up, Knauf Insulation, Saint-Gobain Isover and Rockwool Romania declare that they have a powerful commitment to social responsibility and employee care which are very important in building their employer image.

This research has limits. The study has potential biases caused firstly by the limited number of companies investigated that operate only on a local market. Secondly, the results may be affected by the websites design and content, even though there are discernible differences between analyzed companies' policies regarding employer branding, these are not visible on their websites partly due to poorly optimized website design. For the future development of this study, it would be very important to take into account also the voice of the employers of the analyzed organizations, as they may provide useful information about the realities within the companies. For this we propose a set of quantitative researches being done among employees to find out how the declared actions are reflected into existing experiences of day-to-day business.

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