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On sponsoring and CSR involvement. Two theories explaining their effects on a company's attractiveness for candidates

Abstract

The use of e-recruitment for hiring personnel is constantly expanding. However, the scientific understanding of factors affecting company employer brand during e-recruitment, is still poor. Research into corporate social responsibilities (CSR) shows that information about the company's involvement in these areas makes its image more positive, including its image as an employer. CSR is an umbrella concept, which includes activities similar to traditional sponsoring of sports and cultural events.

Two theories explaining the impact of information on attractiveness of the employer's brand in the e-recruitment process are presented. The aim of the text is to check which of them – cultural fit or signaling theory – more adequately explains the changes in how a candidate perceives a company's attractiveness, when given information about its' sports and cultural sponsoring and environment-related activities. The effect of both positive and negative information concerning a company's activities on its employer image in the e-recruitment situation is analyzed. Data from an questionnaire filled in by 80 young full-time workers shows that positive information about a company's CSR and sponsoring activities affects candidates according to the cultural fit model, while negative – according to the signaling theory model. The consequences for theory and managerial practice are described.

Keywords: employer branding, fit theory, signal theory, CSR, cultural and sport sponsorship.

1. Introduction

At present, e-recruitment is the most rapidly growing fragment of the recruitment field (Listwan, 2010), with candidates and employers having to deal with increasingly fewer barriers of access to the Internet. The variability of its methods however creates difficulties for understanding it in a scientific manner, and for developing effective management directives. Lack of competence on the part of employers has also been mentioned as one of the obstacles to its becoming widely used (Wozniak, 2013, 2014a). E-recruitment is a large image-building challenge for a company. Potential candidates have access to a wide range of information about the company, both that purposefully chosen by the company to build its image in the eyes of the targeted group, as random information the company has addressed to other recipients (such as its own employees), and finally information coming from other sources than the company. As a result of dialogues conducted over the Internet, with the variety of new information they bring from various new sources, a company's reputation – understood as a stable image in the eyes of groups communicated with – is therefore constantly subject to verification and threatened.

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Companies are currently advised to strive for the position of “employer of choice” in pre-selected segments of the labour market. This means that they need to build themselves a positive image in the targeted groups of candidates. However, as research in this field is comparatively recent, scientific understanding of factors affecting perception of a company as an attractive place of work in online recruitment is still poor. Employer branding research defines an employer brand as the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company. However, choosing which information candidates may consider to be a benefit as yet has insufficient theoretical grounds.

Recruitment research has shown that candidates are influenced not only by instrumental factors (i.e. the package of direct benefits they will receive as employees, such as salary, localization, kinds of tasks, or development and promotion opportunities). Also significant are the less measurable symbolic or image-related advantages, such as the values the company espouses – related to environment, social consciousness, or care for marginalized groups in the global economy. What more, the scope and standard of functional benefits which companies from a given sector offer employees is determined by the market, therefore, from the perspective of company image management, the choice of the right information which creates symbolic value for candidates is very important.

One of the means that enterprises frequently reach for when using symbolic factors to create a positive image, is to engage in activities from the field of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is an umbrella concept which links under one term several distinct kinds of involvement in social issues, where the beneficiaries are for example one’s own employees, local communities, the environment, disadvantaged groups, etc (Wozniak, 2012). Some of these activities may seem similar to traditional sponsoring – the financial support of sport or cultural events.

Scientific research on the impact of different kind of information on a company’s attractiveness is conducted within one of two competing theoretical paradigms (Braddy, et al., 2009; Pfieffelmann, Wagner & Libkuman, 2010): cultural fit theory (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman & Johnson, 2005; Edwards & Billsberry, 2010) and signalling theory (Spence, 1974, 2002; Connelly et al, 2011). These two theories refer to different mechanisms of building an organization’s attractiveness, and may thus lead – in some types of situation – to different predictions (Wozniak, 2014bc).

The goal of this article is to verify which of the theories – both describing how employer attractiveness during e-recruitment is assessed – more adequately explains the influence of different types of information about company activities on how candidates perceive a company’s attractiveness. We chose as an information about company which influence its attractiveness some information about its involvement in environmental, sport and cultural activities. These areas of CSR-related activities have been chosen as their significance for younger generations, should – from the perspective of one of the above two theories – be on the increase.

The main task of this article is to show that each of these theories describes the effect of different kinds of information, and so in fact they complement each other rather than compete in explaining the value of symbolic information in the recruitment process.

The text is organized as follows. The first part discuss the concept of CSR and sponsoring activities, their similarities and differences, from the perspective of their potential for building a positive image of the company in the eyes of potential employees. The second part explains how cultural fit and signaling theory are applicable to the recruitment process. Part three is devoted to the premises of two studies conducted, and the hypotheses and method-

ology used. The fourth part of the text contains the results, and the final parts are a discussion of the relevance of the results for managerial practice and conclusions.

2. Corporate Social Responsibility and sponsoring as tools for creating a positive image during e-recruitment from the perspective of employer brand theory

Using new tools for communicating with the social environment – such as internet games, competitions or emotionally-laden information – constitutes only a narrow fragment of recommendations for employers on how to build corporate image. Going a stage further, attempts have been made to show what information should be selected for the content of these communication tools. It is often postulated that this content needs to be very specific, and accompanied by activities which demonstrate its authenticity.

Marketing research suggests that value for employees is created through both the functional (instrumental) as the symbolic features of the company brand. Employer brand management signifies creating value for potential employees, with reference to the fact that brand carries value over and above functional benefits and that the value of the employer brand may be affected by the consumer brand (Keller, 2003; Cable & Turban, 2003; Gomez & Neves, 2010). Recruitment literature stresses that defining the content of the Employee Value Proposition so as to strengthen the company brand is not a simple matter, among others because knowledge of the subject is limited (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Transposing deliberations from consumer marketing to a product such as the employer requires differentiating the functional features of the job from its symbolic value. The former are salary levels, organizational components (place, times, flexibility, length of working hours, how the workplace is equipped, material benefits, etc.), and potential for growth and promotion. The latter – the prestige of working for a given employer, or the image that a certain job carries for different social groups, or how consistent the job is with the image one has of oneself.

Research into the advantages of each of these two groups brings consistent results across brands, and shows that the influence of both is similar in strength. Lievens, who studied the strength of the employer brand on the example of the Belgian army, ascertained that instrumental (functional) features explain ca. 40% of differentiation in candidates' opinions of the army's attractiveness, while symbolic features – ca. 30% (Lievens, 2007). In addition, instrumental features were more significant at the stage when the decision to apply for work was being made (as opposed to the stages of being a potential candidate or already employed), while symbolic features were equally strong at each of these three stages (Lievens, 2007, p. 62). In an analogous study carried out on a sample of bank employees and students, the influence of instrumental and symbolic factors was also similar in strength (ca. 16% differentiation of attractiveness explained by each; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003, pp. 92-94), although different symbolic factors were significant. Differently than for the army, the most important non-instrumental feature of the bank as employer was its image as a competent and innovative enterprise (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003, p. 95).

The choice of image-related information (symbolic advantages) that helps an organization to be considered attractive, is weakly grounded in theory. "Due to the budding state of research into employer branding, it is unclear which features of consumer brands may be transposed to this area" (Maroko & Uncles, 2008, p. 161).

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) was introduced in the 1950s. It was defined as the responsibility an enterprise had for its impact on the environment in which it functioned, at first personified by the entrepreneur or CEO, but later taken to mean the activities of the enterprise as a whole. This company environment is generally divided into the closest surroundings (local community), own employees, the natural environment, and variously marginalized communities.

It is currently common knowledge – talked of in the media and taken into consideration by the boards of large enterprises – that CSR-related activity is necessary for improving company image. However, research conducted in Poland shows unequivocally that the activity of enterprises in this field is frequently mere pretense (Leszczynska, 2011). It seems that, influenced by the media, company boards consider that even superficial or purported CSR activities will positively affect their company reputation.

Although current research shows that having a good CSR-related reputation has promising effects for economic returns (see Godfrey, Merrill & Hansen, 2009 reviewed in Wozniak, 2012, pp. 234-237), studies usually assume that CSR investments are significant, and hence that the company will not be suspected of consciously manipulating public opinion. CSR credibility is rarely taken into account as a factor in research, as it is common knowledge that manipulation of this kind has a destructive effect on reputation (Wozniak, 2012).

Another factor that must be taken into consideration when researching the effectiveness of a company's image-building is communication between Internet users. The latter (including company employees) willingly exchange any information they have about companies, both positive as negative, also with persons they do not know (Wozniak, 2013). Hence a company's brand is never created solely through the information the enterprise shares with the public; it becomes the end result of a multitude of variously reliable messages from different sources.

The problem of image manipulation by a company is illustrated well by another concept used in marketing to build a positive image – namely, sponsoring. Sponsoring is defined as “a form of communication between businesses and the market, in which the enterprise supports such areas of economic and social life as sports, culture, science and education, or philanthropy, to showcase its image and achieve marketing objectives” (Datko, 2012, p. 34). In contrast to patrons (such as Maecenas), whose aim it is to act in the interests of society and so who in principle do not need to advertise their support, sponsoring requires that this support be made known to the public (or, more precisely, to the company's potential clients). At the same time, everyone is aware that the aim of a company supporting some activity is to improve its image in the eyes of the public, and thus that the support is manipulative (deliberately chosen for the purpose of maximizing the company's own benefit and not the benefit of its social environment). In this sense sponsoring is – despite any apparent similarity – the opposite of activities in the area of Corporate Social Responsibility, where company funds are expended on non-business activities with no business goals intended.

3. Two explanations of an organization's attractiveness for candidates

Research into how company branding affects candidates during online recruitment has only just begun. As the Internet has lowered the costs of obtaining information, it has given candidates access to a broader range of information about a company than the latter offers

through its intentional branding activities. A series of findings concerning how attractiveness of e-recruitment openings is assessed has shown opinions to be impacted both by the formal properties of the advertisement (Allen, Mahto & Otondo, 2007), as by the company website itself. In both these areas, two theoretical paradigms (Braddy et al., 2009; Pfieffelman, Wagner & Libkuman, 2010) are used to describe the mechanisms of candidates' reactions to information acquired online: the model of intentional rational action – specifically Vroom's motivational theory (Lin, 2010) – and Simon's theory of bounded rationality (Wozniak, 2013).

In the first paradigm, the most important theory explaining the attractiveness of an organization is the theory of personality fit, specifically Ben Schneider's Attraction-Selection-Attrition theory developed in 1980. According to this theory, fit with the organization's culture will increase its attractiveness in the candidate's eyes, as well as his or her chances of doing well while working for it (Schneider et al., 1998). This is consistent with a management phenomenon studied for about a hundred years, called "one of the most valuable motifs in psychological theorizing" (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005, p. 281): of how well-matched are the interactions of an individual with his or her environment. It has been confirmed many times that persons who fit in well with the value system of the organization for which they work achieve higher levels of affective variables (indices that describe their morale as employees: work satisfaction, company involvement) and behavioural variables (such as citizenship behaviour – Arthur et al., 2006).

It is increasingly accepted that organizational fit theory should be used as a basis for employee selection in spite of a "lack of empirical evidence [higher productiveness of individuals fitting the organization] to support it" (Arthur et al., 2006, p.788). In attempting to define the concept of fit, a series of differentiations and partial definitions has been developed, to describe whether an individual matches his or her vocation, job, organization, group, and superior (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Edwards & Billsberry, 2010), as well as to distinguish objective, perceived, or subjective fit in each of these areas.

Studies of candidates have demonstrated that they are capable of analysing information about an organization's culture presented online (Braddy, Meade & Kroustalis, 2006). In most cases, fit theory has proved useful for explaining the attractiveness of a given employer brand, though some types of information have a different effect from what the theory predicts. Only for women did a perceived fit with the organization's culture correlate with a perception of the organization as attractive. No such dependence was discovered among men (Pfieffelman et al., 2010).

The second theory used to explain the effect of branding information in online recruitment is signalling theory. This theory assumes that if a social situation requires parties to act when access to information is limited and different for each of the parties, the goal of part of their activities is not so much explicit communication, as signalling certain information that it is difficult for the other party to obtain.

Research in this area has been conducted within the broader framework of economics theory, which stresses the asymmetry of information between partners on the market. Studies have shown two main areas in which this asymmetry appears – information about quality and information about intention – both of which can be found in a the recruitment context. Employers face a fair amount of uncertainty as they assess the qualities of a candidate they intend to employ, but candidates also wonder what working for the company will entail beyond what is revealed and described in the job contract. Neither side knows the intentions of the other – the employer does not know whether the candidate really wants to devote the years to come

to the job (as a key step in his or her career), while the candidate does not know what the employer has in store (in terms of contract length, career development, or specific arrangements for reconcile work and private life).

Michael Spence's signalling theory, the framework for analysing these issues, appeared in 1973. The theory makes it possible to describe why students are ready to pay the significantly higher tuition fees of famous schools, even though the quality of education between different educational institutions does not vary much. It explains that, from the employer's perspective, a definitive appraisal of a job candidate's value cannot be done *ex ante* (before the candidate has worked for the employer for a significant time). Candidates therefore provide the employer with signals by which they try to convince the latter of their high value. Investing in a degree from an expensive school constitutes such a signal, as it indicates the importance candidates attach to education and thus indirectly indicates the value they attach to work. In contrast to Becker's theory of social capital, Spence considers that the role of expensive education is not to transmit knowledge, but to send signals (lowering the risk caused by information asymmetry – Spence, 2002). The definitional 'signalling' in this theory means the selection by the party sending the signal of an easily verifiable attribute (e.g. a degree from an expensive school) as an instrument of transmitting information about intangible traits that are hard to verify, and can be assessed only with a high degree of uncertainty. For the recipient of the signal, the conclusions reached on the basis of the information transmitted by the signal must be advantageous – the signalling has a strategic effect. In the absence of any such signal, the recipient would have difficulty in engaging in any of the courses of action open to him/her, as uncertainty concerning its consequences would be significant.

This claim – that the sender significantly decreases the recipient's uncertainty concerning the consequences of a possible course of action by sending a specific signal, and that this action is in the interests of the sender – is key to signalling theory. To consider this claim true, we need to accept the premise that the costs incurred in order to send this signal have to be high. The result otherwise would be a mass sending of untrue signals, and any conclusions based on them would be false. For this reason, Spence's theory is sometimes called "the theory of sending expensive signals" (Connelly et al., 2011, p. 45). Hence credibility of the signal is a significant variable, which needs to be taken into consideration during analysis.

Despite its 40-year legacy, instances in which signalling theory have been applied in recruitment research are rare. A review article on signaling theory indicates only a few works which refer directly to recruitment (Connelly et al., 2011). However, it is its relationship with new trends in communication analysis, which base not so much on dictionary definitions of concepts, as on their multi-tiered clusters of meanings, which has shown it to be the most useful in recruitment analysis. Signalling theory explains why the use of modern communication tools such as games, competitions or blogs is interpreted by candidates as an indication of the high value of the workplace the company offers – which, from the perspective of fit theory, was difficult to understand.

In the case of recruitment, signalling refers to information – available and interpreted by both company and candidate – indicative of other features than those purportedly described. In other words, pro-environmental activity is a signal for high quality of the workplace, and anti-environmental activities – are a signal for low quality of the job. Hence within the framework of signalling theory, positive information about the company will increase its attractiveness, and negative information will decrease its attractiveness for all candidates, irrespective of candidates' values.

4. Research methodology and hypotheses

The goal of this study is to understand how the attractiveness of the jobs an organization offers depends on the similarity between company values and those of the candidate. For the sake of research three independent values were selected: ecology, sports and culture (further referred to as “the three values”). We are going to formulate two parallel groups of hypothesis based on two theories. Hypothesis based on fit theory will have not apostrophe, and based on signal theory will be marked with it. Each of them will consider the three values separately, what will be indicated by a, b, c letters.

Assuming the fit between the candidate and company to be otherwise adequate, presenting itself as pro-environmental, sports- or culture-oriented should increase the company’s attractiveness for candidates who declare these types of values, both when this declaration is only of a general nature, as – more significantly – when candidates declare their actual involvement in activities connected with these values.

H1. Candidates who espouse one of the “three values” will consider companies which inform that they are involved in supporting this value as more attractive, than candidates who do not espouse this value.

This effect should be symmetrical. For example, providing information about a company’s pro-environmental activities should increase its attractiveness, and providing information about its anti-environmental activities should decrease its attractiveness in the group of subjects who are sensitive – on account of the values they profess – to this type of information.

H2a. Candidates who declare pro-environmental values should find companies which provide information about their anti-environmental activities less attractive, than candidates who do not declare such values.

From the perspective of signalling theory, positive and negative situations will be interpreted differently. Positive information should always increase an organization’s attractiveness, but this effect will probably be strongest for persons who are involved in the given area (because greater significance will be given to this information). However, negative information should be interpreted in a similar way by all candidates, regardless of the values they espouse, as this signals that the job opening is unattractive. Signalling theory therefore provides us with the following hypothesis:

H2’a. Information proving that a company has engaged in activities harmful for the natural environment should decrease the desire of job-seekers to apply, independently of whether they declare pro-environmental involvement.

H1 is based on the assumption that a company’s involvement is presented as a CSR activity rather than sponsorship, i.e. it assumes the company’s sincerity (this problem is discussed in Wozniak, 2014bc). From the perspective of the two theories used by the managerial sciences to explain how information affects employer attractiveness, sponsoring should have different effects on appraisals of attractiveness by candidates (it only relates to symbolic benefits, so functional benefits will not change described patterns). According to signalling theory, symbolic signals will have an equally strong effect on all employees, regardless of candidates’ values (just slightly increasing employer attractiveness). According to cultural fit theory, company attractiveness increases only for candidates who are involved in a similar field (e.g. sponsoring of sports for those involved in sports, or a cultural sponsorship for those interested in culture). However, the manipulative nature of the sponsor’s investment should

significantly weaken this effect – sponsoring does not meet this theory's condition of fit between the values of company and candidate, as the field sponsored is not espoused as a value of high importance for the company. Both these explanations show that information about sponsoring should at most have a weak effect on increase in company attractiveness. This relationship will be significantly modified if employees are offered specific functional benefits in connection with a sponsorship. Benefits in this case will have an effect on persons espousing a given value (cultural fit theory), as well as on neutral persons (signalling concern for the welfare of employees).

H3. Offering (functional) benefits in connection with a given area of sport or cultural sponsoring will significantly increase candidates' assessments of a company's attractiveness, regardless of the form and material value of the benefit. This increase will occur among both candidates who espouse a given value, as those for whom it is neutral.

If the company description includes examples of sports or cultural activities which are mandatory, e.g. employees are obliged to play a sport or engage in cultural pursuits, then – according to cultural fit theory – these are participatory benefits advantageous for employees who are interested in them. On the other hand, the element of coercion (such as covering only half of the cost of a compulsory activity) will be considered as an abuse of power and negatively evaluated by employees. According to signalling theory, employees' values will not have an impact on the assessment – all kinds of coercion will be treated as negative information about the company.

H2'bc. If involvement in culture or sports is mandatory for its employees, this should decrease the desire of job-seekers to apply to a company that offers such activities, independently of whether they espouse these values or are neutral towards them.

A factor which could modify candidates' appraisals of a company's job openings is a strong fear of unemployment. In order to limit this effect, subjects were told that several equally attractive job offers were available to them, and they were just making a decision about their first choice. Information about the company's pro- and anti-environmental involvement was only one of several types of information about its activities provided (such as activities on behalf of employees, higher remuneration than the competition's, or activities on behalf of the local community).

The hypotheses were verified by two independent questionnaire studies, which assessed the desire to apply for work to a given organization under the influence of information found on its website. The questionnaires were fairly long, with approx. 60 items concerning different issues affecting assessment of the company as an attractive place of work – such as localization, salary, laptops for private use, etc. Questions concerning involvement in environmental issues or sponsoring constituted ca. 20% and 40% respectively of all questions. From the respondents' perspective, the questionnaire concerned functional issues, and the two questionnaires had similar questions from this area. In other words, the real difference between them lay in the two blocks of questions concerning environmental involvement in one, and sponsoring in the other.

The research subjects were two groups of ca 80 management and psychology students in an evening college course; ca. 28 years of age, mostly working. Their age and the fact that they are students indicated that they were at an early stage in their professional careers. The samples were selected for theoretical reasons, as it is generally recognized that young people evince a higher value-related sensitivity. Because the study is exploratory in character, the choice of respondents does not need to be representative of the larger population, other than concerning the variables researched.

The groups differed slightly. The sponsoring group consisted of 81 slightly younger respondents – the average age was 28 years (median was 25, 1/3 over 30 years old). Ca. 1/3 of the group were men (23 men to 58 women); almost half (35) were employed on a full benefit contract, while the rest worked in other legal or non-legal forms. Only 2 respondents were dependent on their parents and 7 declared they work only for pleasure.

The CSR group had 79 respondents, and an median of age was 24 years (the youngest student was 20 years old; 15 people were over 40 years old). Over 2/3 of this group were women (52 women to 27 men). 1/3 of the respondents were employed and were currently not considering any change of work; 1/5 declared themselves to be unemployed; and the rest worked on various legal and non-legal forms of employment.

Subjects filled out a questionnaire in their lecture hall. On a 5-point Likert scale they marked the strength of their desire to apply for the job after studying the information provided on the employer's website. To assess environmental, sports and cultural orientation, candidates declared what activities they had been involved in these areas over the previous month.

5. Research results

The data used to verify the hypotheses is presented below.

Table 1. Percentages of respondents who will apply to the company as a first choice, based on information on its www (the responses: “strongly increases” and “increases” have been tallied together).

Questionnaire items	Increased desire to apply as a first choice among environmentally-involved respondents (n=24)	Increased desire to apply as a first choice among respondents who are not environmentally involved (n=55)	Means and t test for independent groups
The company runs pro-environmental projects (waste recycling, reusing printing paper, etc.)	75%	55%	F= 0,607, p=0,438; t=-1,915; p= 0.059; means difference -0,442; standard means error =0,231; lower:-0,902; upper; 0,018
The company organizes group commuting to protect the environment	80%	50%	F= 0,723, p=0,398; t=-2,700; p= 0.009; means difference -0,570; means standard means error =0,211; lower:-0,990; upper; -0,150
The company's business is environment-friendly	83%	65%	F= 2,626, p=0,109; t=-0,873; p= 0.386; means difference -0,183; means standard means error =0,209; lower:-0,599; upper; 0,234
The company sponsors some pro-environmental activities	83%	50%	F= 5,787, p=0,019; t=-1,931; p= 0.059; means difference -0,377; means standard means error =0,195; lower:-0,802; upper; 0,048

The data in the table positively verifies hypothesis 1a. It also shows that type of environmental involvement has a weak impact on candidates. Information concerning casual pro-environmental involvement (subsidizing pro-environmental activities and a declaration of general concern) increased the attractiveness of a given organization the most, while providing specific examples of involvement resulted in a weaker change. However, taking into account the small size of the test group, these differences are not large, and the above data allows us to state only that information about a company's pro-environmental activities has a stronger effect on persons who are involved in pro-environmental activities (hypothesis 1a), regardless of how specific the information is. It should be noted that in both groups providing information concerning pro-environmental activities of any type did not decrease the readiness to apply for a job, and thus the desire to apply of persons not covered in the above table could be expected not to undergo any change as a result of such information (see Wozniak, 2014b for wider discussion).

The data which measure the impact of sponsoring a cultural event on employer attractiveness are bellow. All correlations are statistically important (r Pearson is typically about 0,150, and the highest is for item 4: 0,2).

Table 2. The impact of cultural sponsorship (sponsoring a cultural activities) on employer attractiveness among cultural oriented and un-oriented (only answers: "very strongly increased" and "strongly increased" together).

Questionnaire's item	Cultural activities oriented ("I often take part in cultural events")	Cultural activities un-oriented ("I seldom take part in cultural events" or "I sporadically take part in cultural events")	Means and t test for independent groups
1. "the company is a sponsor for some cultural events"	10 (39% from 26 cultural oriented)	15 (27% from 55)	$F = 0,027$, $p = 0,869$; $t = -1,366$; $p = 0,176$; means difference $-0,23113$; standard means error $= 0,16923$; lower: $-0,56825$; upper: $0,10599$
2. "The company give to employees free tickets for cultural events sponsored by the employer"	17 (65% from 26 cultural oriented)	28 (51% from 55)	$F = 0,089$, $p = 0,767$; $t = -0,903$; $p = 0,370$; means difference $-0,12772$; standard means error $= 0,141444$; lower: $-0,40989$; upper: $0,15445$
3. "The company sells to employees for half price tickets for cultural events sponsored by the employer"	11 (42% from 26)	19 (35% from 55)	$F = 0,223$, $p = 0,638$; $t = -1,335$; $p = 0,186$; means difference $-0,35470$; standard means error $= 0,26575$; lower: $-0,88378$; upper: $0,17438$
4. "The company organizes a lottery for 5% of its best employees with a trip to Film Festival in Cannes as a price"	17 (65% from 26)	31 (56% from 55)	$F = 0,575$, $p = 0,451$; $df = 47,702$; $t = -1,661$; $p = 0,102$; means difference $-0,27973$; standard means error $= 0,16839$; lower: $-0,59456$; upper: $0,03510$
5. "The company obligate its employee for participation in cultural activities"	6 (23% from 26)	7 (13% from 55)	$F = 0,070$, $p = 0,791$; $t = -1,298$; $p = 0,198$; means difference $-0,21990$; standard means error $= 0,16943$; lower: $-0,55756$; upper: $0,11776$

The above data illustrates the effectiveness of using cultural sponsoring to increase the attractiveness of a company as employer. Consistently with hypothesis 1b, cultural sponsoring leads to a growth in company attractiveness. This impact is stronger, although still fairly weak, for persons who espouse values connected with the sponsored area. Similar data is obtained for sponsoring of sports (see table 3 below).

Table 3. The impact of sport sponsoring on sport oriented and unoriented a sports event on increase of employer attractiveness (“increased” and “strongly increased” together).

Questionnaire's item	Sport oriented (“I am sport active – professionally or for pleasure” – agree or partly agree)	Sport unoriented (disagree or partly disagree)	Means and t test for independent groups
1. “The company is the main sponsor of a Polish football team”	17 (31% from 54 sport oriented)	5 (20% from 26)	F=2,635,p=0,109; t=1,109; p= 0.271; means difference 0,14387; standard means error =0,10118; lower: -0,10950; upper: 0,39725
2. The company support financially local sport team (volleyball)	28 (52% from 54 sport oriented)	12 (46% from 26)	F=0,035,p=0,852; t=0,153; p= 0.879; means difference 0,01852; standard means error =0,12082; lower: -0,22201; upper: 0,25905
3. The company support financially sport team and gives free tickets for its' sport events to employees	29 (54% from 54 sport oriented)	12 (46% from 26)	F=1,875,p=0,175; t=-1,340; p= 0.184; means difference -0,17379; standard means error =0,12986; lower: -0,43196; upper: 0,08438
4. The company support financially local sport team and gives tickets on half price for its' sport events to employees	17 (31% from 54 sport oriented)	12 (46% from 26)	F=3,183,p=0,078; df:36,516 t=-0,852; p= 0.400; means difference -0,18234; standard means error =0,21400; lower: -0,61613; upper: 0,25146
5. Employee can draw as a price in lottery a free ticket for company's sponsored sport event	35 (65% from 54 sport oriented)	20 (77% from 26)	F=11,043,p=0,001; df:66,589 t=-1,787; p= 0.078; means difference -0,19658; standard means error =0,10998; lower: -0,41612; upper: 0,02296
6. The company obligate its employee for participation in sport activities	20 (37% from 54 sport oriented)	17 (65% from 26)	F=0,007,p=0,931; t=-1,772; p= 0.080; means difference -0,63390; standard means error =0,35769; lower: -1,34600; upper: 0,07819

The data in table 4 below supports hypotheses 2'a rather than hypothesis 2.

Table 4. Percentage of respondents who will change their decision to apply to the company as a first choice, on the basis of information about the company's anti-environmental activities.

	"The company recently committed an environment-related crime"			Total	Means and t test for independent groups
Type of respondent	Strong decrease	Medium decrease	No change		F = 0,113; P = 0,738
Environmental involvement	9 (37,5%)	12 (50%)	3 (12,5%)	24 (100%)	t = -0,925 df 77
Uninvolved	29 (53%)	10 (18%)	16 (29%)	55 (100%)	p = 0,358
Total	38 (48%)	22 (28%)	19 (24%)	79 (100%)	means difference: -0,236; standard means error = 0,255 lower: -0,745 upper: 0,272

The above data supports hypothesis 2'a rather than hypothesis 2a. Both environment-oriented job seekers as job-seekers who are uninvolved in pro-environmental activities have a negative attitude towards applying to a company that has committed an environmental crime (actions against the natural environment, valued negatively, were operationalized as an environmental crime), although the strength of this negative assessment is inconsistent with cultural fit theory. Contrary to hypothesis 2a, this reaction is slightly more frequent in the environmentally **uninvolved** group (the desire to apply decreased in 88% of environmentally uninvolved persons and in 71% involved ones). However, even the strength of this reaction is not consistent with the line of hypothesis 2a, i.e., the desire to apply decreases much more in the group that is not involved in pro-environmental activities (53% would definitely not apply to such a company), than in the involved group (37% would definitely not apply).

This data partially confirms hypothesis 2', which states that negative information about a company decreases respondents' desire to apply to that company, regardless of the respondents' values (i.e., whether the information contains negative content in terms of the respondents' values). Although, contrary to the hypothesis, this information has a negative impact on a larger percentage of environmentally involved persons, it has a stronger (more negative) influence on persons who are not involved.

Hypothesis 2'bc was confirmed (see tab.2.5 and tab.3.6), irrespective of how it was operationalized. Company attractiveness was decreased both by compulsory sports (in the case of 70% of respondents). No-one felt that these benefits increase company attractiveness. It is also worth noting that the question "a company sells its employees tickets at half the price to cultural events it sponsors" evoked a strong negative reaction – 100% of respondents considered that this lowered the employer's attractiveness.

Data that confirms hypothesis 3 is included in tables 2 (as item 3) and 3 (as item 3) above. It is supported if the level of attractiveness should be compare to the level from item 1 in each of the tables. It worth to be noticed, that use of a lottery increased the attractiveness of the company even more, then such giving a functional benefit – it can be interpreted as a gamification effect, as young generation is known for its gamification attitude.

6. Discussion

The results outlined above have both theoretical as well as practical (managerial) significance.

From a theoretical perspective, we have shown that the two theories analysed provide complementary explanations for the impact on employer brand of different types of information. If the arguments presented above are considered sufficient, it may be said that positive and negative information acts through different mechanisms: positive information through the control mechanism of cultural fit, while the negative – through signalling.

The second important theoretical impact of the above research is to show the relation between symbolic and functional factors of the employer value proposition. The positive symbolic offer included in the Employer Value Proposition is important mostly for the candidates whose values fit the offer. But including in the value proposition some, even not very costly, functional offers (free tickets for a sponsored sports event or even the chance to train with a sports champion) increased the attractiveness of the company not only for candidates with values that fit these activities, but for all candidates. This conclusion shows that symbolic and functional factors influence the candidates' assessment in a synergetic manner.

There are at least three important consequences for management practice.

Our results indicate that placing easily accessible information about the company's sponsoring activities on its website is very valuable not only from the marketing perspective, but also from the perspective of human resource management.

They also indicate that sponsoring expenses need not be large, particularly if the activities also provide employees with direct benefits (e.g. in the form of tickets to a sponsored event, or contact with celebrities participating in events for employees).

The study also suggests that companies should exercise caution when informing candidates about mandatory participation in benefits, as respondents appear to value such information negatively. It indicates also that information about participatory benefits (partly financed by employee) offered by the company should not be placed on the company web site.

7. Conclusion

It is becoming more and more common for enterprises to use branding to promote job openings during recruitment. However, the kind of information that can have the strongest impact on a company's target group is still the subject of scientific debate. To state that every company should inform about its Employee Value Proposition bypasses the issue that communication between Internet users is taking place beyond the company's control.

Two theories that analyse the interaction of information about a company's activities and candidates' values predict different reactions to negative information. Organizational fit theory states that only information directly connected with a candidate's values will have a strong negative impact, while signalling theory considers that all information typically considered negative will have a negative impact.

The aim of this study was to make an initial analysis of the adequacy of applying the explanations of signalling and cultural fit theories to recruitment. Online recruitment was chosen as it creates a possibility for candidates to access rich and varied data concerning the employer they are considering. From the research perspective, this situation allows us to study the effect of both positive and negative information, as well as of a wealth of detailed infor-

mation, on assessments of a company's attractiveness. Respondents were placed in a hypothetical e-recruitment situation, in which they had several equally attractive job openings to choose between. The results of the surveys showed that positive information about a company's involvement in the fields of environment, sports or culture, and negative information in the same area, affect a candidate in a manner that is better explained by, respectively, cultural fit theory and signalling theory. Consistently with cultural fit theory (hypothesis 1), it was found that information about a company's activities consistent with a candidate's values increases the desire of this candidate to apply to this company. A better explanation of respondents' reactions to negatively valued information about a company's activities is provided by signalling theory, which states that all candidates, independently of their values, are less inclined to apply to a given company under the influence of negative information.

This conclusion further refines the knowledge we have of the different effects of negative and positive information in the recruitment situation. Negative information had previously been found to have a much stronger impact than positive information (see the overview of research in Wozniak, 2013). Our research suggests that the mechanisms whereby positive and negative information affects recruitment differ: positive information through the control mechanism of cultural fit, while negative information – through signalling.

The result indicates that – from the perspective of employer brand attractiveness – the difference between CSR activities and sponsorship is not important for candidates. Analyses of the impact of sport and cultural sponsorship have shown that information about sponsoring which has a positive value for candidates affects them through the cultural fit mechanism. In other words, it increases the attractiveness of a company more strongly in the eyes of candidates who profess values related to the sponsored area. On the other hand, the impact of information connected with sponsorship but valued negatively by candidates can be explained with the use of signalling theory, as information suggesting coercion of employees is treated as negative information, independently of whether the 'coercion' concerns co-financing benefits or mandatory participation in sports or culture.

The results are promising, but the limitations of the study call for more extensive research in this area. The test groups were small and the candidates specific (young, relatively well-educated, and at the start of their careers). They were probably more concerned with the symbolic and functional benefits of the activities researched, than older or less educated candidates would have been. It could also be argued that answering questions in a survey sets in motion different decision-making mechanisms than is the case when applying for a job, and thus the results of research on a group outside of the recruitment situation are of limited value for generalizing about recruitment itself.

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