

Perceptions of Employer Attractiveness across Employee Cohorts in Slovakia

Lukáš SMEREK¹, Cecília OLEXOVÁ², Lívía KNECHTOVÁ³

¹ Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Faculty of Economics, Banská Bystrica, Slovak Republic, lukas.smerek@umb.sk

² Bratislava University of Economics and Business, Faculty of Business Economics with seat in Košice, Košice, Slovak Republic, cecilia.olexova@euba.sk

³ Ernst and Young in Bratislava, Slovak Republic, lknechtova@gmail.com

Background/Purpose: This paper investigates employer attractiveness from the perspective of different employee cohorts in Slovakia. The study aims to identify which employer attributes are perceived as most important and to investigate how these perceptions vary across different generational and educational segments. The research addresses current labour market challenges, including shortages of both highly and moderately skilled labour, further exacerbated by demographic ageing.

Methods: A quantitative research design was applied, using a questionnaire survey with a final sample of 481 respondents. A two-step cluster analysis using SPSS software was employed to group respondents with similar preferences.

Results: The results reveal that younger cohorts prioritise opportunities for development and reputation, while older generations emphasise salary and job security. Differences in perception were also observed across education levels. The findings highlight the need for a segmented approach in employer branding strategies, tailored to demographic and regional labour market specifics.

Conclusions: The study contributes to the literature by contextualising employer branding within the Slovak labour market and providing practical insights for organisations seeking to attract and retain diverse talent. These findings are relevant for both academics and HR practitioners aiming to develop more effective employer value propositions.

Keywords: Employer attractiveness, Employer branding, Attributes, Clusters, Intergeneration differences

1 Introduction

Employer branding is a growing trend in the field of human resource management (hereinafter referred to as HRM), particularly in response to the shortage of qualified labour across many countries, including Slovakia. It represents a strategic mismatch between employer expectations and labour market realities, driven by demographic, economic and technological shifts. Among these, the rise of AI-driven automation has contributed to the decline of

middle-skilled positions, further intensifying competition for qualified talent and reinforcing the need for targeted employer branding strategies. In Slovakia, employers face difficulties in hiring both highly qualified technical staff and lower-skilled workers in the manufacturing sector. The healthcare is also affected, with a notable shortage of medical staff. The creation of new jobs with new requirements for employees, high demands on people's skills or retirements can be considered the main reasons. Problems can escalate in connection with population ageing, espe-

cially the gradual ageing of strong population cohorts born between 1970 and 1989 and their subsequent retirement, which reduces the number of working-age population. According to the National Active Ageing Programme report for 2021-2030 (Slovak Republic 2021), the burden of the working-age population (aged 20-64) by the senior (aged 65 and over) will pick up from the current approximately 25 people to 36 in 2030 and 63-67 per 100 people at working age in 2060. In terms of the ageing and labour cost index, Slovakia will rank among the EU countries with the highest percentage of seniors and the highest burden on the working-age population. The forecasts are consistent across OECD countries. Slovakia is among the fastest-ageing OECD countries, and it is expected that the ratio of the population in post-reproductive age to the working-age population will increase from 24% to 54% between 2020 and 2050 (Dujava & Pécsyová, 2020). These labour market and demographic challenges create an increasing need for companies to differentiate themselves as attractive employers and develop targeted employer branding strategies.

Therefore, the primary goal of companies is to attract high-quality job applicants and retain their current employees. Several studies have addressed the topic of employer branding, including publications that attempt to cover the concept comprehensively due to its inherently multidisciplinary nature. However, the approach of employers operating in Slovakia is not sufficiently discussed in the literature. Partial problems of employer branding were mentioned by Fratričová & Kirchmayer (2017). More scientists have addressed this topic only marginally within related fields (Hitka et al., 2019; Kucharčíková et al., 2019; Vetráková et al., 2020; Hitka et al., 2021). However, the growing interest and importance of employer branding can be seen, thanks to the mapping of this area by HR agencies (Deloitte, 2023; Univerzum, 2023). Univerzum (2023) states that most companies – the world's most attractive employers (78%) consider employer branding a top priority. There is also increasing interest from companies and organisations in participating in the survey for The Most Attractive Employer of The Year, which has been announced in Slovakia for more than ten years and is gaining prestige year by year. The results of the survey are based not only on the decision of the general public, but also on the opinions of employees, and gradually, employers from various sectors are being added (Profesia, 2023). While existing literature confirms the relevance of employer branding as a strategic HR tool, there is still limited understanding of how its specific attributes are perceived across different demographic and cultural settings. The preferences of different groups of potential job seekers are a specific area of interest due to the meeting of different generations in the labour market. Does it make sense for employers to target their activities at different generations of employees, and also depending on the level of education achieved? In this context, environmental awareness and green skills, such as

sustainability thinking or resource efficiency, are emerging as increasingly relevant values, especially for younger generations seeking purpose-driven work. These expectations may shape the way employer branding is perceived and communicated.

Ultimately, the literature lacks consensus regarding the specific audience for employer branding (Theurer et al., 2018), particularly in terms of differences between demographic groups (Sarabdeen et al., 2023). The generational perspective has become increasingly important in the context of workforce diversification; yet, few studies systematically explore how various age cohorts in post-transition economies, such as Slovakia, perceive employer branding.

Therefore, this paper aims to identify the key attributes of building an employer brand that are important for employees of different generations in Slovakia to perceive as attractive, thereby contributing to theoretical knowledge that takes into account the local context and offers practical conclusions applicable to companies operating in Slovakia.

The paper adopts a context-specific approach to employer branding, examining how national labour market conditions and demographic structures shape perceptions of employer attractiveness. This perspective aims to complement international literature and provide theory-driven insights into generational employer preferences.

To achieve the goal, the paper is structured as follows: firstly, a review of the literature on employer branding, including intergenerational differences, is presented. Subsequently, the aim, methodology and sample are defined. In the following sections, the significant results of the research are presented. In the discussion, the focus is put on the essential elements of the employer brand in terms of generational differences and differences resulting from the level of education. In conclusion, the implications of our results, as well as further research directions and limitations, are discussed.

2 Literature review

2.1 Building the Employer Brand

An employer brand exists in every organisation, whether consciously managed or not. Without active shaping, prospective and current employees will form their own opinions (Daley, 2022). A strong employer brand engages current employees and attracts new candidates, making the employer a preferred choice (Rampl, 2014), serving as a long-term competitive advantage. The concept is increasingly tied to employee engagement and organisational embeddedness, where employer branding reinforces perceived organisational support and employee identification (Allen & Shanock, 2013). This brand perception is linked to customer views, with stronger business brands

attracting higher-quality talent. Companies with better reputations tend to have more satisfied employees, and a positive applicant experience also boosts retention. Retaining valuable employees is crucial for sustaining a competitive advantage (Gelencsér et al., 2023).

Employer attractiveness, crucial for recruiting and retaining professionals, has received substantial scholarly attention (Berthon et al., 2005; Pingle & Sodhi, 2011). While attractiveness defines key elements, employer branding focuses on the communication that enhances this appeal. This distinction is grounded in signalling theory, which explains how employers' signals (such as branding) influence perceptions under conditions of imperfect information (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Recent studies have also linked employer branding to psychological contract theory and social exchange theory, highlighting how trust and perceived fairness mediate employer-employee relationships (Allen & Shanock, 2013; Kuchеров & Zayvalova, 2012). Even consumer-targeted communication impacts employees (Batt et al., 2021). Therefore, the employer branding process should be systematic (Stacho et al., 2022).

Employer branding borrows from product branding by using storytelling and emotion-based messaging to differentiate the company in the labour market (Rampl, 2014). The employer does not make a specific job offer, but instead builds continuous visibility and relevance. Unlike transactional staffing, employer branding represents a long-term strategy to position the company as an employer of choice (Reis & Braga, 2016). This facilitates talent acquisition and enhances internal engagement.

Employer branding also supports retaining employees by promoting internal values and consistency between promises and experience (Vetráková et al., 2020). This requires alignment of internal and external communication. The process of generating value for employees begins with expressing this value, continues with its measurement, and is then transformed into financial and non-financial indicators. It concludes by determining the activities that generate this value (Kucharčíková et al., 2019). From the perspective of psychological contract theory, this alignment is critical, as discrepancies between communicated promises and the actual work environment can erode trust and retention. In this regard, recent findings emphasise that not only psychological but also physical aspects of the workplace matter. Yasin et al. (2025) demonstrate that a green work environment, fostered through green human resource management practices, strengthens employer branding. They demonstrate that employees perceive sustainable and safe physical conditions as part of fulfilling the implicit contract with their employer. A company is considered attractive when potential employees proactively pursue job opportunities with it (Reis & Braga, 2016). Company culture is a key medium through which employer branding becomes credible. It is characterised by fairness, honesty, respect, and employee trust in the employer's actions.

Consistency in upholding company values is also crucial (Fonseca, 2022). These soft factors are increasingly important in knowledge-intensive industries, where cultural fit and employer ethics significantly influence employee decisions (Allen & Shanock, 2013).

Brand building involves identifying what makes an employer unique and defining its core values. The "employee value proposition (EVP)" represents the value offered to employees, which Minchington (2006) described as a "set of associations and offerings provided by an organisation in return for the skills, capabilities and experience an employee brings to the organisation."

Several approaches to measuring employer branding are presented in the literature; however, no consensus has been established (Sarabdeen et al., 2023). Some scholars have proposed multidimensional models, such as Srivastava, Bhatnagar, and Arora (2017), who validated an 11-item second-order construct comprising "reputation, perceived culture, and HR systems and processes". Berthon et al. (2005) measured employer attractiveness using five primary values, i.e., attractiveness attributes, a similar approach followed by Lassleben and Hofmann (2023), who added work-life balance. These differing frameworks reflect the complexity of employer branding as a multidimensional phenomenon, requiring a contextual and flexible approach. Robust constructs and a comprehensive measurement model for employer branding were published by Sarabdeen et al. (2023).

Ambler and Barrow (1996) originally defined employer branding as the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment. They emphasised its dual relevance for both attracting new talent and retaining existing employees. They conceptualised employer branding as the application of marketing principles to HRM, highlighting that consistent communication of these benefits is key to aligning employer identity and reputation.

EVP is increasingly seen as the strategic core of employer branding and requires adaptation to demographic and cultural expectations. According to Ambler and Barrow (1996), EVP functions as a psychological contract that aligns the mutual expectations of the employer and employee. EVP includes elements such as compensation, trust, work-life balance, and growth opportunities. According to economic migration theories summarised by Přívara et al. (2023), labour mobility is influenced not only by wage differentials but also by labour market segmentation and perceived opportunity structures. These theoretical frameworks support the notion that younger generations and educated talent are more sensitive to perceived employer value propositions.

Employer values can be determined through employee surveys, public opinion, internal analysis, or benchmarking against competitors. Ranking like Slovakia's Best Employer (organised by Profesia) also supports brand vis-

ibility by validating employer image through comparative evaluation criteria (management's approach, employer branding strategies, communication, performance management, employee development, benefits, and corporate social responsibility).

2.2 Attributes of employer attractiveness in terms of intergenerational differences

A LinkedIn survey of 18,000 employees from 26 countries, published in the 2014 Talent Trends study, revealed that more than half of job seekers (56%) consider a company's reputation as a great place to work to be a decisive factor in choosing a job. Other influencing factors included the reputation for quality products/services (20%), the reputation of the people employed in the company (17%), and the company's prestige (7%). These findings underscore the importance of clearly articulating organisational values, workplace culture, and expectations in external employer branding strategies. This highlights the strategic role of employer branding in shaping external perceptions.

Reis and Braga (2016) noted that different generations have distinct preferences, mirroring findings from motivation research, which suggest that motivation factors vary significantly with age (e.g., Hitka et al., 2021). Consequently, developing an employer brand that resonates across generational cohorts presents a growing challenge. This challenge is particularly acute in Slovakia, where employers often lack experience in strategic brand communication and segmentation, especially when targeting different generations. Contemporary workplaces commonly comprise three generational groups: Generation X (born 1961–1981), Generation Y (born 1982–2000), and Generation Z (born 2000–2012). This generational framework draws on Strauss and Howe's (1991) theory, which suggests shared historical and social experiences shape each cohort. Generation X is typically characterised by confidence and independence, stronger loyalty to career progression than to employers, and a preference for skill development and work-life balance over hierarchical status. They value opportunities for professional growth paired with competitive compensation, especially in environments that foster diversity and creativity.

Generation Y tend to prioritise personal fulfilment, novelty and continual stimulation through change and challenges. They value flexibility, quality of life, recognition, and continuous feedback, as well as collaborative workplace relationships (Cavazotte et al., 2012). They are also more likely to share experiences and engage in leisure pursuits (Wiścicka & Misiak-Kwit, 2017). Although they may place less emphasis on work itself, they prioritise an attractive compensation package, personal growth, and a positive work environment. Millennials are particularly

interested in rapid career advancement and technological innovation, shaped by their formative years during the internet boom (Twenge, 2010).

Generation Z, also known as Gen Z, is the successor cohort to millennials. In contrast, older cohorts may experience greater barriers to digital interaction. Seberini et al. (2022) note that older adults are particularly at risk of internet-related social exclusion, since they tend to use the Internet less than younger adults. They are considered the first true digital natives, having grown up with widespread use of technology. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digital transformation across all age groups, including those previously less engaged with digital tools. The COVID-19 pandemic helped public administration to reduce the digital divide and increase digital citizenship without citizens even realising it (Tokovska et al., 2023). They bring advanced digital skills to the workplace, using them extensively for collaboration. However, their career outlook tends to be more cautious, shaped by exposure to recent global economic recessions. Aligning with their independence, entrepreneurial motivation, and outcome orientation, they place high value on workplace autonomy, including non-traditional employment arrangements such as teleworking (Weidmer, 2015; Lanier, 2017; Dwivendula et al., 2019).

A LinkedIn global trends survey (2020) found cross-generational agreement on top work values (listed as a percentage of people who listed selected factors as the most important when deciding on a new job): adequate compensation and benefits, work-life balance, and a positive work culture, possibly also an inspirational colleague and culture. Purpose-driven work was most valued by Boomers (32%) and least by Gen Z (18%). On the contrary, 36% of Generation Z considered education highly important compared to only 20% of Generation X.

Current research is increasingly targeting the preferences of Generation Z as they transition into employment. Ružić and Benazić (2023), studying Generation Z in Croatia, identified six key attributes based on Berthon et al.'s (2005) methodology: "organisation's market orientation, acceptance and good relationships with colleagues, informal workplace characteristics, potential for gaining experience and career advancement, salary and material benefits, and a sense of belonging to the organisation." Their findings also stressed the impact of economic volatility and labour shortage on shaping these generational preferences. Vieira et al. (2024), based on a literature review, identified key attributes for a Generation Z workplace as social responsibility, salary, and the company's reputation. Ružić and Benazić (2023) noted that cultural context and specific conditions may explain deviations from the original framework proposed by Berthon et al. (2005). Kapuściński et al. (2023) examined Generation Z in the hospitality sector. They recommended tailored employer strategies, including empowering employees through ad-

ditional responsibilities, supporting development via mentorship programs, and recognising achievements by sharing success stories on social media. However, empirical evidence from Central and Eastern Europe remains scarce, and insights on how employers adapt their branding and EVP strategies to accommodate generational diversity are largely missing. Our research addresses this gap by examining how different generational cohorts in Slovakia perceive employer attractiveness and how these insights can inform employer branding strategies. Specifically, we argue that employer branding must be tailored to inter-generational preferences through differentiated Employee Value Propositions (EVPs), communication channels, and management approaches. For example, digital fluency and autonomy may be central to Gen Z messaging. At the same time, opportunities for personal development and work-life balance are more relevant to Gen Y. These findings provide actionable guidance for HR professionals in designing more effective recruitment and retention strategies that align with the needs of this generation.

3 Objective, Materials and Methods of Research

While the most common selection criteria for employees include technical ability and experience (Poór et al., 2017), age and level of education of candidates are also among the five main factors affecting the selection of employees in Slovak companies (Smerek & Kováčiková, 2019). Therefore, this paper aims to identify the characteristics of an attractive employer and the differences in perception of their importance among various categories of respondents in Slovakia, specifically among different generations of respondents and among respondents with varying levels of education.

Research questions were formulated as follows:

RQ1: What are the most commonly perceived attributes of an attractive employer?

RQ2: Does the perception of attributes of an attractive employer depend on age and education?

Data collection was conducted through a questionnaire survey from October 2024 to February 2025. An electronic questionnaire was created on the Google Docs platform. Respondents were approached either personally or by email (400 people) and through social networks, specifically Facebook and LinkedIn (reaching 2,128 people). This approach represents a form of convenience sampling, which was chosen due to its flexibility and ease of access to a large number of respondents. The sample consists of 481 respondents completing the entire questionnaire. The response rate of the questionnaire was 19.03%. The representativeness of the sample was verified using the Chi-square test of goodness of fit, based on two sorting attributes: gender and age.

Because recruitment relied in part on Facebook and LinkedIn, our sample may reflect platform- and topic-specific self-selection. Recent experiments have shown that subtle changes in the design of social media ads (e.g., explicit cues or themes) can influence who clicks and responds, which in turn can impact composition and estimates (Neundorf & Öztürk, 2025). Studies of surveys conducted via Facebook further suggest that the topic and presentation can subtly alter responses, although not always consistently (Donzowa et al., 2025). Furthermore, platform dynamics (e.g., LinkedIn profile verification practices and age bias) may underrepresent older or less digitally active workers (Schellaert et al., 2024). We minimised this risk through multi-channel outreach and subsequent age and education representativeness checks; however, generalising results beyond active social media users requires caution.

Table 1: Representativeness of the sample in terms of age

Age					
	Observed N	%	Expected N	Expected %	Residual
< 25	160	33.26	151.5	31.50	8.5
25 – 40	134	27.86	121.1	25.18	12.9
40 – 64	187	38.88	208.4	43.32	-21.4
Total	481	100.0	481	100.0	
Null Hypothesis		Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig	Decision
The categories of age occur with the specified probabilities		4.037 ^a	2	0.133	Retain the null hypothesis

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 121.1.

Source: Own processing, 2025

Table 2: Representativeness of the sample in terms of the level of education achieved

Education					
	Observed N	%	Expected N	Expected %	Residual
Primary	78	16.22	76.5	15.90	1.5
Secondary	219	45.53	234.7	48.79	-15.7
Higher	184	38.25	169.8	35.30	14.2
Total	481	100.0	481	100.00	
Null Hypothesis		Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig	Decision
The categories of gender occur with the specified probabilities		2.257 ^a	2	0.324	Retain the null hypothesis

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 76.5.

Source: Own processing, 2025

For the identification of the basic set, we utilised data from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, specifically the STATdat database, as of 31 December 2023. The age groups in the mentioned database are shifted by approximately two years compared to the theoretical definition of Generations X, Y and Z. However, the definition of generations is given as indicative in all sources. For statistical testing, an exactly defined age in the database of the statistical office was used. For the purposes of evaluating the results, respondents aged 40 – 64 years were considered Generation X, respondents aged 25 – 40 years Generation Y and respondents aged up to 25 years Generation Z. Although generational theory (Strauss & Howe, 1991) defines cohorts by shared cultural experiences, the present study operationalises them through age categories due to data availability, following an approximate alignment with theoretical generation boundaries. For assessing the representativeness of the sample based on educational attainment, the active population aged 15 and above was considered. The testing was conducted at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, with the results presented in Tables 1 and 2.

In our survey, we were inspired by the individual values and attributes that contribute to employer attractiveness. Respondents were also allowed to add attributes to better identify the specifics of the Slovak labour market. The questionnaire items were derived from established studies (Berthon et al., 2005; Sarabdeen et al., 2023). Unlike most existing studies that focus on global patterns or single generational cohorts, this paper contributes to the literature by comparing generational and educational differences in the Slovak context.

In addition to providing identification data, respondents were asked to identify which attributes of an attractive employer they considered relevant and preferred. To compare differences in the identification of these attributes, the McNemar test was applied. This test is appropriate for comparing two binary variables, assuming the null hy-

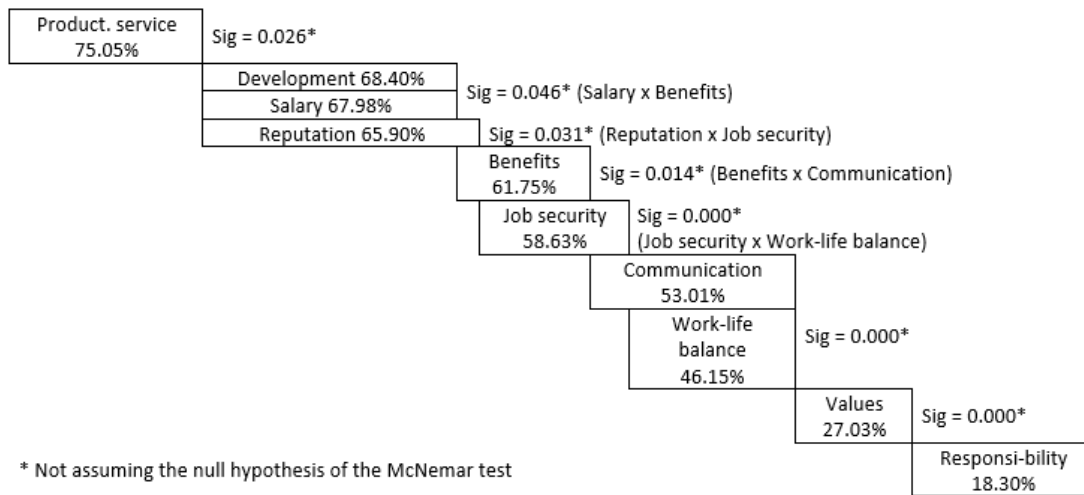
pothesis that the distribution across categories is equal. To assess differences in the perceived importance of employer attributes, the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was used, which is suitable for ordinal variables. The null hypothesis assumes that the median difference in the paired data is zero. The testing of the significance of differences between individual groups of respondents at the level $\alpha = 0.05$ was carried out. Finally, to identify groups of respondents with similar preferences, a two-step cluster analysis was conducted using SPSS software. Although findings are statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.05$, their practical relevance is discussed with caution, particularly in the context of designing HR strategies tailored to generational needs.

4 Results

In evaluating the perception of attractive employer attributes, respondents had the opportunity to select any number of attributes from the list or add their own. They were then to express their importance on a scale from 1 (low importance) to 5 (high importance). If a respondent did not mention a particular attribute in the response, it was assigned an importance of 0 (no importance). Subsequently, the order of the ten most frequently appearing attributes of an attractive employer, according to the percentage of respondents who noticed them (Table 3), was compiled. For each attribute, its average importance was determined (Table 4).

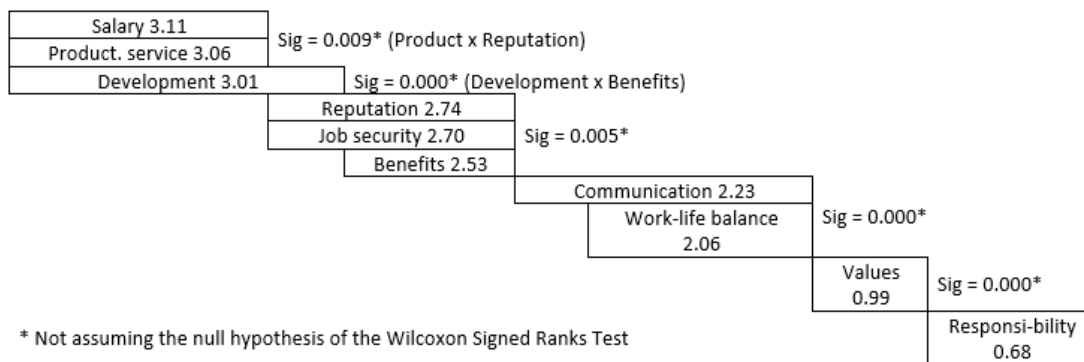
By applying McNemar's test, groups with statistically significant differences between them in the identification of attractive employer attributes were created. Furthermore, using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, groups of attributes were created and statistically significant differences in the perception of their importance were identified.

Table 3: Difference in identification of attractive employer attributes



Source: Own processing, 2025

Table 4: The difference in perception of the importance of attractive employer attributes



Source: Own processing, 2025

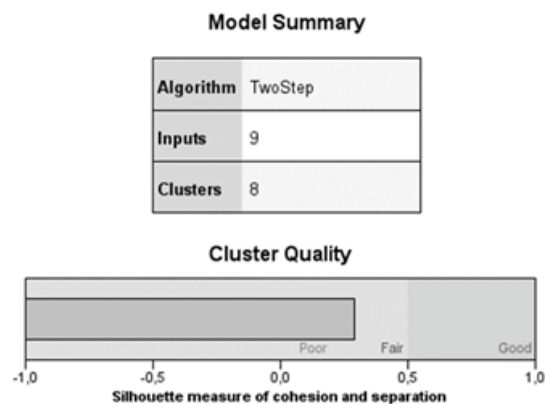


Figure 1: Cluster Model Summary

Source: Own processing, 2025

To identify specific patterns of perception of an attractive employer's attributes that are valid for individual groups of potential employees, a two-step cluster analysis was employed. The attributes mentioned by at least 50% of respondents were considered to create clusters. Therefore, the first 7 of the 10 most frequently perceived attributes – customer satisfaction with the company's product/service, career and personal growth, salary, overall company reputation, benefits offered, job security offered, and good company communication were used. Generally, salary is among the most significant factors in determining an employer's attractiveness. For example, Saini et al. (2015) stated that, although multiple factors are important for job seekers, salary still has the greatest impact on their work decisions. Surprisingly, fewer respondents mentioned work-life balance, as it is often in the centre of attention in society; however, this was also found by Sarabdeen et al. (2023) and Saini et al. (2015). The age of the respondents and their education were investigated as the essential variables. These can be relevant for companies when searching for new employees and can impact the candidate's suitability for performing specific work activities, or can positively influence the work team structure.

Figure 1 shows the appropriateness of the chosen methodology. Considering the data used, the quality of the identified clusters is not the best, but it is satisfactory for us to draw relevant conclusions and recommendations.

When comparing respondents' answers, 8 relevant clusters were created (Table 5–7). Tables 5–7 provide a detailed overview of these clusters, demonstrating how age and education interact to shape preferences for employer attributes. Their analysis enables us to identify distinct patterns for Generations Z, Y, and X, providing the basis for the subsequent graphical model (Figure 2).

Table 5 breaks down Generation Z respondents by ed-

ucation level. The results show that growth and reputation were particularly important to respondents with a college degree. At the same time, those with only primary or secondary education placed a greater emphasis on compensation and benefits. These results highlight that even among the youngest cohorts, education level has a strong influence on perceptions of employer attractiveness.

Table 6 presents the clusters for Generation Y. Respondents in this age group showed a balanced perception of various employer attributes. While compensation and job security remained important, respondents with higher education placed greater emphasis on product/service quality and professional development. This suggests that Generation Y tends to evaluate employer attractiveness more differentially than Generation Z.

Table 7 summarises the clusters for Generation X. Within this age group, compensation and product/service quality are consistently prioritised across all education levels. Compared to younger generations, Generation X respondents value stability and tangible outcomes from their work experiences. These perceptions explain why compensation and job security are the top priorities in their employer brand preferences.

It means that within the group of respondents under 25 (Generation Z) and over 40 (Generation X), differences in the perception of the importance of an attractive employer's attributes by respondents in terms of education can be observed. In the case of the 25- to 40-year-old age group (Generation Y), respondents with primary education exhibited some of the characteristics of respondents with higher or lower levels of education. This is also a limitation of our research. Overall, however, conclusions can be drawn in response to RQ2.

In HR processes, such as job analysis and subsequent recruiting, it is quite common for human resource man-

Table 5: Clusters of age under 25

Cluster	Primary Z			Secondary Z			Higher Z		
Size	5.2% (25)			14.3% (69)			13.7% (66)		
Education	100%			100%			100%		
Age	100%			100%			100%		
	Mean	St. dev	Med	Mean	St. dev	Med	Mean	St. dev	Med
Salary	2.00	2.33	0	2.75	2.22	4	2.68	2.22	4
Product/Service	3.20	1.73	4	2.65	1.98	4	2.52	1.97	3
Job security	2.04	2.37	0	2.19	2.26	0	2.21	2.33	0
Benefits	1.76	2.07	0	2.54	2.14	3	3.20	1.95	4
Reputation	2.04	2.09	3	2.81	2.01	4	3.15	1.97	4
Communication	1.76	2.11	0	2.01	2.18	0	2.32	2.28	3
Development	3.32	2.17	4	2.83	2.11	4	3.32	2.20	5

Source: Own processing, 2025

agers and other HR specialists to create preferred groups of employees suitable for a specific job position. Depending on the nature of the activities performed and the job requirements, the most common determinant is the level of education completed. To maintain a desirable corporate culture, the continuity of the workforce structure and succession planning are crucial. The age of recruited employees is a frequent determinant in this regard. For the practical application of our findings, a graphic model (Figure 2) was created. The attributes of an attractive employer with an average importance higher than 3 were considered.

In Figure 2, the colours distinguish the educational groups of respondents to provide better clarity of the model. Green indicates respondents with a university education, blue indicates respondents with a secondary education, and red indicates respondents with a primary education. This visual coding allows for easier comparison of

how different levels of education within each generation perceive the importance of employer attributes.

This model can serve as an aid to company management in setting the employer's branding strategy regarding the mentioned determinants. The features not connected to the respondents' categories in the model showed an average importance of less than 3, indicating that their influence on the perception of the attractiveness of the employer's brand has minimal added value for the company. Interestingly, respondents with higher education showed greater consistency, which enabled us to identify more significantly essential factors. Generation Y members with primary and secondary education could not agree on a single significant factor. For this generation, it is therefore necessary to strike a balance between following all the signs of an attractive employer.

Table 6: Clusters of age between 25 and 40

Cluster	Secondary Y			Higher Y		
Size	13.1% (63)			11.0% (53)		
Education	100%			98.1%		
Age	100%			100%		
	Mean	St. dev	Med	Mean	St. dev	Med
Salary	2.52	2.26	4	3.00	2.31	4
Product/Service	2.46	2.18	3	3.26	2.15	4
Job security	2.83	2.30	4	3.32	2.24	5
Benefits	2.46	2.04	4	2.60	1.93	3
Reputation	2.44	2.15	3	2.26	2.31	2
Communication	1.76	2.18	0	2.17	2.29	2
Development	2.95	2.05	4	2.70	2.28	4

Source: Own processing, 2025

Table 7: Clusters of age between 40 and 64

Cluster	Primary X			Secondary X			Higher X		
Size	10.8% (52)			18.1% (87)			13.7% (66)		
Education	100%			100%			100%		
Age	65.4%			100%			100%		
	Mean	St. dev	Med	Mean	St. dev	Med	Mean	St. dev	Med
Salary	3.60	1.97	5	3.78	1.90	5	3.70	2.07	5
Product/Service	3.42	1.66	4	3.59	1.59	4	3.44	1.76	4
Job security	3.12	2.18	4	2.92	2.29	4	2.71	2.38	4
Benefits	2.52	2.18	3	2.25	2.21	3	2.55	2.21	3
Reputation	2.81	2.07	4	2.79	2.01	4	3.05	1.90	4
Communication	2.38	2.32	3	2.79	2.08	3	2.17	2.10	3
Development	2.92	2.13	4	3.10	2.04	4	3.00	2.13	4

Source: Own processing, 2025

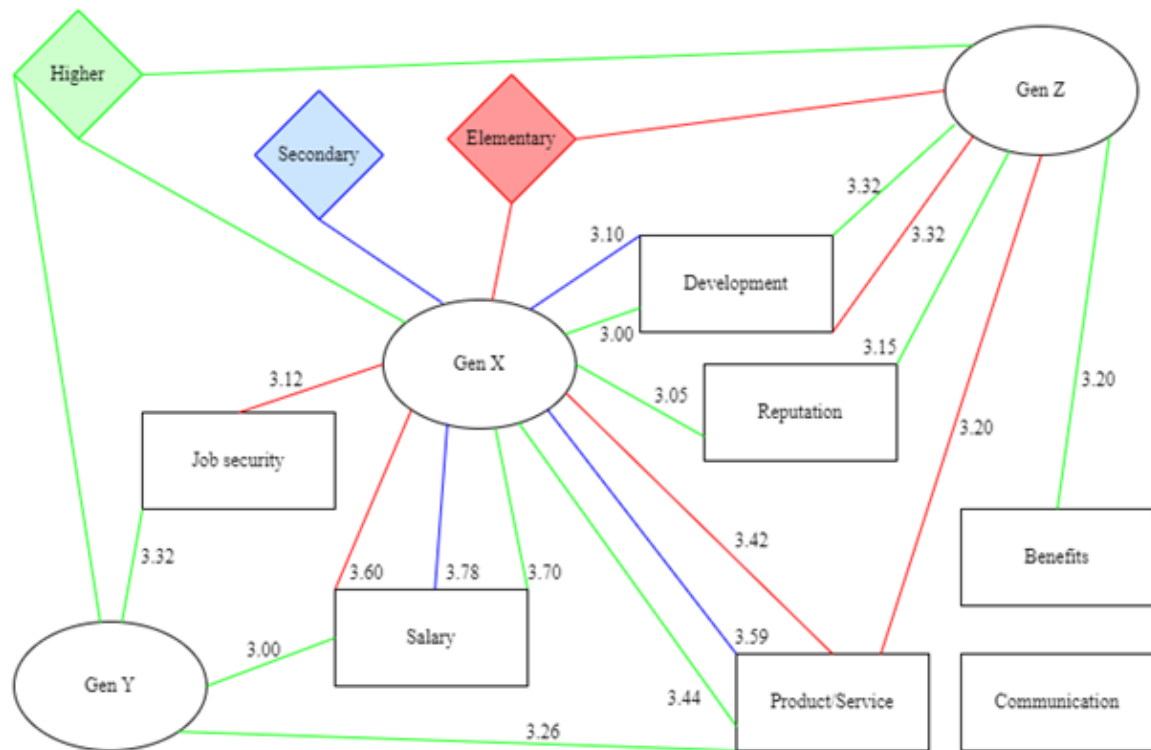


Figure 2: Influence of the characteristics of an attractive employer on different groups of respondents

Source: Own processing, 2025

5 Discussion

The most significant attributes of an employer attractiveness are logical. Regardless of education, development is the most important feature for the age category under 25, i.e., young people are aware of the importance of education for further practice. Similar to our study, Grigore et al. (2023) also examined how age and education influence the perception of employer attractiveness in the context of Eastern Europe, specifically Romania. Their findings underscore the importance of demographic segmentation in designing employer branding strategies for post-transition economies. Sarabdeen et al. (2023) likewise argue that junior employees, or those at the beginning of their careers, are interested in training and perceive development opportunities as “a value-added attribute”. Similar conclusions were also reported in the research conducted by Kapuściński et al. (2023) among Generation Z in the UK hospitality industry. Based on this, they emphasised the need to offer people the possibility of career development by providing training or work opportunities in other locations, respectively, in other countries. Dwivedula and Singh (2020) also state that growth opportunities are

among the essential factors for Generation Z. According to a Deloitte survey (2023) of Generation Z and Millennials, these groups of people would like employers to offer better career opportunities for part-time employees in this regard. Stiglbauer et al. (2022) dealt with intergenerational differences in a sample of the German online population. However, they concluded their findings by saying that there are no considerable differences in the fundamental characteristics of attractiveness between Generations.

Nevertheless, they only pointed to some, e.g., that Generation Z, compared to Generation X, places greater emphasis on development (like our case) but also on relating (in the sense of placing great emphasis on good social relationships). Compared to other age groups, salary did not appear among the most significant attributes of attractiveness – here we can see a similarity with the results of a survey of motivation factors (Hitka et al., 2019), which presents statistically significant differences between age and salary when younger age groups are aware of their limits in skills and experience and the need to acquire relevant experience for their career development. Similarly, Gallo et al. (2023) state that this is also the case in the example of Generation X social workers. Financial remuneration

neration and upskilling are significant motivators for them. At the same time, career growth is more important for Generation Y, along with interesting work, a friendly work environment, feedback, and a good work-life balance. The findings must be interpreted within the context of the Slovak labour market, characterised by ongoing demographic ageing, emigration of young, skilled labour, and regional disparities. These factors may shape how generations perceive employer attractiveness and how employers respond through tailored branding strategies. This aligns with empirical findings by Přivara et al. (2023), who demonstrated that immigration in V4 countries has a significant and negative effect on unemployment, particularly in the short run, which supports the potential of targeted labour mobility as a solution for less developed regions such as Prešov and Košice. In addition, our results empirically support the dual-process model of EB proposed by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004). In addition to the dual-process perspective, two complementary models help explain why cohorts in our data weigh employer attributes differently. First, signalling theory (Thang & Trang, 2024) posits that under conditions of information asymmetry, job seekers rely on observable signals to infer implicit employment terms. Gen Z, who are more digitally embedded, is particularly vulnerable to employer signals disseminated through social media; thus, they appear to respond more strongly to online signals about advancement and reputation. Second, psychological contract research suggests that cohorts entering the labour market have different sets of expectations regarding reciprocity. Data from recent cohort-moderated models show that younger workers exhibit lower psychological contract fulfilment compared to older cohorts (Ellethiey et al., 2024), which may increase their sensitivity to tangible advancement opportunities and transparent communication. Together, these mechanisms fit our pattern – Gen Z emphasises growth/reputation, Gen Y emphasises job security, and Gen X emphasises reward – and suggest that tailoring EVP signals to cohort-specific expectations can increase employer attractiveness.

Respondents aged 25–40 with secondary education mentioned development as the most important feature. For university-educated people of Generation Y, other attributes of employer attractiveness are more important, as they want to apply their education and experience. It is completely different for the group of people aged 40 to 64. They showed the salary as the most important factor, which is not surprising. There can be several explanations. Firstly, the fact that employees at this age already want to materialise the results of their work experience, and at the same time, it is pragmatism because the salary will later affect their retirement income. In addition, the salary in Slovakia is relatively low, including differences in terms of the highest level of education completed, and the salary mainly serves to cover basic needs, which may be another explanation for the emphasis on salary compared to the

results of Stiglbauer et al. (2022), where all generations placed less emphasis on money.

When examining the other features of employer attractiveness, diversity is evident in the differences between age and educational levels. In general, regardless of education, a company's reputation is important to Generation Z. We can rely on the findings of Wilden et al. (2010), which indicate that the credibility of information also contributes to employer attractiveness. The importance of reputation, especially for inexperienced respondents, which in our case means Generation Z, is explained by Wilden et al. (2010). The main reason is that these people want an employer with a strong brand name on their CVs. Generation Y, currently at a productive age, also considers job security and salary. Generation X agrees, regardless of the level of education, that customer satisfaction with the company products and services is also an important attribute for this generation, which can be explained by the fact that for this generation it is essential to experience the meaningfulness of work and the awareness of the close connection between customers' satisfaction and the success of the company, reflected in the amount of pay. They also attach relatively high importance to education, which is currently a prerequisite for maintaining work skills due to the constantly increasing demands on employees.

Deloitte survey results (2023) also found that 49% of Generation Z and 62% of Millennials say work is central to their identity. However, they place great emphasis on work-life balance – a distinctive trait they admire in their peers and the main criterion when choosing an employer. Similarly, work-life balance is also evident in the results reported by Ada et al. (2023) and Rozsa and Machová (2020). However, it was not confirmed by our data. A general explanation could be that nowadays, especially in the post-pandemic period, it is taken for granted, not something that makes the employer unique and different from others (see Universum, 2023), or this may also be a matter of different culture (Baum & Kabst, 2013; Bábiková & Bucek, 2019). We believe, following the situation in Slovakia, that it may be a locally specific issue, with low salaries and less attractive job opportunities in individual regions of Slovakia. This is also stated by Habánik et al. (2019), who note that Slovak employers tend to focus more on low-wage employees due to Slovakia's emphasis on industry. For these reasons, the salary and other values mentioned are on the first rungs of the decisive attributes.

Based on the findings, employer branding strategies should highlight professional development opportunities and reputation for Gen Z, job security and career progression for Gen Y, and fair compensation and meaningful work for Gen X. Tailoring communication on platforms relevant to each group (e.g. social media for Gen Z, LinkedIn and internal communication for Gen Y/X) can further enhance employer appeal. In this respect, Ghorbanzadeh et al. (2025) provide empirical support by showing that

social media characteristics, particularly social presence and informativeness, significantly shape employer brand attractiveness and person–organisation fit. From a signalling theory perspective, these online cues serve as important signals of organisational values, reinforcing the importance of carefully crafted digital content (Suprawan et al., 2025) as a key driver of recruitment outcomes.

In line with global sustainability agendas and shifting generational values, recent research confirms that all generational cohorts are increasingly responsive to employers' environmental and societal commitments. Generation X shows the most favourable attitude toward sustainability, followed by Generation Z, which highlights the need for organisations to communicate their sustainability efforts effectively to attract these groups (Verčič & Verčič, 2025). Green employer labels in recruitment ads enhance person–organisation fit and employer attractiveness, especially among environmentally oriented applicants (Pffelfmann et al., 2025). Although not directly captured in our survey items, attributes related to sustainability and environmental responsibility may be indirectly reflected in preferences for development, innovation, and employer reputation. Future employer branding strategies may need to explicitly articulate their commitments in this area to maintain competitiveness among emerging generations of talent. This supports the theoretical proposition that employer brand associations (e.g. development, reputation, security) influence the employer brand image, which in turn affects employer attractiveness (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Our findings support the view that such brand associations contribute to better person–organisation value matching, especially when tailored to generational expectations.

6 Conclusions

The topic of building an employer's brand is not new in Slovakia, but it gained practical importance only in connection with the labour market's shortage of employees. Even though the rate of registered unemployment in Slovakia is not enormously high (3.81% in December 2024), employers face growing challenges in attracting and retaining qualified human resources, especially in less developed regions (such as Prešov and Košice). The paper contributes to its results by identifying attributes of employer attractiveness, which can help employers in Slovakia retain talent and attract new ones. Creating an employer brand must be systematic and responsive to generational differences in employee values. The results show that while core values are shared, their relative importance differs by age and education. Employers should segment EVP communication to match generational expectations and consistently deliver on these promises. Practically, this implies fostering intergenerational inclusivity, strengthening a culture of feedback, and investing in the growth of younger cohorts

to enhance engagement and loyalty. Satisfied and engaged employees can thus become powerful brand ambassadors, shaping external perceptions through authentic advocacy. The conducted research also has its limitations. This study is limited by potential self-selection bias due to convenience sampling and the inability to isolate employer branding effects from broader organisational variables.

Specifically, social-media recruitment can introduce coverage and algorithmic delivery effects, as well as cohort-specific non-response (e.g., lower propensity among older workers) (Schellaert et al., 2024). Future work should pre-register ad variants, log recruitment creatives, and, where feasible, triangulate samples from offline frames or probability-based panels to improve external validity (Neundorf & Öztürk, 2025; Donzowa et al., 2025). Subsequent studies might incorporate longitudinal or experimental designs to assess causality.

Upcoming research agendas should also address the role of the sectoral differences, company size, and regional labour market disparities in shaping employer brand preferences.

In addition, future research should explicitly include elements of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability commitments, given the growing body of evidence that younger generations – particularly Generation Z – value employers' commitment to environmental and social issues (Sengupta et al., 2024; Gintale et al., 2024; Mas-Manchón et al., 2024). Recommended elements include externally verified ESG reports and emissions targets, investment in green skills training, ethical supply chain policies, community engagement and volunteering opportunities, and transparent sustainability communications. Incorporating these elements would enable testing whether Generation Z clusters demonstrate a stronger response to CSR-related signals than older generations and whether CSR enhances value alignment between individuals and organisations beyond basic attributes, such as development and compensation. CSR can, within the framework of signalling theory, act as a strong signal of an organisation's authenticity and value orientation. Empirical findings by Vázquez-Rodríguez et al. (2025) further show that companies with a stronger CSR orientation not only develop soft skills more intensively but also engage their managers more actively in community activities, thereby signaling to applicants that CSR is an integral part of the organisational culture rather than merely a symbolic tool with comparative studies across countries or industries helping to establish broader generalisability.

Overall, this paper contributes to the theoretical understanding of intergenerational employer brand perception and delivers practical implications for strategic HRM and EVP design. It also highlights avenues for future research in a rapidly evolving labour market.

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Lukáš Smerek, Associate Professor. In his research activity, he has previously devoted himself to the diagnosis of Organisational Culture. Currently, he focuses mainly on Human Resource Management in companies of the V4 countries, comparing HR processes across companies, HRD, and increasing the competitiveness of companies through the application of modern HR and Green HRM. He is an active member of several associations, such as the European Marketing and Management Association (EUMASS), the Slovak Academic Association for People Management (SAAPM), and the Association of Lecturers and Career Counsellors (ALKP). ORCID: 0000-0003-0008-282X.

Cecília Olexová, Associate Professor, deals with the issue of human resource management in relation to the efficiency of organisations, both in teaching and research. She prefers a multidisciplinary approach to management, considering legal and tax aspects. She is significantly involved in developing views on the financial aspects of HRM, as well as on green HRM. She is a member of the Slovak Academic Association for People Management (SAAPM) and an ambassador for diversity and inclusion. ORCID: 0000-0003-2154-9564.

Lívia Knechtová is a graduate with a Bachelor's degree in Business Economics and Management and a Master's degree in Economics and Management of Small and Medium Enterprises from the Faculty of Economics at Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. During her studies, she primarily focused on identifying supporters of crowdfunding campaigns and, later on, the determinants of attractive employers in Slovakia. She currently works at Ernst & Young in Bratislava as a junior specialist in the financial department.