



How does brand reputation impact the recruitment of staff in the ground handling at Helsinki-Vantaa airport

Antti Pesonen

Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences

Thesis

2023

Abstract

Author

Antti Pesonen

Degree

Aviation Business – Bachelor of Business Administration

Report/thesis title

How does brand reputation impact the recruitment of staff in the ground handling at Helsinki-Vantaa airport

Number of pages and appendix pages

22+6

This thesis aims to research brand reputation impact on the recruitment of ground handling staff at Helsinki-Vantaa airport. Research was conducted using a mixed methods approach, which included a literature review. Research findings suggest that brand reputation does have a significant impact on recruitment.

The survey results suggest that there is room for improvement in how ground handling companies communicate their employer brand. Ground handling companies could improve their brand reputation by emphasizing their unique attributes and company values in their branding efforts. Interacting through social media platforms and presenting their company in schools to raise awareness and attract new talent. Investing in employee satisfaction to create a positive work environment to keep employee satisfaction high.

Study had some limitations. Survey sample size was small due to lack of network or partner in the survey process.

Future research could focus on conducting a larger survey on ground handling with the cooperation of a ground handling company to get a more comprehensive understanding of the importance of brand reputation. Second suggestion for future research could explore the relationship between employee satisfaction and brand image in the ground handling industry.

Keywords

Ground handling, Brand's impact, Employer branding, Brand reputation

Table of contents

List of abbreviations.....	1
1 Introduction	2
2 Literature review.....	3
2.1 Employer Branding	3
2.1.1 Branding studies	4
2.1.2 Recruitment outcomes	5
3 Ground Handling overview	7
3.1 Staffing challenges.....	7
3.2 Ground handling operations	8
4 Methodology	10
4.1 Research methodology	10
5 Survey.....	12
5.1 Survey design	12
5.2 Hypothesis	13
5.3 Data collection	13
5.4 Survey distribution	13
5.5 Survey results	14
5.6 Survey graphs.....	14
6 Discussion.....	18
6.1 Survey results analysis	18
6.2 Suggestions	19
6.3 Survey reflection and validity of the survey	20
6.4 Future studies	21
6.5 Conclusion	21
References	22
Appendices.....	24
Appendix 1. Graphs	24
Appendix 2. Open ended answers.....	28

List of abbreviations

IATA	International Air Transport Association
HR	Human Resources
USD	United States Dollar
ISAGO	IATA Safety Audit for Ground Operations
RTG	Ready To Go

1 Introduction

This thesis researches brands impact on recruitment of ground handling staff and how the research aims to give insight to the brands impact on recruitment, research was done. Ground handling companies play a critical role in ensuring the safe and efficient operation of airports around the world, and this research aims to investigate what impact does brand reputation have on recruitment of ground handling staff.

This thesis includes a literature review which gives information to understand brands impact in the recruitment process. Literature review was done mainly by researchers searching for literature online. The literature review consisted of research on brand reputation, employer branding and a short review on current challenges. Peer-reviewed articles, papers and news were used as a source. This section set the theme of the research's, which helped keep the research on track.

Methodology chapter chose to use mixed methods approach which allowed the survey to be structured to give out numerical data and open-ended questions.

Research question was "What impact does brand reputation have on the recruitment of ground handling staff?"

Survey chapter discusses the creation of the survey and all the consideration considered while creating the survey and sharing the survey. Discussion chapter discusses the results of the survey and analyses them while giving out ideas and suggestions based on survey's results and the authors own learning during the writing process.

2 Literature review

Theoretical framework chapter aims to examine previous research on employer branding and present a theoretical framework that explores the relationship between brand reputation and employee attraction. Theoretical framework chapter supports the study with peer reviewed literature, International Air Transport Association (IATA) statements, and analyses on the current studies done in branding.

Using summer's 2022 non-peer reviewed sources such as 'Canceled flights, pandemonium at airports - the aviation business is facing significant issues owing to workforce scarcity,' the aviation industry is currently facing a staffing crisis (Mugabe, 2022). This emphasizes the importance of this research into the impact of brand reputation on recruitment in the aviation industry.

IATA (2022) highlights the challenges and potential solutions for addressing the shortage of skilled ground handlers in the aviation industry, with a focus on the importance of standardization, the adoption of new technologies, and the creation of diverse job opportunities and career paths to attract a new generation of talent.

2.1 Employer Branding

Branding has been a popular topic in the field of marketing for many years, and research has demonstrated the impact of brand equity on consumer behavior and purchase decisions (Kim, York & Lim 2010). However, the effects of brand equity extend beyond just consumer behavior, as recent research has begun to examine the role of branding in the realm of Human Resource (HR) management. According to Kim (& al 2010) explored the effects of product-level brand equity on job pursuit, finding that strong product brands can influence a person's decision to apply for a job. However, this study only looked at how brand equity at the product level affected job seeking; corporate brand reputation and equity were not evaluated.

Corporations have understood the necessity of building a positive image and reputation as an employer. A study done by Khalid and Tariq (2015) touches on the topic of employer branding and its impact on the recruitment and selection process. The researchers (Khalid & al 2015) used an interview method and content analysis to gather in-depth data on employer branding, resulting in a qualitative case study.

2.1.1 Branding studies

The following studies have tried to generate literature in a narrowly researched area. Area of research involving employers brand's impact on recruitment. Employer branding has also been described as a highly effective long-term recruitment strategy effective at attracting top talent for the organization. (Khalid & al 2015)

To address this gap in the literature, previous research aimed to investigate the connection between product-level brand equity and corporate-level brand reputation/equity in the context of job pursuit (Kim & al 2010). In doing so, previous researchers extended work of DeIVecchio (Kim & al 2010) by incorporating corporate-level branding into their model of job recruitment. To investigate the effects of product-level brand equity and corporate-level brand reputation on job pursuit, four alternative models were developed to support the study made by Kim (& al 2010).

To test these models, potential materials were pretested to determine their effects on job pursuit. Four product brand name-corporate brand name pairings were selected based on their differences in brand equity and corporate reputation. A sample of 193 undergraduate students were then recruited to participate in the study, and were asked to imagine that they were in the job market and looking for a job in their major. The students were presented with job descriptions that varied in terms of product brand name and corporate brand name, and were asked to rate their willingness to pursue the job on a seven-point scale. (Kim & al 2010)

The study's findings demonstrated that brand reputation at the product level had a considerable impact on hiring, having both direct and indirect effects on job searching. Indirectly, product branding influenced corporate brand reputation, which in turn was used by potential applicants to generate inferences about job attributes leading to job pursuit. Directly, a brand may influence job seeking through the transfer of positive affect. These findings suggest that strong product brands can give an organization a competitive advantage in attracting job applicants, and that HR can leverage this advantage by prominently displaying strong product brands in recruitment materials. (Kim & al 2010)

Overall, the present research adds to the growing body of literature on the role of branding in HR and provides important theoretical and practical implications for the field. Theoretically, the study supports the idea that incorporating brand equity into previous Understandings of effects can provide a more complete picture of the subject. (Kim & al 2010)

Branding involves not only external efforts directed toward customers and stakeholders but also internal branding efforts focused on employees. According to a study conducted by the employer branding institute, companies with a strong employment brand have been found to have 28% lower employee turnover and 24% higher performance (Sullivan 2004). This opens the topic of branding in ground handling operations, as it can have a direct impact on employee preservation, performance, and overall organizational success.

One important aspect of employment branding is managing employees', potential employees', and related stakeholders' perceptions of the company. This can be accomplished by using consistent messaging and promoting the company's culture, management practices, and employee benefits. A successful employment branding strategy can increase the company's exposure and reputation, making it a top choice for job seekers. (Sullivan 2004)

However, managing an employment brand can be difficult because it necessitates a collaborative effort across departments and involves striking a balance between promoting the company as a "good place to work" and focusing on productivity and performance. A culture of continuous improvement and the sharing of best practices is essential for a successful employee branding strategy. (Sullivan 2004)

2.1.2 Recruitment outcomes

Employee recruitment history and employer branding significantly positively correlate in a positive outcome. Where company B uses employer branding and company A does not use employer branding, they are different in their selection process. (Khalid & al 2015)

The study also found that symbolic traits of an organization, such as image and reputation, hold additional value over and above functional attributes such as pay or other incentives in explaining an organization's perceived attractiveness as an employer. (Figure 1)

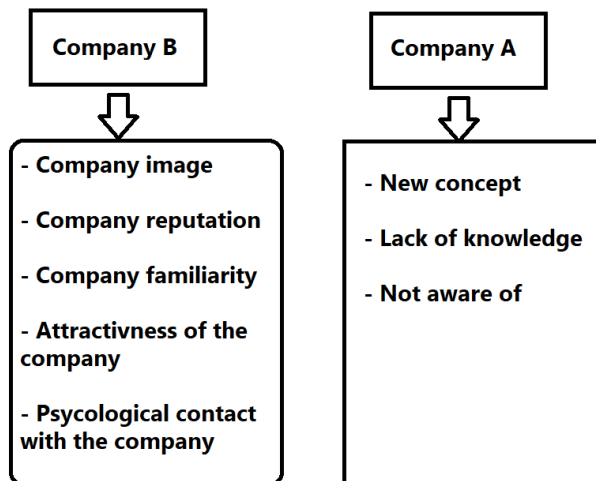


Figure 1. Khalid's Factors of perceived employer branding (adapted from Khalid 2015)

These findings are consistent with research done by Khalid (& al 2015), which indicates that a positive employer branding image can increase an applicant's intentions to apply for a job at a company. According to the findings, a positive employer image is influential for attracting more applicants. Employer branding assists organizations in attracting and retaining high-performing employees, as well as increasing the number of applicants. (Khalid & al 2015)

This can be implemented in the theoretical framework of brand reputation impact on recruitment of staff in the ground handling industry, as it highlights the importance of having a strong and positive employer brand to attract and retain the best employees in the industry.

3 Ground Handling overview

Chapter 3 looks at the current situation in ground handling sector in employment and overview on operations ground handling sector while focusing on the ramp side of services in ground handling.

3.1 Staffing challenges

A non-peer reviewed paper titled “Canceled flights, pandemonium at airports - the aviation business is facing tremendous challenges due to employee shortage” confirms the current staff shortage crisis in the aviation industry (Mugabe, 2022). The article discusses how major airlines like Lufthansa and Southwest Airlines struggle to satisfy staffing needs, resulting in thousands of canceled flights. Furthermore, the article cites McKinsey and Company specialists who claim that "airlines are the biggest destroyer among all aviation sub-sectors" in terms of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the business. The non-peer reviewed source written by Mugabe offers essential industry insight into the aviation industry's ongoing staffing issues.

Current challenges arrive in Helsinki-Vantaa airport with the ground handlers, ground handlers issued a walkout as a response to Finnairs decision to stop offering ground handlers so called zonal employee discount, which was used for flight ticket discounts. (YLE 2023)

At the IATA Ground Handling Conference, IATA acknowledged a problem and pushed for reforms to address the long-term requirement for a stable talent base in the ground handling sector (IATA, 2022).

The pandemic has resulted in thousands of ground handling staff leaving the aviation industry, and now as aviation ramps up, the critical need for reform to stabilize the talent pool is being highlighted by the significant shortage of experienced ground handlers.(IATA 2022). Nick Careen, IATA's Senior Vice President states that the immediate issue that the industry is facing is the bottleneck for security clearances as the airline industry prepares for the peak northern summer season. (IATA 2022).

The following list shows hands-out suggestions for attracting ground handling talent suggested by IATA (2022)

- An awareness campaign to highlight the attractiveness and importance of ground operations in global logistics and transport operations

- Adoption of 25by25 campaign to help address the gender imbalance across the industry.
- Apprenticeships in partnership with trade schools to revitalize candidate pipelines.
- Career path mapping to demonstrate long-term prospects for people entering the sector.
- Adopt a stronger talent acquisition strategy
- Streamline onboarding processes,
- Develop a more compelling retention proposition

IATA (2022) highlights the challenges and potential solutions for addressing the shortage of skilled ground handlers in the aviation industry, with a focus on the importance of standardization, the adoption of new technologies, and the creation of diverse job opportunities and career paths to attract a new generation of talent. Therefore, it could be a useful reference for anyone looking to understand the current state of affairs of this industry and its challenges in terms of recruitment and retention of staff

3.2 Ground handling operations

Ground handling in aviation involves the loading and unloading of baggage, cargo, mail, and other goods from an aircraft's compartment before and after flight. It is a critical part of ramp operations performed by ground handling staff, which also includes tasks such as catering, fueling, safety checks, and maintenance (Carlson & al 2020). Ground handling staff are responsible for carrying out various ramp operations to ensure the aircraft is ready for its next flight.

Ground handling a wide range of processes and tasks that are essential for the safe and efficient operation of aircraft on the ground. These processes can vary depending on the specific airport, airline, and aircraft type bring out variables. Continuous monitoring, evaluation, and improvement of ground handling operations are essential to meet the evolving needs and demands of the aviation industry. (Szabo & al 2021)

Ground handlers play a vital role in the aviation industry, ensuring that aircraft are safely and efficiently loaded and unloaded, refueled, and catered before and after flight. Without ground handlers, aviation operations would be impossible.

Estimates of ground handling market globally generates revenue of 50 billion USD annually, such a substantial market size gives indicative of the industry's importance on a global scale. (Tomova & al 2015).

Airpro is a ground handling company, which operates and offers services in Helsinki-Vantaa airport, which includes ground handling and aviation services. (Finavia 2023) Airpro's dedication to development is showcased by their IATA Safety Audit for Ground Operations (ISAGO) registration. Airpro's ISAGO registration in Helsinki- and Oulu airport showcases their commitment to enhancing operational practices. This recognition further reinforces Airpro's brand as a trusted and respected player in the industry (Airpro 2023)

Airpro's Subsidiary company Ready To Go ground handling oy (RTG), which is responsible for Airpro's ground handling ramp department.

Aviator Ground Handling as the largest independent ground handling company in the Nordics, Aviator brings decades of experience and expertise to Helsinki-Vantaa (Aviator 2023). Aviator is also known as aviator airport services Finland oy. They focus on providing top-notch service, guaranteeing the highest standards of quality, safety, and reliability. Aviator is committed to environmental sustainability and actively seeks ways to minimize our carbon footprint and reduce our impact on the environment (Aviator 2023).

4 Methodology

This chapter discusses the usage of an appropriate research method, and it presents the processes and the tools used to collect data and insights, evaluating their reliability and their meaning for this research. The research goal and questions related to the research and the survey are introduced.

In this chapter the researcher chooses between the qualitative and quantitative research methods based on the nature of their research question, the available resources, and the desired outcomes of the study. For this thesis research the author has chosen the mixed research method to support the study.

4.1 Research methodology

Researcher evaluated the potential of using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. Following methods give direction for the researcher to study, which the researcher can base his research design. (Creswell 2018, 49)

Using a mixed methods approach, the researcher can gather both qualitative and quantitative data, combining them to gain insights and a deeper understanding of the research topic. Core idea of mixed methods is that the data brings from qualitative and quantitative create additional insights (Creswell 2018, 41.) With the reasoning behind the choice of mixed methodologies approach was that the research would not fit the criteria of traditional boundaries of qualitative or quantitative Research.

The choice to use a mixed methodologies approach was driven by the research's survey design, which did not align with the traditional boundaries of qualitative or quantitative research. (Morgan 2013, 58) As seen in Table 1 using open-ended questions would indicate the use of Qualitative methods, while the survey itself uses numerical 1-5 to determine the impact of pre-determined scenarios in the survey questionnaire. Including open-ended questions in the survey design can help capture information that may have been overlooked due to researcher bias, which would have been limited in a scenario where all research questions were used on 1-5 scale.

While stating the researcher uses mixed methodologies approach it can be argued the study is more favored towards quantitative approach while only taking a limited number of qualitative methods to complement the quantitative findings.

Methodologies should be viewed as tools with their unique strengths that help the research build towards their set of goals (Morgan 2013, 46.)

Table 1. Overview between different research methodologies. (adapted from Cresswell, 2018)

Quantitative	Mixed	Qualitative
Pre-determined	Both predetermined and emerging methods	Emerging methods
Instrument based	Both open- and closed-ended questions	Open-ended questions
Performance data, attitude data, observational data, and census data	Multiple forms of data drawing on all possibilities	Interview data Observation data Document data Audiovisual data
Statistical analysis	Statistical and text analysis	Text and image analysis
Statistical interpretation	Across databases interpretation	Themes, Patterns interpretation

5 Survey

This chapter describes the survey design, data collection, and data analysis methods used in this study. The survey was designed to measure the impact of brand reputation on recruitment outcomes and job seeker perceptions in the ground handling industry. A total of 25 completed responses were received with the survey.

To Ensure the validity and reliability of the survey a review of existing literature to generate a knowledge base for generation of the survey was conducted.

5.1 Survey design

Using knowledge from the literature review and methodological review, such as Creswell (2018), the survey was designed to incorporate both qualitative and quantitative elements, consistent with the selected mixed methods approach. Open-ended questions were included to capture valuable insights that might have been overlooked if solely relying on pre-determined closed-ended questions.

During the survey generation process, the researcher acknowledged possibility for biases in sampling and the reliance on self-reported data. However, effort was put into ensuring that the questionnaire generated accurate and reliable data, to the best of the researcher's abilities.

The survey was administered using Webropol, and participants were explicitly informed about the anonymity of their responses, ensuring their privacy and confidentiality. sustainability.

For research ethics considerations, a researcher needs to anticipate ethical issues that could arise due to collecting data from people or about people. (Creswell 2018, 144). When conducting the survey ethical guidelines on data collection were investigated.

Survey was designed with the goal of being easy to answer, with different style of questions, which would keep the responder keen on answering the survey. All of the questions were with the same formula click, slide or open-ended questions. Some of the questions featured and text field in the answers.

5.2 Hypothesis

While researcher generates the survey and the survey questionnaire it brings value to the survey results and the research to generate a hypothesis beforehand.

Positive brand is expected to increase the likelihood of individuals deciding to apply for a position within the ground handling sector. Positive and negative brand directly influence the decision to apply. Companies that effectively improve their brand value, culture, and opportunities are expected to be more appealing to potential applicants.

5.3 Data collection

The primary data collection involved distributing the survey questionnaire. Questionnaire consisted of questions regarding brand reputation, recruitment outcomes, and job seeker perceptions. It consisted of pre-determined questions, which were rated on scale 1-5 and open-ended questions at the end of each question page. The survey was administered online using a Webropol survey platform, ensuring data privacy and anonymity. Participants were given the choice to respond in either Finnish or English.

A total of 49 responders opened the survey, 30 started responding, and 25 submitted full responses to the survey. This results in a 42.3% response rate. However, if we consider only the respondents who started responding, the response rate is 50%. This suggests that some respondents who opened the survey lost interest and did not complete it, while others may have mistakenly opened the survey link from LinkedIn post. Timing of the survey, lack of interest towards the survey topic, and uninteresting question design all of these factors may have had an impact on losing the few percentage points on the survey response rate.

5.4 Survey distribution

The survey will be distributed using a variety of methods, including email, social media, and the researcher's personal contacts. Emails were sent to the ground handling units and key members of the companies at their work emails, which were obtained from the contact sections of their company websites.

Participants for the survey were targeted to include employees or individuals interested in ground handling operations at Helsinki-Vantaa Airport, and from ground handling operations the focus group was ramp ground handlers. Participants were informed in the post about the purpose and anonymity of the survey in the surveys opening page, as well as

the estimated time required for completion, which was 2-5 minutes.

Timing was included in the survey distribution message to encourage the potential target audience to answer the non-time-consuming survey. With the survey distribution message additional catch was implemented in the distribution plan, a raffle for a movie voucher, which would be drawn at the end of the survey.

The survey was open from July 10 to August 25. The long-time window was due to the summer season and summer holidays, which could result in a low response rate. This was planned in advance, and the researcher implemented a reminder plan to remind their network on LinkedIn at the start and end of the survey.

5.5 Survey results

The survey results chapter will discuss the findings of the survey. The survey results will be analysed using inferential statistics. The inferential statistics will be used to test the hypotheses of the study. Which the researcher has gained from his previous work and the background research.

Part of this research aims to understand the customer's experience by analysing their responses in the form of open-ended questions which the responders provide text answers. None of the survey questions were mandatory by survey design thus why some of the questions do not have all the responders.

5.6 Survey graphs

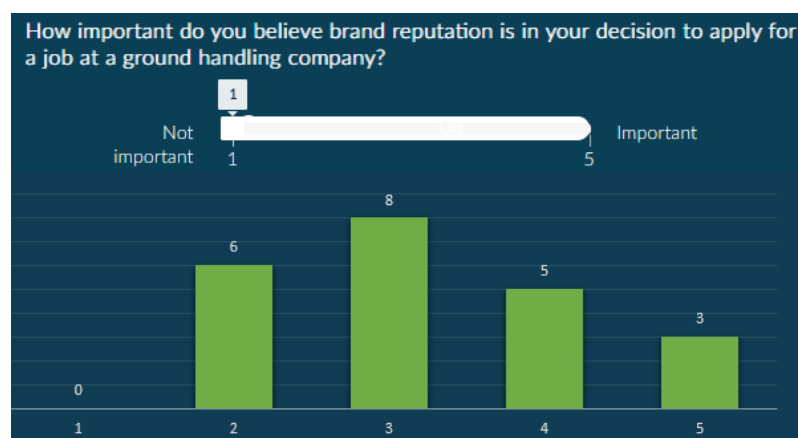


Figure 2. How important do you believe brand reputation is in your decision to apply results a ground handling company?

Figure 2 shows the answer distribution on results if responders believe brand reputation is important, 3.8 was the average answer result.

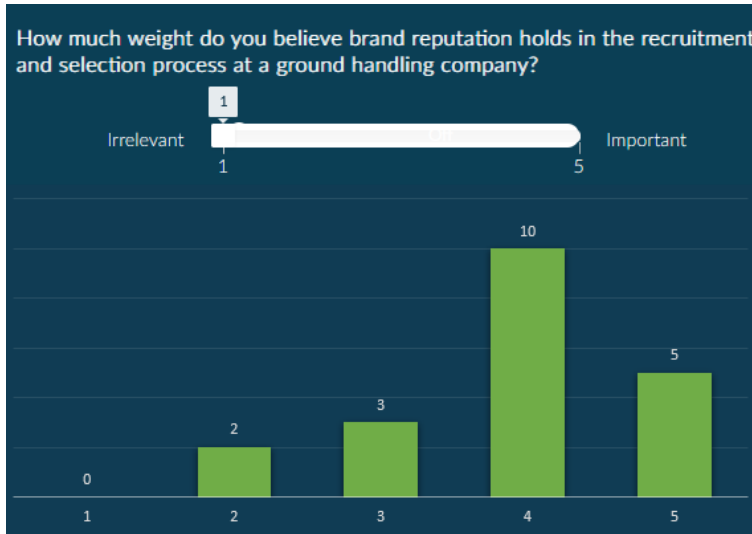


Figure 3. How much weight do you believe brand reputation holds in the recruitment and selection process at a ground handling company?

The next question asked about the weight of brand reputation and the answers averaged 3.7.

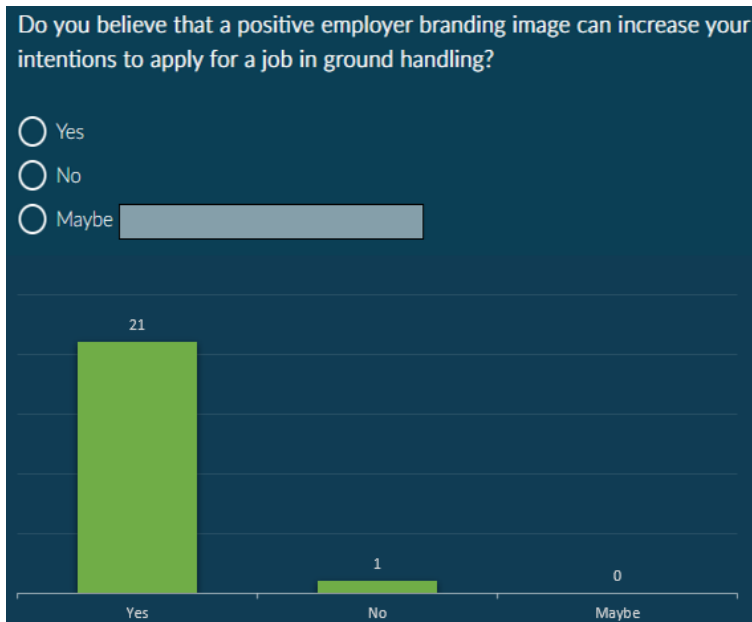


Figure 4. Do you believe that a positive employer branding image can increase your intentions to apply for a job in ground handling?

Majority of the responders 21 believe that a positive image can increase the intention for a potential employee to apply.

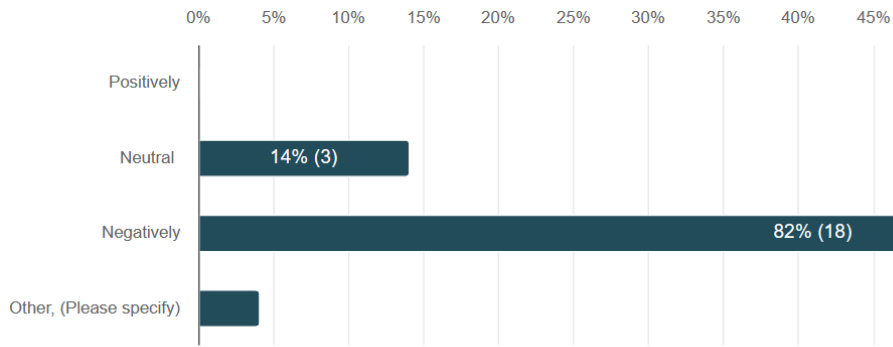


Figure 5, How does a negative brand reputation at a ground handling company influence your perception of the company as a potential employee?

14% Answered neutral and 82% indicated a negative impact on perception of the ground handling company, and the 1 text answer informed that sometimes the negative comes from the labor union and he cannot do anything as an employer.

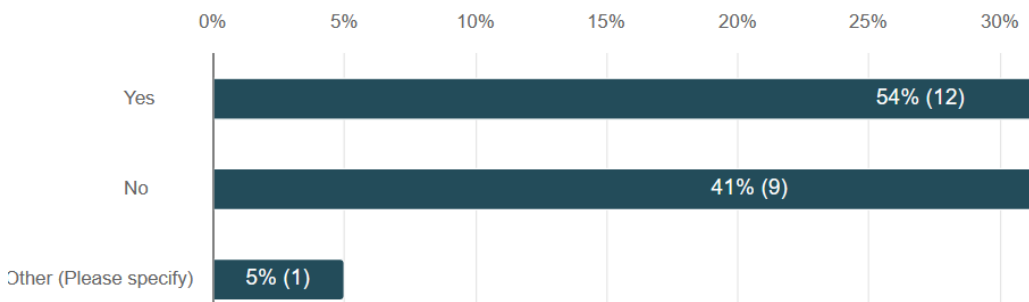


Figure 6. Does the choice of ground handling company matter to you?

Choice of ground handling company question split with a 54% to 41% split and 1 text answer. Text answer said: "Doesnt really matter I just want to work and get paid, Which ever company pays the most"

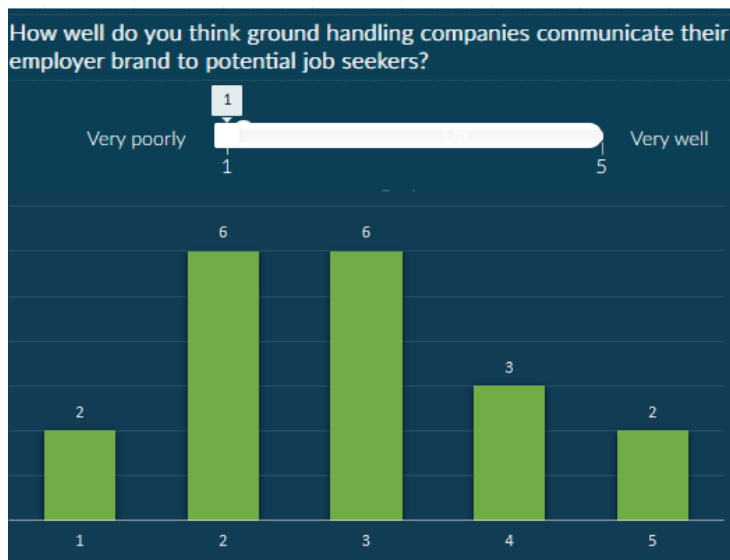


Figure 7. How well do you think ground handling companies communicate their employer

brand to potential job seekers?

Average answer was 2.8, the answers were not 1 sided but weighted on the towards the lower end of the numbers.

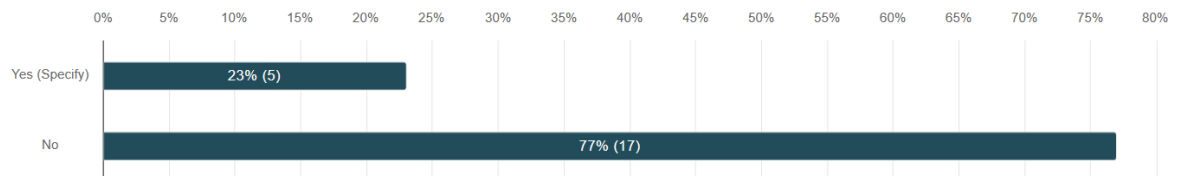


Figure 8. Are you familiar with the branding efforts of ground handling companies?

23% were familiar out of the five yes answers 3 gave a text result. Most of the responders were not familiar with Ground handling companies branding efforts.

Text answers of figure 8.

- "They sell their brand quite well in my opinion"
- "They do their job fairly well, but could be done."
- Voisivat olla aktiivisempia

An open-ended question aimed towards ground handling workers asked about their satisfaction on their employers efforts in branding. These were the results:

- "Erittäin tyytyväinen"
- "I believe my company right now tried to do their best by investing in electric vehicles, but all the issues all the time, with the vehicles and right now they feel already outdated as tech. I still think they do a good job in branding, but could be done better."

Last question was an open-ended question for the responder to express any comments on ground handling companies and their branding as well as asking for their insights or suggestions for the future. Below is list of responses:

- "Eihän tosta brändäys hommasta tuu hevosen vittua. Kaikki uusiksi."
- "Personally I haven't applied for work in ground handling but I can say overall a company's brand image has a immense impact on my decision to apply for work there."
- "Whenever I fly to/from HEL, being familiar with the ground handling companies, I kinda feel "prepared" to what's going to happen. From personal experience, while I found check-in/gate agents being really good from all companies, I always have problems when it comes to luggage handling with Airpro. That for sure affects my choice of flying as well."
- "The perception of ground handling companies is that the entire business is about cost minimisation leading to motivation to consider other sectors first."
- "The challenge is the reputation and actions of the labor organization that affect the actual service. They have been very much minding their political agenda instead of understanding that their actions ruin the good company profile and the competitiveness of the total experience when traveling."
- "Brändäyksessä kannattaisi keskittyä korostamaan yritysten erilaisuutta suhteessa toisiinsa, sillä muuten ne sulautuvat vahvasti yhteen eivätkä ne eroa toisistaan tavankansalaiselle, joka pohtii työnhakemista alalta."
- "En ole paljoo kuullut maahuolinnasta, mutta olisin kiinnostunut kuulla enemmän. Näistä ei paljoo mediassa mainosteta, ja ymmärtääkseni se ei ole ihan jokaisen työtä, mutta olisi kivaa tietää siitä enemmän kuin vain kavereiden sanoista jne."
- "I think the issue with branding in ground handling is no one really cares about the brand, whatever is the cheapest option for the airlines... that's how it feels right now."

6 Discussion

This research aimed at exploring a (niche) not well researched topic such and figuring out the importance of brand reputation, understanding the impact of brand value in ground handling companies.

6.1 Survey results analysis

General results of the survey showed that there is value in improving the brand and most notably getting your brand known to the public. From open-ended questions there seems to be a lack of knowledge on ground handling companies existing.

Survey showed as seen in Figure 2 there is a weight on importance on brand being perceived as a positive brand, and this is supported by the theoretical framework earlier on where Khalid (& al 2015) indicate that a positive branding image increases an applicants intention to apply for a job. Furthermore, in Figure 3 which showed that responders believe there is weight on brand in recruitment and selection.

In Figure 3, the average response was 3.7, suggesting that responders believe brand reputation holds a significant weight in the recruitment and selection process at ground handling companies. Most of the survey responders believed in positive employer branding image increases the intentions to apply for a job as seen in Figure 4 which as again enforced.

If a brand is perceived in negative light 82% of responders indicated a negative impact on their perception of the company as a potential employer. One survey responder gave insight that in some cases the negative perception of a ground handling company is out of the company's hands, and it is enforced by the labour unions. This can be seen in the article mentioned in theoretical framework chapter written by YLE.

Even though majority of the survey respondents agreed that if a brand is seen in the negative light choice of a ground handling company didn't matter to 41% while the 54% stated a choice of the company matters. Open-ended question indicated another angle to the question, where the pay matters the most in the choice of a ground handling company.

Communication of brand as seen in Figure 7 based on the average response being 2.8 indicated the need for ground handling companies to communicate and make themselves known to the public. Figure 8 question asked about if the responders are familiar with

ground handling companies branding efforts. Major split of 23% to 77% with a few text answers. Some of the text answers informed that branding is done quite well while others said it could be done better when the last written answer hoped for more activity from the ground handling companies. This indicates that the work that is currently being done in effort of improving brand has some impact but the hopes for more activity are around.

Two written answers where current ground handling employees wrote a written response on how satisfied they are with the current efforts of their employer. Statements included a company which had invested in new electric equipment stated that the equipment feel outdated, but still said that his company does a good job in branding, but it could be improved. While the other text answer expressed that he or she is very satisfied with the company efforts.

And lastly the most important question the open text box which gave insight on different perspectives with the written answers. Responses highlight various perspectives: Some responders expressed dissatisfaction with the branding efforts but did not give much insight on what to do next. Others emphasized the importance of a company's brand image in their decision to apply for work. Some noted specific issues with certain ground handling companies, affecting their choice of airline. And then responders expressed a lack of knowledge about the ground handling industry and a desire for more information. Generating the need for more communication from the ground handling companies.

There were concerns about the perception of ground handling companies as focused solely on cost minimization rather than focused in other sectors that impact the company. A recurring theme was the negative impact of labour organization actions on the company's profile and competitiveness. Suggestion was given that companies should emphasize their uniqueness in branding to differentiate themselves.

6.2 Suggestions

Survey results suggests that brand reputation has significant in the decision to apply for a job in ground handling, but there is room for improvement in how ground handling companies communicate their employer brand and address negative perceptions. Negative perceptions should be clarified on why some incidents have been caused such as labour union causing problems which are out of the company's control. Responders have varying opinions on the importance of company choice, and there is a need for more information in branding efforts.

Enhance brand reputation Ground handling companies if they have the budget could look to enhance their brand reputation and give some light for the ground handling industry. As stated in the survey responses ground handling company could try to stand out in the job market emphasize their unique attributes and the company values. This could help make them more appealing to potential candidates. This would additionally help the aspect of reaching a larger audience. In the responses there was a desire for more information, there could be a potential to explore and spread awareness on the aviation industry about its employment opportunities.

Concrete suggestions would be to interact more with social media platforms to make the brand and the ground handling operations more known to the common public. Another way of pushing out the brand would be to start presenting company in schools, which could raise the awareness, career opportunities and strengthen the brand.

As stated previously in the literature review IATA(2022) highlighted suggestions, more on the operational side but most importantly there was a suggestion for the ground handling companies to try attract and keep talent in to the world of ground handling. The 1st IATA point was an awareness campaign which would highlight the importance of ground handling operations.

6.3 Survey reflection and validity of the survey

Survey trustworthiness is a bit mixed low number of answers 25 gives an idea of the current situation, but it was affected by variables that were beyond the control of the researcher. Several factors contributed to low response rate, lack of network on researchers' side, no partner company in ground handling to support the spread of the survey. Researcher tried to avoid this by asking about a cooperative thesis from the current ground handlers in Helsinki-Vantaa.

Researcher had an idea of interview-based survey, but decided to go forwards with just a questionnaire survey. Interview based survey would have been used if this thesis was a master level thesis. Regardless of the low amount of responses, the survey responses offer valuable insight for the research. With the low sample size of answer there is a risk of bias in the answers. Researcher tried to avoid this by implementing the survey as anonymous to let survey responders write freely their comments. Incentive was given to try to increase the willingness to complete the survey but with the response rate did not reach the wished amount to become an trustworthy survey on data side. Despite the limited response rate, the survey offers valuable insights on which areas should be focused on.

Validity of the survey limited the risk of bias, and the results can be miss aligned with the larger population withing the population interested in ground handling sector.

6.4 Future studies

Future studies on this topic should be done with the co-operation of a ground handling company to ease the response process. Future topics could move from branding to employee satisfaction to their company or even compare employee satisfaction with the brand image to see if there is a possible correlation. Future studies should be focused around gaining a large sample size, which would give more representative picture of the current situation.

6.5 Conclusion

Thesis process had challenges it was difficult and due to lack of motivation, burnout and most importantly difficulty of coming up with a topic. Selecting a thesis topic proved to be a time-consuming task. At the beginning of the thesis process work went smoothly but due to difficulty establishing the theoretical framework and dissatisfaction with my own writing it became very difficult to move to the next step. Complete burnout to writing a thesis was established, taking break in order to establish a healthier schedule for thesis writing was needed.

Motivation was found after completing every course needed to graduate for the degree, which sparked the thesis writing process again and the help of the thesis counselor. Incorporating counselors suggestions helped me forwards and overcome obstacles on the way. Notably this was the researcher's first thesis and the biggest solo project in his academic career.

This research was time-consuming process, which teched a lot all the thesis process, from background research, data collection, scheduling, and analysis. Each stage of thesis writing had its own challenges but at the end thesis writing was an rewarding experience.

References

- Airpro 2023. Tietoa Meistä. URL: <https://www.airpro.fi/tietoa-meista/>. Accessed 1.6.2023
- Aviator 2023. Company profile. URL: <https://www.aviator.eu/en/about-us/company-profile>. Accessed 1.6.2023.
- Carlson, V., Lindblom, B., n.d. Airport Ground Operations Through the Lens of Human-Technology Systems. KTH ROYAL INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING SCIENCES IN CHEMISTRY, BIOTECHNOLOGY AND HEALTH. 2020 URL: <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1538782/FULLTEXT01.pdf>. Accessed 10.3.2023
- Creswell, J. & Creswell, D. 2018. Research Design. 5th ed. Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches. SAGE Publications.
- Finavia 2023. Aviation services. URL: <https://www.finavia.fi/fi/node/6672?id=Accessed> 1.6.2023
- International Air Transport Association 2022. Reforms Needed to Attract / Retain Ground Handling Talent URL: <https://www.iata.org/en/pressroom/2022-releases/2022-05-31-01/>. Accessed: 19.12.2022
- Kim, J., York, K.M., Lim J. 2011. The role of brands in recruitment: A mixed-brand strategy approach. Marketing Letters 22, 165–179. URL:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11002-010-9119-9> Accessed: 19.12.2022.
- Khalid, S., Tariq, S., n.d. 2015 IMPACT OF EMPLOYER BRAND ON SELECTION AND RECRUITMENT PROCESS. Pakistan Economic and Social Review. Volume 53, no 2. pp. 351-372. URL: <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1792214441?parentSessionId=onN0yrTuMugkn8%2F2q38vu1oetLqxaSha5XWloX8BXiE%3D&pg-origsite=primo&accountid=27436>. Accessed 4.1.2023.
- Lehtiposti 2023. Swissport lopettaa laajojen maahuolintapalveluiden tarjoamisen Helsinki-Vantaan lentoasemalla. URL:https://www.lentoposti.fi/uutiset/swissport_lopettaa_laajojen_maahuolintapalveluiden_tarjoamisen_helsinki_vantaan_lentoasemalla. Accessed 1.6.2023
- Morgan, D. 2013. Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Methods: A Pragmatic Approach. Sage Publications.
- Mugabe, F. 2022 Cancelled flights, chaos at airports – the aviation industry is facing tough challenges due to staff shortage, 2022. The HR Congress Magazine. URL: <https://hr-congress.com/2022/07/22/cancelled-flights-chaos-at-airports-the-aviation-industry-is-facing-tough-challenges-due-to-staff-shortage/>. Accessed 4.1.2023.
- Sullivan J. 2004. The 8 Elements of a Successful Employment Brand. URL: <https://www.ere.net/the-8-elements-of-a-successful-employment-brand/>. Accessed 4.1.2023.
- Swissport 2023. Network Helsinki. URL:<https://www.swissport.com/en/network/europe/finland/hel> Accessed 1.6.2023

Szabo, S., Pilát, M., Makó, S., Korba, P., Čičváková, M., Kmec, L., 2021. Increasing the Efficiency of Aircraft Ground Handling—A Case Study. *Aerospace* 9, 2. <https://doi.org/10.3390/aerospace9010002>. Accessed 10.3.2023

Tomova' A., Kirschnerova I., 2015. The Players in Airport Ground Handling: a New Typology Reflecting the International Expansion. *Ekonomiczne Problemy Usług* 119, 145–158. URL: <https://doi.org/10.18276/epu.2015.119-10>. Accessed 3.9.2023

YLE 2023. Helsinki Airport ground staff walkout prompts flight cancellations. URL: <https://yle.fi/a/74-20050932>. Accessed 25.9.2023

Appendices

Appendix 1. Graphs

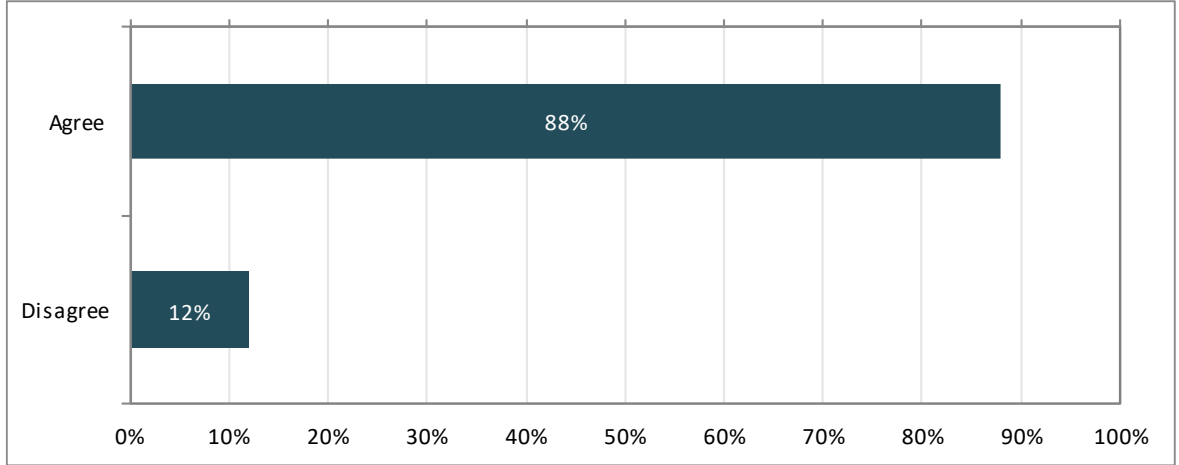


Figure 1. Agreeing terms and conditions of the survey

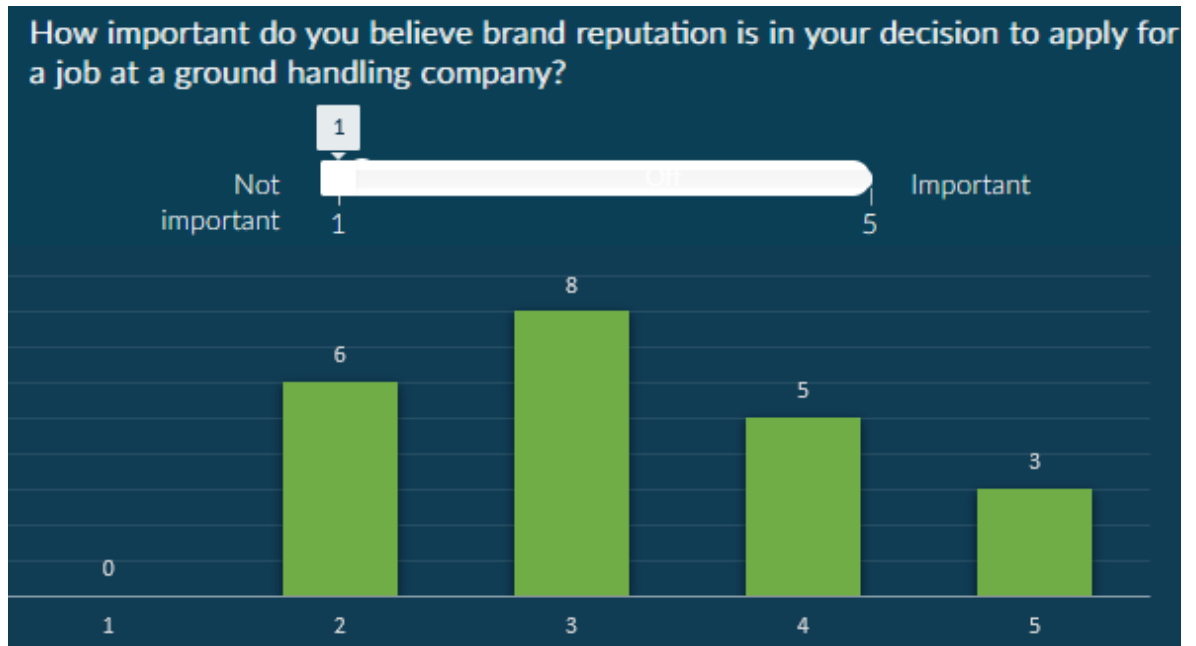


Figure 2. How important do you believe brand reputation is in your decision to apply for a job at a ground handling company?

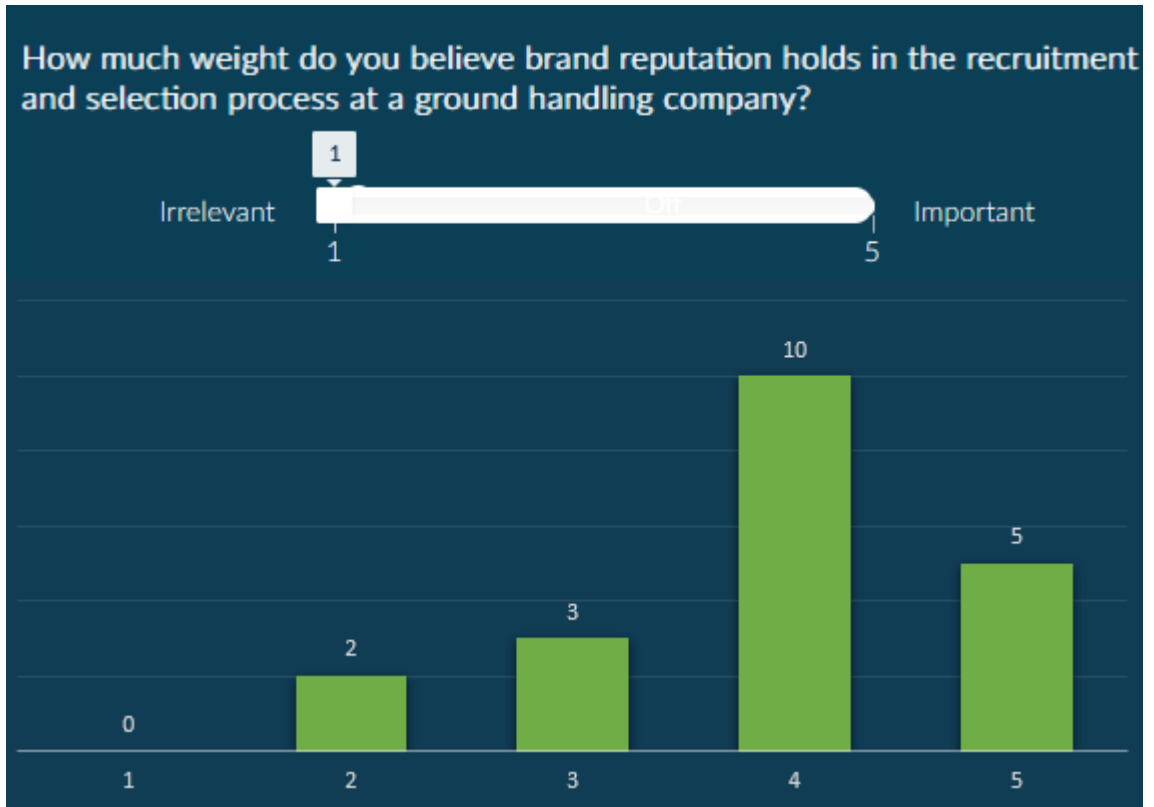


Figure 3. How much weight do you believe brand reputation holds in the recruitment and selection process at a ground handling company?

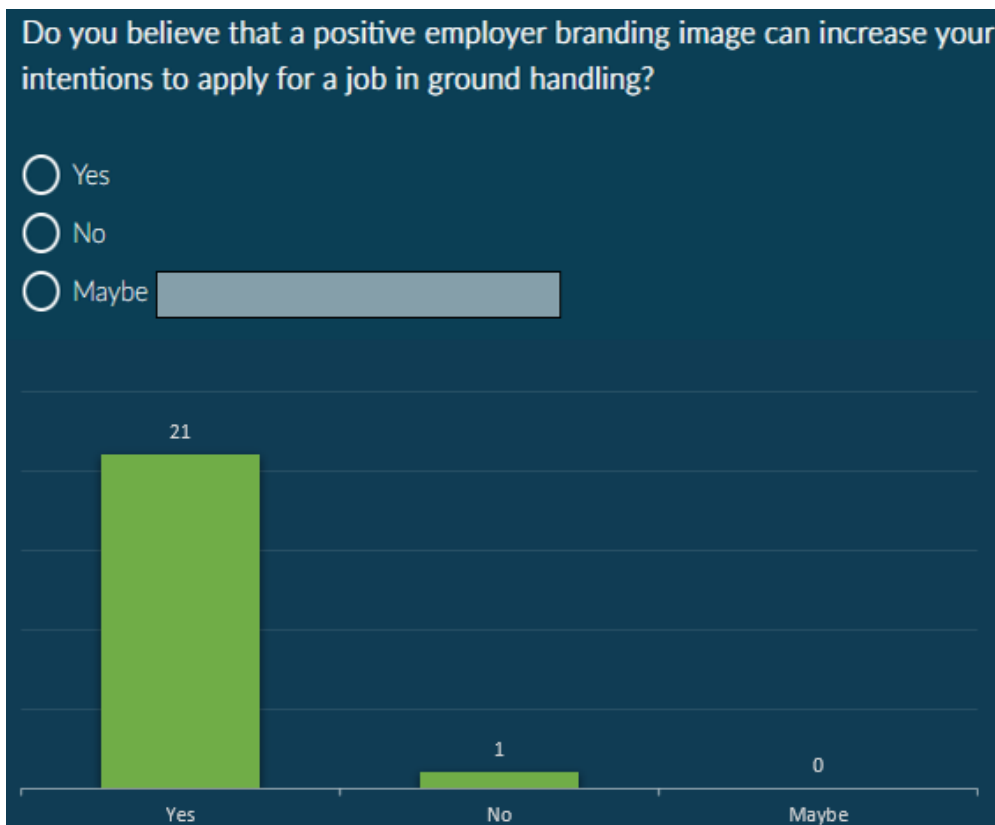


Figure 4. Do you believe that a positive employer branding image can increase your intentions to apply for a job in ground handling?

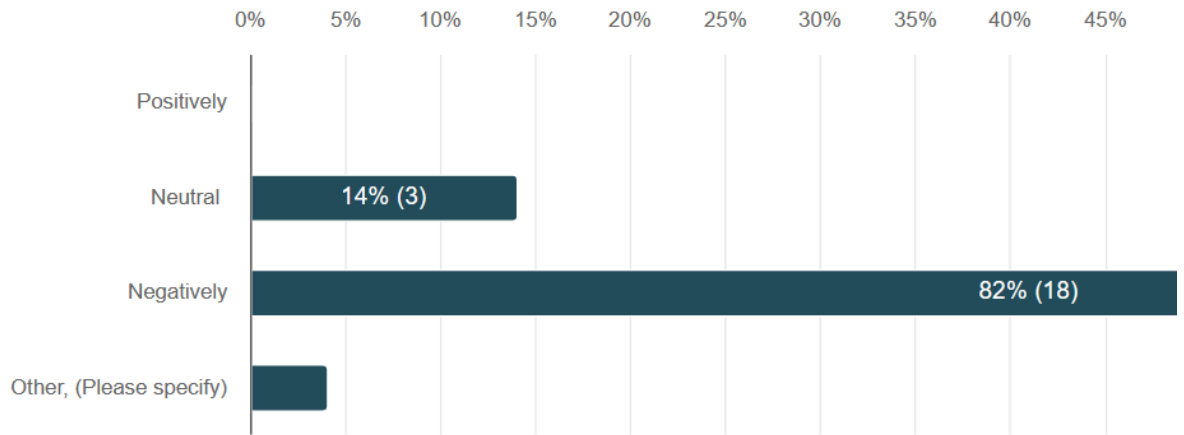


Figure 5. How does a negative brand reputation at a ground handling company influence your perception of the company as a potential employee?

Other (Please specify) text answer:

Sometimes the negative at least has been in Helsinki, comes from the labor union, so you cannot do anything as an employer

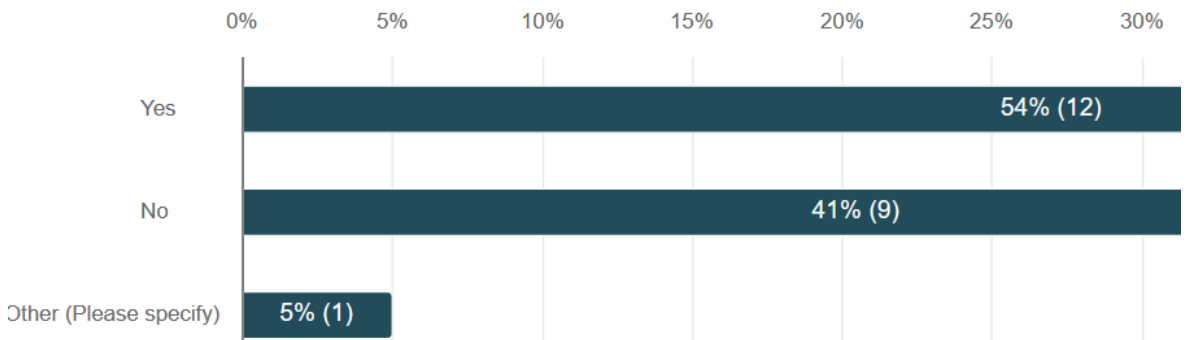


Figure 6. Does the choice of ground handling company matter to you? Please select one of the following options:

Other (Please specify) text answer

Doesnt really matter I just want to work and get paid, Which ever company pays the most

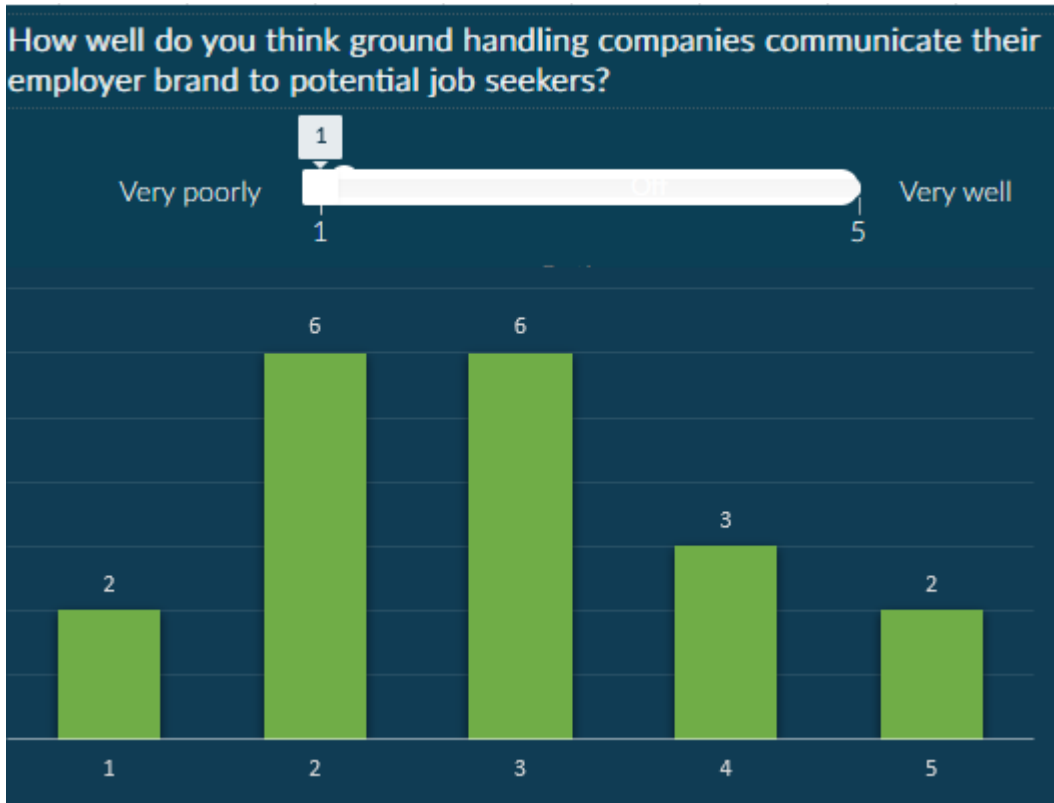


Figure 7. How well do you think ground handling companies communicate their employer brand to potential job seekers?

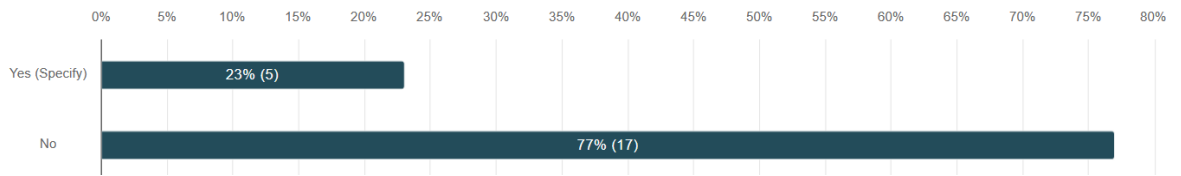


Figure 8. Are you familiar with the branding efforts of ground handling companies? If yes, how satisfied are you with their current branding?

Yes Specify text answers 3:

Voisivat oll aktiivisempia
They do their job fairly well, but could be done better.
They sell their brand quite well in my opinion.

Appendix 2. Open ended answers

Is there anything else you would like to share or any additional comments you have regarding the topic of ground handling companies and their branding?
feel free to provide any further insights or suggestions.

Number of respondents: 8

Responses
Eihän tosta brändäys hommasta tuu hevosen vittua. Kaikki uusiksi
Personally I haven't applied for work in ground handling but I can say overall a companies brand image has a immense impact on my decision to apply for work there.
Whenever I fly to/from HEL, being familiar with the ground handling companies, I kinda feel "prepared" to what's going to happen. From personal experience, while I found check-in/gate agents being really good from all companies, I always have problems when it comes to luggage handling with Airpro. That for sure affects my choice of flying as well.
The perception of ground handling companies is that the entire business is about cost minimisation leading to motivation to consider other sectors first.
The challenge is the reputation and actions of the labor organization that affect to the actual service. They have been very much minding their political agenda instead of understanding that their actions ruin the good company profile and the competitiveness of the total experience when travelling.
Brändäyksessä kannattaisi keskittyä korostamaan yritysten erilaisuutta suhteessa toisiinsa, sillä muuten ne sulautuvat vahvasti yhteen eivätkä ne eroa toisistaan tavankansalaiselle, joka pohtii työnhakemista alalta
En ole paljoo kuullut maahuolinnasta, mutta olisin kiinnostunut kuulla enemmän. Näistä ei paljoo mediassa mainosteta ja ymmärtääkseni se ei ole ihan jokaisen työtä, mutta olisi kivaa tietää siitä enemmän, kuin vain kavereiden sanoista jne.
I think issue with branding in ground handling is no one really cares about the brand, whatever is the cheapest option for the airlines... thats how it feels right now.

**If you currently work in ground handling, please answer the following question:
How satisfied are you with the employer branding efforts of your current ground handling company?**

Number of respondents: 2

Responses
Erittäinen tyytyväinen

I believe my company right now tried to do their best by investing in electric vehicles, but all the issues all the time, with the vehicles and right now they feel already out-dated as tech.

I still think they do a good job in branding, but could be done better.