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THE USE OF EMPLOYER BRANDING TO ATTRACT HIGH QUALITY CANDIDATES

– The case of IBM France and its recruitment website

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THE USE OF EMPLOYER BRANDING TO ATTRACT HIGH QUALITY CANDIDATES – THE CASE OF IBM FRANCE AND ITS RECRUITMENT WEBSITE

Employer Branding is a fashion phenomenon for the last 15 years but is still a vague concept nowadays. This phenomenon takes more and more place in the companies' strategies and particularly for the Human Resources department. This department has now a strategic role to develop and maintain the employer image of a company. It is very important nowadays due to the employment context in which finding high quality candidates can be a real difficulty. Due to the inceasingly popularity of this concept, some companies dedicate specific jobs to the question of Employer Branding and they have employees who are in charge of the development of their Employer Brand. Employer Branding can be a solution to help a company in attracting more easily the high quality candidates it wants. However, Employer Branding can also provide some limits and has to be carefully developed.

The objective of the study is to analyse the role of Employer Branding in the objective of attracting the best candidates. The thesis has collaborated with IBM France to understand the place of Employer Branding in the company and to verify if the theories regarding Employer Branding can be applied in a real context. The thesis process was implemented by a qualitative research with an interview answered by the Head of the Recruitment of IBM France and her recruitment marketing & communications collaborator. An observation work has also been made to identify how some of the IBM France strategies can be developed through an example of a communication support which is its recruitment website.

CONTENT

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resource Management
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Motivation for this subject

This topic was chosen in accordance with the author's personal interests. The intention was to write a thesis about the specialization in which she would like to work; the Human Resources. Furthermore, it was intended that this thesis will help her to continue her future studies in this field.

Secondly, Employer Brand Management is well known by professionals but it has been noticed by the author that this is not the case from a lot of people of her generation. When her classmates, neighbours or friends asked what the general subject of the thesis was, they were always surprised when they heard "Employer Branding" and asked what it is. That is why the goal is also to create awareness and show them that they are and will be often confronted to that, especially with the booming of the use of internet, without realizing it.

Brand Management is essential for every company (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 501). The interest was to look at it from a HR perspective to understand what companies can do to develop their employer brand image in order to attract the best candidates. However, Employer Branding has not yet been studied extensively by academics. It was another interesting challenge for this work.

Finally, the interest in creating a connection between Employer Branding and internet in this thesis is because Employer Branding is increasingly managed and communicated on internet nowadays. The objective was to understand how a company develops its Employer Brand by focusing on an example of a support that communicates it; the recruitment website. To achieve that, IBM France and its recruitment website have been chosen.

1.2 Objectives and research questions

The objective of this thesis is to analyse the role and importance of Employer Branding in a company's strategy to attract the best candidates. This thesis studies also an example of a support on which a company communicates its Employer Brand; the recruitment website. The goal is to apply the theoretical research on a case study analysis about how IBM France considers the importance of the concept of Employer Branding, and how it can be illustrated on its recruitment website. Indeed, can the theories about Employer Branding be applied in a real context?

The aim of this thesis is to answer the following research questions:

1. What is Employer Branding?
2. Why a company should develop its Employer Brand in order to attract high quality candidates?
3. What challenges can a company face when it develops its Employer Brand?
4. What is the importance of Employer Branding for IBM France and how its recruitment website contributes to its Employer Branding strategy?

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The next chapter presents the literature review which is based on the theoretical findings regarding the role of Employer Branding to attract the best candidates. This chapter is the basis of the research analysis on the case of IBM France.

The third chapter describes the case study chosen in which IBM France and its professional recruitment website are shortly presented.

The fourth chapter explains the process about how the reseach study has been conducted. The research methodology, the research design, the data collection and the reliability, validity and generalization are presented.

The fifth chapter is based on the analysis of the research findings that are compared to the theoretical ones. In this chapter it will be demonstrated if the theories of Employer Branding are applied in the real life by IBM and how it can be illustrated on its recruitment website.

The last chapter is a conclusion and a general view of the thesis work and how the research findings could be improved by giving some advice for further research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Employer Branding becomes more and more popular and is widely used by practitioners. Yet there is a clear lack of academic research concerning this topic. (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 501 ; Sokro, 2012, 164). Many firms have developed Employer Branding practices or are interested in developing it (Conference Board, 2001). Using Employer Branding in HRM to attract the best candidates is a relatively new phenomenon (Sorko, 2012, 164). "Best" refers to the people "who bring value to the company and are able to deliver on the company's brand promise" (Moroko & Uncles, 2005, 53) but also people who fit with the company's vision, culture, methods of work,…; in other terms those who are suitable for the organization (Barrow, & Mosley, 2008, 116). As Alex Marples of Kaisen said when he worked for Lego during a consulting mission: "Rather than trying to adjust the values to fit the people, our job is to select those who fit the environment…you cannot force people, it's like chasing water uphill". (Barrow & Mosley, 2005, 116). This chapter will define the essence of Employer Branding and explain what is it and why using it to attract the best candidates. Furthermore, Employer Branding, like every subject, provides also challenges that will be presented in this literature review too.

2.1 What is Employer Branding?

Before defining Employer Branding, it is important to highlight that this concept takes its essence from marketing aspects and Brand Management. These marketing concepts can be seen as the foundation of Employer Branding because they are now used in the area of HRM. (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 501). Applying brand marketing principles to HRM is called Employer Branding (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 501). These marketing principles are related to internal marketing to retain and commit the current employees to the values and goals defined by the firm. They are also related to external marketing to attract the best possible candidates. (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 502-503).

The American Marketing Association defines a brand as "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the

goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors" (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 502). Branding can be used to differentiate tangible products. However, as time goes on, it is also more and more applied in order to differentiate people, places and firms (Peters, 1999, cited in Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 502). In a HR context, Branding proposes a "differentiation of a firms' characteristics as an employer from those of its competitors" (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 502). Here, the customers can be seen as the candidates. If they are dissatisfied with the Employer Brand of a company, they will not apply for a job in this company. It is the same case for a customer who will not buy a product. (Rokos, 2015, talentculture.com). As noticed, brand has also repercussions on the company in the context of being seen as an employer.

Several definitions exist to propose an explanation of Employer Branding by concentrating on different aspects. All the definitions mentioned below are important for the rest of the thesis. Over the years, authors continue to propose some definitions for Employer Branding because this concept is still quite young due to a lot of schools of thoughts. Giving only one definition in this thesis is hard because Employer Branding is not that easy to define and each author gives important notions to remember. These definitions cover different approaches of employer brandig and complement each other.

The first definition was introduced by Ambler and Barrow (1996, 8) as "the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company". According to Sokro (2012, 165), this definition is based on the assumption that the benefits a company – seen as the brand – can provide to its potential and current employees – seen as the customers.

Then, other authors have completed this first definition by highlighting different aspects that will be developed through this thesis to explain how Employer Braning can help a company to attract the best candidates:

The Conference Board (2001, 10) said that "the employer brand establishes the identity of the firm as an employer. It encompasses the firm's value system, policies and behaviors toward the objectives of attracting, motivating and retaining the firm's current and potential employees". In this case, it can be assumed that Employer Branding helps a company to position itself by developing its identity. Moreover, Employer Branding does not only attract candidates but also retain its current employees. By the way, these current employees will then help the company to attract other candidates.

In 2002, Ruch (cited in Meier, 2006, 17) defined the employer brand mainly by the people's perception regarding the benefits that a firm offers. He continued by explaining that the desire to work in a company is directly linked to the salary but also to other abstract benefits like values and culture of the company. Ruch proposes a similar explanation as Ambler and Barrow. The company offers some benefits (value offering) to its potential and current employees. It can be assumed that these benefits can be compared to promises made by the employer to the candidates with the intent to attract them.

Sullivan (2004, cited in Sokro, 2012, 165) explained that the employer brand is not the result of a punctual need but of a long-term strategy to maintain the awareness and perceptions of a large public (employees, potential employees and stakeholders) about the firm's image. A reputation is built over time.

Minchington (2005, brettminchington.com) affirmed that the employer brand is "the image of your organisation as a 'great place to work' in the mind of current employees and key stakeholders in the external market (active and passive candidates, clients, customers and other key stakeholders)". In this case, Minchington links the concept of image with Employer Branding and gives a similar approach as Sullivan by saying that potential and current employees have perceptions and feelings towards a company's employer image.

Gilliver (2009, cited in Sokro, 2012, 165) gave a general definition about the employer brand that "identifies an organization in the marketplace and makes it

unique". Here, Gulliver assumes that Employer Branding makes a company different and unique on the labour market.

2.2 The use of Employer Branding in recruitment

2.2.1 Positioning of the company as an employer

According to Duroni (2014, agnes-duroni.com), using employer branding can help a company to understand itself by thinking of its identity, that is often compared to its social DNA. It is important to define what a company as an employer is, before to communicate to others the benefits it can provide by working within this company. It allows the company to answer to the question "Who am I ?". It can be composed of its values, corporate culture, history, mission, vision, business practices, working environment, HR policy,… according to Engel (2014, finyear.com). She defines that as the HR positioning of the company. This employer identity is the voluntary image that a company wants to transfer (Smets, 2013, inboundwetrust.be).

The employer image is also indeniably a key concept in Employer Branding to attract candidates. As claimed by Engel (2014, finyear.com), this image results from how the company is perceived by the stakeholders such as potential and current employees.

Backhaus & Tikoo (2004, 504) carried out an analysis about employer branding to demonstrate how it can attract and retain employees. They assume that Employer Branding creates two phenomena: brand associtations and brand loyalty.
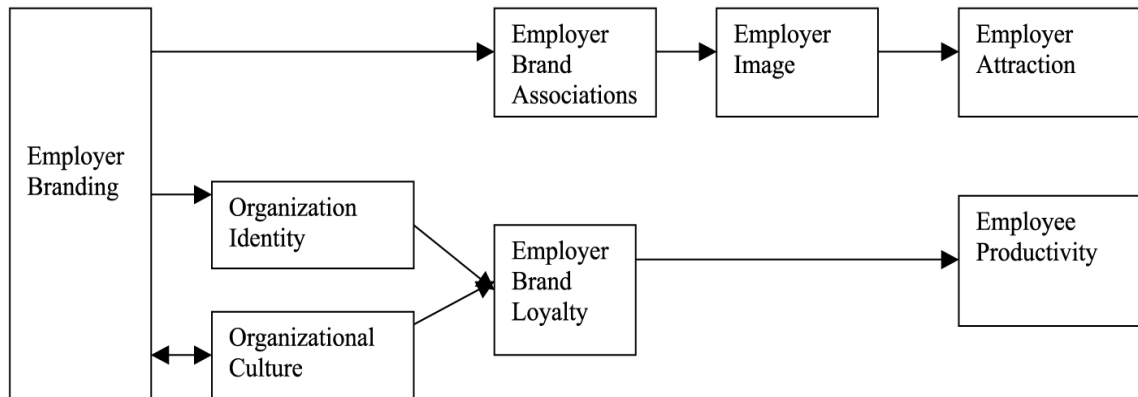
Figure 1. Employer Branding framework (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 505).

The first phenomon shows how employer branding creates an employer image. According to Backhaus & Tikoo (2004, 505), the employer image is built thanks to brand associations that come from Employer Branding practices. These brand associations affect the image of the company as an employer and impact candidates' application.

Aaker (1991, cited in Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 505) claims that brand associations are what a brand name arouses in the mind of consumers. According to Supphellen (2000, warc.com), these brand associations can be verbalized, visualized but also sensory or emotive impressions (consumers' feeling about a brand, an emotional reaction, a memory of a smell, taste, sound…). Minchington (2011, brettminchington.com) translated it into a HR context where brand associations are what an organization's name arouses in the minds of current and potential employees. They can have similar feelings (emotional response or memories for example) about a brand thanks to their experiences with the company or through touch points like social media channels (Minchington, 2011, brettminchington.com).

The processus of the brand associations is "an amalgamation of the perceptions related to the product-related/non-product-related attributes and the functional/symbolic benefits that are encompassed in the brand associations that reside in consumer memory (Keller, 1993)" (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 505 ; Lievens & Highhouse, 77) and can be seen as the foundation and construction of the brand image (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003, 77). It means that brand image

is built thanks to the consumers' combination of functional and symbolic benefits regarding a brand (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003, 77). Functional benefits are related to product-related attributes - description of the product with tangible, physical and objective (Keller, 1998 cited in Lievens & Highhouse, 2003, 78-79) - and attract people because they want to "maximize benefits and minimize costs" (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003, 78-79). Symbolic benefits are related to non-product-related attributes from consumers' mental representation - description of the product with intangible and subjective terms that result from how people perceive, feel, have ideas concerning a product - and attract people who want to express themselves, keep their self-identity, increase their self-image (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003, 79).

It is the same reflection in the context of employment concerning the employer brand image. The functional benefits are related to company's elements that are objectively and physically desirable (salary, benefits, leave allowances, location of the compay,…). The symbolic benefits concern intangible and subjective elements like stature and prestige of the company, or its flexibility, innovativeness, pleasant working environment, perceived and felt by the candidates who imagine themselves enjoying working in the company. (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 505). Candidates will be attracted to a company that will have the functional and symbolic attributes that they suppose it has and that correspond to them, according to the degree of importance they place on these attributes and benefits (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 505). Furthermore, candidates designate personality traits to the companies that can be seen as symbolic attributes (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003, 79). In other words, they will compare their personality, needs, values, culture, vision,… to the company's employer brand image they have in mind (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 506). In this context, the company possesses human traits (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003, 79). This is based on the person-organization fit; the more the values, personality, needs, vision,… of the candidates are matching with those of the company, the more the candidates will be attracted to this company (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 506). It can help a company to get candidates that are more suitable to its culture, vision, values, beliefs,…

2.2.2   Differentiation from the competition

Behind this employer image, the company's goal is to differentiate itself from its competitors by making itself unique on the labour market. Unique by offering not only a job but also specific values, vision and future. Being unique will help it to attract the best candidates because the recruitment environment becomes more and more competitive (Sokro, 2012, 164). This increasingly competitive context gives difficulties to companies to recruit and retain the best people (Sokro, 2012, 164). This challenge is enhanced by the fact that jobs and companies within the same industry field are often similar (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003, 75). That is why it is important to make the difference and stand out from the competition (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003, 75). As reported by Berthon et al. (2005, 167), there is a propability that competition for the best candidates "will be as fierce as competition for customers" in the future.

Having the right human capital is important but besides this, it would be a lie to say that companies do not pay attention to the skills of the candidates that are also a source of competitiveness and performance. For instance, it becomes harder for companies to find people who have specific skills because they become rare in this economy that is more and more a "knowledge-based economy" (Sokro, 2012, 166). As matter of fact, companies are more and more competing to attract highly skilled employees in different fields (Mahroum, 2000, 179). McKinsey (2001, 1) resumes this context as the "war for talent" where this high competitive labour context creates difficulties for recruiting and retaining talented people. It can be concluded that there is a dual challenge for companies; finding highly skilled people who match their culture, values, personality, vision, objectives,…

When a company builds its employer image, its goal behind is to be differentiated from its competitors. The previous section showed particularly the external employer image of a company thanks to brand associations perceived by the candidates. This current section explains it from the company's perspective.

Armstrong (2006, cited in Sokro, 2012, 167) considers that the aspiration of employer branding is to become an "employer of choice", it means a place where people prefer to work. To become this "employer of choice", Sears (2003, cited in Sorko, 2012, 167) thinks that the company has to develop a "value proposition" in order to communicate what it can offer to the candidates as a "great place of work". In other words, what this company offers more than another one? This value proposition is called Employee Value Proposition (EVP) defined by Minchington (2005, brettminchington.com) as "a set of functional and emotive associations and offerings (e.g. career development, salary, friendly working environment, etc) provided by an organisation in return for the skills, capabilities and experiences an employee brings to the organisation". The EVP is an experience promised by the employer and is related to the Employer Brand Proposition (Barrow & Mosley, 2005, 125). This is a "complete package of reasons for job seekers to choose to work for the company" (Garibaldi, 2014, 3). Candidates are more attracted to companies that have a strong and great employer brand value than those that have a curtailed employer brand value (Wallace et al., 2014, 20). The functional and symbolic benefits explained in the previous section are a component of the company's EVP because they represent some examples given by Minchington. For example, a company can make itself different from its competitors particularly by concentrating more on the symbolic functions when the functional differences between it and its competitors are insignificant (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 506). Within the same industry, companies have often similar functional benefits and making the difference with the symbolic benefits can help them to be above their competitors and to be more attractive (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003, 80). Towers Watson (2012), a large company specialized in risk management and human resource consulting, proposes a similar approach of the EVP based on work experience. This is called the Total Rewards Model. This company supports the idea that basic benefits (e.g. financial benefits like salary) have no secrets for candidates because they know what goes in and out their wallet but they do not really know the whole value of their benefits (other than financial) given by their employer.
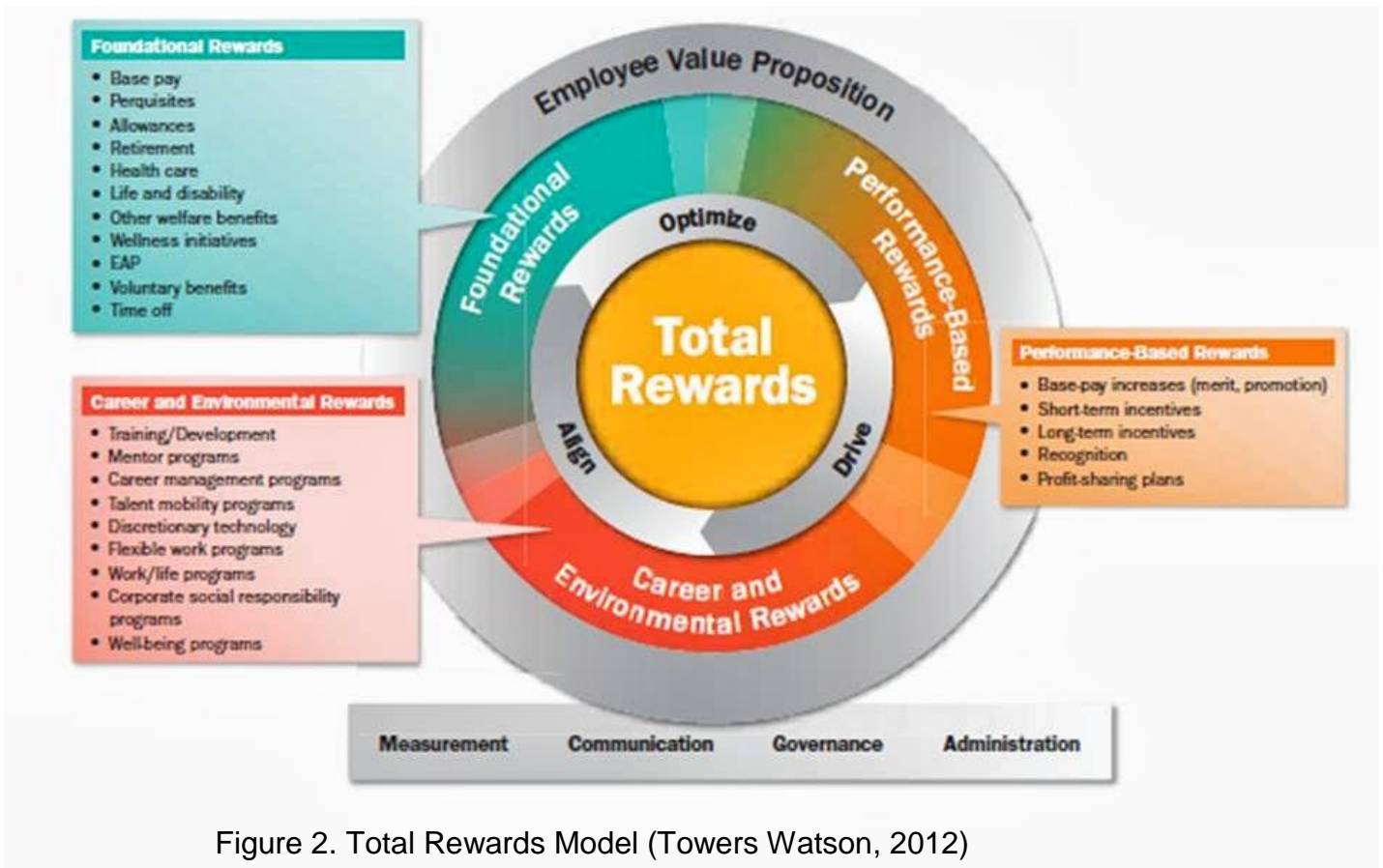
Figure 2. Total Rewards Model (Towers Watson, 2012)

In this model, the rewards can be seen as a part of the functional and symbolic benefits. Some of the rewards provided here are tangible (see foundational and performance-based rewards on Figure 2) and others more intangible, focused on the self development and working environment of the employees (see career and environmental rewards on Figure 2). The Total Rewards provide a key role in supporting the company's EVP by being a part of this one (Mosley, 2014, 125). Moreover, it helps the potential employees to understand all they are gaining concerning the rewards provided by the company (Towers Watson, 2012). Indeed Employer Branding, through the Total Rewards of the EVP, helps a company to be above its competitors by proposing a "crystal-clear picture" of its benefits it can provide to the candidates (Towers Watson, 2012). Moroever, a company will emphazise certain aspects more than others because they will vary based on a its business, vision, culture, demographics,… (Paclikova & Gendron – Towers Watson, 2013).

To strengthen its EVP and so its differentiation from the competition, a company building its Employer Brand has to think of a tailored EVP (Barrow & Mosley, 2005, 125). This tailored EVP – that can be a customized financial package but also other customized specific benefits – can be expressed to different target groups depending on the skills types, levels, functions, job roles, geographic locations,… of the candidates (Barrow & Mosley, 2005, 125 ; Towers Watson, 2012). For instance, a company can express in different ways its mission, values, vision, culture, financial benefits, career development, working conditions and the other aspects cited in the sections, depending on which types of candidates it targets (Audrerie, 2013, futurstalents.wordpress.com). Barrow & Mosley (2005, 125-126) give the example of Microsoft in which one of the ideas of the EVP is the "realise your potential" proposition that is communicated in different ways to the Technical, Marketing or HR functions to attract candidates.

2.2.3 Retention of the current employees

The role of the current employees of an organization is important to support its Employer Branding strategy in order to attract other best candidates. For that, the company has to succeed to retain them by making them satisfied and loyal. Here too, the Employer Branding has something to do with making the employees satisfied and loyal. (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 512)

The EVP, seen as the "give" and the "get" (Veal, 2014, trainingjournal.com) takes shape into a psychological contract during the recruitment process (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 507). A psychological contract is "an individual's beliefs regarding reciprocal obligations. Beliefs become contractual when the individual believes that he or she owes the employer certain contributions (e.g. hard work, loyalty, sacrifices) in return for certain inducements (e.g. high pay, job security)" (Rousseau, 1990, 390). Furthermore, it is not compulsory written and less formal than a written employment contract that only specifies reciprocal duties in a general form (Rousseau, 1989, 126). There is the creation of an employer-employee relationship based on the obligations they promised

to each other during the recruitment phase (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 507). If the promises are kept in both sides, it will provide loyalty and commitment from the employees (Moroko & Uncles, 2008, 54).

The second phenomenon proposed by Backhaus & Tikoo (2004, 508) also shows that Employer Branding practices influence employees' loyalty (see Figure 1, 13). Here, it is focused on internal branding/marketing. The new recruits and current employees are exposed to the EVP developed by the Employer Branding, and the goal is to make them "committed to the set of values and organisational goals established by the firm" (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 502). It is considered as the employer brand loyalty, that is comparable to the organizational commitment (Backaus & Tikoo, 2004, 508). Organizational commitment is the "identification and involvement with the firm, including acceptance of the organisation's goals and values, eagerness to work hard, and desire to remain with the firm (Crewson, 1997)" (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 508). As showed in the framework and explained by Backhaus & Tikoo (2004, 508), employer brand loyalty is built on behavioral elements (related to organizational culture) and attitudinal elements (related to organizational identity).

Backhaus & Tikoo (2004, 508) consider that Employer Branding helps the company to establish and/or enhance its organizational culture and organizational identity (that are parts of the social DNA and of the EVP as explained in the previous sections). These both elements affect the employer brand loyalty. Exposing the employees to the EVP by promoting and communicating them the existing value of the company's culture is fundamental because employees who have learned and assimilated it are in accordance with the company's culture, goals, values,… Thus they will identify themselves with the company and will be attached to it. Then they will tend to be more loyal. (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 503). As said before, the organizational culture shapes the behaviour of the employees. The right organizational culture will impact positively their loyalty (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 509). This is also the case for the organizational identity; a positive one contributes to self-esteem and employees will more likely identify themselves with the company (Backhaus

& Tikoo, 2004, 509). Then it reduces the possibilities that these employees will leave their company for another one even if their company goes through a troubled period.

Backhaus & Tikoo (2004, 510) go deeper in their analysis by stating that loyal employees are important because it means they are satisfied to work in their company. Therefore they will increase productivity by providing higher performance at work (Iaffaldano & Muchinsky, 1985, 270 ; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 510) and strengthen customer satisfaction (Rucci et al. 1997, hbr.org ; Morrison, 1995, cited in Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 510). This phenomenon is called the "service profit chain" by Heskett et al. (1997, hbr.org) where the profit and growth of the company, the customers' satisfaction and loyalty, and the employees' satisfaction, loyalty and productivity are related to each other (Heskett et al., 1997, hbr.org).

The Links in the Service-Profit Chain
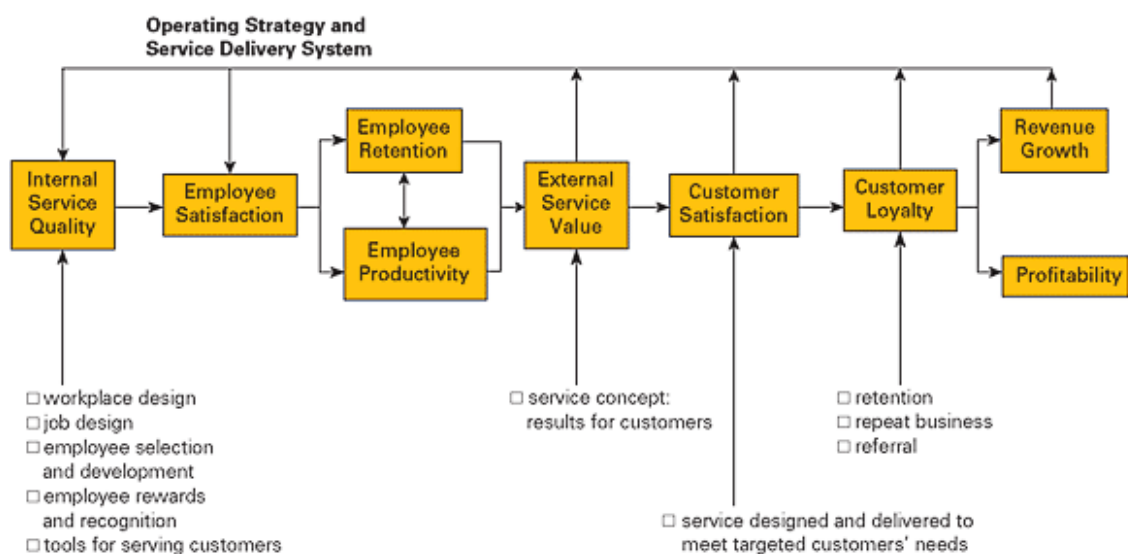

Figure 3. The service-profit chain (Heskett et al., 1997, hbr.org).

As maintained by Heskett et al. (1997, hbr.org), the profits result from customers' loyalty. This loyalty comes from their satisfaction to the high quality products/services provided by the company. This strong value is generated by satisfied, loyal and productive employees. These employees are in this good

dynamic process because the company provides them some benefits (functional/symbolic) or total rewards and a good quality support that enables them to deliver a strong value to the customers. (Heskett et al., 1997, hbr.org).

Furthermore nobody can deny that a healthy company (revenue growth, profitability), thanks to its very good products/services provided by its high quality employees, is more likely to attract best people. Ambler and Barrow (1996, 2) made qualitative research interviews concerning HR methods of different managers. One of the leading retailers in UK told them "if we have the best shops, with the best people, then we have the best word of mouth and receive the best applications and then we will have the best shops". It is a virtuous circle:

Best people

Best applicants

Best shops

Best word of mouth
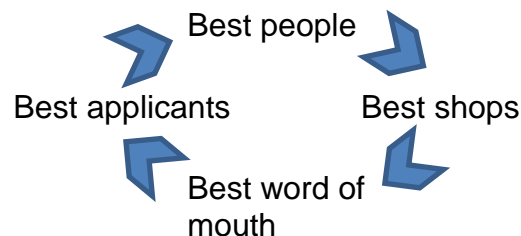
Figure 4. Link between best candidates who have been recruited and quality of products/services to attract other best candidates (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, 2).

Then, a company that has recruited the best candidates for it and made them satisfied, commited and loyal, will possess employees who will be the best brand advocates. This will allow the company to attract other best candidates. (Garibaldi, 2014, 35). That is why it is important to have "natural" brand ambassadors in order to enhance the employer image of the company. Ambassadors are employees who are totally committed to their company and to their job (Barrow & Mosley, 2005, 101). These employees' opinions and point of views have influence on other best candidates and so they can attract them (Garibaldi, 2014, 41). Candidates rely on different factors to have an opinion concerning a company and one of these factors is the word of mouth from current or past employees (Wallace et al., 2014, 22). This factor would be one of the most reliable information for them on what really happens in a company (work conditions, company's methods of work, atmosphere,…) (Keeling et al., 2013, 4 ; Anderson, 2013, forbes.com). That is why it is important for a

company to satisfy its employees who will become its ambassadors and help to support its Employer Brand. People who are proud to work in their company will give more easily a positive word of mouth concerning their tasks, responsabilities, work atmosphere,… to potential applicants (Matthijs, 2015, vlerick.com). It will promote and enhance a company's image as an employer in order to attract best candidates.

2.3   Challenges regarding Employer Branding

2.3.1   Promises versus reality

Developing an Employer Brand may provide negative issues for a company (Moroko & Uncles, 2005, 55). The new recruits can consider that their experience of employment is different from the one promised by the company when it communicated it through its Employer Brand (Moroko & Uncles, 2005, 55). That is why the content of the Employer Brand message has to propose appropriate, accurate and realistic information in order to avoid potentially misperceptions of the recruits regarding the company (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 507). The company has to provide realistic job previews. It means that there are positive as well as negative information concerning what the firm proposes. (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 507). Otherwise, these misperceptions from the recruits may lead to breach or violation of the psychological contract (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 507). It may reduce satisfaction at work, trust towards the company, performance and increase turnover (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004 507 ; Moroko & Uncles, 2005, 55). These consequences will impact negatively the employer brand image of the company and consequently the attraction of the best candidates. One example given by Backhaus & Tikoo (2004, 507) is the organizational culture that influences the decisions of candidates' job choice. Backhaus & Tikoo (2004, 507-508) pretend that Employer Branding messages regarding the company's culture have to be accurate and honest. An insufficient or dishonest picture of the culture of an organization will dissatisfy the new recruits and they will tend to leave the firm because their beliefs do not fit with the real company's culture. Here too, the credibility of the employer brand

image is affected and it will impact negatively the attraction of the best candidates. (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 507-508). It can be concluded that the employer image has to be the same internally and externally to attract and retain the best candidates.

One solution is to involve the current employees to prove and enhance the transparency and authenticity of the company's Employer Brand messages (Michel, n.d., businessdiversity.fr). Candidates want to know more and more about their probable future employer. Seeing the current employees can be a guarantee for them to obtain the authenticity of the Employer Brand (Michel, n.d., businessdiversity.fr). In this case, the employees can be seen as "official" brand ambassadors because this is not the utilisation of the word of mouth provided by the "natural" ambassadors. They are involved in a more "official" way by the company with videos, testimonies,… concerning their experience at work. There is more control on the part of the company concerning the message provided. The company can implicate its employees in the creation of its Employer Brand (Garibaldi, 2014, 19). The goal is that the candidates can reflect and imagine themselves in the current employees' experience inside the company (Michel, n.d., businessdiversity.fr).

3 IBM AND ITS RECRUITMENT WEBSITE

The use of Internet (websites, social media,…) provides some opportunities and challenges for companies to develop and communicate their Employer Brand. Internet gives them a huge, easy and inexpensive access to develop their Employer Brand (Kaplan, n.d., smartceo.com). In exchange, the candidates have more possibilities to research and find a lot of information concerning the workplace image and reputation or the employment experience of a company (Peters, 2014, talentculture.com). Internet gives a new turn for the Employer Branding practices because it provides more transparency about the way the campany works (De Loÿs, 2015, parlonsrh.com). For instance, it is very difficult for a company nowadays to hide some aspects of its real work environment. Furthermore, the company has less control to manage the public opinion on internet.

3.1 IBM

International Business Machines, usually called IBM, is an American multinational company created in 1911. The firm is specialized in manufacturing and selling hardware and software, offering infrastructure, hosting and consulting services and operates in 170 countries. The total turnover of the firm represents $99,7 billion and there are approximately 430 000 employees worldwilde.

The company is often listed on different international rankings concerning its employer image. It covers diversified subjects like :

- most attractive employers (by Universum)
- working mother 100 best companies for workplace flexibility particularly for mothers who have a family (by Working Mother) and for Executives Women (by Working Mother too)
- world's most admired companies (by Fortune)
- top companies for diversity (by DiversityInc)

3.2 IBM French recruitment website

LinkedIn made a survey of 3 028 talent-acquisition managers in the world concerning the promotion and delivery of the Employer Brand (Anders, 2012, forbes.com). 78% of them have responded that companies websites are the most effective channel to promote and deliver their Employer Brand messages. It is closely followed by the word of mouth (56%), the professional social networks (46%), the other social medias (38%) and the job boards (34%) (Anders, 2012, forbes.com). It can be concluded that the recruitment website of a company is important to communicate its Employer Brand and has to be carefully built. It can be seen as the first step to communicate its Employer Brand and particularly its EVP.

This thesis is focused on IBM France and on its French recruitment website. IBM France dedicates a specific website for employment in this country, available here: http://www-05.ibm.com/employment/fr/. The use of IBM France recruitment website in this thesis is to propose a support on which IBM France communicates its Employer Brand.

Figure 5. Recruitment website – IBM France (IBM, http://www-05.ibm.com/employment/fr/)

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Methodology

The goal of the empirical research is to understand the importance of Employer Branding for IBM France through its strategies and how this can be illustrated on its recruitment website.

The methodology of research can be quantitative, qualitative or a mix of both (Saunders et al., 2012, 164-165). For this research, the qualitative method was used through an interview. This method corresponds well to obtain detailed information concerning the company's point of view and strategy to develop its Employer Brand. Furthermore, due to the lack of academic research concerning this topic (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004, 501 ; Sokro, 2012, 164), the qualitative method is more useful and relevant to go deeper into the analysis of the subject (Q.Qu & Dumay, 2011, 246). Using the quantitative method means obtaining numerical data (Amaratunga et al., 2002). It is not the most appropriate for this type of research because it is focused on the case of one specific company.

The qualitative research methodology is also based on an observation work on the recruitment website of IBM France with the aim to show how the Employer Brand is developped. These two types of empirical research (interview and observation work) are considered as primary data and utilised only for this thesis. Whereas the theoretical findings from the literature review are considered as secondary data and can be used again for other research.

4.2 Research Design

The interview design is based on the willingness to understand the importance and the role of Employer Branding at IBM France. The observation work was used to apply on the recruitment website some of the explanations provided by the interviewees. The choice of the recruitment website of IBM France for this thesis is to propose a possible support to communicate its Employer Brand. The questions of the interview are voluntarily large and open to obtain as much

information as possible. The goal was to articulate and clarify them during the interview depending on the answers given. That is why, a "guide" was made with the predefined large questions but the interview was flexible and other questions had been add during it to guide the interviewees. The interview was designed to be a semi-structured one (Q.Qu & Dumay, 2011, 246). Thanks to that, the interview was always related to the aspects developed in the theoretical findings and the interviewees were free to add any information that could be relevant for the subject studied in this thesis. The questions of the interview are divided in six themes: introduction of the interview and interviewees, understanding of key terms, introduction of the French recruitment website, the use of Employer Branding in recruitment, the challenges regarding Employer Branding and finally the possible statistics.

4.3   Data collection

A priority was made concerning a face-to-face interview. This type of interview was very important in order to obtain clear and concise answers and develop them during the interview to be always linked with the theoretical findings and to avoid off topic. The interviewees have given the opportunity to interview them in their work environment. That is why the interview took place at the headquarters of IBM France in the city of Bois-Colombes, near Paris. The interview has been recorded with a samsung galaxy s4 mini mobile phone and lasted 2 hours and a half. Concerning the request of interview, a direct phone call was made to avoid losing time that often happens with the use of e-mails. This direct phone call was made in February 2015 to know if IBM agreed to participate. Then, the relationship has been maintained by e-mails. The principal interviewee is Mrs C. who is in charge of the recruitment marketing & communications of IBM France. The head of the recruitment of IBM France, Mrs H., came during the interview but she could not stay during the whole interview due to her work priorities.

The observation work was made before and after the interview in order to help the creation of the interview's questions but also to illustrate some of the strategies explained by the interviewees.

4.4   Reliability, validity and generalization

This thesis is based on a case study (IBM France) and the results obtained cannot be the same if they were collected from another company. It means that the research findings cannot be generalized for every company.

In the interest of increasing reliability and validity, the interview explains the study with as many details and explanations as possible. As explained previously, it has been recorded to keep all the information given by the interviewees. The interview was conducted in French (mothertongue of the interviewees and interviewer) to avoid misunderstandings that can decrease the reliability and validity of the thesis. Moreover, it was important to be efficient during the interview to get as much information as possible in a limited amount of time. Again for the interest of increasing reliability and validity of this research, the questions of the interview were carefully chosen to answer the research questions in order to have coherence during all the thesis process.

The fact that the company's name is not anonymous can provide some limits. The identity of the company can be an obstacle because interviewees may make reservations concerning their answers but it has not be perceived like this during the interview. Furthermore, the interview only shows the views from the Mrs C. & Mrs H. at top HR management level.

5 RESEARCH ANALYSIS

The goal of the research analysis is to understand how IBM France considers and manages its Employer Brand plus how this can be possibly illustrated on its recruitment website.

5.1 Introduction of the interview and interviewees

Question 1: "What is your position in the company and what are your missions?"
Mrs C. and Mrs H. are in the HR department of IBM France. This department is divided in different parts. For instance, the interviewees presented the offices of the persons who work for the recruitment, the persons who are responsible for the intern and apprentice students and the persons in charge of the young graduates who have recently joined IBM. Finally, they also presented the persons dedicated to the internal and external communications that promote IBM on the social networks, manage the recruitment website and all the events consecrated to employment in which IBM participates. Mrs C. explains that she is in charge of the recruitment marketing & communication of IBM France. She is responsible for the promotion of IBM on the social networks concerning employment (Facebook "IBM France recrutement", Twitter "@IBMRecrutement", LinkedIn,…), the redaction of the recruitment website, the events dedicated to employment,... Her manager is Mrs H., the Head of the recruitment of IBM France. Mrs C. and Mrs H. are the most aware of the question of Employer Branding at IBM France due to their position at work.

Question 2: "Is the HR the only department in charge of Employer Branding or do you collaborate with other departments?"
The French HR department does not collaborate with any other department regarding its Employer Brand. This department is independent. It means that it makes its own marketing and communication actions concerning the employment and its employer brand image without the help of the marketing department. This department is more related to the promotion of the products and services of IBM. Mrs H. and Mrs C. defended their idea by explaining that that the French HR department has very limited actions concerning the

promotion of its employer image because all is coordinated and led by IBM US. IBM wants to homogenize all its recruitment websites in each country. Each of them is built and managed in the same way. Mrs C.'s role is to adapt and deploy the same strategy for the French recruitment website. Moreover, IBM France had cut the costs concerning the marketing and communications in HR. For these reasons, IBM France does not need a lot of persons responsible for the marketing and communication of its employer image. Nobody has the status of Employer Brand manager because it does not exist at IBM France (but it exists at IBM US and UK for instance).

5.2   Understanding of key terms

Question 3: "How would you define a best candidate?"

According to the interviewees, a best candidate is not only someone who has high skills and comes from a famous private business or engineer school (as matter of fact, IBM France has about the same pourcentage of people who come from universities and private schools). It is also someone who has human qualities and is able to get used in the way IBM works (concerning its vision, culture, working conditions,…). For instance, regarding the working conditions and culture, IBM wants someone who is able to work in team. Furthermore, the company is looking for people who are not "formatted" (i.e. only high skills for the job) and possess an open minded spirit that the company expects. IBM calls this wanted type of person a "*royal duck*". Mrs C. illustrated this argument by explaining that IBM has especially created online lessons named "interview the IBM way" dedicated to that. These training lessons teach the HR recruiters and the managers (managers at IBM have the right to hire someone) about the good and bad ways to conduct an interview in order to identify the right persons ("Interview the IBM way" is a certification). Mrs H. explained that "*there is obviously a subjective side on the part of the interviewer but "Interview the IBM way" is there to add a factual approach to identify the people who are able to evolve in IBM's environment".*

Moroko & Uncles (2005, 53) and Barrow & Mosley (2008, 116) state that the best people are those who bring value to the company and fit with its vision,

culture, working environment, goals,… (see introduction of the literature review). It can be noticed that IBM France highlights the same aspects and applies it in everyday life with its "Interview the IBM way" lessons.

Question 4: "What is Employer Branding and the goal of it according to you?"
The first answer that came in Mrs H.'s mind is that Employer Branding is marketing applied to HRM. She thinks that Employer Branding is still a vague concept nowadays that is difficult to assess and there is not an exact definition about it because it gathers a lot of aspects. She said that it is for what a company is known from the outside and that makes its strength (to differentiate itself from the competition). According to her, it is "*the management of the external image of IBM*". Mrs C. continued her definition by stating that Employer Branding is also related to "*the internal image of the company*".. The goal of Employer Branding is "*to attract people but also and above all to retain the current employees at IBM France*". The definition of Mrs C. is similar to the one provided by the Conference Board (2001, 10) by stating that Employer Branding does not only attract candidates but also retains the current employees of the company. Actually, the average seniority in the company is 22 years, which is very high. She will demonstrate in the next questions why the current employees have to be retained thanks to Employer Branding practices. Regarding the external Employer Branding, Mrs C. argued that it is more focused on the new generation (students or young graduates) than on the previous one (the strategy is to retain them). The interviewees explained that the age of the company (more than 100 years) is an advantage for its Employer Brand because it is a "*guarantee of stability, rigour and seriousness*". Thanks to its age and its place on the market, the company is well-known. Almost everybody has its logo in mind for instance.

It can be concluded that IBM has the same understanding of the term "Employer Branding" as the authors in chapter 2.1. Mrs C. and Mrs H. highlight key terms like external/internal image, differentiation from the competition, attract/retain the best people, that are developed in this thesis. Furthermore, Mrs H. added that Employer Branding is still hard to define because it covers lots of aspects. The chapter 2.1 also shows that different authors' approaches

are complementary because each of them thinks of different notions regarding Employer Branding.

Question 5: "Since when is Employer Branding an important and inescapable concept in your strategy to attract the best candidates?"

According to Mrs H., Employer Branding practices are not a top priority for IBM France. Due to the fact that IBM is more than 100 years old and operates successfully in 170 countries, neither the globalisation or lack of talents (in terms of skills for the jobs) are a problem for IBM to attract candidates (or except a niche of very specialised skills). So, IBM France is naturally inobtrusive and does not publish a lot of articles concerning employment. The age and success of the company allow it to be well positioned in people's mind. As claimed by Mrs H., IBM's Employer Brand is self-sustaining partly thanks to the company's durability. However, this is IBM US in charge of Employer Branding and IBM France only implements the strategy. That is why Mrs H. does not consider it as a top priority for IBM France.

IBM France is more focused on the attraction of young people (e.g. students and young graduates) because they have different and higher expectations regarding employment nowadays. IBM France adapts its strategies to the young people's quick mindedness and this fast pace world.

IBM France uses Employer Branding practices to attract candidates but it is not its primary concern. The company has focused its strategy of attraction on the young people due to the current context. This question also illustrates the idea of Ambler & Barrow (1996, 2) claiming that a successful healthy company is more likely to attract best candidates (see chapter 2.2.3). Furthermore, IBM does not face that much the competitive labor context described by Sokro (2012, 164) (see chapter 2.2.2).

5.3   Introduction of the French recruitment website

Question 6: "Which of the following tools do you think they are the most important to promote and deliver your Employer Brand? Why?

Recruitment website of IBM, Job boards, Social media (youtube, facebook, twitter, linkedin,…), Word of mouth, Other(s):…"

To answer this question, the interviewees have chosen the recruitment website (the first window to communicate the Employer Brand), social media (particularly LinkedIn and YouTube), word of mouth (with the current and past employees) and have proposed another solution that is the crowd recruiting to ensure the seriousness of the application and to limit spending. Mrs H. explained that crowd recruiting is to "*use the current employees' social network in order to find other right candidates*". Mrs C. justified the choice of the recruitment website by saying that "*IBM France is not very present on online job boards and does not hire people through recruitment firms*". The recruitment website is the only possibility for a candidate to apply at IBM. That is why the recruitment website is important because candidates will inevitably see it. A clear and concise recruitment website is always in favour of the company. Mrs C. also explained that she is distrustful of the social networks but LinkedIn (a professional one) is a good way to communicate the Employer Brand thanks to the current and past employees who make "advertising" for the company. YouTube is used to show videos of employment at IBM and also all its actions in the world which are published by IBM US. The word of mouth is also very important that is why IBM France uses Employer Branding practices to retain its employees. Furthermore, the word of mouth is a part of the crowd recruiting. Mrs H. concluded her explanation by stating that these channels are not enough to communicate the Employer Brand of IBM France. The recruitment phase is very important to clearly explain how IBM France thinks and works plus what it offers. She defined this phase as an "*act of sale*". She finished by saying that the recruitment phase is also the final purpose of Employer Branding by determining the expectations of each party (employer/employee).

A survey of LinkedIn had showed that companies' recruitment website, word of mouth and professional social networks are an effective way to promote and deliver the Employer Brand (see chapter 3.2). IBM France relies on the same channels. Moreover, the conclusion of Mrs H. is similar to the psychological contract explained by Backhaus & Tikoo (2004, 507, see chapter 2.2.3) and

shows that Employer Branding is present until the recruitment phrase of IBM France and not only through the communication channels cited above.

Question 7: "Can you briefly present the recruitment website of IBM France?"

Mrs C. presented the recruitment website in a simple way because it is built in order to make it easy to understand and effective. Two main parts shape the recruitment website. The first one is related to the communication of the Employer Brand to the different targets and is made by IBM (see Figure 5, 25). The second one is the employment platform on which people apply for every type of jobs at IBM all around the world. This platform is a tool realised by the company NetMedia. As demonstrated previously, it is IBM US/UK that coordinates Employer Branding strategies. That is why Mrs C. has to translate and adapt the English content in French in order to provide coherence for the French labour market while respecting the global strategy.

Figure 6. IBM employment platform powered by NetMedia

5.4   The use of Employer Branding in recruitment

Question 8: "Do you think the use of Employer Branding has helped IBM to define its social DNA?"

In the opinion of Mrs H., the case of IBM France is the "opposite". Employer Branding is a relatively new concept that appeared a long time after the creation of IBM. IBM knew itself before. However, Mrs H. proposed the idea that "*Employer Branding allows IBM to rethink and redesign some aspects of its social DNA*". In 2013, IBM has developed the "1 vision, 3 values, 9 practices" model in which the client experience comes from internal Employer Branding methods. These vision, values and practices are a component of IBM's social DNA because they gather its purpose, business practices, corporate culture,…

Duroni (2014, agnes-duroni.com) argues that the identity (social DNA) of a company is part of its Employer Brand (see chapter 2.2.1). Employer Branding can help to build or define it. In the case of IBM France, it is interesting to see that IBM already knew who it is due to its age but Employer Branding has helped it to reshape and clarify a part of its social DNA (1 vision, 3 values, 9 practices).

Question 9: "The EVP is composed of functional (tangible) and symbolic/emotive (intangible) offerings. Can you present the main aspects you want to communicate through your EVP?"

This question is directly focused on the recruitment website of IBM and Mrs H. added some examples of benefits that are not available on it. IBM develops both functional and symbolic benefits. It is clearly written on the French recruitment website that "regarding competitive compensation and benefits – tangible and intangible – IBM has always been a leader". It can be noticed that IBM easily makes the difference between tangible and intangible benefits and knows their importance for its EVP differentiation on the labour market. Some of the tangible and intangible benefits described by IBM France are the same as those developed in the model of Towers Watson (2012, see chapter 2.2.2):

Functional benefits: the functional offerings are well developed and communicated on its French recruitment website. This is not so common to see

all these tangible details on a recruitment website. Mrs H. has noticed that the reasons why employees leave IBM are rarely due to functional (and particularly financial) reasons. Actually, IBM can offer high tangible benefits thanks to its age, size and position on the market.

- *Base pay (salary) and base pay increases (merit, promotion)*: IBM France explains on its recruitment website that they are "all the financial benefits that are able to attract, motivate and retain the high performing employees". For instance, IBM France proposes a "competitive salary" that can increase if the results of the employees' performance are superior than those planned initially. These financial opportunities "can bring the employees among the best paid employees on the market". IBM France shows that its functional benefits are a mark of differentiation to stand out from its competitors even within the same industry field. However, Mrs H. & Mrs C. explained that it is not sufficient nowadays. It can be concluded that IBM France has the same opinion as Lievens & Highhouse (2003, 75) stating that it is difficult to stand out from the competition within the same industry with the tangible benefits (see chapter 2.2.2). IBM France uses the tangible benefits to be different but it does not focus solely on that.

- *Health care and wellness initiatives*: IBM France proposes complementary health insurance and other related benefits as well as wellness programs.

- *Share purchase program*: employees at IBM France can buy shares with a 5% discount.

- *Offices location*: IBM has offices throughout the country. It allows its employees to work closed to their home.

 - *Works council*: this is not presented on IBM France recruitment website but more during the recruitment phase. Mrs C. explained that this is a strong functional benefit. For instance, IBM France offers holiday trips for its employees and their family at a reduced price.

The functional benefits presented on IBM France recruitment website are mainly financial. Financial offerings are the most common tangible benefits.

Symbolic benefits:

- *Flexible work programs*: employees manage their timetable. What is more important is the final result. They can work longer hours one day and work shorter hours another day. They can also work at home if they have personal priorities. Company's flexibility allows them to combine professional and personal life.

- *Mentor programs*: intern, apprentice students and young graduates are guided and helped by professionals from IBM France during all their training or at the beginning of their career concerning the young graduates.

- *Training/Development*: intern and apprentice students, young graduates or professionals have trainings when they enter to the company, and during all their period at IBM France (regarding how IBM works, professional and personal competencies development, individual development plan,…).

- *Career management programs*: Mrs H. supported that employees at IBM France can do different jobs during their career. The company also helps its employees' self and career development by providing them a lot of opportunities in their job.

- *Work/life programs*: Mrs H. explained that IBM France provides support and is attentive to its employees by giving them a great team and working atmosphere for instance.

- *Corporate social responsibility programs*: IBM is very present in humanitarian actions and projects (clean water, climate change, electric car, HIV infection, grevy's zebra protection, recycling…).

We can see that the EVP of IBM is well and clearly developed. It can be compared to the "crystal-clear picture" provided by Towers Watson. But all is not defined on the recruitment website of IBM France. Mrs H. explained that the recruitment phase is the continuity of the EVP by going deeper in the benefits proposed.

Question 10: "Are the functional or symbolic/emotive benefits the most important to attract the best candidates? Why?"

Mrs C. stated that both are important. They are both presented in the recruitment website and described in depth during the recruitment phase. She

thinks that "*IBM France emphasises more and more the symbolic benefits without forgetting the functional ones*".

IBM France writes on its recruitment website that "*in order to prosper and grow, your employer must know how to estimate and assess what is the less tangible but not the less important, namely the benefits that make work enjoyable and fulfilling*". Nowadays, people are looking for their career development, their well being at work,… but they do not forget the functional benefits that are still important for them. Mrs H. & Mrs C. gave the example that IBM France gives importance for the great comfort at work and the possibilities to have special trainings and different jobs during a career at IBM France. The career development is an important aspect at IBM France. Furthermore the company shows on its recruitment website the importance of its values (e.g. diversity and actions in humanitarian projects). There is a section dedicated to diversity with an explaining paragraph ("*people who has different experiences and culture*", "*regardless who he/she is and what he/she does*") and a schedule of facts that happened in the company to promote women, handicapped people and equal opportunities towards sexual orientation. The company also proposes some videos and photos in which we can see employees from different areas (different colours of skin) or sick employees and its participation in humanitarian projects. By the way, the recruitment website is clearly focused on the symbolic meanings more than on the functional ones.

IBM France strategy is in accordance with the idea of Lievens & Highhouse (2003, 80) stating that companies have to make the difference with the symbolic attributes particularly within the same industry field (see chapter 2.2.2).

Question 11: "IBM France communicates its EVP to different targets on its recruitment website, why?"

The presentation page divides the following of the recruitment website in 5 parts and 3 of them are destined to the targeted public. The 2 other parts are dedicated to everybody ("about IBM", and "made with IBM" to show company's success). The 3 parts related to the targeted public are divided in 3 main targets according to their "level": students (interns and apprentices), young graduates

and professionals. According to Mrs. C, "*a tailored EVP shows that each target is important and can bring value to IBM France*". Furthermore, this is an effective way to present them the EVP's benefits and the Employer Brand in a general view. Actually, the general messages of the benefits are similar for each target but they are not sent in the same way. For instance, the career development promised by IBM France cannot be the same for a student and a professional. They are made and communicated differently. The training sessions, the monitoring, the base pay and base pay increases, acquisition of skills,… are not the same for each target. These different parts enhance the clarity of the EVP. People, according to their level, can more easily imagine themselves working at IBM France and compare IBM's values, vision, business practices,… with what they are and seek. This method strengthens the "crystal-clear picture" that IBM France wants to send.

The tailored EVP proposed by Barrow & Mosley (2005, 125) in the chapter 2.2.2 is an advantage in the strategy of IBM France to attract the candidates who fit the best with its identity.

Question 12: "How do you expose your Employer Brand internally to make your employees loyal (satisfied and committed)?"

The "1 vision, 3 values, 9 practices" model is a great example of internal employer branding. This model is written in a guide that each first line manager possesses. Thanks to this guide, employees are exposed to IBM's culture, way of working and thinking (values, mission, vision, business practices,…). It allows IBM to shape its employees' behaviour in order to have employees in the "right way" wanted by the company. The guide is a tool that advise them how to work and react and increases their effectiveness and commitment to their job and their employer (IBM France) by giving them understable vision, goal and gudieline. Furthermore, professionals who have recently joined IBM France receive a training session at the beginning in which the company explains them again how it thinks and works. We can see that professionals at IBM France are continuously exposed to its Employer Brand.

Regarding the young graduates, they are also exposed to the Employer Brand of IBM France. The foundation graduate program is a tool of attraction of the best candidates but also of retention. Its goal is to welcome and support them during their first 2 years at IBM France regardless their function or job in the company. This program is divided in 2 parts. The first one is common to all and is present to facilitate their integration. IBM France organises collective animations (afterworks, events, lunches,…) in order to create a community between young graduates but also a strong sense of belonging to IBM's community. The second one is the information and training sessions according to their job that can last 18 weeks for the sales persons until 2 years for the consultants. The goal of these sessions is to train them according to the company's business practices and way of thinking. Mrs C. justified this program by saying that "*the voluntary quit rate is higher during the first years of employment (universal conclusion) that is why it is important to retain them by "pampering" them*". The intern and apprentice students can enjoy a similar type of help because they are also important in the strategy of retention of IBM. IBM France hires in most cases its students after their internship or apprenticeship. Furthermore, like the professionals, young graduates and students also receive presentation sessions in which IBM shows them its culture, way of thinking and working,...

In the strategies presented above, it can be noticed that IBM wants to create a strong community. It is with good reason that IBM calls its employees the "IBMers". There is a strong sense of belonging to the company and also a sense of pride to work in this company. Mrs H. gave the example of the corporate badge. People who finish their career at IBM France and leave the company would have liked to keep their corporate badge. IBM France succeeds in most cases to get attached employees who have assimilated IBM's culture, way of working and thinking,… as defined by Backhaus & Tikoo in chapter 2.2.3 (2004, 503).

The second phenomemon proposed by Backhaus & Tikoo (2004, 508) in chapter 2.2.3 is exactly what happens at IBM France. Through its different

internal Employer Branding strategies, the goal of IBM France is to get committed employees.

Question 13: "How these loyal employees can help for your external Employer Brand in order to attract the best candidates?"

According to Mrs C., there are different ways in which IBM France employees can help the company to attract other best candidates.

By being a successful company with effective employees. It is what IBM has done by deploying the guide and training "1 vision, 3 values, 9 practices". IBM explains in its guide that "*these manager actions, inspired by the 1-3-9, drive superior performance and IBMer engagement. IBMer engagement then fuels the client experience as engaged IBMers proficiently demonstrate our 9 practices. A superior client experience, in turn, differentiates us in the market place and generates sustainable business results*". This strategy supports the "service profit chain" presented by Heskett et al. (1997, hbr.org) in chapter 2.2.3. IBM increases business results thanks to customer satisfaction that comes from satisfied and committed employees. It reminds a second time in this interview the idea explained by Ambler & Barrow (1996, 2) that a healthy company can attract talented candidates.

Concerning the "natural" brand ambassadors, IBM France relies on the word of mouth particularly for the crowd recruiting. A satisfied employee who is proud to work at IBM France and who is aligned with IBM France culture, way of thinking, business practices,… will speak more easily about its employer with his family, friends and in all his social network. It allows IBM France to attract more easily potential right persons who are not necessarily seeking for a job. Regarding particularly the students, Mrs C. maintains that "*the word of mouth can also be efficient if they speak about IBM France in their university/school*".

Concerning the "official" brand ambassadors, IBM France involves them through videos that are available on YouTube but also on its recruitment website. Employees are also present on the photos on which they are always smiling. Furthermore, all people on the video related to diversity are employees of IBM. As explained by Mrs C., the communication regarding employment is

done by IBM US and so all the videos and photos on the recruitment website of IBM France have American influences in the way of doing things (different colours of skin, handicapped people,…). For instance, the French recruitment website offers a video that shows how consultants work at IBM. We can see consultants at IBM in their work environment to show to the potential employees how IBM works. This video demonstrates again the diversity at IBM with people from different areas. "Official" brand ambassadors are also involved particularly for the attraction of the young graduates. Professionals at IBM France can be teachers at university or private business/engineer school. They are directly the link between IBM France and schools. Professionals, young graduates and students of IBM France are also involved in all the events related to employment (career days, forums,…) to support the company. Finally, in order to prove again IBM's values in humanitarian projects, its "official" brand ambassadors are involved in humanitarian actions. They participate to the "solidarity day" where they help associations.

In fact, the involvement of IBM's employees as ambassadors is frequently used in communications and actions. This is reminiscent of the ideas stated by Michel (n.d., businessdiversity.com) and Garibaldi (2014, 19) in chapters 2.2.3 and 2.3.1 concerning the use of ambassadors in the Employer Branding strategies of a company.

5.5   Challenges regarding Employer Branding

Question 14: "What is/are the main challenge(s) when you develop your Employer Brand? How do you face them?"

According to Mrs H., "*IBM France makes a point of honour to be always transparent and honest*". IBM has the same opinion as Backhaus & Tikoo (2004, 507) in chapter 2.3.1. Furthermore, the company will not write negative issues on its recruitment website because the goal is to attract candidates. However, the recruitment website is clear concerning the challenges at IBM France. It is written that IBM "*will expect a lot from its potential employees*". IBM France explains more the possible negative issues during the recruitment phase. Mrs H. claimed that the company always anticipates by telling to its

potential employees that IBM is a "process" company. Mrs H. did not hide the fact that the company faces one problem: the wrong image of its activities. Too many people still think that IBM repairs and sells computers instead of its consulting services and it can provides some limits during the recruitment phase regarding people's expectations. That is why the recruitment website is built around that to avoid people's misperception towards IBM. For instance, it is written: "*if you think we only offer opportunities in computing, you are mistaken. We can offer a numerous roles, in line with the range of services we offer*". This is also one of the reasons that IBM French recruitment website offers the video presented above which is related to consulting missions. It has also been noticed that the recruitment website also offers a full and detailed view of IBM's history to demonstrate the evolution of IBM's activities due to the innovation technology. That is why IBM tries to change current people's wrong ideas regarding its activities and to anticipate by "creating" the right ones particularly for students and young graduates.

5.6   Statistics

Question 15: "Do you have any statistics that can show the influence of Employer Branding in the attraction of the best candidates? Particularly for your recruitment website?"

Unfortunatly, IBM France does not have any statistics related to Employer Branding and its efficiency in the attraction of the best candidates. This is IBM US/UK that centralises all the strategies related to this subject. IBM France does not have an Employer Brand manager, as explained above. That is why Mrs H. has stated that it is still difficult to prove with figures the efficiency of IBM's Empoyer Branding in France. However, the fact that IBM France does not have difficulties to find best candidates according to it shows that its strategies presented in this interview may be efficient. Furthermore, the different rankings of IBM presented in chapter 3.1 also show that Employer Branding is well established at IBM.

6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Research findings

The objective of this thesis was to study the role of Employer Branding in recruitment and especially in attraction of the best candidates. The thesis' goal was also to compare authors' research and IBM France strategies regarding Employer Branding. Some of the strategies of the company have been illustrated through its recruitment website.

The first research question investigated the meaning of Employer Branding. It has been demonstrated that this concept is still difficult to define because it covers a lot of aspects. The essence of Employer Branding in HRM comes from Brand Marketing aspects. It is a strategy related to the external (attract potential employees) as well as the internal (motivate and retain current employees) image of the company. It has been established that IBM France is in accordance with the meaning of this concept.

The second research question examined the reasons why a company should develop its Employer Brand in order to attract the best candidates. It is a continuity of the first research question with intent to go deeper into the analysis of the role of Employer Branding. The research have showed the importance and advantages of Employer Branding in attracting the best candidates. It is a tool that helps a company to position itself as an employer on the labour market by defining its identity and creating an employer image perceived by the potential and current employees through brand associations. This external image perceived and felt by the potential and current employees is built on the company's willingness to become different and unique on the labour market by offering them a clear and tailored Employee Value Proposition (EVP). This EVP is based on promised benefits that can be tangible or intangible and that also represent the identity of the company (values, mission, vision, way of thinking and working,…). Finally, Employer Branding helps a company to retain its current employees by making them committed to their employer. Satisfied and

loyal employees are a key to success in attracting other best candidates because they are the best ambassadors of a company's Employer Brand.

The third research question measured the challenges that a company can face when it develops its Employer Brand. The main challenge encountered is that a company has to deliver an accurate and honest message. A dishonest information in a company's Employer Brand may lead to misperceptions on the part of the new recruits. The psychological contract that has been created during the recruitment phase between the employer and the employee can be breached or violated. Employees who feel betrayed will not hesitate to give negative feedback of their employer. That is why a company does not need to lie and has to send a realistic information.

The fourth and last research question was directly linked to the case of IBM France. The intention was to understand the importance of Employer Branding for IBM France by analysing which strategies are used and how this can be possibly developed on its recruitment website. A high degree of correlation has been noticed between the theories and the strategies of IBM France whether for the meanings of key terms (« Employer Branding » and « best candidates ») or the management of the Employer Brand. It can be concluded that the theories are mainly applied in real life by IBM France and on its recruitment website.

After the interview, it has been noticed that IBM France does not have any problem to find highly skilled people or those who have specific skills. IBM France uses more Employer Branding in order to find the right people who are in accordance with its vision, mission, values, way of thinking/working and so on. IBM France attaches great importance to this point. The company does not feel Employer Branding as a top priority. This is probably due to the very fine line between IBM France and IBM US. The management of the Employer Brand of the company is made by IBM US and IBM France only implements the same strategy asked by IBM US. It means that IBM France has less control regarding this aspect. However, the strategies implemented at IBM France are closely related to the theories of Employer Branding in this thesis. Furthermore, even if IBM is 104 years old, it has been noted that it constantly needs to innovate its

Employer Brand due to the changes in its expectations and particularly its activities. IBM is now specialised in consulting services instead of repairing and selling computers.

6.2   Suggestions for further research

Analyzing only one company for the empirical research can provide some limits. As explained before, the case of IBM cannot be generalized and applied for the case of all the companies. There are some possible differences between multinational companies and SMEs in their Employer Branding practices because SMEs may have fewer resources but a strong need to develop their Employer Brand to make themselves known. The strategies and goals of Employer Branding may differ depending on the size and goals of the companies. It could have been also interesting to interview other multinational companies to provide different point of view concerning Employer Branding and their strategies to develop it. Thanks to that, a comparison could have been made. But due to a lack of time to obtain an interview with professionals, it was too complicated to interview several companies. That is why it was focused on one specific company only. But this focus allowed to provide a further analysis of Employer Branding practices. Furthermore, due to a lack of time and accessibility, the interview was made principally with one person of the French HR department of IBM. Hopefully, the Head of the recruiment of IBM France has been able to participate partly to the interview. Having interviewed top HR managers (Mrs H. & Mrs. C) for IBM France only presents their views. It can be interesting to verify in another thesis all these strategies from employees' perspective. Finally, the fact that Employer Branding is more related to IBM US provided an additional difficulty because IBM France has less power and actions related to the Employer Brand. Concerning the theoretical research, they propose quite a large scope of Employer Branding due to the restriction of the bachelor's thesis length. That is why the literature review offers a general view of this topic.

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