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A view of the new social paradigms in the modern context as a source of competitive advantage of the enterprises

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A VIEW OF THE NEW SOCIAL PARADIGMS IN THE MODERN CONTEXT AS
A SOURCE OF COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OF THE ENTERPRISES*

ABSTRACT

L'attuale contesto competitivo è in forte evoluzione. Abbiamo visto il frenetico ritmo nell'accelerazione del cambiamento nella globalizzazione, l'innovazione tecnologica, l'affermarsi di nuovi paradigmi sociali e competitivi, dovuti alla coesistenza di generazioni differenti nell'organizzazione dell'impresa, e a nuovi business models, come quelli della sharing economy, che sta ampliando le tecniche di collaborazione e condivisione in numerosi settori anche grazie alla tecnologia informatica; dunque tali cambiamenti non possono passare inosservati.

L'obiettivo della ricerca è di analizzare se le imprese, per sopravvivere in questo contesto, possano adottare nuove strategie che prendono in considerazione le opportunità dei nuovi paradigmi sociali e competitivi.

In particolare il paper si propone di analizzare, se e quale valore aggiunto possa trarre un'impresa e quali impatti una cultura aziendale allineata e modellata in base ai cambiamenti in atto nel contesto di riferimento possa avere sulla corporate branding e brand equity.

Il paper cercherà di individuare i fattori che possono favorire o contrastare le scelte aziendali indirizzate a sviluppare una cultura aziendale più in linea con i nuovi paradigmi sociali seguendo le teorie organizzative. Esso anche individuerà sia gli strumenti che internal branding approach mette a disposizione di manager delle risorse umane e sia gli strumenti che la letteratura di

The current competitive environment is rapidly evolving. We have seen a fast pace of change in globalization, technological innovation and the emergence of new social and competitive paradigms. This is due in no small part to the coexistence of different generations in the enterprise organizations, and to new business models, such as those of the sharing economy, that has been expanding the avenues for sharing and collaboration through information technology. Such is the impact these changes cannot be overlooked.

Our research objective is to analyse whether firms can adopt new strategies which take into account the opportunities from these new social and competitive paradigms in order to survive in this context.

In particular the paper aims at analysing, what and indeed if any is taken on board by organizations and what impact a corporate culture shaped by the new corporate environment can have on corporate branding and brand equity. The paper will try to identify the factors that can facilitate or inhibit corporate decision-making aimed at developing a corporate culture more in line with the new social paradigms following the organizational theories. We will also identify the tools that internal branding approach provides human resource managers. Further we will examine the tools that marketing literature on brand management and employer branding offers to area marketing managers. Firstly the tools will

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<p>marketing riguardo al brand management e employer branding mette a disposizione di manager dell'area di marketing così da permettere lo sviluppo di una cultura aziendale ai primi e di costruire la brand equity ai secondi più in linea con i nuovi paradigmi. In sintesi, il paper cerca di tracciare un framework teorico della tematica.</p> <p>Le implicazioni manageriali sono che il paper si propone di integrare la letteratura esistente per la comunità accademica e i decision makers.</p>	<p>be examined with regard to how they can aid the development of a corporate culture and secondly how they enhance brand equity in line with the new paradigms. The paper outlines a theoretical framework for this topic.</p> <p>The managerial implications are that the paper integrates existing literature for both the academic community and decision makers.</p>
<p>Nuovi paradigmi sociali - innovazione tecnologica - brand management</p>	<p>New social paradigms - technological innovation - brand management</p>

SUMMARY: 1. A change-oriented organizational culture which learns how to cope with the problems of survival and adaptability to external environment; - 2. Organizational prospect to the topic; - 3. Marketing prospect to the topic; - 4. Conclusions.

1. As far as this paper is concerned, we tried to understand and verify if, in the current competitive context, the corporate culture is able to align itself with the new competitive paradigms of the sharing economy and with the characteristics of the millenials' new generation; moreover, we analysed the potential effects that this cultural alignment might have on the corporate branding and brand equity policies.

The research object will be both the factors that can favour or oppose the corporate choices aiming at developing a corporate culture more in line with the new social and competitive paradigms of the context where it works, and the levers that the marketing area and the human resources area can consider in order to favour and support these choices.

To answer the first research question, concerning the possible factors that can favour or oppose an organization's cultural adaptability to the new environment, we started from some definitions of the culture concept in general terms, and dwelt on some theoretical contributions related to the corporate culture definition.

We therefore analysed the organizational contingency theory which seemed to be particularly related to our research topic. The organizational contingency theorists helped in giving culture a leading role in the organization. As a matter of fact, they describe the organizational culture as a tool through which you can analyse and support the relationship between organization and environment¹. Therefore, the corporate

¹ Burns and Stalker, 1961; Lawrence and Lorsch 1967a, 1967b. In particular Lawrence and Lorsch say that «differentiation is defined as the state of segmentation of the organizational system into subsystems,

culture is said to be a cluster of basic values and principles, learnt by an organization's members, when it learns how to cope with the problems of survival and adaptability to external environment and with the integration problems among its members, i.e. the inner integration ones.

Once we defined the leading object of our research, that is the new social and competitive paradigms considered as a competitive advantage source of the enterprises that work in the current context, we integrated the basic concepts of the organizational contingency theory with "the model of the organizational change process"² in order to identify the potential enabling and impedimental factors for the development and adaptation of an organization's culture in line with the current reference environment.

The model preliminarily analyses the *potential motivations* that might lead an organization to adapt itself to the environment where it works. These are forces that put the enterprise structure under strain thus becoming a few basic *motivating incentives or factors* for the organizational and strategic change³: nowadays the *environment* is considered as a contingent factor – see Mintzberg⁴ – more than before because it is particularly dynamic and turbulent; the *value and cultural changes* brought in by millennials that become important both in social and professional spheres; the *increasing competitiveness* among enterprises dictated by the new economic models; the *technological innovation* that created new business models. Finally, also the *scarcity of resources* is considered as a possible factor that might lead organizations to change⁵

We should not forget that these factors do not guarantee any change in themselves, but one of the essential characteristics to realize any innovative strategy is the actors' ability to accept those stimuli, to influence the way they combine with one another, and sometimes to amplify their manifestation and impact.

We stressed that the factors analysed and contextualized in our research topic, in themselves, do not lead an organization to adapt itself either to the changed external environment or to the development of a corporate culture fallen into line with the characteristics of the new social and competitive paradigms; consequently, we analysed the so-called "change agents", identified in the model⁶. These agents, integrated with the specific subjects of the organizational contingency theory, allowed us to identify some enabling and impedimental factors for an organization's cultural adaptation to the new reference environment: they are identified with the leadership, the

each of which tends to develop particular attributes in relation to the requirements posed by its relevant external environment» (Lawrence and Lorsch 1967a, 3-4).

² Rebora, 1998, 218.

³ Rebora, 1998, 219-227; Lawrence, Dyer, 1983; Normann, 1978; Pralahad, Hamel, 1990.

⁴ According to the contingent approach, and more precisely according to Henry Mintzberg, there is a series of situational or contingent factors that influence the organizational planning process; one of them is the environment and its various aspects, like a stable and dynamic environment (Mintzberg, 1983).

⁵ Fanagal, 2011.

⁶ Rebora, 1998, 232-234.

organizational inertia, the correlation between the new technologies and the millennials' characteristics, the age and size of the organizations.

A good leader should be able to communicate the motivations and goals of the enterprise's adaptation to the new competitive environment in an innovative and convincing way; in this meaning the leadership can be an enabling factor. Leadership plays a crucial role in creating and maintaining an evolutionary, change-oriented organizational culture⁷. Leadership mindset and style set the overall tone for organizational culture and performance, including how change efforts are run. Command and control, the most common leadership style, does not work for transformational change, yet most leaders and organizations rely exclusively on it⁸. For this reason a good leadership should develop a corporate culture that can incorporate change into its basic values and principles.

The organizational inertia⁹, which can be caused by behavioural and systemic factors, always represents an impedimental factor as it involves a resistance to change even when there are strong incentives coming from both the external environment and the enterprise's internal one.

The skills and knowledge necessary for the use of the new technological tools that the new generation owns could be a factor enabling Yers to enter the enterprise world, provided there are no obstacles due to particularly restrictive and binding corporate policies for safety and control reasons, and there are not strong resistances from a cultural point of view.

Moreover, according to the organizational contingency theorists¹⁰, an older age and a larger size of the organization usually correspond to a bigger resistance to change; therefore, the two aspects can only represent factors impeding the adaptation or the development of a new organizational culture more in line with the new competitive paradigms of the sharing economy and with millennials.

2. In the past few decades the competition between enterprises gradually changed, thus paying more attention to attracting and retaining better human resources in the organizations, as they can give a huge competitive advantage. For this reason, we defined which strategies and levers should be chosen and used by the human resources function of the enterprises that work and compete in the above mentioned current environment, in order to attract and retain the new actors of the environment, the millennials, thus integrating their culture and values with the corporate ones and vice versa¹¹.

⁷ Ionescu, 2014, 65; Schein, 1985.

⁸ Anderson D., Anderson L. A., 2010.

⁹ Rumelt, 1995.

¹⁰ Mintzberg, 1983.

¹¹ Punjaisri, Wilson, 2011; Dahlstrom, 2011, Howe, Strauss, 2000; Martin, 2005.

We started from the definition of the brand concept¹² in order to answer the second question concerning the levers that the human resources function should consider to adapt the corporate culture to the new social and competitive paradigms. We finally identified and defined the employer branding and the internal branding as the main levers that the HR function should consider in order to attract and retain the new generation of millennials in the enterprise, as they hold the basic principles of the sharing economy.

The *employer branding*, which will be analyzed in depth in the last part of this paper, was defined as the cluster of strategies, corporate policies and activities aiming at creating, building, promoting and managing a specific identity and image of the organization¹³ so that externally it appears as a “desirable place” where you can work in to attract (recruit) the “right” human resources who identify themselves with the organization’s values and culture¹⁴. We therefore need to underline that the recruitment and selection distinctive activities are carried out by the HR function through the lever of the employer branding in order to attract the “right” human resources.

On the other hand, the *internal branding* was defined as the cluster of the strategies and activities that an enterprise implements not only to obtain the employee’s satisfaction but also to ensure an increasing involvement of the internal staff (“employee engagement”)¹⁵ in the different corporate activities, thus creating “engagement” in order to motivate and retain the new generation inside the organization (“employee retention”)¹⁶ and to integrate the corporate culture with their culture and values¹⁷, because the enterprise is aware of the Yers individuals’ innate competences and skills, the source of a huge competitive advantage¹⁸. For this reason, understanding the motivational and behavioural dynamics of these individuals has become the most remarkable task of the HR function.

¹² Kotler, Scott, 1993; Kotler, Armstrong, 2012; Kotler, Keller, 2009.

¹³ Balmer, Greyser, 2006. The literature on this matter states that the corporate brand represents an explicit promise that the organization makes to all its main stakeholders, thus creating a branding proposition that includes the attributes and the elements describing the organization identity and that highlights the enterprise’s communication and differentiation efforts towards the competitors (Balmer, 1998). A strong and positive corporate brand is described as a “navigation tool”, useful for all the stakeholders, who are not only the employees and the shareholders but also the potential collaborators (Balmer, Gray, 2003). From this definition we can clearly understand that the corporate brand must be managed following two prospects, both internal and external: internal branding activities will be carried out for the employees already integrated in the organizational environment in order to make certain that they can absorb and interiorize the brand promise so that they can transfer it to the external stakeholders later; employer branding activities will aim at recruiting the “right” collaborators.

¹⁴ Lloyd, 2002; Berthon, Ewing, Hah, 2005.

¹⁵ Ahmad, Iqbal, Kanwal, Javed H., Javed K., 2014.

¹⁶ Ozcelic, 2015, 100-101.

¹⁷ Therefore the paradigm seems almost inverted: the enterprise is not the only one recruiting and selecting people whose characteristics are more in line with its culture, but it’s the enterprise that must align itself with the new generation’s culture (Dahlstrom, 2011).

¹⁸ Prensky, 2001; Howe, Strauss, 2000; Martin, 2005.

It is therefore evident that attracting and retaining the new generation in the enterprise, thanks to managerial techniques, levers and strategies, becomes a challenge for the human resources function. This function should consider the millennials' needs, wishes, values and abilities in order to understand the motivations that could attract them or retain them inside the organization, if they are already part of it, thus developing suitable strategies and activities.

For this reason, the millennials' different values, needs and behaviours led scholars, in their researches, to revise and identify the HR levers for the development and realization of the employer and internal branding. As a matter of fact, the recruiting and selection processes of human resources should be integrated with the identification not only of specific abilities and competences, but also of personal values and personal skill-sets; all that thanks to the adoption of performance management systems – which are considered as an engagement driver – that are more based on the millennials' need to get prompt feedbacks concerning their performance and career advancement opportunities, with the “training and development” concepts turned into “learning by doing”, and with the new specific principles such as flexibility and mobility that act as engagement drivers¹⁹.

The more the organization will reach this goal, the more it will obtain added value and competitive advantage. Therefore, if the new generation's innate skills and competences were suitably exploited by enterprises, all that could represent the true added value and an important source of competitive advantage.

There have been numerous debates about the task that only an excellent Human Resources Management can carry out in the strategies and operative initiatives of internal branding²⁰, i.e. creating, letting grow, developing and reinforcing feelings such as pride, sense of belonging, emotional affection for the company and consequently being able to make collaborators “internalize” the brand. To realize all that, the HR function should comprehend the needs, wishes, values and motivations that lead the employees to be involved and emotionally bound to any organization – “employee engagement” – and should develop the levers to favour the creation of a perception of congruence and compatibility between the employees' values and culture and the corporate culture and the organization brand.

All that in order to reach the ultimate goal of the *internal branding approach*²¹: allowing the individuals integrated into the organizational environment and the best human resources – i.e. the best millennials – to undertake to communicate the brand positivity also outside the company (figure 1), thus turning the millennials into “brand ambassadors”. Anyway, before doing that, as we said before, the HRM should have already transmitted and let the corporate brand message take root in the young

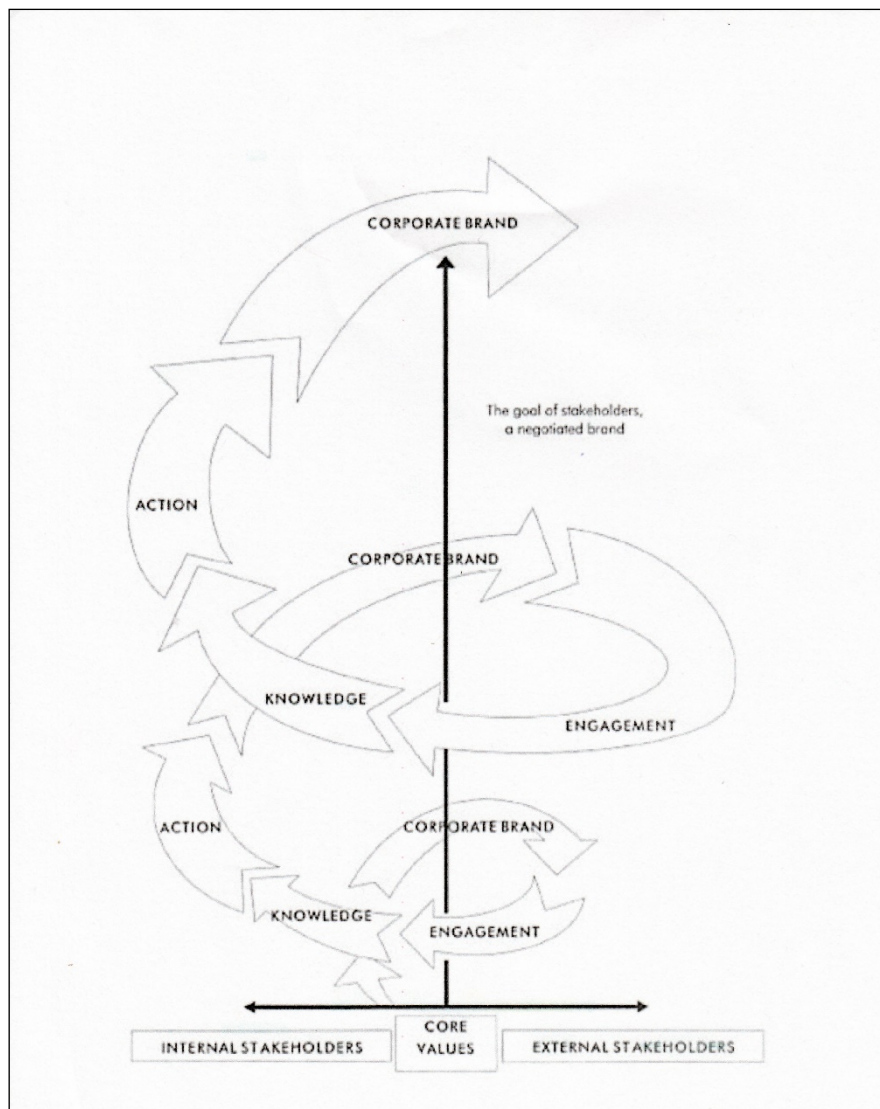
¹⁹ Ozcelik, 2015, 102-104; Smola, Sutton, 2002; Reisenwitz, Iyer, 2009.

²⁰ Sartain, Schumann, 2006; Ahmad, Iqbal, Kanwal, Javed H., Javed K., 2014.

²¹ Mahnert, Torres, 2007; Punjaisri, Wilson, Evanschitzky, 2008; Aurand, Gorchels, Bishop, 2005; Gregory, 2007.

collaborators, so that a sense of belonging, the emotional affection and the loyalty to the organization can develop also inside them, with the ultimate goal of transmitting outside.²²

Figure 1 Engaging with Stakeholders: The Negotiated brand process



Source: Gregory, 2007, 63

3. To give the last research question an answer, concerning the identification of the possible levers and strategies that the marketing function should adopt in order to align the brand equity to the characteristics of the new social and competitive paradigms of

²² Only the organizations that can comprehend and manage the shift of values, expectations and behaviours, due to the generational passage, will be able to win “the war for talents” (Ozcelik, 2015, 105), retain the human resources Y and turn them into “brand ambassadors” (Jacobs, 2003), thus contributing to improve the corporate brand image also outside.

the environment where the enterprise works, we mainly focused on the employer branding lever.

Initially, we defined the brand equity²³ which, from the marketing point of view, can be considered as the product brand value perceived in the awareness levels – “brand awareness” – and usually the customer’s one, in the brand image and in the customer’s loyalty to the brand – “brand loyalty”²⁴.

Then we dealt with the *employer branding* concept: we considered and developed it from the marketing perspective in order to integrate the techniques and methods for the human resources management considered by the HR function²⁵.

The employer branding task is to create in the mind of the potential labour market the idea that the organization is a “great place to work in”²⁶ and in particular the “employer branding proposition” is used as a tool to describe the offer on which the organization bases its own campaign of employer branding and recruitment²⁷.

Let’s try to consider and manage the “job” as a product that must attract, develop and motivate the potential employees (internal customers) and that must contribute to the organization’s overall objectives. According to literature, enterprises should use marketing techniques to plan jobs that can meet the employees’ and the organization’s needs²⁸.

In this research we show our attention and interest in the employer branding topic that is used as a managerial lever in recruitment, because we think that it is an essential concept in an economy on the one hand based on sharing and collaboration between organizations and individuals who have personal skills (where individuals are the consumers and the employees of the enterprise itself), and on the other hand based on technological innovation²⁹. Moreover, the rise of the employer branding could be stimulated by the increasing requests of the Yers generation: as millenials are the “children” of these new business models, like the sharing economy, they think about job in a different way: they are changing the way we work, have different needs, behave in a different way and ask enterprises for more career advancement. These changes oblige enterprises to revise the way they attract and retain individuals, because, if we

²³ Keller (1993, 1) states that «customer-based brand equity is defined as the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand». Also consult Aaker, 1991; Aaker, Joachimsthaler, 2000; Hart, Murphy, 1998; Hankinson, Cowking, 1993; Vicari, 1995.

²⁴ Keller, 1993.

²⁵ The employer branding strategies should be used as a cross tool concerning both marketing and the human resources management; in other words, the strategies require an integrated approach that should align the corporate branding policies with those of brand equity, in order to develop a long-term strategy that can manage the brand image and therefore the perception that some actors have of a particular enterprise: the employees already working in the enterprise, the potential employees and the stakeholders.

²⁶ Ewing, Pitt, de Bussy, Berthon, 2002.

²⁷ Backhaus, Tikoo, 2004, 502.

²⁸ Wilden, Gudergan, Lings, 2010.

²⁹ Belk, 2007, 2014; Botsman, Rogers, 2010; Lamberton, Rose, 2012; Prahalad, Ramaswamy, 2004; Ritzer, Jurgenson, 2010; Toffler, 1980.

consider that the new generation moves from an organization to another one more often than the previous generations, the attraction and retention of the new collaborators will be the basis of the organizations' competitive advantage³⁰.

We succeeded in defining a possible strategy of employer branding that could be divided into the following stages³¹: recruitment, target profile definition, employer branding proposition, external marketing. The recruitment is the cluster of practices and activities pursued by the organization and aimed at attracting a suitable number of "right" potential employees, for the specific position to have inside the organization, for the new business models. The target profile definition of the people to hire involves identifying the required person's profile, the demographic characteristics and the skills and competences.

If in the branding of products and services the term "value proposition"³² is used, from the recruitment and "employer branding" point of view what we use is the concept of "employer branding proposition" or "employer value proposition" (EVP). The EVP describes the possible job offer and the content is turned into messages, visual expressions and communicative strategies targeted at different talent groups and markets³³. The choice of words, images and channels will depend on the target group in order to be emotionally connected to the company. The *employer value proposition* is a message which contains the attributes and the elements describing the organization identity and the potential labour supply, and which contains the psychological, economic and functional benefits that motivate the target of the potential employees to join the company and the already integrated employees to remain³⁴.

A decade ago, marketing and branding experts from around the world predicted the era of the brand would be dead by now. But the evolution of branding and more changes are expected in the coming years³⁵. One of the reasons is that what the millennials of 2000's and today are a much different breed of customers. They are not students any more but many of them have already made significant progress in their professional careers. Their lifestyle has changed: they are renting and purchasing homes, and, perhaps most important, spending their disposable income. The millennials have unprecedented influential power. Thanks to social media channels, which are largely populated by this generation, consumers and not traditional media outlets are becoming the primary source of information on products and services. They are more likely to

³⁰ Smola, Sutton, 2002; Westerman, Yamamura, 2007; Martin, 2005.

³¹ Backhaus, Tikoo, 2004, 502-503.

³² Bertoli, Busacca, 2012; Zeithaml, 1988.

³³ In order to be the long-term basis of the employer branding, the employer value proposition must be "attractive, true, credible, distinct and sustainable" and, at the present time, enterprises, when they formulate it, should think about the new reference target that needs, more than the previous generations, to be attracted by the organization if they want to be a part of it. According to Duraturo Carlo, What is an employer value proposition? <http://www.slideshare.net/duraturo/what-is-an-employer-value-proposition>.

³⁴ Balmer, 1998; Sartain, Schumann, 2006.

³⁵ Dawar, 2013.

buy from a brand that was referred to them by a friend, rather than one they saw in an advertisement³⁶.

The development of external marketing activities involves the communication and transmission of the EVP in the market towards the target of the potential and future employees, by ensuring veracity, honesty and accuracy of the information, and suitability, loyalty and transparency concerning the offer in the brand promise.

Only if enterprises clearly understand that the brand promise will be supported by an effective effort to make it real, the *employer value proposition* will be able to yield its benefits. The new potential employees of an enterprise, the millennials, usually are rather prone to leave the job and the position they have to accept a better one; this means that if the enterprise is less than their expectations because the brand promise has not been kept, as it was declared in the EVP, they will not feel any remorse for leaving the organization even after a short time there. What was important in the work environment for Generation X workers seems to be of lesser importance for the millennials. They grew up with social media, in the age of community and connection. Today, long-term company benefits such as pensions, steady but gradual promotion, mean less to the Gen Y employee than immediate challenge, development, opportunity, and meaning³⁷.

The message contained in the EVP obviously needs to be transmitted and spread on the market. One of the most suitable and complete forms of transmission can be the *recruitment advertising*³⁸: it allows the message describing the organization and the potential job offer to be not only more visible and widespread but also more recognizable and identifiable; it also helps the organization identify, attract, hire and retain the best human resources in order to create the *employer brand equity*³⁹.

Therefore, we were able to define a possible employer branding strategy that could be divided into the following stages: defining the target profile of the people to hire and identifying the message content of the employer value proposition that must be spread on the market; moreover the message content must be consistent both with the chosen channels of recruitment advertising and with the organization brand.

4. Finally, on the basis of what we stated, we think that it is possible to answer the research question we initially asked. According to the research we did, if the organizational culture adapts itself to the external environment thanks to the enabling factors and if the strategies to attract and retain the millennials in the company are implemented in a correct and strategic way in order to reach the goal of adaptation to the environment, we can consequently think that we are able to influence the brand equity perception outside.

³⁶ Taylor, 2014.

³⁷ Kingl, 2014.

³⁸ Gatewood, Gowan, Lautenschlager, 1993.

³⁹ Berthon, Ewing, Hah, 2005; Reynolds, Gutman, 1984; Ambler, Barrow, 1996; Balmer, Greyser, 2006.

If we consider that, according to the consolidated literature, the brand equity has always been analysed as an indicator of a product brand value, with a view to studying the relationship between the brand and the consumer, some recent contributions about the employer branding topic have extended the research field also to the relationships between the organization brand and the employees, which is equivalent to the employer brand equity: the brand value is therefore perceived both by the potential collaborators and the already integrated ones.

If the organization brings inside it the youngest subjects, the Yers, the children of the sharing economy, by aligning its culture to theirs, the internally perceived employer brand equity will be positive and in line with the environment where the enterprise works; when the employer brand equity and the organization alignment are transmitted outside by the employees themselves (thus turned into “brand ambassadors”), the consumers will perceive the brand value (brand equity) as a brand aligned with the new social and competitive paradigms of the environment, which therefore becomes a source of added value and competitive advantage.

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