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Employer attractiveness of small and medium enterprises

Empirical study on factors of attractiveness concerning the choice of an employer and the perceived strengths and weaknesses of small and medium-sized enterprises among German, Dutch and Hungarian marketing students

Theses of the dissertation

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Signature of the supervisor

1. Problem description and objectives

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) are of great economic importance in Europe. They represent 99.8% of all enterprises and created e.g. between 2002 and 2008 more than nine million jobs. Against the background of demographic developments the question arises, how SME can cover the high demand for appropriate personnel also in the future. Therefore, companies are facing increasing challenges at attracting qualified personnel.[1] Particularly concerning highly-skilled workers, the skills shortage will exacerbate in the coming years. Because of more professional personnel policy structures and instruments as well as a perceived higher attractiveness of larger companies by many applicants, large companies are expected to be in front at the war for talent towards SME.

In addition, SME tend to have less financial, human and time resources to deal with long-term issues.[2] Accordingly, the personnel policy of SME is often informal and can be characterized by ad hoc decisions. Although smaller companies take care of personal matters, they rarely have an expert for personnel management in the company. These conditions make it difficult to search for new employees.[3] In addition, large companies have another awareness of the impact of demographic change than SME.[4] Beside these SME specific problems there is also the general problem of asymmetric information in the labor market. As a candidate knows the true qualities of a prospective employer just incompletely, information e.g. about the work environment or career opportunities within the company largely remains unknown. If a candidate has just got an unclear idea of the prospective employer or the applicant has come to wrong insights, it could hold him or her back from applying at the company and opts for another company, which seems to be less risky from the applicant's point of view.[5]

In the present study the factors which are important to students in choosing an employer and the students' assignment of strengths and weaknesses to SME should be identified.

Through this SME should get suggestions on how to become an employer of choice for potential employees.

The research question is: How can SME become the employer of choice for marketing students?

- Sub-question 1: What factors are important for students when choosing an employer?

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[1] Cf. Schamberger (2006), p. 2, Petkovic (2007), p. 2
[2] Cf. Schlick et al. (2009), p. 46
[3] Cf. Mayson/Barrett (2006), p. 449
[4] Cf. Schlick et al. (2009), pp. 46
[5] Cf. Wilden et al. (2010), p. 59

- Sub-question 2: What are the strengths and weaknesses that marketing students assign to SME?

- Sub-question 3: Do marketing students prefer SME or large companies as employer?

- Sub-question 4: Are there differences or potential relationships between different target groups with regard to the expectations concerning an employer, the assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of SME and the choice of an employer?

- Sub-question 5: Which preference clusters can be distinguished with regard to the employer factors?

Based on the problem, the research question and sub-questions, different objectives can be derived, which shall be achieved within the PhD-assignment.

- Description of the information asymmetry between employers and applicants.

- Explanation of the possibilities for companies to create preferences and become employer of choice

- Determination of the most popular employers on the basis of employer attractiveness studies.

  The objectives mentioned above serve as a basis for further research.

The following objectives are to be validated on an empirical study.

- Identification of employer preferences and evaluation of different reviews and settings of German, Dutch and Hungarian students. This sub-goal is examined empirically based on the hypothesis. 1

- Identification of employer preferences and evaluation of gender differences with regard to the assessment and attitudes concerning SME. This sub-goal is examined by means of the hypothesis 2.

- Evaluation of potential relationships between the performance of the student and the evaluations, attitudes and employer preferences. By means of hypothesis 3 this sub-goal is examined.

- Identification of possible preference clusters among students.

- Derivation of targeted ways to increase employer attractiveness.

2. Hypotheses

Hypotheses go beyond an individual case, are falsifiable and make assumptions about real world problems. In this case assumptions (hypotheses) are checked in reality.

If hypotheses are tested to be wrong, they are falsified. If a hypothesis is tested in the investigation as correct, it can be provisionally confirmed as true. Provisionally, because later findings can still lead to the rejection of the hypothesis contrary to the present study results. Since existing knowledge needs to be critically examined repeatedly, there is never certain knowledge and thus no certain foundations of knowledge, neither in theory or in practice. As a result, there is a theoretical hypothesis construct that can be derived inductively from the present findings and theories, the observation of reality and previous empiricism. Subsequently, these hypotheses are deductively – i.e. from general to specific. – tested.

Hypothesis 1: If German, Dutch and Hungarian students differ fundamentally, then there are more differences than similarities in the ascription of the importance of cognitive employer factors, cognitively and affectively perceived strengths and weaknesses of SME, as well as conative differences in the choice of an employer.

- Sub-hypothesis 1.1: German, Dutch and Hungarian students have more differences than similarities regarding the importance of cognitive employer factors.
- Sub-hypothesis 1.2: German, Dutch and Hungarian students have more differences than similarities regarding the cognitively perceived strengths and weaknesses of SME.
- Sub-hypothesis 1.3: German, Dutch and Hungarian students have more differences than similarities regarding the affective perceptions of SME.
- Sub-hypothesis 1.4: German, Dutch and Hungarian students differ regarding their conative choice of an employer.

Hypothesis 2: If male and female students differ fundamentally, then there are more differences than similarities in the ascription of the importance of cognitive employer factors, cognitively and affectively perceived strengths and weaknesses of SME, as well as conative differences in the choice of an employer.

- Sub-hypothesis 2.1: Male and female students have more differences than similarities regarding the importance of cognitive employer factors.
- Sub-hypothesis 2.2: Male and female students have more differences than similarities regarding the cognitively perceived strengths and weaknesses of SME.
- Sub-hypothesis 2.3: Male and female students have more differences than similarities regarding the affective perceptions of SME.
- Sub-hypothesis 2.4: Male and female students differ regarding their conative choice of an employer.

Hypothesis 3:   There is a relationship between the performance of the student and the majority of the ascribed cognitive employer factors, the cognitively and affectively perceived strengths and weaknesses of SME as well as the conative choice of an employer.

- Sub-hypothesis 3.1: There is a relationship between the performance of the student and the majority of the cognitively ascribed employer factors.
- Sub-hypothesis 3.2: There is a relationship between the performance of the student and the majority of the cognitively perceived strengths and weaknesses of SME.
- Sub-hypothesis 3.3: There is a relationship between the performance of the student and the majority of the affective perceptions of SME.
- Sub-hypothesis 3.4: There is a relationship between performance of the student and the employer choice (conative component).

3. Methodology

At calculating the sample size for a representative survey it is generally assumed to have an random sample. An unrestricted random sample, i.e. that each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected, is not to be realized for this study. However, practice shows that the results of purposive samples also lead to usable results regarding the error margin and the sample size. This method is used if the survey is not based on the obligation of the respondents to give information but on a voluntary reply. In pilot studies this method is often usability.

The chosen sampling method is the quota method. In market and attitude research it is the most frequently used approach. It belongs to the non-random-oriented methods and to the method of purposive sampling. Thus, the selection of survey units does not follow the random sampling, but deliberately and thoughtfully according to relevant features. The characteristics (quotas) shall be selected in the way that a representative picture of the population is depicted. The sample of this study should depict the proportion of nationality and gender proportional to the general population. The relevant sample consists of 237 German, 104 Dutch and 47 Hungarian students (see Table 1). According to the Goodness of Fit test (p = 0.182, N = 388) the sample allows statements concerning the general population.

Table 1: Comparison of the gender distribution of social sciences, business and law studies

Total number of students in social sciences, business and law	Male		Female	
	Enrolled students of the population	Sample size	Enrolled students of the population	Sample size
672.123 German students	331,357 (49.3%)	115 (48.5%)	340.766 (50.7%)	122 (51.5%)
252.850 Dutch students	131,988 (52.2%)	54 (51.9%)	120.862 (47.8%)	50 (48.1%)
157.156 Hungarian students	55,948 (35.6%)	13 (27.7%)	101.208 (64.4%)	34 (72.3%)

Data source: European Commission (2013), S. 113

Beside students also potential small and medium sized employers were asked about the strengths and weaknesses of their own company. The questions of the questionnaire are closely based on the student questionnaire, since only this allows a comparison with the responses of the students. This survey wants to identify the differences between employers and students. As random sampling is – for time and cost reasons – not possible, the method of

the purposive sampling is selected. For this reason study units were determined that are typical for the population.

The selection criteria were that the companies surveyed are SME with fewer than 250 employees and have a maximum annual turnover of 50 million euros. Furthermore, SME from various sectors (services and manufacturing) and countries (Germany, the Netherlands and Hungary) were interviewed in order to compare the results with the responses of the students of the respective nationalities. So concrete recommendations for these companies are possible (see Table 2).

Table 2: Number of answered company questionnaires per country

Country	Number of answered questionnaires
Germany	34
The Netherlands	21
Hungary	14

Own illustration

4. Answering the hypotheses

Sub-hypothesis 1.1: The review of the three nationalities concerning significant differences in cognitive employer factors showed significant differences in 16 of the 28 items and so in 57% of the inquired employer factors. Consequently, in twelve factors there (43%) there were no significant differences. Due to the fact that in more than half of the factors the nationalities differ sub-hypothesis 1.1 is temporarily confirmed.

Sub-hypothesis 1.2: The null hypothesis had to be rejected in 10 of the 28 cognitively perceived strengths and weaknesses (36%). Thus, only in few factors there are significant differences between nationalities. In the majority of factors (17 factors or 64%) students of the three countries do not assess differently. The sub-hypothesis 1.2 is thus falsified.

Sub-hypothesis 1.3: In three of 13 affective feelings (23%) there are significantly different evaluations. Ten items (77%) were not rated significantly different. This means that there are very few differences in the assessment of affective factors between nationalities. The sub-hypothesis 1.3 is thus falsified.

Sub-hypothesis 1.4: Regarding the choice of an employer there are significant differences between the responses of the students from Germany, the Netherlands and Hungary. German and Hungarian students prefer large companies, Dutch SME. The sub-hypothesis 1.4 can therefore be temporarily confirmed.

Concerning **hypothesis 1** "If German, Dutch and Hungarian students differ fundamentally, then there are more differences than similarities in the ascription of the importance of cognitive employer factors, cognitively and affectively perceived strengths and weaknesses of SME, as well as conative differences in the choice of an employer" it can be concluded that there are differences between German, Dutch and Hungarian students in cognitive-rational, as well as in affectively perceived and conative aspects. Due to the falsification of sub-hypotheses 1.2 and 1.3 the hypothesis is also falsified.

Sub-hypothesis 2.1: Nine out of 28 cases (32%) differ significantly. In the remaining 19 factors (68%), no significant differences between the genders could be determined. Thus, there are differences between the genders in less than half of factors. The sub-hypothesis 2.1 is thus falsified.

Sub-hypothesis 2.2: The evaluation of two cognitively perceived strengths and weaknesses (7%), differ significantly between male and female students. This means that there are very

few differences between male and female students in terms of perceived cognitive strengths and weaknesses of SME. The sub-hypothesis 2.2 is thus falsified.

Sub-hypothesis 2.3: Regarding one perception the two genders differ significantly. This is equivalent to 8% of the items of the semantic differential. Again, there are few differences between male and female students. The sub-hypothesis 2.3 is thus falsified.

Sub-hypothesis 2.4: Male and female students do not differ concerning the employer choice. The sub-hypothesis is thus falsified.

In **hypothesis 2** "If male and female students differ fundamentally, then there are more differences than similarities in the ascription of the importance of cognitive employer factors, cognitively and affectively perceived strengths and weaknesses of SME, as well as conative differences in the choice of an employer" the majority of the evaluation and the attitudinal dimensions do not differ significantly. The hypothesis therefore cannot be confirmed, but is falsified.

Sub-hypothesis 3.1: In eight factors (29%) there is a significant relationship between academic performance and cognitive assessment of employer factors. This means that only in few factors significant relationships are recognizable. The majority of the factors (71%) does not show a relationship between evaluation and academic performance. The sub-hypothesis 3.1 is thus falsified.

Sub-hypothesis 3.2: Three evaluations of the strengths and weaknesses of SME show a significant relationship with the academic performance of the students surveyed. This corresponds to 11% of the interrogated factors. Consequently there exist only in very few cases significant relationships. The sub-hypothesis 3.2 is hence falsified.

Sub-hypothesis 3.3: In one perception there is a significant relationship with the academic performance. The is equivalent to 8% of the items of the semantic differential. The sub-hypothesis 3.3 is thus falsified.

Sub-hypothesis 3.4: With regard to the employer decision there is no significant relationship between academic performance and the employer of choice. The sub-hypothesis is thus falsified.

The hypothesis 3 is "There is a relationship between the performance of the student and the majority of the ascribed cognitive employer factors, the cognitively and affectively perceived strengths and weaknesses of SME as well as the conative choice of an employer" Although there are some significant relationships between the evaluation respectively attitude dimensions and the academic performance, However, most factors indicate no correlation between study results and the answers. The hypothesis cannot be confirmed, but is falsified.

After carrying out the hypothesis tests it can be stated that there are more differences between the students of the three nationalities, than between the genders. Apparently, the gender differences are smaller than those between nationalities.

Mainly in the assessment of cognitive employer factors significant differences between students from the considered countries respectively between both genders can be observed. In the cognitive and affective assessment of SME, however, there are only small differences. Interesting for SME, however, is that the intentions of German and Hungarian students differ significantly from of Dutch ones. So the Dutch respondents prefer – in contrast to students of the other nationalities – SME as an employer. With regard to the relationship between the academic performance and the assessment of employer factors a relationship can be found only in a few cases.

5. Results and recommendations

General Information

The majority of students have already gained practical experiences in a company. 166 students (43.0%) said that they had been working in a large company. 104 students (26.9%) were already working for a SME, 36 students (9.3%) had worked in a large company and a SME and 80 students (20.7%) have not had gained any professional experience. The expected and observed frequencies of the tested variables differ significantly from each other (Chi^2-test: $p < 0.001$, $N = 386$).

27.6% of respondents indicated that they had chosen intentionally for a large company. Significantly fewer students (15.9%) expressed that they had made a conscious decision for an SME. 56.5% of the students surveyed chose a companies at random. The expected and observed frequencies of the tested variables differ in this case differ significantly (Chi^2-test: $p < 0.001$, $N = 308$).

The students, who had already gained experience indicated at 36%, that recommendations have the greatest importance in the choice of the company. The website of the company (18.8%) and Internet search via a search engine (15.5%) follow next. Job offers in newspapers or magazines (8.6%), social media (6.3%), company contact fairs (4.0%) or employment agencies (2.3%) follow behind and are quite unimportant. Some students also stated that internship company is well-known (8.6%) and that therefore further information was not necessary. The results are not uniformly distributed, so the null hypothesis has to be rejected in this case. (Chi^2-test: $p < 0.001$, $N = 303$).

Also in terms of employer preferences highly significant results can be recognized (Chi^2-test: $p < 0.001$, $N = 384$). With 47.7% of the students almost half of them prefer a large company as an employer. 30.5% of students are still undecided. With 21.9% only few students prefer an SME as a future employer.

Evaluation of factors employer

Only two out of the nine most important factors for choosing an employer (average rating $\geq$ 4), students consider as strong at SME (average $\geq$ 4, characterized by a green color). As seen in **Table 3**, the assessment of the students and are congruent with the opinions of the surveyed employees of SME. The results indicate a discrepancy between the wishes of the students and expected or to be expected employer factors in SME. The yellow coloring stands for values $\geq$ 3 and < 4 and indicate a mediocre evaluation.

Table 3: The most important employer factors

	Importance of the factors	Evaluation of students on SME	Self-evaluation of SME
Friendly working climate	4.37	4.33	4.31
Good career opportunities	4.36	3.29	3.37
Job security	4.33	3.74	3.74
Good reputation as an employer	4.24	3.55	3.74
Further education	4.15	3.24	3.26
Attractive job career opportunities	4.11	3.30	3.71
Challenging tasks	4.08	3.64	3.87
Teamwork	4.03	4.00	4.03
Flexible working hours	4.02	3.59	3.68

(Scale: Importance of the factors (1) unimportant - (5) is very important / Scale: Evaluation (1) very weak - (5) very strong)
Own illustration according to: Survey 2014

On consideration of the assessed strengths and weaknesses it is noticeable that in most factors large companies are rated better than SME. In most cases these differences are significant. Only in the factors job security, friendly working climate, family-friendliness, teamwork, flat hierarchy, low rents and low property prices as well as a workplace close to home SME are rated better than large enterprises.

With respect to the self-assessment of German, Dutch and Hungarian SME it is striking that there are similarities, but also differences between countries. Thus, the respondents rated their SME generally very positive concerning a friendly working atmosphere and family-friendliness. Large differences between countries are on the contrary, a.o. the factors reputation as an employer, a high level of awareness of the company, frequent business trips abroad, high initial salary or benefits. It is also noticeable that German SME assess themselves more critical than Dutch and Hungarian SME. Compared with the other countries, German SME assign themselves the fewest strengths (mean ≥ 4) and most weaknesses (mean < 3). The employees of Hungarian SME, however, just mention few weaknesses. Except for weaknesses in many vacation days, job offers in newspapers/magazines and company contact fairs, Hungarian employees see their SME positive.

Based on the polarity profiles a significantly weaker emotional assessment of students on SME compared to the perception of the SME themselves can be seen. Students rated only the contrastive pairs clear-blurred more positive than the SME themselves. Alone in the contrastive pairs sympathetic-unsympathetic and elitist-mediocre there were no significant differences between the assessment of students and the SME (Wilcoxon signed-rank test: p > 0.05).

The different assessments are also illustrated by comparing the EPA-values of the semantic differential (see Table 4). The evaluation of students concerning SME in the factor evaluation (good-bad) tends to be negative (red color) and in the factors potency (strong-weak) and activity (active-passive) slightly positive (green color). In contrast, SME have significantly more positive perceptions in all dimensions about themselves, which results in higher EPA-values (0.28 / 0.93 / 1.40, green color).

Table 4: Comparison of EPA values of students concerning affective feelings concerning SME and the self-assessment for SME

Factor	Perceptions of students about SME (external image)	Own perceptions of SME (self-image)
Evaluation	-0.26	0.28
Potency	0.45	0.93
Activity	0.61	1.40

Most negative perception -3; neutral 0; most positive perception 3

Own illustration

Not only between students and SME, also among enterprises of the considered countries different perceptions are identifiable. So perceive Dutch SME significantly more positive than German or Hungarian SME. Mostly the Hungarian companies see themselves as a significantly less attractive employer than the SME from the other countries.

Cluster analysis

In addition to the more traditional target group segmentation in nationality, gender and academic achievements, other criteria may be included in the segmentation. Three groups of students can generally be distinguished.

By means of the cluster analysis students can be categorized into the clusters "the prestige and security-oriented", "the career-oriented international" and the "the frugal ones".

Cluster 1: The prestige and security-oriented (N= 113 or 36% of the valid values)

Students of the first cluster put emphasis on the salary and benefits, so at an adequate compensation for their performance, when choosing an employer. Furthermore, the working environment – like an attractive location near home with low rents and low property prices as well as the prestige and security of the employer – is important. The employer should have a good reputation and a high level of awareness and should guarantee a high level of job security. Less important are career aspects and the factor internationality. Students who belong to this cluster, wish a safe and well-paid job in a reputable company, but are not

seeking international career. Students of this cluster can be defined by the phrase **"I want a secure and well-paid job in a prestigious company."**

Cluster 2: The career-oriented international (N=117 or 37% of the valid values)

The second cluster includes students for whom are internationality and career aspects are important. They expect an appropriate compensation from the employer. Less important are for this group the factors prestige /safety and the working environment. Students of this cluster would rather like to work in an international environment and can be described by the phrase **"I aim for an international career."**

Cluster 3: The frugal ones (N=86 or 27% of the valid values)

Students in this cluster assess all factors considered as less important for the selection of an employer. The values of the cluster analysis can be interpreted in this way that the students do not have big expectations concerning an employer and that they would be glad to find a job anyway. Especially concerning the compensation for their work effort the students are very reserved. The factor prestige/safety of the new job is the least negative one. Students of this cluster can be characterized with the following sentence: **"The main thing is that I do find a job."**

German students are mainly part to cluster 2 (63%), followed by cluster 1 (33.5%). This suggests an important role of career, money and security aspects. The Dutch and Hungarian respondents appear to be more frugal. So these two nationalities are mainly assigned to cluster 3 (NL: 83.33%, HU: 57.89%). With about 29% also relatively many Hungarian students aspire to an international career.

Both men and women are represented prevalently in cluster 2 (men: 59.74%, 53.09% women). While female students can be classified to about a quarter into cluster 3 (the frugal one), male respondents (33.77%) are more monetary and security oriented than their female counterparts (22.84%).

Very good (67.86%) and good students (48.25%) are most commonly found in cluster 2. Thus, the majority belongs to the career-oriented internationals. However, a relatively large proportion (41.26%) of good students also falls within cluster 1, which includes monetary and safety-oriented students. Students with average and below-average study results however are found mainly in cluster 3 (the frugal one). Large firms are mainly preferred by students of cluster 2 (47.40%), followed by students of cluster 1 (36.36%).

However, SME are mostly preferred by students of the first cluster (42,19%).

In contrast, students of cluster 3 usually have no preference concerning an employer (see Table 5).

Table 5: Distribution of the characteristics examined among the clusters

Characteristics		Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Total
%					
Nationality	German	33.50	63.00	3.50	**100**
	Dutch	11.59	5.13	83.33	**100**
	Hungarian	13.18	28.95	57.89	**100**
Sex	Male	33.77	59.74	6.49	**100**
	Female	22.84	53.09	24.07	**100**
Study results summarized	Very good	10.71	67.86	21.49	**100**
	Good	41.26	48.25	10.49	**100**
	Average/below average	27.89	6.56	65.57	**100**
Employer preference	Large enterprise	36.36	47.40	16.23	**100**
	SME	42.19	23.44	34.38	**100**
	No preference	29.47	29.47	41.05	**100**

Own illustration

The clusters can serve as a guide for SME with regard to the employer wishes and expectations of marketing students.

6. Conclusion

Although differences could be identified, there are many similarities – between nationalities, genders or study results. So the three most important employer factors of all students are job security, friendly working climate and good career opportunities (external target image).

In order to obtain students of different target groups optimizing the employer factors or focusing on communicative aspects is necessary, but not necessarily sufficient for reaching the desired candidate. Thus, the more traditional segmentation in nationality, gender or study results which showed few differences, should be complemented by preference clusters.

According to monetary and non-monetary employer factors the three clusters ("the prestige and security-oriented", "the career-oriented international" and the "the frugal ones".) can be distinguished.

To acquire good and motivated students SME should try to address students of the first or second cluster. The most important communication channel of the students in all three clusters is the website of the company. Students of the first and second cluster see recommendations e.g. recommendation from lecturers or friends as the second most important mean of communication. Students that belong to the third cluster, regard recommendations as significantly less important. Significant differences are also recognizable in the importance of social media (the evaluation of the third cluster is here significantly lower than the evaluation of the first and second cluster) and company contact fairs (the evaluation of the third cluster is here significantly lower than the rating of the second cluster).

Companies which are looking for students of the first or second cluster should increasingly communicate through these communication channels security aspects and international career options in the company.

Concerning market cultivation the desired audience should be addressed as accurate as possible in the context of a differentiated or concentrated strategy. Here it is up to the company to decide whether more target groups or only one target group shall be addressed with all resources. However, factual information exchange alone is not enough to affect the behavior of the receiver. Instead, conveying both – objective and emotional aspects of the company or the workplace – is crucial. Basically, the SME should try to position themselves more clearly in the target groups to actually address the right candidate. This applies mainly regarding the adjectives international, sympathetic, interesting, creative and successful. Students of the cluster 3 see SME in those adjectives significantly more positive than students of cluster 1 and 2 (international, interesting, creative, successful concerning cluster 1 and

personable, interesting, creative concerning cluster 2). Therefore there is a risk for SME to address students of the wrong cluster if the image is not communicated clearly directed at the target group. This can lead to an adverse selection.

In order to win the desired candidates SME should consider the three following options. On the one hand, SME should work on removing the actual weaknesses. In this case SME should focus on the employer factors that potential applicants regard as important, but which they consider as less developed in SME. Besides also the self-image of SME is weak.

At this an **optimization** or complete redesign of the respective employer factor is possible. Furthermore, SME should pay attention to clear **communication** of the employer factors which potential applicants regard as important, but where the perceived image about SME is weak and the self-image of SME is considered to be strong. Here there is a discrepancy between the desired public image and the actual self-image of SME. Companies should convey the true quality of the employer factors by communicating target group specific over appropriate communication channels. Finally, SME should try to **emotionalize** to a greater extent. Most of the students are more likely perceiving in a neutral or slightly negative way. A clearer conveying of rational and emotional employer factors is more likely to convince candidates of the strengths of SME and thus make SME to the preferred employer of choice.

7. New scientific findings

• When choosing an employer there are significant differences between the three nations. German and Hungarian marketing students prefer large companies as an employer, in contrast Dutch students speak out in favor of SME as an employer.

• The statistical relationship between the study results and the cognitively and affectively perceived strengths and weaknesses of SME is very weak. Marketing students with better study results evaluate SME more positive respectively negative than underachieving students.

• There is no significant relationship between academic performance and the employer choice. Marketing students with a weaker performance are therefore not more attracted from SME than students with better study results.

• The three most important cognitive employer factors across gender, nationality and study performance are a friendly working environment, good career opportunities and job security.

• SME emotionalize students only to a small extent, so that SME are neither regarded affectively as very positive nor as very negative.

• By means of the cluster analysis students can be categorized into the clusters "the prestige and security-oriented", "the career-oriented international" and the "the frugal ones".

8. Critical appraisal and further need for study

In addition to the presentation of some restrictions, in the following the next steps resulting from the investigation should be explained.

The considered employer factors were derived from the theory presented. Students were part of a preliminary study at the Fontys International Business School in Venlo (The Netherlands) and the University of West Hungary, Sopron (Hungary). Before the final survey started, the questionnaire was also submitted as part of a pre-test to other students. The design of the questionnaire therefore took place under the greatest objectivity. Due to the large number of possible factors influencing the choice of employers, nevertheless completeness cannot be guaranteed. The employers factors therefore only show an exemplary image of preferences and evaluations of the students surveyed.

Despite contacting numerous universities, conducting surveys at many universities was not possible. Consequently, not more students of other universities could be involved in the investigation. Since unrestricted random sampling was not feasible, a process of purposive sampling was used. At this, the subject selection is not random, but deliberately and thoughtfully in accordance with relevant features. Thus, not every member of the population had the opportunity to be part of the sample. As a result, only a representative picture of the population is shown. Because of the relatively small target group (marketing and marketing savvy students) and the above-mentioned challenges, the survey was a huge effort. To get a complete picture of preferences and perceptions of students, other economic students of different disciplines could therefore in another study be interviewed.

The survey of SME does not claim to be representative, but serves only as a first comparison of the self-image of SME with the perceived image of students about SME. In another research, the focus could lie on the evaluation of the differences between SME from different countries and between SME and large enterprises.

Furthermore, the statistical analysis should be reviewed critically. First, the danger of an alpha error shall be pointed out. This one is committed, if the hypothesis test suggests the assumption of the alternative hypothesis, although in reality the null hypothesis is true. In case of the beta error one decides for the acceptance of the null hypothesis, although in reality the alternative hypothesis is true. Both errors have to do with the selection of the sample. If by chance the students have been chosen to suggest the adoption of the null or the alternative

hypothesis, although the other hypothesis is true for the population, it comes to a falsification of truth.

Also the cluster analysis should be challenged with the necessary distance, since the determination of the number of clusters is always subject to a certain subjectivity.

Finally, it should be noted that in the context of the assignment important and less important brand drivers should be identified for building up an employer brand from the perspective of potential candidates.

The depicted ways to increase employer attractiveness of SME are therefore limited to rather general recommendations based on the results of the analysis.

9. List of Publications

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