**EMPLOYER BRANDING DESCRIPTIONS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A BUSINESS TO BUSINESS FIRM EXAMPLE**

**ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of this study was to investigate the expectations and information channels of the Y generation while evaluating their potential employers. This study was conducted with 543 Agriculture Faculty students in a state university to be able to understand their expectations of future employers especially in the scope of a special type of business to business firm. The results revealed that the 543 Turkish agriculture students identified the ideal employer as people- oriented (14%), considerate of staff training and education(12.53%), offering opportunities for career development (12.17%) and providing well-developed working conditions( 9.99%). The results also showed that the sources of information for the students of employer branding image were from personal experience of specific firms, such as face-to-face interaction with a representative of the firm at a university career day or references by a university professor.*

***Keywords: Employer Branding, Y generations, Brand Equity***

***JEL Classification:M12,M31,M51***

**ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN İŞVEREN MARKASI TANIMLAMLARI: BİR İŞLETME ÖRNEĞİ**

**ÖZ**

*Bu çalışmanın amacı Y jenerasyonunun potansiyel işverenlerinden beklentilerini ve işverenleri hakkındaki değerlendirmelerini hangi iletişim aracına bağlı olarak yapılandırdıklarını ortaya koymaktır. Bu amaçtan hareket ile Türkiye’de faaliyet gösteren kamu üniversitelerinin Ziraat Fakültelerinde okuyan 543 öğrenci üzerinde ideal işveren beklentileri, spesifik bir firma özelinden hareket ile değerlendirilmiştir. Araştırma bulguları 543 Ziraat Fakültesi öğrencisinin ideal işvereni, insan odaklı (%14), çalışanının eğitim ve gelişmesine önem veren (%12.53) kariyer gelişimi fırsatı sunan(%12.17) ve iyi çalışma koşullarına sahip (%9.99) işveren olarak tanımladıkları bulgusuna ulaşılmıştır. Çalışma bulguları ayrıca öğrencilerin işveren firmaları değerlendirme sürecinde üniversite kariyer günleri gibi yüz yüze iletişim ya da öğretim üyelerinin referansları gibi kişisel tecrübeye dayalı etkileşim süreçlerinden daha fazla etkilendiklerini göstermektedir.*

***Anahtar Kelimeler: İşveren markası, Y Jenerasyonu, Marka Değeri***

***Jel Sınıflandırması: M12,M31,M51***

**1.INTRODUCTION**

Present-day organizations still have to make decisions around the fact that the human resource is a fundamental element of the struggle to survive in a highly competitive environment (Barney 1991, Drucker, 1995: 59-60 ). Human capital brings great benefits in the competition between firms where most researchers have defined human capital as a unique instrument of competition in the modern world (Kaplan and Norton, 2004: 5, Barney, 1991: 11, Pennings, Lee and Van Witteloostijn, 1998: 425). In this context, human resources departments need to improve their efforts to find skilled labour and to widen their job candidate pool in order to identify how firms can gain a sustainable competitive advantage through people as they also have to analyse today’s workforce competencies to integrate them into the firm’s knowledge and market value. Hence, these new roles of human resources managers lead them to compete with each other for qualified and talented employees.

However, there remain some macro and micro challenges for human resource managers. According to the research of Guthridge, Komm and Lawson (2008), small and medium sized companies increasingly target the same talented people who are sought by the large companies (Guthridge, Komm and Lawson, 2008: 57) thus reaching the most talented individuals has become more difficult. In addition, demographic profile changes among society is a risky and hidden topic which is waiting for organizations. Researchers have reported that as the general population is ageing, so the workforce is ageing in developed countries, and it has been suggested that in Europe the population aged 15-60 years will decrease from 62% to 49% and in North America will decline from 60% to 54% by 2050. On the other hand, the young population of eastern countries or emerging markets is increasing (http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/generations-demographic-trends-population-and-workforce) and thus, emerging markets are producing a surplus of young talent. For example, the population of Turkey in 2014 was approximately 78 million, with a young population rate of 16% (age 15 to 24 years), with an unemployment rate in this age group of 17.9 %. (http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/UstMenu.do?metod=temelist) Thus, based on these findings, in the coming years developed countries will have to import a workforce from undeveloped countries. Some authors have identified this issue as a “war for talent” (Cambers, Foulon, Handfield, Hankin and Michaels, 2008; Ulrich, 1997; Pfeiffer., 2001; Dobbs, Lund and Modgoykar, 2012). At the same time, from a micro perspective, human resources professionals will be faced with high turnover rates among young employees. In the past, high performers might have changed their employer once or twice in a full career, whereas nowadays changing company has risen to a rate of 7-8 times in a full career (Dewhurst, Guthridge and Mohr, 2009). In addition, the expectations of the new generation about working life and working conditions have acquired a different character from those in the past. The authors have noted that generation Y wants to feel good at work and they want to have a work-life balance with enough time for their private life such as hobbies, physical training..etc. They are looking for organizations which will provide them with constant learning opportunities, career development, social relations, work-life balance, and flexible working hours (Kultalahti and Viitala, 2015; Lariad, Harvey and Lancester, 2015; Kong, Wang and Fu, 2015; Lim, 2012; Oliver, 2006; Hurst and Good, 2009). Therefore, the examination of the millennials’ preferences is an important area of inquiry for management research. Firms must recognize the influence of the values and work preferences of the new generations on the organization.

Employer branding provides a framework for firms to be able to cope with the problem of finding well-qualified employees or candidates and to keep them within the company (Wilden, Gudergan and Lings, 2010; Branham, 2001). Employer branding is the projecting of an image showing the organization as a good place to work (Sullivan, 2004). Employer branding creates two principle assets for the firm of brand association and brand loyalty. Employer brand association shapes the attractiveness of the organization among potential employees or recruitment markets (Franca and Pahor, 2012; Berthon, Ewing and Hahl, 2005; Gatewood, Gowan and Lautenschlager, 1993; Judge and Cable, 1997; Ong, 2011) whereas employer brand loyalty shapes the current employees perceptions of the organization and work situation, which in turn provides positive work outcomes for companies (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004:504-505). Therefore, most firms have started to present their employer branding strategies and programs in order to generate positive employer branding perceptions inside and outside the company.

Although a growing number of studies focusing on the functions of employee branding have mostly been implemented on internal branding strategies among current employees of the firm, very few studies have responded to the external perceptions of employer branding among prospective employees, especially in the Y generation.

Based on this limitation, the current study aimed to investigate the parameters of the Y generation while evaluating or nominating potential employers. In this context, this field research was designed to be conducted on 543 public university students to be able to understand their expectations of an employer, especially in the scope of a special type of business to business firm. A further aim of the study was to examine the sources of information for the students of their employer branding image of a specific firm. The findings of this research can make a contribution to the relevant literature as well as providing guidance to human resource managers while implementing employee branding policies and value propositions which will promote the employer branding image among university students and to guide business to business firms in the assessment of their employee branding strategies.

**2. LITERTURE REVIEW**

**2.1 Who are Generation Y and What are the Characteristics of Generation Y**

Managing generation Y is a hot and interesting topic for human resources as well as marketing managers. However, there is no single generally accepted way to segment groups by their age or generation. Based on the related literature, generation Y is defined as those born between 1977 and 1994. Generation Y have some different attributes from their predecessors, and some of those attributes are unaccustomed to some individuals. Some authors have identfied characteristics of this generation as independent, well educated, confident, upbeat, passionate, open minded, sociable, curious, have lived with strong social stressors, etc (Broadbirdge, Maxwell and Ogden, 2007: 527). Generation Y appears to be a "notoriously fickle" consumer group, demanding the latest trends in record time. Communicators wanting to reach these individuals have "to embrace that type of fast change”, No matter what they are buying, Generation Ys prefer brands with a core identity based on core values (Morton, 2002; Cui, Trent, Sullivan and Martiru, 2003; Charters, et.al 2011). Generation Y customers have rated more customized products and personalized services than general ones (Bolton, Parasuraman, Hoefnagels, Migchels, Kabadayı, Gruber, Loureiro and Solnet, 2013).

In addition, the expectations of Generation Y to working life and working organizations are different. They expect a lot in return for what they give and want jobs that provide training, fair compensation, and most importantly, a positive company culture. They want supportive managers and bosses who are "open and positive," and give them flexibility. The work-life balance is an important value for this generation. They place value on the training programs of organizations and seek employers who will further their professional development (Guillot –Soulez and Soulez, 2013; Edwards, 2005: 267; Luscombe, Lewis and Biggs, 2013; Cui, Trent, Sullivan and Matiru, 2003).The motivators of this generation are different from others, as contributing to society, parenting well, challenging tasks or works, corporate image and a balanced life appear to be more motivating topics for them (Broadbirdge, Maxwell and Ogden, 2007; Hurst and Goods, 2009; Maxwell ,Orgen and Broadbridge, 2010).

In this framework, the preferences of this new generation are important topics for managers as well as for academics. Companies are faced with a demographic landscape dominated by the looming retirement of baby boomers in the developed world and by a dearth of young people entering the workforce (Guthridge et.al, 2008). Therefore, human resources have to identfy and understand this new workforce. In addition to the new curious expectations from working life of the new generation, a study in the hospitality industry showed that Generation Y values economic return and work environment more highly than the Baby Boomers or Generation X did (Chen and Choi, 2008). The new generation will graduate at twice the rate of the developed world and a new knowledge worker will provide three times more profit than others (Guthridge et.al, 2008: 51-52) Hence, managers have to learn, work and cope with them.

However, recent studies have observed that the new generation has considered some new parameters in contrast to previous ones in the job application process. For example, in a study by Turban and Greening (1996) it was reported that there is a high positive correlation between the reputations of firms and their attractiveness to students to be selected as a potential employer (Turban and Greening, 1996; Turban, 2001: 294) and others have reported similar results (Highhouse, Lievens and Sınar, 2003). The new generation or young potential labour force cares about the attributes of employers such as the mission, vision, reputation, and social responsibility obligations (Edwards, 2005: 267, Luscombe, Lewis and Biggs, 2013; Cui, Trent, Sullivan and Matiru, 2003; Gatewood , Gowen and Lautenschlager, 1993; Luce, Barber and Hillman, 2001; Backhouse, Stone and Heiner, 2002; Greening and Turban, 2000) as well as the human resource recruitment procedures such as the attitude of the interviewer in the interview process, the staff of the selection tools of advertising, promotion and sponsorship activities, of word-of-mouth information, and campus visits etc (Robertson and Khatibi, 2013; Turban, 2001: 294). In this respect, recruiting young employees has become harder than before in addition to the generational differences.

According to theMcKinsey report, entitled “the state of human capital” (2012), the young generation wants leverage technology, they speak a digital language, they do not want to adapt to organizations, but rather they are seeking organizations or structures that are adapted to them, and these expectations are new issues even for managers and organizations (2012, p 8). Therefore, organizations have to understand the new workforce attributes and relate them to their organizations, compete with each other for young talented employees and answer the question of why those smart, energetic and ambitious individuals want to work for them rather than for other organizations.

**2.2. Employee/Employer Branding**

Nowadays organizations are looking for new approaches or instruments to cope with the challenges of the market place such as changes in the demographic profile of the workforce between countries and the priorities and preferences of the young generation. In this framework, employee/employer branding strategies and tactics provide some sort of advantage for firms.

Employee branding is defined from several different perspectives. According to a study by Amber and Barrow, employee branding is information that is “provided by the employment and is explained by the employer firm as a functional, economic and physiological benefits package” (Ambler and Barrow, 1996: 187). According to Sullivan, employee branding is a targeted, long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regards to a particular firm (Sullivan, 2004) where employer branding is a unique employer identity that differentiates it from its competitors (Backhaus and Tikko, 2004: 502) and makes it desirable to work for (Berthon et al., 2005: 153) and attracts qualified employees (Edwards, 2005: 266). Employee branding is a “value proposition” which is the true presentation of what the firm offers to employees (Eisenbergh, Kilduff, Burleigh and Wilson, 2001). According to Edwards (2005: 267), employee branding is a focus on winning the “hearts and minds” of staff whereas Ewing defined the concept as a “great place to work” (Ewing, Pitt, Bussy and Berthon, 2002). Based on those definitions, this study identified employee branding as strategic issues of the firm, incorporating presentation of the company to the potential and existing labour market and its developed version based on stakeholder perceptions of the firm (Maxwell and Knox, 2009; Backhause and Tikko, 2004 ; Foster , Punjaisri and Cheng, 2010).

Employer branding is discussed in different fields such as organizational behaviour and strategic management literature. For example, in organizational behaviour and strategic management literature, the concept is assumed to be a component of corporate image or corporate reputation and is defined as prestige perceptions of employees or a constructed external image, in addition to the strategic intangible assets of the firm that it provides some strategic and operational advantages. It is assumed that there is a positive correlation between employees prestige perceptions and commitment to organizations (Meal and Ashforth, 1992; 1995; Dutton and Dukerich, 1991-1994; Çiftçioğlu, 2010). A survey conducted on companies in the Fortune 500 list reported that employees assumed that highly reputable companies would demonstrate more honest practices (Koys, 1997: 97). Therefore, the reputation of an organization has a positive influence on recruiting talented employees into the organization( Fombrun, 1996; Cable and Turban, 2001).

In related literature, authors and managers have mostly discussed the utility or image of employer branding. First, group studies focussed on the positive effects of the employer branding image on current employees which could be defined as insider branding. In this group research, it was stated that employer branding practices provide some positive work outcomes, such as job satisfaction, loyalty to the organization, staying in the organization..etc.. (Maxwell and Knox, 2009; Franca and Pahor, 2012; Martin, Gollan and Grigg, 2011; Wilden et.al, 2010, Davies, 2008; Backhause and Tikoo, 2004; Lievens, 2007). Positive employee branding attitudes provide commitment to the organization and create a low turnover intention (Casio, 2014), enhance the productivity of employees (Sehgal and Malati, 2013) and satisfaction (Davies, 2008). In a study by Robertson and Khatibi of 369 employees, it was reported that employer branding activities (employer brand and employee branding strategies) have a positive association with organizational productivity (Robertson and Khatibi, 2013).

Another aspect of employer branding is related to the recruitment markets and the effects on prospective employees (Knox and Freeman, 2006). In this perspective, the concept is defined as external employee branding or employer branding where it is mostly concentrated on how to be the first choice of highly skilled prospective employees and what factors affect this process of attraction to differentiate organizations to be able to gain strategic advantage. This research also reported that positive employer branding perceptions in the recruitment markets affects the applicant’s selection of employer (Turban and Greening, 1998; Turban, 2001; Fombrun and Stanley, 1990; Barber and Roehling, 1993; Gatewood et.al, 1993; Franca and Pahor, 2012; Berthon et.al, 2005; Judge and Cable, 1997; Ong, 2011).

In addition to the several advantages of a positive employer branding image, a growing number of studies have focussed on identification of the components of employer branding, in order to manage it. A branding equity approach provides a complementary theoretical perspective for understanding employer branding and provides functional instruments for managers to be able to manage. The marketing approach suggested that managers could manage their employer branding in a similar manner to a product or service brand. Brand equity is a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand and firm defining the value provided by a product or service of a firm” (Aaker, 1991). Customer-based brand equity relates to the effects of brand knowledge and the consumers’ response to the marketing of the brand (Keller, 1993). Therefore, brand equity reduces the consumer’s perceptions of risk, cost of information and generates confidence. Brand can convey some value propositions, promise to consistently deliver a specific set of features, benefits and services to other party (Kotler, 1997: 443). In this context, employer branding is a type of brand that keeps employees, reduces risk of the work environment and employer and presents trust in the employer as a good place to work.

Employer branding includes symbolic and functional benefits which are shaped by the corporate identity and the effect of the organization on insiders and outsiders (Bakhause and Tikoo 2004). Amber and Barrow (1996) defined employer branding as package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment. After that study, Lievens (2007) combined the functional economic components and identified the concept as having two main components (Lievens, 2007). Instrumental attributes refer to the functional features of the organizations among employees such as compensation (pay), job security, working conditions, promotion opportunities, career choice, etc. The symbolic attributes have generally embraced the intangible features of companies which are related with social approval in society, such as prestige perceptions of the company, consumer perceptions as a producer, social responsibility, vision, mission statements, and eco-environmental policies, etc. (Lievens, 2007; Ong, 2011; Backhouse and Tikoo, 2004; Maxwell and Knox, 2009; Davies, 2008; Mosley, 2007).

Based on these dimensional conceptualizations of employer branding, authors have recommended a three step management process. First, companies should develop a “value proposition” for current and prospective employees which is related to the firm’s identity and the benefits of joining the company. At the second stage, the company should design the presentation of this value proposition to employees, based on central messages using communication instruments. Finally, the company should monitor employee committment inside and outside the organization to determine employer branding reactions or approval (Aaker, 1996; Eisenberg et. al, 2001). However, this simple process does not always work as it should.

The cognitive psychology view of brand equity as assumptions of knowledge in the market depends on information about the brand. Brand knowledge can be conceptualised as consisting of a brand node in the memory with a variety of brand associations. Brand knowledge is composed of 1) brand awareness, which relates to consumers’ ability to recognise or recall the brand and 2) brand image, which consists of consumers’ perceptions of and associations with the brand. According to Keller (1998), brand knowledge develops with brand awareness and brand image as those components are also created by communication strategies such as direct experiences from information communicated by other commercial or non-partisan sources and word of mouth (Keller, 1998: 48-49-51). When brand images are strong, they can be used to enhance a person’s self-image (Tuominen, 1999: 84). When reviewing employer branding concept with a branding equity approach it could be defined as a kind of image that is held by the workforce which is formed by the employer’s clear brand signals to recruitment markets.

However, recruitments markets are characterized by information asymmetry (Wilden et. al,2010:59). Based on the signalling theory (Spence, 1973), applicants have incomplete information about organizations compared to current employees, and the applicants only interpret information they receive from outside the organization which mostly comes from complex manipulated sources. Hence, knowledge would be different for each individual. In this context, employee branding assumptions among candidates emerge from different channels such as other individuals’ experiences, customer recommendations and information from third parties such as media channels (public relations activities), comments of opinion leaders, competitor firms discourse, existing employee’s speech and behaviours and their peers which we will be defined as their friends’ perceptions. While examining these sources it was seen that knowledge of the specific firm is structured mostly by others and is not directly formed by the prospective individual’s personnel experiences (eg current employees) (Wilden et.al., 2010; Çiftçioğlu, Arsoy, and Selimoğlu, 2011; Katoen and Macioscheck, 2008). However, those signals and information about organizations determine the job choice decision and the attraction of organizations (Luce, Barber and Hillman, 2001; Backhaus, Stone and Heiner, 2002). Dowling argues that interpersonal communications between employees and external groups are far more powerful in terms of shaping attitudes and images than any communications sponsored by the firm itself. (Dowling, 2002). The results of research by Gatewood et al. (1993) and Turban and Greening (1997) showed that a firm’s familiarity contributes to organizational attractiveness. In a field study of 460 senior level university students, Çiftçioğlu et al. reported similar findings that the attraction of a firm is influenced by the firm’s familiarity rather than social responsibility perceptions among prospective employees. (Çiftçioğlu et.al, 2011).

The new generation have been labelled digital natives rather than digital immigrants as they are the first generation to have spent their entire lives in a digital environment, and information technology profoundly affects their engagement with brands and firms, and lifetime values (Bolton, Parasuraman, Hoefnagels, Migchels, Kabadayı, Gruber, Loureiro and Solnet, 2013: 245). Therefore, to manage employer branding perceptions among prospective employees, human resources and marketing managers have to understand how information types and channel preferences affect the recruitment market. It has been previously mentioned that employer branding perceptions are generally shaped by the customer’s branding image or the firm’s products or services brand values on the market. (Knox and Freeman, 2006; Hurst and Good, 2009). Therefore, businesses to consumer firms have some advantages over business to business firms as candidates have a personal opinion if they are the actual consumers of that firm. They have personal experience of the firm and they are familiar with the company name or products, whereas these direct interactions do not exist for a business to business firm.

Employer branding studies which have been conducted on a student sample have mostly focussed on the attractiveness of business to consumer firms to potential employees (Turban and Greenings, 1996; Alniaçık and Alnıacık, 2012; Hurst and Good, 2009; King and Bu, 2005; Terjesen , Vinnicombe and Freemn, 2007). There has been no consideration of the business to business firm, and those previous studies have not contributed any information or perspective to a business to business firm while generating their employer branding policies.

Based on the findings and limitations of the related literature which has mostly focussed on the insiders’ perceptions of employer branding, which is seen as a limitation of the existing studies, the aim of this study was to investigate employer branding components on potential employees. A secondary aim of this research was to determine the sources of information that generate an employer branding image to the Y generation. To achieve these aims, a collaboration was undertaken with a business to business firm, which is a producer of seeds in the agricultural sector. MAY Seeds has been engaged in research, production, domestic and international sales of vegetable, field, industrial and forage crop seeds since 1978 under the brand name, MAY. MAY Seeds is Turkey’s leading agricultural sector investor with an annual certified seed production and processing capacity of 29,000 tons and over 120 agronomist specialists employed. MAY’s vision is to be a Turkish seed company which offers innovative seeds for the targeted geography through strong RandD to sustain global competition. The data used in this study were collected from 543 Agriculture faculty students of 7 Turkish public universities.

**3.METHOD**

To evaluate the participant’s employer branding expectations of the specified firm, a questionnaire consisting of 3 sections was prepared. In the first section, questions were asked to elicit the demographic profile of the sample. (4 questions). The second section comprised a check list of 15 features of an ideal employer, the definitions of which were taken from related research findings (Turban and Greening, 1996; Turban, 2001; Luce et.al, 2001; Backhaus, Stone and Heiner, 2002). In the third section the respondents were asked to identify their sources of information about this specified firm. The initial findings showed that 543 usable questionnaires were returned from the universities for analysis.

**4. FINDINGS**

The study sample consisted of 543 Agriculture Faculty students from public universities in the 7 different geographic regions of Turkey. The sample was formed of Generation Y as 90% of the students were born after 1990. The students were 73.48% first and second year students and 50.64% were male.The descriptive statistics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

**Table1. Desciptive Statistics of the Sample**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Uludag University | Ege University | Ankara University | Çukurova University | Namık Kemal University | Selçuk University | Ayhan Şahenk University | **Total** |
| **Sample size** | 104 | 71 | 40 | 89 | 104 | 84 | 51 | **543** |
| **Students degree** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **First and second year** | 87 | 54 | 21 | 71 | 35 | 84 | 47 | **399** |
| **3th year** | 13 | 11 | 4 | 18 | 28 | - | - | **74** |
| **Senior students** | 4 | 6 | 14 | - | 41 | - | - | **65** |
| **Age** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **1980-1985** | 2 | 2 | 1 | - | - | 6 | 2 | **13** |
| **1985-1990** | 3 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 11 | 3 | - | **27** |
| **1990 and after** | 96 | 66 | 34 | 87 | 85 | 74 | 49 | **491** |
| **Gender** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Man** | 47 | 41 | 20 | 59 | 47 | 37 | 24 | **275** |
| **Women** | 55 | 30 | 20 | 29 | 57 | 45 | 27 | **263** |

In the second section of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to identify 5 features of their ideal employer from the given checklist. Frequency analysis was applied to the items to determine the expectations of an ideal employer and to set the components of well approved employee branding characteristics among Generation Y. These Turkish students identified or valued an ideal employer as human oriented and considerate of personal development such as providing professional development and career choices and these features were followed by good working conditions and high financial compensation. (Table 2).

**Table 2: Students Attributions for Ideal Employer**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **N** | **%** |
| **Human oriented/respect** | 392 | 14,19 |
| Consider Training , education and development oppurtunity | 346 | 12,53 |
| Career opportunity | 336 | 12,17 |
| Well developed Physical and pyschological working conditions | 276 | 9,99 |
| High compensation | 203 | 7,35 |
| Well-reputed or have good image among market | 198 | 7,17 |
| Care eco-environment | 171 | 6,19 |
| Care balance with work and privacy life | 171 | 6,19 |
| Corporate governance | 147 | 5,32 |
| Social responsibility | 110 | 3,98 |
| Employee Benefits such as car, healty insurance or bonus | 92 | 3,33 |
| Travel opportunity | 92 | 3,33 |
| Flexible working hours | 91 | 3,29 |
| Opportunity take decision (initiative) | 63 | 2,28 |
| Low hierarch | 40 | 1,45 |
| other | 34 | 1,23 |

In the final section of the questionnaire, the students were asked to identify the firm to be able to measure their awareness of a specific business to business firm and were also asked to identify their source of information about this firm. The results showed that 58.14% of the students were aware of the firm and its features and 71.3% of the respondents expressed that they would like to be employed by this firm. The sources of information or knowledge about this firm were seen to have been mostly formed by the firm’s presentations and attendance at career days of the universities (147 ), their professors reference, direct connections with firm as a consumer or completeing an internship and social media news (Table 3). The findings showed that the sources of information were mostly related with student-centred activities of the firm. Therefore, it can be assumed that experienced-based knowledge is the most permanent and effective resource for the young generation.

**Table 3: Source of Information Channels.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Total |
| University presentation and career days attendance | 147 |
| University academicals references (speech) | 70 |
| Being a consumer | 57 |
| Internship and Academy programs | 53 |
| Social media | 51 |
| I have acquaintance who is working in (Grounds this firm (personel referances) | 45 |
| News in press (newspaper) | 43 |
| Sector exposition –tradeshow | 30 |
| Other source | 20 |

**5. DISCUSSION**

The goal of this study was to explore the expectations of Generation Y of their ideal employer and to identfy their source of information about their potential employer. The results of the study showed that 543 Turkish agriculture students identified their ideal employer as human oriented (14%) , considerate of staff traning and education (12.53%) and career development (12.17%), and provide them with well-developed working conditions(9.99%). Amber and Barrow defined employer branding as information that is “provided by the employer and explained by the employer firm as a functional, economic and physiological benefits package” (Ambler and Barrow, 1996: 187). Based on this definition, it can be said that Turkish students care more about the functional features of the employer than the economic benefits. Only 7.35% of the students mentioned about high compensation and very few (3.33%) considered employee benefits (car, health insurance) while identfying their ideal employer. The respondents mostly focussed on psychological or symbolic factors while examining their potential employer. This result is similar to foreign examples, which is an interesting finding for Turkey. In Turkey, the unemployment rate is very high in the young population. According to the Turkish Statistics Institute (TIK) report dated August 2015, the unemployment rate in Turkey was 10.1 % and the unemployment rate in the young population (15-24 years) was 16.6%. The minimum wage in Turkey is 424.6 Euro/month(2015). Therefore, it had been assumed that the students’ preferences about the ideal employer might be based on salary and benefits provided by the employer. However, the findings demonstrated that the sample of this study considered personal development and career opportunities to be more important than salary.

The secondary aim of the study was to identfy the information channels by which the students formed their perceptions or preferences about firms. In this context, a business to business firm was selected as the study partner. It was assumed that a business to business firm would have some disadvantages in reaching potential young employees compared with a business to consumer firm. According to social categorization and social identity theory, individuals look for well-known companies to improve their self – esteem and personal image in order to gain social approval (Turner, Brown and Tajfel, 1979; Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994). As an individual’s self image is influenced by the characteristcs inferred by others based on their social category, this is known as organizational membership (Hogg and Terry, 2000) Working for a well-known or visible firm has been reported to affect current and potential employees’ decisions about an employer. Turban and Greening (1996) reported a high positive correlation between the reputations of firms and their attractiveness to students as a potential employer (Turban, 2001: 294).

Based on these assumptions, the students’ familiarity and source of information about the partner business to business firm was reviewed. The findings showed that the students’ perceptions about this firm occurred through personal experience such as face-to-face interaction with the firm at career days at universities (28.49%). University professors’ speeches or references (as an opinion leader) was stated by 13.5% of the students, 10.66% of students reported that their knowledge about the firm came from personal experience such as being a consumer of this firm and 10.27% of respondents mentioned internship and academy programs with the firm. The results also showed that media information has less impact on the students’ perceptions or awareness about this firm. Social media (9.88 %) and news in the press (8.33%) had the lowest scores compared to the other sources for the study sample. These findings indicate that personal contact between students and firms is the most valued issue constituting good employer branding for a business to business firm. Therefore, managers have to consider experimental marketing tactics when generating their employer branding strategies. It was assumed that this relationship becomes the most significant factor for a business to business firm

To validate the relationship identified in this study, there is a need for the study to be replicated in various different samples. This study was aimed at a specific population of Turkish agriculture students. Therefore, the effect of industry and sample size must be taken into consideration while interpreting the findings of this study.

Several directions for future research can be suggested. It would be interesting and different to investigate the relationship with different variables and in different faculty students.

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