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THE ROLE OF GREEN INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL IN BUILDING EMPLOYER BRANDING AND ATTRACTING EMPLOYEES: THE PERSPECTIVE OF GENERATION Z

ABSTRACT

In response to the escalating global talent shortage, companies are increasingly exploring novel strategies to attract and retain valuable employees. Generation Z, the youngest cohort of potential candidates, requires distinct recruitment strategies due to their unique motivations and attitudes toward work compared to older generations. This study aimed to evaluate the role of Green Intellectual Capital (GIC) in attracting Generation Z candidates. The empirical research was conducted using a diagnostic survey method. The research tool was a custom-designed questionnaire made available to respondents via Google Forms. The study included 185 Generation Z students from the University of Siedlce. The obtained data were analyzed comparatively, taking into account the respondents' form of study. The study employed a five-point Likert scale to assess the impact of GIC-related practices on employer attractiveness. These findings are instrumental for management in refining recruitment strategies and advocating for GIC investments to enhance human resource potential in an employee-centric market. The study's originality lies in highlighting GIC's critical role in employer branding and employee attraction within the Polish context.

KEYWORDS: *green intellectual capital, generation Z, employee attraction, employer branding*

INTRODUCTION

The survival of any organization largely hinges on the quality of its human capital. Consequently, organizations must prioritize attracting highly qualified candidates through an effective recruitment process (Muscalu, 2015). Current labor market analyses reveal that many employers struggle to attract employees. The shrinking pool of working-age individuals and their increasing demands pose significant challenges for managers in attracting and retaining specialists (Wojtaszczyk, 2012). Demographic shifts and changing employee attitudes necessitate modifications in personnel functions. Particularly, employers must meet the expectations of Generation Z, who, influenced by global communication networks and modern technologies, approach work differently than previous generations. Understanding their unique motivations and attitudes is crucial for effective recruitment.

Representatives of Generation Z seek not only well-paid positions but also opportunities for skill development, career fulfillment, and a community that

aligns with their values. Consequently, the significance of a green employer brand is increasing, becoming a key factor in attracting candidates, fostering loyalty, and engaging employees. Green Intellectual Capital (GIC) plays a crucial role in shaping such an image.

Previous studies have demonstrated GIC as a competitive advantage and a tool for sustainable development in modern organizations (Chen, 2008; Nivlouei & Khass, 2014; Sidik et al., 2019; Susandya et al., 2019; Bombiak, 2023). However, its role in employer branding and employee attraction remains under-explored, evidenced by a lack of studies addressing this issue. Literature analysis reveals a gap in empirical research on the role of GIC in attracting Generation Z representatives. Although the literature has examined the characteristics, preferred values (Maloni et al., 2019; Cresnar & Nedelko, 2020; Bień & Kubiczek, 2020), and work attitudes of Generation Y (Barhate & Dirani, 2021), as well as generational similarities and differences (Klopotan et al., 2020; Mahmoud et al., 2021), the sensitivity of Generation Z to GIC-related practices has not been studied. This study aims to at least partially address this research gap.

In view of the above, this article aims to assess the role of Green Intellectual Capital (GIC) in employer branding (EB) for recruiting Generation Z representatives. The first part of the study characterizes Generation Z and explores the theoretical connections between EB and GIC. The second part presents the research findings and discusses them in the context of existing literature. The study's originality lies in demonstrating GIC's contribution to employer brand management. To the author's knowledge, this is the first study to analyze GIC's role in attracting employees within the Polish context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A generation is defined as a group of people who share similar birth years, life experiences, and cultural influences (Jayatissa, 2023). The current labor market comprises several generations, including the Baby Boomers, the dominant Generation X, Generation Y, and the youngest, Generation Z. Generation Z typically includes individuals born after 1995 (Cilliers, 2017), though some studies extend this range to those born after 1990 or 2000 (Dolot, 2018).

While some members are still in education, others have started their professional careers. This generation's distinct approach to employers and employment is fundamental to their effective recruitment.

Generation Z grew up in the Internet age and are adept with new technologies (Biernacki, 2016; Gajda, 2017; Kirchmayer & Fratriëová, 2020; Gaidhani et al., 2019). They easily access applications, data, and communicate from anywhere. However, they face challenges with direct communication and prolonged focus (O'Boyle et al., 2017). They require clear expectations and feedback and are known for their openness, directness, and multitasking abilities (Sidorcuka & Chesnovicka, 2017; Fratriëová & Kirchmayer, 2018; Hysa, 2016; Lazányi & Bilan, 2017; Żarczyńska-Dobiesz & Chomątowska, 2014; Bejtkovský, 2016). They value work flexibility and work-life balance (Kirchmayer & Fratriëová, 2017).

Generation Z is confident, open, and creative (Kuczerska & Smolağ, 2018). They possess high self-esteem and recognize the importance of continuous education, preferring e-learning over traditional methods (Hysa, 2016). They aspire to rapid career advancement and expect clear career paths, training access, and advancement opportunities from employers. They are willing to change jobs if rapid professional growth is not facilitated, showing lower loyalty to employers compared to previous generations and do not tie their careers to a single organization. Their tendency to quickly become disinterested poses a challenge for retention (Çora, 2019). The evolving priorities of Generation Z necessitate constant adaptation to their needs and values (Sidorcuka & Chesnovicka, 2017).

Generation Z shows strong interest in environmental issues and is aware of environmental threats, indicating a high sense of responsibility towards natural resources (Singh & Dangmei, 2016). They exhibit significant concern for environmental well-being (Fodor et al., 2017; Çora, 2019; Jiri, 2016), and therefore value employers who engage in socially responsible practices and support charitable initiatives. Given their expectations, building a positive employer brand is crucial in the recruitment process.

Employer branding (EB) is a relatively new concept driven by contemporary labor market changes. It encompasses all organizational activities aimed at current and potential employees to enhance the employer's attractiveness (Kozłowski, 2012). Attractiveness refers to the extent to which potential

and current employees perceive the organization as a desirable place to work (Eger et al., 2019). EB can also be defined as a strategy for creating favorable associations in the minds of employees and potential candidates regarding the organization as a workplace (Gołaszewska-Kaczan, 2009). It involves a package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits associated with employment and identified with the employing organization (Ambler & Barrow, 1996), while simultaneously building a distinct and unique organizational identity (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

EB influences candidates' behavior and decisions, helping them choose a specific organization over others in the labor market (Keller & Meaney, 2017). Brand recognition and a positive employer reputation lead candidates to proactively respond to job offers, increasing the chances of attracting top specialists. Investing in EB can help companies stand out from the competition and contribute to increased trust from customers and business partners. Given the growing importance of sustainable development, the future of EB is largely linked to shaping an eco-friendly employer image. Green Intellectual Capital (GIC) can play a significant role in this process.

The term *Green Intellectual Capital* (GIC) refers to a new paradigm derived from intellectual capital and is defined as the total value of intangible assets, knowledge, skills, and environmental concern or innovation at both individual and corporate levels (Sukirman & Dianawati, 2023). Its structure consists of three components (Chen, 2008):

- Green Human Capital (GHC)
- Green Structural Capital (GSC)
- Green Relational Capital (GRC)

GHC encompasses the competencies, experience, and attitudes of employees regarding environmental sustainability. These employees initiate innovations that not only lead to the development of eco-friendly products, technologies, and processes but also improve the efficiency of natural resource use and reduce the negative environmental impact of human activities (Ullah et al., 2022; Jirakraisiri et al., 2021).

GSC encompasses intangible assets and intellectual property, databases, as well as less tangible elements such as green organizational culture, philosophy,

knowledge management systems, and all processes, methods, and structures that pertain to environmental protection and facilitate the flow of ecological knowledge (Chen, 2008; Yong et al., 2019).

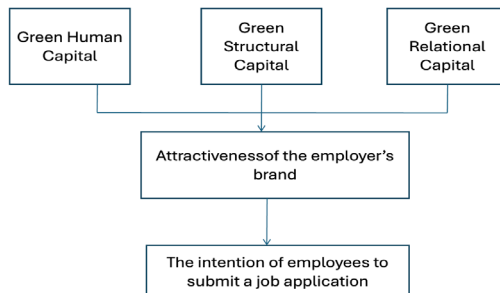
GRC encompasses a company's relationships resulting from collaboration with suppliers, customers, and business partners in the areas of environmental protection, sharing ecological knowledge, and implementing green innovations (Yusliza et al., 2020). It aids in designing business processes to minimize their negative environmental impact.

The structure of Green Intellectual Capital is thus complex, with its various elements being complementary and interacting with each other. This study presents the results of research assessing the potential of these elements in enhancing the attractiveness of employers as potential workplaces for Generation Z employees.

RESEARCH METHODS

The aim of the research was to evaluate the role of GIC in the process of employer branding development in the labor market among representatives of Generation Z. The study sought to answer the question of which practices shaping GIC are perceived by Generation Z representatives as attractive and play a crucial role in attracting them to the organization. The conceptual framework of the research, based on a literature review, is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. *Conceptual model*



Source: own work.

The study was conducted on a sample of 185 respondents, who were students at the University of Siedlce, between February and May 2025. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the survey was anonymous. This research uses a sampling technique, purposive sampling, where the sample selection technique is based on criteria determined by the researcher. The sampling criteria for this research were active students at the University of Siedlce, who intended to look for work. The survey, provided via Google Forms, was targeted at students representing Generation Z. Before completing the survey, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and instructed on how to properly fill out the questionnaire. The characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Sample structure (N=185)*

Criterion		Number of Respondents	Percentage (%) of Respondents
Gender	Female	113	61.1
	Male	72	39.9
Form of study	Full-time	113	61.1
	Part-times	72	38.9
Level of study	First-cycle	124	67.0
	Second-cycle	61	33
Field of study	Management	115	62.2
	Logistics	70	37.8

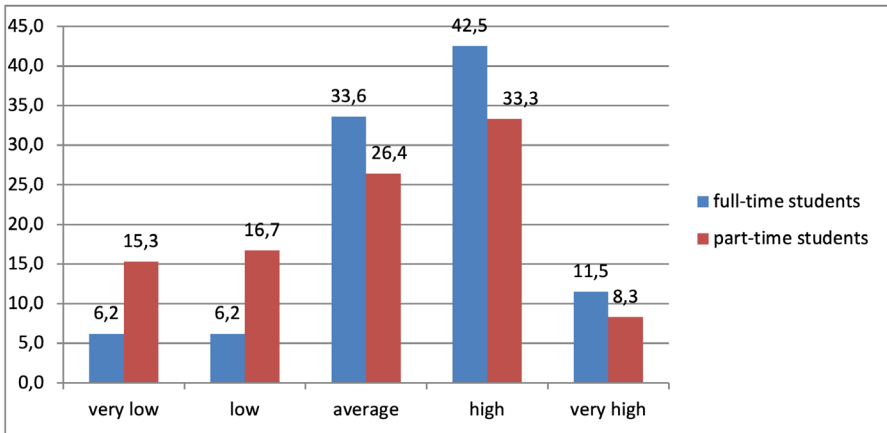
Source: own work.

In the studied population, women predominated, constituting 61.1% of the respondents. The sample included both full-time and part-time students, with a predominance of full-time students, who also made up 61.1% of the total. Within the structure of the studied population, bachelor's degree students were slightly more prevalent, accounting for 67% of the respondents, with the majority (62.2%) studying management.

RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

First, the importance of the green employer image in encouraging Generation Z candidates to apply was assessed. Respondents rated this on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated a very low influence and 5 indicated a very high influence. The responses are illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Evaluation of the impact of a green employer brand on attracting Generation Z candidates (data in %)



Source: own work.

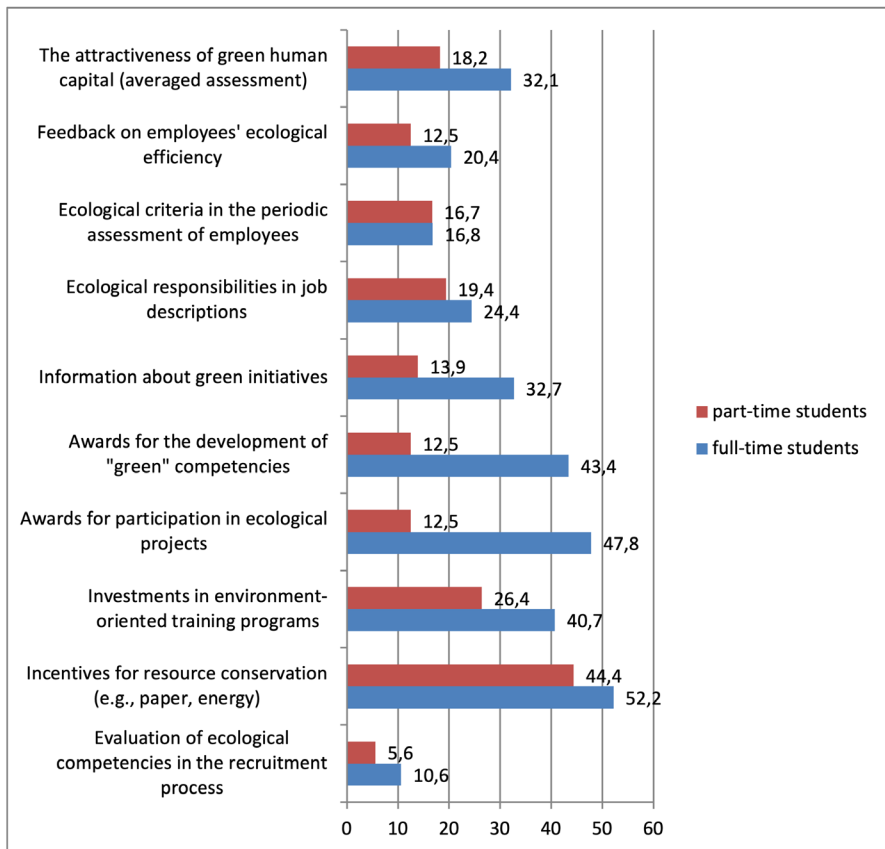
As shown by the presented data, the largest percentage of respondents indicated that a green employer brand significantly influences the attraction of new candidates to work. This opinion was held by 42.5% of full-time students and 33.3% of part-time students. Only 6.2% of full-time respondents and 15.3% of part-time students assessed the impact of a green image on the recruitment process as very low. Therefore, it can be concluded that for Generation Z representatives, a green employer brand is an important factor in choosing an employer. It can also be observed that full-time students rated its significance in the recruitment process higher than part-time students.

Next, respondents were asked to identify GHC practices they find most attractive and that most significantly interest them in employment. The results obtained are illustrated in Figure 3.

As shown by the presented data, the largest percentage of respondents highlighted the importance of implementing incentives for resource conservation. This opinion was shared by 52.2% of full-time students and 44.4% of part-time students. For nearly half of the full-time students, rewards for participating in ecological projects, the development of green skills, and investment in eco-friendly training were also important. These initiatives were significantly

less often indicated as attractive by part-time students. Part-time students primarily valued eco-friendly training, incorporating ecological tasks into job descriptions, and applying ecological criteria in the periodic employee evaluation process. Regardless of the mode of study, the least important factor in the recruitment process, according to the respondents, was the assessment of ecological competencies during the application process.

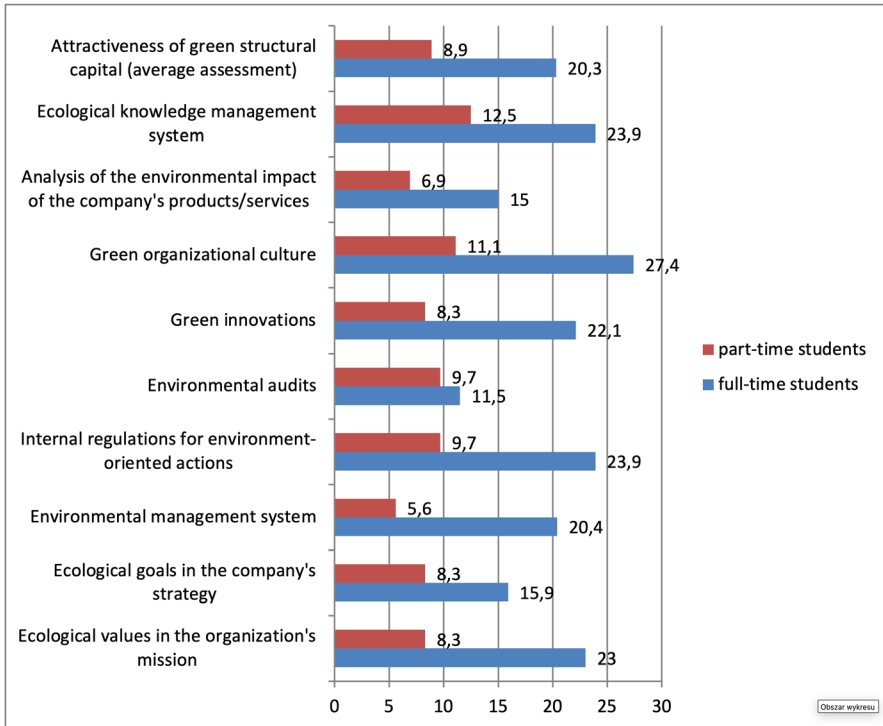
Figure 3. *GIC's ability to attract generation Z candidates (data in %)*



Source: own work.

Next, respondents were asked to identify GSC practices that have the greatest potential to attract them to an organization. The results obtained are illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4. GSC's ability to attract generation Z candidates (data in %)



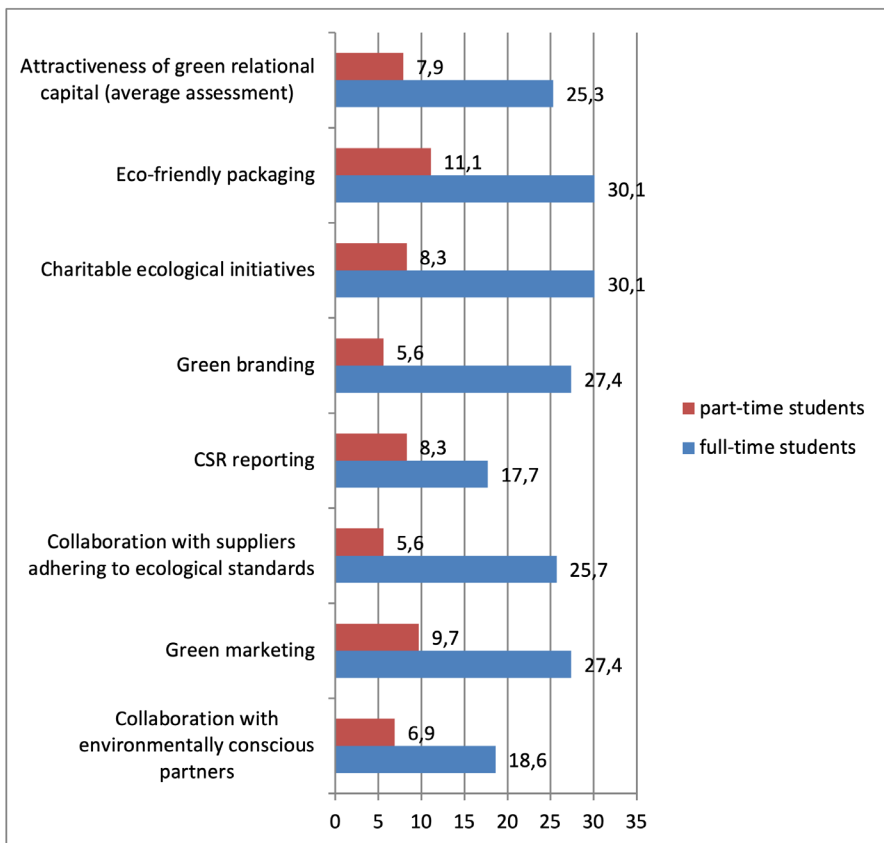
Source: own work.

In the area of GSC, the largest percentage of respondents highlighted the importance of a green organizational culture, although significant differences in opinions were noted between full-time students (27.4%) and part-time students (11.1%). Full-time students also significantly more often appreciated the importance of all analyzed practices, particularly preferring the ecological knowledge management system and internal eco-friendly regulations, as well as incorporating ecological values into the company's mission. Conversely, part-time students most frequently mentioned the ecological knowledge management system, although its frequency

of mention was much lower than among full-time students. Following this, green culture, eco-innovations, ecological goals in the strategy, and ecological values in the mission were noted. Among full-time students, environmental audits were considered the least attractive. In the part-time student group, the environmental management system received the least interest.

The final area of research involved evaluating the potential of practices oriented towards shaping GRC in attracting Generation Z representatives. The results of the evaluation of the attractiveness of these practices are illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5. GRC's ability to attract generation Z candidates (data in %)



Source: own work.

Analysis of the results in GRC management shows that the largest percentage of respondents were interested in whether the company supports ecological charitable initiatives. This was indicated by 30.1% of full-time students. Similarly high percentages were recorded for the importance of maintaining a green image and green marketing. Cooperation with eco-conscious suppliers was also valued. Among part-time students, although less frequently than full-time students, the use of eco-friendly packaging and green marketing were relatively appreciated. Interestingly, CSR reporting was least frequently mentioned by full-time students. Conversely, part-time students attached the least importance to a green image and cooperation with suppliers adhering to ecological standards.

DISCUSSION

Employer branding (EB) is an effective tool that helps organizations shape their image in the minds of potential candidates, positioning themselves as preferred employers. Research confirming the importance of EB in attracting new employees to organizations has been conducted by scholars in various countries.

Santiago (2019) examined the relationship between employer brand attractiveness and the intention to apply for a job within the organization. The study included 281 Portuguese participants, of whom 60% were Generation Z representatives. It was found that for this generation, the employer brand was more significant in their choice of employer than economic factors such as an attractive salary package, job security, and opportunities for advancement.

In 2022, researchers in Indonesia investigated methods of attracting Generation Z employees. The study included 324 Generation Z workers. The results showed that employer brand, perceived benefits, and perceived career development significantly and positively influenced the candidates' intention to apply to the organization. Although this study did not confirm a significant impact of CSR implementation in organizations on potential candidates' decisions, it revealed a strong influence of CSR on the employer brand (Gandasari et al., 2024).

The influence of company and job attributes on candidates' decisions to apply for a job was also analyzed in India in a study involving 2,854 respondents.

The results confirmed that company reputation and organizational familiarity influence candidates' job choice decisions (Saini et al., 2015).

Similarly, research conducted in Latvia confirmed the importance of a good company reputation for Generation Z representatives. It was also found that this generation has specific communication preferences and can be reached through various social media platforms and special events organized by the company (Sidorcuka & Chesnovicka, 2017).

Soeling et al. (2022) conducted a study on the role of organizational reputation as a mediating variable in the relationship between employer brand attractiveness and the intention to apply to the organization. The study included 425 final-year students from public universities in Indonesia. The results showed that employer attractiveness significantly influences the desire to apply. Likewise, Aslam (2015) demonstrated, based on research conducted in Pakistan with over 200 respondents, that a good employer brand significantly influenced decisions to apply to an organization.

Banerjee et al. (2020) investigated the relationships between corporate brand, product brand, and employer brand in a study involving 619 respondents across 11 organizations. They found that a strong corporate brand positively impacts the employer brand, and the employer brand influences job seekers' intention to apply.

Indria et al. (2025) conducted a study among 80 Generation Zers in Pakistan. The study aimed to determine the impact of green human resource management (GHRM) on organizational attractiveness and job desire among young people. They confirmed that organizations implementing green HR practices build stronger employer branding among Gen Z. A green reputation is becoming a competitive advantage in the labor market.

Figiel and Badar (2025), based on a study of 280 educated Generation Z representatives in Europe, found that Generation Z prefers organizations with a strong environmental orientation. The research confirmed that sustainability and green innovation influence an organization's attractiveness as an employer. The authors emphasize that an organization's ecological orientation influences both organizational goodwill and the ability to attract young talent.

Chen et al. (2025) attempted to assess the impact of SMEs' environmental reputation on employer attractiveness. Their study found that

sustainability-based employer branding can be a stronger attraction factor than remuneration. Young candidates preferred environmentally friendly companies even with lower financial benefits. However, information about environmental pollution significantly reduced employer attractiveness.

The study conducted by the author among 185 Polish students found that implementing activities aimed at developing GIC can be a factor that increases interest in employment within an organization. The research confirmed that GIC-related practices are perceived by Generation Z representatives as attractive and, therefore, have the ability to attract them to the organization, although this ability varies. The greatest potential for attracting new candidates to the organization was identified concerning GHC, with an average of 31.1% of full-time students and 18.2% of part-time students indicating this component. Conversely, the lowest potential in this area was noted concerning GSC, with an average of 20.3% of full-time students and 8.9% of part-time students indicating this component.

When interpreting the obtained results, it is important to consider the specific cultural and economic conditions characteristic of Poland, which may have influenced the respondents' perception of green intellectual capital. Poland, as a country undergoing transformation towards a more environmentally sustainable economy, is still characterized by a relatively lower level of organizational environmental maturity than Western European countries. Consequently, green management practices may be perceived by young people as a distinguishing feature of an organization in the labor market, rather than as a standard of business operations. This may explain the relatively high assessment of the impact of green employer branding on employer attractiveness obtained in our own research.

The socioeconomic experiences of the young generation in Poland may also be significant. Representatives of Generation Z grew up during a period of dynamic economic change, the growing importance of social media, and the intensifying public debate on climate change and corporate environmental responsibility. At the same time, young Poles operate in a labor market characterized by high competitiveness, job insecurity, and rising costs of living. In such circumstances, organizations demonstrating stability, social

responsibility, and a long-term focus on sustainable development may be perceived as more reliable and secure employers.

Cultural factors related to the growing Europeanization of attitudes among the younger generation in Poland may also have influenced the obtained results. Representatives of Generation Z are deeply embedded in the global digital environment and are influenced by international trends related to sustainable development, ethical consumption, and corporate climate responsibility. As a result, the expectations of Polish students from employers may be increasingly similar to those of young employees in Western Europe. At the same time, it should be noted that some respondents—especially part-time students—rated the importance of GIC-related internships lower. This may be due to their greater professional experience and a more pragmatic approach to the labor market, where economic considerations, job security, and salary levels continue to play a significant role.

It is important to note that the conducted research has its limitations. Therefore, it is not possible to generalize the obtained results to the entire population. The primary limitations include the small sample size and lack of representativeness, as well as the reliance on respondents' subjective opinions. Additionally, the respondents' professional experience was limited due to their young age, which may have resulted in a less comprehensive perception of the labor market. Students may find it challenging to foresee which factors might influence their employment decisions in a given organization.

In the future, it would be beneficial to continue the research with a larger and more precisely selected sample and to incorporate objective quantitative indicators. To gain a broader perspective, the study should be repeated and conducted across various companies from different economic sectors, including Generation Z employees performing diverse jobs. An interesting aspect for further research could be analyzing the sensitivity to GIC among representatives of Generations X and Y and comparing it with Generation Z's sensitivity in this area.

CONCLUSIONS

Generational changes are a crucial determinant of strategies for attracting employees to organizations. The young generation, which is the focus of this article, is just beginning their careers. They openly express their needs and expectations regarding the workplace, presenting a challenge for contemporary organizations. Many managers will need to revise their current approaches and seek new answers to how they can become attractive to Generation Z and encourage them to work for them. Human resource managers should prepare in advance to attract and effectively manage this generation.

The results obtained in this study indicate that green employer branding (EB) is important to the young generation. It was found that individual components of Green Intellectual Capital (GIC) can encourage Generation Z representatives to apply for jobs. This is an interesting finding from both an academic and professional perspective. Identifying these elements of employer attractiveness is crucial for organizations to attract and retain talented employees. The research demonstrated that GIC could be such an element. With this knowledge, companies can develop more effective personnel strategies.

The study shows that GIC has the potential to improve recruitment efficiency, which is especially important in the context of a skilled labor shortage. This research contributes valuable insights to the ongoing discussion on talent attraction. It provides new information about the expectations of Generation Z, which will soon constitute a significant portion of the workforce. It helps understand how the youngest generation of employees perceives organizations. As a result, the findings can be useful for management in designing actions aimed at improving EB. They can help develop effective recruitment and loyalty-building strategies for Generation Z and encourage managers to invest in GIC to strengthen the organization's human resource potential in an employee-driven market.

The practical implications of these findings suggest that organizations need to invest in GIC to effectively support the recruitment processes of Generation Z candidates. The results highlight the need to invest particularly in Green Human Capital (GHC) and Green Relational Capital (GRC). Promoting resource conservation, strengthening green organizational culture,

and rewarding participation in ecological projects are key ways to encourage the young generation to apply for jobs in modern organizations.

The research findings also suggest that Polish organizations should more consciously integrate activities related to green human capital into their employer branding practices and recruitment communications aimed at Generation Z. Simply implementing pro-environmental initiatives may prove insufficient if the organization fails to effectively communicate them to potential candidates. Managers should therefore highlight elements of green human capital in recruitment materials, social media, and on the organization's career pages.

In practice, this may include publishing specific examples of environmentally friendly activities undertaken by employees, presenting programs for developing green competencies, communicating employee participation in sustainability projects, and emphasizing the impact of employees on the organization's ESG strategy. Using authentic employee stories, employee advocacy videos, reports from environmentally friendly team initiatives, and information about opportunities to participate in environmental projects from the beginning of employment may be particularly important.

In light of the findings, organizations should also implement solutions that support the development of green competencies in employees. These may include:

- training in sustainability and the circular economy,
- *green onboarding* programs for new employees,
- reward systems for environmental initiatives,
- engaging employees in environmental volunteering,
- creating interdisciplinary teams for green innovation,
- incorporating environmental goals into performance appraisals and career paths.

Developing a green organizational culture based on transparency and authenticity can also be an important step. Generation Z is particularly sensitive to greenwashing, so employer branding messages should be supported by actual organizational actions. Companies should avoid declaratively communicating environmental values without implementing specific organizational practices.

The study also provides significant implications for further scientific research and management practice. For researchers, the results provide a basis for in-depth analysis of the relationship between green intellectual capital, employer branding, and the behavior of young employees in the labor market. A particularly interesting direction for further research may be cross-cultural analysis, which would allow for a comparison of the level of sensitivity to GIC practices in different countries and the identification of factors moderating this relationship, such as the level of economic development, environmental awareness of society or the situation on the labor market.

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