

Wroblowská, Zuzana

Article

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Employers' Requirements for Brand Managers: A Comparative Study in the US and Ukraine

Zuzana Wroblowska

Abstract

Purpose of the article: The author's interest focuses on brand managers as brands are among the factors strongly contributing to increasing intellectual capital of any organization. This paper provides a comparison of requirements for brand managers at the phase they are addressed by employers in both the US and Ukraine. The author finds it useful to focus on requirements for skills, knowledge and work experience, as the findings have potential to inspire applicants for vacancies in the product management departments and tertiary education providers.

Methodology/methods: Using a re-applied Berelson's method of content analysis makes it possible to analyse and discuss the requirements for job of brand managers in different countries. The hypothesis regarding the analysed variable's independence on the sign representing the country where the job advertisements were posted was tested applying chi-square statistics.

Scientific aim: The objective was to verify that the requirements for brand manager positions in Ukraine and the US do not differ. The hypothesis was formulated as follows: American and Ukrainian employers do not raise different recruitment requirements in terms of required practice and education, knowledge, technical and strategic competence for brand manager posts.

Findings: The comparison of the frequency of requirements for the applicants in Ukraine and the US showed differences. When testing the set of requirements for work experience and required practice for brand manager positions in Ukraine and the US, the Pearson's test confirmed the differences for $\alpha = 0.05$, $\alpha = 0.01$, and $\alpha = 0.001$. The Pearson's test also confirmed the difference in the group classified under the letter "Q" concerning education, specific knowledge, business management skills and transferable skills at all tested levels.

Conclusions: The findings raise more questions, both about the knowledge and skills of brand managers, and the nature of their role in the brand management process.

Keywords: brand manager, intellectual capital, knowledge, product management, skills, strategic competence

JEL Classification: D83, M12, M31, M51

Introduction

Across sectors and businesses, brand managers are most often responsible for both tactical decision-making and strategic development of assigned brands. Branding is riskier and less predictable nowadays, as events in the past decades have proven that there are no certainties in the world at large. The marketplace is significantly different from what existed even 15 years ago. According to Kotler, Keller (2012, p. 12), information network technology and globalization heightened competition together with seven other forces are major societal forces that have the greatest impact on marketing reality. Among the most significant social forces, seen by Kotler, Keller (2012, p. 13), is the consumers' involvement supported by the ability to make their voices be heard and to spread it quickly when they are not heard by a recipient. This marketing reality with intensive competition among domestic and foreign brands makes building a powerful brand more difficult than before. Managers with responsibility for tactical manoeuvring and managing brands deserve the attention of professional public.

General tasks and duties of brand managers were described (Upshaw, 1995; Kappferer, 1998; Keller, 2008; DeChernatony, 2009) and it is obvious that to fulfil them, brand managers must have knowledge, professional skills, and personal qualities. Since the up-to-date set of requirements placed on brand managers was not found in secondary sources, there is enough space for empirical research in this field.

The research project was designed to identify and compare the employers' requirements which are imposed on potential candidates at the beginning of the recruitment process, when brand manager job vacancies are published. Using the re-applied Berelson's method of content analysis makes it possible to analyse and discuss the requirements for job of brand managers in different countries. As they are the US, where the

concept of product management was first put in practice, the data from Ukraine, presented in scientific journals last year, was compared with the requirements of the American advertisers of the vacancies of the brand managers published in 2017.

The author finds it is worth focusing on the technical competence, qualifications, and professional experience, as well as strategic competence and behavioural competency of product managers and brand managers, as this kind of open position permanently attracts the attention of both graduates and experienced workers. The purpose of this paper is to present a research project developing to compare the labour market situation in Ukraine and the US, specifically vacancies for brand managers, and link the partial results with the secondary data, namely published research and literature already available.

1. Theoretical background

Many of authors, see for example Perreault, McCarthy, 1996; McDonald, Wilson, 2012; Kotler, Keller, 2016, and others, characterised marketing as a discipline and described its planning process and business function.

When updating the marketing concept, Kotler, Keller (2012, p. 18) accented the understanding of non-financial and financial benefits of marketing programmes for business and human society. The principles of marketing apply to all businesses, but they can differ in the intensity (McDonald, Wilson, 2012, p. 29). Nevertheless, the union of social structures created the prerequisites for globalization, the emergence of world markets, and the growth in demand for globalized goods and services. As the consequence, the marketing paradigm shifted. The new paradigm had its different characteristics: information orientation, process orientation, and relationship orientation (Achrol, Kotler, 2012).

Product management fulfils the requirement created by process-oriented approaches to management. Tomek, Vávrová (2009, p. 9) see product management as “an integrated product development and creation process, which corresponds to the market’s needs. Gorchels (2005, p. 313) considers brand management as a form of product management, emphasising that portfolio management by brand is mainly applied in consumer goods producing companies. Keller (2013, p. 31) highlights the difference between a product and a brand, the former refers to anything offered to the market, the latter is a broader concept involving the characteristics that distinguish the product from competing ones, which are on the market to meet the same need.

With the holistic marketing philosophy as a backdrop, according to Kotler, Keller (2012, p. 26–27), one can identify a specific set of tasks that make up successful marketing management and marketing leadership; among others it is building strong brands. According to Aaker (1991, p. 6), a brand is “a distinguishing name and/or symbol (such as a logo, trade-mark, or package design) intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors”. Kotler, Pfoertsch (2006, p. 3) point out that brands have almost the same goals on B2B markets as brands on B2C markets, because “they facilitate the identification of products, services and businesses, as well as differentiate them from the competition.”

To develop a set of requirements for the post of a brand manager means to start with what is his/her role in the strategic brand management process. The four strategic, tactical and operational steps are as follows: brand positioning, brand marketing, brand performance measurement and interpretation, and brand equity growth and sustainability; see Keller (2013, p. 58). In line with outcomes of intellectual capital research conducted by Nguyen, an improved customer intellectual,

behavioural and sensory experience with a brand is what managers should primarily strive for; see Nguyen *et al.* (2015).

The intellectual capital comprises organizational capital, consisting of institutionalized knowledge, owned organizations, social capital, and, last not least, human capital. Bontis (1999 in Armstrong, 2006, p. 33) refined the original content of the term “human capital”, stating that “human capital represents the human factor in the organization, the combined intelligence, skills and experience, that gives the organization its distinctive character”. Human factor in the organization aspires to be an indubitable competitive advantage if the organization has human resources with competencies that cannot be imitated or substituted by the competition (Barney, 1991 in Armstrong, 2006, p. 35).

There are a lot of definitions of the term “competency” and “competence” in secondary data. Noe and his colleagues define “competency” as a set of knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics that together enable an employee to perform his/her job (Noe *et al.*, 2017, p. 701). Personality traits and the type of behaviour required to deliver results, as for example a teamwork communication, are known as soft skills (Armstrong, 2006, p. 160). Grant (1996), using the language of the resource-based view of the firm, characterises strategic competence as meta-level competence that represents a confluence of individual and organizational characteristics. Sparrow, Hodgkinson (2006) define strategic competence at the organizational level as the ability to acquire, store, recall, interpret, and to act upon information of relevance to the longer-term survival and well-being of the organisation. It becomes clear that at the individual level cognitive skills are paramount (Sparrow, Hodgkinson, 2006). According to Armstrong (2006, p. 161), technical competences are defined as “what people have to know and be able to do (knowledge and

skills) to carry out their roles effectively". The expression "hard skills" are sometimes used instead of the term competence.

2. Objectives and research methodology

The paper brings a comparison of requirements for brand managers at the phase they are addressed by employers in both the US and Ukraine. The primary objective was to verify that the requirements for brand manager positions in Ukraine and the United States do not differ. The hypothesis was formulated as follows: American and Ukrainian employers do not raise different recruitment requirements in terms of required practice and education, knowledge, technical and strategic competence for brand manager posts.

For studying the content of recruitment advertisements, the repeatedly tested method of summative content analysis in arrangement by Bernard Berelson (1952 in Mioviský, 2006, p. 118) was used.

The sample of 74 Ukrainian vacancies in three Ukrainian regions (Kiev, Lviv, and Dnipropetrovsk) was compared with 58 job advertisements from three states in the USA (California, Illinois, New York). A collection of data from job sites Monster.com in the US and Work.ua in Ukraine lasted one month. The data segments were transferred into an electronic form. There were analysed requirements with frequency of occurrence exceeded 5 per cent in the analysed data files, for more details, please see the published articles (Wroblowska, 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2019).

The hypothesis regarding the analysed variable's independence on the sign representing the country where the job advertisements were posted was tested using chi-square statistics. The procedure was applied according to Řezanková (2007). The test was conducted at significance levels of 0.1, 1, and 5 per cent to detect whether the null

hypothesis concerning independence of the analysed variables can or cannot be rejected.

3. Results

The purpose of the article is to present and discuss the selected research outcomes, other results related to comparison of personality traits and behavioural competencies of brand managers in Ukraine and in the U.S.A. will be published in another scientific paper by the same author, which is now being revised and is not yet available to the public.

When designing the research methodology, the information previously published by the author in the presentation of the partial findings of a long-term research project focusing on the study of the human factor of brand managers and product managers, especially the sources quoted in Part 1 and 2, were used. As far as the other findings of the secondary data survey are concerned, they are mentioned in the Part 4 "Discussion".

Table 1 shows the sorted data from advertisement texts in the form of a frequency chart. The data provided information on published requirements for technical knowledge and skills, education, business management skills, language and IT skills, work experience and required practice, which were gained by analysing recruitment adverts in the selected regions of Ukraine. Table 1 also presents frequencies of occurrence of requirements for possessing a business-oriented and strategic mind-set. The group is presented under the letter "S". Table 1 also contains the results of the empirical research conducted in the US; for more details see Wroblowska (2017a). The number of analysed US advertisements totalled 58 advertisements, while in Ukraine, the sample of single advertisements consisted of 74 advertisements, when the same selection rules were applied.

The first comparison is shown in Figure 1, while Table 2 presents the chi-square outputs. Table 3 demonstrates the procedure of

Table 1. Employers' requirements for brand managers in Ukraine and the US.

Group	Job Requirements Qualifications and experience	USA Brand Manager		Ukraine Brand Manager	
		Abs.	Relative	Abs.	Relative
		Frequency		Frequency	
Q	education, knowledge, business management skills and transferable skills				
T	technical competence, knowledge and skills				
	1 business management skills	3	5.2%	15	20.3%
	2 knowledge of product management	12	20.7%	1	1.4%
	3 knowledge of brand management/brand marketing	0	0.0%	11	14.9%
	4 knowledge of marketing	33	56.9%	25	33.8%
	5 knowledge of project management	5	8.6%	4	5.4%
	6 knowledge of online media/media industry	1	1.7%	5	6.8%
	7 expertise aligned with a company business	8	13.8%	8	10.8%
L	education				
	8 university/higher education institution	35	60.3%	68	91.9%
W	general, transferable competencies				
	9 advanced level of English language	0	0.0%	28	37.8%
	10 work with the Internet/proficient in MS Office	26	44.8%	36	48.6%
S	strategic and business-oriented thinking				
	1 business thinking/mindset	7	12.1%	0	0.0%
	2 strategic thinking/mindset	32	55.2%	6	8.1%
	3 entrepreneurial thinking/mindset	6	10.3%	0	0.0%
R	required practice and work experience				
	1 previous sales experience	1	1.7%	6	8.1%
	2 professional experience	20	34.5%	3	4.1%
	3 work experience in marketing	28	48.3%	38	51.4%
	4 experience in the field/preferred experience	1	1.7%	23	31.1%
	5 experience with this position at least 1 year	2	3.4%	13	17.6%
	6 experience with this position at least 2 years	4	6.9%	16	21.6%
	7 experience with this position at least 3 years	18	31.0%	5	6.8%
	8 experience with this position at least 5 years	20	34.5%	0	0.0%

Source: Author's own study.

Table 2. Overview of the results of individual requirement group testing.

Groups of tested requirements	Chi-square value	df	Test result
Q Education, technical competence and general skills	56.8942271	9	H ₀ rejected
S Strategic and business-oriented thinking	2.3263158	2	H ₀ not rejected
R Required practice and work experience	80.1323047	7	H ₀ rejected
T Technical competence, knowledge and skills	31.9059741	6	H ₀ rejected

Source: Author's own study.

Figure 1. Comparison of the frequency of requirements for qualifications and work experience applied to candidates for brand manager positions in Ukraine and the US. Source: Author's own study.

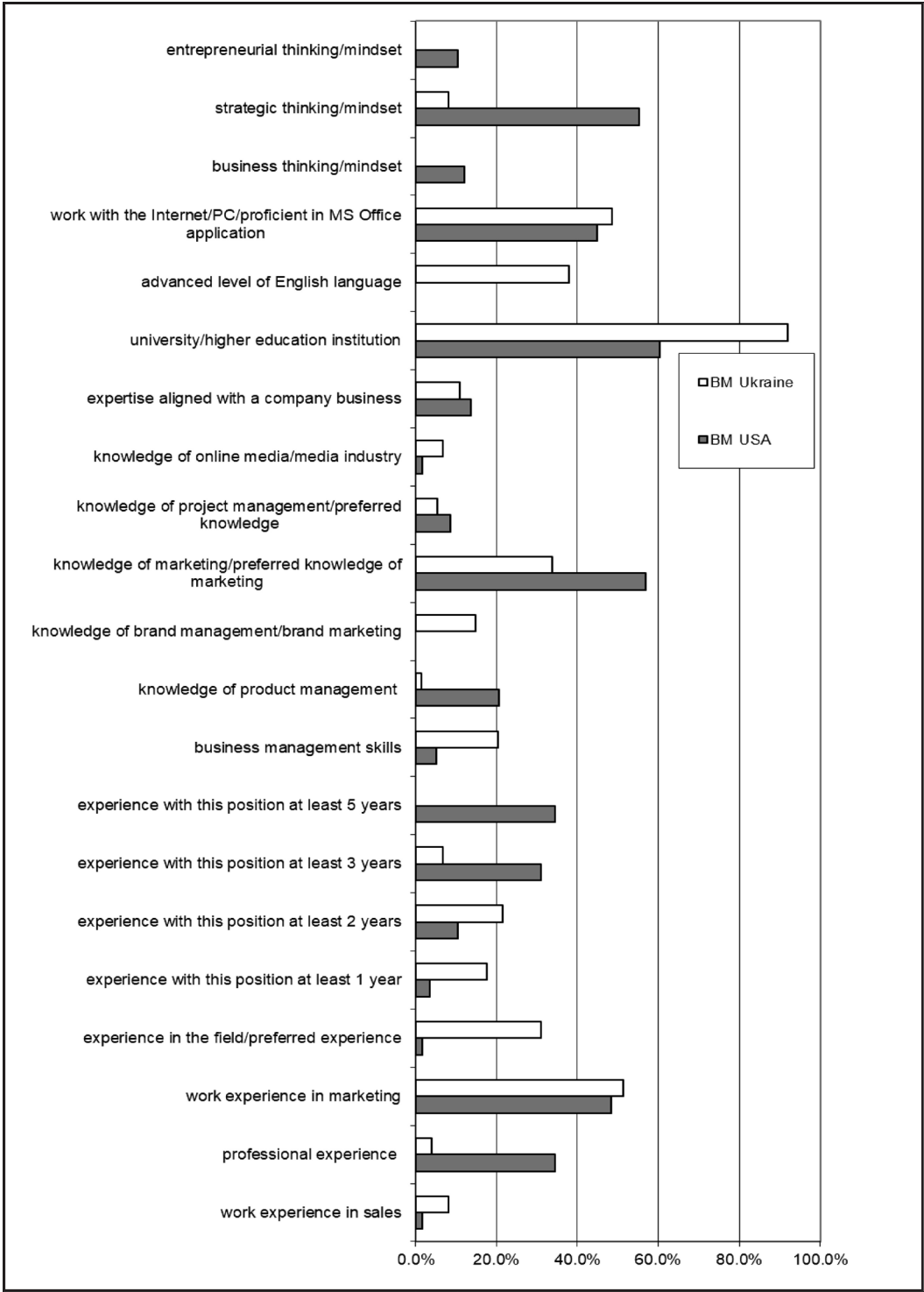


Table 3. Two-dimensional analysis for the group of technical competence, knowledge and business management skills.

Overall conclusion: At the significance levels of 0.1%, 1%, and 5% we can reject the null hypothesis; the probability distribution of the individual characters does not differ in groups brand managers in USA and Ukraine.				level		
				0.1%	1%	5%
The hypothesis that the columns and rows are independent of the level				refuse	refuse	refuse
TESTED DATA				rows	7	
				columns	2	
Tech. competence, knowledge and skills		Brand Managers		TEST OF INDEPENDENCE		
advertiser's requirements - group T		USA	Ukraine	chi-square	31.905974	
Signs of group T		A1	A2	level	0.002%	
business management skills = T1		3	15			
knowledge of product management = T2		12	1			
knowledge of brand manag./marketing = T3		0	11			
knowledge of marketing = T4		33	25			
knowledge of project management = T5		5	4			
knowledge of online media = T6		1	5			
expertise aligned with a empl. business = T7		8	8			
		62	69	0	0	0
A = position + country of data collection				expected frequency		
Signs of group T		A1	A2			
T1		8,5	9,5			
T2		6,2	6,8			
T3		5,2	5,8			
T4		27,5	30,5			
T5		4,3	4,7			
T6		2,8	3,2			
T7		7,6	8,4			
				post hoc - chi-square		
Signs of group T		A1	A2			
T1		3,6	3,2			
T2		5,6	5,0			
T3		5,2	4,7			
T4		1,1	1,0			
T5		0,1	0,1			
T6		1,2	1,1			
T7		0,0	0,0			
				adjusted residuals		
Signs of group T		A1	A2			
T1		-2,8053	2,8053			
T2		3,4224	-3,4224			
T3		-3,2848	3,2848			
T4		1,9551	-1,9551			
T5		0,5123	-0,5123			
T6		-1,5399	1,5399			
T7		0,2285	-0,2285			

Source: Author's own study.

The statistically significant difference in the distribution of frequencies of the analysed requirements was confirmed for $\alpha = 0.05$, $\alpha = 0.01$ and even for $\alpha = 0.001$, while testing the group classified under the letter "Q", which joins various requirements associated with qualifications, the group "R", which aggregates requirements for required practice and work experience, and for the narrower set of requirements for qualifications marked "T" the null hypothesis was rejected. The changes in the representation of the requirements for applicants for brand manager posts in the US and Ukraine are statistically insignificant for $\alpha = 0.05$ only for the group "S" which joins strategic, entrepreneurial, and business-oriented thinking/mind-set.

4. Discussion

At the outset, the purpose of the discussion is to confirm the suitability of the choice of information sources. The benefit of addressing knowledge workers through the Internet has been described (Sullivan, 2016; Wroblowska 2016). For example, the research conducted in 2013 by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (Armstrong, Taylor, 2014, p. 228–229) showed that advertisers generally give way to online recruitment. The criterion for selecting the data source in both countries (Ukraine and the US) was its top position among job websites.

Now, the results will be analysed, followed by the evaluation of the degree of the fulfilment of the scientific goal. In Ukraine, there was identified as the most frequent the "university education" requirement (67 cases, 68 in total with one requirement for "university education but not exactly at university"). This result confirms the demand for graduates, but at the same time it shows the different priorities of advertisers in both countries. Less than 10 per cent of Ukrainian advertisers, but more than one third of American employers

have not published what level of education they require. In the US, there were mentioned requirements for "higher education, but not university" once and "a university degree" in 35 cases. Completing post-graduate education and/or MBA diploma degree was not imposed on applicants for the position of brand managers in Ukraine at all, while the requirement for the mandatory or desirable post-graduate education or MBA diploma degree, which accompanied that one for the university degree, was mentioned in 25 cases in the US.

The second top requirement of Ukrainian employers is that one for work experience in marketing, which is also often announced in the US. The requirement "proficient in MS Office application and/or a good level of work with the Internet" is not surprisingly the third most frequent in Ukraine as well as in the US. The transferable skill "work with PC on a good level" ranked second in a set of 10 competencies in a survey organized by the American Society for Human Resource Management Association in cooperation with the US National Association of Manufacturing, as published by Casner-Lotto, Barrington (2006 in Noe *et al.*, 2010), which respondents identified as a key to success in the labour market in ten years. As a secondary remark, role-specific knowledge and skills have not been the subject of their research interviews.

Nevertheless, Table 1 shows the difference in the occurrence of business management skills requirements in both countries. Armstrong, Taylor (2014, p. 583) pointed out that these skills are required to adopt a business-like approach to management – one that focuses allocating of resources to business opportunities. Ukrainian employers seek brand managers who know the concepts of business models, who understand the business model innovation and who are able to implement them. Compared to the US findings, it cannot be concluded simply that employers are more demanding in Ukraine,

because American employers are significantly more emphasizing professional experience and a longer practice in the position enabling adoption of a business-like approach to management. Of course, completing a MBA degree is also an effective manner to master a business approach and increase the level of strategic competence.

As Figure 1 illustrates, there are some other differences between the findings from Ukraine and the US. Although applying the Pearson's chi-square test, the statistically significant difference was not confirmed at any level of significance for the group marked "S", as is presented in Table 2, it is evident that American employers are looking for brand managers with strategic and business-oriented thinking much more frequently. The importance of strategic competence is underlined by growing competition between domestic and foreign brands, with the logical consequence of increasing marketing costs, as noted by Kotler, Keller (2012, p. 12), and there is no doubt that heightened competition strongly influences the job demands in the US.

When testing the set of requirements for work experience and required practice (group "R") for brand manager positions in Ukraine and the US, the Pearson's chi-square test confirmed the differences for $\alpha = 0.05$, $\alpha = 0.01$, and $\alpha = 0.001$. The chi-square test also confirmed the difference in the group classified under the letter "Q" concerning education, specific knowledge, business management skills and transferable skills at all tested levels. This result led to decision to exclude the group of transferable skills from the analysis, as it is expected that recruiters in Middle and Eastern Europe are interested much more in language skills of applicants than in the US. Therefore, the following analysis focused on professional competence (marked "T"), which corresponds to the role-specific competencies and combines the specific knowledge, mainly in marketing, and business management skills, was carried out.

As illustrated in Table 3, the Pearson's chi-square test also confirmed the difference in the significance levels of 0.1%, 1%, and 5% for sets of technical competence in Ukraine and in the US. These three tests led the author to the following statement: "The hypothesis regarding the matching of requirements for the applicants for brand manager positions in the US and Ukraine was rejected on the basis of statistical verification."

Now the discussion will address benefits, research limitations and practical implications. This paper focuses on the issue characterized by a lack of complex, comprehensive, and classified information. If there is no publicly available analysis of brand manager jobs, analysing data gathered in the labour market represents a method to deepen the orientation of the issue and the comparison of any national market with the demanding US labour market is a manner how to obtain a valuable input for further research.

There are certain constraints determining the scope and boundaries of the research paper. Firstly, they consist in the selection of the three states and regions, nevertheless the reason for choosing three American states (Illinois, New York, California) and three Ukrainian regions (Kiev, Lviv, and Dnipropetrovsk) came from the assumption that those states and regions may seem attractive to highly skilled knowledge workers. Secondly, the chosen recruitment advertisements do not encompass the whole industrial spectrum nor represent all types of employers, either.

Despite these limitations, the author believes that the analysis brings insights into the brand manager's human factor, and the findings help talents to orient themselves in job market offerings not only in Ukraine. Moreover, cross-national study extended the validity of the findings and initiated a more vigorous discussion than it would have been in assessing findings from one national market. At present, the author is collecting the data from job websites in Slovakia in the

order to conduct a deeper international analysis of the issues.

5. Conclusion

The author finds it useful to focus on the requirements for brand managers, since it is a subject relevant to both sides of the labour market: for applicants for this job and for employers looking for the most competent candidates. Two facts were decisive for the choice of the brand manager position: first, the branding is a strong weapon in a competitive race in current markets influenced by turbulences, second a strong brand is considered as an integral part of each organization's intellectual capital. This article represents a comparison of requirements for candidates for the posts labelled "Brand Manager" collected from top ranked career portals in Ukraine and the US. The subject of analysis consisted in the requirements for technical competence, business management skills, transferable skills, as e.g. language and IT proficiency, strategic competence, required education, and practice and work experience. The hypothesis regarding the matching of requirements for qualifications and the required practice and length of work experience requested from the appli-

cants for brand manager positions in the US and Ukraine was rejected by applying the procedure of statistical verification, except testing the group associating strategic, entrepreneurial, and business-oriented thinking. Although the statistically significant difference was not found, when testing a set of signs of strategic competence, the comparison of absolute numbers showed that American employers highly prioritized applicants possessing the strategic mind-set, whereas Ukrainian advertisers seldom drew attention to strategic and business-oriented thinking. The findings raise further questions about the job of a brand manager with an emphasis on demonstrating their strategic role in the brand management process.

Comparing data collected from different labour markets – in Ukraine and the US – the study opens room for further discussion concerning the brand manager's job role and requirements imposed on the key role bearer in brand-oriented product management.

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RNDr. Zuzana Wroblowská, Ph.D.

College of Regional Development
and Banking Institute – AMBIS, a.s.
Department of Economics and Management
Lindnerova 575/1, Prague 8, 180 00
Czech Republic
Phone: +420 603 840 425
E-mail: zuzana.wroblowska@ambis.cz