

University Branding Impact on Academic Staff Commitment in the Egyptian Private Higher Education Sector

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The main purpose of this research is to examine the impact of employer branding on organizational commitment. A quantitative approach using Quota sampling technique was employed on the data gathered through a self-administered survey, that was conducted on a sample of 332 full time academic staff members working in the private universities in higher education sector in Egypt. The results indicated that there is a strong significant impact of employer branding on normative and affective commitment, while there is an insignificant impact on continuance commitment. This research will provide the selected universities with insight on how building a strong employer brand will help universities in enhancing the commitment of academic staff members. Future studies could focus on examining administrative staff because they come in a direct contact with students so their commitment is extremely important in enhancing university brand and performance.

Keywords Employer Branding (EB), Private Higher Education, Organizational Commitment (OC), Human Resource Management (HRM), Employee Retention. Developing Countries.

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Introduction

The increasing competition in the labor market creates a high demand for a qualified workforce, which forces organizations to put more emphasis on creating strategies to differentiate themselves in the market (Kuscu and Okan, 2010). Branding is considered according to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) as one of the most vital and valuable assets for any organization, that helps them to develop a lasting image in consumer's minds so that consumers start to automatically link a certain image with organizational services or products. However, branding can be applied in HRM to retain current employees and attract new ones as presented by Kunerth and Mosley (2011), when applying branding to HRM, this concept is called "Employer Branding" (EB) (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). Therefore the key to reach a long term sustainable development and technological advancement that creates productive entities is having a highly committed well-educated, competent workforce (Ng'ethe, Iravo, and Namusonge, 2012). So creating and maintaining academics high commitment level is a crucial factor for private universities to remain competitive in the market and sustain high levels of educational service quality offered to students (Bhatnagar, 2007 and Kipkebut, 2010).

This can be described in the context of a win-win perspective in which Kipkebut (2010) analyzed how private and public universities' academic and administrative staff commitment, satisfaction levels and turnover intention depend on HRM practices, the author concluded that both academics and administrative personnel are more satisfied and committed when their universities apply positive work practices. Kipkebut (2010) implied that a few studies have addressed the importance of organizational commitment between academics staff in developing countries, therefore this study will aim at measuring academic staff commitment level in Egyptian private higher education universities. Accordingly by identifying the main predictors of OC in this sector, universities will ensure higher performance level (Khan, Ziauddin, Jam, and Ramay, 2010). This is one of the few studies that has attempted to examine the Impact of employer branding concepts on organizational commitment within the Egyptian private higher education sector.

Theoretical background

Employer Branding(EB)

By the time competition started to increase among organizations in different sectors, the demand for attracting a qualified workforce increased (Gözükara and Hatipoğlu, 2016). Today the number of qualified talents is lower than before and the available candidates have more career choices and options so organizations are facing difficulty in attracting and retaining a qualified workforce. For organizations, it's important to appeal to the best possible applicants, attract them as well as motivating current employees to keep their employment and contribute fruitfully to their organizations (Tanwar and Prasad, 2016). As per Verma and Ahmed (2016) this forces organizations to develop attractive benefits for its potential and current employees, in addition to organizational ability to create a competitive edge through recruiting and retaining those who are capable of representing their organizations in front of their customers (Gözükara and Hatipoğlu, 2016). This is related to the assumption that each employee is considered the most valuable asset for any institution and organizations who are expert in human capital investment will take the advantage of having a successful EB in achieving higher levels of performance (Kuscu and Okan, 2010).

Different scholars have tried to define EB concept from different perspective as stated by Sokro (2012) although they all complement each other, starting by Ambler and Barrow

(1996) who were the first creators of this concept and presented three basic values that describe EB as “the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing organization, that together create a unique employer enthusiasm in the minds of job applicants and current employees and that make them willing to join or stay with the organization”. Based on Ambler's definition employer brand contains multiple facets that describe employment offers, through these facets, the main objective of an organization is to reach the status of being an employer of choice (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004).

Many researchers suggested different views in order to describe EB as a strategy to build an image in current and potential members mind to be “a great place to work” or to become an employer of choice (Srivastava and Bhatnagar, 2010) which means the reputation that is built over time. Knox and freeman (2006) defined EB as the organizational image that is seen through its current and prospective applicants eyes which is related to employment experience to describe what it is like to work for a certain organization including a set of tangible benefits like salary and intangible benefits like organizational culture or attributes that an organization offers and appeal to its employees. EB is about promoting what makes an organization unique and desirable as an employer, inside and outside the workplace to increase its attractiveness among potential and current employees as stated by Chhabra and Sharma (2014).

HR practitioners find that although retaining employees is considered a difficult task than attracting new applicants, however it has been proved by senior management and HR professionals that turnover is one of the most costly and major challenges facing organizations (Singh and Rokade, 2014). Keeping good calibers became even more and more challenging than before as the labor market starts to much tighter than before. Employees are considered as a free agent that can indeed leave at any time (Mathis and Jackson, 2011). The key for retention is by creating an environment that employees want to remain and develop in it, when an experienced employee decides to leave, he leaves with his valuable knowledge putting into consideration the expense and difficulty of replacing this talent, which forces organizations to retain this employee for a long time period other than attracting a new one as mentioned by Mathis and Jackson (2011). Hence, a qualified workforce shortage with organizational high demand for those employees developed a “war for talent”, that is the core driver for the high need and recognition of the importance of EB as an organizational discipline (Arachchige, 2013).

Organizational Commitment(OC)

OC is considered a crucial factor for boosting job performance, so managers should utilize the benefits of having a committed workforce, but the question is why organizations need to have committed employees, the main reason is the changes that take place regularly in a business environment that force organizations to have a distinct competitive edge in the market, which can be achieved by creating highly committed employees (Sutanto, 1999).

Moreover, research results by Porter, Steers, Mowday and Boulian (1974) suggested that employee with high commitment might perform better than an employee with low commitment level, Sutanto (1999) claimed that employees with high commitment tend to be much happier than others that they belong to a certain organization, feel good and believe in what it stands for and have strong intention to behave in a way that is good for the organization towards achieving its goals and objectives. Vaijyanthi, Roy, Shreenivasan, and Srivathsan (2011) stated that this implies that those employees tend to contribute and invest

their efforts and energy for the success of their organization, therefore show higher productivity, performance, lower absenteeism and turnover rate.

Becker (1960) explained commitment concept through the side-bets theory, in which Becker's concept revolves around the idea that employee will remain working for an organization as long as there is a value exchange with that organization, this exchange will be lost if decided to leave (which is about the accumulation of investment), "investments" refer to the degree that the possibility of participating in another organization is very low, for example, an employee will be strongly committed to his organization if the value of retirement fund will increase in relation to the number of working years in this organization, the longer the employee stays in his organization the more benefits he can get (Vaijayanthi, *et al.*, 2011). An alternative approach is a study that was done by Porter *et al.* (1974), in which commitment shifts from tangible side-bets to the psychological attachment that an individual holds towards an organization.

The multi-dimensional approach, in which two pioneering approaches were developed in the 1980s, one approach is proposed by Meyer and Allen (1984) while the other approach presented by O'Reilly and Chatman (1986). First, O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) stated that commitment is "the psychological attachment felt by individuals toward their organizations", reflecting the degree to which the employees adapt with the organizational characteristics, they claimed that individuals psychological attachment is predicted by three dimensions: Compliance (instrumental attachment) is about being committed to an organization because of gaining a specific reward, identification which is based on a desire for affiliation and internalization is about the alignment between employees values and goals with those of their employers (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986).

This paper will draw on Meyer and Allen's OC model, that is considered the most commonly used model in OC researches as stated by (Stazyk, Pandey and Wright, 2011) with high validity and reliability, in which they integrated the approaches developed by Becker (1960); Porter *et al.* (1974) through correlating the attitudinal and behavioral dimensions into one model to reach a more accurate measurement of OC as presented by Wong (2014). Meyer and Allen (1990) found out that to understand the nature of OC it is crucial to consider the three components concurrently.

Affective Commitment is an employee intention to stay with an employer because of an emotional bond with that employer and it is reflected in the "want to stay" component. This means that an employee with affective commitment continues to serve an organization because he wants to do so (Vaijayanthi *et al.*, 2011). This also reflects that the extent to which employees enjoy their working environment, an employee who enjoys his/her work, works better, and become intrinsically motivated. This is translated into a desire to strengthen the link between employer and employee, accordingly employer branding experience acts as a main predictor for creating employees with affective commitment as stated by (Fernandez-Lores, Gavilan, Avello and Blasco, 2016).

In line with these findings, it is assumed in a study done by Hanin, Stinglhamber and Delobbe (2013) that the more employees perceive their employment experience as composed of beneficial job conditions, the more they would be likely to get employees emotionally committed to the employer providing this attractive benefit package. Commitment reflecting an affective attachment is proved to provide a great benefit to any organization and associated

with desired work behaviors (Meyer and Maltin, 2010) over the other two types that are based on economic and social costs (Cooper-Hakim and Viswesvaran, 2005).

Continuance Commitment is created as the result of the cost associated with discontinuing employment with a certain organization such as attractive benefits, the threat of wasting time, effort spends there, disrupt personal relationships (Lambert, Hogan and Jiang, 2008). In other words, the perceived costs related to leaving it and it is reflected in the “have to stay” component (Vaijayanthi *et al.*, 2011). This type is supposed to be differentiated from affective commitment in which those who have the intention to stay in the organization because they have no other option or choice, while those employees with affective commitment are more familiar with the organization and emotionally attached to it, which makes employees want to stay (Dixit, 2012).

Suliman and Iles (2000), explored organizational commitment multidimensional nature in a non-western context, they argued that this type of commitment is a positive phenomenon that must be encouraged with a lot of cautious, in which employees with continuance commitment can leave at any time when the expected benefit from terminating employment with a certain organization become less than the cost of leaving. Hence, as long as the cost of leaving exceed that expected benefit so employee won't think of leaving the organization now, so it could be useful to encourage continuance commitment but with a lot of cautious (Suliman and Iles, 2000).

Normative Commitment, the third dimension is about employees' sense of moral obligation towards their employers as described by Allen and Meyer (1990) regardless of how much status improvement or fulfillment the employer provides the employee across the employment years and reflects the “ought to stay” component (Dixit, 2012; Vaijayanthi, *et al.*, 2011). Normative commitment differs from affective commitment through the belief of high sense of duty to keep employment with certain organization and not necessarily get emotionally engaged with, while at the same time it differs from continuance commitment in which it is not necessarily related to perceived or calculated costs associated with leaving as stated by Karakurum (2005).

Finally to conclude there are three groups of committed employees as stated by Allen and Meyer, one group decide to stay or leave depending on the cost of leaving versus rewards or benefits gained from leaving (continuance commitment), the other group intention to stay is associated with high sense of duty (normative one) this type is expected to contribute more in terms of attendance and performance but because this behavior could be as a result of obligation so they might be less enthusiastic about being involved in the organization than those with high emotional attachment that represents the third group of committed employees (He, 2008).

Relationship between Perceived University Branding and academic staff Commitment level

As mentioned earlier that employer branding is not only about attracting potential applicants but also maintaining existing ones, so there are major attributes that can be developed in employment value proposition and offered by employers that should drive high commitment levels (Ariffin, 2014). Joo and Mclean (2006) suggested that to become an employer of choice the following attributes should be considered: learning and career development, strong organizational culture and positive working environment with high sense of achievement and pride, in addition they added that employers with a strong workplace reputation have higher tendency to attract and retain talents and ensure a

sustainable organizational success, so it has been approved that EB attributes if delivered as promised will lead to creating an image of “ employer of choice” in the market place, which will create highly committed employees.

Previous studies have argued that there is a positive relation between EB as a total variable and OC as a total variable. As presented by Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2009) in their study that was applied on a hotel industry in Thailand on how employer brand experience plays an important role in strengthening employees commitment towards certain organization, data was analyzed through using simple regression and correlation tests, they concluded that the more employees have favorable employer brand experience, the better is their commitment level. Thus, a study done by Storsten and Ampuero (2013) supported the argument that employees who perceive EB positively, care more about their organizations and increase their satisfaction and commitment levels.

On the other hand, Vaijayanthi *et al.* (2011) studied the effect of employer branding as an antecedent to organization commitment on a sample of 58 respondents in different organizational environments in the case of service and manufacturing industry, they found out a low correlation value between employer brand with the organizational commitment. While other studies have focused on the affective commitment component only and showed that this type of commitment is significantly correlated with work experiences and favorable job conditions. Employees who encounter positive experiences at work or who receive desired outcomes from their organization would be more likely to reciprocate this favorable treatment by getting emotionally committed to their organization as stated by Hanin *et al.* (2013) and Fernandez-Lores *et al.* (2016).

Tanwar (2017) tried to measure the relationships between EB dimensions and OC in two IT firms operating in India using purposive sampling method in which the selected respondents were those who have been working there for more than two years, data was analyzed using structural equation modeling technique, the results showed a significant relationship between EB and OC, it was also suggested that the relationship between EB and OC could be measured in other sectors in future studies, OC has been examined as a total dependent variable instead of studying the effect of EB on each dimension of OC separately.

Another study by Sharma, Jain and Singh (2018) examined the impact of employer branding on organizational commitment, a convenient sample was selected from 150 employees working in IT sector in India, data was analyzed using correlation and regression analysis, the results showed a significant relationship between EB and OC (as total variables).

The above literature review shows a number of limitations in researches tackling EB attributes. More studies are needed to be further investigate EB across different sectors and in different cultural contexts other than the above-mentioned ones, this would provide evidence as to whether reputation, economic, social, diversity, and development attributes are considered universal or industry-specific drivers on employees’ favorable attitudes towards their employers. In addition few studies have directly tackled current employees perspective on employer branding; the majority have tackled EB from the perspective of potential applicants. Also limited number of researches studied the relationship between employer branding attributes on each dimension of organizational commitment dimensions in higher education context specifically in the Egyptian context.

This research argues that the growing number of private universities in Egypt creates a variety of employment choices to academic staff. The absence of an effective employer branding strategy and the delivery of meaningful and beneficial employer branding attributes might affect academic staff commitment negatively thus contributing to high turnover intention rate which negatively affects the ability of private universities to compete effectively locally and internationally. This argument coupled with the research gaps mentioned above clarify the main problem of this research.

Towards this end, the current research will tackle perceived employer branding from the current academic staff perspective in private universities operating in Egypt. consequently the following hypothesis will be tested:

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant positive impact of university branding on academic staff commitment level.

Organizational commitment is measured using three dimensions; accordingly this hypothesis can be classified into the following sub hypotheses:

H1a: There is a positive significant impact of university branding on affective commitment.

H1b: There is a positive significant impact of university branding on normative commitment.

H1c: There is a positive significant impact of university branding on continuance commitment.

Research Context and Methodology

This research is applied on full-time academic staff members working in private universities in Egypt. The main reason for selecting private higher education sector as an area of application in this research is the growth in Egyptian private higher education sector, in which the number of newly established private educational universities is increasing throughout the past years, as per CAPMUS report, which lead to more efforts to compete with each other to headhunt highly qualified academics. Given the lack of sampling frame, non-probability Quota Sampling technique is used in which a predetermined proportion of respondents are sampled from different private universities to represent a variety of academic staff working in each university.

Seven private universities have been selected because they are considered a very well-known, early established in the educational sector nearly in the early (1996) in Egypt, which has provided them with an opportunity to build an employer brand throughout their years of establishment, moreover they include a good variety of faculties with multidiscipline. The researcher selected those seven universities in light of some constraints related to time, cost and the ability of the researcher to get a formal approval of departments heads or faculty deans to contact academic staff within those faculties, so the researcher tried to represent different universities from different years of establishment as presented in the following table:

Table (1): Selected universities

University	Established Year	Number of Faculties
MSA	1996	9
MUST	1996	13
MIU	1996	6
GUC	2003	5
MTI	2004	8
BUE	2005	9
FUE	2006	6

Source: Universities website and CAPMUS report, the academic year 2017- 2018, Issued in March 2019

Out of the 400 surveys distributed, only 332 valid questionnaires were used in the analysis with a response rate of 90.5%. The respondents' mean age was 34 years old and 55% of them were females. Respondent's academic rank was distributed as follows: Teaching assistant (40%), Lecturer assistant (20%), Lecturer (17%), Associate professor (16%), Professor (7%), 55% of the respondents from faculties of science while 45% were from faculties of humanity.

To measure employer branding as the independent variable in this study, staff members were required to evaluate their perception of employer branding attributes regarding their current university in terms of reputation, social, development, diversity and economic benefits. These measurement items were partly adapted from the study of Berthon, Ewing and Hah (2005) and modified by Schlager, Bodderas, Maas and Cachelin (2011) in which the reliability of the scale used for each dimension was: 0.82, 0.84, 0.82, 0.71 and 0.85 respectively.

An example of an item from the reputation benefit subscale is: "[...] *Good employer name to have on my resume.*" For the social benefit subscale: "[...] *There is a friendly relationship among individual co-workers in this university.*". For the development benefit subscale: "[...] *There is a good internal training opportunity inside the university*". For the economic benefits subscale: "[...] *It provides a competitive salary package than others operating in the same field.* And for the diversity benefit subscale: "[...] *There is a good variety of work activities.*

The most commonly used measurement for organizational commitment(OC) is developed by Allen and Meyer (1990). OC is represented by affective, normative and continuance commitment as the dimensions of the dependent variable in this study, the reliability of the scale for each dimension was: 0.87, 0.79 and 0.75 respectively.

An example of an item from the affective subscale is: "[...] *I do not feel emotionally attached to this university.*" For the continuance subscale is: "[...] *I believe that I have too few options to consider when I decide to leave this university now.*" And for the normative subscale is: "[...] *I have to stay in one university for most of my career.*"

Analysis and Findings

The employer branding was measured using 25 items, the reliability of the scale was measured and the Cronbach's alpha was equal to .88. A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sample adequacy for the 25 items related to employer branding was found to be significant with a value of .843. As for the organizational commitment scale, the survey consists of 15 items, Cronbach's alpha was equal to .78. The KMO test results were found to be significant with a value of .795, the high value indicates that the pattern of correlations among items. To examine the relationship between employer branding and organizational commitment a correlation analysis was performed. A significant positive relationship was found between employer branding and organizational commitment ($r=.557, p<.05$). The correlation analysis results revealed that the more employees perceive their university branding positively the more they become committed towards their employers.

Following the correlation analysis, Table(2) showed that a stepwise regression analysis was conducted, the results demonstrated that all the five dimensions of EB together have significant influence on increasing affective commitment of academic staff. Analyzing the influence of the different EB attributes showed that the social benefit ($\beta= .25, t(4.75), p < .05$) was the strongest significant contributor to creating affective commitment, followed by economic benefit ($\beta= .23, t(3.75), p < .05$) and development benefits ($\beta= .16, t(2.67), p < .05$) respectively, while Reputation ($\beta = .131, t(2.11), p < .05$) and diversity benefits ($\beta = .111, t(2.09), p < .05$) are the least contributors,. The regression analysis results revealed that social benefits such as “friendly relationship between co-workers” and “strong team spirit” had a positive impact on affective commitment, as for the adjusted R^2 which is equal to 0.30, which means that 30 % of the variance in affective commitment accounted for the five dimensions together, therefore H1a was accepted.

Table (2) Stepwise Regression Model for the effect of EB attributes on Affective Commitment

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T		F		Adjusted R square
		B	Std. Error	Beta	Value	Sig.	Value	Sig.	
	(Constant)	.409	.243		1.685	.093	29.551	.000 ^e	.301
	Development	.161	.060	.154	2.672	.008			
	Social	.248	.052	.236	4.746	.000			
	Economic	.229	.061	.207	3.749	.000			
	Reputation	.131	.062	.111	2.105	.036			
	Diversity	.111	.053	.112	2.087	.038			

Dependent Variable: Affective Commitment - No excluded Variables

As for normative commitment, Table(3) showed that reputation benefit ($\beta= .299, t(5.34), p < .05$) was the strongest significant contributor to normative commitment followed by economic benefit ($\beta= .164, t(2.94), p < .05$) and development benefits($\beta= .162, t(3.00), p < .05$) respectively, while diversity benefit ($\beta = .128, t(2.69), p < .05$) is the least contributor . The regression analysis results revealed that reputation benefits such as “work-life balance arrangements”, “delivery of high-quality educational service” had a positive impact on normative commitment, as for the adjusted R^2 which is equal to 0.299 which means that 30% of the variance in normative commitment accounted for the four dimensions together, therefore H1b was accepted.

Table (3) Stepwise Regression Model for the effect of EB attribites on Normative Commitment

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T		F		Adjusted R square
		B	Std. Error	Beta	Value	Sig.	Value	Sig.	
	(Constant)	.476	.201		2.368	.018	36.312	0.000	.299
	Reputation	.299	.056	.278	5.342	.000			
	Economic	.164	.056	.163	2.948	.003			
	Development	.162	.054	.170	3.000	.003			
	Diversity	.128	.048	.144	2.689	.008			

Dependent Variable: normative commitment – Excluded: Social

Finally, table (4) showed that there is an insignificant relationship between EB and continuance commitment since the significance level is more than 0.05 accordingly regression analysis was not performed, therefore H1c is rejected.

Table (4) Correlation test between EB attributes and Continuance Commitment:

Model Variable	Correlation Coefficient	Significance (two-tailed)**
Reputation	0.003	0.952
Social	-0.029	0.601
Development	0.007	0.902
Diversity	0.034	0.531
Economical	0.086	0.117

** Correlation is significant at $p \leq 0.05$ (two-tailed)

The result from multiple regression and correlation analysis indicated that there is a significant positive impact of perceived EB on affective commitment (H1a), a significant positive impact of perceived EB on normative commitment (H1b) and no significant relationship between perceived EB and continuance commitment (H1c). Therefore EB has a significant effect only on two of the OC components: affective and normative commmitement.

Discussion

The objective of this research was to find out the effect of employer branding on organizational commitment and the results revealed that there is a strong significant positive relationship between EB (as a total variable) and OC (as a total variable) with a correlation coefficient value of (0.557) this positive relationship between EB and OC indicates that academic staff’s Commitment directly depends on how successfully employer branding attributes have been perceived and applied in the university.

Besides, it was found that the perceived EB has a significant positive correlation with the affective and normative type of commitment but no correlation with continuance commitment, which is consistent with the study of Akuratiya (2017) who found a significant relationship between the same variables but weak relationship between EB and continuance commitment. This means that staff perception of their EB strengthens the level of affective and normative commitment among academics and contradicts the study of Vaijayanthi *et al.* (2011) who stated that all three components of OC had very little relationship with EB.

The stepwise regression analysis supported correlation analysis results. For affective commitment, the underlying theme is that having a “strong team spirit” with a “friendly relationship among co-workers and their supervisors”(the items that represent social value) have been proved by many scholars as important drivers for positive employees attitude as per Harrison, Newman and Roth (2006) and Avery, McKay and Wilson (2007) that

employees who are strongly identified with their organizations and their co-workers are emotionally attached to their organizations than others, this finding is in line with Matongolo, Kasekende and Mafabi (2018) who argued that creating an open, friendly working environment will result in creating a highly motivated employees who wish to maintain employment with organization for a long time. These are in keeping with Zeytinoglu and Denton (2005) who stated that the relationship between staff members and their peers or supervisors may be a reason for leaving or staying with their employers.

As for normative commitment component the high sense of moral obligation can come up from several factors; when an employee feels that by leaving now he/she would put a lot of pressure on his/her colleagues or the sense of obligation that an employee should stay employed with the university because it invested a huge amount of money on his/her training, another factor would be that the university might provide that employee with a reward such as: paying for his postgraduate studies fees. The stepwise regression results demonstrated that out of the five dimensions of EB, it was found that reputation benefit has a significant influence on encouraging normative commitment among academic staff, which is supported by a study done by Beheshtifar and Allahyary (2013) who proved a strong relationship between organizational reputation and commitment level, therefore, having a strong reputation leads academic staff to compete to maintain its employability with their current employer which will increase their sense of loyalty and moral obligation to stay. Ariffin (2014) who added that organizations with a strong workplace reputation have higher tendency to attract and retain talents and ensure sustainable organizational success, reputation could also be built through work-life balance policies that increase employees' possibility to stay in an organization that offers such benefit as supported by Deery (2008).

Finally, correlation analysis results show that there is an insignificant relationship between EB and continuance commitment. This finding is in contrary to the study done by Akuratiya (2017) who found a relationship between employer branding and continuance commitment. He stated that those who stay in a university, stay because they are afraid if they moved to another university, they will not find the same benefits in their current one, such as good relationship among their colleagues, fringe benefits and competitive compensation package (fear of loss). The findings are also inconsistent with Matongolo *et al.* (2018) who proved that academics are likely to stay in their universities even if they get an opportunity to change their careers just because of the open and friendly working environment.

Conclusion

Since employees in general and academic staff, in particular, are the most valuable asset for any educational organization, universities should always try to identify the different strategies that could lead to increasing their commitment level. Accordingly, this paper has highlighted the indispensable need for universities to develop employer branding attributes that can assist each university in differentiating itself in the market, in order to face the tough competition that exists in private higher education sector and maintain their talented academic staff. This could be achieved through providing attractive EB attributes which will help the academic staff to be more committed to their universities.

This research has also revealed that different attributes of EB can have different effects on the dimensions of academic staff commitment. The social attribute of the EB shows the strongest significant effect on affective while the reputation attribute shows the strongest significant effect on normative commitment. All EB attributes did not have a

significant effect on continuance commitment. These results should guide universities in continuously evaluating the different attributes of their EB in order to maintain a significant commitment level from academic staff.

The research has also revealed that employees with high affective commitment levels are more likely to remain in their organizations and add more to organizational success than employees with continuance and normative commitment. Despite that the three types of commitment should be encouraged by universities with more cautious given to continuance type of commitment.

Research Implications

From this perspective, the results of this research suggested that private universities aiming to improve academic staff level of commitment should focus on developing a strong employer branding strategies based on their preference for the crucial employer branding attributes which are highlighted in the analysis. Accordingly for each university to promote itself as one of the best places to work for, it should focus on the reputational benefits offered to its current and prospective staff members through creating a working culture that provides alternative work arrangements in terms of the ability to alter working hours, time off or leave arrangements according to each staff member's needs in other words providing a suitable work life balance policies. In addition to providing an access to a suitable childcare arrangements (for working mothers).

As for the social dimension of EB, it is considered a crucial dimension since higher education sector is people oriented and service provider sector that depends on human resources mainly, universities must develop social plans where their emphasis is on creating a healthy social friendly environment through employing practices such as: arranging team building activities, social gathering (celebrating staff members birthdays, having breakfast together once per month, celebrate wins; in terms of recognizing a milestone or achieving a goal...etc) through enhancing workplace friendship and improve staff moral by showing all members that important events are noticed and praised.

Private universities should properly conduct training need analysis to determine what their staff needs for their career path, then ensure a proper learning experience, each university has a reasonable number of qualified well trained staff members who can deliver as expected which will be reflected on the developmental dimension of EB. In addition to career development programs for example preparing teaching assistant to be assistant lecturer, assistant lecturer to be a researcher, researchers to be capable of publishing in A* journals, and have the skills needed for applying for research funding, in addition to developing international exchange programs among international universities and offering consultancy services under university name.

It is also suggested that HR department should give a great importance to the economic dimension of EB through designing an attractive compensation package which include competitive salary (taking into account cost of living, qualifications of staff member, market value of potential hire) adding to that proper incentives and proper health benefit package. Compensation could take the form of money, along with non monetary rewards like: staff certificate of appreciation, gifts as a symbol for encouragement or to deliver a sense of appreciation for working hard, additional time off or even rewards that are given based on staff member length of service in their current university, in addition to offering one or two awards for teaching excellence across each faculty at the end of each academic year. It's also

necessary to present attractive physical facilities (in terms of office, equipment, facility.. etc.) to do their job effectively.

Finally private universities should start by understanding what staff members find attractive about their employer and ensure that their EB attributes reflect the interest of their current staff as well as the distinctive identity of the university then design a message that can affect academics perception towards the benefits provided by their university during their service longevity.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Certain limitations should be taken into consideration, the results obtained cannot be generalized on public universities or other sectors due to differences in terms of their objectives and practices. The population is limited only to full-time academic staff members, moreover the majority of the research sample is limited to teaching assistants and assistant lecturers, they represent 60% of the total research sample. Perceived employer branding is measured from the perspective of internal customers only (current academic staff).

Further research could focus on analyzing the difference between potential staff members' perception (high ranked senior students who are about to graduate) and existing staff perception towards employer branding in the same sector or industry. This research is limited to private universities in higher education sector, similar studies could be conducted to compare academic staff perception of EB in public versus private universities.

Other studies could be developed to include administrative staff because they also come in direct contact with students and their parents so their satisfaction, commitment and retention are extremely important in maintaining a positive reputation for universities. Finally, using mixed methods for conducting a similar study and collecting data using questionnaires and interviews would yield rich data and results that could be more insightful into how employees perceive their EB, what aspects of EB should be developed to reflect their needs and how EB affect different behavioral outcomes such as employees' satisfaction, commitment and engagement.

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