

# Are Employees Committed to the Brand?

## Developing a Measurement Tool

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### Abstract

Employer branding as a source of sustainable competitive advantage has received increasing importance in the last few years. Attracting, retaining and above all committing the best employees is essential for organizational success. The objective of this paper is to develop a reliable and valid scale able to reflect employee's affective commitment towards employer brands. To do so, we conducted four different studies. A better understanding of the dimensions underlying affective commitment to an employer brand will have important implications to those companies who wish to implement strategies oriented to attract, and commit outstanding workforce.

### 1. Introduction

The development of a service-based economy, the growing importance of intangible assets and intellectual capital as a source of strategic advantage, in addition to the increasing power of brands, expressed by the value of companies such as Google, Apple or McDonalds in the BrandZ Top Index<sup>(1)</sup>, incentivates companies to develop stronger brands.

Marketers and practitioners unanimously accept that products and corporate brands are among the most valuable assets of a company<sup>(2)</sup>; and the goal of branding strategies is always to attract, retain and engage customers by creating brand's value in the consumer mind.

Within the field of consumer marketing, brand success relies on promises that add value for the customer. In the last years these promises have clearly evolved towards the development of strong emotional content<sup>(3,4,5)</sup>. Emotions strengthen attachment to a brand and might predict desirable behaviors such as buying or even willing to pay a premium price for it.

Until fairly recently, customers were seen to be only those external to the company. However, branding literature has broadened its focus by considering that the firm's first customers are their own employees<sup>(6)</sup>, the rationale being that employees are internal customers and jobs can be seen as internal products. Therefore, employer branding strategies should address this internal "customer" and attract, retain and commit talented employees by satisfying their needs and wants. In this context, the brand should address the overall objectives of the organisation<sup>(5,7)</sup>.

In line with consumer brands, employer brands are moving towards the delivery of emotional benefits to achieve employees' commitment<sup>(8)</sup> as a first step towards the generation of desirable behaviours or brand citizenship behaviours (BCB) as defined by Burman and

Zeplin (2009): willingness to help, willingness for further development and brand enthusiasm<sup>(9)</sup>.

## 2. Background

### Employer Branding

Ambler and Barrow<sup>(10)</sup> coined the term employer branding to refer to all the benefits offered by a company, which creates a unique identity in the eyes of applicants and employees, and make them willing to join or stay with the company. In essence, authors suggest that just like a traditional brand, an employer brand has a personality and an image in the mind of labour market able to create tight bonds between the brand and its workforce. The company, above all others is a great place to work<sup>(11)</sup>. An employer brand represents a “value proposition” that individuals believe they will receive when working for a specific employer<sup>(12)</sup>.

### Brand commitment

Commitment is viewed as a central concept in the relationship marketing literature<sup>(13)</sup>. The increased attention given to commitment is responsible for many important developments both in theory and research.

Despite employee commitment to the organization has been covered comprehensively in the management literature<sup>(14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19)</sup>, its focus has been the relationship between the employee and the organization.

From a marketing perspective, employees can develop closer relationships with the employer brand, just as consumers do with product brands<sup>(20, 21)</sup>. In this sense, employer brand commitment contributes, from a new perspective, to understand and predict work behavior and its projection on customers.

### Affective Brand Commitment

Commitment is a complex multi-faceted construct, related with attitudes and behaviors<sup>(22)</sup>. Allen and Meyer<sup>(23)</sup> identified three dimensions in the definition of commitment: commitment as affective attachment, commitment as perceived cost associated with leaving the organization, and commitment as an obligation to remain in the organization. They referred to these three forms of commitment as *affective*, *continuance*, and *normative* commitment, respectively. However, the nature of the psychological state for each form of commitment is different. Only employees with a strong affective commitment remain with the organization because they desire to. Someone who is affectively committed (i.e., has a strong feeling of attachment to the brand) might be more likely to keep up with developments of the brand (i.e., willingness to talk about the brand with others) than someone who is not so engaged. Thus, affective commitment to employer brand becomes a marketing goal.

Employee's affective commitment to the employer brand might predict their willingness to make extra efforts expressed by citizenship behaviours<sup>(9, 10)</sup>. Unfortunately, no empirical tested measure of affective brand commitment is available. Consequently, it is difficult for both, researchers and practitioners to appraise the strength of the relationship between employees and their employer brand.

Therefore, there is a need to develop a suitable instrument to measure the strength of the link between employees and employer brands, specifically for affective employer brand commitment.

The objective of this research is therefore to advance a reliable and valid measurement scale that reflects employee's affective commitment to employer brands. To do so, we conducted four different studies. A better understanding of the dimensions of affective

commitment to an employer brand will have important implications to those companies who wish to implement strategies oriented to attract, retain and generate commitment from outstanding workforce.

### **3. Method**

#### **1. Study 1: Qualitative study.**

First, we conducted a qualitative research based on 5 focus groups with employees of three multinational companies in Spain. The main objective at this point was to generate as many items as possible to define what employees understand are the main descriptors of affective commitment with the employer brand. The results of the qualitative study together with an extensive literature review about employee's commitment<sup>(8, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 24, 25, 26)</sup> ended up with the generation of 96 items. With these items we developed a questionnaire that captured all the dimensions of affective brand commitment. After initial screening and face validity (back translation was used), we retained 80 items grouped in 7 dimensions: emotional attachment (15 items), identity with the brand (15 items), sense of belonging (10 items), evangelization (14 items), long term orientation (14 items), persistence (5 items), and reciprocity (7 items).

#### **2. Study 2: Pretest**

The objective of study 2 was to identify if items were clear and suitable. We send the questionnaire to a sample of 64 employees from different companies selected among main banking companies. We ask them to evaluate the extent to which the 80 items described their commitment with the employer brand using a 7-point Likert scale (1= not descriptive at all, 7= totally descriptive) and collected suggestions on wording to improve the final scale. We retained items with the highest frequency of mention a mean value greater than 4.5 and standard deviation less than 2.0, for a total of 55 items.

#### **3. Study 3: Item reduction and Confirmation of the Dimensions.**

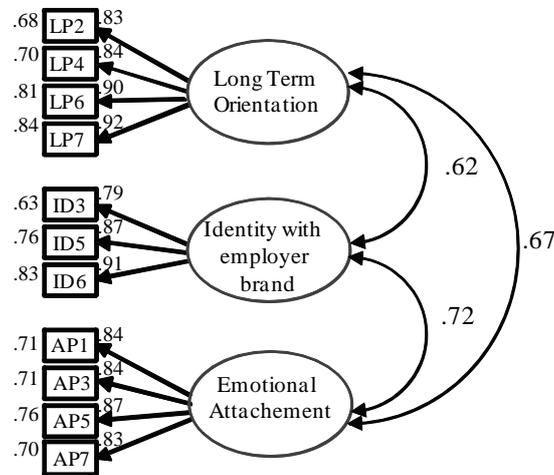
We designed study 3 to further reduce the number of items. For this purpose we asked a new sample of 495 employees, also belonging to main banking companies, to indicate the extent to which the 55 items described their commitment with the employer brand. For this purpose we used a 7-point Likert scale (1=totally disagree, 7=totally agree). 20% of the items were negatively worded. Next, we conducted both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. The exploratory factor analysis using Varimax rotation revealed a six factor solution with eigenvalues greater than 1 (variance explained=71.4%), but only three of them were significant based on a screen plot. Additionally, three of the factors were easy to interpret. Factor 1 measured long term orientation, Factor 2 emotional attachment and factor 3 identification with employer brand. Factors 4, 5 and 6 included a mix of items. To determine whether the three-factor solution could provide a better structure and to reduce the number of items further, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis that restricted the number of factors to three (64.6% of variance) and used a stricter loading criterion (>0.7) to evaluate the rotated factors (See table 1).

Table 1: Employer Brand Affective Commitment dimensions revealed by Exploratory Factor Analysis

CONSTRUCT	Factor		
	1	2	3
LP4 My Commitment with the Employer Brand is long term oriented	<b>.842</b>		
LP6 I desire to work for Employer brand for a long time	<b>.835</b>		
LP2 I would feel sad if I had to leave Employer Brand	<b>.830</b>		
LP7 I feel myself part of employer Brand and I wish to remain like this in the	<b>.825</b>		
LP3 I am loyal to Employer Brand	<b>.773</b>		
PERS3 I remain constant in my commitment with Employer Brand	<b>.670</b>		
ID3 I feel that any problem of Employer Brand is also my problem	<b>.827</b>		
ID6 I feel Employer's Brand projects as mine	<b>.804</b>		
ID4 Employer Brand's problems affect me	<b>.799</b>		
ID5 Employer Brand's successes are also mine	<b>.760</b>		
AP5 I am fond of Employer Brand			<b>.81</b>
AP1 I have developed strong bond ties with Employer Brand			<b>.81</b>
AP3 I am emotionally attached to Employer Brand			<b>.79</b>
AP7 I feel the "colors of my team"			<b>.75</b>

The confirmatory factor analysis was used to estimate parameters and compute goodness-of-fit measures through Maximum Likelihood estimator (See Figure1). Three items were deleted due to cross saturations with other factors; PERS3, LP3 and ID4. The confirmatory model - with 11 indicators, 3 latent variables and 41 degrees of freedom - indicate acceptable fit. GFI: 0.961, AGFI: 0.937, NFI: 0.975, TLI: 0.980, IFI: 0.985, CFI: 0.985, RMSEA: 0.05<sup>(27)</sup>.

Figure 1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Employer Brand Affective Commitment dimensions



Measurement of theoretical constructs through empirical indicators requires ascertaining of the adequacy of these indicators to latent variables (validity) and obtaining consistent results in consecutive measurements (reliability). Table 2 shows the values obtained for validity and reliability indices in the measurement model<sup>(28)</sup>.

Both construct reliability (values over 0.8) and variance extracted (values over 0.7), as well as high values of Cronbach's Alpha, assure model reliability and scale internal consistency<sup>(29)</sup>.

Table 2: Validity and Reliability Indexes

CONSTRUCT	item	Standard regression weight.(standard error)	T	Cronbach's Alpha	Construct Reliability	AVE
LONG TERM ORIENTATION	LP2	0.825 (.039)	24.453	0.926	0.93	0.76
	LP4	0.836 (.036)	25.149			
	LP6	0.899 (.033)	30.631			
	LP7	0.918				
IDENTITY WITH EMPLOYER BRAND	ID3	0.793		0.892	0.89	0.74
	ID5	0.874 (.05)	20.626			
	ID6	0.911 (.05)	21.794			
EMOTIONAL ATTACHEMENT	AP3	0.843 (.047)	22.99	0.911	0.91	0.72
	AP7	0.835 (.045)	22.988			
	AP1	0.842 (.042)	22.993			
	AP5	0.871				

Regarding convergent validity, all standardized factor loadings are significant and range over 0.80. Therefore, we have evidence of convergent validity of our measures<sup>(30)</sup>.

Discriminant validity refers to the fact that each factor or latent variable should represent a different dimension to the rest. Fornell and Larcker<sup>(28)</sup> proposed that discriminant validity exists between two latent variables since the extracted variance ( $\rho_{vc}$ ) estimates of the latent dimensions exceed all  $\phi$  correlations between pairs of constructs (see Table 3). The results obtained indicate that the average extracted variance of the latent dimensions, which ranges between 0.72 and 0.76, is in all cases, higher than the values taken by the square correlations between factors.

Table 3: Discriminant validity

	EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT	IDENTITY WITH EMPLOYER BRAND	LONG TERM ORIENTATION
EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT	<b>0.72</b>		
IDENTITY WITH EMPLOYER BRAND	0.52	<b>0.74</b>	
LONG TERM ORIENTATION	0.44	0.39	<b>0.76</b>

Figures in diagonal = AVE

#### 4. Study 4: Additional Reliability and Discriminant Validity Tests on the scale

The purpose of Study 4 was to validate the Affective Commitment Scale in several ways. First, to provide evidences of consistency across populations. Second, to provide discriminant validity. We asked a new sample of 209 employees of the banking sector to fill a questionnaire on the 11-item affective commitment scale and also on other different scales of related concepts: Motivation<sup>(31)</sup> and Satisfaction<sup>(32)</sup>. Using confirmatory factor analysis the three factor model fit was again acceptable ( $\chi^2$  183.6 (41)  $p < 0.001$ ; CFI= .935; RMSEA= 0.07). Each item loaded on the predicted factor with standardized coefficients above 0.70.

Then we conducted a factor analysis on the composite affective commitment scales together with two related concepts: Motivation and Satisfaction which revealed a three-factor-

solution (variance extracted 69.8%) displaying discriminant validity. Results showed that all dimensions loaded in different constructs. Table 4 shows the factor pattern after axis rotation. Table 4: Exploratory Factor Analysis (varimax rotation) with Emotional Affective Dimensions and measurements of Motivation and Satisfaction.

	1	2	3
LONG TERM ORIENTATION	.04	.83	.21
EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT	.36	.68	.14
IDENTITY WITH EMPLOYER BRAND	.19	.56	.08
MOTIVATION	.70	.15	.36
SATISFACTION	.31	.01	.58

#### 4. Discussion, limitations and managerial implications

The objective of this research is to advance a reliable and valid scale that reflects employees affective commitment to an employer brand. We found that affective commitment is a multidimensional construct consisting of three dimensions: long term orientation, identity with employer brand and emotional attachment.

The affective employer brand scale is short and easy to administer, consisting of 11 items. It also went through several reliability and validity tests. Additionally, the scale displays discriminant validity from other related constructs such as motivation or satisfaction.

From a managerial perspective, the scale provides a useful tool to evaluate the efficacy of employer branding strategies, suggesting specific areas of branding development able to enhance employer brand commitment.

Further research is needed on the reliability and validity of the scale as well as on the behaviors that employee's affective commitment to the employer brand might predict.

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