



Exploring the Influence of Employer Branding Strategies on Employee Engagement

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ABSTRACT: Employer branding has become a strategic tool for employee retention, and firms have used it as a means of maintaining a staff that is both stable and competitive. An employer brand that is strong is characterized by values that include social, economic, reputational, development, and diversity opportunities. The literature demonstrates that there are variances in employee engagement in terms of values, preferences, and demands pertaining to the workplace. This is significant when taking into consideration the dynamic and ever-changing character of an organization's workforce. It is the objective of this study to describe how the branding of an employer affects the level of engagement experienced by employees.

The methodology utilized in this study was quantitative, and deductive reasoning was utilized throughout the process. Workers in Almaty, Kazakhstan who are employed in the information technology field were given a questionnaire to fill out. The sample consisted of a total of 111 replies. Preliminary findings suggest a direct correlation between employer branding values (social, economic, reputational, development, and diversity) and employee engagement. Moreover, social, economic, reputational, and development values significantly impact employee satisfaction. However, it's important to note that our study is ongoing, and final results will be presented in the thesis work. Based on preliminary analysis of available data,

Keywords: Employer Branding, Employee Engagement, IT Sector, Corporations.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of analyzing the dynamics of employer branding, the Republic of Kazakhstan presents a unique environment due to the fact that it is a developing economy with a commercial landscape that is rapidly evolving (ANCOR, 2021). The information technology industry is at the vanguard of this transition as the nation is simultaneously experiencing a digital revolution. According to Western Digital Corporation (2022), the demand for qualified information technology experts is on the rise,

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and businesses are competing with one another to recruit and keep the most talented individuals. According to Statista Market Insights (2023), the market for information technology services in Kazakhstan has been expanding at a consistent rate over the course of the past few years. This growth has been driven by the growing demand for digital transformation and the adoption of new technologies. Because of the rapid growth and development of the information technology industry in Kazakhstan, it is absolutely necessary to have a solid understanding of the dynamics of employer branding. The industry is an extremely competitive one, and in order to attract and keep the most qualified professionals, firms need to separate themselves from their competitors. According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), a strong employer brand has the potential to act as a significant means of differentiation in this regard.

In the face of increasing competition, organizations must differentiate themselves to attract, engage, and retain top talent. A strong employer brand can play a pivotal role in this regard (Sivertzen et al., 2013). However, despite the growing recognition of the importance of employer branding, there remains a gap in understanding its precise mechanisms and effects, particularly in the context of the Kazakhstani IT sector (Nanjundeswaraswamy, Bharath, & Nagesh, 2022). This gap is not just academic; it has practical implications. For organizations striving to navigate the competitive landscape of the IT sector, understanding the role and impact of employer branding is imperative. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the relationship between employer branding and employee engagement in Kazakhstani IT organizations, specifically three organizations within Almaty city. The central proposition of this research is that a well-developed employer brand positively influences employee engagement, leading to improved organizational outcomes (Chopra, Sahoo, & Patel, 2023). This proposition is grounded in the belief that engaged employees are not just more productive; they are also more likely to stay with the organization, contribute to a positive work culture, and ultimately drive the success of the organization (Purushothaman & Kaviya, 2020).

In a service-based economy where talent is becoming increasingly scarce, organizations are always engaged in a competitive battle to engage all personnel. Therefore, it is crucial for enterprises to develop strategies that not only attract capable individuals, but also actively engage them with the organization (Srivastava and Bhatnagar 2010).

Employer branding (EB) is defined as the process of managing and influencing a company's reputation as an employer among job seekers, employees, and key stakeholders (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). It includes all the activities a firm undertakes to establish itself as an employer of choice. This attracts employees who have shared interests, values, goals, and culture of this firm (Martin, 2008, p. 18). Employer branding involves communicating an organization's unique qualities to internal and external stakeholders (Jenner & Taylor, 2008, p. 7). It also involves attracting and retaining talented employees who identify with the company's brand and mission, and delivering desired results (Martin, 2008, p. 19).

Historically, corporations were less interested in EB due to a lack of competition and opportunities for employees (Srivastava & Bhatnagar, 2010). In such environments, with limited competition, attracting and retaining talent wasn't as pressing a concern. Moreover, the labor market dynamics were different, with fewer specialized skills and narrower career paths, making it easier for companies to find suitable candidates without extensive employer branding efforts (Cable & Turban, 2001). Additionally, societal norms placed higher value on stability and long-term employment, reducing the need for companies to differentiate themselves as employers of choice (Cable & Turban, 2001). However, with the evolution of the workforce's expectations, technological advancements, and the rise of social media, the importance of EB has grown significantly. Today, employees prioritize factors such as work-life balance, organizational culture, and career development opportunities,

necessitating companies to invest more in their employer brands to remain competitive (Srivastava & Bhatnagar, 2010).

However, due to the significant expansion of employers in the market in recent years, there has been a proportional rise in employee turnover, resulting in increased competition and the starting point of a new era in employment (Tupper & Ellis, 2022). In this evolving landscape, it has become essential for organizations to understand the expectations of potential employees and adjust their human resource strategies accordingly to attract higher-quality candidates (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Engaging talent post-hiring is paramount for organizations due to its multifaceted benefits. Firstly, it significantly impacts retention rates by fostering employee satisfaction and reducing turnover costs (Dixit, 2021). Moreover, engaged employees tend to exhibit higher productivity and performance levels, leading to increased organizational efficiency and effectiveness (Tupper & Ellis, 2022). Additionally, employee engagement cultivates a culture of innovation and creativity, where motivated employees are more inclined to contribute novel ideas and solutions (Tupper & Ellis, 2022). This, in turn, enhances the organization's ability to adapt and remain competitive in dynamic markets. Furthermore, engaged employees are more likely to deliver exceptional customer service, resulting in heightened customer satisfaction and loyalty (Cable & Turban, 2003). By prioritizing employee engagement, organizations also foster a positive work environment and promote employee well-being, thus contributing to overall organizational success (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

An important factor to consider is the impact of an employer brand on a potential candidate's desire to work for the organization (Cable & Turban, 2003). Research indicates that the strength of an organization's employer brand can influence a candidate's decision to express interest in joining the organization (Chapman et al, 2005). When a candidate perceives an organization's employer brand positively, they are more likely to view the organization as an attractive place to work, leading to increased interest in joining. This initial attraction to the organization, shaped by its employer brand, sets the stage for subsequent employee engagement. Engaged employees are those who feel a strong connection to the organization, its values, and its mission (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Therefore, when candidates who were initially attracted to the organization based on its employer brand become employees, their pre-existing positive perceptions may contribute to higher levels of engagement. As they align with the organization's values and goals, they are more likely to invest themselves fully in their work, resulting in increased levels of employee engagement.

Given the evolving state of the job market and the need to secure and engage talent, the conventional work environment is experiencing significant changes that require organizations to reassess the methods they use to engage personnel. This change in the operational framework has led to an increased focus on Employer Branding as a vital tool of the range of HRM strategies. Both practitioners and academic researchers emphasize the importance of building strong employer branding strategies, claiming that such tactics can provide a competitive advantage by cultivating engaged employees who are loyal and committed to the firm and work towards achieving the superordinate objectives of the firm (Wilden *et al.*, 2010).

Research on employees inside a business focuses on a variety of traits, such as motivation (Prasilowati et al., 2021) and happiness and loyalty (Davies, 2008; Tanwar & Prasad, 2017). Very little research has been done on the relationship between employee engagement and corporate branding. Based on the study, it can be concluded that employer branding will benefit greatly from its inclusion in the larger theoretical framework.

Main Research Question:

"How do employer branding strategies influence employee engagement levels within the Kazakhstani IT sector?"

Essential Subtopics:

1. What are the specific employer branding strategies utilized by organizations in the Kazakhstani IT sector?
2. To what extent do these employer branding strategies impact employee perceptions of organizational reputation and attractiveness as an employer?

LITERATURE REVIEW**Employer Branding**

Ambler and Barrow (1996) defined employer brand as the set of benefits associated with employment, including economic, functional, and psychological aspects. These researchers were the first to define "Employer Brand," while Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) expanded on the concept, describing it as the process of establishing a distinct employer identity.

Organizations utilize employer branding to retain and attract suitable personnel, differentiating themselves from competitors and presenting themselves as desirable places to work (Barrow & Ambler, 1996). This strategy involves communicating an organization's unique qualities to internal and external stakeholders (Jenner & Taylor, 2008), attracting talented employees who resonate with the brand (Martin, 2008), and fostering an agreement where organizational goals match employee engagement and retention.

Knox and Freeman (2006) emphasize that organizations communicate their employer brand to prospective hires by showcasing their characteristics to cultivate a favorable perception. Employer branding aims to portray an organization that invests in employee development, cares about their interests, and adapts to labor market trends (Buttenberg, 2014). According to researchers Kunerth and Mosley (2011), they argue that EB can effectively synchronize human resource procedures and stimulate employee engagement (EE). The literature in the field of economics and environmental economics has acknowledged the correlation between these two ideas. Research indicates that when employees perceive their employer as distinctive and attractive, they are more likely to be emotionally and physically engaged in their work responsibilities (Heger, 2007; Kucherov and Zavyalova, 2012; Park and Zhou, 2013; Ahmed et al., 2014). According to Heilmann et al. (2013), EB encompasses more than only the task of attracting and maintaining personnel. According to the writers, the result of the EB initiatives is to enhance performance by engaging employees. Therefore, we formulated the hypothesis that:

H1: Employer branding has a positive relationship with employee engagement.

Employee Engagement

According to Kahn (1990), employee engagement (EE) refers to the active involvement of individuals in their work responsibilities, where they utilize and demonstrate their physical, cognitive, and emotional abilities during their job performances. According to Kahn (1992), employees who perceive their job as demanding, fulfilling, and adequately resourced are more likely to respond by being more attentive, focused, and engaged in their work. In their study, Rich et al. (2010) discovered that engagement refers to the condition in which employees actively participate in their work by investing their cognitive, physical, and emotional resources.

According to the model proposed by Demerouti et al. (2001), job resources have a positive effect on employee engagement (EE). Previous research has presented empirical evidence of the correlation between work resources and employee engagement (EE). Studies have demonstrated that employment resources such as remuneration, training programs, and effective communication have an impact on employee engagement (Markos and Sridevi, 2010). According to Anitha (2014), compensation, which includes both monetary and non-monetary benefits such as overtime pay, health insurance, and life cover, is closely connected to employee engagement. In a meta-analysis of 155 studies, Bailey et al. (2017) found that employees' opinions of organizational culture, job design, leadership, and psychological states have an impact on employee engagement (EE). In addition, May et al. (2004) argue that having supportive supervisors and a positive team environment might enhance an employee's motivation to actively engage in their work.

Previous research (e.g. Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2009; Hanin et al., 2013; Ito et al., 2013; Lelono & Martidanty, 2013) has demonstrated that there is a favorable correlation between corporate branding and employee commitment. According to Schlager et al. (2011) and Backhaus (2016), it has been established that the signals given off by the employer brand have a direct impact on the level of commitment shown by employees.

Following are some theories on the relationship between workplace branding and employee commitment. Second hypotheses were produced by taking into consideration the five values (social, economic, reputational, development, and diversity) that comprise employer branding. Social value was shown to have the most significant beneficial influence on organizational commitment, according to Schlager et al. (2011), who examined the five different values. According to Schlager et al. (2011) and Kashyap and Verma (2018), businesses that foster an atmosphere of respect, foster pleasant connections among coworkers, and prioritize the well-being of their employees are more likely to have employees who are committed to their job. According to Kashyap and Verma (2018), the kind of social value can be a factor in determining whether an employee will remain loyal to the organization or if they will quit.

In addition, it was shown that characteristics such as having positive connections with both superiors and coworkers are essential for increasing organizational commitment (Gaylard et al., 2005; Kashyap & Verma, 2018). It is possible for employees to have a sense of connection and appreciation from other members of the company, which not only satisfies their desire for relatedness but also strengthens their commitment to the organization (Greguras & Diefendorff, 2009; Meyer, 2014). On the other hand, employees have a tendency to be less devoted to the business when they are subjected to supervisory behaviors such as threatening subordinates, using aggressive body language, publicly shaming subordinates, or hiding crucial information (Kashyap & Verma, 2018). In accordance with these findings, it is anticipated that social value will have a positive relationship with employee commitment; hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: The level of engagement shown by employees will be significantly influenced by employer branding.

RESEARCH METHOD

A survey study is chosen as the research data collection tool due to its suitability for answering the research questions regarding employer branding strategies and employee engagement levels. Taking into consideration the deductive and cross-sectional research strategy, a survey study is the most practical option for our dissertation out of all the numerous methodologies for conducting research. According to Saunders et al. (2016), a survey study is a frequent method utilized in the field of business and management research. This method is often employed to provide answers to research questions that begin with the words "what," "who," "where," "how much," and "how many." Survey methodology allows for the collection of standardized data from a large population, aligning with the research objectives.

The study comprises 111 individuals aged 18 to 40 employed in various roles across three local IT organizations in Almaty, Kazakhstan. These companies represent IT sectors of different segments, ranging from banking, the provision of services, to hubs that are nurtured by Kazakhstani startups. All these companies are local, that is, they have settled and are based in Kazakhstan itself, and include at least 100 employees. Almaty was selected based on its prominence in the IT industry and established connections with local IT businesses, facilitating access to necessary resources and ensuring a representative sample.

The model developed by Tanwar and Prasad (2017), who identified essential aspects such as brand attractiveness, brand prestige, and brand legitimacy, serves as the foundation for the constructs that are used for employer branding. For the purpose of conducting an exhaustive evaluation of employer branding, each of these types of constructs is evaluated using a number of different items.

Additionally, the constructions for employee engagement are based on the work of Stein, Hobson, Jachimowicz, and Whillans (2021), who provided characteristics such as cognitive, affective and physical engagement. These constructs are used to guide the development of employee engagement. To reiterate, numerous items are utilized in order to measure each component in order to capture the complete scope of individual employee engagement. The Likert scale, which ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), serves as the basis for the measures that will be used to evaluate these variables. Research in the social sciences frequently makes use of this particular form of scale since it enables responses to be nuanced.

Data analysis utilizes the statistical software JASP, employing descriptive statistics to summarize data and inferential statistics (e.g., correlation, regression) to examine the relationship between employer branding and employee engagement. JASP has shown itself as reliable statistical software that contains all the necessary tools for mathematical data analysis (Zavodska, 2017). Correlation analysis assess the relationship between variables, while regression analysis quantifies the impact of employer branding strategies on employee engagement.

RESULTS

The first part of the survey included seven items focusing on demographic information and sample characteristics. A total of 111 individuals participated, comprising 68.5 percent (N=76) males and 31.5 percent (N=35) females. Participants were also asked about their age, academic degrees, and length of employment in their current position. Table 1 presents the demographic information gathered from the survey participants.

Table 1. Descriptive data

Age distribution	N	%	Gender distribution	N	%	Ethnicity	N	%
18-24	44	39,6	Male	76	68,5	Kazakh	77	69,4
25-34	55	49,5	Female	35	31,5	Russian	31	27,9
35-44	12	10,8				Korean	1	0,9
						Metis	1	0,9
						Tajik	1	0,9
Total	111		Total	111		Total	111	

Education Level	N	%
Some college	1	0,9
Bachelor's degree	94	84,7
Master's degree	16	14,4
Total	111	

Table 2 displays the means and standard deviations of the variables analyzed in this study.

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation of constructs

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation
Employer Branding	3,976	0,821
Employee Engagement	4,040	0,770

To validate the scale used for the dissertation, data analysis was conducted using statistical analysis program known as JASP to measure consistency among variables and their dimensions in the two scales. During the initial phase of the study, the data were examined to see whether or not any values were missing, and the normality of all variables was examined. Using Cronbach's Alpha and KMO and Bartlett's Test, a reliability test was carried out in order to examine the inter-correlation and dependability of each scale. In general, the computation of Cronbach's Alpha is only significant if the intercorrelation is positive (Bortz and Doring 2006); this indicates that the range is the value that falls between 0 and 1 (Cleff 2015). The correlation that indicates the internal consistency between numerous items on a scale is denoted by Cronbach's Alpha, which is defined as the correlation (ref). Both scales utilized in this study (Table 3) show that this is the case.

Table 3. The reliability test results

Construct	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	KMO and Bartlett's	Inter item correlation
Employer Branding	39	0,889	0,801	0,455
Employee Engagement	11	0,843	0,778	0,341

The Cronbach's Alpha values for both variables, Employer Branding (EB) and Employee Engagement (EE), are notably high at 0.889 and 0.843, respectively. These values indicate a high level of internal consistency among the items within each variable. A Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.7 is generally considered acceptable, suggesting that the items within each variable reliably measure the underlying constructs.

Additionally, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity are also significant for both variables, with values of 0.801 for EB and 0.778 for EE. These results suggest that the correlations between items within each variable are sufficiently strong to warrant conducting further analysis, such as factor analysis.

Furthermore, the inter-item correlation values for both EB and EE are moderate, with coefficients of 0.455 and 0.341, respectively. These values indicate that while there is a degree of correlation between the items within each variable, they are not so highly correlated as to suggest redundancy in measurement.

Bortz and Doring (2006) recommend a minimum alpha value of 0.8 for internal consistency in scales. All questionnaires used in this study surpassed this threshold. Additionally, the KMO and Bartlett's test were conducted to ensure survey reliability, yielding scores of 0.801 for Employer Brand Scale, 0.778 for Employee Engagement.

Factor analysis proceeded with correlation scores exceeding 0.341, indicating reliable inter-correlation among EB and EE. Harman's single factor test showed minimal influence of common method variance, with only 31.5 percent variation attributed to it, below the required 50 percent. Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests confirmed normal distribution for all scales except Employee Engagement ($p=0.054$), suggesting it as the only non-normally distributed scale.

Table 4. Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests' results

Construct	Kolmogorov-Smirnov		Shapiro-Wilk	
	Statistics	Significance	Statistics	Significance
EB	0,141	<0,001	0,901	<0,001
EE	0,067	0,054	0,943	0,04
Satisfaction Equipment	0,311	<0,001	0,809	<0,001

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings of this study, the first hypothesis examining the relationship between x and y was confirmed/ supported. This hypothesis supports the importance of employer branding in contemporary sectors by indicating a favorable correlation between company branding and employee engagement. These results have been supported by a number of research investigations, such as Lee et al. (2014) and Yadav et al. (2020). Businesses should take note of this important consequence since it should grab their attention when they want to give their employees an employer branding advantage. Another advantage of this understanding could be learning the difference between work satisfaction and staff engagement. This suggests that H1, the first hypothesis, is accepted. Employer

branding clearly has a significant and dramatic impact on the degree of engagement that both employers and workers experience, as evidenced by its effect factor of 0.535. However, to the extent of 1%, this influence is statistically significant ($p\text{-value} = 0.000 < 0.001$).

Research indicates that a statistically significant positive association exists between employer branding and employee engagement. The dissertation's primary topic is the theory of employer branding, and this accepted hypothesis advances the field's theory in general. Researchers that studied employer branding focused a great deal of attention on the relationship between workplace branding and how it affects potential candidates (Berthon et al., 2005).

This result is theoretically congruent with the hypothesis being discussed. If the company provides reasonable benefits and values to its employees, the latter will contribute his or her own values to the enterprise. Employee engagement is a reaction to the company's principles, which include teamwork, support, education, promotion, work-life balance, corporate social responsibility, and travel opportunities. The relationship that exists between the employee and the organization is the reason for this response. When compared to the social exchange theory, the results of the study that was done on this connection make perfect sense in light of this. Conversely, a previous study's findings indicate that employer branding positively affects workers' degree of involvement with their companies. Tanwar and Prasad (2017) state that numerous studies have demonstrated the impact of employer branding elements on work satisfaction, including development, reputation, work-life balance, corporate social responsibility, company culture, ethics, and diversity.

Giving workers a job that increases their degree of satisfaction will increase their level of engagement at work. In a similar line, Burawat (2015) showed that employee expectations have a good impact on engagement and that employer brand knowledge has a favorable impact on employee expectations along with employee engagement. Furthermore, the study's conclusions show that employer brands indirectly affect employee engagement levels through the standards they establish. From the same perspective, a number of academics have noted that factors that positively impact employee engagement include trust, support, and communication inside the organization (Davies, 2008; Iyer & Israel, 2012). Prior research has demonstrated a positive relationship between employee engagement and corporate branding. The results of other studies corroborate these conclusions. This result is appropriate for activities that are practicable. Any company that wants to succeed in terms of employee engagement must invest in employer branding. When businesses are profitable and effective, this will help employees feel the benefits and values they are receiving, which will eventually motivate them to stick with the company in the long run. For example, when a company continuously creates opportunities for people to grow in their careers, those workers will feel valued and invested in the organization. From that point on, there will be more incentives to work harder and stick with the company.

Some businesses, like Unilever (Kazakhstan), prioritize giving their employees coaching and training in order to reduce the number of positions that are open at their company. Conversely, some state-owned companies, in spite of their poor pay, give their employees enough time to take care of them. This has a positive impact on the degree of employee engagement within the organization. Like other firms, organizations choose the solution that gives their personnel lots of chances to visit different places. This is achieved through offering employees the chance to take part in a range of experiments that enhance their engagement with the company, planning team-building exercises, meetings, and workshops in remote locations, and augmenting the amount of annual leave. To sum up, the results of this relationship study are completely consistent with current events and the realities of the corporate world, both in Kazakhstan and elsewhere in the world.

The results presented in this conference paper are based on predictive analysis derived from ongoing data collection. The study currently involves 111 individuals, representing a relatively small sample size. While these preliminary findings offer valuable insights, they are subject to further refinement as additional data is gathered. One inherent limitation of this study is the inclusion of only three IT companies in the survey, limiting the generalizability of our findings to the broader IT market in Kazakhstan. Moreover, the study focuses specifically on employees aged 18 to 40 in local IT organizations in Almaty, Kazakhstan. While this focus provides valuable insights into the local context, it may not fully capture the diversity of employee demographics or organizational structures prevalent in other regions of Kazakhstan.

CONCLUSIONS

The study reveals that employer branding significantly influences employee engagement, both directly and indirectly, underscoring the importance of strategic employer branding initiatives in retaining talent and enhancing engagement levels. Managers should focus on various aspects of employer branding, particularly those related to compensation, benefits, work-life balance, career development, supportive culture, and corporate social responsibility.

The study introduces a novel connection between employer branding and employee engagement, expanding research beyond recruitment to focus on the ongoing impact of employer branding on existing employees. This discovery enriches theoretical understanding and provides a basis for future research exploring additional factors influencing employee engagement. Moreover, the development of a comprehensive employer branding scale offers researchers a valuable tool for assessing employer branding in further studies, enhancing the depth and breadth of future investigations.

Despite yielding fascinating results, the current study faces several limitations that warrant consideration. Firstly, the study's design was constrained by time limitations, hindering collaboration with businesses and resulting in a limited survey response rate. Although a cross-sectional design was suitable, these constraints impacted data collection.

Furthermore, the study's generalizability may be limited as data were collected from organizations within the same industry. This raises questions about the applicability of findings to broader contexts. Despite these limitations, the dissertation offers fresh insights and contributes significantly to the understanding of corporate branding and employee engagement theory.

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