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# PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT AND EMPLOYER BRANDING: THE MEDIATOR ROLE OF PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

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## Abstract

In recent years, both firms and researchers focus on concepts of psychological empowerment, employer branding and perceived organizational support (POS) to find out and test their effects on leading competitive advantage, internalizing company values and assisting in employee retention. In the literature, there are many studies conducted on these concepts, however there is no one which investigates relationship between them. It makes us thought that psychological empowerment state of employees that affects employer branding may be ignored to some extent. In this context we propose a research model to investigate the effect of psychological empowerment on attractiveness in employer branding mediated by the effect of POS empirically. Depending on previous studies, we investigate psychological empowerment motivations as meaning, impact, self-determination and competence and attractiveness of employer branding factors as values of interest, development, application, social and economic. We also treated POS as mediator because of the possibility to affect the relationship between psychological empowerment and attractiveness in employer branding. This study aims to reveal whether the state of psychological empowerment makes employer branding attracted and POS mediates that relationship or not. Probable protestation presents the way for retention or employment of employees who have high commitment and performance. These results can be useful for firms' managers and inspiring for following researchers to analyse relationship between psychological empowerment and employer branding with new variables.

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*Keywords:* Psychological empowerment, employer branding, perceived organizational support



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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, both firms and researchers focus on concepts of psychological empowerment, employer branding and POS to find their effects. These concepts are examined in that study and in order to discuss their effects and find out the relationship between them. Introducing these concepts can be crucial at the beginning.

Until recently, only external ones are seen as customers and internal customers are ignored (Ewing & Caruana, 1999). The concept of internal marketing claims that employees are internal customers and works are internal products that should captivate, develop and motivate the employees (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991). As Kotler (1997) defines internal marketing as the work of successful recruiting, training and motivating employees. In order to make both current and potential employees believed that the place is great to work, it is needed to make an effort and that efforts are described as employer branding by Ewing et al. (2002). Strong employer brands can have opportunity to decrease the employee acquisition cost, develop employee relations, enhance retention of employee (Ritson, 2002).

In order to make employer branding measurable, Berthon et al. (2005) use the concept of employer attractiveness that means benefits that are visualised by a potential employee for working a specific organization. In their study, employer attractiveness has five different factors, these are interest, social, economic, development and application values. These factors are related to exciting environment to work, distinctive practices of work, use of employee creativity to produce high quality services and products, joyful environment of work, good collegial relationship, above-average salary, package of compensation, security of job, opportunities of promotion, recognition, self-esteem and confidence, career enhancing experience, being a spring board to future employment, applying what is learned and to teach it to others, both humanitarian and customer oriented working environment. In that study, it is supposed that psychological empowerment makes employer branding attracted.

Psychological empowerment can be defined as intrinsic motivations which are exhibited in four cognitions that reflect a human being's orientation to his or her job role: meaning, impact, self-determination and competence (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). These dimensions are related to subjective assessment of the importance of the job, belief in ability to influence job environment, sense of control and autonomy and personal sense of efficacy (Vardi, 2000). These dimensions make us to propose that whether empowering an employee psychologically or not has an effect on the one's decision which is made while choosing a new employer.

The relationship between psychological empowerment and attractiveness in employer branding can be affected by many things. In this study, we have focused on mediator role of POS which is defined as global beliefs that is developed by employees to determine readiness of the organization to award increased effort of work, concerning the extent to which organization values their well-being and contributions. Organizations' treatments aim to increase POS can be classified as justice, assist of supervisor, organizational awards and conditions of work (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). They are respectively relevant to resource distribution among employees (Greenberg, 1990), valuation of employees' contributions and well-being by the organization (Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988), recognition, pay and promotions, security of job, autonomy, role stressors, opportunity to trainings and organization

size (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). We believe in that the relationship between psychological empowerment and attractiveness in employer branding can be mediated by any of these POS instruments.

This paper is organized as follows: the problem section gives theoretical information about psychological empowerment, POS and employer branding. The following section focuses on research questions, purpose of the study, research methods, findings and conclusion.

## **2. Problem Statement**

In recent years, firms and researchers focus on activities that makes their employer brand powerful but psychological empowerment state of employees that affects employer branding may be ignored to some extent. Possibly, it is the reason behind that there are many studies about psychological empowerment, attractiveness in employer branding and POS, however no study gathers these concepts can be found. These concepts are examined in that study in order to discuss their effects and find out the relationship between them. That makes us prepared to ask research questions and settle research model.

### **2.1. Psychological Empowerment**

Empowerment is an attention drawn concept in the studies of organization literature (Spreitzer, 1995). It can be defined as a process followed by people, organizations or community to dominate their affairs and it differs by people, organizations and settings (Rappaport, 1987). Recent researches focus on its psychological sides in the work place (Spreitzer et al., 1999) and there are some empirical studies which relate empowerment to satisfaction of work and symptoms of general stress (Thomas, Thomas, & Tymon, 1994); socio-political support and climate for participation (Spreitzer, 1996). Thomas and Velthouse (1990) who built their work on the work of Conger and Kanungo (1988), defined psychological empowerment as main motivation exhibited in four cognitions that reflect a human being's orientation to his or her job role: meaning, competence, self-determination and impact. Meaning is the worth of work target according to a judgement of an individual's own standards and ideals (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990) or subjective evaluation of the importance of the work activity (Vardi, 2000). Competence, also called as self-efficacy is a belief in one's ability to perform an activity of work well (Gist, 1987) or personal understanding of efficacy (Vardi, 2000). Work role is focused in competence dimension (Spreitzer, 1995). Self-determination is a sense of preference to direct one's action (Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989) and reflection of autonomy over processes such as deciding for something related to work (Bell & Staw, 2010; Spector, 1986) or one's autonomy or sense of control. Lastly, impact can be defined as belief in one's capability to affect the work environment (Vardi, 2000). It is also called as opposite of learned helplessness (Martinko & Gardner, 1982). Previous researches show that meaning leads to sacrifice, high commitment and concentration of energy (Kanter, 1968), competence leads to persistence in challenging cases (Gecas, 1989) and high performance (Locke et al., 1984), self-determination leads to interest in activity and learning (Deci & Ryan, 1987) and accomplishing the aim of the task (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

According to Spreitzer's (1995) tested Partial Nomological Network of Psychological Empowerment in the Workplace model, general feeling of self-esteem, access to information and rewards as an incentive affects dimensions of psychological empowerment and resulted in managerial effectiveness

and innovative behaviour. Managerial effectiveness is defined as the degree to which a manager meets or exceeds job role expectations. It is claimed that empowered managers consider themselves as competent and able to affect their environments of work (Spreitzer, 1995). Innovative behaviours are change oriented because they contain the creation of a new product, idea, service or process (Woodman et al., 1993). When empowered individuals believe in that they have impact and autonomy, they are tended to be more creative, feel less prevented and likely to be innovative (Amabile, 1988).

## **2.2. Employer Branding**

All organizations work for having a sustainable competitive advantage in order to make profit and survive (Sivertzen et al., 2013). In order to succeed in having competitive advantage, recruiting qualified employees and combine their skills is a good way (Boxall, 1996). The importance of brand is well known in recruitment process (Sivertzen et al., 2013) and it can be defined as a collection of perceptions in consumers' mind (Kapoor, 2010). Ambler and Barrow (1996) describes employer brand as "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company" (p.187). The term of brand is defined as a name, term, design, symbol or any other characteristic that identifies one seller's service or good as distinguished from those of other sellers by American Marketing Association (n.d). The term of branding comes from marketing (Cascio & Graham, 2016). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) defines employer branding as a process of creating unique identity of employer that differentiates from competitors. They claim that employer branding creates asset of organizational culture and employer brand associations. Brand associations can be defined as ideas and associations that comes mind when a brand name is heard (Aaker, 1991) and they are determinants of brand image that can be defined as senses relevant to a product or non-product related features (Keller, 1993). These brand associations and images affects employer attraction. Employer brand loyalty is seen as attachment of a brand by Aaker (1991) and it is another asset that is created by employer branding with affecting organization identity and organizational culture (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Morgan and Hunt (1994) claim that when there is a brand loyalty of customer, it is not very likely to change the customer preference, the source of that attitude is trust between the customer and the product. According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), brand loyalty of employer is the promise that is made by employees to their employers and that promise can be seen as worker's feeling of loyalty to the organization. That promise makes employees productive.

In brief, employer branding is an effort to develop relationship between brand loyalty of employer and productivity of employee and to create good brand associations and images to make a brand attracted. That effort has effects on both retention and recruiting best possible human talent (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

In order to make employer branding measurable, Berthon, et al. (2005) use the concept of employer attractiveness that means benefits that are visualised by a potential employee for working a specific organization. In their study, employer attractiveness has five different factors. Factor of interest value is relevant to exciting environment of work, distinctive practices of work and use of creativity of employee. Factor of social value concerns happy and fun working environment and good collegial relationship. Factor of economic value related to above-average salary, compensation package, job security and promotional

opportunities. Factor of development related to recognition, self-worth and confidence, career enhancing experience and a spring board to future employment. Finally, factor of application value concerns with applying what they have learned, to teach it to others and both humanitarian and customer oriented working environment.

### **2.3. Perceived Organizational Support**

As defined in The American Heritage Dictionary (n.d.), commitment is the state of being devoted intellectually or emotionally, as to belief, a manner of action or a person and in parallel to that, organizational commitment defined as orientation or attitude toward the organization which combines identity of the individual to the organization by Sheldon (1971). According to Levinson, employees have inclination to see actions of organization's agents as organization itself (1965) and that point of view helps for creating a concept of POS which was defined as global beliefs that is developed by employees to determine readiness of the organization to reward increased effort of work, concerning the extent to which organization values their well-being and contributions (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

Organizational support theory, developed by Eisenberg et al. (1986), claims that the improvement of POS is encouraged by inclination of employees to define the organization manlike characteristics. That theory addresses some psychological processes underlying consequences of POS. Firstly, POS should produce the feeling of obligation to care organization well-being and help the organization to attain its goals. Secondly, POS attitudes like caring, recognition and esteem should meet employees' socioemotional needs and empower their organizational membership. Thirdly, POS should make employees believed in that increased performance is recognized and awarded by the organization. The processes should have affirmative results for both employees and the organization, results can be increased satisfaction of work for employees, commitment and performance and reduced turnover for the organization (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Organizations' treatments aim to increase POS can be classified as justice, assist of supervisor, conditions of work and organizational awards. Procedural justice concerns the justice of resource distribution among employees (Greenberg, 1990) and it has both structural and social aspects. Structural aspect is relevant to decisions that influence employees, including enough briefing before decisions are performed and social aspect is relevant to quality of interpersonal treatment in resource distribution, including behaving employees with respect (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Supervisory support concerns valuation of employees' contributions and well-being by the organization (Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988). According to organizational support theory, organizational awards such as recognition, pay and promotions also contribute to POS. Similar to these, job conditions also affect POS. Job security, autonomy, role stressors, opportunity to trainings and organization size can be classified as job conditions (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

According to Rhoades and Eisenberger's qualitative study (2002), POS has strong relationships with organizational commitment, satisfaction of work, positive state of mind at work, desire to remain with the organization and intention to leave the organization. POS has medium relationships with strains, involvement of job, behaviours of withdrawal, sort of turnover such as lack of continuity and lateness.

### **3. Research Questions**

In this study, we propose that there is a positive relationship between psychological empowerment and attractiveness in employer branding and POS has mediating effect on that relationship. As remarked above, meaning, competence, impact and self-determination dimensions of psychological empowerment has some positive results such as high commitment (Kanter, 1968), self-efficacy (Gist, 1987), autonomy (Vardi, 2000) and we propose that these positively affect interest, social, economic, development and application values of attractiveness in employer branding. According to Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), POS has effects on satisfaction of work, positive state of mind at work, job involvement and desire to remain with the organization. Because of our assumption that these effects can mediate the relationship between psychological empowerment and attractiveness in employer branding, we include POS to our research model as a mediator.

#### **3.1. The Relationship Between Psychological Empowerment and Employer Branding**

Concept of psychological empowerment is used frequently in literature as mediator, moderator and main variable. For example, mediating role of psychological empowerment is examined on relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment (Avolio et al., 2004) and relations between the job, interpersonal relationships and work outcomes (Liden et al., 2000). In the study that transformational and transactional leadership and innovative behaviour relationship is discovered, moderating role of psychological empowerment is examined (Pieterse et al., 2010). The relationship between psychological empowerment and leadership (Spreitzer et al., 1999), job satisfaction (Wang & Lee, 2009), organizational commitment (Joo & Shim, 2010) and even leader's humour (Gkorezis et al., 2011) was studied in various works.

Concept of employer branding is also used frequently in literature but the studies about employer branding are generally definitive. The studies of Conceptualizing and researching employer branding (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) and Captivating company: dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding (Berthon, et al., 2005) can be examples of that definitive works. There are also some works that examine the relationship between employer branding and its influence on managers (Davies, 2008), employee attraction and retention (Sokro, 2012) and job seeking behaviour (Gomes & Neves, 2010).

Although both employer branding and psychological empowerment is linked with many concepts in literature, any study which is on the relationship between psychological empowerment and attractiveness in employer branding can't be found.

Effects of psychological empowerment are stated. In the light of such information, we propose that fulfilment of psychological empowerment's dimensions such as meaning, competence, impact and self-determination affects interest, social, economic, development and application values of attractiveness in employer branding. If an employee feels as psychologically empowered, attractiveness in employer branding will be affected positively for the one, because with the possible results of interest in activity and high commitment and performance, the state of psychological empowerment makes the one more selective for a potential job. The one will possibly find the firms which have a good employer branding as attractive. Based on this assumption, we state the following proposition:

*P1: There is a positive relationship between psychological empowerment and attractiveness in employer branding.*

### 3.2. The Mediator Role of Perceived Organizational Support

There are many studies that examine the relationship between variables with the moderating or mediating effect of POS. For example, while the relationship between psychological contract and employee performance (Conway & Coyle-Shapiro, 2012), emotional labor and job-related outcomes (Hur et al., 2015), organizational stressors and organizational citizenship behaviours (Jain, Giga, & Cooper, 2013) are examined with the moderating effect of POS; the relationship between procedural justice, supervisor autonomy support, work satisfaction, organizational identification and job performance (Gillet et al., 2013), justice perceptions to organizational commitment and intention to leave (Loi et al., 2006) are examined with the mediating effect of POS.

As stated in perceived organizational support section, POS has relationships with organizational commitment, satisfaction of work, positive state of mind at work, desire to remain with the organization, intention to leave the organization, strains, involvement of job, behaviours of withdrawal, sort of turnover like lack of continuity and lateness (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). As seen, job related judgements can be affected from the perception of organizational support and that's why we propose that it has a mediator effect on the relationship between psychological empowerment and attractiveness in employer branding. With that acceptance, we state the following proposition:

*P2: POS mediates the relationship between psychological empowerment and attractiveness in employer branding.*

In this paper, depending literature review and we settled a research model as can be seen Figure 1.

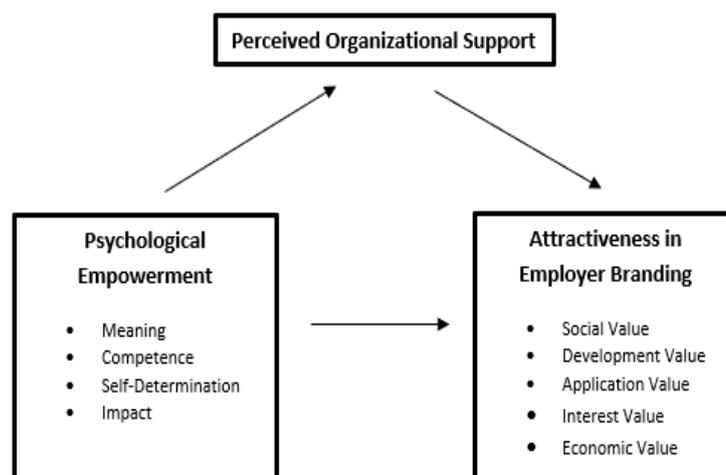


Figure 1. Proposed research model

## 4. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to reveal whether the state of psychological empowerment makes employer branding attracted and POS mediates that relationship or not. Probable protestations support two possible

results. First, because of the limited counts of firms which have a good employer brand, a jobseeker employee's potential job alternatives decrease and it is resulted as increased retention of employee who has high commitment and performance. Second result shows itself up when the jobseeker finds a firm which has a good employer brand. In that situation, the firm which has a good employer brand employs the one who has high commitment and performance.

## **5. Research Methods**

Our research methodology is quantitative, we will collect questionnaires from respondents. In order to limit scope of research, we choose bank employees in Turkey. According to report of The Banks Association of Turkey (n.d), there are c.a. 190k bank employee in Turkey as of September, 2019 and it is needed to collect questionnaires from at least 384 people to reach a statistically meaningful result for the size of that universe (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2016). In order to measure psychological empowerment, attractiveness in employer branding and POS, we plan to use scales of Spreitzer (1995), Berthon, et al. (2005) and Eisenberger et al. (1997) respectively. In order to analyse findings, frequency and factor analyses, Cronbach Alpha reliability tests, descriptive, correlation, simple and multiple regression analyses are used.

## **6. Findings**

The research is ongoing. There is no result that is reached yet.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study is expected to contribute employer branding literature with findings of psychological empowerment and attractiveness of employer branding relationship mediated by POS. There are many studies about psychological empowerment, attractiveness in employer branding and POS, however no study gathers these concepts can be found. In this model, we highlight that the relationship between psychological empowerment and attractiveness in employer branding can be affected by such effects which are driven by POS, like satisfaction of work, positive state of mind at work, job involvement and desire to remain with the organization. We hope that results of our study will be useful for the firms and further researchers. It is hoped that verification of propositions makes psychological empowerment prioritized for the firms.

The proposed model has some limitations for future researches. First limitation is about generalization. In this study, we choose bank employees as subject of our research and it can be claimed that our universe can represent just employees in banking sector, that is why it is difficult to generalize results of our model especially for different sectors. Another limitation can be biased responds. Although respondents are allowed for completing questionnaires whenever they want, because of that questionnaires contains questions about respondents' current work satisfaction and expectations in future, possible lack of confidence and any current job security concern could affect responses of participants.

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