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Employer branding factors as promoters of the dimensions of employee organizational commitment

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ABSTRACT

Due to the current battle to attract and engage the best professionals, companies must design strategies and implement actions that help them to position themselves in the labour market as the best option for the most valuable employees. This work proposes the creation of the employer brand as a strategy to promote the dimensions of organizational commitment. In addition, a measurement tool is proposed to facilitate the understanding of the implementation and measurement phases of employer branding. With this objective in mind, a study was carried out on the 93 employees of a company in the automotive sector. The results show that actions related to professional development and benefits have a positive impact on the three dimensions of commitment. In addition, the actions destined to favour the work-life balance of the employees contribute positively to affective commitment, as well as normative commitment.

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1. Introduction

The concept of talent has evolved significantly in recent decades (McDonnell et al., 2017). One factor that has been included in this evolution is the increase in professional opportunities, which can be seen in the decline in unemployment in recent times. As a result of this improvement in the employment landscape, employees have become more demanding and, in recent decades, there has been a need to generate changes in people management (Botella-Carrubi & Tudela-Torras, 2020; Collings et al., 2015).

Human capital has become a key element. Companies focus their attention on the interests, needs and objectives of workers in order to guarantee commitment on their part (Betanzos & Paz, 2007; Pfeffer, 2005).

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Due to the globalization process, the diversity in the origin of the employees is increasing. Organizations should bear in mind that the flexibility with which they direct, manage and organize human talent determines the degree of commitment of the workers in their company (Deery & Jago, 2015; Du Plessis & Sukumaran, 2015; González-Cruz et al., 2019). The attraction and retention of talent has been one of the main challenges for business management in recent years. Professionals have become the greatest source of competitive advantage, so the most successful companies will be those that make an effort to engage them (Blasco et al., 2014; Jiménez & de PeopleMatters, 2015).

Commitment is a psychological state that unites the individual with the organization and characterises the employee's relationship with it. According to the multidimensional model of organizational commitment proposed by Meyer and Allen (1991), the employee may experience various profiles or dimensions of commitment. These authors call this commitment: affective, continuance and normative commitment.

At present, some authors point out that the selection processes have been reversed. Now it is the candidates, who choose their employers, especially those with the greatest talent. This has caused companies to compete in order to get the best professionals, which is why properly positioning themselves through social networks and the creation of the employer brand is a priority (Enciso & Villamizar, 2014). Thus, McKinsey presents the construction of Employer Branding as one of the main challenges facing people management today (Fecheyr-Lippens et al., 2015). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) stated that the employer brand could be especially valuable for the strategic management of human resources.

The objective of this work is the study of Employer Branding as a strategy to promote the organizational commitment of employees. To achieve this objective, this study is structured as follows:

First, in the review of the literature, a review of the theoretical framework of organizational commitment is made, taking the multidimensional model of Meyer and Allen (1991) as a reference. Likewise, Employer Branding is emphasized, since the objective of the work is focused on generating commitment through it. Emphasis is placed on the origin of the concept, its definition and the identification of the actions that lead to its implementation.

Second, the methodology used in the fieldwork carried out with 93 employees of a company in the automotive sector is described. The results obtained are described below as well as the main conclusions of the study. Finally, the limitations of the research are presented.

The results of this study show that actions related to professional development and benefits have a positive effect on all three dimensions of commitment. Actions related to the work-life balance of employees also contribute positively to both affective and regulatory commitment. However, it would be interesting to check these results against other companies in the sector and even other sectors to see if the results can be generalized. On the other hand, future research could address whether some personal variables such as age or family responsibilities have a mediating effect between employer branding factors and commitment dimensions.

2. Literature review

2.1. Organizational commitment: definition and dimensions

To start the review of the concept of organizational commitment, the work published by Porter and his collaborators during the 1970s is considered an initial reference. These authors define organizational commitment as “the strength of the identification of an individual and his link in a particular organization” (Porter et al., 1974). A few years later, the authors clarify their definition as the “relative strength of identification of an individual with participation in a particular organization” (Mowday et al., 1979).

Beyond the identification or the person-organization relationship cited by the previous authors, others choose to define organizational commitment as a psychological state. Thus, O’Reilly and Chatman (1986) define it as “the psychological attachment felt by a person by the organization; it will reflect the degree to which the individual internalizes or adopts characteristics or perspectives of the organization”. Allen and Meyer (1990) also mention “a psychological state that unites the individual with the organization” and use the terms: continuance commitment (CC), affective commitment (AC) and normative commitment (NC) to classify the three dimensions of organizational commitment.

Continuance commitment is developed when a person makes an investment that becomes a sunk cost, since it will be lost if they discontinue their activity. The affective dimension of commitment was defined by Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) as “the desire of individuals with a strong emotional commitment who want to follow a course of action relevant to a goal. Therefore, we suggest that any personal or situational variable that contributes to the probability that an individual: (a) gets involved (intrinsically motivated, absorbed) in a course of action; (b) recognizes as relevant and valued the association with an organization or its exercise in a course of action and/or; (c) derives its identity with the organization working for an objective, will contribute to the development of the affective commitment”.

The first authors who peripherally deal with the normative dimension of commitment suggest that personal norms influence behaviour and even abandonment of the organization (Prestholdt et al., 1987). Other works refer to the feeling of obligation to remain in the organization (Etzioni, 1975; Marsh and Mannari (1977). In the 80s, Wiener and his colleagues (Vardi et al., 1989; Wiener, 1982; Wiener & Vardi, 1980) focused their studies on what they call “normative vision” arguing that committed employees make personal sacrifices for the good of the organization, because they consider it moral and correct.

The three dimensions of organizational commitment reviewed previously, reflect the relationship between the employee and the organization that decreases the probability of abandonment. However, the difference between them lies in their nature. Employees with a strong continuance commitment remain in the company because they need it. Employees with a strong emotional commitment remain in the company because they want to. Finally, employees with a strong normative commitment remain in the company because they feel they should do so (Meyer et al., 1993). In other words, the dimensions of organizational commitment justify its existence in the diversity of motivations, understood as forces that drive the associated behaviour.

2.1.1. Organizational commitment background

Botella (2019) describes the explanatory variables of organizational commitment. Previously, Iverson and Buttigieg (1999) classified these variables into three groups: personal variables, work variables and environment variables. For the elaboration of this work, we will focus on the variables related to work as they are the ones that are most related to the construction of an employer branding strategy.

Following the studies of Farrell and Rusbult (1981) and Rusbult and Farell (1983), the variables of work generally associated with commitment to continuance are those related to the perceived cost. Some examples are the threat of wasting time or effort devoted to the development of non-transferable skills, losing attractive benefits, giving up privileges associated with seniority or the disruption of personal relationships. In another study Dunham et al. (1994) highlight money, job security and promotion opportunities as a positive background related to this dimension of organizational commitment.

Mowday et al. (1982) classify the antecedents of affective commitment associated with work into two categories: organizational structure and work experiences. With respect to the structure of the organization, there is evidence that affective commitment is related to decentralised decision-making, formalization policies of the procedures, supervisor-employee relations and the clear definition of roles. Given the volume of research that has studied the relationship between the variable experiences of work and emotional commitment, Meyer and Allen (1991) decide to classify them into two groups: the variables that make employees feel comfortable in the organization both physically and psychologically, and those that contribute to making employees feel competent in their role in the organization.

The following are identified as variables that make employees feel comfortable in the organization both physically and psychologically, and that correlate with affective commitment: confirmation of expectations set before entering the organization, equitable salary systems, organizational support, reliability of the organization and consideration of the supervisor.

Regarding the variables related to competition in the role, Meyer and Allen (1991) include the following: achievement, autonomy, equitable remuneration for performance, work challenges, work environment, opportunities for progress, opportunity to express themselves, participation in decision-making and importance for the organization.

Finally, normative commitment is developed when the organization provides the employee with early rewards or incurs significant costs such as training. The recognition of these investments will create a sense of debt in the individual and a feeling of reciprocal obligation and commitment to the organization until the debt is covered. It also highlights organizational climate as an antecedent of this dimension, (Deery et al., 1994).

Once the explanatory variables of each of the dimensions of organizational commitment identified in the literature have been studied, we intend to identify the most appropriate strategy for current organizations to engage their employees.

2.2. Employer branding as the background of commitment

The term employer branding emerged in the 90s, and aimed to attract, retain and commit potential talent, applying the strategic elements of the organization. Ahmad

and Daud (2016) stated that the employer brand is the image that the stakeholders of the company have about the experience of their work in the organization. Sullivan (2004) defines employer branding as a long-term strategic process focused on managing knowledge about the organization and the perception that employees and potential employees have of the company.

It is the most innovative application of employer brand management since, instead of being considered a marketing strategy that aims to improve the positioning of products in the market, it is defined as a Human Resources tool to manage the attraction and retention of talent (Dabirian et al., 2017). In this sense, Verma and Ahmad (2016) argue that companies not only build an image in the market thanks to the products they sell, but also by their employer brand. It consists of creating a brand of the organization that can be marketed in order to face a great challenge: to commit existing talent and potential (Biswas & Suar, 2016).

The Employer Branding aims to carry out effective interventions to create a culture that enables professional development and a favourable organizational climate; generated by internal quality communication, optimal working conditions and good teamwork that drives employees to feel committed to the organization and the objectives it pursues (Esteban, 2012). Thanks to the construction of an employer brand, the company will be able to ensure that employees understand the objectives of the company and commit to them (Jiménez et al., 2010).

Following the instructions of Blasco et. al., (2014), the objective of employer branding, is to develop a commitment bond with the employees, with a set of values and goals of the organization, common to all, but established by the firm, based on active involvement by current employees and thus improving their motivation and retention and making them the best ambassadors of the company.

There is evidence that shows that the effects of employer branding can contribute significantly to the overall performance of the company (Barrow & Mosley, 2005). These authors define a set of benefits associated with the implementation of employer branding actions, both internally and externally. Internally, it results in an increase in employee satisfaction and, therefore, their commitment. In addition, building a culture with company values helps employees internalize them and "live" the brand.

Other authors state that organizations that invest in a good employer branding experience a decrease in costs (Latukha, 2015; Biswas & Suar, 2016) caused by changes in the recruitment processes and the reduction of the employee turnover rate, being more satisfied and less inclined to leave the company.

Externally, the implementation of employer branding practices leads a company to gain a reputation as a "first choice employer", which enables it to recruit and retain the right candidates, attracted by a good employer brand and a shared common culture. Getting company employees to recommend the company as an attractive place to work is much more credible for potential candidates (Wallace et al., 2014). Thus, employers become ambassadors for the company, which occurs as a result of employees being satisfied with their work experience in the company.

Mosley (2007) explains that satisfied, committed employees not only attract potential talent to the company, but also offer a better customer service experience. This

allows the company to differentiate itself from the competition in the labour market (Kucherov & Zavyalova, 2012).

With regard to the implementation of employer branding, it should be noted that there is still no consensus in the scientific community regarding the most appropriate actions to carry out this strategy. Paredes (2017) points out that in addition to the economic salary, there are other factors such as emotional salary that contribute to making the worker more motivated and committed. Tanwar and Prasad (2016) stress the importance of offering employees better schedules, better quality of life and more support for family life. Gilani and Cunningham (2017) propose a list of initiatives aimed at retaining talent, all related to social benefits and professional development. On the other hand, Paredes (2017) also pointed out a series of actions related to family conciliation and social ethics and responsibility to fostering employee engagement.

Based on this premise, this work aims to study the impact of employer branding on the three dimensions of organizational commitment: continuance commitment, affective commitment and normative commitment.

After reviewing the theoretical framework of the dimensions of organizational commitment and its background, and the contributions that identify employer branding as a promoter of commitment, the fieldwork that was carried out is explained in the following sections.

3. Methodology

This section, dedicated to the methodology, is made up of the following phases:

First, the data collection process and the construction of the questionnaire are explained; second, the questionnaire validation process is described. Next, a factor analysis is performed. Finally, the regression analysis is described.

3.1. Sample

The fieldwork was carried out in an organization dedicated to the automotive sector and located in the Valencian Region, Spain. This company was chosen for the study as most of the works that address the study of organizational commitment have been carried out in highly vocational professions, such as the health or educational sector. In this sense, approaching this study in an industrial and less vocational sector contributes to the specialized literature on the topic. This company has a staff of 93 employees, which we consider the target population of the research.

3.2. Data collection

After the design of the questionnaire, the Limesurvey platform was chosen as support for distribution of the questionnaire and data collection. Version 2.05+ was used for various reasons: the possibility of hosting different question formats in a questionnaire; the possibility of varying the order of presentation of the items, thus avoiding possible biases; its compatibility with the data formats required by SPSS; and above all, it is free software with a wide community of users.

The data collection process took place between June 10 and 21, 2019. Access to the questionnaire was through a link that was disseminated among workers through internal communication to their professional email. An open, anonymous survey was chosen to facilitate access and to increase the level of sincerity and confidence in the project by employees guaranteeing their anonymity.

3.3. Questionnaire and measurement scales

3.3.1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire was composed of 34 items. Items 1–18 corresponded to the measurement scale of the dimensions of organizational commitment. On the other hand, items 19–34 were dedicated to the measurement of the employer branding construct. In addition, some questions were included to identify certain sociodemographic variables of the employees.

3.3.2. Measurement of organizational commitment

To measure the dimensions of organizational commitment, the scale created by Allen and Meyer (1990) and subsequently modified by Lee et al. (2001) was used. This is a scale validated and accepted by the scientific community since it has been used for numerous fieldworks. This is a scale of 18 items: 6 items dedicated to the measurement of commitment of continuity, 6 items dedicated to the measurement of affective commitment and finally, 6 items dedicated to the measurement of normative commitment. It should be noted that each of these 3 variables is calculated for statistical analysis as the average of the items that compose it.

3.3.3. Construction of the Employer branding actions questionnaire (EBAQ)

In the case of employer branding, it should be noted that as it is a new construct, there is still no scale that has been validated and accepted by academia. Based on the theoretical contributions dedicated to the implementation of the employer branding, in which the most appropriate actions are identified, the authors of this work built an evaluation tool for this construct. This is the Employee Branding Actions Questionnaire (EBAQ). The instrument was analyzed by 10 experts in the field of people management; those items that received a level of agreement between them greater than 0.7 were included in the final questionnaire. The EBAQ is made up of 16 questions that are valued for the construction of the employer brand using a 5-point Likert scale (Table 1).

The reliability coefficients - Cronbach's alpha - of the scale were satisfactory (Table 2). In all cases these coefficients exceed the 0.70 criterion determined by Nunally and Bernstein (1978) to consider that a scale is reliable.

To determine the empirical structure of the EBAQ questionnaire, it was factored through the SPSS program. The principal component method was used, subjecting its final solution to a varimax rotation. Factors that did not exceed Kaiser's criteria were excluded and were not considered in the interpretation of saturation contents below 0.45. Four factors were obtained that explain 62.452% of the total variance (Table 3).

To evaluate whether the factorial model (or the extraction of the factors) as a whole was significant, the Bartlett Sphericity Test was used.

Table 1. Employer branding actions questionnaire (EBAQ).

19	My company cares about the environment
20	My company has a good reputation in the sector
21	The latest technology is used in my company
22	My company cares about the quality of the products and services
23	In my company there is good internal communication
24	My salary accords with the functions I perform
25	My company offers social benefits (medical insurance, pension plan, childcare assistance)
26	My company allows me to reconcile my personal and family life
27	The work environment in my company is pleasant
28	In my company I can develop my work in a safe way
29	My company offers a flexible schedule
30	In my company, there is the possibility of professional development
31	I do an interesting job in my company
32	The centre where I work has easy access
33	My company offers me the necessary training to carry out my duties
34	I feel that I have job stability in my company

Source: The authors.

Table 2. Reliability of the scale.

	p19	p20	p21	p22	p23	p24	p25	p26	p27	p28	p29	p30	p31	p32	p33	p34
Cronbach Alpha	0,781	0,781	0,779	0,78	0,772	0,777	0,818	0,788	0,778	0,782	0,808	0,771	0,784	0,802	0,777	0,803

Source: The authors.

Table 3. Total variance explained EBAQ.

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums Of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %
1	4,839	30,246	30,246	4,839	30,246	30,246	3,876	24,227	24,227
2	2,378	14,863	45,109	2,378	14,863	45,109	2,150	13,436	37,663
3	1,440	9,003	54,112	1,440	9,003	54,112	2,019	12,621	50,284
4	1,334	8,340	62,452	1,334	8,340	62,452	1,947	12,168	62,452

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Bartlett's Sphericity test was also used to evaluate the applicability of the factor analysis of the variables studied.

This tests the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix. An identity matrix is a matrix in which all of the diagonal elements are 1 and all off diagonal elements are 0. The null hypothesis is rejected:

- If Sig. (P-value) < 0.05 we reject H0. Factor analysis is applicable.
- If Sig. (P-value) > 0.05 we accept H0. Factor analysis is not applicable.

Table 4 shows these results.

Since the pvalue is 0.000, the factorial model is appropriate for the variables studied.

Table 5 contains the rotated factor loadings, which represent both how the variables are weighted for each factor and also the correlation between the variables and the factor.

Finally, the Rotated Component Matrix shows you the factor loadings for each variable. Across each row, the highlighted factor indicates the strongest loaded variable. Based on these factor loadings, the factors represent:

Table 4. KMO and Bartlett test.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin. Measure of sampling adequacy		,721
Bartlett test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-squared	609,698
	df	120
	Sig.	,000

Table 5. Rotated Factor Matrix(a).

	Factor			
	1	2	3	4
p19	,856	,011	,083	-,016
p20	,826	-,052	,097	,058
p21	,844	-,018	,002	,143
p22	,724	-,004	,354	-,069
p23	,626	,048	,395	,192
p24	,450	,207	-,021	,539
p25	-,210	-,124	-,115	,692
p26	,231	,796	-,060	,018
p27	,289	,087	,732	,155
p28	,355	-,093	,661	,202
p29	-,105	,850	-,074	,022
p30	,465	,149	,151	,602
p31	,090	,210	,185	,721
p32	-,046	,092	,692	-,144
p33	,140	,540	,351	,359
p34	-,257	,589	,259	,122

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. a Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

First, **factor 1** accounts for 24.22% of the variance explained and saturates items p19, p20, p21, p22 and p23 related to social responsibility and corporate prestige.

Secondly, **factor 2** explains 13.43% of the variance explained and is composed of items p26, p29, p33 and p34 related to work-life balance

On the other hand, **factor 3** explains 12.62% of the variance explained and is formed by items p27, p28 and p 32 related to aspects that are not very related to each other, such as easy access to the job, the development of work in a safe way and the pleasant environment in the company.

Finally, **factor 4** explains 12.16% of the variance explained and is made up of items p24, p25, p30 and p31 related to benefits and professional development.

Following the validation of the employer branding actions questionnaire, the relationship between this construct and the three dimensions of organizational commitment is analyzed in the following section.

4. Result analysis

For the study of the relationship between the 4 factors that make up employer branding and the three dimensions of commitment (AC, CC and NC), a linear regression analysis was performed. Linear regression estimates the coefficients of the linear equation, with one or more independent variables that best predict the value of the dependent variable. In our case, the four factors obtained for the employer-branding

Table 6. Simple linear regression.

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Correlation coefficient	Model sig.	Model coefficients				Model
				Constant	p-value	Slope	p-value	
F1	CA	0.171	0.102	2.840	0.000	0.222	0.102	CA = 2.016 + 0.181·F2
F2	CA	0.375	0.000	2.016	0.000	0.481	0.000	
F3	CA	0.194	0.062	2.676	0.000	0.268	0.062	
F4	CA	0.480	0.000	1.375	0.004	0.667	0.000	CA = 1.375 + 0.667·F4
F1	CC	0.149	0.154	2.933	0.000	0.164	0.154	CC = 2.406 + 0.230·F4
F2	CC	0.012	0.911	3.614	0.000	0.013	0.911	
F3	CC	0.014	0.897	3.593	0.000	0.016	0.897	
F4	CC	0.375	0.000	2.041	0.000	0.442	0.000	
F1	CN	0.183	0.079	2.403	0.000	0.230	0.079	CN = 1.784 + 0.438·F2
F2	CN	0.354	0.001	1.784	0.000	0.438	0.001	
F3	CN	0.249	0.016	1.995	0.001	0.333	0.016	
F4	CN	0.383	0.000	1,531	0.002	0.516	0.000	CN = 1.531 + 0.516·F4

Source: The authors.

construct were taken as independent variables and the three dimensions of commitment (AC, CC and NC) as dependent variables. The analysis was carried out with the SPSS program. Table 6 shows the results obtained:

Only those models with a level of significance greater than 95% were constructed (i.e. a p-value model <0.05)

As can be seen in Table 6, factor 2 has a significant relationship with affective commitment. This leads us to affirm that actions aimed at facilitating the work-life balance of employees have a positive impact on their affective commitment. Similarly, affective commitment is significantly related to factor 4, that is, when the company carries out actions related to professional development and benefits, it increases the effective commitment of its employees.

With respect to continuance commitment, only a significant relationship with factor 4 was identified. Therefore, we can affirm that this will increase only when the company carries out actions related to professional development and benefits.

Finally, when studying the impact of employer branding on the normative dimension of the commitment, three significant relationships were identified that correspond to factors 2, 3 and 4. This leads us to affirm that both actions related to work-life balance, benefits, professional development and other aspects such as easy access to the job, a pleasant environment and safety at work contribute to an increase in the normative dimension of commitment.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Currently, one of the biggest challenges for companies is to attain commitment in their human capital. According to the specialized literature, there are different reasons why the employee is linked to the organization. This gives rise to the three dimensions of commitment identified by Meyer and Allen (1991): continuance commitment, affective commitment, and normative commitment.

Some authors have focused on analysing the work variables that explain the presence of these dimensions of commitment (Deery et al., 1994; Dunham et al., 1994;

Iverson & Buttigieg, 1999; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Mowday et al., 1982; Rusbult & Farrell, 1983). These works study how certain work conditions affect each of the dimensions of employee commitment. However, the contribution of this research is to study the strategy to promote these dimensions of commitment.

In recent times, some authors have identified the construction of employer branding as a good strategy for companies to attract and retain the best human talent. However, little has been written about its implementation and there is still no measurement tool accepted by the scientific community.

The contribution of this work is, on the one hand, to propose employer branding as a strategy to promote the three dimensions of organizational commitment. Furthermore, in the present work the employer branding actions questionnaire (QAEB) is proposed to measure the construct.

Statistical analysis shows the reliability of the scale. Four different factors were also identified in the composition of the construct. Factor 1 is related to social responsibility and corporate prestige. The second factor is related to actions aimed at favouring the work-life balance of employees. The third factor was identified as the most dispersed and is related to safety at work, easy access and a pleasant environment in the company. Finally, factor 4 corresponds to actions linked to the professional development and benefits that employees receive.

By studying the relationship between the four employer branding factors and the three dimensions of commitment, we can conclude that there are several significant relationships that can support management in making decisions.

Companies that carry out actions aimed at favouring the work-life balance of employees will see the affective commitment of their employees reinforced. This shows us that when the company cares about the family and personal life of employees, they will develop a greater sense of identification and affection with the company. In turn, work-life balance will also contribute to the improvement of regulatory commitment, so we can conclude that the feeling of duty and debt of the employees to the organization will increase if they can benefit from this type of policy.

This study also concludes that actions related to a pleasant climate, safety at work and easy access to the company also contribute positively to the development of the moral dimension of commitment (NC).

Finally, with regard to professional development and benefits, their significant effect on commitment stands out, as the results show that it contributes positively to the development of the three dimensions. Therefore, we can conclude that this type of policy will always strengthen the bond of employees with the company.

Before concluding, the authors would like to highlight that a limitation of this work is that the study was carried out in just one company in the automotive sector. It would be interesting to compare the results with other companies in the sector and even with other sectors to see if the results can be generalized. On the other hand, in future research, we would also be interested in addressing whether some personal variables such as age or family responsibilities could have a mediating effect between employer branding factors and commitment dimensions. Finally, once the employer branding action questionnaires have been validated, other studies could be carried out to study its impact on other variables of organizational behaviour.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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