

# Employer Branding and Sustainable Competitive Advantage: Mediating Role of Talent Acquisition

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## Abstract

Over the past decades, organizations have been competing in a globalized and competitive environment with developments of new approaches in business. Employer branding has become the buzzword in organizations. The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between employer branding and sustainable competitive advantage through the mediating role of talent acquisition. This study attempts to assess parameters stipulated by Berthon et.al (2005) in relation to employer brand attractiveness dimensions, namely, development value, interest value, economic value, social value and application value. The study attempts to provide inputs to employers on factors that could make the employer more attractive and to acquire the best talent pool. Data were collected through structured

five point Likert scale questionnaire from the power industry. The collated data were analysed using the Smart PLS 3.2.8 software. The findings of the study reveal that there is a partial mediation of talent acquisition between employer branding dimensions (application value, development value, social value and economic value) and sustainable competitive advantage. Interest value was found to be statistically not significant and no mediation was found between interest value and sustainable competitive advantage. The study concludes with research implications, limitations and directions for future research.

**Keywords:** *Employer branding, Employer brand attractiveness, Employer attractiveness scale, Sustainable competitive advantage, Talent acquisition*

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Over the past decades, organizations have been competing in a globalized and competitive environment with developments of new approaches in business. Modern enterprises contest in a highly unstable, complex and dynamic business environment. To function in a rapidly changing environment, enterprises need to be better organized, develop strategic flexibility, manoeuvre and respond quickly to market changes to capitalise on evolving opportunities and react promptly to changes in consumers' preferences. Enterprises constantly pursue achieving a sustainable competitive advantage. Competitiveness is no longer an option, it's a compulsion for organizations in this current competitive era (Chakraborty, 2020). There are different ways to manage organizational competitiveness. Employees are representatives of organizations as a brand and help to enhance performance (Gwal and Gwal, 2019). The Resource Based View (RBV) is said to be a framework capable of examining resources from the viewpoint of sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991), which helps researchers and managers in effective assessment of resources. Employer branding becomes a new approach to gain a competitive edge in the world markets. The perceived image of a firm as an employer of choice is being recognized as one of the important elements of attracting a job seeker to an organization (Highhouse S. Z., 1999). The image of an employer consists of the perception of an individual with regards to what is enduring, significant and distinctive about the organization as a desired place to work (Highhouse S. B., 2009). It has been challenging for firms to change and create such an image as an employer that tends to attract the right talent, a procedure called employer branding (Edwards, 2010). A strong employer brand enables more time and cost efficient recruitment, and attracts better quality candidates (Pia Heilmann, 2013). The present study examines the term 'employer branding' in the power industry. The power industry is an important area of business. This industry will experience growth only with investments made, particularly in clean and renewable energy generation (Pia Heilmann, 2013).

Employer branding is said to be an essential management tool for organizations of the power industry, as attractive firms will be able to recruit top skilled talent more easily. Very few studies on employer branding have been carried out so far in the power industry (Heilmann, 2013). Barrow and Ambler (1996) were first to coin the idea of employer branding in the article titled "Employer Brand". Both have defined employer brand as the bundle of economic, psychological and functional welfare that employment provides and recognized by the hiring firm. Employer branding is defined as an organization's efforts to demonstrate to its existing and prospective employees that it is an employer where employees wish to work (Lloyd, 2002). According to Berthon et al., (2005), the concept of employer attractiveness leads to employer branding. Based on the study of employer branding, Berthon et al., (2005) have identified five dimensions (a set of value propositions) which lead to employer attractiveness. The concept of employer attractiveness has been important for an economy where organizations are in competition to entice the best and skilled employees (Ewing et al., 2002). Formation of strong employer brand creates attributes favourable to prospective employees (Berthon et al., 2005), which as a result, permits organizations to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage for being distinctive from competition. Organizations are jostling for space in the job market where war for talent has set skills at a premium. Organizations face the challenge of attracting potentially high calibre talent. The labour market is rapidly changing, and employees are inclined to change employers more often than before (Backhaus, Stone & Heiner, 2002; Wilden, Gudergan & Lings, 2010; Collectum, 2013; SCB, 2014).

Many studies have been carried out on employer branding. Previous studies focused on employer branding and organizational performance (Tumasjan, Kunze, Bruch & Welp, 2020), employer branding, employee attraction and retention (Ahmad, Khan & Haque, 2020), employer branding and employee-emotional bonding (Budhiraja, & Yadav, 2020),

employer branding, personal branding, corporate branding and corporate reputation (Potgieter & Doubell, 2020), HRM 4.0 and employer branding (Thomas, Kureshi, Suggala & Mendonca, 2020). Limited studies have been conducted on employer branding (Tariq, 2015) specifically with sustainable competitive advantage with the mediating role of talent attraction. Employer branding is an important concept for organizations to facilitate hiring of talented people (Charbonnier-Voirin, Poujol, & Vignolles, 2017). The focus of this research is on the power industry where talent attraction mediates the relationship between employer branding and sustainable competitive advantage.

Three research questions have been addressed in this research: First, is there any mediating role of talent attraction between employer branding dimensions and sustainable competitive advantage? Second, what is the relationship between development value, interest value, economic value, social value and application value with talent attraction? Third, what is the relationship between talent attraction and sustainable competitive advantage? This research contributes to the literature of employer branding, talent attraction and sustainable competitive advantage. The main contribution of the research is to check the mediating role of talent attraction between employer branding and sustainable competitive advantage. Second, the relationship between employer branding dimensions and talent attraction also form a part of this research. Finally, the study assesses the relationship between talent attraction and sustainable competitive advantage.

### **Applicability and Generalization**

Maintaining sustainable competitive advantage is one of the most important challenges companies are facing in developed countries and emerging economies. This research was conducted in Pakistan and includes emerging economies like India and other similar countries on the power sector. The power sector is an important sector that helps in a country's economic growth (Ainavolu, 2019). Organizations in the power

sector need to find ways to maintain their competitive advantage in the long run. This implies that organizations look for research in this area. Researchers suggest that businesses must be able to retain and attract talent, which ascertains the growing significance of employer branding (Burmam & Zeplin, 2005; Gilliver, 2009; Moroko & Uncles, 2008; Sengupta, Bamel, & Singh, 2015). Suitable policies are important for the growth of this sector. This research offers important results that can be generalized in emerging economies and developed countries to revise and improve policies related to the power sector. Organizations can use the findings of this research to maintain their competitive advantage in the long run. Research has provided insights on employer branding for sustainable competitive advantage through talent attraction. Organizations may decide to revise strategies related to employer branding and competitive advantage by using this research.

### **Theory and Hypothesis**

The theoretical foundations of employer branding are manifold as it's a relatively new concept. This study discusses and analyses the literature and the concepts relevant to this research. There is a dearth of literature on employer branding linkage with competitive advantage through talent attraction. The study uses the method stipulated by Ewing, Hah and Berthon (2005) where employer branding dimensions were used to attract talent by organizations - social value, economic value, interest value, development and application value. All these five values are in line with the definition of employer branding by Ambler and Barrow (1996). Human resources is one of the most significant factors that contributes to competing in the market (Chakraborty, 2020). Employer branding is significant for talent acquisition in firms (Edwards & Edwards, 2013). With the advent of resource based theory, organizations look for sustainable sources of competitive advantage. To attract ideal and potential employees has thus become the most challenging task for most firms. It is now extensively accepted that firms will have a distinctive edge in the marketplace for

attracting the best minds. Since the war for new skilled talent increases, organizations are required to differentiate themselves in the eyes of potential employees. Research framework is shown in Figure 1.

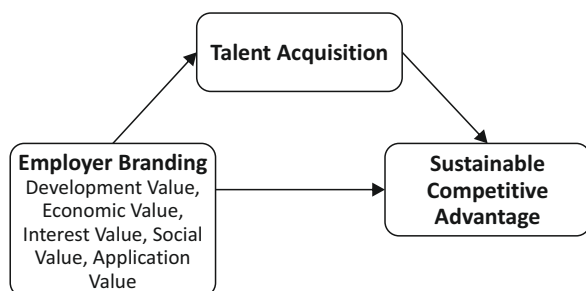


Figure 1: Research Framework

### Development Value and Talent Acquisition

The first dimension – development value – has been adapted from Berthon et al. (2005). This is the extent to which an employee is enticed towards an employer that offers opportunities for career growth, self-worth coupled with confidence. Investing in employees' development is a strategy that affects the commitment and motivation of an employee (Ichniowski et al., 1997; MacDuffie, 1995; Snell and Dean, 1992, Youndt et al., 1996). Development value is said to be an important reason for prospective employees to apply for a particular job (Bartels et al., 2007). Proper investment in development of employees means preparing them with new skills, knowledge and abilities (Kazanas and Rothwell, 1989). Based on the research by Robert Walters, a recruitment firm, published in May of 2015, 91 per cent of millennials say that rapid progression in their career holds top priority when a destination employer is chosen. Employee development is crucial for maintaining and developing individual competences. The main foundation is perceived investment in employee development and an environment where employees believe that their contribution is being valued by the organization and they feel secure and cared for with respect to their employability. By investing in employee development, organizations are able to gain a competitive advantage by offering

current and potential employees continuous learning and new skills to help them perform effectively (London, 1989). Gaddam (2008) stated that employer brand should be presented in every part of the employment experience and should endorse various employment packages such as career development, benefits, working environment, mental and social satisfaction etc. to retain employees. Huczynski and Buchanan (2013) developed the “Employment Cycle”, which elucidates the stages that an employee is required to go through whilst working for a particular organization. Taylor (2002) and Marchington and Wilkinson (2012) stated that good employee development programmes, including training and induction, can positively affect the employee's journey within a firm with increased commitment owing to early integration with the organization's brand. Thus, the following hypothesis is suggested:

**Hypothesis 1:** The more the organization satisfies the development value of its employees, the higher will be the chances of talent acquisition.

### Interest Value and Talent Acquisition

The second dimension that has been adapted from Berthon et al. (2005) is - interest value - which refers to the extent to which human resources are attracted towards an organization that offers novel work practices, where the workplace environment is said to be enthusiastic and makes the best use of creativity of employees for producing high quality products. A healthy and safe environment plays an important role in commitment (Muhammad, Qasim and Khan, 2020). This leads to the generation of useful and novel ideas and procedures. Therefore, according to Iravo, Ng'the and Namusonge (2012), suitable investments in employee development fosters creativity; for instance, product designers, marketers or Research & Development personnel's innovative ideas generated through training and skill development could lead to the organization obtaining competitive advantage (Shalley et al. 2004). Providing employees the opportunity to be entrepreneurial and creative are said to be essential responsibilities of firms to retain

talented employees. Dockel (2003) states that giving employees freedom and fulfilling their need to get involved, work with other people and get their hands dirty make them feel like a part of something important (Patel 2017). Thus, the following hypothesis is suggested:

**Hypothesis 2:** The more the organization satisfies the interest value of its employees, the higher will be the chances of talent acquisition.

### **Economic Value and Talent Acquisition**

The third dimension - economic value - adapted from Berthon et al. (2005) incorporates salary, promotional opportunities, and job security, and hence, includes both tangible and intangible rewards. Attractive compensation package by human resource personnel increases the chance of job attractiveness. Tikoo and Backhaus, (2004) proposed that organizations must ensure what values they offer to existing and potential hires. If organizations want to establish their employer brand that creates value for their current and future employees, it is important for them to provide the proposition of brand and flexibility to attract as many employees as possible (Mosley and Barrow, 2005). Tornikoski (2011) found this element to be one of the most important and strongest retention and attraction measures. Employee benefits are a tool for attraction as this provides actual and personal needs perceived by employees, including security. This also includes additional perquisites such as providing company cars to employees as an addition to pay (Murlis & Armstrong, 2004). Employees' benefits are a measure of the extent to which firms value their participation and contribution (Rousseau & Ho, 2000, Jensen, McMullen & Stark, 2007). Employer attraction involves some kind of rewards and benefits that define attraction of prospective applicants to a firm. These rewards and benefits could be conceptualized, on one hand into functional, tangible or instrumental features, and on the other hand, into intangible or symbolic features (Cable & Turban, 2001; Highhouse & Lievens, 2003). Monetary rewards are seen as the main driver to encourage individuals to the

organization. Thus, the following hypothesis is suggested:

**Hypothesis 3:** The more the organization satisfies the economic value of its employees, the higher will be the chances of talent acquisition.

### **Social Value and Talent Acquisition**

The fourth dimension of Berthon et al. (2005) - social value - offers the degree to which a person is attracted to the organization, which provides a happy and fun environment and provides a supportive team where employees have a good relationship with their superiors and colleagues. Social value is regarded as the strongest predictor of attractiveness (Alniacik, 2012). Sokro (2012) discussed the impact of employer branding on employer attractiveness and proposed that employers must create such a favourable work environment that employees are comfortable and stay with the organization. According to Sutherland et al. (2002), the best employees tend to choose the best company based on its practices and corporate culture. Organizational culture involves attitudes, values, beliefs and eventually, experiences offered by the firm. This view point is in line with the extensive meaning of the sociological construct such as culture, and states that culture of an organization is not only significant for maintenance, but also in the choice of job (Backhaus Tikoo 2004; Mosley 2007). Employees are said to enjoy a work environment that offers a positive work setting where they feel their efforts are taking the organization forward and they feel valued, are treated with respect, fairness and honesty (Fauzi, Gelaidan & Ahmad, 2013). Holbeche & Matthews (2012) proposed that employees who enjoy working for an organization subconsciously become the firm's brand ambassadors. Continuous efforts of organizations on employer branding lead to effective talent acquisition by them (Keppeler & Papenfuß, 2020). Thus, the following hypothesis is suggested:

**Hypothesis 4:** The more the organization satisfies the application value of its employees, the higher are the chances of talent acquisition.

## Application Value and Talent Acquisition

The fifth dimension of Berthon et al. (2005) - application value – is the extent to which an organization is able to showcase an employee's potential in a customer-oriented environment and where employees are able to share their learnings (Lievens, et al., 2007). Applicants are more attracted to organizations that consider their employees as fundamental assets and provide an opportunity to share their potential. Employees get involved when they find motivation and meaning in their work, receive positive and interpersonal support and work in an environment that fosters motivation and flexibility. Organizations should provide a work environment which enables employees to put in their best efforts (Branham, 2005). Hewitt (2002) stated that contemporary businesses always keep their employees well informed with respect to fundamental affairs of the business, and appreciate their comments in decision making at all the levels in order to better exploit their talents. Noah (2008) has supported this view and proposed that involving employees in making decisions helps to create a sense of belonging among them. This, in turn, helps to create an affable work environment and contributes towards the development of good employee-employer relationship. Involvement is all about empowerment, human capability and teamwork at all levels. Employees at different levels feel that they have played a part in decision making, which will positively affect their work and its nature, and is connected to organizational goals. Use of one's ideas and having the autonomy to exploit them is the most significant factor. Application value is thus considered an important element in employer attractiveness. Thus, the following hypothesis is suggested:

**Hypothesis 5:** The more the organization satisfies the application value of its employees, the higher will be the chances of talent acquisition.

## The mediating role of Talent Acquisition

Literature suggests that employer branding has a significant relationship with organizational

performance. But recruitment efficiency, which is important for talent acquisition, does not mediate this relationship (Tumasjan, Kunze, Bruch & Welpel, 2020). Acquiring talent is rapidly becoming one of the fundamental issues for organizations. Organizations can acquire sustainable competitive advantage if they properly use their available resources and make the right investments in the market. Based on a survey from 33 countries and 33,000 employers, it is stated that 40 percent of managers had a problem in hiring and finding the desired and skilled talent (Manpower Inc., 2006); 90 per cent of managers (approximately 7,000) stated that retention and acquiring talent had become more difficult (Axelrod et al., 2001). The strategy of a strong employer brand begins with understanding the needs and requirements of the target talent, and the gaps between the employer's position today and in future. To attract talent with the requisite skills and competencies, employers use the best strategies; successfully acquiring the right talent leads to achieving competitive advantage. De Cieri, Shea and Hutchings (2011) stated that employees are attracted to organizations which have implemented a variety of good employment practices including bonuses, competitive remuneration, improved workplace benefits, training and development along with non-standard, flexible work. Effective management of human resources can not only contribute towards sustainable competitive advantage for an organization, but also help in building the organization to become the employer of choice. Thus, the following hypothesis is suggested:

**Hypothesis 6:** Talent acquisition mediates the relationship between employer brand attractiveness and sustainable competitive advantage.

## Talent Acquisition and Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Talent acquisition and sustainable competitive advantage go hand-in-hand. The central aim of every organization is to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness for acquiring a talented pool of personnel. Armstrong (2006) proposed that firms are

required to use numerous methods and techniques for recruiting the right talent. The recruitment of skilled and talented work force is the first and most significant task as this talent pool includes candidates that are prospective executives of the organization who are responsible to steer the firm towards competitive advantage and competitive performance. Superior and skilled talent is widely considered as the main source of sustainable competitive advantage in organizations. Underlying the trend of acquiring and attracting skilled and talented workforce is a rapidly changing and growing business environment and increasing need of professionals and managers. Cappelli (1999) opined that to attract potential talent, the organization needs to pay and treat talented people well. Organizations comprehend that they will have a competitive edge when they are able to attract and hire talented candidates (Ramadan, 2012). In

essence, organizations are in competition with each other on the basis of their intellectual capital, and the authentic and true differentiator of businesses in the long run are their employees. Their capability to acquire talented employees is a challenge owing to “war for talent”, which escalates competition for highly skilled employees. It requires creating an environment that encourages innovation and an open culture to attract and retain talent, and, in turn, attain organizational goals (Gidwani & Shrimali & 2012). Successful utilization and attraction of top and skilled employees increases the possibility for competitive advantage in the market. Thus, the following hypothesis is suggested:

**Hypothesis 7:** There is a strong positive relationship between talent acquisition and sustainable competitive advantage.

## Methodology

### Population and Sample

The target population in this study was HR heads, managers, assistant managers and superintendents of the power generating organizations of Pakistan. We believe the participants that are chosen are fit to answer the research questions based on their different levels within the organization. This will give insights of their perception and how they demonstrate their employer brand throughout the organization. For factor analysis, Hair et al., (2010) suggested that a sample should be more than 100 for factor analysis. According to Saunderson, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), the calculation of sample size is proposed through 30 latent variables; thus, to get more accurate results, we have calculated the sample size by 40 latent variables thereby  $7 \times 40$  to get the estimated sample of 280. We received data from 287 respondents working in different power generating organizations of Pakistan. The estimated sample size is 287 employees working in different power generating organizations of Pakistan.

### Research Instrument

This research contains the use of primary as well as secondary data, and for the development of the questionnaire, non-probability convenience sampling is used. Since the respondents' attitude is evaluated, Likert scale is suitable for the present study. According to Churchill (2001), this allows individuals to show intensity of their feelings. Participants are further asked to rate the questionnaire with their opinion depending on the five point Likert scale ranging from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”. The Berthon et al., (2005) scale of employer attractiveness is used in this research to calculate relative significance of every component. This instrument has already been used in several international studies, with good reliability (Nilsen, Sivertzen, & Olafsen, 2013, Alniaçik and Alniaçik, 2012). We have also chosen this scale because multiple attributes are extracted and aggregated from the existing literature on employer attractiveness (Berthon et al., 2005), and incorporates employer attractiveness dimensions applicable to a wide range of employers' situations. The Berthon et

al., (2005) scale encompasses 25 items addressing five distinctive attributes that are perhaps offered by firms. 1) Development Value: professional enhancement, recognition, career strengthening and skills development. 2) Interest Value: innovative products and services, stimulating job, and environment that fosters innovative work practices and creativity. 3) Economic Value: attractive compensation, job security, above-average salary and opportunities of promotion. 4) Social Value: pleasant and a positive interpersonal environment. 5) Application Value: Transmit knowledge, creating learning environment and applying expertise, and the degree to which the job is in an environment which has application in society and is market oriented. For talent acquisition, the questionnaire is adopted from Lyria (2013). For sustainable competitive advantage, the questionnaire is adopted from Benchmarking Marketing Capabilities for Sustainable Competitive Advantage by Vorhies & Morgan (2005).

## Statistical Tests

We ensured that all the assumptions of multicollinearity, linearity and normality have been met before the actual data analysis. We have used partial least square path modelling with Smart PLS 3.2.8 Software with the required assumptions. In this research, we have included the assessment of measurement model and the assessment of structural model. In the assessment of measurement model, the researchers have tested the reliability of individual items, internal consistency, convergent validity and discriminant validity. In the assessment of structural model, the current study is assessed to test the relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables by running bootstrapping. We have assessed the direction relationship and mediating relationship in this research. We used blindfolding test to check the predictive relevance of the model.

## Results

### Reliability Analysis

The present study has adopted the psychometric properties of the scales. Within reliability of individual item, internal consistency, convergent validity and discriminant validity are examined (Hair et al., 2012, 2014 and 2016, Henseler et al., 2009). To determine the internal consistency and to understand the consistency of an instrument, reliability analysis is conducted (Ary et al., 2002). For the assessment of internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha or coefficient alpha is used (Ary et al., 2002; Pallant 2001, Huck, 2004). The values of Cronbach's alpha varies from 0 to 1, considering 1 to be perfect (Bell and Bryman, 2011); below the value of 0.6 questions the construct's reliability (Malhotra, 2010). For each indicator, the value of Cronbach's alpha is presented in Table 1. The sustainable competitive advantage which has Cronbach's alpha of 0.908 is regarded as the highest. Application value has Cronbach's alpha of 0.873 followed by development value with 0.853. Interest value records Cronbach's alpha of 0.830; talent

acquisition has 0.812 followed by social value with Cronbach's alpha of 0.772 and economic value with 0.733. Table 1 shows that each variable with Cronbach's alpha > 0.7 (Hair et al., 2006) indicates reliability and internal consistency of data for more statistical analysis. Table 1 shows the Internal Consistency Reliability (ICR) of overall variables used in this study. Since the values are >0.70, internal reliability is established.

### Convergent and Discriminant Validity

For the verification of convergent validity, AVE is calculated. Table 1 shows the AVE of variables used in this study. The values are said to be > than prescribed value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2006) and thus, convergent validity is established. The highest value of SCA with AVE 0.73 is considered to be very good whereas, SV 0.59 is said to be accepted as this is in line with the prescribed value of AVE 0.50. Thus, it is adequate for convergent validity.

**Table 1. Reliability Statistics**

Constructs	No. of Original Items	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE	No. of Items Retained
Application Value	05	0.873	0.91	0.66	05
Development Value	05	0.853	0.89	0.63	05
Economic value	05	0.733	0.85	0.65	03
Interest value	05	0.830	0.88	0.60	05
Sustainable competitive Advantage	09	0.908	0.93	0.73	05
Social value	05	0.772	0.85	0.59	04
Talent acquisition	06	0.812	0.88	0.64	04

The square root values of AVE constructs should be higher than the values of constructs respectively. The Fornell & Larcker (1981) cross loading scores and criterion are used to develop discriminant validity. Table 2 defines the square root of AVE is higher than the correlations of inter construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) and thus ratify discriminant validity.

**Table 2. Discriminant Validity**

Latent Variables	AV	DV	EV	IV	SCA	SV	TA
AV	<b>0.81</b>						
DV	0.614	<b>0.79</b>					
EV	0.704	0.584	<b>0.81</b>				
IV	0.688	0.682	0.645	<b>0.77</b>			
SCA	0.403	0.408	0.396	0.475	<b>0.86</b>		
SV	0.511	0.469	0.536	0.549	0.765	<b>0.77</b>	
TA	0.680	0.656	0.638	0.634	0.423	0.558	<b>0.80</b>

Thus, Table 2 shows the greater value in square root of each AVE construct in contrast to other latent constructs.

**Table 3. Outer Loadings**

Items	AV	DV	EV	IV	SCA	SV	TA
AV1	0.81						
AV2	0.83						
AV3	0.81						
AV4	0.84						
AV5	0.78						
DV1		0.72					
DV2		0.80					
DV3		0.86					
DV4		0.82					
DV5		0.77					
EV1			0.80				
EV3			0.84				
EV4			0.78				
IV1				0.78			
IV2				0.74			
IV3				0.79			
IV4				0.76			
IV5				0.79			
SCA5					0.80		
SCA6					0.87		
SCA7					0.89		
SCA8					0.86		
SCA9					0.86		
SV1						0.81	
SV2						0.80	
SV3						0.77	
SV5						0.69	
TA2							0.73
TA4							0.82
TA5							0.86
Ta6							0.78

Two measures - EV2 and EV5 - from sub-constructs of EV along with SCA1, SCA2, SCA3 and SCA4 from SCA's sub-constructs and TA1 and TA3 of TA indicator are omitted in Table 3. Omission of these sub-constructs have increased the AVE and CR above the proposed values of 0.50 and 0.70 respectively (Hair et al., 2013, p. 100). After extracting the items from constructs that do not fulfil the requirement of being >0.70, the final model is rectified in Figure 2.

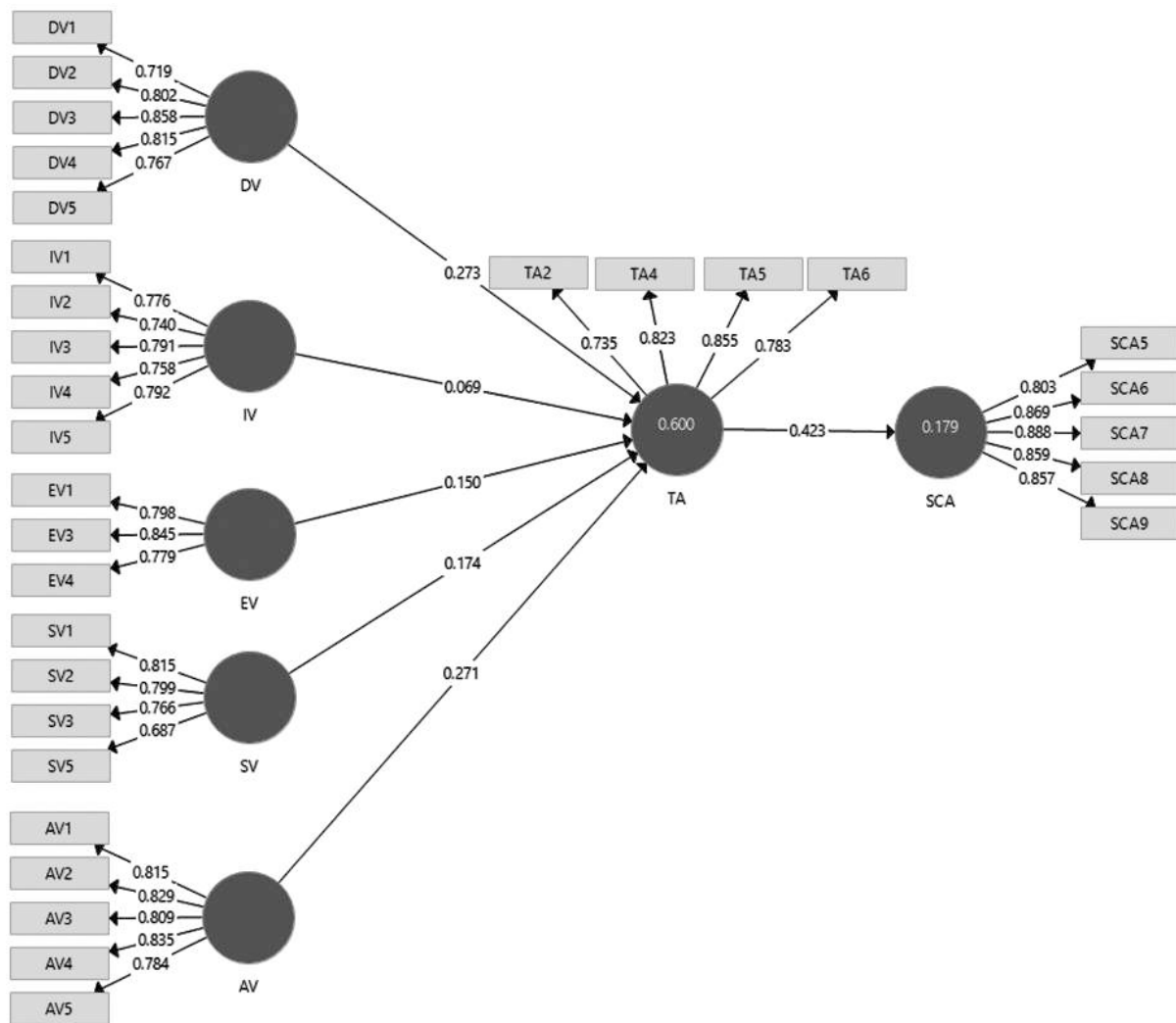


Figure 2. Measurement Model

### Hypothesis Testing

Structural model is also known as inner model. It is assessed to test the relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables. Hair et al. (2014) suggested that the structural model should be measured in two ways - estimating the direct relationship followed by

inclusion of mediating variable to calculate the buffering strength. To investigate the relationship among the latent variables, bootstrapping (BT) is run to estimate the t values in PLS SEM. Figure 3 shows t scores over the arrows meanwhile showing the significant and non-significant relations.

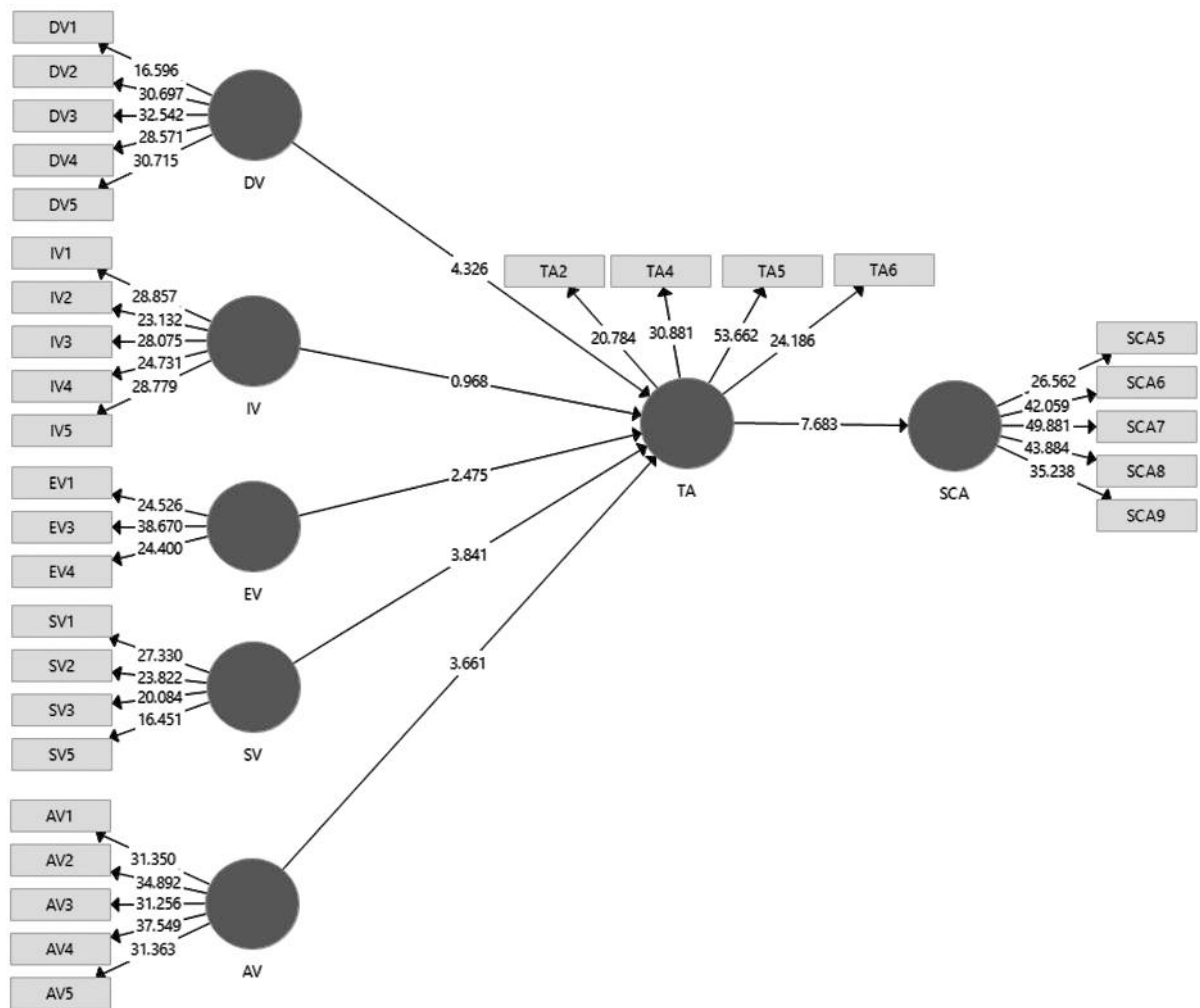


Figure 3. Structural Model

The main objective of bootstrapping is to measure the standard error of coefficient for the examination of statistical significance of coefficients (Vinzi et al., 2010). Table 4 shows direct effects coupled with bootstrap values, 'T' values of all the variables.

**Table 4. Direct Effect**

Hypothesis	Variables	Beta	T Value	P Values	Decision
H5	AV -> TA	0.27	3.66	0.00	Supported
H1	DV -> TA	0.27	4.33	0.00	Supported
H3	EV -> TA	0.15	2.48	0.01	Supported
H2	IV -> TA	0.07	0.97	0.33	Not Supported
H4	SV -> TA	0.17	3.84	0.00	Supported
H6	TA ->SCA	0.42	7.68	0.00	Supported

The t-values in this study indicate the statistical significance in each item except the relationship between the Interest value and Talent acquisition. Several significant relations have been hypothesized positively, thus, the strong relationship between Talent acquisition and Sustainable competitive advantage (TA -> SCA) prevails; as a result, hypothesized relationship is accepted followed by the relationship between Development value and Talent acquisition (DV -> TA); thus, the hypothesis is significant and accepted. In addition, the correlation between Social value and Talent acquisition (SV -> TA) is hypothesized positively and being accepted. The relationship between Application value and Talent acquisition (AV -> TA) is significant and positively accepted. The relationship between Economic value and Talent acquisition (EV -> TA) is significant and accepted as well. Thus, the relationship between Interest value and Talent acquisition (IV -> TA) is insignificant at 0.97 as this is  $t < 1.96$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and hypothesized relationship is not accepted.

Mediation analysis is carried out to determine the causal relationship between exogenous and endogenous variables by the addition of a third explanatory mediating variable (Hair et al., 2013). The PLS-SEM bootstrapping approach is adequate for the analysis of mediation because bootstrapping doesn't make an assumption with regards to statistics of sampling distribution; thus, according to Hair et al., (2013), this can apply on small sample sizes. By introducing the mediator variable, the direct effect is supposed to be reduced since some of the effect has been shifted through the mediator, but still significant, the mediation effect is referred to as "partial mediation". On the other hand, if the direct effect is reduced and no longer exerts or significant, then the mediation is said to be "complete mediation". The procedure of bootstrapping is applied again on 287 cases to measure the mediating effect of Talent acquisition on the relationship of employer branding dimensions with sustainable competitive advantage. Table 5 demonstrates the mediating effect between the Independent and dependent variables.

**Table 5: Mediating Effects**

Hypothesis	Variables	Beta	T- Value	P Values	Mediation
H5	AV -> TA -> SCA	0.11	3.39	0.00	Partial
H1	DV -> TA -> SCA	0.11	3.78	0.00	Partial
H3	EV -> TA -> SCA	0.06	2.40	0.02	Partial
H2	IV -> TA -> SCA	0.03	0.93	0.35	No Mediation
H4	SV -> TA -> SCA	0.07	3.07	0.00	Partial

Procedure of bootstrapping on the course of mediation was found significant in Table 5; mediating effect of talent acquisition on the relationship between the application value of employer branding and sustainable competitive advantage ( $p=0.00$ ). Similarly, the relationship between the development value and sustainable competitive advantage is to be mediated by talent acquisition ( $p=0.00$ ). The economic value relationship with sustainable competitive advantage is mediated by talent acquisition with the  $p$  values of 0.02; relationship between the social value and sustainable competitive advantage is mediated with the  $p$  value of 0.00 of talent acquisition. On the contrary, the relationship between the interest value and sustainable competitive advantage found no buffering effect of talent acquisition ( $p=0.35$ ) thereby, rejecting this hypothesizing.

Coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) value estimates the structural model. This  $R^2$  calculates the projecting accuracy of the model. With the research findings, 18 per cent variance in sustainable competitive advantage has been explained by direct effect model. Consequently, the mediating model has resulted with 60 per cent of variance in the endogenous latent variable. Miller and Falk (1992) have suggested 0.10 as acceptable  $R$  square values. According to Hair et al. (2014),  $R$ -square values of 0.25, 0.50 and 0.75 can be considered low, reasonable and significant respectively.

### **Effect Size ( $f^2$ ) Values and Predictive Relevance**

Effect size  $f$  square calculates the change in value of  $R^2$  value. Cohen (1988) proposed the recommended  $f^2$  ranges, thereby, 0.02 has small effect followed by 0.15 medium effect and 0.35 large effect respectively. Results show that talent acquisition has a medium effect on sustainable competitive advantage as  $f^2$  value is 0.22. Meanwhile, the effect size of development value is 0.09, a small effect followed by application value with the effect size 0.07, again a small effect. Furthermore, the social value has effect size of 0.05, a small effect followed by economic value with effect

size of 0.02. Besides this, the effect size of interest value is marked 0 having no effect in this regard. Blindfolding procedure is also applied in this study in order to evaluate research model's predictive relevance. The Stone–Geisser's test (1974) is applied in order to calculate the goodness of fit in PLS SEM (Ruposo, and Duarte, 2010). Henseler et al. (2009) proposed that when ( $Q^2$ ) is greater than zero, this can be considered to have sufficient predictive relevance. Therefore, higher ( $Q^2$ ) shows the predictive relevance is higher. Thus, the test results show 0.12 for direct and 0.35 for mediating effect  $Q^2$  statistics. Hence, predictive relevance is suggested.

### **Discussion**

The main objective of this study was to examine the employer branding role in attracting new talent that leads organizations to sustainable competitive advantage. The results of the research are discussed based on the research hypothesis. To answer the research hypotheses, the Berthon et al. (2005), EmpAt scale is used which encompasses five values that should be considered while attracting potential talent. In this study, the use of scale revealed that the first dimension - development value of Berthon et al. (2005) scale encompasses appreciation, recognition, self-confidence and feelings of being happy working with a reputable company, which in turn, results in springboard and career enhancing experience for future prospects. These symbolic attributes attract employees. Opportunities for training and advancement are said to be important for employees and help firms attract potential talent. Elving et al. (2013) supported these findings where developmental possibilities and career prospects contributed to employer attractiveness. Thus, the RQ1 is being testified through the H1 hypothesis; as a result, the H1 hypothesis is supported and accepted. The second dimension - interest value was not significant, thus contradicted the Michael Ewing, Pierre Berthon, & Li Lian Hah (2005) research. The interest value, according to Berthon et al (2005), comprises the use of employees' creativity, innovation and interest in high quality services and products. The applicants

appeared not to value the intangible attributes of interest value, hence, contradicted the view of Lievens & Highhouse (2003) where symbolic attributes (in terms of creativity and innovation) accounted for more than instrumental (tangible) attributes. For employee creativity, excitement and innovation attributes were found to be less attractive in an employer. As a result, the answer to RQ2 is discovered by testing H2 implies that for employees, an innovative and creative work environment is less attractive, thereby rejecting the H2 hypothesis. The third dimension of Berthon et al. (2005), EmpAt scale - economic value includes elements such as job security, salary, promotion opportunities and financial benefits, which employers use as an attraction. These are considered as tangible attributes. The research finding suggests that high average salary and overall preferred attributes are said to be attractive compensation. Chhabra & Sharma (2014) found that compensation was ranked to be the highest source of attraction. Sivertzen et al. (2013) revealed that dimension of economic value had no substantial influence. These findings have been contradicted in the present study. Since the economic value is regarded as an attractive factor for potential employees, the RQ3 has been discovered by testing H3, which implies salary and other tangible assets as determinant factors in talent attraction. The fourth dimension of Berthon et al. (2005), EmpAt scale - social value encompasses a happy and fun working environment, and fun working relations. Social value is a significant aspect in employer attractiveness. Firms could use social value to highlight a congenial atmosphere at work to attract new talent. Employers create an image of happy employees having fun and a good team atmosphere as a basis for job satisfaction. Backhaus & Tikoo (2004) proposed that prospective employees were attracted to firms with values and images that were similar to theirs. When it comes to choosing an employer, a happy work environment was an important consideration. Employees wanted a workplace that is sociable with happy, fun and cooperative colleagues in order to feel comfortable and thereby, more productive.

Thus the findings of Collins & Steven (2002), Mukesh Biswas and Damodar Suar (2013) have been supported and the findings of RQ4 revealed by testing H4 implies the significance of a happy, fun environment as an attractive factor for new talent to work with a particular firm. The fifth dimension of Berthon et al. (2005), EmpAt scale - application value encompasses features like acceptance, opportunity to spread knowledge, being customer oriented and a sense of belonging to form an image as a brand and attract talented workforce to a firm. Use of own ideas and having the freedom to exploit those ideas is regarded as the most attractive element for employees. Employees feel the need to share their knowledge with colleagues. Greening and Turban (1997) proposed that firm contribution in corporate social responsibility improves employer branding programmes' effectiveness, which add value to companies' profile. This has been supported by Edwards (2010). Thus, the findings of this research have contradicted the view of previous studies of Mukesh Biswas and Damodar Suar (2013) on application value for employer attractiveness and scores highest in contrast to previous studies of Philip Cheng<sup>1</sup>, Ariane Gabrielle Lim<sup>1</sup>, Daphne Ashley Sze<sup>1</sup> and Phoebe Mae Co<sup>1</sup>, (2015), Mukesh Biswas and Damodar Suar (2013). The RQ5 has been revealed by testing the H5, which implies firms that provide opportunities to employees for applying knowledge acquired by learning and teaching can attract new talent thereby accepting the H5 hypothesis.

The mediating variable - talent acquisition - plays a very important role in acquiring potential talent through the formation of employer brand. Acquiring potential talent is a significant issue for organizations since it decides how firms compete for scarce skills in the market (Groysberg, Fernandez-Araoz, & Nohria 2009; Rashid & Hewlett, 2010 and Collins & Kanar, 2013). The research findings support RQ6; hence, H6 hypothesis is supported. Since talent acquisition has been introduced as a mediating variable between the independent variable employer branding and dependent variable sustainable competitive

advantage, this adds value and provides the development in existing research on employer branding. By introducing the mediating variable, we have found a strong support and a partial mediation between all the variables except the mediation between interest value and sustainable competitive advantage. This shows firms which foster employees' knowledge sharing and new ideas (application value), career enhancement and opportunity development (development value), good compensation programs, offering above average basic salary and other perks (economic value) added with a fun environment where employees feel a sense of belonging (development value) have the chance to attract potential talent and achieve sustainable competitive advantage. The dependent variable in this study is sustainable competitive advantage. Firms are capable of building the employer brand mainly through the effective use of their human capital. With firms endeavouring to gain competitive advantage, branding of workplace appears to be a targeted long term strategy to manage perception and cognizance of present and prospective employees regarding the firm (Tikoo and Backhaus, 2004). Thus, the analysis of data reveals that independent variable - employer branding with its dimensions, except the interest value, has a significant influence on a dependent variable - sustainable competitive advantage, mediated through talent acquisition.

## Conclusions

With the data gathered, analysed and discussed, it can be concluded that employer branding is a coherent, robust and stable activity, which organizations deploy to attract bright and skilled talent to gain a sustainable competitive advantage in today's competitive world. This study has presented the concept of employer branding from the perception of employee values. Dimensions of employer branding include development value, interest value, economic value, social value and application value mediated through talent acquisition to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. The research findings support the hypothesis that new talent will be acquired when

organizations pay close attention to and work rigorously on employer attractiveness dimensions. On average, all five dimensions are important to respondents; however, they gave the most importance to application value and least importance to interest value. Firms are required to develop strategies in order to confirm that their talent remains accurate for dealing with the challenges that businesses face today. In this highly competitive market, developing strategies for employer brand to be an employer of choice and increasing the number of talented people to achieve strategic competitive advantage is now apparent. Thus, to conclude, this research area is pertinent to both organizations and HR managers because attracting talented employees involves investing more resources in employment related branding strategies. It is quite clear that for an organization to create employer brand image that would attract new talent, it has to meet the values of employer branding which are considered essential to them. This study is unique in the fact that it propounds the prevailing theory in the field of employer branding and it provides pragmatic evidence for calculating the strength of employer branding model. The study contributes to a better and proper understanding of the processes that drive employer branding. The results of this study could be used as a preliminary point for future research and for those who want to use the model in their everyday practice.

## Managerial Implications

In the 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Global CEO Survey (PwC, 2013), 93 per cent of CEOs stated that they identify the necessity to create a change or they continue to change their strategies for employer branding. The present study strives to offer a solution to the problem organizations face today of acquiring talent. Since organizations invest huge amounts on various channels like selection, recruitment and projecting and marketing themselves as praiseworthy institutions in the market, it is significant that they examine the features that could help them in attracting the right talent. Firms are required to maintain an image that is attractive in the market by focusing on certain aspects that are

important and are explored under several studies, the present study being one of them. HR managers can use the scale developed in the present study to better understand the desires and needs of employees. This will improve person-organization fit and candidates will be in a better state to match their personal goals with that of the organization. There are several benefits of a good internal and external employer branding; organizations are required to invest greatly and heavily in employer brand promise - a sum of organizational policies, culture, work environment and systems that deliver the organization's value proposition. According to Ambler and Barrow (1996), best employer brand image is formed in the minds of existing and potential talent when good HR practices are exercised by employers such as training and development, job design, compensation, career management as well as outcomes of sophisticated external and internal communication, which results in a positive word-of-mouth of employer brand ambassadors, brand advocates and firm reputation. Employers have to understand which attributes are fundamental for current and potential employees that help in acquiring new skilled talent. Also, employers should understand whether those attributes change over time, which is acknowledged by our results. In other words, employers have to integrate in their activities both outside and within the organization, elements that make employers desirable and should align the employer brand propositions with the activities that are demanded by new talent. Hatipoglu and Gozukara (2016) suggested that firms should first define the aspects that are regarded as attractive and those that are not attractive to their existing and future employees, and then frame an employer brand strategy based on those predefined aspects. It is true that firms can have a good brand that lives in the minds of current employees. This will attract potential talent. A good employer brand can provide sustainable competitive advantage to organizations and factors such as culture training, remuneration, leadership and organization values have a direct impact on the employer brand of the firm. The present study has proven that employer branding plays a very crucial role

in providing an organization a competitive edge and this has a positive effect from the organizational perspective on talent attraction. Organizations are required to make serious efforts to demonstrate psychological benefits and to address the wants and needs of talent from an external and internal perspective. Organizations face a number of challenges around how to retain and attract good talent. Organizations are required to convert their threats into opportunities by formulating employer brand strategy.

### **Limitations and Future research directions**

The present study has significant implications; however, it is not without limitations. First, the present study was conducted on the power industry and rest of the sectors have been excluded. Second, this research is limited to the existing employees of the chosen sector; therefore, the results of this research might not be relevant to other sectors. Third, in the present study, only five dimensions have been studied. There is scope to identify more employer branding dimensions. Thus, further research is encouraged to assess employer branding strategies across different industries. This will provide evidence as to whether the Berethon et al (1995) 25 item EmpAt employer attractiveness devised scale is universal or favourable only for industry specific employee attitude. In addition, convenience sampling was used in this study; thus, for making general implications, it is suggested that studies be carried out with the use of more representative random sampling. Organizations and HR managers are required to guarantee that the next generation's talent is exploited so that strength of these millennials become beneficial to the firm. This will remain a challenge for managers going forward. Therefore, it would be interesting to make a comparison based on existing and prospective employees in more detail. Managers and organizations must understand and pay attention to employer branding to attract the right talent, which ultimately leads to sustainable competitive advantage.

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