

# **Employer Brand and Firm Competitiveness on the Labour Market: The Case of Azerbaijan**

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Doctoral Thesis Summary



**Tomas Bata University in Zlín**  
**Faculty of Management and Economics**

Doctoral Thesis Summary

## **Employer Brand and Firm Competitiveness on the Labour Market: The Case of Azerbaijan**

**Budování značky zaměstnavatele a firemní konkurenceschopnost  
na trhu práce: případ  
Ázerbájdžánu**

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Zlín, August 2023

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Published by **Tomas Bata University in Zlín** in the Edition **Doctoral Thesis Summary**.

The publication was issued in the year 2023

**Key Words:** *Employer brand, online employee reviews, employee retention, recruitment efficiency, firm competitiveness*

**Klíčová Slova:** *Budování značky zaměstnavatele, online recenze zaměstnanců, retence zaměstnanců, efektivita náboru*

Full text of the doctoral thesis is available in the Library of TBU in Zlín.

ISBN 978-80-7678-202-0

## **ABSTRACT**

In this skilled and labour-intensive era, companies are trying to attract and retain employees through the employer brand in order to gain competitive advantage. This study investigates the impact of employer brand to increase the firms' competitiveness based in Azerbaijan. It investigates the mediation of organizational commitment and recruitment efficiency (RC) in the association of employer brand and firm competitiveness. Furthermore, the moderating role of online employee review (OnERev) as a moderator in the relationship of employer brand and organizational commitment is investigated. Data were collected from the employees of Azerbaijani firms tagged on Glassdoor and assessed by former employees. The Structural equation modelling was employed to test the hypotheses. This research adds the body of knowledge on employer brand and firm competitiveness by establishing the relationship of employer brand (EB) and firm competitiveness (FC) directly and through the mediation of organizational commitment (OC) and recruitment efficiency (RE) in developing countries. Finally, it contends that employer brand can improve firm-level performance by increasing organizational commitment and RE. Nevertheless, employee online reviews do not moderate the link between employer brand and organizational commitment, considering that due to the high unemployment rate, the employees of developing countries do not take into account the online employee reviews during their working life and continue to work despite observing negative reviews about their employer.

## **ABSTRAKT**

V této éře náročné na pracovní síly se společnosti snaží přilákat a udržet zaměstnance prostřednictvím značky zaměstnavatele, aby získaly konkurenční výhodu. Tato studie zkoumá roli budování značky zaměstnavatele při zvyšování konkurenceschopnosti firem se sídlem v Ázerbájdžánu. Zkoumá roli závazku k organizaci a efektivity nábory jako mediátorů vztahu mezi budováním značky zaměstnavatele a konkurenceschopnosti firmy. Dále je zkoumána role online recenzí zaměstnanců (OnERev) jako moderátora ve vztahu mezi značkou zaměstnavatele a organizačním závazkem. Data budou shromažďována od zaměstnanců Ázerbájdžánských firem, které jsou evidovány společností Glassdoor a hodnoceny bývalými zaměstnanci. Pro testování hypotéz bude použito modelování strukturálních rovnic. Tato studie přispívá k literatuře o budování značky zaměstnavatele a konkurenceschopnosti firmy určením vztahu mezi budováním značky zaměstnavatele a konkurenceschopností firmy přímo i prostřednictvím závazku k organizaci a efektivity nábory v rozvojových zemích. Nakonec tvrdí, že značka zaměstnavatele může zvýšit výkon na úrovni firmy prostřednictvím závazku k organizaci a efektivity nábory. Nicméně on-line recenze zaměstnanců nezmírňují vazbu mezi značkou zaměstnavatele a organizačním závazkem vzhledem k tomu, že kvůli vysoké míře nezaměstnanosti zaměstnanci v rozvojových zemích během svého pracovního života neberou v úvahu on-line hodnocení zaměstnanců a pokračují v práci navzdory tomu, že negativní recenze na jejich zaměstnavatele.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

EB	Employer brand
OC	Organizational commitment
RE	Recruitment efficiency
OnERev	Online employee review
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
P-O fit	Person-Organization fit
FC	Firm Competitiveness
RBV	Resource Based View
CEO	Chief executive officer
FSA	Firm-specific advantages
CSA	Country-specific advantages
HR	Human Resource
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
PLS – SEM	Partial Least Squares- Structural Equation Modeling
CFA	Confirmatory factor analysis
EFA	Exploratory factor analysis
PA	Path analysis
AZN	Azerbaijani manat

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of human resource management is to develop and retain a competent workforce in order to improve firm competitiveness (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Taylor & Collins, 2000). Firms have commenced to captivate both incumbent employees and potential recruits in the competitive labour market. This method of attracting employees is appertained to as employer brand, which strives to establish a clear view, internally and externally, of what makes a firm desirable and distinct as an employer (Berthon et al., 2005). Despite creating competitive employer brand strategies, firms confront difficulties in recruiting and keeping employees (Tanwar & Prasad, 2017). Employer brand not only refers to attract the new employees but also encourages to retain existing employees to enhance firms' outcomes. In today's society, there is a severe need to recruit and retain competent employees in order to compete and globalize (Mouton, 2017). Furthermore, high demands of skilled workforce have caused reduced labour supplies in the labour market (Ployhart, 2006). This has become crucial for organizations to work on employee's commitment to job due to the shortage of skilled human capital. Having a well-structured employer brand technique for attracting and retaining employees has become an effective strategy for organizations (Michaels et al., 2001).

Employer brand should be managed so that it can attract, oversee, and keep personnel. (Maheshwari et al., 2017). Additionally, an explicit organizational commitment (OC) plan aids in the retention of knowledgeable and capable workers, improving the competitiveness of the company. (Gberevbie, 2010; Juhdi et al., 2013). One line of research implies that firms receive outstanding results whenever they apply OC strategies (Gberevbie, 2010; Kwon & Rupp, 2013). The OC of employees can change after observing negative or positive feedback from previous employees, which comes in the form of online employees' reviews (OnERevs). Employer brand implementation considers employee ratings of the company posted online on sites like Glassdoor, Jobadvisor, and Kununu, among others. Glassdoor is one of the leading reviews websites where current and former employees pass reviews about their employer (Seo & Lee, 2021). These online reviews from current and former employees play a crucial role in effecting these employer brand strategies (Wilden et al., 2010). Future candidates and current workers rely heavily on OnERevs because they are more reliable because employers cannot delete comments from these platform websites (Dubey et al., 2014) and because better reviews and ratings help organizations retain current employees while also attracting new candidates (Dabirian

et al., 2017). Due to the low unemployment rate in industrialized nations, potential employees have the choice to work for companies that have a solid reputation and offer competitive pay and benefits (Shapiro & Stiglitz, 1984). However, given the high unemployment rates in developing nations, these workers choose to join the organization without just reading and investigating employee feedback. (Caliendo & Kritikos, 2010).

It has yet to be investigated the role of OnERevs in affecting employer brand strategies. Furthermore, the role of recruitment efficiency and employee retention in the relationship of employer brand and OC is another area to explore. To deepen comprehension and close these knowledge gaps in this area, this thesis investigates a moderating impact of OnERevs on a relationship between employer brand and OC in the context of undeveloped countries. This thesis also examines the mediating role of employee retention in a relationship between employer brand and firm competitiveness. Furthermore, recruitment efficiency is also considered a key factor in improving the role of the employer brand in firm competitiveness in the labour market. As the employer brand affects the recruitment efficiency by increasing applicant pool, that ultimately increasing recruitment efficiency(Theurer et al., 2018). This thesis also analyses the mediating role of recruitment efficiency in the relationship between employer brand and firm competitiveness in the labour market. Azerbaijan is selected to investigate these concerns and chosen the best multinational companies in the manufacturing industry. Azerbaijan is selected as a developing country context (Ravitch & Riggan, 2022; Tan et al., 2022) , and this research investigates how the online reviews of current employees from developing countries such as Azerbaijan, affect employer brand and employee retention that may result in increasing firm competitiveness in the labour market.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1. Firm competitiveness in labour market**

Competitiveness, as defined by Schwanitz et al., (2002) and Karaev et al., (2007), is the capacity of an individual enterprise, industry, area, or country to successfully establish itself in domestic and international markets. The authors illustrate that enterprises' competitiveness is the consequence of several factors, not just their own initiative, including sound policymaking, healthy competition, and sufficient infrastructure. In a capitalist economy, it seems to reason that the best way for a business to ensure its continued existence and growth is to compete successfully against its rival (Connor, 2003). Competitor-focused strategies are increasingly seen



as important for survival as the very definition of competition is being rethought (Bergeron & Hiller, 2002). As such, a company's ability to create cutting-edge strategies based on original thought and innovation could be stunted if it focused solely on the external environment in which it operates (Bergeron & Hiller, 2002).

To be competitive, businesses must constantly adjust to shifting market and societal norms (Chikán, 2008.) As followed by Rugman & Verbeke, (2001) in the realm of international business, Cerrato & Depperu, (2011) in firm-level competitiveness in international contexts and draw a line between firm-specific and country-specific advantages. FC may be represented through the identification of drivers and outcomes, which are influenced by enablers in our conceptualization of FC, building on this work and integrating additional features from (Cerrato & Depperu, 2011). These three elements make up the foundation of FC, and enablers can be paired with macro-level influences that arise from the macro-environment. Related works include M. Porter, (1990)'s diamond framework and the International Institute for Management Development and World Economic Forum (2019)'s competitiveness rankings. A firm's drivers are its accessible resources and the means to utilise, improve, and discover new uses for them (March 1991). Their idea is known as the Competitive Advantage of the Firm.

Firms should focus on diversity and inclusion (Kang & Kaplan, 2019). A diverse and inclusive workplace can attract top talent and create a more productive and innovative workforce (Earle, 2003). Companies should develop policies and practices that promote diversity and inclusion, such as offering training on unconscious bias, creating employee resource groups, and promoting diversity in recruitment (Ployhart & Kim, 2014). Firms can leverage technology to attract and retain top talent (Wilkinson et al., 2019). Companies can use social media and other digital platforms to promote their employer brand and engage with potential employees (Theurer et al., 2018). Additionally, companies can use technology to improve employee experience by providing remote work options, online training, and digital tools that make work easier and more efficient (Bergeron & Hiller, 2002). Firms should prioritize employee well-being (Grawitch et al., 2006). Providing a safe and healthy work environment can help reduce turnover rates and improve overall employee satisfaction (Abou Elnaga, 2013). Companies can offer employee wellness programs, promote work-life balance, and provide resources for mental health support (Mwangi et al., 2016). According to Ambler & Barrow, (1996) employer brand may increase firm competitiveness on the labour market by increasing important key HR outcomes such as recruitment efficiency and applicant attraction. Motivated and happy potential employees may deliver a better service to the company and may increase firm competitiveness on the labour market, such as financially growth (Tortosa et al., 2009).

## 2.2. Employer Brand

Ambler & Barrow, (1996) defined employer brand the combination of functional, economic, and psychological benefits supplied by employment and identified with the employing organization. The idea of an employer brand's main goal is to recruit a talent pool by favourably motivating current and prospective employees (Berthon et al., 2005). Employer brand was defined by Armstrong, (2006) as the development of a particular perception of the company with a focus on the employer as a brand.

The employer brand is defined as "a focused, long-term strategy to manage the awareness and perceptions of potential employees and related stakeholders with relation to a particular organization" in a research done by Sullivan, (2004). Backhaus & Tikoo, (2004) highlight that organizations utilize employer brand for two primary reasons. The first reason is to attract a large number of employees in the candidate pool and the second reason is to attract the internal and external stakeholders. Cable & Turban, (2001) also offer their concepts about employer brand. According to their concept, the knowledge of the employer brand has three main elements. The first one is employer familiarity, which refers to awareness and the ability to identify potential employers for the company; the second one is employer reputation; the third one is employer brand image, which refers to the people's perception of the company's business, services, and methods of operation based on their employers' experiences Cable & Turban, (2001).

According to Barrow et al., (2007) employer brand combines features and qualities in one example that can distinguish companies and organizations different and guarantee a unique experience for their employment. This approach often targets those who wish to grow, develop and accomplish in this setting (Barrow et al., 2007). Sullivan, (2004) offered a long-term plan for managing current and potential employees. Many researchers emphasized the importance of employer brand in gaining a competitive edge. One line of research by Wroblowska, (2019) claims that well-known employer brand is a crucial aspect for a competitive environment in almost any organization. Ambler & Barrow, (1996) described the main role of an employer brand to increase employee productivity and characterized it as psychologically and frugally beneficiary for organizations.

According to Balmer et al., (2006) employer brand has sparked interest in a variety fields such as corporate reputation, organizational image, corporate communication, organizational identity, corporate culture, and brand. In a study run by Küpper et al., (2019) the main goal of employer brand is the capacity to create brand knowledge, which might influence application intents and work motivation decisions among employees and candidates. The research of Armstrong, (2006) discovered that the

objective of employer brand is to attract the choice of those employees where they want and prefer to work. Employer brand encompasses the development of an organizations' brand image for potential employees (Armstrong, 2006).

### **2.2.1. Signalling Theory**

In the context of management, signalling theory refers to the use of signals by individuals or organizations to convey information and influence the perceptions, decisions, and behaviours of others. Signalling theory has the potential to be applied in the employment market under the umbrella of employer, because in current information technology era, the employees turn to the online reviews about employers and determine whether to go for the employment application or not (Bissola & Imperatori, 2013). According to signalling theory, consumers utilize signals such as price and brand to create quality judgments (Koku, 1995). In the employment, the distorted information forces the employees to look for signals that provide the genuine meaning of information and help them to solve the problem of asymmetric information. This method is based on signalling theory (Spence, 1974). These online reviews behave as signals that can facilitate the selection decision of potential applicants (Wolpaw et al., 2000).

The main goal of signalling theory is to reduce information imbalance between parties. Asymmetry of information can work both ways. Qualifications, for example, are used by job seekers to convey to employers their future performance. Similarly, corporations can indicate diverse boards in order to promote high social ideals (Miller & del Carmen Triana, 2009), as a result, becoming more appealing to potential employees (Ryan et al., 2000), and entice a high-quality workforce (Greening & Turban, 2000). Researchers recognize that corporations utilize corporate social responsibility (CSR) information to favourably impact numerous stakeholder groups, therefore signalling theory is relevant in conceptualizing the CSR employer branding process model. CSR research has employed signal theory to investigate corporate attractiveness, recruiting, and employee self-selection (Jones et al., 2014). CSR refers a company's operational ways that enhance society and the environment instead of contributing negatively to them (Dahlsrud, 2008).

### **2.2.2. Online employee review (OnERev)**

Internet reviews play an important part in assisting and determining the characteristics and features reviewers regard to be the most valuable and to gauge the amount of satisfaction with each facet of the product or service that is the subject of the review (Yang & Fang, 2004). Readers, such as business managers and customers, gain insights that are useful and essential from reading reviews of this sort (Baek et al., 2012). One of the most important indicators for effective business management (Velimirović et al., 2011) is the amount of contentment or unhappiness with the

products or services offered by a particular company in the market. In addition to this, they are able to aid customers in feeling more at ease with the product that they have purchased (Kursan Milaković, 2021). However, it is quite improbable that a living human being could ever make it through such a large number of assessments. Text mining is a technique that has been used by researchers as well as businesses to sift through web reviews in search of nuggets of wisdom (Bhatnagar, 2016). This is a process that has the potential to be incredibly fruitful but is also extremely tough (Chanana, 2021).

Although online employee reviews are becoming more prevalent, research into the factors that lead to workers' pleasure on the job and the insights that they might give for managers is still scarce (Hellman et al., 2019). Online employee reviews are becoming increasingly common. Internet evaluations, assuming that they provide information about what employees like and dislike about their firms, can be used to identify and analyse indications of job satisfaction (Jalagat, 2016). Traditional survey methods have been widely used to assess work satisfaction; however, these methods have their drawbacks, including a limited number of questionnaire items and a lack of generalizability. Employee review websites have brought both new opportunities and challenges into the realm of online reputation management and company branding as a direct result. A widespread public scrutiny has ensued in the wake of high-profile corporate scandals such as Volkswagen's exhaust gas crisis in 2015 (Davenport & Ewing, 2015) and United Airlines' incident in April 2017 (Davenport and Ewing 2017). As a result of this scrutiny, trust in businesses may be more important than it has ever been (Yamada et al., 2017).

### **2.3. Recruitment Efficiency**

Recruitment efficiency refers to the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of the recruitment process in attracting, selecting, and hiring suitable candidates for job vacancies within an organization. It is a measure of how well an organization's recruitment efforts meet its staffing needs while optimizing the use of resources. Employers and recruiters need to communicate clearly and effectively with one another in order to more precisely evaluate how well the candidate's individual requirements and values coincide with those of the organisation (Braddy et al., 2006). Companies that put an emphasis on their employer brand and show appreciation for it are more likely to enhance the part of their target audience that has a positive perception of their brand (Cable & Turban, 2001, 2003). However, businesses with a strong employer branding orientation are more likely to paint an accurate picture of the kinds of things workers might expect from working for them, including the company's culture, values, and working conditions. This is because employer branding is one of the most important factors that workers consider when deciding where to work (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Candidates who feel they have a good fit

with the employer brand will apply on their own, whereas candidates who do not feel they have a strong fit will probably not apply. Because of this, placing a higher emphasis on employer branding will result in less time and money being spent on wrongly filling open positions. This is because a greater number of applicants will demonstrate that they are a good fit with the organization's culture and values.

A research by Sheehan, (2014) also discovered a strong correlation between the use of structured management approaches and financial success. Furthermore, Greer et al., (2016), assert that the use of successful recruiting tactics used by small firms in large companies have a beneficial impact on perceived company results. In a similar research, Kim & Ployhart, (2014) discovered that companies with more competent staff had higher efficiency and profit growth than companies with less selective staffing. Consequently, according to the current literature, it is stated that recruitment efficiency will lead to the success of the company. While efficiency within the HR role cannot actually convert immediately into improved firm valuation, HR productivity will produce value via its effect on the efficient of business operations.

Furthermore, according to the employer brand equity study, higher employer brand levels will not directly enhance firm competitiveness in the labour market but will do so through improving important HR outcomes which in turn drive firms performance (Theurer et al., 2018). Employer brand has an effect on company performance only if it first results in improves HR outcomes as intermediate structures. Thus, utilizing the current literature and relying on the employer brand value chain model, it is possible concluded that the employer brand is link with firm competitiveness on the labour market via recruitment efficiency.

## **2.4. Organizational commitment**

Al-Emadi et al. (2015) defines organizational commitment (OC) as the process of encouraging and involving employees in order to form a long-term relationship with organizations. A strong employer brand attracts and retains talented employees and enhances their organizational commitment (Botella-Carrubi et al., 2021). Organizational commitment is a measure of how much an employee believes himself to be a part of the company (Paramita et al., 2020). An individual's level of interest in their organization is an indication of their dedication to it (Filimonau et al., 2020). It manifests itself through employees' unwavering commitment to the company's mission and their tireless pursuit of the organization's goals (Astakoni et al., 2022). The willingness and ability to do something is one definition of commitment. Commitment to an organization, is a measure of how much members care about it. Evidence of an organization's dedication to its goals is employees who are devoted to

its achievement and who put up their best effort to do so (Boonsiritomachai & Sud-On, 2021).

Employees are more invested in the success of the business when they have a personal investment in its success (Ozkeser, 2019). When we talk about dedication within a company, this is what we have in mind (Mowday et al., 1979). Employees that demonstrate organizational commitment are dedicated to the success of their employer, enthusiastic about staying on staff, and sympathetic to the company's guiding values and goals (Alismail et al., 2022). Porter & Lawler, (1965) came up with this formulation in 1965, then in 2008, Greenberg & Baron, (2008) updated it. According to their research, an employee's level of identification with the company for which he or she works is a key factor in determining that person's commitment to the company and future plans for employment elsewhere.

#### **2.4.1. Person-Organization Fit theory (P-O fit)**

Employer brand strategies of the organization convince employees to match their capabilities with the goals of the employees capable by using the PO fit theory lens (Biswas & Suar, 2016). Kristof, (1996) described PO fit as the “compatibility between people and the organizations in which they work.” PO fit describes that characteristics and properties of organizations are compatible with characteristics and attributes of individuals, and the attitudes of these individuals can be influenced according to compatible consistency between employees and organizations (Pervin, 1989). Argyris, (1957) is credited with laying the framework for the application of person-organization fit theories through the theoretical work that he did on job expansion and participative management.

The study of Lauver & Kristof-Brown, (2001) investigated the ways in which employees' levels of personal and organisational fit influence their perspectives on their jobs and their intentions to quit their current positions have produced conclusions that are in conflict with one another. In a study by Abdalla et al., (2018), a meta-analysis was performed to estimate the population impact sizes by combining the findings of prior studies on the relationships between P-O fit and outcomes such as job satisfaction, organisational loyalty, and the desire to quit an organisation. During the course of this meta-analysis, several potential moderators of these associations were also investigated. A number of recent researches lend support to the idea that fit can be broken down into numerous distinct dimensions, each of which adds its own set of variables to the prediction of occupational outcomes (Cable & Judge, 1996).

Many authors have defined the PO fit in different dimensions including goal congruence, needs-supplies, value congruence, and demands-abilities fit (Kristof,

1996). Most common and frequent dimension of PO fit is known as value congruence, which involves similarities of values between the organization and its employees (Kristof, 1996). Schneider et al., (1995) attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) framework also describes goal congruence as an important dimension of PO fit. According to the framework of ASA, employees will be drawn to organizations whose goals are consistent with the goals of employees (Halfhill et al., 2008). Therefore, goal congruence is associated with similarity between the organization's goal and its employees, and is also closely related to the individual employee's goal achievements such as job performance and commitment.

## 2.5. Conceptual Framework

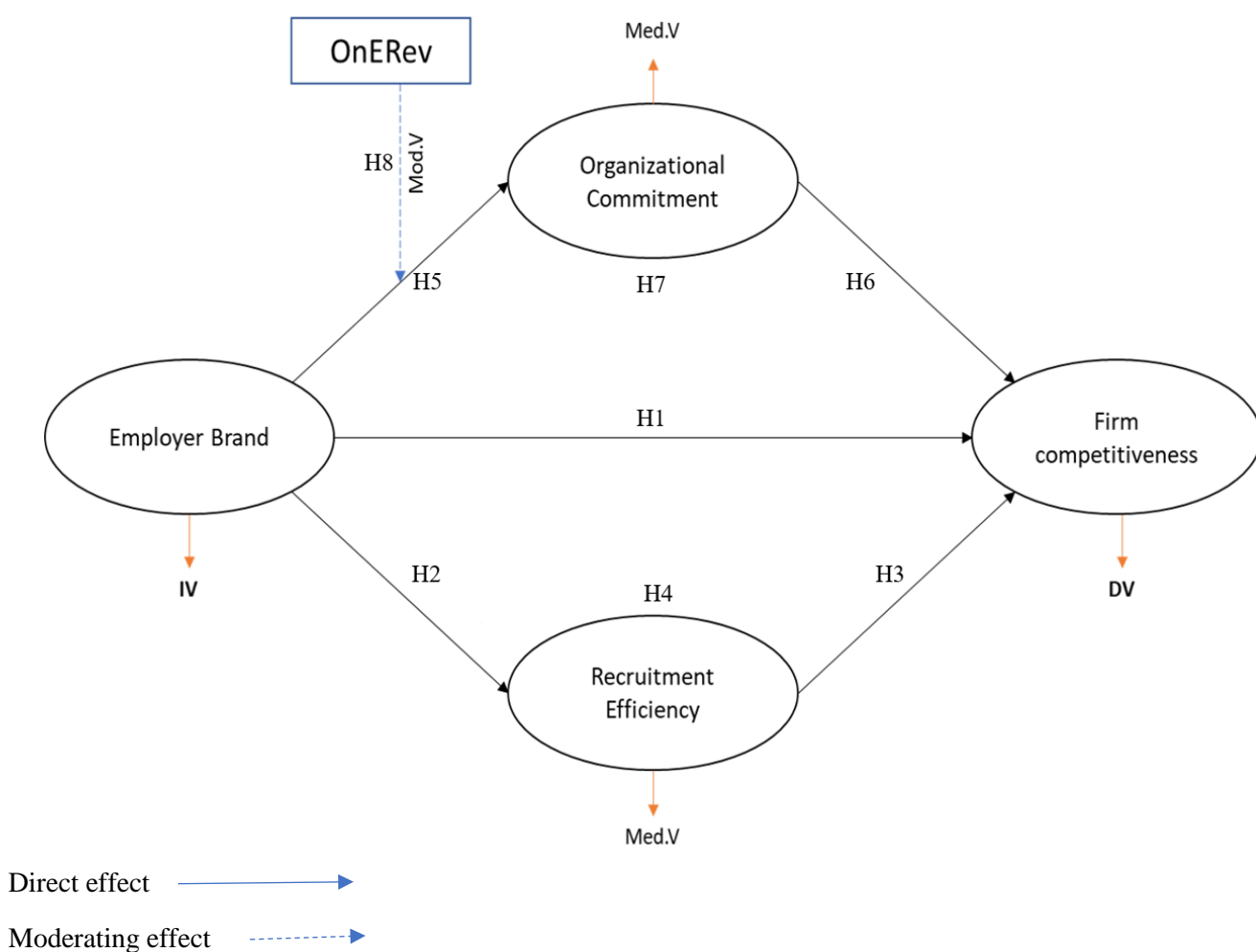


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework (Source: Author's own)

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Research Problem and Study Context**

The effect of EB on firm competitiveness on the labour market, and mediating role of OC and recruitment efficiency between EB and firm competitiveness in the context of developing countries is the area to explore. Moreover, the existing literature is still uncovering the moderating role of employee online reviews on the relationship between EB and OC. Consequently, the research problem of this study is to explore the moderating role of OnERevs, and the mediating role of OC and recruitment efficiency in affecting EB strategies of the firms to improving firm competitiveness in the context of developing countries, i.e., Azerbaijan.

### **3.2. Research Questions and Research Objectives**

EB is an important tool to enhance OC among employees (Botella-Carrubi et al., 2021). Similarly, EB strategies also play a crucial role in affecting firm's competitiveness (Tumasjan et al., 2020). Therefore, the first research question of the study and the related hypothesis are illustrated as,

**RQ1:** How does employer brand affect firm competitiveness on the labour market?

**RO1a:** To identify the role employer brand in influencing firm competitiveness.

**H1:** Employer brand is positively associated with firm competitiveness on the labour market.

Collins and Han (2004) suggest that higher levels of EB boost the candidate pool, which in turn enhances recruiting performance. However, in the context of developing countries, this study brings forth research questions as,

**RQ2:** How does employer brand effect firm's recruitment efficiency?

**RO2:** To identify the role of employer brand in influencing recruitment efficiency.

**H2:** Employer brand is positively associated with recruitment efficiency.

B. E. Becker et al., (2001) mentioned a significant procedural line and connection between the procedures of human resource department and the dedication of HR to increase the operational performance of firms. Similarly, Kim & Ployhart, (2014) highlighted the relationship of skilled staff of a company to better profitability and



efficiency as compared to the companies with less skilled staff. The last research question of the study consists as,

**RQ3:** How does recruitment efficiency affect firm competitiveness on the labour market?

**RO3a:** To identify the role of recruitment efficiency in influencing firm competitiveness.

**H3:** Recruitment efficiency is positively associated with firm competitiveness on the labour market

**RO3b:** To identify the mediating role of recruitment efficiency between the relationship of employer brand and firm competitiveness

**H4:** Recruitment efficiency mediates the relationship between employer brand and firm competitiveness on the labour market.

**RQ4:** How does employer brand influence organizational commitment?

**RO4:** To identify the role of employer brand in influencing organizational commitment.

**H5:** Employer brand is positively associated with organizational commitment.

According to the study of Irshad & Afridi, (2007) the OC strategy of organizations is highly related to the organizational competitiveness. Osteraker, (1999) in his research also stated that OC is the main success for organizations. It leads to the third research question of the study and the hypothesis that states as follows.

**RQ5:** How does organizational commitment effect firm competitiveness on the labour market?

**RO5a:** To identify the role of organizational commitment in influencing firm competitiveness.

**H6:** Organizational commitment is positively associated with firm competitiveness on the labour market

**RO5b:** To identify the mediating role of organizational commitment between the relationship of employer brand and firm competitiveness.

**H7:** Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between employer brand and firm competitiveness on the labour market.

**RO5c:** To identify the moderating role of online employee review between the relationship of employer brand and organizational commitment

**H8:** Online employee reviews moderate the relationship between employer brand and organizational commitment.

### **3.3. Research Design**

The study begins with theoretical research on “Linking EB and firm competitiveness: The role of OnERevs, OC, and recruitment efficiency in the case of Azerbaijan Glassdoor reviewed firms”. Based on the research design, the conceptual framework created earlier in the literature will be used. The recommended research design's methodological approach has been used by the researcher to carry out the goals and objectives of the study. The theoretical idea of the study model is supported by the literature review for the proposed model. In order to accomplish the general goals of the study, a deductive strategy would be used.

### **3.4. Sample, Demographics, Data Collection, and Analytic Technique**

Following the approach employed in previous academic studies, we use Glassdoor companies as a context and as a data source for our study. The top managers, middle managers and executives from each company were contacted, and their working experience with the current employer were asked. They were requested to participate in the survey by sharing the Google form link via email and LinkedIn by using the online survey method and then extracted the results in a spread sheet for data analysis. The data were analysed by using SPSS and Smart PLS. A total of 453 employees from 258 companies were contacted and requested to participate in this survey (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). In return, a total of 368 usable responses were received from 158 companies. The method of data collection is compatible with other research such as Ahmed et al., (2019), Awan et al., (2021), Shamim et al., (2017), Zia, (2020),, and Wamba et al., (2017). It is imperative to share that the unit of analysis for this study is individual employee.

### **3.5. Measures of Variables**

There are seven items that are used to measure Employer brand (EB) and these are adapted from P. Berthon et al., (2005). Organizational commitment (OC) is measured

by using eight items derived from (Meyer et al., 1990). Three items are used to measure firm competitiveness and are adapted from Delaney & Huselid, (1996). A total of three items are used to measure recruitment efficiency, and these are adopted from (Tumasjan et al., 2020). There are three items of online employees review that are adapted from (Pernkopf et al., 2020).

Table 1: Definitions and summary of constructs

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Constructs</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Literature adapted from</b>
<b>1</b>	Employer brand	EB is defined as a constellation of benefits that includes “functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company” (Ambler and Barrow, 1996).	Armstrong, (2006)  (Ambler & Barrow, 1996)
<b>2</b>	Organizational commitment	Organizational commitment (OC) is the process of encouraging and involving employees in order to form a long-term relationship with organizations	Al-Emadi et al., (2015)
<b>3</b>	Firm competitiveness	The ability and capability of a firm to efficiently utilizing the available resources to	Peterson et al., (2003)

		achieve set goals that are consistent with the vision and mission of the firm.	
4	Recruitment efficiency	Recruitment Efficiency referred as to hire required people in less time and it is also a measure of speed and time of hiring process.	Pappas, (2004)
5	Online employees review	Electronic word of mouth is referred as online employee reviews in special case, that is considered as an indication of employee satisfaction about employers, which also gives valuable internal information about employers from all hierarchical levels.	Symitsi et al., (2018)

#### 4. QUANTITATIVE STUDY – Results

The method of Fornell & Larcker (1981) is applied to test the convergent and discriminant validity. The study hypothesis is examined by using the partial least squares method (PLS). The study carefully employed PLS after weighing the advantages and disadvantages of PLS. Literature such as Rönkkö & Evermann's (2013), Chin et al (2003), and Henseler et al (2014) supports the use of PLS. According to Chin et al. (2003), PLS can take into account both the structural model and the measurement model at the same time. With PLS, it is feasible to test how well study variables and somewhat complex interactions, like a mediator and moderator, are measured. PLS is used to examine the complicated and complex model because

this study incorporates mediators in addition to analyzing variables utilizing new scales (Henseler et al., 2014).

#### 4.1. Construct reliability and validity

The Cronbach alpha is used to gauge the construct reliability. Cronbach's alpha value measures the reliability, and it should be more than 0.70 (George, 2011). The analysis' findings reveal that each construct's Cronbach alpha value is higher than 0.70, demonstrating reliability and internal consistency. The factor loading of each item must be greater than 0.70, the average variance extract (AVE) must be greater than 0.50, and the composite reliability value (CR) must be greater than AVE in order to prove convergent validity (Donate & de Pablo, 2015; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results in Table 2 demonstrate that all constructs satisfied the criteria; factor loadings for the constructs of employer brand (EB) range from 0.73 to 0.89, firms' competitiveness from 0.87 to 0.92, recruitment efficiency (REC EF) from 0.85 to 0.86, organizational commitment (OC) from 0.77 to 0.89, and online employee reviews from 0.8 to 0.88. Additionally, the convergent validity is established because the AVE value exceeds 0.50 and the CR value exceeds the AVE value.

Table 2: Reliability and Convergent Validity (Source: author's own)

Variables	Items	Factor loadings	AVE	CR	Cronbach's Alpha
Employer brand (EB)	EB_2	0.80	0.65	0.91	0.89
	EB_3	0.77			
	EB_4	0.89			
	EB_5	0.88			
	EB_6	0.74			
	EB_7	0.73			
	Firm competitiveness (FC)	FC_1			
FC_2		0.92			
FC_3		0.87			
Recruitment efficiency (REC EF)	RE_EF_1	0.86	0.75	0.89	0.83
	RE_EF_2	0.88			
	RE_EF_3	0.85			

Organizational commitment (OC)	OC_1	0.84	0.71	0.93	0.91
	OC_2	0.85			
	OC_3	0.89			
	OC_4	0.88			
	OC_7	0.77			
	OC_8	0.81			
Online employee reviews	ONEREV_1	0.86	0.76	0.90	0.84
	ONEREV_2	0.87			
	ONEREV_3	0.88			

The criteria for assessing discriminant validity have been defined by Fornell & Larcker (1981). According to Fornell & Larcker (1981), discriminant validity is shown when the AVE value is greater than the squared correlation between the constructs. The results in Table 3 show that the discriminant validity is established. The value of the squared correlation is lower than the AVE value. The results of the factor analysis, along with the reliability and validity tests carried out using Smart PLS and a variance based PLS approach, illustrate the quality of the research model

Table 3:Discriminant validity (Source: author's own)

Factors	1	2	3	4	5
EB	<b>0.806</b>				
FC	0.602	<b>0.909</b>			
OnERev	0.401	0.472	<b>0.872</b>		
OC	0.719	0.743	0.457	<b>0.843</b>	
REC_EF	0.478	0.601	0.463	0.650	<b>0.864</b>

## 4.2. Path analysis and hypothesis testing

The Smart PLS 3.3.3 software version has been used to test hypotheses and path analysis using the structural equation model. The study first investigated the direct

link between the constructs, as shown in Table 4, and then looked at the constructs' potential mediating effects and moderating effects. The findings show that employer brand (EB) positively and significantly effects organizational commitment (OC) ( $\beta = 0.634, p < 0.05$ ), firms' competitiveness efficiency (FC) ( $\beta = 0.136, p < 0.001$ ), and recruitment efficiency (REC\_EF) ( $\beta = 0.478, p < 0.001$ ). These results support the acceptance of H1, H2 and H5. The outcome also demonstrates the direct relationship of organizational commitment (OC) with firms' competitiveness (FC) and the direct relationship of recruitment efficiency (REC\_EF) with firms' competitiveness (FC). The findings show that organizational commitment (OC) is positively and significantly related with firms' competitiveness (FC) ( $\beta = 0.514, p < 0.001$ ). Recruitment efficiency (REC\_EF) is also positively and significantly associated with firms' competitiveness (FC) ( $\beta = 0.202, p < 0.001$ ). These results support the acceptance of H3 and H6.

Regarding mediating relationships, the results indicate that there is an indirect association of employer brand (EB) with firms' competitiveness (FC) through the mediation of recruitment efficiency ( $\beta = 0.097, p < 0.001$ ) and organizational commitment ( $\beta = 0.326, p < 0.001$ ). After entering the recruitment efficiency and organizational commitment between the relationship employer brand and firms' competitiveness into the model, the direct relationship of employer brand (EB) with firms' competitiveness (FC) was reduced from  $\beta = 0.558$  to  $\beta = 0.136$ . Partially mediation is demonstrated by the fact that the associations are still significant at  $p < 0.05$ . The results support H4 and H7. The moderating effect of online employee reviews (OnERev) in the relationship of employer brand (EB) and organizational commitment (OC) is also examined. The moderating effect of online employee reviews (OnERev) in the relationship of employer brand (EB) and organizational commitment (OC) is not significant. Results reveal that online employee review (OnERev) do not moderate the relationship of employer brand (EB) and organizational commitment (OC) ( $\beta = -0.013, p > 0.05$ ). Therefore, the findings do not support the moderation effect of online employee reviews (OnERev), and lead to the rejection of H8.

Table 4: Path analysis and hypothesis testing (Source: author's own)

Path	Direct effect $\beta$ (t-value)	Indirect effect $\beta$ (t-value)	Total effect $\beta$ (t-value)	Moderating effect $\beta$ (t-value)	Hypothesis	Result
EB -> OC	0.634**(17.042)				H5	Accepted
EB -> FC	0.136***(2.192)				H1	Accepted
OC -> FC	0.514***(7.539)				H6	Accepted
EB -> REC_EF	0.478***(10.878)				H2	Accepted
REC_EF -> FC	0.202***(3.649)				H3	Accepted
EB -> REC_EF->FC	0.136**(2.192)	0.097**(3.473)	0.558***(13.739)		H4	Accepted
EB -> OC->-FC		0.326***(6.844)			H7	Accepted
(EB)(OnERev)->OC				-0.013(0.691)	H8	Rejected

Note: \*\* represents  $p < 0.05$  and \*\*\* represents  $p < 0.001$



### 4.3. Determination coefficient

In order to determine the effect size in a multiple regression analysis of the continuous independent and dependent variables, Cohen (2013) developed Cohen's f-square. This effect size is categorized as small, medium, and large by Cohen (2013). According to Cohen (2013), there are three categories: small effect ( $f^2 = 0.02$ ); medium effect ( $f^2 = 0.15$ ); and large effect ( $f^2 = 0.35$ ). According to the table, the majority of significant connections point to a medium effect, with an effect size that ranges between 0.15 and 0.35.

Table 5: Effect size overview of structural model- Cohen's  $f^2$  (Source: author's own)

<b>Effect</b>	<b>Original Sample (O)</b>	<b>Sample Mean (M)</b>	<b>St. d</b>	<b>T Statistics</b>	<b>P Values</b>	<b>Cohen's <math>f^2</math></b>	<b>Remarks</b>
EB -> OC	0.634	0.630	0.037	17.042	0	0.89	Strong effect
EB -> FC	0.136	0.138	0.062	2.192	0.029	0.11	Small effect
OC -> FC	0.514	0.514	0.068	7.539	0	0.39	Medium effect
EB -> REC_EF	0.478	0.479	0.044	10.878	0	0.57	Strong effect
REC_EF -> FC	0.202	0.199	0.055	3.649	0	0.19	Medium effect

Table 6: Summary of tested hypothesis (Source: author's own)

<b>Hypothesis</b>		<b>Conclusion</b>
H1	<i>Employer brand is positively associated with firm competitiveness in the labour market.</i>	Accepted
H2	<i>Employer brand is positively associated with recruitment efficiency.</i>	Accepted
H3	<i>Recruitment efficiency is positively associated with firm competitiveness on the labour market.</i>	Accepted
H4	<i>Recruitment efficiency mediates the relationship between employer brand and firm competitiveness on the labour market.</i>	Accepted
H5	<i>Employer brand is positively associated with organizational commitment.</i>	Accepted
H6	<i>Organizational commitment is positively associated with firm competitiveness on the labour market.</i>	Accepted
H7	<i>Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between employer brand and firm competitiveness on the labour market.</i>	Accepted
H8	<i>Online employee reviews moderate the relationship between employer brand and organizational commitment.</i>	Rejected

## 5. DISCUSSION

This study examines the role of employer brand to enhance firm competitiveness with mediation of organizational commitment and recruitment efficiency. Furthermore, the moderating role of online employee reviews in the relationship of employer brand and employer brand and organizational commitment is also examined. The study uses the context of Azerbaijan, as a developing economy, and examines the relationships of employer brand and firm competitiveness with mediating roles of recruitment efficiency and organizational commitment in those companies that are registered in Glassdoor.com. Moderating role of online employees' reviews between the relationship of employer brand and organizational commitment is also examined. This study provides a rich direction of implications to the firms of Azerbaijan that are facing various negative reviews on rating websites like Glassdoor.com

The findings suggest employer brand is positively related to firms' competitiveness. It means that a stronger employer brand of the firm is a useful tool to enhance firms' competitiveness in the context of developing economies. More the firms invest on their employer brand, more the companies will attract and retain highly talented staff that would play a crucial role in producing goods and services according to the market needs. The results are consistent with the findings of Tumasjan et al. (2020), that advances the literature and demonstrate the relationship of employer branding effects to firm performance. The research outcome exhibits a direct relationship of employer brand with recruitment efficiency. It stipulates that firms with stronger employer brand are in a better position to attract employees that helps to implement efficient recruitment practices. These findings are consistent with existing literature (Tumasjan et al., 2020). The results also support the direct relationship of employer brand with organizational commitment. In the context of this study, it means that employees feel motivated to strengthen work commitment for those employers who have a strong employer brand. . The study results are accordant to existing studies (Botella-Carrubi et al., 2021).

In addition, the study indicates a direct relationship of recruitment efficiency and organizational commitment with firm competitiveness. These finding also support the results of existing studies that have investigated the relationship between recruitment efficiency and firm competitiveness (Greer et al., 2016; Sheehan, 2014). The results also show that recruitment efficiency mediates the relationship of employer brand and firms' competitiveness. It indicates that firms in developing countries with strong employer brand can be in a good position to efficiently recruit employees that will ultimately enhance firm competitiveness towards achieving its organizational mission. These results contradicts with findings of Tumasjan et al. (2020), that depicts that employer branding do not indirectly effect firm performance through mediation of recruitment efficiency.

. Furthermore, organizational commitment mediates the relationship of employer brand and firms' competitiveness. In the context of this study, it means that a stronger employer brand positively affects employee's commitment to achieve organizational goals that leads to strengthen the firms' competitiveness. Research results about the relationship of employer brand with organizational commitment supports the findings of the work done by Botella-Carrubi et al. (2021), that proposes the employer brand creation as a best strategy to enhance

dimensions of organizational commitment. The results also show that online employee reviews do not moderate the relationship of employer brand and organizational commitment. In the context of this study, it indicates that due to higher unemployment in developing countries (Su et al., 2022), despite looking at the negative reviews about the employers, job seekers do not pay much attention to employees' reviews. The labour market is concerned to get job despite the fact that employer is not well rated on online platforms like Glassdoor.com.

## **5.1. Theoretical, Academic and Practical Implications**

The thesis contributes towards body of knowledge in several ways by investigating the role of EB in enhancing firm competitiveness (FC). Existing literature is mostly focussing on the EB dimensions and attributes (Küpper et al., 2019); however, research on how OnERevs effect EB and organizational commitment is still limited. The current study explores the effect of OnERevs on the relationship of EB and FC in the context of developing countries. It is one of the rare studies discussing the moderating effect of OnERevs in the context of developing countries. It contributes to the signalling theory by examining the moderating effects of OnERev signals on the relationship between EB and organizational commitment.

The current study extends signalling theory implications by using its lens to examine OnERev signals to strengthen the effect of EB on organizational commitment. It also extends the use of PO fit theory lens to attract and retain talented employees to become a best fit for the organization. Furthermore, investigation of the mediating role of organizational commitment and recruitment efficiency in the relationship of EB and firm competitiveness is also a novel contribution. This thesis makes an empirical contribution by investigating these concerns in Azerbaijan, which provides the context of a developing economy. Moreover, this study also contributes to the strategic human resource management with the decisions and intentions of the organisational employer brand strategies concerning to the employment relationship towards recruitment and performance management.

The results of the thesis are practically useful for the HR managers of the firms of developing countries to hire the best talent to enhance their firm competitiveness. In addition, the study also highlights the importance of OC to employers to strengthen the relationship between EB and firm competitiveness.

This thesis focuses to the online employee reviews to attract new employees and effect EB strategies. Online employee reviews play more crucial role in developed countries as compared to developing countries. In the context of developing countries, the firms should focus more to build employer brand and work on best HR practices to attract and retain best talent rather than to put more attention to online employee reviews. Online employee reviews have strong impact in developed countries as compared to developing countries (Bahrini & Qaffas, 2019).

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The proposed employees for the firms of Azerbaijan are facing challenges in finding the best employer for employment (Choshin & Ghaffari, 2017). Firms are making EB strategies to attract new employees and retain old ones to improve their firm competitiveness. Not only in developed countries, but the companies in developing economies are also struggling to put maximum efforts to strengthen their employer brand (Mičík & Mičudová, 2018). While applying for the jobs, the proposed employees can see the reviews of former employees about reputation of relevant employer through platform firms, i.e., Glassdoor, and then decide whether to join the firms or not. OnERevs play a crucial role in decision making of applicants, as these reviews can affect the EB strategies that may be the foundation for better firm competitiveness.

In the context of developing economy such as Azerbaijan, this study examines the role of EB to enhance the competitiveness of Azerbaijan-based firms. This study investigates that how organization's EB strategies are convincing employees to match their goals by using the lens of PO fit theory in order to promote firm's competitiveness. It investigates the mediation of OC and recruitment efficiency in the association of EB and firm competitiveness. Furthermore, the moderating role of OnERev in the relationship of EB and OC is also examined. This study uses a quantitative method, where a questionnaire is sent to the employees of those companies that are registered in Glassdoor website domain of Azerbaijan. The results of the study contribute to both theory and practice.

### **6.1. Limitations and suggestions for future research**

There are few limitations of the study. This research only collects data from Azerbaijan, which is a developing economy. Future research should collect data from other regions in order to compare the outcomes and effects of employer

branding strategies among different countries. Particularly, the data collection from other countries in a post-pandemic period may come up with interesting findings. Another limitation is that this study is based on cross-sectional data, which is prone to common method bias. However, several precautions were taken to avoid typical method bias i.e. randomization of items, data collection in multiple waves, maintaining the anonymity of respondents, and statistical check i.e. Harman single factor test, which also suggests that common method bias is not significant. As the study didn't find a positive effect of online employee reviews on the relationship of EB and OC, therefore future studies can replace online reviews with online rating of the employers. An online review is a written evaluation or commentary that describes a person's experience with a product, service, or establishment, however an online rating is a quantitative assessment of a product, service, or experience given by a user. It usually involves selecting a specific number of stars or rating points to indicate the overall satisfaction level. The study highly encourages to use employer rating as a moderating variable to examine its effects on the relationship of employer brand and recruitment efficiency. Because, in current digital era, the trend of employer rating is more eminent as compared to the online reviews (Holtom et al., 2008).

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- Zia, N. U. (2020). Knowledge-oriented leadership, knowledge management behaviour and innovation performance in project-based SMEs. The moderating role of goal orientations. *Journal of Knowledge Management*.

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### Published articles

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2. Yasin, R., **Huseynova, A.**, & Atif, M. (2022). Green human resource management, a gateway to employer branding: Mediating role of corporate environmental sustainability and corporate social sustainability. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*. DOI: [10.1002/csr.2360](https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.2360)
3. Yasin, R., Yang, S., **Huseynova, A.**, & Atif, M. (2022). Spiritual leadership and intellectual capital: mediating role of psychological safety and knowledge sharing. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, DOI: [10.1108/JIC-03-2022-0067](https://doi.org/10.1108/JIC-03-2022-0067)
4. Yasin, R., Jan, G., **Huseynova, A.** and Atif, M. (2023), "Inclusive leadership and turnover intention: the role of follower–leader goal

congruence and organizational commitment", *Management Decision*, Vol. 61 No. 3, pp. 589-609. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MD-07-2021-0925>

5. **Huseynova, A.**, & Matošková, J. (2022). Sustainable HRM practices for a stronger employer brand: Leveraging organizational culture. *Scientific Papers of the University of Pardubice-Series D-Faculty of Economics and Administration*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46585/sp30031605>

## Conference Proceedings

6. 16th International Bata Conference for Ph.D. Students and Young Researchers (DOKBAT 2020). A wider future research agenda and research gaps in the context of industry 4.0, with the focus on management issues [ Czech Republic, 2 Sep 2020 – 3 Sep 2020] DOI: [10.7441/dokbat.2020.50](https://doi.org/10.7441/dokbat.2020.50)
7. **Huseynova, A.**, & Zia, N. U. (2021, July). Holistic Perspective of Globally Accepted Research on Social-Media Marketing on SME Perspective. In *ECISM 2021 8th European Conference on Social Media* (p. 90). Academic Conferences Inter.
8. Zia, N. U., Burita, L., **Huseynova, A.**, & Owusu, V. K. (2022, June). A Managerial Review and Guidelines for Industry 4.0 Factories on Cybersecurity. In *European Conference on Cyber Warfare and Security* (Vol. 21, No. 1, pp. 336-340). DOI: [10.34190/eccws.21.1.499](https://doi.org/10.34190/eccws.21.1.499)
9. EURAM 2022, Leading digital transformation. Business failure preclusion of B2B distributors during the pandemic epoch: Does digital transformation change the business paradigm? [ Switzerland, 15 June 2022 – 17 June 2022]
10. **Huseynova, A.** (2022). Sustainable Human Resource Management Practices Impacting Employer Branding. *Cognitive Sustainability*, 1(2). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55343/cogsust.15>
11. The Digital Transformation of Small Business Models: Challenges of Emerging Economies during COVID-19 Pandemic. Proceedings – 5th European Rome 2022. ISSN: 2169-8767. [882.pdf \(ieomsociety.org\)](https://www.ieomsociety.org/882.pdf)

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**Employer Brand and Firm Competitiveness on The Labour  
Market: The Case of Azerbaijan**

Budování značky zaměstnavatele a firemní konkurenceschopnost na trhu práce:  
případ Ázerbájdžánu

Published by: Tomas Bata University in Zlín,  
nám. T.G. Masaryka 5555, 760 01 Zlín

Edition: published electronically  
1<sup>st</sup> edition

Typesetting by: Aydan Huseynova

This work has not gone through any editorial review or proofreading

Year of publication: 2023

ISBN 978-80-7678-202-0

