

# The Role of Attractive Employers and Perceived Organizational Support on Employee Motivation and Engagement

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## The Role of Attractive Employers and Perceived Organizational Support on Employee Motivation and Engagement

Sophia Chiovitti

The functions of an employer brand are to attract and retain employees. Previous research on incumbent employees has typically focused on commitment related variables; therefore, it remains unclear whether working for an attractive employer motivates incumbent employees to engage in their work. The purpose of the present study was to investigate the process in which organizational attractiveness leads to employee engagement. Drawing from both signaling and self-determination theory, this study proposes that organizational attractiveness will lead to employee engagement through autonomous motivation. It is also proposed that this relationship would be dependent upon whether the incumbent employee experiences perceived organizational support. Employees ( $n = 220$ ) from various firms across North America were recruited and surveyed online at two time points. Organizational attractiveness and its dimensions positively predicted employee engagement and autonomous motivation. It was also found that autonomous motivation mediates the influence of organizational attractiveness on employee engagement; whereas the effect appears to be moderated by perceived organizational support. Results showed support for the mediation-moderation model. However, different patterns emerged for the moderating effect of perceived organizational support. It is concluded that brand value dimensions along with organizational support interact to motivate incumbent employees to engage in their work. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

*Keywords:* employer brands, organizational attractiveness, perceived organizational support, autonomous motivation, employee engagement

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## Contributions of Author

### Contribution 1:

In determining the effects of organizational attractiveness and its values on incumbent employees, this research adds to the management and marketing literature by demonstrating how an employer brand impacts incumbent employees.

### Contribution 2:

By addressing autonomous motivation as the underlying mechanism in the relationship between organizational attractiveness and employee engagement, this research contributes to the self-determination literature by demonstrating another relationship mediated by autonomous motivation.

### Contribution 3:

By demonstrating that the employee perception of perceived organizational support plays a key role in explaining the relationship between organizational attractiveness and its values, with autonomous motivation, and employee engagement, this study contributes support for social exchange theory.

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## The Role of Attractive Employers and Perceived Organizational Support on Employee Motivation and Engagement

### **Introduction**

As the globalized war on talent continues (i.e., Beechler & Woodward, 2009; Aguinis, Gottfredson, & Joo, 2012), firms need to develop and implement strategies to attract and retain talent. In the present time, it appears that for firms to thrive, they must not only put marketing efforts towards their products; but also towards themselves, as employers. An often sought out strategy is the development of an employer brand. According to Hanin, Stinglhamber, and Delobbe (2013), employer brand practices allow firms to differentiate themselves in terms of the benefits they offer their employees in respect to their competitors. A firm's employer brand is therefore a topic worth investigating, as it is proposed here that it can satisfy employer and employee needs through the norm of reciprocity and social exchange (i.e. Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart, & Adis, 2017), thereby fostering positive outcomes for both parties, such as autonomously motivated and engaged employees.

Ambler and Barrow (1996) were the first to coin the term employer brand. They've argued that bringing marketing concepts into the employment situation may improve human resource-related processes, such as recruitment and retention (Hanin, Stinglhamber, & Delobbe, 2013). For example, Randstad (2017) has reported that the most attractive attributes sought in employers have to do with human-resource related processes, such as salary and benefits. Similarly, marketing scholars have argued that internal brand management towards employees is necessary for delivering the firm's values to customers and other stakeholders (King & Grace, 2009). According to Ambler and Barrow (1996) internal brand management, which is ensuring that employees are effectively delivering the organization's values through programs and policies, is achieved through employee development and rewards – which are elements of an employer brand.

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) have theorized that an employer brand serves two main functions in the management of human resources, to recruit external candidates and to assure that incumbent employees are engaged in the firms' strategy. This study is specifically concerned the effects of the brand on incumbent employees. Since brands are considered to be intangible assets (Keller & Lehmann, 2006), previous researchers (e.g., Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005) have measured the strength of an employer brand through organizational attractiveness, which is

defined as, “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company” (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 187; Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). Based on this construct, Jiang and Iles (2001) further propose that employees will derive different levels of economic, social, developmental, and interest values, along with brand trust from their employer, which are the dimensions of organizational attractiveness.

Organizational attractiveness is a five-factor construct that contains both convergent and discriminant validity (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). The economic value dimension refers to the extent to which an individual is attracted to the salary, compensation package, job security, and promotional opportunities that their employer has to offer (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). Developmental value has to do with the extent to which an individual is attracted to their employer as their employer appears to value recognition, self-worth, and career-enhancing experiences (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). On the other hand, social and interest values revolve around the work environment. As such, interest value refers to extent to which an employer provides an exciting work environment, uses good work practices, and makes use of its employee’s creativity to produce high-quality and innovative products and services. Social value also refers to extent to which an employer provides a positive work environment; however, with an emphasis on good relationships and a team atmosphere (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). Lastly, brand trust can be described as the perception of safety and sincerity with the given employer (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005; Rampl & Kenning, 2014). Similarly, previous studies that have used an employer branding framework, have captured the strength of the employer brand through the construct of organizational attractiveness (e.g., e.g., Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005; Lievens, 2007; Jiang & Iles, 2011; Biswas & Suar, 2016). In line with these studies, organizational attractiveness will be used to measure the strength of the employer brand in terms of its economic, developmental, social, and interest values along with brand trust.

The first objective of the present study is to apply the concept of organizational attractiveness on incumbent employees. According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), both potential and incumbent employees should be affected by the employer’s brand. Previous studies (e.g., Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005; Jiang & Iles, 2011) have used organizational attractiveness to measure the envisioned benefits that potential employees perceive from a given employer. Studies on potential employees have found organizational attractiveness to be related to



marketing outcomes such as, intentions of applying for job postings (Sivertzen, Nilsen, & Olafsen, 2013), evaluation and attitudes towards organizations (Gomes & Neves, 2010), and actual application decisions (Collins & Stevens, 2002). However, addressing the concept of organizational attractiveness on incumbent employees has been overlooked in the management literature, with some exceptions which will be elaborated on below. This therefore presents a limited view on the potential benefits of actually working for an attractive organization. Thus, this research will contribute to the management literature by attempting to determine the effects of organizational attractiveness on incumbent employees.

The outcomes of internally marketing brand values towards incumbent employees have typically focused on commitment-related variables (e.g., Davies, 2008; Hanin, Stinglhamber, & Delobbe, 2013). That said, the second objective of this research is to investigate the process through which organizational attractiveness influences employee engagement. Although some have speculated that a strong employer brand may foster motivation in incumbent employees (e.g., Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004), the theory does not address motivation, specifically autonomous motivation, as an associating mechanism between organizational attractiveness and a desirable outcome such as, employee engagement. Drawing from self-determination theory (Deci, & Ryan, 2011; Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017), this study will contribute to the management literature by identifying and addressing autonomous motivation as the underlying mechanism in the relationship between organizational attractiveness and employee engagement.

The third objective of this study is to explain the relationship between organizational attractiveness, autonomous motivation, and employee engagement through perceived organizational support. A common theme in the employer brand research with incumbent employees has been the focus on commitment-related variables (e.g., Davies, 2008; Hanin et al., 2013). Similarly, the research on perceived organizational support emerged from the growing interest in the factors that influence the employee dedication to organizations as employers (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). This body of research proposes that employment is a social exchange between employee commitment and effort towards the organization, for both tangible and intangible benefits in return (Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart, & Adis, 2017). This study will therefore contribute to the management literature and social exchange theory by addressing that the employee perception of perceived

organizational support will play a key role in explaining the relationship between organizational attractiveness, autonomous motivation, and employee engagement.

## **Literature Review**

The literature shows varying definitions for employer brand, the concept can be generally defined as the active management of an organization's image as an employer (Rampl, Opitz, Welp, & Kenning, 2016). From the organization's perspective, Backhaus (2004) conducted a qualitative analysis to see how organizations behave in the market as employers. She conceptualized an employer brand as a multidimensional construct including the following eight dimensions: (1) corporate social responsibility; (2) customer orientation; (3) customer satisfaction; (4) organizational climate; (5) workers' non-work related responsibilities; (6) work-family balance; (7) stakeholders' responsibilities; and (8) size. The idea of employer brand as a multidimensional construct has been widely recognized and addressed in some of the literature (e.g., Gomes & Neves, 2010); however, this definition seems to implicate various stakeholders, including employees. On the other hand, others have defined employer brand strictly from the employee perspective as "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company" (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 187), which will be the focus of the present research.

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) have theorized that an employer brand appears to serve two main functions in human resource management. As mentioned, its first function is to attract and recruit external candidates; whereas the second function is to assure that current employees are engaged in the organizations' strategy and motivated by the culture of the firm. The process of creating an employer brand is said to occur in three-steps (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). First, the firm develops a proposition of values. These values are usually found in the firm's mission statement. They are embodied in the employer's brand which includes, but not limited to, the organization's climate (Backhaus, 2004). Next, the value proposition is marketed to potential employees through multiple channels, such as recruitment agencies. Internal brand marketing of the employer brand is the final aspect of the creation process. Here, incumbent employees are said to be engaged in the company's strategy and this engagement consequently motivates them to deliver the firm's values and to become "brand ambassadors" (Elving, Westhoff, Meeusen, & Schoonderbeek, 2013, p. 356).

The majority of the research pertaining to employer brand perceptions has generally focused on recruitment efforts (e.g., Collins & Stevens, 2002; Gomes & Neves, 2010; Sivertzen, Nilsen, & Olafsen, 2013; Rampl, Opitz, Welpel, & Kenning, 2016). Nevertheless, some researchers have examined various relationships and effects of incumbent employee perceptions. Although the studies do not operationally define employer brand in the same manner, this section will review some of the literature while examining some of the varying conceptualizations of employer brand. For instance, Davies (2008) operationalized employer brand as, “a set of distinctive associations made by employees (actual or potential) with the corporate name” (Davies, 2008 p. 667). Davies (2008) borrowed from the marketing literature to hypothesize that a strong employer brand would be associated to perceived differentiation of the organization, affinity, and satisfaction with the organization, along with loyalty to the organization. A sample of commercial managers were surveyed. It was found that employer brands were positively associated with a perceived differentiation, affinity and satisfaction, along with strong loyalty to the organization (Davies, 2008).

As compared to Davies (2008), Biswas and Suar (2016) also targeted a management sample to address the antecedents and consequences of perceived employer brand with incumbent employees. Top-level executives from different organizations answered a survey in which they were asked to evaluate their company’s employer brand. Here, employer brand was used as an umbrella term to refer to the brand’s equity, capacity to attract and retain talent, and levels of loyalty. The survey also included potential antecedents and consequences of the perceived employer brand (Biswas & Suar, 2016). Antecedents included constructs such as perceived organizational prestige and corporate social responsibility; whereas consequences included measures of non-financial performance, along with objective financial performance. Non-financial performance was measured as a subjective measure of employee performance as an assumed are a result of the employer brand perception. This study revealed that leadership was the strongest predictor of a positive employer brand. In addition, the authors found that realistic job previews, perceived organizational support, equity in reward administration, perceived organizational prestige, organizational trust, psychological contract obligations, and corporate social responsibility all contribute to the employer brand perception. Consequently, this perception appeared to be related to perceived non-financial and financial performance.

Contrary to previous researchers (i.e., Davies, 2008; Biswas & Suar, 2016), Lievens (2007) conceptualized employer brand through an instrumental-symbolic beliefs framework. Instrumental beliefs refer to product-related attributes, which are job and organizational characteristics, such as job security and task diversity. Symbolic beliefs are non-product related attributes, which are abstract and perceived, such as organizational prestige. That said, instrumental and symbolic beliefs of employer brand were therefore examined between three groups part of the Belgian military. The three groups of participants consisted of potential applicants, actual applicants, and selectees with less than one year of experience. Survey data was collected and it was found that in all three groups, both instrumental and symbolic attributes were related to the organization's attractiveness. However, symbolic attributes played a stronger role than instrumental values in determining attractiveness across all three groups. Furthermore, actual applicants showed more favorable perceptions about the employer's instrumental and symbolic attributes than potential applicants. Further, symbolic meaning was considered a factor that explained a large proportion of the army's attractiveness as an employer in incumbent employees. Instrumental meaning seems to decrease from applicants to actual employees. The author suggests that differences exist due to perceived image amongst applicants and perceived identity amongst employees.

Similar to Lievens (2007), Helm, Renk, and Mishra (2016) were also interested in comparisons as they explored factors that are related to employer brand with current employees. The purpose of this study was to explore the effect of employees' brand self-congruity (which is, employees' actual self and ideal self) on their employer brand identification, brand pride, along with brand citizenship behaviours (which is conceptualized as behaviours that enhance the employer brand). Brand citizenship behaviours also refer to participation on the job, along with behaviours that support and influence brand-building efforts (Helm, Renk, & Mishra, 2016). Support for their hypotheses in which brand pride is related to brand citizenship behaviours was found. Self-congruity with employee actual selves and ideal selves had similar effects on brand identification. However, brand pride is only affected by congruity of the brand with the ideal self. Congruity of the actual self seems to only affect brand citizenship behaviour. The authors conclude that their study provides some support for social-identification theory. This theory suggests that affiliation with in-groups and distinction from out-groups are important motivational factors. This is comparable to results that was addressed earlier in this review (i.e.,

Davies, 2008), in which positive employer brand personality was associated with perceived differentiation. These conclusions suggest that perceived differentiation of an employer brand could be a motivational factor for incumbent employees.

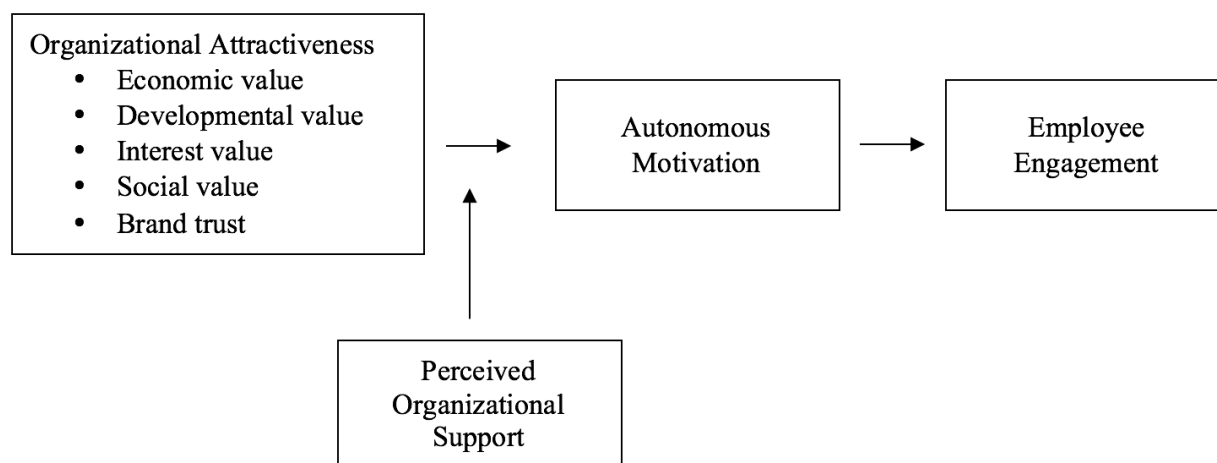
Similar to the previously mentioned research, Hanin, Stinglhamber, and Delobbe, (2013) operationalized employer brand in the same manner as Ambler and Barrow (1996), which was mentioned earlier. Hanin and colleagues (2013) were interested in the influence the perception of employer brand has on employee commitment. It was argued by the authors that the purpose of conveying a strong employer brand to current employees is to motivate and retain them. Unlike previous researchers, employer brand was measured in terms of employment offering, as conveyed by the job conditions. This study examined the interaction between employment offering, as portrayed by the organization, and actual (or lived) employment experience on affective commitment. The construct of affective commitment has been reported to be strongly related to both extra-role performance and negatively related to voluntary turnover. That said, it was expected that the more positively employees perceived their lived employment experience (in terms of beneficial job conditions), the more they would be affectively committed. Furthermore, it was argued by the authors that employment offering should emphasize favorable and positive work conditions. A discrepancy between employment offering and lived employment experience of favorable job conditions could potentially lower affective commitment. It was further hypothesized that the employment offering perceived by the employee should strengthen the relationship between lived employment experience and affective commitment. Researchers also explored the effects of psychological contract violation and perceived organizational support, as there seems to be a theoretical link to affective commitment. Survey data was collected and results showed an interaction between employment offering and lived employment experience. Moreover, the authors conclude that the role of psychological contract violation and perceived organizational support are two significant mechanisms that are needed to better understand the effect of employer brand on affective commitment.

### **Research Question & Hypotheses**

The literature above demonstrates that research on incumbent employees has mostly examined commitment-related variables as outcomes of the perceived employer brand. For instance, studies focused on outcomes such as, organizational loyalty (e.g., Davies, 2008); employee commitment (e.g., Hanin, Stinglhamber, & Delobbe, 2013); retention (e.g., Backhaus,

& Tikoo, 2004); along with brand pride, and brand citizenship behaviours (e.g., Helm, Renk, & Mishra, 2016). These findings are in line with the marketing perspective, as commitment-related variables reflect brand loyalty (King & Grace, 2009). However, this presents a theoretical limitation given that strong, or attractive, employer brands are said to engage employees in the firm's strategy (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). In line with Backhaus and Tikoo's (2004) theory, King and Grace (2009) have proposed that internal brand management helps build employee understanding of their organization's objectives, thereby fostering this understanding in their performance (King & Grace, 2009). Although employee engagement represents less than the entire domain of work performance (Macey & Schneider, 2008), Campbell (1990) has suggested that engagement is considered to be a broad and general aspect of employee performance for many types of jobs. However, it remains unclear whether the perception of organizational attractiveness actually motivates employees to become engaged in their work. This study will therefore shed light on this potential relationship and the influential process of organizational attractiveness in incumbent employees. The following research question is therefore proposed:

Research Question: *How does organizational attractiveness and its dimensions lead to employee engagement?*



## **Employee Engagement**

In practice and in press (i.e., Kruse, 2012), engaged employees are viewed as desirable to employers because of the positive impact this trait appears to have on performance. In line with practice, research has revealed that employee engagement strengthens the relationship between organizational-level variables and task performance (Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010) and affects individual-level job performance (Carter, Nesbit, Badham, Parker, & Sung, 2018), as well. Meta-analyses showed that employee engagement was correlated to business-level performance (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002); and also revealed the predictive validity of employee engagement on job performance, above other job attitudes (Mackay, Allen, & Landis, 2017). Given the value of having engaged employees, it is important to address the antecedents or conditions that facilitate employee engagement.

According to reviews articles (i.e., Macey & Schneider, 2008; Bailey, Madden, Alfes, & Fletcher, 2017), employee engagement has various antecedents and can be categorized as a state, trait, or behaviour. For the purpose of this paper, employee engagement will be defined as, “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002 p. 72). These three elements of employee engagement capture energy, resilience, willingness to invest effort, and persistence (otherwise known as vigor); enthusiasm, pride, inspiration and a sense of challenge at work (described as dedication); and finally, feeling happy, concentrated, and becoming at one with the work (absorption) (Salanova, Agut, & Peiró, 2005). This definition of employee engagement appears to be complete, as it captures the many facets of engagement described by Macey and colleague (2008).

It has long been suggested that the environment, or conditions in which people work in, can foster work engagement (Erikson, 2005). For instance, Rich, Lepine, and Crawford (2010) have demonstrated that values communicated by the organization that are in line with personal values, foster a sense of meaningfulness in the work and as a consequence, higher levels of employee engagement. More recently, it has been proposed that organizational culture, which comprises of organizational values in the work environment, leads to employee engagement (Al Mehrzi, & Singh, 2016). Similarly, a firm’s employer brand is said to signal a set of proposed values on behalf of the employer towards the employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Mandhanya & Shah, 2010; Jiang & Iles, 2011). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) have proposed that one of the

purposes of an employer brand is to assure that incumbent employees are engaged in the organizations' strategy and motivated by the culture of the firm. Further, employees that are engaged in the company's strategy are motivated to deliver the firm's values in their performance (Elving et al., 2013). In line with the antecedents of employee engagement and based on the theoretical arguments pertaining to the internal purposes of an employer brand, it is proposed here that organizational attractiveness, comprised of value dimensions and brand trust, will predict employee engagement.

Hypothesis 1: *Organizational attractiveness will positively predict employee engagement.*

The five-factor model of organizational attractiveness appears to contain both convergent and discriminant validity (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). For instance, the economic value dimension addresses the extent to which an individual is attracted to the salary, compensation package, job security, and promotional opportunities that their employer has to offer (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). In line with the elements of this dimension, a study on individual differences and employee engagement found significant relationships between compensation and employment security with employee engagement (Garg, 2014). It has been further suggested by Anitha (2014) that compensation, in terms of both financial and non-financial rewards, can lead to employee engagement, as it motivates the employee to achieve more. A study on human resource practices and employee performance demonstrated a link between rewards and employee engagement (Sattar, Ahmad, & Hassan, 2015). Alike, Kuvaas and colleagues (2016) demonstrated a relationship between base pay and work effort. Thus, the perception of economic value associated with the employer is proposed to lead to employee engagement.

Hypothesis 1a: *Economic value will positively predict employee engagement.*

Developmental value has to do with the extent to which an individual is attracted to their employer as they value recognition, self-worth, and career-enhancing experiences (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). Research has shown that employee training opportunities appears to be positively related to job satisfaction (Hanaysha, & Tahir, 2016). In the context of employer brands, Hanin, Stinglhamber, and Delobbe (2013) used job conditions as a proxy measure for an



employer brand, which included opportunities for development. They found that this job condition was associated to affective commitment and job satisfaction in employees. In terms of employee engagement, studies that have identified that employee training (Sattar, Ahmad, & Hassan, 2015), and the perceptions of employee development, described as “a set of learning experiences designed to enhance employees’ applied skills and competencies” (Taufek, Zulkifle, & Sharif, 2016, p. 701), are significant predictors of employee engagement. It is therefore hypothesized that the perception of developmental value associated with the employer will lead to employee engagement.

Hypothesis 1b: *Developmental value will positively predict employee engagement.*

Interest value is the extent to which an employer provides an exciting work environment, uses good work practices, and makes use of its employee’s creativity to produce high-quality and innovative products and services (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). Similarly, social value also refers to extent to which an employer provides a positive work environment; however, with an emphasis on good relationships and a team atmosphere (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). These values are proven to be distinct (i.e., Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005); yet they emphasize the work environment. As mentioned earlier, the environment, or conditions in which people work in, can foster work engagement (Erikson, 2005) and it has been demonstrated that the values that foster a sense of meaningfulness in the workplace lead to employee engagement (Rich et al., 2010). Further, well-designed jobs that offer interesting and challenging tasks appear be related to positive outcomes such as job satisfaction (Güntert, 2015) and affective commitment (Mostafa, Gould-Williams, & Bottomley, 2015). It is therefore hypothesized that the level of interest value emphasized by the employer, perceived by the employee, will lead to employee engagement.

Hypothesis 1c: *Interest value will positively predict employee engagement.*

In line with both interest and social values, Sokro (2012) argued that it is necessary for organizations to provide work environments that are “psychologically empowering” and “socially rich,” in order to outperform competitors (p. 171). In line with Sokro (2012), a study (Hall, Dollard, Coward, 2010) has found that psychological safety climate, which is characterized by

interpersonal trust, mutual respect, comfort, and freedom, predicts employee engagement. Further, other studies have linked *socially rich* constructs such as, team work (Hanaysha, & Tahir, 2016) and employee participation in strategic planning (De Baerdemaeker, & Bruggeman, 2015) to positive outcomes such as, job satisfaction and to affective commitment. In line with these studies, a review article (Bailey, Madden, Alfes, & Fletcher, 2017) addressing the antecedents of employee engagement further confirms that team factors and social climate contribute to employee engagement. In line with these studies, it is hypothesized that the perception of social value associated with the employer will lead to employee engagement.

Hypothesis 1d: *Social value will positively predict employee engagement.*

Brand trust is the final dimension of organizational attractiveness, which can be described as the perception of safety and sincerity with the given employer (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005; Rampl & Kenning, 2014). Heavey, Halliday, Gilbert, and Murphy (2011) argue that due to the rapidly changing business environment, employer trust is a key value for employees. Accordingly, organizational trust appears to be associated with a number of positive work attitudes and higher levels of performance (Dirks, 2001). In terms of employer brands and in line with this research, Lievens (2007) found that organizational sincerity was more valued by incumbent employees, in comparison to applicants. Further, Biswas and Suar (2016) provided a link between trust and engagement by finding that organizational trust, conceptualized as integrity, dependability, honesty, and concern for employees was related to non-financial performance, which was described as management's perspective how the brand engages employees. In line with these findings, it is hypothesized that brand trust will lead to employee engagement.

Hypothesis 1e: *Brand trust will positively predict employee engagement.*

### **Linking Organizational Attractiveness and Work Motivation**

Self-determination theory (SDT) proposes that optimal motivation arises when three basic psychological needs are satisfied: the needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Deci, & Ryan, 2011; Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017). Motivation, according to this theory, can be captured

on a continuum from autonomous to controlled motivation. Autonomous motivation specifies that an individual behaves out of their own will and choice; whereas controlled motivation indicates that behaviour is done to assert control over a situation, or because one is pressured to do so (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999). Similar to employee engagement, a recent review on SDT (Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017) demonstrated that the antecedents of autonomous motivation include environmental factors such as job design, pay contingencies, and managerial style. Further, these relationships are typically mediated by satisfaction of the psychological needs (Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017). Since organizational attractiveness includes the employee evaluation of various environmental factors, it is proposed that organizational attractiveness, and its dimensions, will elicit autonomous motivation in employees.

Hypothesis 2: *Organizational attractiveness will positively predict autonomous motivation.*

Social value, a dimension of organizational attractiveness, is described as the importance an employer places on people's social needs as well as their sense of belonging (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). Similarly, the need for relatedness in SDT is described as the need to have relationships with others (Deci, & Ryan, 2011). In terms of eliciting autonomous motivation in employees, Grant (2007) advocated the importance employees place on knowing how their work benefits others. In line with Deci, Olafsen, and Ryan (2017), others have emphasized the role of the environment in facilitating autonomous motivation. For example, Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, and Deci (2004) have proposed that a tense or rigid social climate impairs autonomous motivation; whereas a social climate that endorses encouragement and openness leads to students experiencing feelings of autonomous motivation. Similarly, a study in the teaching context (Desrumaux, Lapointe, Sima, Boudrias, Savoie, & Brunet, 2015) has found that job climate, which emerges from the perceived quality of social exchanges between individuals, management, and other constituents, appears to be positively related to the psychological need for relatedness, thereby contributing to autonomous motivation. Although these studies are contextual, they provide some evidence for the relationship between the social values of an organization, leading to autonomous motivation in incumbent employees. It is therefore proposed that the perceived social value of an employer will lead to autonomous motivation in incumbent employees.

Hypothesis 2a: *Social value will positively predict autonomous motivation.*

Appelbaum and Santiago (1997) have long suggested that individual careers are determined by organizational structures, which can have a significant impact on wellbeing. Similarly, workplace contexts that support the needs for competence, the feeling of being capable and effective; and autonomy, the feeling that behaviour is not controlled (Deci & Ryan, 2011) elicits autonomous motivation, which also has a significant impact on wellbeing (Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017). Previous studies show a potential link between environments that value employee development to autonomous motivation. For example, a study (Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2008) on employee perceptions of training opportunities within their organization found a significant relationship between this perception and autonomous motivation. Dysvik and Kuvaas (2008) proposed that the needs for competence and autonomy could be satisfied when individuals are in an environment that encourages employees to freely seek challenges for their capacities and to maintain their skillset. Further, it was suggested that if employees perceive high training opportunities that are also non-coercive, the need for autonomy could be satisfied thereby eliciting autonomous motivation (Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2008). Further, Kuvaas and Dysvik (2009) found that continuous investment in employee development was related to employees experiencing higher levels of intrinsic motivation, which is on the continuum leading to autonomous motivation. It is therefore proposed that the employers that value employee development will lead to autonomous motivation in incumbent employees.

Hypothesis 2b: *Developmental value will positively predict autonomous motivation.*

Employers that are considered high on interest value provide employees with exciting work environments and make use of good work practices (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). For example, one study (Hon, 2012) on the factors that lead to employee creativity has found that empowering managers that allocate responsibility and autonomy to their employees leads to creativity through autonomous motivation. Further, studies have found that well-designed jobs that offer challenging yet interesting tasks are associated to public service motivation (Mostafa, Gould-Williams, & Bottomley, 2015) and autonomous motivation (Güntert, 2015). It is therefore

proposed here that the level of interest value emphasized by the employer will lead to employees feeling autonomously motivated.

Hypothesis 2c: *Interest value will positively predict autonomous motivation.*

Trust is considered to be a key factor in fostering motivation. According to a performance study (Heavy, et al., 2011) in a multinational organization, trust appeared to have a significant impact on motivation. In terms of self-determination theory, a study on social networking sites has found that trust, although conceptualized differently, contributed to the need for relatedness (Xuequn, & Yibai, 2015). Further, a review paper (Aryee, Walumbwa, Mondejar, & Chu, 2015) on the literature linking justice, self-determination and social exchange theories, proposes organizational trust as an antecedent of intrinsic motivation. Although the relationship between brand trust and intrinsic motivation remains untested and the studies reviewed (i.e., Heavy, et al., 2011; Xuequn, & Yibai, 2015) were highly contextualized, they provide evidence for a relationship between trust and autonomous motivation. It is therefore hypothesized that brand trust will predict autonomous motivation.

Hypothesis 2d: *Brand trust will positively predict autonomous motivation.*

As mentioned, economic value, is the extent to which employees perceive that their employer provides above-average salary, compensation package, job security and promotional opportunities (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). In relation to autonomous motivation, a field study comparing variable pay and base salary (Kuvaas, Buch, Gagné, Dysvik, & Forest, 2016) found that base salary is positively related to autonomous motivation. Although SDT also shows the negative effects in rewarding performance, as it appears to diminish autonomous motivation (e.g., Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017), Gagné and Forest (2008) proposed a model which includes a positive relationship between compensation and autonomous motivation. For instance, they propose that the relationship between compensation and autonomous motivation may be positive if mediated by a cooperative culture and moderated by climate. In terms of promotional opportunities eliciting autonomous motivation, Stone, Deci, and Ryan (2009) propose that employees may view promotions as either an external reward thereby eliciting controlled

motivation, or as an opportunity to fulfill autonomy and competence thereby fostering autonomous motivation – thus, it is a relationship dependent upon this perception. Stone and colleagues (2009) further suggest that the manner in which manager’s present incumbent employees with the opportunity to develop will elicit autonomous motivation, if it doesn’t appear to be coerced. That said, it is proposed that the evaluation of economic value will lead to employees feeling autonomously motivated.

Hypothesis 2e: *Economic value will positively predict autonomous motivation.*

### **The Mediating Role of Autonomous Motivation**

Although a theorized a link between positively perceived employer brands and aspects of employee performance has been speculated upon (e.g., Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004), it is unclear about the underlying mechanism that links this relationship. It is therefore proposed that autonomous motivation will be an influential mechanism in the relationship between organizational attractiveness and its dimensions, in predicting employee engagement. Similar to organizational attractiveness emphasizing values, Li, Wang, You, and Gao (2015) found that value congruence between teacher’s and their organizations was indirectly associated to work engagement, through the mediating effect of autonomous motivation. Alike, Vansteenkiste and colleagues (2004) found that autonomous motivation mediated the relationship between environments that support autonomy and test performance. Another study linking SDT to engagement found that manipulating the need for relatedness caused engagement in prosocial activities (Pavey, Greitemeyer, & Sparks, 2011). Thus, the present study proposes that the relationship between organizational attractiveness and its dimensions, and employee engagement, will be mediated by autonomous motivation.

Hypothesis 3: *Autonomous motivation mediates the relationship between organizational attractiveness and employee engagement.*

According to Le Pine (2002), compensation could potentially be a leading factor in employee motivation and engagement. In line with this, a study on reward systems and employee engagement found a positive relationship between compensation and employee engagement

(Taufek, Zulkifle, & Sharif, 2016). Although motivation was not addressed as a mediating factor, it was speculated upon by Taufek and colleagues (2016) to be an explanation for this relationship. In line with this speculation, Mostafa, Gould-Williams, and Bottomley (2015) found that public service motivation mediated the relationship between aspects of economic value according to Berthon and colleagues (2005) (i.e., job security and promotions) and affective commitment. However, Kuvaas and colleagues (2016) specifically addressed autonomous motivation and found it to be a mediator in the relationship between base pay and work effort. In line with these studies, it is proposed here that autonomous motivation will mediate the relationship between an employer's economic value and employee engagement.

Hypothesis 3a: *Autonomous motivation mediates the relationship between economic value and employee engagement.*

As an employer's developmental value is concerned with providing employees with career-enhancing experiences (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005), a study on high performance human resource practices, which includes levels of employee training and development, has found that public service motivation mediated the relationship between training, development, and affective commitment (Mostafa, Gould-Williams, & Bottomley, 2015). Further, Kuvaas and Dysvik (2009) found that intrinsic motivation mediated the relationship between the perceived continuous investment in employee development and self-reported work effort. It is therefore proposed here that autonomous motivation will mediate the relationship between the perception of an employer's developmental value and employee engagement.

Hypothesis 3b: *Autonomous motivation mediates the relationship between developmental value and employee engagement.*

As mentioned, employers that are considered high on interest value provide employees with exciting work environments and make use of good work practices (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). A study on the diamond mining industry (Masvaure, Ruggunan, & Maharaj, 2014), which is considered to be a high pressured context showed a positive relationship between intrinsic motivation and employee engagement, which was strengthened when participants reported

themselves fulfilled in their need for competence, along with the high levels of effort and importance placed on their jobs. Similarly, well-designed jobs are described as offering employees challenging yet interesting tasks (Güntert, 2015). Güntert (2015) found that autonomous motivation mediated the relationship between work design and job satisfaction. Alike, Mostafa and colleagues (2015) found that public service motivation mediated the relationship between work design and affective commitment. It is therefore proposed here that autonomous motivation will mediate the relationship between an employer's interest value and employee engagement.

Hypothesis 3c: *Autonomous motivation mediates the relationship between interest value and employee engagement.*

As mentioned, social value refers to extent to which an employer provides a positive work environment, with an emphasis on relatedness (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). A study (De Baerdemaeker, & Bruggeman, 2015) on employee participation in strategic planning revealed the mediating role of autonomous motivation in strengthening the relationship between employee participation and affective commitment. Further, it has been found that the quality of the relationships that form a work team mediates the link between individual differences and work engagement (Al Hosani, Elanain, & Ajmal, 2018). Similarly, it is proposed here that autonomous motivation will strengthen the relationship between employers that emphasize social values and employee engagement.

Hypothesis 3d: *Autonomous motivation mediates the relationship between social value and employee engagement.*

As mentioned, brand trust is described as the level of trust, perceived safety, and sincerity one associates with their employer (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005; Rampl & Kenning, 2014). Although previous studies have linked brand trust to positive work attitudes, (Dirks, 2001); financial, and non-financial performance (Biswas and Suar (2016); few studies have linked brand trust, motivation, and engagement. However it's a relationship that is speculated upon. For instance, Heavy et al. (2011) proposed trust as an antecedent of motivation, which in turn, should



lead to performance. Based on his findings, Singh (2016) concluded that creating a culture of trust plays a pivotal role in fostering both intrinsic motivation and employee engagement. That said, autonomous motivation is expected to strengthen the relationship between brand trust and employee engagement.

Hypothesis 3e: *Autonomous motivation mediates the relationship between brand trust and employee engagement.*

### **The Moderating Role of Perceived Organizational Support**

It was previously mentioned that environmental factors such as job design and pay contingencies help foster autonomous motivation in employees (i.e., Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017). Deci and colleagues (2017) further elaborated on the roles that organizations and management have on fostering autonomous motivation in their employees by “acknowledging the employees’ perspectives, offering choices, providing meaningful feedback, encouraging initiation, making assignments optimally challenging, and giving a rationale when requesting that an employee do a particular task” (p. 26). Accordingly, perceived organizational support refers to the development of a perception on behalf of the employee pertaining to the extent to which their employer cares about their wellbeing and values their contributions to the organization (Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart, & Adis, 2017). It is therefore proposed that the relationship between organizational attractiveness and its dimensions, autonomous motivation, and employee engagement is explained through perceived organizational support.

Social exchange theorists view employment as an exchange between commitment and effort on behalf of employees towards the organization, for both tangible and intangible benefits in return (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart, & Adis, 2017). Similar to previous research on employer brands (e.g., Davies, 2008; Hanin, Stinglhamber, & Delobbe, 2013), perceived organizational support also appears to be concerned with cultivating commitment in employees (e.g., Riggle, R. Edmondson, & Hansen, 2009; Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart, & Adis, 2017), which presents a common, yet limited view on the potential fruitful outcomes of strong employer brand. In line with Deci and colleagues (2017), work environments that support autonomy and satisfy the other psychological needs will foster autonomous motivation. That is, work design and pay contingencies perceived through organizational attractiveness will not be sufficient in fostering

outcomes such as autonomous motivation and engagement; the organization and its managers will have to propel support towards their employees in order to attain the positive outcomes previously proposed. In other words, if employees are treated well by the organizational entities, the norm of reciprocity suggests that the positive treatment will be returned (Gouldner, 1960). This principle guides the idea of perceived organizational support, which is proposed in this study to explain the relationship between organizational attractiveness and autonomous motivation.

*Hypothesis 4: Perceived organizational support will strengthen the relationship between organizational attractiveness and autonomous motivation.*

By receiving tangible and intangible benefits from an employer, it has been argued by Erdogan and Enders (2007) through the norm of reciprocity (i.e., Gouldner, 1960) that employees will feel obligated to return the favor in their performance. In line with this argument, it was found that high leader-member exchanges that foster trust was linked to higher performance, when perceived organizational support was high (Erdogan & Enders, 2007). Similarly, a study (Vigoda-Gadot, & Talmud, 2010) on the perception of organizational politics, found that job satisfaction and organizational commitment increased when social support was high; whereas job stress and burnout increased when social support was low, in the context of high organizational politics. Although Vigoda-Gadot and Talmud's (2010) study was interested in fairness; in line with the present study, the measure of organizational politics included perceptions of economic value from rewards to promotions in relation to employee outcomes, which was moderated by social support. In respect to autonomous motivation, a more recent study (Olafsen, Halvari, Forest, & Deci, 2015) linked salary to intrinsic motivation by proposing that salary linked to distributive justice would lead to intrinsic motivation when moderated by managerial need support. Olafsen and colleagues (2015) concluded that managerial need support, described as workplace contexts that support the needs, moderated the relationship between salary, distributive justice, and intrinsic motivation. As mentioned earlier, Stone and colleagues (2009) suggested that the manner in which manager's present incumbent employees with rewards can lead to autonomous motivation – or impede it. In line with this suggestion and previous studies, it is proposed that economic value will lead to autonomous motivation, and this relationship will be present in the context of perceived organizational support.

Hypothesis 4a: *Perceived organizational support will strengthen the relationship between economic value and autonomous motivation.*

Dysvik and Kuvaas (2008) found a link between the employee perceptions of training opportunities and intrinsic motivation. However, based on their model and results, they speculate that there may be other sources of influence on intrinsic motivation. In line with this gap, a conceptual paper on developmental practices proposed that perceived organizational support, along with work environments that emphasize transfer of training, impacts employee motivation (Khan, Mufti, & Nazir, 2015). Although motivation is not addressed by Shuck and colleagues (2014), it was found that employee perceptions of support for participation in human resource development practices fosters employee engagement (Shuck, Twyford, Reio & Shuck, 2014). Khan and colleagues (2015) argue that the instrumental aspect of providing employees to develop is not sufficient to elicit motivation, as an unsupportive climate may block the transfer of new learned behavior back to the job. In line with this, it is proposed here that developmental value will lead to autonomous motivation, and this relationship will be present in the context of perceived organizational support.

Hypothesis 4b: *Perceived organizational support will strengthen the relationship between developmental value and autonomous motivation.*

The extent to which an employer provides an exciting work environment, uses good work practices, and makes use of its employee's creativity (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005), otherwise known as an employer's interest value, has been previously proposed to lead to autonomous motivation. For instance, Hon (2012) found that the employee perception of a climate that emphasizes creativity significantly predicts autonomous motivation. However, she addresses the potential role that organizational support may have on fostering autonomous motivation and creative performance by arguing that trust could further our understanding of social-contextual factors leading to creativity. In line with Hon's (2012) suggestion, Yu and Frenkel (2013) found that perceived organization support significantly predicted work unit identification (a motivating factor), which in turn, lead to task performance. However, they critiqued that the work values at the higher organizational level may reinforce, or inhibit, the relationship between perceived organizational support, identification, and performance. In line with these suggestions (i.e., Hon

2012; Yu & Frenkel, 2013), it is proposed here that an employer's interest value will lead to autonomous motivation, in a context of perceived organizational support.

*Hypothesis 4c: Perceived organizational support will strengthen the relationship between interest value and autonomous motivation.*

Social value also emphasizes the environment and is described as the importance an employer places on people's social needs as well as their sense of belonging (Jiang & Iles, 2011). Erdogan and Enders (2007) have suggested that when employees receive intangible benefits from an employer, such as understanding and friendliness, it has been argued through the norm of reciprocity (i.e., Gouldner, 1960) that employees will feel obligated to return the favor in their performance. It was further found that the relationship between intangible benefits and performance was moderated by perceived organizational support (Erdogan & Enders, 2007), which is the perception that the employer actually cares about the employee's wellbeing and values their contributions to the organization (Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart, & Adis, 2017). Similar to Erdogan and Enders (2007), this study proposes that an employer's social value will foster autonomous motivation, if the employee perceives organizational support.

*Hypothesis 4d: Perceived organizational support will strengthen the relationship between social value and autonomous motivation.*

Organizational trust, otherwise referred to as brand trust in the context of employer brands, refers to "trust in the organization's institutionalized processes and principles" (Searle, et al., 2011, p. 1070). Shantz and Alfes (2015) found that organizational trust, along with the quality of employee relationships with their line managers, improved the negative association between employee engagements on voluntary absence, thereby moderating the relationship. Similar to the quality of relationships (i.e., Shantz & Alfes, 2015), Erdogan and Enders (2007) found that high leader-member exchanges that foster trust was linked to higher performance, when perceived organizational support was high, thereby demonstrating the moderating role of perceived organizational support in the relationship between trust and motivation. Similarly, a study on employer brands has addressed brand trust (cf. Rampl & Kenning, 2014) and perceived organizational support as two factors impacting financial and non-financial performance, and found significant and positive relationships. Similarly, it is proposed here that an interaction

between brand trust and perceived organizational support will lead to autonomous motivation.

*Hypothesis 4e: Perceived organizational support will strengthen the relationship between brand trust and autonomous motivation.*

There is evidence in the employer brand literature that is linked to signaling theory (e.g., Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011; Jiang & Iles, 2011) which emphasizes the potential role of perceived organizational support in the relationship between overall organizational attractiveness, autonomous motivation, and employee engagement. For instance, a firm's employer brand is said to signal a set of proposed values on behalf of the employer towards the employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Mandhanya & Shah, 2010; Jiang & Iles, 2011). According to signaling theory, all firms have the opportunity to signal information. The signal itself is conveyed by signalers, which are described by Connelly, Certo, Ireland, and Reutzel (2011) as managers or executives that have inside information on the firm's mission, projects, and strategies. It is therefore proposed in this study that the aspect of signalers, conceptualized through perceived organizational support, emphasizes the humanistic aspect of a successful employer brand strategy.

There is some evidence linking perceived organizational support to autonomous motivation and employee engagement. For instance, it has been found that perceived organizational support is positively related to self-determined motivation (Tremblay, Blanchard, Taylor, Pelletier, & Villeneuve, 2009). Similarly, a study (Gillet Huart, Colombat, & Fouquereau, 2013) on perceived organizational support in French police officers found that work engagement was enhanced through self-determined motivation, similar to what is proposed in this study. These studies provide some evidence for how perceived organizational support may act as an independent variable towards autonomous motivation and engagement, a key characteristic of a moderator variable (Namazi & Namazi, 2016). This study therefore proposes that it may not be sufficient for employers to simply have policies or communications that propel organizational values; instead, constituents of the organization must exchange these values to create autonomy supporting environments (Deci, et al., 2017) to foster positive outcomes such as, autonomous motivation and employee engagement. It is therefore hypothesized that perceived organizational support will strengthen the relationship between organizational attractiveness and its dimensions, autonomous motivation, and employee engagement.

Hypothesis 5: *The mediating effect of autonomous motivation between organizational attractiveness; (a) economic value; (b) developmental value; (c) interest value; (e) social value; (f) brand trust and employee engagement will be strengthened when employee's perceived organizational support is higher.*

The overarching goals of the present study are: (1) to apply the concept organizational attractiveness, and its dimensions, on incumbent employees; (2) to investigate the process through which organizational attractiveness influences employee engagement; and (3) to explain the relationship between organizational attractiveness, autonomous motivation, and employee engagement through perceived organizational support. Participants will be asked to answer a survey at two time points on their employer's brand conceptualized as organizational attractiveness, their perceived organizational support, autonomous motivation, and engagement. The leading hypothesis of this study is that firms rated high in organizational attractiveness will lead to autonomously motivated and engaged incumbent employees. More specifically, the role of perceived organizational support will be taken into consideration. It is theorized here that constituents of the organizational are responsible for delivering the brand values to incumbent employees, as an employer's brand is considered to be an intangible asset (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). The findings of the present study are expected to provide support for the second function of an employer brand in human resource management, which is to assure that incumbent employees are engaged in the organizations' strategy and motivated by the culture of the firm (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

## Method

### Participants

The participants of the present study were recruited online (see Design subsection for more details). Of the 989 employees and managers contacted, 486 agreed to participate at Time 1. Among these 486 participants, 220 respondents indicated their willingness to participate at Time 2, which took place 3 weeks later. This study therefore included 220 full-time employees and managers (102 men, 118 women) from the United States and Canada working in various industries from healthcare to banking and occupying difference positions from analysts to store clerks. Participants ranged in ages from 21 to 67 ( $M_{age} = 45.36$ ,  $SD = 13.36$ ). Average income was reported in the thousands CAD ( $M_{income} = 62.58$ ,  $SD = 26.87$ ), 11.4% reported working for their current employer for less than a year, 29.5% between 1 to 5 years, 20.5% between 5 to 10 years and the larger majority, 38.6% reported working for their employer for over 10 years. Participation in the study was voluntary. All participants were provided with informed and written consent prior to participating (see Appendix A).

### Measures

**Organizational attractiveness.** Organizational attractiveness was measured using the of the employer attractiveness measure developed by Berthon, Ewing, and Hah (2005). They validated this measure on a sample of potential recruits. Respondents were asked to evaluate the attractiveness of working for *company x*, based on the following values on a seven-point Likert-type scale (ranging from 1= 'to a very little extent' to 7= 'to a very great extent'). The measure consists of five subscales measuring economic, developmental, interest, and social value, along with brand trust. A sample item for economic value is, "An attractive overall compensation package," a sample item for social value is, "Supportive and encouraging colleagues," a sample item for developmental value is, "Gaining career-enhancing experience," a sample item for interest value is, "The organization both values and makes use of your creativity," finally, a sample item for brand trust includes, "I trust my organization as an employer." The internal consistency estimate for organizational attractiveness was  $\alpha = .967$ , see Table 1 for each dimension.

**Autonomous motivation.** Autonomous motivation was assessed using a shortened version of the Motivation at Work Scale developed by Gagné and colleagues (2010). The

measure was shortened to simply capture autonomous motivation, rather than both controlled and autonomous motivation. This previously validated scale asks respondents to rate reasons as to why they would put effort into their work. These reasons can be categorized between identified and intrinsic motivation, two dimensions comprising two subscales (3 items each) of autonomous motivation. All items were measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale (ranging from 1= 'not at all for because of this reason' to 7= 'completely because of this reason'). A sample item for identified motivation is, "Because this job fits my personal values;" a sample item for intrinsic motivation is, "Because I have fun doing my job". The internal consistency estimate for autonomous motivation was  $\alpha = .918$ .

**Perceived Organizational Support.** Perceived organizational support was assessed using the previously validated 16-item measure by Eisenberger and Huntington (1986). Some example items include: "The organization really cares about my wellbeing," and "The organization cares about my opinion." Respondents were asked to evaluate the extent to which they agree with each statement, on a seven-point Likert-type scale (ranging from 1= 'strongly disagree' to 7= 'strongly agree'). The internal consistency estimate for perceived perceived organizational support for this sample was  $\alpha = .956$ .

**Employee engagement.** Engagement was measured using the validated version of the engagement measure developed by Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova (2006). Respondents were asked to evaluate the extent to which they agree with each statement, on a seven-point Likert-type scale (ranging from 1= 'to a very little extent' to 7= 'to a very great extent'). The 17-item measure consists of three subscales reflecting the varying dimensions of engagement: vigor (6-items), absorption (6-items), dedication (5-items). A sample item for vigor is, "When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work." A sample item for absorption is, "Because I have fun doing my job". A sample item for dedication is, "I am enthusiastic about my job". The internal consistency estimate for employee engagement was  $\alpha = .921$ .

**Control variables.** In line with Becker's (2005) recommendations in selecting control variables, four control variables will be included in the present study: age, tenure with the organization, gender, and income, to eliminate any potential spurious relationships between the variables of interest. It was previously proposed that age, tenure, and gender can affect employee engagement (Sonnentag, 2003; Lu, Lu, Gursoy, & Neale, 2016). Respondents will therefore be asked to report their age, as there is further evidence of an interaction between age and the



dependent variable, employee engagement (i.e., Avery, McKay, & Wilson, 2007; Berry, 2010; James, McKechnie, & Swanberg, 2011). In line with Sonnetag (2003), there is evidence that organizational tenure also affects employee engagement (Bal, De Cooman, & Mol, 2013); respondents will therefore be asked to report their length of tenure with their current employer on a scale ranging from from less than a year to over ten years. Respondents were also asked to report their gender (0 = male, 1 = female, 3 = other). Finally, since a previous study (Handa, & Gulati, 2014) has found that salary affects employee engagement, therefore respondents will be asked to report their income from their employment.

### **Design**

This study is exploratory and aims to examine relationships between variables, therefore non-experimental survey research was used. The independent variable of interest is organizational attractiveness which was measured at Time 1; whereas the dependent variables are autonomous motivation and employee engagement, which were measured at Time 2. Further, a moderator is proposed which is perceived organizational support, measured at Time 1 and 2. The overarching hypothesis is that organizational attractiveness will predict both employee engagement and autonomous motivation. This relationship will be further explained through perceived organizational support. The web-based survey was developed using Qualtrics software, which contained the previously described scales and control variables. Data was then downloaded from Qualtrics and analyzed in the software SPSS Version 23.

## Results

Hypotheses were tested using SPSS, Version 23. The data was verified for any missing values and outliers. There were very few missing values (approximately .2%), which were consequently not replaced. All variables were normally distributed, analyses revealed no significant outliers, and no transformations were needed.

### Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive data obtained for organizational attractiveness ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = .87$ ) revealed that a highest value was placed on the social dimension ( $M = 3.63$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ), followed by brand trust ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ), developmental ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = .99$ ), economic ( $M = 3.35$ ,  $SD = .87$ ) and with the lowest being the interest dimension ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = .98$ ). Descriptive data further revealed means for perceived organizational support ( $M = 3.24$ ,  $SD = .86$ ) and autonomous motivation ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = .89$ ). Finally, employee engagement ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = .70$ ) revealed that the highest form of engagement was dedication ( $M = 3.64$ ,  $SD = .84$ ) followed by vigor ( $M = 3.58$ ,  $SD = .72$ ), and the lowest being absorption ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = .73$ ), see Table 1.

Table 1

*Descriptive and correlation analysis*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Organizational attractiveness	3.46	.87	.967												
2. Economic value	3.35	.87	.848	.841**	-										
3. Developmental value	3.43	.98	.922	.924**	.785**	-									
4. Interest value	3.60	.98	.899	.902**	.771**	.771**	-								
5. Social value	3.63	1.04	.929	.884**	.745**	.745**	.793**	-							
6. Brand trust	3.60	1.37	.884	.878**	.790**	.790**	.722**	.752**	-						
7. Perceived organizational support	3.24	.86	.956	.588**	.551**	.515**	.515**	.569**	.569**	-					
8. Autonomous motivation	3.60	.89	.918	.647**	.650**	.545**	.545**	.591**	.576**	.576**	-				
9. Employee engagement	3.60	.70	.921	.627**	.481**	.643**	.519**	.551**	.547**	.547**	.849**	-			
10. Age	45.46	13.36	-	-.136*	-.072	-.184**	-.131	-.064	-.028	-.028	-.093	-.060	-		
11. Income	62.58	26.85	-	.066	.136	.001	.014	-.043	-0.39	-.043	-.012	.005	.290**	-	
12. Organizational tenure	-	-	-	-.154*	-.035	-.208**	-.169*	.026	-.141*	-.076	-.142	-.122	.595**	.360**	-
13. Gender	-	-	-	.022	-.099	.011	.007	.057	.080	.027	-.041	.011	-.077	-.249**	-.180**

## Hypothesis Testing

**Hypothesis 1.** The first hypothesis stated that organizational attractiveness would predict employee engagement. To test this, a regression analysis was computed including the controls of age, income, tenure, and gender, along with the independent variable organizational attractiveness and the dependent variable of employee engagement. The results revealed a significant five-predictor model,  $R^2 = .29$ ,  $F(5, 213) = 17.15$ ,  $p < .001$ . Specifically, the control variables age  $\beta = .02$ ,  $t(212) = .21$ ,  $p = .830$ , 95% CI [-.01, -.01]; income  $\beta = .02$ ,  $t(212) = .27$ ,  $p = .785$ , 95% CI [-.01, -.01]; tenure  $\beta = -.024$ ,  $t(212) = -.49$ ,  $p = .628$ , 95% CI [-.05, .05]; and gender  $\beta = .01$ ,  $t(212) = .15$ ,  $p = .05$ , 95% CI [-.14, .17], were not found to be significant predictors of employee engagement; whereas and the independent variable of organizational attractiveness  $\beta = .51$ ,  $t(212) = 8.68$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.42, .59], was found to be a significant predictor of employee engagement, thereby providing support for Hypothesis 1, see Table 2.

Because Berthon, Ewing, and Hah (2005) revealed a five-factor model of organizational attractiveness demonstrating both convergent and discriminant validity and the confirmatory factor analysis in the present study revealed the distinctiveness of the dimensions, each dimension was tested separately in the prediction of employee engagement. First, a regression analysis was done to test Hypothesis 1a, which stated that economic value would predict employee engagement. To test this hypothesis, a regression including the controls of age, income, tenure, and gender, along with the independent variable, economic value was computed on employee engagement. The results revealed a significant five-predictor model,  $R^2 = .25$ ,  $F(5, 213) = 14.05$ ,  $p < .001$ . Specifically, the control variables age  $\beta = .05$ ,  $t(212) = .73$ ,  $p = .47$ , 95% CI [-.01, .01]; income  $\beta = -.03$ ,  $t(212) = -.39$ ,  $p = .696$ , 95% CI [-.01, .01]; tenure  $\beta = -.13$ ,  $t(212) = -1.66$ ,  $p = .098$ , 95% CI [-.19, .02]; and gender  $\beta = -.39$ ,  $t(212) = .624$ ,  $p = .533$ , 95% CI [-.12, .23], were not found to be significant predictors employee engagement; whereas economic value  $\beta = .50$ ,  $t(212) = 8.08$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.30, .49] was found to be a significant predictor of employee engagement, thereby providing support for Hypothesis 1a.

Hypothesis 1b stated that developmental value would predict employee engagement. A regression analysis included the controls of age, income, tenure, and gender, along with the independent variable, developmental value on employee engagement. The results revealed a significant five-predictor model,  $R^2 = .42$ ,  $F(5, 213) = 14.05$ ,  $p < .001$ . Specifically, the control variables age  $\beta = .08$ ,  $t(212) = 1.16$ ,  $p = .25$ , 95% CI [-.01, .01]; income  $\beta = -.01$ ,  $t(212) = -.13$ ,  $p$

= .898, 95% CI [-.01, .01]; tenure  $\beta = -.04$ ,  $t(212) = -.51$ ,  $p = .609$ , 95% CI [-.11, .07]; and gender  $\beta = -.01$ ,  $t(212) = .11$ ,  $p = .915$ , 95% CI [-.14, .16], were not found to be significant predictors employee engagement; whereas developmental value  $\beta = .65$ ,  $t(212) = 12.07$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.39, .54] was found to be a significant predictor of employee engagement, thereby providing support for Hypothesis 1b.

Hypothesis 1c stated that interest value would predict employee engagement. A regression analysis included the controls of age, income, tenure, and gender, along with the independent variable, interest value on employee engagement. The results revealed a significant five-predictor model,  $R^2 = .27$ ,  $F(5, 213) = 15.95$ ,  $p < .001$ . Specifically, the control variables age  $\beta = .04$ ,  $t(212) = .49$ ,  $p = .621$ , 95% CI [-.01, .01]; income  $\beta = .03$ ,  $t(212) = .39$ ,  $p = .694$ , 95% CI [-.01, .01]; tenure  $\beta = -.07$ ,  $t(212) = -.91$ ,  $p = .356$ , 95% CI [-.15, .05]; and gender  $\beta = -.01$ ,  $t(212) = .16$ ,  $p = .908$ , 95% CI [-.16, .18], were not found to be significant predictors of employee engagement; whereas interest value  $\beta = .51$ ,  $t(212) = 8.64$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.28, .45] was found to be a significant predictor of employee engagement, thereby providing support for Hypothesis 1c.

Hypothesis 1d stated that social value would predict employee engagement. A regression analysis included the controls of age, income, tenure, and gender, along with the independent variable, social value on employee engagement. The results revealed a significant five-predictor model,  $R^2 = .33$ ,  $F(5, 213) = 21.12$ ,  $p < .001$ . Specifically, the control variables age  $\beta = .04$ ,  $t(212) = .55$ ,  $p = .582$ , 95% CI [-.01, .01]; income  $\beta = .05$ ,  $t(212) = .73$ ,  $p = .463$ , 95% CI [-.01, .01]; tenure  $\beta = -.08$ ,  $t(212) = -1.09$ ,  $p = .276$ , 95% CI [-.15, .04]; and gender  $\beta = -.01$ ,  $t(212) = -.31$ ,  $p = .755$ , 95% CI [-.19, .14], were not found to be significant predictors employee engagement; whereas social value  $\beta = .56$ ,  $t(212) = 9.99$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.31, .46] was found to be a significant predictor of employee engagement, thereby providing support for Hypothesis 1d.

Hypothesis 1e stated that brand trust would predict employee engagement. A regression analysis included the controls of age, income, tenure, and gender, along with the independent variable, brand trust on employee engagement. The results revealed a significant five-predictor model,  $R^2 = .32$ ,  $F(5, 213) = 19.61$ ,  $p < .001$ . Specifically, the control variables age  $\beta = .02$ ,  $t(212) = .34$ ,  $p = .735$ , 95% CI [-.01, .01]; income  $\beta = .06$ ,  $t(212) = .99$ ,  $p = .325$ , 95% CI [-.01, .01]; tenure  $\beta = -.12$ ,  $t(212) = -1.69$ ,  $p = .093$ , 95% CI [-.18, .01]; and gender  $\beta = -.01$ ,  $t(212) = -$

.09,  $p = .929$ , 95% CI [-.17, .16], were not found to be significant predictors employee engagement; whereas brand trust  $\beta = .56$ ,  $t(212) = 9.62$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.30, .45] was found to be a significant predictor of employee engagement, thereby providing support for Hypothesis 1e.

Table 2

*Regressions on employee engagement (controls included)*

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients					95% <i>CI</i>	
	B	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LL	UL
Organizational Attractiveness	.51	.04	.51	8.69	.000	.42	.59
Economic Value	.37	.05	.49	8.08	.000	.30	.49
Developmental Value	.46	.04	.65	12.07	.000	.39	.54
Interest Value	.39	.04	.51	8.64	.000	.28	.45
Social Value	.39	.04	.56	9.99	.000	.31	.46
Brand Trust	.37	.04	.56	9.62	.000	.30	.45

**Hypothesis 2.** The second hypothesis stated that organizational attractiveness would predict autonomous motivation. To test this, a regression analysis was computed including the controls of age, income, tenure, and gender, along with the independent variable organizational attractiveness on employee engagement. Results revealed a significant five-predictor model,  $R^2 = .42$ ,  $F(5, 213) = 31.35$ ,  $p < .001$ . Specifically, the control variables age  $\beta = .04$ ,  $t(212) = .54$ ,  $p = .587$ , 95% CI [-.01, .01]; income  $\beta = -.02$ ,  $t(212) = -.35$ ,  $p = .729$ , 95% CI [-.01, .01]; tenure  $\beta = -.06$ ,  $t(212) = -.94$ ,  $p = .350$ , 95% CI [-.17, .06]; and gender  $\beta = -.06$ ,  $t(212) = -1.08$ ,  $p = .281$ , 95% CI [-.29, .09]; were not found to be significant predictors of autonomous motivation; whereas and the independent variable of organizational attractiveness  $\beta = .64$ ,  $t(212) = 12.14$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.56, .77] was found to be a significant predictor of autonomous motivation, thereby providing support for Hypothesis 2, see Table 3.

Hypothesis 2a stated that social value would predict autonomous motivation. To test this, a regression analysis was computed including the controls of age, income, tenure, and gender, along with the independent variable of social value on employee engagement. Results revealed a significant five-predictor model,  $R^2 = .38$ ,  $F(5, 213) = 26.50$ ,  $p < .001$ . Specifically, the control variables age  $\beta = .02$ ,  $t(212) = .25$ ,  $p = .800$ , 95% CI [-.01, .01]; income  $\beta = .02$ ,  $t(212) = .36$ ,  $p = .721$ , 95% CI [-.01, .01]; tenure  $\beta = -.08$ ,  $t(212) = -1.09$ ,  $p = .279$ , 95% CI [-.18, .05]; and gender  $\beta = -.08$ ,  $t(212) = -1.49$ ,  $p = .138$ , 95% CI [-.35, .05]; were not found to be significant predictors of autonomous motivation; whereas and the independent variable of social value  $\beta = .61$ ,  $t(212) = 11.12$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.43, .62] was found to be a significant predictor of autonomous motivation, thereby providing support for Hypothesis 2a.

Hypothesis 2b stated that developmental value would predict autonomous motivation. To test this, a regression analysis was computed including the controls of age, income, tenure, and gender, along with the independent variable developmental value on employee engagement. Results revealed a significant five-predictor model,  $R^2 = .43$ ,  $F(5, 213) = 31.82$ ,  $p < .001$ . Specifically, the control variables age  $\beta = .05$ ,  $t(212) = .83$ ,  $p = .409$ , 95% CI [-.01, .01]; income  $\beta = -.03$ ,  $t(212) = -.58$ ,  $p = .566$ , 95% CI [-.01, .01]; tenure  $\beta = -.03$ ,  $t(212) = -.49$ ,  $p = .625$ , 95% CI [-.14, .09]; and gender  $\beta = -.06$ ,  $t(212) = -1.12$ ,  $p = .265$ , 95% CI [-.29, .08]; were not found to be significant predictors of autonomous motivation; whereas and the independent variable of developmental value  $\beta = .65$ ,  $t(212) = 12.23$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.49, .69] was found to be a significant predictor of autonomous motivation, thereby providing support for Hypothesis 2b.



Hypothesis 2c stated that interest value would predict autonomous motivation. To test this, a regression analysis was computed including the controls of age, income, tenure, and gender, along with the independent variable interest value on employee engagement. Results revealed a significant five-predictor model,  $R^2 = .30$ ,  $F(5, 213) = 18.49$ ,  $p < .001$ . Specifically, the control variables age  $\beta = .02$ ,  $t(212) = .19$ ,  $p = .844$ , 95% CI [-.01, .01]; income  $\beta = -.00$ ,  $t(212) = -.01$ ,  $p = .995$ , 95% CI [-.01, .01]; tenure  $\beta = -.07$ ,  $t(212) = -.89$ ,  $p = .370$ , 95% CI [-.18, .07]; and gender  $\beta = -.06$ ,  $t(212) = -.97$ ,  $p = .334$ , 95% CI [-.31, .11]; were not found to be significant predictors of autonomous motivation; whereas and the independent variable of interest value  $\beta = .54$ ,  $t(212) = 9.20$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.38, .59] was found to be a significant predictor of autonomous motivation, thereby providing support for Hypothesis 2c.

Hypothesis 2d stated that brand trust would predict autonomous motivation. To test this, a regression analysis was computed including the controls of age, income, tenure, and gender, along with the independent variable brand trust on employee engagement. Results revealed a significant five-predictor model,  $R^2 = .37$ ,  $F(5, 213) = 24.49$ ,  $p < .001$ . Specifically, the control variables age  $\beta = .01$ ,  $t(212) = .03$ ,  $p = .978$ , 95% CI [-.01, .01]; income  $\beta = .04$ ,  $t(212) = .64$ ,  $p = .524$ , 95% CI [-.01, .01]; tenure  $\beta = -.12$ ,  $t(212) = -1.74$ ,  $p = .084$ , 95% CI [-.22, .01]; and gender  $\beta = -.07$ ,  $t(212) = -1.23$ ,  $p = .220$ , 95% CI [-.33, .08]; were not found to be significant predictors of autonomous motivation; whereas and the independent variable of brand trust  $\beta = .59$ ,  $t(212) = 10.67$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.41, .59] was found to be a significant predictor of autonomous motivation, thereby providing support for Hypothesis 2d.

Hypothesis 2e stated that economic value would predict autonomous motivation. To test this, a regression analysis was computed including the controls of age, income, tenure, and gender, along with the independent variable economic value. Results revealed a significant five-predictor model,  $R^2 = .23$ ,  $F(5, 213) = 12.94$ ,  $p < .001$ . Specifically, the control variables age  $\beta = .03$ ,  $t(212) = .40$ ,  $p = .694$ , 95% CI [-.01, .01]; income  $\beta = -.05$ ,  $t(212) = -.72$ ,  $p = .472$ , 95% CI [-.01, .01]; tenure  $\beta = -.13$ ,  $t(212) = -1.63$ ,  $p = .105$ , 95% CI [-.24, .02]; and gender  $\beta = -.03$ ,  $t(212) = .39$ ,  $p = .694$ , 95% CI [-.01, .01]; were not found to be significant predictors of autonomous motivation; whereas and the independent variable of economic value  $\beta = .47$ ,  $t(212) = 7.59$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.37, .61] was found to be a significant predictor of autonomous motivation, thereby providing support for Hypothesis 2e, see Table 3.

Table 3

*Regressions on autonomous motivation (controls included)*

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients					95% CI	
	B	SE	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LL	UL
Organizational Attractiveness	.66	.06	.64	12.14	.000	.56	.77
Economic Value	.48	.06	.47	7.59	.000	.37	.61
Developmental Value	.59	.05	.65	12.23	.000	.49	.69
Interest Value	.49	.05	.54	9.20	.000	.38	.59
Social Value	.52	.05	.61	11.12	.000	.43	.62
Brand Trust	.51	.05	.59	10.67	.000	.41	.59

**Hypothesis 3.** The third hypothesis stated that autonomous motivation mediates the relationship between organizational attractiveness and employee engagement. In order to test this hypothesis, the variables (organizational attractiveness, autonomous motivation, employee engagement, and the four control variables) were computed into PROCESS macro for SPSS using Model 4. The results showed that the inclusion of autonomous motivation significantly improved the prediction accuracy of the model,  $\Delta R^2 = .73$ ,  $\Delta F(1, 211) = 96.99$ ,  $p < .001$ , which demonstrates its mediating effect. Moreover, autonomous motivation is a significant predictor of engagement,  $\beta = .61$ ,  $t(211) = 16.43$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.53, .68], even after statistically controlling for organizational attractiveness. This shows that there is a relationship between autonomous motivation and engagement that is independent of organizational attractiveness. In other words, autonomous motivation significantly contributes to employee engagement even after levels of organizational attractiveness are taken into consideration, thereby providing support for Hypothesis 3, see Table 4.

Hypothesis 3a stated that autonomous motivation mediates the relationship between economic value and employee engagement. In order to test this hypothesis, the variables (economic value, autonomous motivation, employee engagement, and the four control variables) were computed into PROCESS macro for SPSS using Model 4. The results showed that the inclusion of autonomous motivation significantly improved the prediction accuracy of the model,  $\Delta R^2 = .73$ ,  $\Delta F(1, 211) = 96.97$ ,  $p < .001$ , which demonstrates its mediating effect. Moreover, autonomous motivation is a significant predictor of employee engagement,  $\beta = .63$ ,  $t(211) = 19.72$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.21, .42], even after statistically controlling for economic value. This shows that there is a relationship between autonomous motivation and engagement that is independent of economic value. In other words, autonomous motivation significantly contributes to employee engagement even after levels of economic value are taken into consideration, thereby providing support for Hypothesis 3a.

Hypothesis 3b stated that autonomous motivation mediates the relationship between developmental value and employee engagement. In order to test this hypothesis, the variables (developmental value, autonomous motivation, employee engagement, and the four control variables) were computed into PROCESS macro for SPSS using Model 4. The results showed that the inclusion of autonomous motivation significantly improved the prediction accuracy of the model,  $\Delta R^2 = .74$ ,  $\Delta F(1, 211) = 99.13$ ,  $p < .001$ , which demonstrates its mediating effect.

Moreover, autonomous motivation is a significant predictor of employee engagement,  $\beta = .59$ ,  $t(211) = 16.13$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.27, .44], even after statistically controlling for developmental value. This shows that there is a relationship between autonomous motivation and engagement that is independent of developmental value. In other words, autonomous motivation significantly contributes to employee engagement even after levels of developmental are taken into consideration, thereby providing support for Hypothesis 3b.

Hypothesis 3c stated that autonomous motivation mediates the relationship between interest value and employee engagement. In order to test this hypothesis, the variables (interest value, autonomous motivation, employee engagement, and the four control variables) were computed into PROCESS macro for SPSS using Model 4. The results showed that the inclusion of autonomous motivation significantly improved the prediction accuracy of the model,  $\Delta R^2 = .73$ ,  $\Delta F(1, 211) = 94.71$ ,  $p < .001$ , which demonstrates its mediating effect. Moreover, autonomous motivation is a significant predictor of employee engagement,  $\beta = .64$ ,  $t(211) = 18.90$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.24, .40], even after statistically controlling for interest value. This shows that there is a relationship between autonomous motivation and engagement that is independent of interest value. In other words, autonomous motivation significantly contributes to employee engagement even after levels of social value are taken into consideration, thereby providing support for Hypothesis 3c.

Hypothesis 3d stated that autonomous motivation mediates the relationship between social value and employee engagement. In order to test this hypothesis, the variables (social value, autonomous motivation, employee engagement, and the four control variables) were computed into PROCESS macro for SPSS using Model 4. The results showed that the inclusion of autonomous motivation significantly improved the prediction accuracy of the model,  $\Delta R^2 = .73$ ,  $\Delta F(1, 211) = 94.73$ ,  $p < .001$ , which demonstrates its mediating effect. Moreover, autonomous motivation is a significant predictor of employee engagement,  $\beta = .63$ ,  $t(211) = 17.60$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.25, .42], even after statistically controlling for social value. This shows that there is a relationship between autonomous motivation and engagement that is independent of social value. In other words, autonomous motivation significantly contributes to employee engagement even after levels of social value are taken into consideration, thereby providing support for Hypothesis 3d.

Hypothesis 3e stated that autonomous motivation mediates the relationship between brand trust and employee engagement. In order to test this hypothesis, the variables (brand trust, autonomous motivation, employee engagement, and the four control variables) were computed into PROCESS macro for SPSS using Model 4. The results showed that the inclusion of autonomous motivation significantly improved the prediction accuracy of the model,  $\Delta R^2 = .73$ ,  $\Delta F(1, 211) = 94.53$ ,  $p < .001$ , which demonstrates its mediating effect. Moreover, autonomous motivation is a significant predictor of employee engagement,  $\beta = .63$ ,  $t(211) = 17.93$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.24, .41], even after statistically controlling for brand trust. This shows that there is a relationship between autonomous motivation and engagement that is independent of brand trust. In other words, autonomous motivation significantly contributes to employee engagement even after levels of brand trust are taken into consideration, thereby providing support for Hypothesis 3e, see Table 4.

Table 4

*Mediating effect of autonomous motivation*

	Effect	SE	t	p	95% CI	
					LL	UL
IV = Organizational Attractiveness						
Total Effect	.50	.04	11.41	.000	.42	.59
Direct Effect	.09	.04	2.51	.013	.02	.17
Indirect Effect	.41	.04	16.43	.000	.31	.51
IV = Economic value						
Total Effect	.39	.05	7.91	.000	.29	.49
Direct Effect	.08	.03	2.49	.013	.02	.15
Indirect Effect	.31	.03	19.71	.000	.21	.42
IV = Developmental value						
Total Effect	.46	.04	11.96	.000	.38	.54
Direct Effect	.11	.03	3.13	.002	.04	.17
Indirect Effect	.35	.04	16.13	.000	.27	.44
IV = Interest value						
Total Effect	.36	.04	8.53	.000	.28	.45
Direct Effect	.05	.03	1.59	.115	-.01	.11
Indirect Effect	.31	.04	18.90	.000	.24	.40
IV = Social value						
Total Effect	.38	.04	9.93	.000	.31	.46
Direct Effect	.05	.03	1.59	.113	-.01	.11
Indirect Effect	.33	.04	17.60	.000	.25	.42
IV = Brand trust						
Total Effect	.37	.04	9.56	.000	.29	.45
Direct Effect	.05	.03	1.49	.138	-.01	.11
Indirect Effect	.32	.04	17.93	.000	.24	.41

*Note. For indirect effects, bootstrap SE and 95% CI are reported*

**Hypothesis 4.** The fourth hypothesis stated that perceived organizational support would strengthen the relationship between organizational attractiveness and autonomous motivation. In order to test this hypothesis, a regression analysis with an interaction term was computed in SPSS. The interaction term consisted of organizational attractiveness and perceived organizational support. After entering the four control variables, the final model revealed that the interaction term was found to be a significant predictor of autonomous motivation  $\beta = -.71$ ,  $t(207) = -267$ ,  $p < .01$ , 95% CI [-.23, -.04], thereby providing support for Hypothesis 4. A simple slopes analysis using PROCESS macro for SPSS was further computed. The analysis revealed that when perceived organizational support is low, there is a significant positive relationship between organizational attractiveness and autonomous motivation  $\beta = .62$ ,  $t(207) = 8.29$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.47, .76]; similarly, when perceived organizational support is high, there is also a significant positive relationship between organizational attractiveness and autonomous motivation  $\beta = .39$ ,  $t(207) = 5.16$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.24, .54]. In line with the hypothesis, Figure 1 reveals a weak spreading interaction in which perceived organizational support appears to have a stronger effect on autonomous motivation when an employer is considered low in organizational attractiveness.

Hypothesis 4a stated that perceived organizational support would strengthen the relationship between economic value and autonomous motivation. In order to test this hypothesis, a regression analysis with an interaction term was computed in SPSS. The interaction term consisted of economic value and perceived organizational support. After entering the four control variables, the final model revealed that the interaction term was not found to be a significant predictor of autonomous motivation  $\beta = -.34$ ,  $t(207) = -1.15$ ,  $p = .251$ , 95% CI [-.18, .05], therefore not providing statistical support for Hypothesis 4a.

Hypothesis 4b stated that perceived organizational support would strengthen the relationship between developmental value and autonomous motivation. In order to test this hypothesis, a regression analysis with an interaction term was computed in SPSS. The interaction term consisted of developmental value and perceived developmental support. After entering the four control variables, the final model revealed that the interaction term was found to be a statistically significant predictor of autonomous motivation  $\beta = -.79$ ,  $t(207) = -3.08$ ,  $p < .01$ , 95% CI [-.22, -.05]. A simple slopes analysis using PROCESS macro for SPSS was further computed. The analysis revealed that when perceived organizational support is low, there is a significant

positive relationship between developmental value and autonomous motivation  $\beta = .56$ ,  $t(207) = 8.62$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.43, .69]; similarly, when perceived organizational support is high, there is also a significant positive relationship between developmental value and autonomous motivation  $\beta = .33$ ,  $t(207) = 5.05$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.20, .45]. Figure 2 reveals a weak spreading interaction in which perceived organizational support appears to have a stronger effect on autonomous motivation when an employer emphasizes less developmental value.

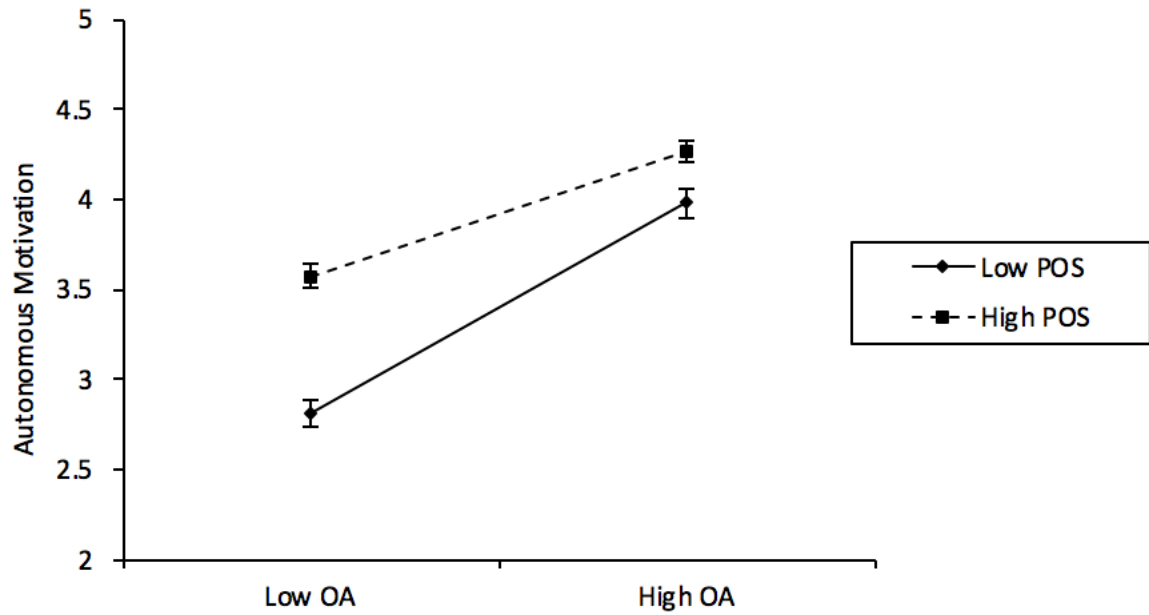
Hypothesis 4c stated that perceived organizational support would strengthen the relationship between interest value and autonomous motivation. In order to test this hypothesis, a regression analysis with an interaction term was computed in SPSS. The interaction term consisted of interest value and perceived developmental support. After entering the four control variables, the final model revealed that the interaction term was found to be a significant predictor of autonomous motivation  $\beta = -.23$ ,  $t(207) = -2.23$ ,  $p < .05$ , 95% CI [-.19, -.01], thereby providing support for Hypothesis 4c. A simple slopes analysis using PROCESS macro for SPSS was further computed. The analysis revealed that when perceived organizational support is low, there is a significant positive relationship between interest value and autonomous motivation  $\beta = .40$ ,  $t(207) = 6.11$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.27, .53]; similarly, when perceived organizational support is high, there is also a significant positive relationship between interest value and autonomous motivation  $\beta = .22$ ,  $t(207) = 3.15$ ,  $p < .01$ , 95% CI [.08, .36]. Figure 3 reveals a weak spreading interaction in which perceived organizational support appears to have a stronger effect on autonomous motivation when an employer emphasizes less interest value.

Hypothesis 4d stated that perceived organizational support would strengthen the relationship between social value and autonomous motivation. In order to test this hypothesis, a regression analysis with an interaction term was computed in SPSS. The interaction term consisted of social value and perceived developmental support. After entering the four control variables, the final model revealed that the interaction term was found to be a significant predictor of autonomous motivation  $\beta = -.66$ ,  $t(207) = -2.46$ ,  $p < .05$ , 95% CI [-.19, -.02], thereby providing support for Hypothesis 4d. A simple slopes analysis using PROCESS macro for SPSS was further computed. The analysis revealed that when perceived organizational support is low, there is a significant positive relationship between social value and autonomous motivation  $\beta = .46$ ,  $t(207) = 7.49$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.34, .58]; similarly, when perceived organizational support is high, there is also a significant positive relationship between social value and autonomous



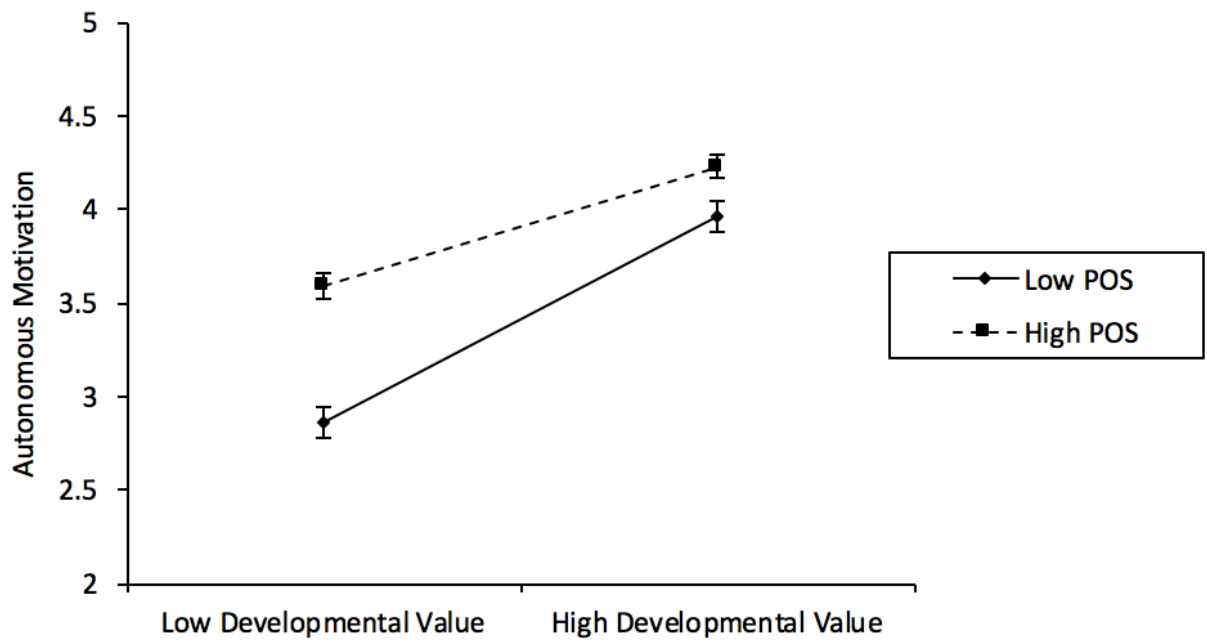
motivation  $\beta = .28$ ,  $t(207) = 4.27$ ,  $p < .01$ , 95% CI [.15, .40]. Figure 4 reveals a weak spreading interaction in which perceived organizational support appears to have a stronger effect on autonomous motivation when an employer emphasizes high social value.

Hypothesis 4e stated that perceived organizational support would strengthen the relationship between brand trust and autonomous motivation. In order to test this hypothesis, a regression analysis with an interaction term was computed in SPSS. The interaction term consisted of brand trust and perceived developmental support. After entering the four control variables, the final model revealed that that the interaction term was not found to be a significant predictor of autonomous motivation  $\beta = -.35$ ,  $t(207) = -1.38$ ,  $p = .170$ , 95% CI [-.14, .03], thereby not providing statistical support for Hypothesis 4e.



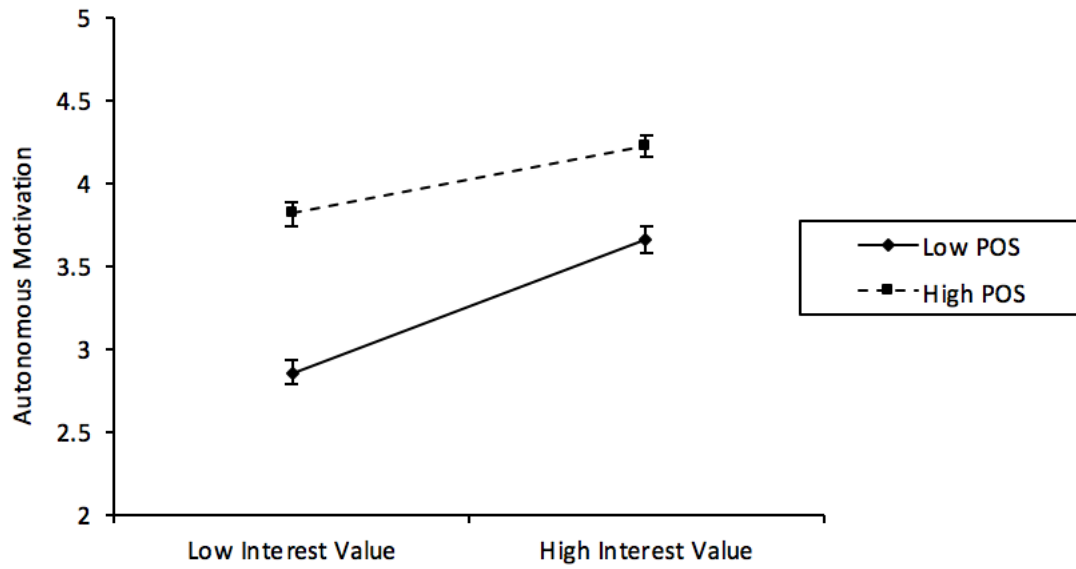
*Figure 1.* Autonomous motivation average at levels of high and low organizational attractiveness (OA) and high and low perceived organizational support (POS).

*Note.* Error bars represent standard error of the mean.



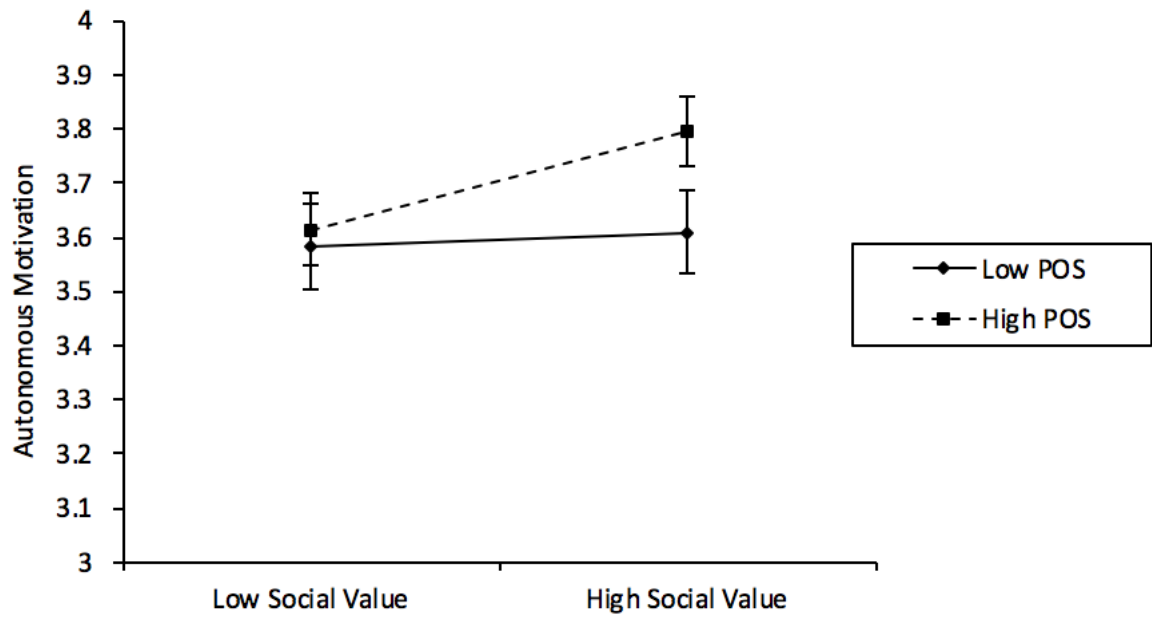
*Figure 2.* Autonomous motivation average at levels of high and low developmental value and high and low perceived organizational support (POS).

*Note.* Error bars represent standard error of the mean.



*Figure 3.* Autonomous motivation average at levels of high and low interest value and high and low perceived organizational support (POS).

*Note.* Error bars represent standard error of the mean.



*Figure 3.* Autonomous motivation average at levels of high and low social value and high and low perceived organizational support (POS).

*Note.* Error bars represent standard error of the mean.

**Hypothesis 5.** The fifth hypothesis stated that the mediating effect of autonomous motivation between organizational attractiveness and employee engagement will be strengthened with the perceived organizational support. In order to test this hypothesis, the entire model was entered in PROCESS macro for SPSS. The results revealed evidence of a statistically significant moderated mediation in the model  $\beta = -0.08$ ,  $SE = .04$ , 95% CI [-.15, -.01], as the confidence interval does not include 0.

Hypothesis 5a stated that the mediating effect of autonomous motivation between economic value and employee engagement will be strengthened with perceived organizational support. To test this hypothesis, the entire model was entered in PROCESS macro for SPSS. The results did not reveal evidence of a statistically significant moderated mediation in the model  $\beta = -.03$ ,  $SE = .05$ , 95% CI [-.12, .06], as the confidence interval includes 0.

Hypothesis 5b stated that the mediating effect of autonomous motivation between developmental value and employee engagement will be strengthened with perceived organizational support. To test this hypothesis, the entire model was entered in PROCESS macro for SPSS. The results revealed evidence of a statistically significant moderated mediation in the model  $\beta = -.08$ ,  $SE = .03$ , 95% CI [-.14, -.02], as the confidence interval did not include 0.

Hypothesis 5c stated that the mediating effect of autonomous motivation between interest value and employee engagement will be strengthened with perceived organizational support. To test this hypothesis, the entire model was entered in PROCESS macro for SPSS. The results revealed evidence of a statistically significant moderated mediation in the model  $\beta = -.06$ ,  $SE = .03$ , 95% CI [-.13, -.01], as the confidence interval includes 0.

Hypothesis 5d stated that the mediating effect of autonomous motivation between social value and employee engagement will be strengthened with perceived organizational support. To test this hypothesis, the entire model was entered in PROCESS macro for SPSS. The results revealed evidence of a statistically significant moderated mediation in the model  $\beta = -.06$ ,  $SE = .03$ , 95% CI [-.13, .01], as the confidence interval includes 0.

Hypothesis 5e stated that the mediating effect of autonomous motivation between brand trust and employee engagement will be strengthened with perceived organizational support. To test this hypothesis, the entire model was entered in PROCESS macro for SPSS. The results did not reveal evidence for a statistically significant moderated mediation in the model  $\beta = -.03$ ,  $SE = .04$ , 95% CI [-.10, .04], as the confidence interval includes 0.

## **Discussion**

The overarching objectives of the present study were: (1) to apply the concept organizational attractiveness on incumbent employees; (2) to investigate the process through which organizational attractiveness influences employee engagement; and (3) to explain the relationship between organizational attractiveness, autonomous motivation, and employee engagement using perceived organizational support. Participants were asked to answer one survey at several time points on their organization's employer brand; otherwise conceptualized as organizational attractiveness. The leading hypothesis of this study was that positively evaluated employer brands, captured through organizational attractiveness, would lead to autonomously motivated and engaged incumbent employees. More specifically, the role of perceived organizational support was taken into consideration. It was theorized that constituents of the organization are responsible for delivering the brand values and support to incumbent employees, which would strengthen the relationships proposed above. The findings of the present study provide support for the second function of an employer brand in the management of human resources, which is to assure that current employees are engaged in the organizations' strategy and motivated by the culture of the firm (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

### **Organizational Attractiveness, Employee Engagement, & Autonomous Motivation**

Organizational attractiveness significantly and positively predicted both employee engagement and autonomous motivation, thereby providing support for the first and second hypotheses. This finding provides empirical support for the rationale behind employer brands and its function to motivate and engage incumbent employees in the firm's strategy (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005; Jiang & Iles, 2011; Elving, Westhoff, Meeusen, & Schoonderbeek, 2013). Instead, previous studies on the effects of employer brands on incumbent employees have typically looked at commitment-related variables (e.g., Davies, 2008; Hanin et al., 2013), which reflects the marketing perspective pertaining to brand loyalty (King & Grace, 2009). However, it was previously noted that this presents a theoretical limitation given that a strong, or attractive, employer brand is said to engage and motivate incumbent employees as well (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Management scholars have looked at performance indicators such as, brand citizenship behaviour, which includes participation on the job (Helm, Renk, & Misha, 2016), along with financial performance and non-financial performance, which was a subjective

measure from the management perspective pertaining to how the employer brand impacts employees to engage in their work roles (Biswas & Suar, 2016). Although the idea that a strong employer brand would foster motivation and employee engagement, research in this area remained scarce. These findings therefore contribute to the literature by providing support for role that organizational attractiveness has in fostering engagement and autonomous motivation in incumbent employees.

This study further examined the relationships between each dimension of organizational attractiveness and its effect on employee engagement and autonomous motivation. For instance, an employer's emphasis on development appeared to be the strongest predictor of both employee engagement and autonomous motivation. This finding is in line with previous studies linking perceived employee training and development opportunities to employee engagement (Sattar, Ahmad, & Hassan, 2015; Taufek, Zulkifle, & Sharif, 2016); as well as to autonomous and intrinsic motivation (Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2008; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2009). The strength of developmental value as a predictor of employee engagement and autonomous motivation was followed by social value and brand trust. Previous researchers (i.e., Heavey, Halliday, Gilbert, & Murphy, 2011) have emphasized the importance of relationship building in the business world, amongst colleagues, customers, and management. They argue that relationships built on trust are key to motivating employees to perform. Similarly, Sokro (2012) advocated the necessity for organizations to provide rich work environments from social aspects to work design in order to outperform competitors. As a number of positive work attitudes appear to stem from organizational trust (i.e., Dirks, 2001; De Baerdemaeker, & Bruggeman, 2015; Hanaysha, & Tahir, 2016; Al Hosani, Elanain, & Ajmal, 2018), our study supports the idea that an employer's emphasis on social value and trust equally contribute to employee engagement and autonomous motivation.

Although statistically significant, the weakest predictors of employee engagement and autonomous motivation appeared to be an employer's emphasis on interest and economic values, with the latter being the weakest. It has been found that meaningfulness in the workplace leads to employee engagement (Rich et al., 2010). Further, well-designed jobs that offer interesting and challenging tasks appear to be related to positive work attitudes and autonomous motivation (e.g., Güntert, 2015; Mostafa, Gould-Williams, & Bottomley, 2015). This study demonstrated that an employer's emphasis on interest value leads to both employee engagement and



autonomous motivation, thereby supporting these previously discussed findings. Further, the literature demonstrates a link between aspects of economic value such as, compensation (Anitha, 2014), rewards (Sattar, et al., 2015) and base pay (Kuvaas et al., 2016) to employee engagement. However, the literature remains mixed for the relationship between economic value and autonomous motivation. For instance, SDT theorists (i.e., Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017) have long showed the negative aspects in rewarding performance, as it appears to diminish autonomous motivation and increase controlled motivation, which can have negative consequences such as, burnout (Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017). However, others have argued that the relationship between compensation and autonomous motivation may be positive depending upon factors such as, cooperative culture and climate (Gagné & Forest, 2008); or whether employees view rewards such as promotions or as an opportunity to fulfill the needs for autonomy and competence (Deci & Ryan, 2009). Our finding support the positive side of the debate, and are contrary to the empirical evidence demonstrating the negative relationship between economic value and autonomous motivation, as reviewed by Deci and colleagues (2017).

Overall, the dimensions of organizational attractiveness appear to significantly and independently predict employee engagement and autonomous motivation. Our findings are contrary to previous researchers (i.e., Piyachat, Chanongkorn, & Panisa, 2014) that have found a limited influence of perceived employer brand on employee engagement. Instead, this study directly demonstrates the significant relationships between overall organizational attractiveness, along with each dimension, with employee engagement. Further, by addressing the mediating role of autonomous motivation, this study advances our understanding of the relationship between employer values and employee engagement.

In line with the third hypothesis, results revealed a significant mediating effect of autonomous motivation. In other words, levels of overall organizational attractiveness and its dimensions, perceived by incumbent employees was indirectly associated to employee engagement through the mediating effect of autonomous motivation. These results are comparable to previous studies in which autonomous motivation mediated the relationship between environments that support autonomy and test performance (i.e., Vansteenkiste et al., 2004). This study's finding is further comparable to value congruence being associated to work engagement, through the mediating role of autonomous motivation (Li, Wang, You, & Gao,

2015). However, both studies were contextualized in the teaching environment; whereas the present study used incumbent employees from various firms and industries, thereby increasing the external validity, or generalizability, of these results towards other contexts. However, future research may want to experiment by manipulating the needs that foster autonomous motivation (as in, Pavey, Greitemeyer, & Sparks, 2011) in order to establish causal relationships between office environments that foster autonomous motivation, that further lead to employee engagement. Nevertheless, this specific finding has implications for SDT, which will be elaborated on below.

### **The Moderating Role of Perceived Organizational Support**

Statistical support was provided for the moderating role of perceived organizational support in the relationship between organizational attractiveness and autonomous motivation. Furthermore, a spreading interaction revealed that perceived organizational support appeared to have a larger effect when incumbent employees rated their employers as lower on organizational attractiveness. According to signaling theory, high quality firms, assumed to be rated higher on organizational attractiveness, are motivated to signal information to their employees; whereas low quality firms are not (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011). Contrary to this theory, it appears that lower quality firms may benefit in terms of motivating their employees from having their organization and managers signal information and support towards its employees. In fact, Kurtessis and colleagues (2017) have found that leader behaviors which include caring, concern, and support for followers, along with clear communications of work role expectations appear to effectively foster perceived organizational support. This being said, the findings from this study suggest that although perceived organizational support may create a condition for autonomously motivating employees, those organizations that may be considered lower quality firms (i.e., Connelly et al., 2011), or have lower employer brand equity, may benefit significantly more from fostering an environment of perceived organizational support in order to cultivate optimal motivation in incumbent employees. Practical implications of this finding are further addressed.

Partial support was provided for the moderating role of perceived organizational support in strengthening the relationship between each value dimension and autonomous motivation, as different patterns emerged for the dimensions. First, perceived organizational support did not appear to interact with economic value and brand trust on the effect of autonomous motivation.

These findings are contrary to that of Olafsen and colleagues (2015) which was that that managerial need support moderated the relationship between salary, distributive justice, and intrinsic motivation. However, in line with Stone and colleagues' (2009) suggestion on the manner in which manager's present incumbent employees with rewards, perhaps perceived organizational support does not complement the effects of economic value, and therefore does not impact autonomous motivation. Similarly, the moderated-mediation hypothesis, which includes the independent variables of brand trust and economic value separately with perceived organizational support, autonomous motivation, and employee engagement was not shown to be statistically significant. These findings appears to be contrary to Erdogan and Enders' (2007) performance study. As mentioned, they proposed that by receiving tangible and intangible benefits from an employer, employees will feel obligated to return the favor in their performance. They further found that higher quality exchanges between leaders and members that foster trust was linked to higher performance, when perceived organizational support was high (Erdogan & Enders, 2007). That said, perhaps autonomous motivation is just a small factor in explaining how work engagement is related to both economic value and brand trust. Research would have to include other factors. For instance, perhaps distributive justice (i.e., Gagné & Forest, 2008; Aryee, Walumbwa, Mondejar, & Chu, 2015; Olafsen, Halvari, Forest, & Deci, 2015) and organizational politics (i.e., Vigoda-Gadot, & Talmud, 2010) play larger roles in these relationships.

Instead, perceived organizational support appeared to significantly moderate the relationship between developmental, interest, and social values with autonomous motivation. In other words, perceived organizational support appears to have a stronger effect on autonomous motivation when an employer emphasizes less developmental value. Studies have shown a positive relationship between an employer's emphasis on developmental practices and employee motivation (e.g., Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2008; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2009; Heavey, Halliday, Gilbert, & Murphy 2011; Khan, Mufti, & Nazir, 2015). However, when developmental practices are low, due to costs or changes in management, the results of this study shows that perceived organizational support can help foster autonomous motivation, despite the low opportunities to develop within a firm. This finding is in line with that of Khan and colleagues (2015) that have found that perceived organizational support interacts with training opportunities to impact

employee motivation. Further, Shuck and colleagues (2014) emphasized the role of support for participation in human resource development practices in fostering employee engagement. Our findings, along with previous studies (i.e., Shuck et al., 2014; Khan et al., 2015), respond to a critique by Baily and colleagues (2017) which have suggested that few studies have examined how training and development programs foster employee engagement. Our study found support for the moderated-mediation between an employer's developmental value, perceived organizational support, autonomous motivation, and employee engagement – thereby providing and explanation for this relationship.

In terms of interest value, perceived organizational support appears to have a stronger effect on autonomous motivation when incumbent employees are faced with an un-exciting work environment in terms of practices and creativity. As mentioned, Hon (2012) found that the employee perception of a climate that emphasized creativity significantly predicted autonomous motivation. In line with this finding, there was no difference in levels of autonomous motivation when employers were considered to be high in perceived organizational support and emphasize the value of interest. Similarly, based on Yu and Frenkel's findings (2013), it was concluded that values at the higher organizational level may reinforce, or inhibit, the relationship between perceived organizational support, identification, and performance. This study provides evidence for the idea that perceived organizational support reinforces the relationship between interest values and autonomous motivation. However, does not appear to impact employee engagement, as statistical support was not found for the moderated-mediation hypothesis. Nevertheless, the moderation between low interest values and high perceived organizational support in eliciting autonomous motivation has implications for mundane work contexts or jobs that don't allow for much creativity in work practices.

On the other hand, perceived organizational support appears to have a stronger effect on autonomous motivation when an employer emphasizes high social values. However, employers that emphasize social values and are considered low in perceived organizational support impedes autonomous motivation. As Yu and Frenkel (2013) suggested, values at the higher organizational level may reinforce, or inhibit, the relationship between perceived organizational support, identification, and performance. Alike, Hanin and colleagues (2013) showed that a discrepancy between employment offering and lived employment experience of favorable job conditions resulted in lower affective commitment. In line with these findings, the interaction between high

social value and high perceived organizational support demonstrates a congruency of shared and enacted values. Hanin and colleagues (2013) along with our findings are further comparable to findings from Howell and colleagues (2012) in which affective commitment was found to be higher when employees perceived congruence between proposed and enacted organizational values. As a result, organizations that claim to highly value teamwork and relationships but are considered low in perceived support results in a perception of discrepancy on behalf of the employee, thereby lowering levels of autonomous motivation. This finding suggests that organizational behaviours must convey the value proposition from the employer brand in order to foster positive outcomes, such as having autonomously motivated employees. However, results did not show support for the moderated-mediation between social values, perceived organizational support, autonomous motivation, and employee engagement, suggesting that perhaps other mediators may lead to engagement.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Most of the research on employer brands have used a marketing perspective in terms of theory and constructs (i.e., Backhaus, & Tikoo, 2004; Davies, 2008; King & Grace, 2009; Gomes & Neves, 2010; Hanin, Stinglhamber, & Delobbe, 2013; Sivertzen, Nilsen, & Olafsen, 2013; Helm, Renk, & Mishra, 2016; Rampl, Opitz, Welp, & Kenning, 2016). For instance, when examining the effects of employer brand perceptions on both potential and incumbent employees, researchers have found that a strong brand appears to be related to intentions of applying in potential employees (Gomes & Neves, 2010; Sivertzen, Nilsen, & Olafsen, 2013); whereas commitment-related outcomes have been a strong focus with incumbent employees (e.g., Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Davies, 2008; Hanin, Stinglhamber, & Delobbe, 2013), along with other outcomes supporting the marketing perspective such as, perceived differentiation and loyalty to the organization (e.g., Davies, 2008). By drawing upon SDT, employee engagement, and perceived organizational support, this study expands past the marketing paradigm with some theoretical implications.

First, autonomous motivation was used as an associating mechanism between organizational attractiveness and a desirable work state, employee engagement. Aside from the organizational values (i.e., interest, developments, and social) that were theorized to satisfy the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness; there was mixed support for the economic

dimension of organizational attractiveness being linked to autonomous motivation. Theoretically, contingent rewards have negative effects on autonomous motivation (Gagné & Forest, 2008); Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017). Contrastingly, Stone, Deci, and Ryan (2009) proposed that promotional opportunities could potentially elicit autonomous motivation by presenting employees with an opportunity to fulfill the needs for autonomy and competence. However, promotional opportunities could equally be viewed as an external reward thereby fostering controlled motivation (Stone, Deci, & Ryan, 2009). The findings from the present study provide support for Gagné and Forest's (2008) attempt to theorize how compensation systems, along with other interacting variables, may satisfy the needs that elicit autonomous motivation. For instance, climates that support autonomy, cooperative cultures, and distributive justice are said to interact with perceived compensation (Gagné & Forest, 2008) resulting in autonomous motivation. Similarly, the social, developmental, and interest values of organizational attractiveness may capture these interacting elements, thereby leading to autonomous motivation and overriding negative effects of perceived economic value. Further, the results from this study support SDT by demonstrating yet another relationship is mediated by autonomous motivation (cf. Vansteenkiste et al., 2004; Li, Wang, You, & Gao, 2015).

Second, this study explained the relationship theorized by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) between employer brands and employee engagement, as well as with autonomous motivation, by using perceived organizational support. With the exception of Hanin and colleagues (2013), few studies have addressed perceived organizational support in the relationship between employer brands and outcomes with incumbent employees. However, a recent meta-analysis on perceived organizational support (Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart, & Adis, 2017) has found the construct to be positively associated to social exchange and negatively associated to economic exchange. This finding is in line with the relationship that was found between perceived organizational support and autonomous motivation. This study therefore adds to the existing perceived organizational support literature by introducing a new mechanism that may help strengthen the effects of employer brands on incumbent employees within organizations.

### **Practical Implications**

First, by addressing autonomous motivation and employee engagement, and further finding that organizational attractiveness predicts both constructs, this study highlights some potential benefits that a strong employer brand might have on the employee experience and firm

performance. For instance, a well-established relationship between autonomous motivation and wellbeing has been documented in the literature (e.g., Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017); whereas the relationship between employee engagement and performance has also been established (e.g., Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010; Carter, Nesbit, Badham, Parker, & Sung, 2018). That said, if increasing aspects of economic value is not possible, increasing developmental, interest, or social values may create a climate that fosters autonomous motivation to further impact employee wellbeing. In general, this finding implies that by increasing these aspects employee engagement and potentially, performance may be increased.

The impact perceived organizational support has on employee's autonomous motivation in the condition of an organization considered lower in attractiveness has implications for management and organizations in the process of developing an employer brand strategy. For instance, training managers to foster perceived organizational support within organizations that are considered lower in brand equity, or organizational attractiveness, can help motivate incumbent employees. According to Backhaus, (2004) after an organization determines their value proposition, internal brand marketing occurs to ensure incumbent employees can deliver the firm's values and to become "brand ambassadors" (Elving, Westhoff, Meeusen, & Schoonderbeek, 2013, p. 356). For instance, perceived human resource practices are the extent to which employees feel as though the human resource practices implemented by their organization will affect them (Boon, Den Hartog, Boselie, & Paauwe, 2011). Human resource practices include training, participation, teamwork and rewards – in which knowledge of the internal brand is conveyed. That said, training managers to embed both brand values and support throughout their strategic functions could help autonomously motivate employees and eventually, build a stronger brand since employees are responsible for delivering the firm's values externally to stakeholders (King & Grace, 2009), which can include future potential employees.

### **Strengths, Limitations, & Future Research**

This study has both strengths and limitations. Employee engagement was examined through the influences of organizational attractiveness and autonomous motivation. Whereas previous studies (i.e., Davies, 2008; Hanin et al., 2013; Helm et al., 2016; Biswas & Suar, 2016) have used survey data at a single time point; the present study used a two-wave design by collecting responses at two time points. This method was used in an attempt to control for

methods bias (i.e., Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). Another strength of this study is that the hypotheses were empirically examined using responses from incumbent employees. This strength is unlike previous studies on incumbent employees (e.g., Davies, 2008; Biswas & Suar, 2016) that have used managers to evaluate how employer brands impact employees at all levels of the organization.

This study is however not without limitations. One potential limitation lies with the sample. Respondents were recruited online across North America; although this provides generalizability towards various industries, future studies may want to research specific organizations in order to increase the internal validity of the findings. Further, this study attempted to control for methods bias by incorporating two temporal points of data collection. However, the dependent variable of interest was employee engagement, which is considered to be a general aspect of performance (Campbell, 1990). As with performance evaluations (Levy & Williams, 2004), it has been suggested by Van Bruggen, Lilien, and Kacker (2002) that using multiple sources of data, rather than a single source, as used in this study, may improve the validity of these findings. Future research may therefore want to incorporate responses from multiple-sources.

## **Conclusions**

This research showed how autonomous of motivation mediated the relationship between each dimension of organizational attractiveness and employee engagement. Further, perceived organizational support appears to moderate some of the relationships between the dimensions of organizational attractiveness, autonomous motivation, and employee engagement. These findings encourage further investigation upon the contexts in which dimensions of organizational attractiveness matter more. By exploring how an employer brand motivates incumbent employees to engage in their work opens a new perspective for the role of employer brand strategies on personnel.



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## Appendix A: Consent Form

### Welcome!

Companies create employer brands with brand promises and values to attract and retain employees. We are interested in understanding your organization's brand and how it affects you as an employee.

You will be asked to answer some questions relevant to employer branding and a number of outcomes. Please be assured that your responses will be kept **completely confidential**.

**This is a two-part study:** The first part is now and should take you around 10 minutes to complete. Two weeks later, you will receive a link for the second part of this study which will take again, 10 minutes to complete. Your participation in this research is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw for any reason, and without any prejudice.

If you would like to contact the **Principal Investigator** in the study to discuss this research, **please e-mail Sophia Chiovitti (sophia.chiovitti@mail.concordia.ca)**, or the **Supervisor of this research, Yu-Ping Chen (yu-ping.chen@concordia.ca)**.

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary and that you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the study at any time and for any reason.

Please note that this survey will be best displayed on a laptop or desktop computer. Some features may be less compatible for use on a mobile device.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the College of Ethics Reviewers (CER) of Concordia University (Protocol No.: 30009857)

- I consent, begin the study
- I do not consent, I do not wish to participate