**International Journal in Management and Social Science**
Volume 6 Issue 08, August 2018 ISSN: 2321-1784 Impact Factor: 6.178
Journal Homepage: http://ijmr.net.in, Email: irjmss@gmail.com
Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Refereed Open Access International Journal

# BUILDING EMPLOYEE BRAND COMMITMENT: THE ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT
## 'A Case of Higher Learning Institutions'

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## Abstract
*Despite the popularity of employee brand commitment in business management studies, the influences of the same are not well documented. Therefore, this study intends to examine the influence of psychological contracts i.e. relational and transactional contracts on employee brand commitment among employees of higher learning institutions. The study collected data from 401 respondents including academic, administrative and technical staffs of the selected University by using a self-administered questionnaire. In addition, data were analyzed by using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), and the study findings show that psychological contracts i.e. relational and transactional contracts have a significant influence on employee brand commitment. The study recommends that, branding of higher learning institutions should adopt a holistic approach that considers employees as the main engine of the Universities branding process. Finally, the study proposes further empirical studies on psychological contracts, by comparing the level of influence between relational and transactional contracts on employee brand commitment.*

*Keywords*: Branding, Employee Brand Commitment, Higher Learning Institutions, Psychological Contract, Relational Psychological Contract, Transactional Psychological Contract.

# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 Background Information

At the global level, higher learning institutions particularly universities have recently been experiencing a very competitive academic environment. It is globally accepted that, this is the result of current major higher education sector reforms that have led to significant decrease of support from governments in the terms of funding and other vital resources (Beneke, 2011; Dholakia and Acciardo, 2014; Stephenson and Bell, 2014). In responding to this situation, higher learning institutions have automatically found themselves adopting and integrating some market-oriented or business-oriented approaches in managing their operations (Williams and Omar, 2014; Delmestri *et al*., 2015). Empirical evidence indicates that, the fact that boundaries that could reduce free movement of both students and staff have continuously been eliminated; universities should expect the ever-growing competitive academic environment in future (Jungblut & Vukasovic, 2013; Erdoğmuş and Ergun, 2016).

In fact, radical and constant changing of students' and staffs' demands as well as expectations are an indication that competition in higher academic settings is a constant phenomenon (Harsha and Shah, 2011; Jungblut & Vukasovic, 2013; Williams and Omar, 2014). Evidence shows that, both students and staff expect higher learning institutions to have significant contributions not only to the national development agenda rather to their specific demands and expectations (Judson *et al*., 2008; Beneke, 2011; Joseph *et al*., 2012; Stephenson and Bell, 2014). In that respect, in the marketing of higher learning institutions demands and expectations of key stakeholders such as students and staff should be central to the marketing strategies (Balmer *et al*., 2010; Dholakia and Acciardo, 2014). It should be noted that, these demands and expectations will continue to change due to the emerging use of technology, which provides a room for students, staff, and the public to access massive information about universities across the world (Opoku *et al*., 2006; Chapleo *et al*., 2011).

Furthermore, the idea that competition in academic environment will persist gains popularity given the current evidence which shows that; students, staff and other stakeholders would prefer to be affiliated or associated with the university that is credible and has good image and reputation (Bunzel, 2007; Harsha and Shah, 2011; Beneke, 2011). Further evidence confirms that, the local and international labour markets are in favour of students who accomplished their studies from universities with preferable reputations across the world (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007). In addition, other empirical studies reveal that it is only universities with preferable reputation which attract global projects and research funds from international agencies, which is among the primary activities of any higher learning institution (Beneke, 2011; Sataøen, 2015).

Given these academic settings, universities in the world are recently struggling to formulate appropriate strategies that can enable them to build a good image for attracting qualified international and local students as well as staff (Beneke, 2011). Besides, universities are currently driven to establish suitable strategies for retaining both qualified staff and students (Schee, 2011; Tanyeri and Nardallı, 2015; Erdoğmuş and Ergun, 2016). The main purpose of staff and students retention is to build loyalty on the eyes of these two major groups of stakeholders which is essentially important in building and sustaining the university's image and reputation (Bock *et al*., 2014). It is these circumstances that necessitate the need for branding higher learning institutions particularly universities (Stephenson and Bell, 2014; Erdoğmuş and Ergun, 2016). From both theoretical and practical perspectives, branding is popularised as a preferable marketing tool that can help universities to survive in the current competitive academic settings (Curtis *et al*., 2009; Harsha and Shah, 2011; Drori *et al*., 2013).

Though branding is theoretically postulated to be relevant in building and sustaining reputations of higher learning institutions, scholars continue debating on whether it is practicable to apply the same business-oriented branding approaches to academic settings (Balmer *et al*., 2010; Erdoğmuş and Ergun, 2016). In fact, scholars on higher education branding agree in principal that, despite of increasing importance to higher learning institutions, less attention has been invested on examining practicability of the same on academic institutions notably universities (Mourad *et al*., 2010; Williams, 2012; Delmestri *et al*., 2015). This implies that, while branding is theoretically and practically accepted to be relevant to universities, it calls for different approaches which could accommodate universities' complexities and dynamisms (Idris and Whitfield, 2014; Delmestri *et al*., 2015; Sataøen, 2015).

From complexities and dynamism perspective, branding in academic settings requires integration of efforts and interests of both internal stakeholders (staff, students, and management) and external stakeholders (public, alumni, government agencies, suppliers, etc.) (Balmer and Liao, 2007; Atakan and Eker, 2007; Chapleo, 2010). Specifically, staff and students of the university seem to be the most important engine in building and maintaining credibility, image, and reputation of the university (Whisman, 2009; Beneke, 2011; Vasquez *et al*., 2013; Dholakia and Acciardo, 2014). This means, in the course of building positive reputation, staff and students should be considered as an important engine and hence should be central to the process (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007). However, this particular view has not been given the attention it deserves from both scholars and practitioners on higher education branding (Mampaey *et al*., 2015).

Based on the above arguments, this study aims at examining the influence of psychological contract in building and sustaining employee brand commitment. The study proposes a theoretical understanding that, if employees are well committed to the university brand, they will be the most important engine in fulfilling brand promises and values (Judson *et al*., 2006; Wæraas and Solbakk, 2008; Hemsley-Brown *et al*., 2016). In other words, if university brand is in line with employees' interests, demands and expectations could stimulate employees' commitment to the brand (Nawab and Bhatti, 2011; Ngobeni and Bezuidenhout, 2011; Dean *et al*., 2016). In determining the main drives of employee brand commitment, the study adopted the concept of psychological contract i.e. relational and transactional contracts that has theoretical roots from the theory of social exchange.

## 1.2 Conceptualizing Branding and Psychological Contract

### 1.2.1 The Concept of Branding

There have been several divergences in defining the term brand. Despite the divergences, several definitions have been offered to describe the term brand. The most popular and frequently cited definition is by AMA (1960) which says, a brand can be a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors'. In a broader perspective, Martin and Hetrick (2006) suggested that a brand should be seen as a promise that must be made and kept in each strategic marketing operations, human resources operations, corporate decisions, and actions, as well as customer and employee interactions so as to deliver strategic value to an organization.

As a matter of fact, if a brand is perceived as a promise, it implies the use of social-contract theory in branding (McMurrian and Washburn, 2008). That means, when a brand is perceived as a promise it implies the customer-producer relationship. The relationship should be built on fulfilling customers' expectations as the basis for meeting producer targets or goals (Willmott, 2003). On the other side, Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) provided the following connotations regarding a brand: *First*, a brand is indeed a promise. *Second*, a brand is the sum of perceptions including all that you see, hear, read, feel, think, etc. concerning a product, service, or business. *Third*, a brand occupies a distinctive position in customers' minds as results of past or prior experiences, associations, as well as future expectations, and *lastly*, a brand is a short-cut of benefits, beliefs, attributes and values that differentiate, minimize complexities, and simplify the consumers' buying decision process.

### 1.2.2 Branding in Higher Learning Institutions

It is widely accepted that, branding in higher education falls under corporate branding. Other scholars emphasize that, branding in higher education should be categorized as internal branding which is an integral part of corporate branding (Judson *et al*., 2008). In fact, the idea behind internal branding is that, branding of an organization should start from within (Berry, 2000; de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003). Evidence confirms that, branding in higher education is an outcome of very stiff competition both at local and international level (Stensaker, 2007). It is suggested that, the need for integrating branding in higher learning education is the result of major transformation in the sector which motivates managements of universities to employ market-based approaches (Ferlie *et al*., 2008). This means, the idea of commercialization and marketization of higher learning institutions surfaced as a result of employing market-based approaches in the higher education sector (Beneke, 2011).

However, though competition between universities in the world is not a new phenomenon, the idea of overcoming competition through branding is indeed something new to the majority of practitioners as well as scholars (Drori *et al*., 2013). In addition, the most critical challenge confronting both scholars and practitioners is how branding which for a long time has been perceived to be only relevant to business organizations can be practical to higher learning institutions. Regardless of this situation, the majority of higher learning institutions have been integrating image and reputation building in their strategic as well as managerial decisions (Stensaker, 2007). In some universities, this is done through emphasizing on innovation programs as a means to secure a good position in global rankings and accreditations which is part of image and reputation building (Aula and Tienari, 2011).

It is therefore very crucial to note that, in the branding of higher institutions, the focus should be on distinguishing the university by manifesting important features that demonstrate its ability to meet students' expectations, needs or wants (Aula *et al*., 2015). Furthermore, the intention should be to engender credibility and trust so as to attract qualified students and to help them to make prudent decisions concerning their enrolment (Bennett and Ali- Choudhury, 2009). However, the issue of differentiation as far as branding in higher learning institutions is concerned is debatable. For instance, while it is generally accepted that differentiation should be part of managerial and strategic decisions concerning branding of higher learning institutions, Chapleo (2010) once argued that, most of the time, university branding programs or initiatives provide very little actual outcomes in terms of differentiation.

Other scholars cemented that, branding at an organizational level such as corporate branding needs to consider the forces for similarity and forces for differentiation (Wæraas, 2015). This statement confirms the idea that, certainly there is a slight differentiation in university brand programs or initiatives. This means, when an organization tries to differentiate itself from other organizations, it must ensure that it continues to retain legitimacy and manifest membership in a field of akin organizations (King and Whetten, 2008). Thus, one could say, the question of similarity as well as differentiation forces are basically contradictory and suggest diverse behaviors (Wæraas, 2015). However, irrespective of this situation, universities should deploy different approaches in order to build and sustain the competitive edge in the higher education sector. This is necessary given the fact that, any competitive situations call the need for differentiation by promising and offering unique benefits.

As it has been previously noted, branding of higher learning institutions is very complex and dynamic process. According to Aspara *et al*., (2014), branding of universities should adopt a holist approach that goes extra miles to address issues concerning universities brand beyond those approaches which concentrate on designing of slogans, symbols, logos, seals, and other traditional marketing communication programs. Evidence shows that, while this approach intends to integrate branding strategies with universities policy development process, it has not been easy to achieve the same (Aspara *et al*., 2014). This means, branding in the context of higher learning institutions is more of an interactional process comprising of approaches that should seek to accommodate the multiplicity of interests of various stakeholders (Aspara *et al*., 2014). In fact, this is different from traditional standpoints of branding which emphasized on inducing brand reputations or images from producers to consumers which always lead to poor acceptance of brand (Aspara *et al*., 2014).

As a matter of fact, a holistic approach to branding suggests that brand identity is a core of any brand. In this line of argument, Suomi (2014); Bagautdinova *et al*., (2015) proposed that an organization vision, values, and culture should be central to the brand. Through integrating elements such as vision, values, and culture the organization is in the position to formulate a unified identity that represents an organization as a whole in the form of corporate branding or reputation (Wæraas and Byrkjeflot, 2012; Bagautdinova *et al*., 2015). Actually, for this approach to be feasible and effective, basic requirements such as stakeholders' (employees, customers, and management) commitment must be fulfilled (Jane Hemsley-Brown *et al*., 2016). Generally, this approach is relevant to higher learning institutions, as they possess all the basic features of organizations (see Bagautdinova *et al*., 2015). Regardless of great emphasis on branding in the higher education institutions, empirical studies in relation to university branding is indeed scarce, and therefore the majority of universities continue to use traditional methods of marketing (Aspara *et al*., 2014), which pay no attention to the complexities and dynamisms of higher education institutions (Chapleo, 2010).

It is for these arguments, this study proposed a holistic approach that will examine university branding by considering employees as an integral part of the branding process. It intends to examine how employees as an important engine of university branding can be motivated to demonstrate commitment towards university brand. It has been well documented that, employees of higher learning institutions could be the most powerful representatives or ambassadors of the brand if are well motivated (Melewar and Nguyen, 2015; Jane Hemsley-Brown *et al*., 2016). The study used the psychological contract as a catalyst that is expected to stimulate employees' brand commitment. In the view of Zhao *et al*., (2007) empirical studies are required to examine the impact of the psychological contract on areas such as organizational citizenship behaviour. In fact, under intensive scrutiny, employee brand commitment is an integral part of organizational citizenship behaviour (Kimpakorn and Tocquer, 2010).

### 1.2.3 The Concept of Psychological Contract

Theoretically, the construct psychological contract has been and is still very popular in various fields including organizational behaviour, human psychology, sociology, industrial relations, etc. (Koskina, 2013). It is widely accepted that, regardless of the field where the concept of psychological contract is applied, the fundamental idea remains to be relationship building. In this particular context, the focus of scholars over the past 20 years has been to examine psychological contract as a prediction of the relationship between an individual mostly an employee and an organization or an employer (Taylor and Tekleab. 2004; Zhao *et al*., 2007). Empirical evidence reports that, the concept has been proven to be very useful in studies related to employee-employer relationship, employees' motivation and commitment, employees' intentions etc. (Taylor and Tekleab. 2004; Zhao *et al*., 2007).

In the context of marketing, psychological contract is theoretically propagated to be relevant in theorizing various marketing phenomenon although it is empirically under-researched (Bordia *et al*., 2010; Guo *et al*., 2015; Hannah *et al*., 2016). This means, though very little is known about the psychological contract in the context of marketing, it is popularized to be very useful in explaining the model of interaction between consumers and service providers in the service sector (Guo *et al*., 2015; Hannah *et al*., 2016). In the view of Palmatier *et al*., (2006) relationship between customers and an organization in the service sector should be viewed through the lens of transactional and relational exchange. In other words, when the organization invests on the social exchange through delivering benefits such as respect, caring, recognition, etc., customers are expected to reciprocate positively in the form of repurchase intention,

intention to stay, positive recommendations, etc. (Mende *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, scholars such Johnson and Selnes (2004) proposed that the psychological contract should be treated as an integral part of marketing as it shares numerous characteristics with marketing particularly the idea of exchange relationship between two parties.

Therefore, the psychological contract should be viewed in the context of relationship building between two parties, of which each part should be ready to fulfil specific conditions that create favourable environments for the relationship to flourish. The fact that it is a contract, then, each part has specific obligations to perform or role to play so as to ensure the relationship is established and sustained. In addition, both parties have expectations that expect to get or achieve in the exchange relationship. Based on these arguments, Rousseau (1995) points out that, the term psychological contract refers to beliefs or perceptions that an individual person develops about a certain organization based on specific conditions or terms of a certain exchange agreement between the individual and the organization. It is generally accepted that, these perceptions or beliefs should be moulded by the organization that is, the organization is expected to be the source of the perceptions and beliefs.

Evidence shows that, an individual person expectation on what an organization has promised or supposed to fulfil is the basis for building either positive or negative beliefs or perceptions about the organization (Rousseau, 1990). In the context of the employee-employer relationship, other scholars have the opinion that, it is the organization promises that build employee expectations which in turn elicit employee specific beliefs and perceptions. Theoretically, a psychological contract is capable of prompting different forms of behavior including attitudes, perceptions, responses, as well as the roles and responsibilities of each actor in the contract. These forms of behaviours are anticipated to persuade both parties to cultivate a sense of control over the current relationship (Anderson and Schalk, 1998). In fact, employee beliefs and perceptions of what an organization is supposed or required to do play an important role in building employee commitment.

**1.2.3.1 Major Types of Psychological Contract**

Different scholars agree in principal that, there are two major types of psychological contract namely transactional and relational psychological contracts. According to Rousseau (2004), a transactional psychological contract is a formal contract guided by well-defined conditions and principles. It contains distinct clauses and requirements, as well as responsibilities and duties which each party in the contract has to accomplish. Given this nature, the transactional psychological contract contains elements that can be legally enforceable. In fact, transactional psychological contract possesses all basic features of being legally enforceable given the fact that agreement, requirements to be fulfilled by each party are feasible, and terms, as well as conditions of the contract, are clear and explicit (Rousseau and Tijoriwala, 1998).

From both theoretical and practical perspectives, a transactional psychological contract is normally short-term or interim possessing specific or precise agreements between two parties i.e. a person and an organization. This means, by looking psychological contract in the context of relationship building, the transactional psychological contract is not able to establish the relationship which lives longer. This is the case because, the major assumptions which underline transactional psychological contact include the idea that, both actors in the contract are indeed rational and self-centred (Rousseau and McLean Parks, 1993). Therefore, when the transactional psychological contract is applied in explaining employee-organization relationship the focus is on promises in the form of extrinsic rewards that are expected to motivate employees working behavior (Rousseau, 1990). In this regard, the focus in relationship building is primarily materialistic whereby employees are working hard to acquire material things in the form of monetary benefits (Bal *et al*., 2013).

On the other side of the coin, there are relational psychological contracts which are established within the framework of flexibility, good faith, implicit and virtual promises between a person or an employee and a certain organization (Rousseau, 1995). Although material things or benefits are still valid under this type of psychological contract, social-emotional value dominates the relationship. Therefore, the fact that relational exchange dominates the relationship, the relational psychological contract is termed as a long-term contract which seeks to build the sustainable mutual relationship between both actors i.e. employees and an organization. Evidence divulges that, any relationship that has root on the relational psychological contract has proved to be timeless and fruitful. This characteristic of being sustainable in terms of results, as well as impacts, differentiates relational psychological contracts against transactional psychological contracts (Anderson and Schalk, 1998). According to Rousseau (2004), the majority of successful organizations are the ones which has invested considerable efforts on fulfilling relational psychological contract so as to motivate employees to commit their efforts in work beyond what is specified in job descriptions.

In addition, another basic characteristic that distinguishes relational psychological contract from the transactional psychological contract is its nature of being subjective. This is the case because, the relational psychological contract is not too formal, and terms, as well as conditions that govern the contract, are implicit, or they not feasible. Thus, in the course of interpreting terms and conditions of the contract a number of contractions as well as misunderstandings may arise (Rousseau, 1995). That means, the way one party describes or perceives terms and conditions of the contract may differ significantly from the other party. This can be confirmed from different studies including the study by Bunderson (2001) which pointed out that, the moment there is a breach of relational psychological contract, its effects can be seen on individuals' satisfaction and their level of commitment to the organization. He went on reporting that, transactional psychological contract affects both individuals' satisfaction as well as turnover intentions.

However, a meta-analysis study by Zhao *et al*., (2007) unveiled that, transactional and relational psychological contracts affect an individual satisfaction, commitment to the organization and turnover intention. Further results revealed that, transactional contracts had a high level of significant impact on commitment to the organization while relational contract had a high level of significant impact on both individuals' satisfaction and turnover intentions. In fact, the results by Zhao *et al*., (2007) contradict those of Bunderson (2001). These contradictions arise given the fact that the psychological contract is a subjective concept. As a result, scholars such as Zhao *et al*., (2007) suggested further studies concerning psychological contract mainly on its influence on behavioural outcome measures such as constructive and destructive reactions, intention to switch, and organizational citizenship behaviour constituted by employee commitment and support behaviour.

In a special way, employee brand commitment is among the responses which employees exhibit after being exposed to various motivational forces and has drawn the attention of various scholars in recent time. However, employee brand commitment has recently attracted the considerable attention of different scholars in internal branding, it is not clear what actually drives employee brand commitment (Terglav *et al*., 2016). This study, therefore, aims at examining the role of psychological contract in influencing employee brand commitment. In other words, the study intends to examine whether the psychological contract should be considered as the most influential driver of employee brand commitment in higher learning institutions.

## 2.0 Theoretical Base

### 2.1 Social Exchange Theory

Given the nature of the study, the social exchange theory was adopted to explain the influence of psychological contract on employee brand commitment. It is well documented that, a brand as a promise implies a social contract between two parties. In fact, the social contract in the context of branding suggests that there is a mutual agreement between two parties, of which each part expects to get something of value from the other party. This is in line with the idea that the psychological contract has a root from social exchange theory (Bordia *et al*., 2015). The theory is popularized to be very powerful in describing how different forms of relationships can be established and maintained. In the context of the social exchange relationship, individuals are expected to exchange both social and material resources. In the view of Blau (1964), social exchange theory provides a framework that explains what kind of resources are exchanged and how the resources are exchanged (Guo *et al*., 2015).

Empirical perspectives suggest that, two major types of psychological contract i.e. transactional and relational psychological contracts create a good theoretical foundation to explain how both social and material resources are exchanged and their impact on relationship building. By considering its assumptions including trust, mutual agreement, promises, etc. the theory is commended in explaining the concept of psychological contract (Wang and Hsieh, 2014). In social exchange, the concept of reciprocity is very important, as there must be environments that support mutual exchange in terms of giving and taking between actors in the relationship (Rousseau 2001).

Thus, it is assumed that, for the relationship to flourish each part should reciprocate in a positive way as a means to appreciate that his/her expectations have been met due to actions or practices of the other part (Thomas *et al*., 2014). Evidence shows that, when constructive reciprocity continues for sometimes it can result in strong commitment, loyalty as well as relational investment (Shore *et al*., 2009; Thomas *et al*., 2014). Actually, social exchange theory proposes that the moment one actor in this study organization considers conditions and terms stipulated in the psychological contract, employees are therefore expected to reciprocate with constructive responses in the form of brand commitment different from unfavorable responses such as negative word of mouth recommendations.

# 3.0 Methods

## 3.1 Area of Study

The study area was Dodoma Region, Tanzania. This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design given its usefulness in collecting data at one point in time as well as place and divulge a relationship between the study's variables or an inquiry that investigates an existing phenomenon (Yin, 2009). It is convenient in evaluating practices and dogmas of a specified population in relation to a certain social, natural and health-related event in their vicinity (Yin, 2009). The surveyed data were collected from employees i.e. academic, administrative, and technical staffs at one selected university in Dodoma region, Tanzania. However, it was agreed by the university management and the researcher that, the name of the university should not be unveiled as the findings of the study might have some detrimental effects to the university.

## 3.2 Data Collection

The study sample was randomly drawn from the study population. In fact, the idea behind a random sample is that all potential members of a given population have equal opportunity or chance to be chosen to participate in the study. Thus, the sample for the study was randomly and carefully chosen from the list of existing employees as the population of the study by using a systematic sampling method (Zikmund, 2003). In addition, a list of University employees who met the basic criteria of the population was derived from the Directorate of Human Resources of the selected University. Thereafter, a total sum of 401 respondents who are employees of the University were randomly selected to participate in the study. Basically, the systematic sampling technique comprises of careful procedures whereby an entering point is established by using a random process and thereafter every $n^{th}$ number of the given list or frame is selected to form the study sample (Zikmund, 2003). In this study, every third name on the list was chosen to participate in the study.

## 3.3 Data Analysis

This study employed the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software Version 21 in analyzing the collected data. Specifically, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was adopted to establish if there is the relationship between the study's endogenous and exogenous variables. SEM was relevant to this study because all study variables were latent which could not be measured directly instead variable indicators were to be used. Thus, this study has multiple factors or variables that can be well examined through the use of a multivariate statistical analysis model. Scholars such as Hair *et al.*, (2006) unveiled that; SEM is a very helpful multivariate statistical model in analyzing the relationship which exists between multiple factors or variables.

### 3.4 Operationalization and Measurement of Variables

In measuring the study variables, specific measurement scales were adopted from previous related studies on employee branding as well as psychological contract. Specifically, both types of psychological contracts i.e. transactional and relational psychological contracts were measured by using measurement scales adopted from Bal *et al*., (2013). The following are some statements used to measure psychological contracts; *I expect growth in this university*, *to me working in this university is like being a member of a family*, *I work only hours set out in my contract and no more*, *my commitment to this university is defined by my contract*. Furthermore, Employee Brand Commitment was measured by using measurement items proposed by Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2010); Terglav *et al*., (2016). Some of the statements used to measure Employee brand commitment include: *I usually tell my colleagues and friends that, this is the best office to work with*; *I really care about this university brand*, *I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that I normally expected in order to help this university brand to be successful*. All variables were captured by using 5 - Point Likert Scales 1 - Strong Agree and 5 - Strong Disagree.

## 4.1 Results and Discussion

### 4.1.1 Respondents' Characteristics

The study respondents' characteristics are described by five dimensions of demographic characteristics namely gender, age, marital status, level of education and occupational status as shown in the table 1 below. Out of 401 respondents, 197 were males and 204 were females that is 49.1% and 50.9% respectively. Again, age categories from 21-30 were 5 which is 1.2%, 31-40 were 261 which is 65.1%, 41-50 were 117 which is 29.2%, 51-60 were 15 which is 3.7% and 60-above were 3 which is 0.7%. In addition, from 401 respondents, the married were 309 and it is 77.1%, single were 91 that is 22.7% and Divorced was 1 which is 0.2%. Respondents' level of education indicates that, respondents with secondary education were 2 that is 0.5%, Diploma were 14 which is 3.5%, Degree were 181 which is 45.1%, Master degree were 136 which is 33.9% and PhD were 68 which is 17%. Lastly, academic staff were 178 that is 44.4%, administrative staff were 165 that is 41.1% and technical staff were 58 which is 14.5%.

**Table 1: Respondents Demographic Characteristics**

| Respondents' Characteristics | | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Male | 197 | 49.1 |
| | Female | 204 | 50.9 |
| | **Total** | **401** | **100** |
| **Age** | 21 - 30 | 5 | 1.2 |
| | 31 - 40 | 261 | 65.1 |
| | 41 - 50 | 117 | 29.2 |
| | 51 - 60 | 15 | 3.7 |
| | 60 - above | 3 | 0.7 |
| | **Total** | **401** | **100** |
| **Maritual Status** | Married | 309 | 77.1 |
| | Single | 91 | 22.7 |
| | Divorced | 1 | 0.2 |
| | **Total** | **401** | **100** |
| **Level of Education** | Secondary Education | 2 | 0.5 |
| | Diploma | 14 | 3.5 |
| | Degree | 181 | 45.1 |
| | Master Degree | 136 | 33.9 |
| | PhD | 68 | 17 |
| | **Total** | **401** | **100** |
| **Occupational Status** | Academic Staffs | 178 | 44.4 |
| | Administrative Staffs | 165 | 41.1 |
| | Technical Staffs | 58 | 14.5 |
| | **Total** | **401** | **100** |

**Source: Field Data Analysis, 2018**

### 4.1.2 Measurement Model

It is strongly recommended that, regardless of whether the study constructs or variables have been extracted or derived from theories or intensive empirical literature reviews, to run Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is compulsory (Holtzman and Vezzu, 2011). The aim of performing CFA is to confirm whether the hypothesized model fits well the sampled data or a given set of observations. Other scholars point out that, CFA intends to establish if there is the existing relationship between the observed study variables and their specific underlying study latent or unobserved constructs (Child, 1990). Most of the time, CFA is very useful or is highly recommended in testing the extent to which the proposed measurement items precisely and accurately explain or measure a given study construct or variable (Hair *et al.*, 2006; Holtzman and Vezzu, 2011).

In order to test if the model fits well the observed data values or the sampled data, the following indices are highly recommended: Normed Fit Index (NFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), Tucker-Lewis Coefficient (TLI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Root Mean Square Error of

Approximation (RMSEA), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), and Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI). The table 2 and figure 1 below show the value of model fit indices and item factor loadings respectively. Specifically, goodness of fit for measurement model indicates or shows that NFI = 0.913, IFI = 0.940, TLI = 0.923, CFI = 0.940, GFI = 0.944, AGFI = 0.914 the acceptable values is that it should be close to 1, RMSEA = 0.071 and acceptable value is 0 to 0.1, $\chi^2/df$ = 2.998 and recommended value is < 3.

On the other side, after running CFA, two items i.e. Motivation and Working Contract were found to have factor loading less than the most recommended value for item factor loading which is 0.60. However, according to Hair *et al*., (1998); Kline (2005); Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) if the study sample size exceeds 350 item factor loading > 0.30 can be considered for structural model analysis. Furthermore, the Cronbach alpha coefficient for Relational Contract (RC) and Transactional Contract were 0.826 and 0.782 respectively the value which is above the recommended range i.e. $\alpha > 0.70$. Hence, the level of reliability that these variables measure psychological contract construct is good.

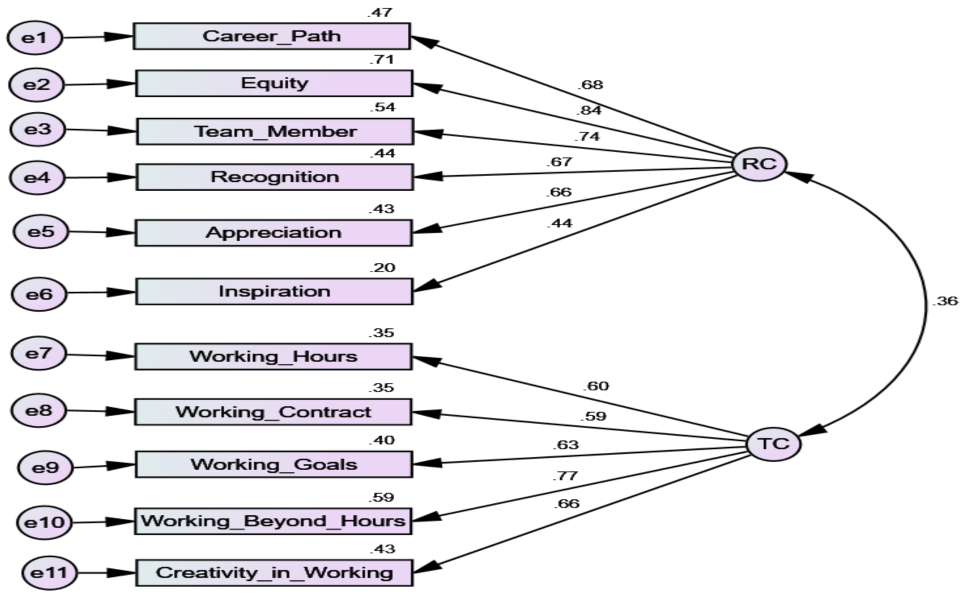
**Table 2: Measurement Model Goodness of Fit Indices**

| | **Model Fit Indices** | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Model** | **NFI** | **IFI** | **TLI** | **CFI** | **RMSEA** | **GFI** | **AGFI** | **$\chi^2$/df** |
| Default model | .913 | .940 | .923 | .940 | .071 | .944 | .914 | 2.988 |
| Saturated model | 1.000 | 1.000 | | 1.000 | | 1.000 | | |
| Independence model | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | .254 | .473 | .368 | |

***Acceptable ranges: NFI, IFI, TLI, CFI, RMSEA, GFI, and AGFI should be close to 1, RMSEA should be between 0 and 0.1, CMIN/DF ($\chi^2$/df) < 3***
**(Kline, 2005; Hooper *et al*., 2008)**

**Source: Field Data Analysis**

**Figure 1: Psychological Contract (Relational Contract and Transactional Contract) Confirmatory Factor Analysis**



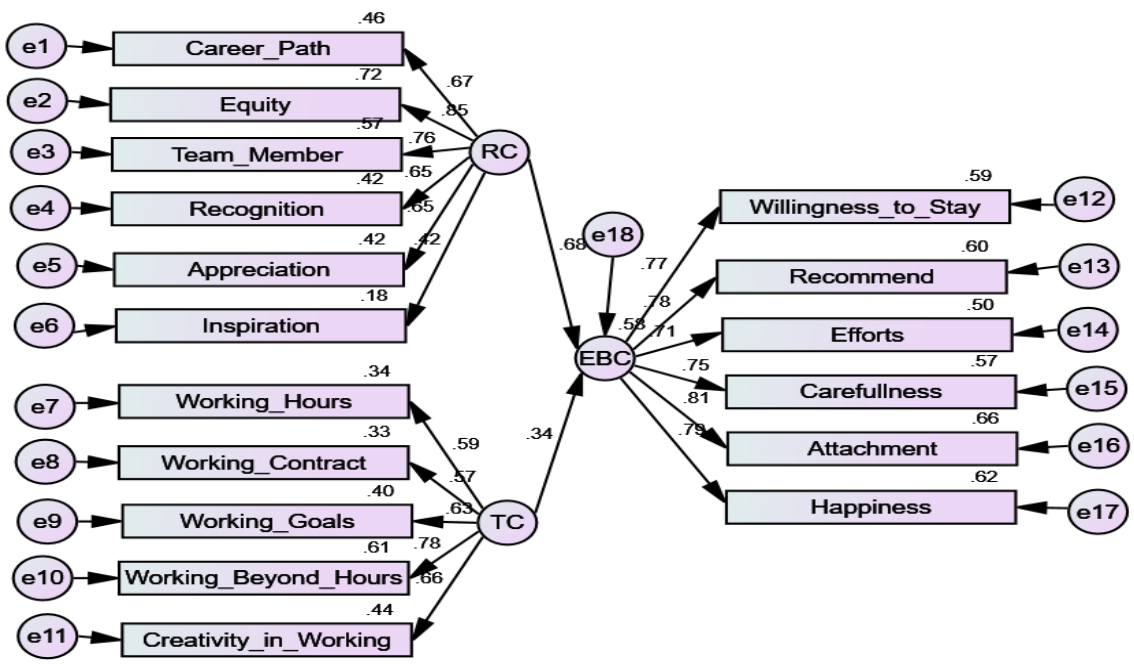

**Source: Field Data Analysis, 2018**

### 4.1.3 Regression Analysis

After running Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) all items were confirmed to be good measures of constructs under the study, which provided the room for conducting the structural model analysis. The aim of the structural analysis was to establish cause and effect relationships between psychological contract variables i.e. relational and transactional contracts against employee brand commitment. In addition, the analysis was expected to give regression weights, as well as the level of significance between exogenous and endogenous variables. The model fit indicated that, the model fitted the sampled data well as it can be seen in table 3 below. The value shows that, CFI = 0.926, GFI = 0.904, IFI = 0.926, NFI = 0.894, and TLI = 0.914. It is recommended that the value for these indexes should be close to 1. Again, the value RMSEA = 0.071 and recommended value is that it should be between 0 and 0.1.  The value for $\chi^2$/df = 2.994 and threshold is 3.

This implies that, overall model fitted well the data and therefore the model was accepted.  In addition, internal reliability and consistency were tested and the results show that the Cronbach Alpha coefficient for Employee Brand Commitment was 0.902, which is above the threshold of $\alpha > 0.70$. Lastly, the Cronbach alpha coefficient for all items in the structural model is 0.901 which is above the standard range i.e. $\alpha > 0.70$. This is an indication that, the level of internal reliability and consistency of all items used to measure study constructs is good. In addition, all factor loadings of the structural model are within the acceptable range of > 0.30 in relation to the study sample size which is 401. As it has been pointed out before, if the study sample size exceeds 350 respondents, factor loadings with the value > 0.30 is satisfactory and acceptable (See. Hair *et al*., 1998; Kline, 2005; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007).

**Figure 2: Structural Model Shows Relationship between Psychological Contract and Employee Brand Commitment**




**Source: Field Data Analysis, 2018**

**Table 3: Structural Model Fit Goodness of Fit Indices**

| | Model Fit Indices | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Model** | **NFI** | **IFI** | **TLI** | **CFI** | **RMSEA** | **GFI** | $\chi^2$**/df** |
| Default model | .894 | .926 | .914 | .926 | .071 | .904 | 2.994 |
| Saturated model | 1.000 | 1.000 | | 1.000 | | 1.000 | |
| Independence model | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | .241 | .299 | 24.197 |

***Acceptable ranges: NFI, IFI, TLI, CFI, RMSEA, GFI, and AGFI should be close to 1, RMSEA should be between 0 and 0.1, CMIN/DF ($\chi^2$/df) < 3***
**(Hooper *et al*., 2008; Kline, 2005)**

**Source: Field Data Analysis, 2018**

### 4.1.4 Regression Weights

The results from regressed variables i.e. Relational and Transactional Contracts against employee brand commitment revealed that the relational contract has a high level of significant impact on employee brand commitment with p-value < 0.05 and $\beta = 0.681$. Likewise, transactional contract was confirmed to have a high level of significant influence on employee brand commitment with p-value < 0.05 and $\beta = 0.342$. Thus, based on the findings it can be concluded that both study variables which used to explain psychological contract which are relational and transactional contracts influence employee brand commitment significantly.

**Table 4: Structural Analysis Results**

| Structural Model Variables or Factors | Standardized Regression Weight($\beta$) | S.E. | C.R. | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employee Brand Commitment (EBC) <--- Relational Contract (RC) | .681 | .153 | 7.252 | *** |
| Employee Brand Commitment (EBC) <--- Transactional Contract (TC) | .342 | .077 | 6.318 | *** |

**Source: Field Data Analysis, 2018**

### 5.1 Discussion

It has been revealed by the study findings that, the psychological contract has a high level of significant influence on employee brand commitment. Basically, these findings conform with preceding empirical findings that, psychological contracts have the influence on employee organization commitment (see. Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler 2000; Flood *et al*., 2001; Aubé et al., 2007; Malik and Nawab, 2010; Anggraeni *et al*., 2017). Specifically, both relational and transactional contracts have been found to have a high level of statistical significance on employee brand commitment. In a more simplified way one could say, if employees feel/believe that an institution offers equal chances for career development, fairness, recognition, appreciation, inspiration, fellowship, etc., they are willing to reciprocate in the form of caring, efforts, positive recommendation, intention to stay, etc. Theoretically, the moment employees exhibit behaviour such as caring, positive recommendation, intention to stay, efforts, etc. it implies that they are committed to the university brand.

In addition, the feelings that employment contract is respected in all angles including working goals, environment that enables a person to deliver according to their intellectual capabilities, etc. may influence employees of universities to work for the betterment of the university brands. This implies that, a holistic approach that considers the multiplicity of interests of stakeholders mainly employees as the central players to universities branding is inevitable. It can thus be said that, given the findings of this study, without considering employees interests, branding of higher learning institutions is indeed impossible (see Makgosa and Molefhi, 2012). This argument has support from the study by Naude and Ivy (1999); Ivy (2001); Jevons (2006); Dholakia and Acciardo (2014); Jegadeeswari *et al*., (2014) who suggested that, in recent time, universities engage employees in brand building with intention of getting a unified or an integrated brand which can easily get the support of all key stakeholders particularly employees.

Specifically, in order to build employee commitment towards the university brand, employees have to be exposed to specific intrinsic factors which influence their behaviour positively. Similar to other studies in employee-employer relationships such as (Kaewsurin, 2012), in this study psychological contract dimensions confirmed to be useful in influencing employees commitment towards university brand. In addition, these intrinsic factors motivate employees to exert specific efforts in ensuring universities realize their mission and vision. These results are similar to the results by Mangold and Miles (2007); Kaewsurin (2012); Terglav *et al*., (2016) who found out that, employees are willing to exert remarkable support, commitment or efforts on organization success if they feel or believe that psychological contract is upheld. In a special way, the study by Schiffenbauer (2001) Judson *et al*., (2008); Kaewsurin (2012) reported that the value of organization brand will consistently gain credibility if employees within an organization provide required support and assistance.

On the other side, in the relation to the study findings, Rousseau (2004); Thompson and Heron (2005) reported that employees are ready to offer significant efforts with the condition that, their efforts should be equal to the rewards they perceive to get from the organization. In other words, employees expect the transactional contract to be upheld for them to reciprocate positively. Other scholars consider this as perceived distribution i.e. employees expect their efforts to be valued through getting back rewards in the form of financial considerations (Kickul, 2001). In this view, employees may reduce their contribution if their expectations have not been fulfilled (Bordia *et al*., 2010). This means, similar to other employees, employees of higher education are highly committed to the university brands if they perceive that there is a close association between what they commit to the university brand and what they would get from the brand. In addition, these study findings are similar to the study by Lee and Liu (2009) who revealed that psychological contract dimensions i.e. transactional and relational contracts have a significant impact on work attitude that was defined by three items i.e. organizational identification, work devotion, and work satisfaction.

## 6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Generally, this study has unveiled that the psychological contract is antecedent of employee brand commitment. This finding implies that similar to other organizations, universities must adopt a holistic approach that considers employees as the basis for branding higher learning institutions. In a specific way, the study has discovered that, in order for employees to be committed towards the brand, the universities should strive to ensure psychological contracts (both transactional and relational contracts) are upheld.

Thus, given the findings of the study, the following major recommendations are important:

1. Different from the branding of products, branding of higher learning institutions calls for the need for adopting a holistic approach. Empirically, branding of organization requires aligning of stakeholders' interests in this case employees and organization vision, values as well as culture. This means it is very important to assimilate or bring into line employees' efforts, interests, and expectations with organization vision, values, and culture. By so doing, employees become the main engine of the process, which is very crucial in nurturing and sustaining employee brand commitment. In actual fact, if employees are committed to the university brand the likelihood of delivering brand promises which meet customers' expectations is high.

2. Similar to other employees, employees of higher learning institutions always hold specific expectations of which the universities should fulfill. In addition, employees expect promises promised by the institutions are fulfilled. In fact, to employees when these expectations and promises are fulfilled, it is an indication that psychological contract has been upheld. According to the study findings, the feelings or beliefs that psychological contracts have been upheld or not has the influence on the level of commitment which employees are expected to offer to the brand. In addition, this determines the extent to which employees will deliver brand promises and eventually meeting customer expectations.

**7.0 Limitations and Future Studies**

The study adopted a quantitative approach to examine the relationship between psychological contract and employee brand commitment. Further studies may be carried out to examine the same relationship by employing a qualitative approach so as to get the naturalistic perspective of the impact of the psychological contract on employee brand commitment. In addition, the study collected data from only one university, it is therefore very crucial to carry out other studies which may collect data from more than one university so as to get solid results of the topic under study. Finally, other studies may be carried out to compare the level of influence between the two types of psychological contract i.e. relational and transactional psychological contracts on employee brand commitment. On the same point, further empirical studies can be done to test the level of influence of the two types of psychological contract on employee brand commitment across different categories of employees of higher learning institutions i.e. administrative, technical and academic staff.

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