EMPLOYER BRANDIMG
IN NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS.
AN EXPLORATION OF FACTORS
THAT ARE RELATED TO ATTRACTIVENESS,
IDENTIFICATION WITH THE ORGANIZATION, AND
PROMOTION: THE CASE OF EMERGENCY

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This paper explores the application of the Employer Branding model in nonprofit organizations. We focus on attributes of the organization that may affect its attractiveness, identification with the organization, and promotion. We conducted a questionnaire-based survey on actual and potential aid-workers from Emergency, an Italian charity that offers free medical assistance to war victims. The questionnaire included measures of organizational identification, attractiveness, symbolic and instrumental attributes and intentions to promote the organization. Results showed that the attractiveness of the organization depended on symbolic rather than instrumental attributes. Unlike previous research on Employer Branding, however, instrumental attributes did not influence the attractiveness of the organization and, additionally, decreased promotion. These findings may contribute to extending the Employer Branding model by including a psychosocial perspective and also suggest important management implications for nonprofit organizations.

Key words: Employer Branding; Aid workers; Organizational identification; Attractiveness; Promotion.

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The aim of this paper is to extend to nonprofit organizations (NPOs) the Employer Branding (EB) model (Ambler & Barrow, 1996), which was originally developed in (and for) the private sector. The core idea of EB is that potential organization members are attracted and retained by the organization’s brand image, that is, the combination of instrumental (salary, career opportunities and other allowances) and symbolic attributes (prestige, value and social identity) associated with being members of the organization.

Although developed independently, the EB model shares many theoretical issues with motivational approaches applied to volunteerism and nonprofit sector (MacNeela, 2008; Schepers
et al., 2005). Nevertheless, to the best of our knowledge it has not yet been studied and applied to aid-workers employed by NPOs, where the economic rationales for workers are less relevant than for those of for-profit (Borzaga & Tortia, 2006). This paper aims at filling this gap by focusing on the elements that affect brand attractiveness, identification with the organization, and promotion of NPOs for potential employees and aid workers (Arnett, German, & Hunt, 2003; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003).

The rationale behind the extension of models developed in the private sector to NPOs is in the transformation that the nonprofit sector is facing. The clear boundaries that ideally divided the public, nonprofit, and private sectors are in fact more and more blurred, resulting in hybridization of nonprofit and third sector (Billis, 2010). The nonprofit sector is characterized by increasing competition due to a great number of organizations working in the same areas, and by a dialectical tension between moral autonomy and dependency on public and private financial support (Borzaga & Fazzi, 2010). These tensions foster debates between “contractual” versus “moral” approaches to organizational management, that is, between capacity to attract and retain volunteers and professionals on the base of an exchange relationship or on the basis of belonging and engagement in a community project (Chemin & Vercher, 2011; Jäger & Beyes, 2009). Management models resultant from these dialectics try to develop newly professionalized organizations, while fostering commitment of members through a collective identity based on core values (Markström & Karlsson, 2012). For current (we may say hybridized) NPOs, the ability to build a strong brand identity with a clear “personality” is thus fundamental to achieving visibility, to attract and retain volunteers as well as employees (Brown & Yoshioka, 2003; Sargeant, Ford, & Hudson, 2007; Venable, 2002) and to formulate a clear strategy to find new and differentiated competitive advantages (Naskrent & Siebelt, 2011). EB model can help to clarify the interaction between “contractual” versus “moral” features associated to NPOs’ brand.

Although not all NPOs are the same as regards their target, field of activity, organizational structure, the professionals and volunteers they are able to attract, we chose to conduct this preliminary investigation with an independent NPO that provides both instrumental and symbolic benefits. For this reason, we selected Emergency, an internationally renowned Italian based charity founded by war surgeon Gino Strada in 1994, that offers free medical assistance to war victims and promotes a peace culture through various activities (for more details, see http://www.emergency.it/en-index.html or http://www.emergencyusa.org).

The article is organized as follows: the first section presents a literature review on previous studies on EB, while the second section discusses the theoretical underpinnings of EB in NPOs and develops the research hypotheses. Subsequently, we describe the research context and methodology. Then results are presented and the last section proposes a discussion in light of the theoretical model here adopted and also presents ideas for future research that could be extended to other NPOs.

**EMPLOYER BRANDING: DEFINITION AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

EB was first defined by Ambler and Barrow (1996) as “the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company” (p. 187). Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) describe it as “the process of building an identi-
fiable and unique employer identity” (p. 502). Thus, the employer brand is a concept of the firm as an employer that differentiates it from its competitors as employers. EB is a strategy analogous to the product brand strategy, and promotes an image that makes the firm unique and attractive as an employer both inside and outside the firm.

Many marketing studies support the influence of instrumental and symbolic attributes on product attractiveness (Aaker, 1997; Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, & Donthu, 1995; Keller, 1993). The instrumental-symbolic model has been applied to the recruiting context, where the instrumental attributes describe a job or the employer in terms of objective, concrete, and tangible characteristics like salary, economic benefits and career opportunities, and the symbolic attributes refer to subjective, intangible, and abstract elements like self-identity and values (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). The strength of the employer brand is thus directly linked to the employer’s attractiveness, which Berthon, Ewing, and Hah (2005) define as “the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization” (p. 156). According to Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), potential employees are attracted to a firm based on the employer’s brand image, which is built on the thoughts and ideas that the brand name evokes in their minds (brand attractiveness). The instrumental attributes of the brand name are the tangible elements of employment like salary and other tangible benefits, while the symbolic attributes relate to the perceived prestige of the organization and to intangible characteristics that differentiate organizations and employers from their competitors.

Several previous studies confirm the key role played by employer attraction. According to Turban, Forret, and Hendrickson (1998), a potential employee’s first impression of a company’s brand image is a strong predictor of brand attractiveness and the decision to become employed by that company (Powell, 1991). Research (Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey, & Edwards, 2000; Highhouse, Zickar, Thorsteinson, Stierwalt, & Slaughter, 1999; Lievens, Decaesteker, Coetsier, & Geirnaert, 2001) demonstrates that organizational attractiveness is affected by employer brand associations like salary, career opportunities, organizational structure, and location. Other studies (e.g., Slaughter, Zickar, Highhouse, & Mohr, 2004) suggest that potential workers are attracted in the first phases of the recruiting process by the prestige, image, and identity of the firm, suggesting that potential workers associate both instrumental and symbolic attributes with the employer’s brand image.

The literature (Highhouse et al., 1999; Lievens, 2007; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Lievens et al., 2001; Lievens, Van Hooye, & Anseel, 2007) supports the application of the EB model to various for-profit contexts (e.g., fast food industry, banking sector). However, the literature has not yet considered this model in the nonprofit domain.

The overall aim of the research, then, is to assess the elements that affect the attractiveness of a NPO to potential and actual aid workers. Drawing on the EB model, we evaluate the interplay of symbolic and instrumental attributes, identification, past behaviors, and future intentions in supporting the organization. The next section addresses the theoretical reasons that support the extension of EB to nonprofit organizations.

**EMPLOYER BRANDING IN NPOs**

Although developed independently, the EB model shares much with research on work motivation and satisfaction in NPOs (Schepers et al., 2005). For example, research conducted on
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Italian NPOs working in the social service sector shows that economic motivations are less relevant for workers of NPOs than for those of for-profit (Borzaga & Tortia, 2006). Moreover, “workers in nonprofit organizations, and especially in social cooperatives, give more importance to workforce involvement. They are more concerned with intrinsic reasons for choosing the organization and attach greater value to the interaction with users” (p. 236). A different mix of intrinsic and extrinsic incentives is thus often employed by NPOs to attract workers and obtain their loyalty notwithstanding the sometimes comparably lower wages (Borzaga & Tortia, 2006; see also De Cooman, De Gieter, Pepermans, & Jegers, 2011).

At a more general level, the symbolic and instrumental attributes examined by EB echo characteristics such as skill variety, task significance, task identity or autonomy, explored by job characteristic models applied to NPOs. Job characteristic models explore the relationships between these features and employee satisfaction, organizational processes such as commitment, and behavioral outcomes such as reduced turnover. Research in hospital settings, for example, showed that job characteristics such as skill variety, autonomy, social contacts, and opportunities to learn have positive effects on motivation and satisfaction for work as well as reduced intentions to leave work (Schepers et al., 2005).

It is clear that the EB model shares many points with research on activism, although the mix between the instrumental and symbolic attributes of the NPO’s brand may differ from the mix for profit-oriented organizations. In any case, we believe it may be useful to extend this model to NPOs, where the attractiveness of the brand and the identification of members with the organization are key to the pursuit of institutional objectives. In particular, the theoretical overlaps described above suggest to explore if and how symbolic and instrumental attributes attached to NPOs’ brand determine its attractiveness, organizational processes such as identification, and behavioral outcomes such as the intention to promote it.

Based on the above considerations, we posit the first research hypothesis as follows:

H1. The attractiveness of the association depends on perceived (a) symbolic and (b) instrumental attributes.

The hybridization processes observed in NPOs, and the overlaps between EB model and research on NPOs suggest that moral and contractual features currently cooperate in defining NPOs’ profiles and management. On these bases we may hypothesize that symbolic and instrumental attributes will both contribute to attractiveness of the association; however, as suggested by research on motivation in NPOs (Borzaga & Tortia, 2006), intrinsic motivations (i.e., symbolic) should be more relevant than extrinsic ones (i.e., instrumental).

Once people are involved, long-term commitment can be sustained by the development of an activist’s identity that is rooted in personal responsibility, bonded to group ideology, and characterized by shared beliefs about the urgency and effectiveness of the group’s actions (Downton & Wehr, 1998). Seminal approaches in social psychology show that people are attracted by organizations or groups that, compared to other groups, contribute to self-enhancement of their members by providing them with a positive social identity (Tajfel, 1981). Based on the findings of social psychology research on the determinants of social identification that were also successfully applied to the problems of organizational psychology (Haslam, 2004), we expect that attraction is an important driver of identification. Therefore we develop the following hypothesis:

H2. The strength of identification with the organization depends on its attractiveness, so that the more attracted participants are to the NPO, the more they will identify with it.
Identification with the group and the organization is one of the reasons for which individuals may bypass their personal goals to achieve shared and superordinate objectives (Brown, 2000; De Carlo, 2004; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002; Tidwell, 2005). Research shows that the reverse path can also be effective, as being involved in collective action helps to develop a specific “activist” identity and to reinforce the intention to continue to participate in group behaviors (van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008).

Research on organizational identification supports the idea that this variable is a useful predictor of variables relevant for organizations such as perceived organizational prestige, intent to leave or not, and working performances (Riketta, 2005). For example, Lievans et al. (2007) argue that instrumental and symbolic attributes that applicants perceive as being related to an organization as a place to work “map well into the factors that are posited to be related to an organizational identification” (p. 49). Arnett et al. (2003), in particular, show that identity salience mediates between relationship-inducing factors (e.g., perceiving an association as prestigious) and supportive behaviors. Results indicate that the salience of identification explains a significant portion of variance in donations and intention to promote the association. Similarly, Van Dick et al. (2004) showed the effect that organizational identification has on turnover. Interestingly, the authors distinguish between identification — that derives from the organizational attributes perceived by employees — and job satisfaction that derives from the evaluation of the characteristics of the job one performs. Organizational identification influences the way jobs are perceived and evaluated, and together these variables determine intentions to leave or to stay. On this basis, we hypothesize that:

H3. The intention to promote the organization depends on (a) its attractiveness and (b) identification with it.

From the previous discussion of literature, it appears clear that the EB model shares many points with functional approach to activism, even if specific elements of the EB model of a NPO may differ from that of a for-profit organization. In any case, we believe it may be useful to extend this model to NPOs, where the attractiveness of the brand and the identification with the organization are key factors to the pursuit of institutional objectives. Thus, we finally test the goodness-of-fit of the model of promotion using structural equation modeling (SEM). We expect that the relationships among the variables fit the model presented in Figure 1, which was developed by combining those of Arnett et al. (2003) and Lievans and Highhouse (2003).

**FIGURE 1**

Hypothesized model of promotion. H1 = Hypothesis 1; H2 = Hypothesis 2; H3 = Hypothesis 3.
METHOD

The NPO

We conducted our study on Emergency, an independent NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) founded in Italy with the mission to provide high quality, free health care to victims of war and poverty and to promote a culture of solidarity, peace, and respect for human rights. Emergency builds and runs hospitals specifically dedicated to war victims and their surgical emergencies. It trains national staff to meet highly professional standards and offers humanitarian aid to prisoners in conflict zones. Emergency’s human resources belong to three different types: salaried administrative staff, paid health professionals (aid-workers) and volunteers.

Volunteers are spread all across Italy (about 3500 persons organized in 170 groups) and provide fundamental support in activities such as information campaigns, demonstrations and happenings, and fundraising. Highly professional aid-workers join the NGO for missions abroad, usually in war territories (about 169 international staff members were active each month in 2011). These aid workers are required to offer specialized medical assistance free of charge to victims of war and poverty.

Candidates for missions abroad are selected based on their curriculum vitae, an application questionnaire, and a selection interview on motivations, professional and soft skills.

The conditions of missions abroad are as follows. Working shifts are usually eight hours per day, with possible night shifts if there are emergencies. The salary, which is comparable to the average salary paid in Italy, is decided during the selection interview. Emergency pays travel and accommodation expenses.

Emergency is an appropriate target for our analysis because it is a well-known, visible brand in the Italian and international context, and it has clear symbolic and instrumental attributes. Because aid-worker positions are paid, the decision to participate could be either instrumental or, if based on the organization’s fit with the candidate’s humanitarian values, symbolic.

Participants and Procedure

All participants in the study (N = 103) were health professionals. Among them 48 were men, 52 women, and 3 did not declare their gender. The age range was between 20 and 63 years (average age was 37 years and 8 months, with a relatively high standard deviation of 10 years and 9 months).

Our convenience sample was made up of three subgroups with a different degree of involvement in Emergency. Group (HI), with high involvement, consisted of 34 respondents (M = 15, F = 19, M_age = 39.4, SD = 9.49) who had participated in at least one mission abroad with Emergency (range 1 to 4 missions, M = 1.82, SD = 1.03). Group (MI), with medium involvement, consisted of 35 respondents (M = 14, F = 19, two did not declare gender, M_age = 33.7, SD = 7.21) who had applied for future missions. Group (LI), with low involvement, consisted of 34 respondents (M = 19, F = 14, one did not declare gender, M_age = 37.0, SD = 14.04) who knew Emergency but were not involved with its activities. Participants in the HI, MI and LI groups were mainly doctors (respectively, n = 16, n = 15, n = 13) and staff nurses (n = 13, n = 14, n = 11); other professionals were also present in the three groups (n = 5, n = 6, n = 10). Since the EB
model is interested in perceived attributes of the organization, it is important to point out that participants in MI and LI groups knew Emergency by fame and expressed their perception of the brand, whereas participants of the HI group were aware also of the actual job characteristics. Participants were randomly selected from a list of contacts provided by Emergency’s staff office (groups HI and MI), and a list of personal acquaintances (group LI). The three groups are equivalent as regards age and gender distributions.

The survey was conducted at the beginning of April 2010 through an online questionnaire. Participants were contacted by an e-mail that presented the goals of the research and gave instructions about how to complete the anonymous questionnaire, leaving to participants the choice to participate or not. No special instructions were given to participants other than to answer all items as accurately as possible. Completion and return of the questionnaire was taken as consent to participate in the study. Response rate was 70%.

Measures

The questionnaire counted 41 items measuring instrumental-symbolic attributes, attractiveness, identification with the organization, and promotion. The items were presented randomly and were followed by a few socio-demographic questions. Filling out the questionnaire required about 15 minutes.

Instrumental and symbolic attributes. We modified a 10-dimension scale from Lievens (2007), which was based on Aaker’s (1997) scale for measuring symbolic attributes related to brands. We considered five instrumental characteristics: social team activities, travel opportunities, advancement, pay and benefits, and task diversity. An example of an instrumental item is “Emergency offers a good salary.” We also considered the following five symbolic characteristics: sincerity, cheerfulness, competence, excitement, and prestige. An example of a symbolic item is “Emergency is honest.” Three or four items were used to measure each one of the above-mentioned 10 characteristics: as a result, 32 items composed the final scale, that is 17 items for instrumental characteristics, and 15 items for symbolic characteristics. Respondents answered these items using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Organizational attractiveness. In order to measure the perceived attractiveness of Emergency as an employer, we adapted three items from the scale of organizational attractiveness proposed by Highhouse, Lievens, and Sinar (2003). An example is “For me, Emergency would be a good place to work.” Respondents rated these items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Organizational identification. Organizational identification was captured by a single item graphic scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992; Shamir & Kark, 2004). The scale was made up of seven drawings, each one depicting two circles. The values of the pictorial measure ranged from 1 (no overlap at all between the two circles) to 7 (almost complete overlap between the two circles). In the present research one circle represented the respondent and the other the NGO Emergency. Participants, by choosing one of the drawings, that were scored from 1 to 7, indicated the perceived closeness between their own personal identity and Emergency’s.

Promotion. We measured the intention to promote Emergency to others using three items by Arnett et al. (2003). An example item is “I talk up Emergency to people I know.” Respondents rated these items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).
RESULTS

In order to preliminarily check consistency of items’ distinction in two sets of attributes, and build appropriate composite indices for instrumental and symbolic attributes, we performed a principal component analysis (PCA: eigenvalue > 1, varimax rotation) on the correlation matrix among all the 32 items measuring these attributes. Seven components emerged, accounting for 67.04% of the total variance. However, Cattell’s scree test suggested the presence of only two factors; therefore, we replicated the analysis using the Maximum Likelihood Method (ML) with oblimin rotation and asking for two factors. The percentage of total variance decreased to 42.89%. Only items with factor loadings higher than .30 were retained (Barbaranelli, 2007), while items showing cross-loadings or no factor loadings at all were deleted, and the analysis was repeated again. The final two factor solution accounted for 43.24% of the total variance and concerned 28 items: 14 were loaded on the first factor and 14 items on the second factor. Factor inter-correlation was .39. The two factors matched very well with the expected instrumental (Factor 1) and symbolic (Factor 2) dimensions, with only minor variations. That is, one of the items measuring prestige (i.e., “Emergency has high status”) and one of those measuring organizational competence (i.e., “Emergency is corporate”) loaded only on the instrumental dimension rather than on the symbolic dimension; vice versa, all items measuring social team activities (e.g., “Emergency offers the possibility to work in teams”) loaded on the symbolic factors, thus suggesting that our respondents interpret the role of the group, and particularly teamwork, in terms of social/symbolic advantages rather than instrumental benefits (Table 1).

Reliability estimates by means of Cronbach’s alpha turned out to be satisfactory for both dimensions (Table 2). The mean scores for the two dimensions resulted higher than the central point of the response scale: participants, on the whole, affirmed that Emergency shows positive instrumental characteristics, $t(102) = 3.96, p < .0001$, and, to a higher degree, also offers symbolic benefits, $t(102) = 25.37, p < .0001$. Answers to items measuring attraction, organizational identification and promotion, showed that participants were attracted by the organization, $t(102) = 9.54, p < .0001$, their identity overlapped with that of Emergency, $t(102) = 6.09, p < .0001$, and respondents had a strong inclination to promote Emergency positively, $t(102) = 15.05, p < .0001$. Table 2 also reports Pearson’s correlations among variables, almost all of which were significant. Attractiveness was highly correlated with identification, promotion, and symbolic characteristics, and identification was positively correlated with symbolic characteristics, attractiveness and promotion. Interestingly enough, instrumental characteristics did not correlate with identification and promotion.

Differences between Groups of Participants

The analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed on the individual scores for instrumental and symbolic attributes, attractiveness, organizational identification and promotion, with groups (high involvement, medium involvement, low involvement with Emergency) as a between factor. A multivariate effect for “groups” emerges, $F(10, 194) = 9.42, p < .0001$, $\eta^2_p = .23$. The analysis of univariate effects indicated that the three groups were different only for symbolic attributes, $F(2, 100) = 5.87, p < .005$, $\eta^2_p = .11$, attractiveness, $F(2, 100) = 18.18, p < .0001$, $\eta^2_p = .27$, and promotion, $F(2, 100) = 15.66, p < .0001$, $\eta^2_p = .24$. No differences occur as regards instrumental attributes, $F(2, 100) = .283, ns$, and organizational identification, $F(2, 100) = 2.88, ns$. 


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TABLE 1
Factor loadings obtained from the exploratory factor analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Factor loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Emergency offers prospects for higher positions [Emergency offre prospettive per posizioni più elevate]</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Emergency offers the possibility to build a career [Emergency offre la possibilità di costruirsi una carriera]</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Emergency offers diverse career opportunities [Emergency offre diverse opportunità di carriera]</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Emergency offers the possibility to travel a lot [Emergency offre la possibilità di viaggiare molto]</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Emergency offers the possibility to practice a diverse range of jobs [Emergency offre la possibilità di svolgere un’ampia varietà di lavori]</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Emergency has high status [Emergency ha uno status elevato]</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Emergency offers the possibility to choose from a diversity of jobs [Emergency offre la possibilità di scegliere fra diversi lavori]</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Emergency offers the possibility to see the world [Emergency offre la possibilità di vedere il mondo]</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Working for Emergency offers a lot of variety [Lavorare per Emergency offre molta varietà]</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Emergency is corporate [Emergency è aziendale]</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Emergency offers a wide range of jobs [Emergency offre un’ampia gamma di lavori]</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Emergency offers the possibility to make a lot of money [Emergency offre la possibilità di guadagnare molto]</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Emergency offers the possibility to live far away from home [Emergency offre la possibilità di vivere lontano da casa]</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. In general, the wages in Emergency are high [In generale, gli stipendi in Emergency sono alti]</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Emergency is honest [Emergency è onesta]</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Emergency is sincere [Emergency è sincera]</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Emergency is well-respected [Emergency è di tutto rispetto]</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Emergency is intelligent [Emergency è intelligente]</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Emergency is friendly [Emergency è amichevole]</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Emergency is down-to-earth [Emergency è realistica]</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Emergency is thrilling [Emergency è emozionante]</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Emergency is exciting [Emergency è entusiasmante]</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Emergency is highly regarded [Emergency è molto apprezzata]</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Emergency offers the possibility to work in teams [Emergency offre la possibilità di lavorare in gruppo]</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Emergency offers the possibility to be amongst people [Emergency offre la possibilità di stare tra la gente]</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Emergency offers the possibility to work together with different people [Emergency offre la possibilità di lavorare con gente diversa]</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Emergency offers the possibility to enjoy a group atmosphere [Emergency offre la possibilità di godere di un’atmosfera di gruppo]</td>
<td>0.32 0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Emergency is technical [Emergency è tecnica]</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. I = Instrumental item; S = Symbolic item. Italian translation in brackets.
TABLE 2
Descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients and Pearson’s correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Symbolic attributes</th>
<th>Attractiveness</th>
<th>Attractiveness</th>
<th>Organizational identification</th>
<th>Promotion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental attributes</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.34*</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic attributes</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>.55**</td>
<td>.34*</td>
<td>.34*</td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractiveness</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.52**</td>
<td>.61**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational identification</td>
<td>//</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.57**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. These statistics are based on the entire sample (N = 103). A Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, except for the single-item measure of organizational identification that was rated on a 7-point scale.

*p < .001. **p < .0001.
Post-hoc analyses (Scheffé’s test, with $p < .05$) showed that the scores of symbolic attributes were lower for the “low involvement” group than for the “medium” and “high involvement” groups, which did not differ from each other (4.05 vs. 4.38, 4.42). The same pattern of results emerged for attractiveness (3.20 vs. 4.21, 4.32) and promotion (3.71 vs. 4.37, 4.71) scores.

Structural Equation Modeling

Data-fit of the model reported in Figure 1 was tested via structural equation modeling (SEM) using regression analysis with latent variables (LISREL 8.80; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996).

The evaluation of model fit is based on multiple indices, such as $\chi^2$, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), non-normed fit index (NNFI), comparative fit index (CFI), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), and following the main cutoff criteria in the literature (Kline, 2005; Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger, & Müller, 2003). Chi-square is acceptable when not significant; RMSEA indicates an acceptable fit if equal to or lower than .08; SRMR should be equal to or lower than .10; finally, NNFI and CFI indicate a satisfactory fit if equal to or higher than .95 (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003).

Five latent variables (i.e., instrumental and symbolic attributes, attractiveness, organizational identification and promotion) and nine observed variables or indicators (i.e., two for each construct, except for organizational identification which was measured by a single indicator), were considered. Where applicable, indicators were computed by aggregation of items, following the procedure of item-to-construct balance suggested by Little, Cunningham, Shahar, and Widaman (2002), in order to reduce the number of parameters to be estimated, to increase the accuracy of parameter estimates, and to decrease the measurement error (Bagozzi & Heatherton, 1994). This procedure was deemed appropriate considering the relatively small sample size ($N = 103$).

In order to test if measures of the variables included in the model (see Figure 1) detected distinct constructs, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed via the ML procedure. The 5-correlated-factor model with nine indicators showed an acceptable fit, $\chi^2(18) = 31.82$, $p \geq .02$; RMSEA = .08; NNFI = .96; CFI = .98; SRMR = .05. Standardized factor loadings support the fact that each factor was defined only by its own indicators, and this supported convergent validity. Factor loadings ranged between .79 and .93. Correlations between latent factors ranged from .13 to .79. With the aim of testing if the $\phi$ coefficients were different from the perfect correlation (i.e., 1.00), for each $\phi$ a 95% confidence interval was computed by considering two standard errors both above and below the estimated correlation coefficient. None of these intervals included the perfect correlation and therefore we concluded that the measures reasonably captured distinct constructs.

According to the theoretical framework previously discussed, instrumental and symbolic attributes, and attractiveness and organizational identification were expected to predict promotion. Additionally, attractiveness was supposed to predict organizational identification. Finally, we expected both attractiveness and organizational identification to mediate the effects of instrumental and symbolic attributes on promotion. The effects of both instrumental and symbolic attributes on identification were also estimated.

Goodness-of-fit of the theoretical model reported in Figure 1 turned out to be not completely acceptable: $\chi^2(22) = 53.98$, $p \geq .000$; RMSEA = .12; NNFI = .93; CFI = .96; SRMR = .08.
The analysis of modification indices suggested estimating also the direct paths between both instrumental and symbolic attributes and promotion.

Figure 2 depicts the final model which showed an overall good fit: \( \chi^2(18) = 31.82, p \geq .02; \) RMSEA = .08; NNFI = .96; CFI = .98; SRMR = .06. Percentage of explained variance (\( R^2 \)) for attractiveness, organizational identification and promotion ranged from .16 to .55.

![Diagram of the model](image)

**Note.** Bolded arrows depict significant paths while dotted arrows represent nonsignificant paths. The curved double-headed arrow denotes correlation.

\*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .0001.

**FIGURE 2**
Regression model with latent variables (completely standardized solution).

As regards the first Hypothesis, only the effect of symbolic attributes on attractiveness turned out to be significant (H1a) while the effect of instrumental attributes on attractiveness was nonsignificant (H1b).

Concerning the second Hypothesis (H2), the effect of attractiveness on identification resulted significant. Moreover, according to the Sobel test, the indirect effect of symbolic attributes
on organizational identification, via the mediation of attractiveness, was significant and equal to .32 ($z = 3.21, p < .001$). The application of the bootstrapping method with 1000 resamples was used in order to evaluate the significance of the indirect effect (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The 95% bias corrected confidence interval for the indirect effect ranged from .096 to .717. Because zero is not in the 95% confidence, it can be concluded that attractiveness mediated the effect of symbolic attributes on organizational identification.

The third Hypothesis (H3) received support since the effect of both attractiveness and identification on intention to promote the organization turned out to be significant. Moreover, we observed that promotion was directly affected also by symbolic (positive effect) and instrumental (negative effect) attributes.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

The paper presents a preliminary attempt to adapt the EB model (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) to nonprofit organizations by including aid workers’ perceptions of Emergency, an internationally renowned Italian-based NPO.

In testing our hypotheses, we found evidence that (H1a) attractiveness depends on the perceived symbolic attributes of the organization — among which, interestingly enough, teamwork seems to play a relevant role in our sample — but not on instrumental attributes (H1b); identification with the organization depends on attractiveness (H2) and attractiveness also mediates the effect of symbolic attributes on identification with the organization; attractiveness and identification affect promotion (H3), and symbolic and instrumental attributes have a direct — even if opposite — effect on promotion.

We also found indications that the scores of perceived symbolic attributes, attractiveness and promotion are different among participants with a different degree of involvement with the organization, although significant differences were found only between those who are involved with the organization and those who are not, but not between those with medium or high involvement. This evidence seems aligned with Turban et al. (1998), according to whom a potential employee’s first impression of a company’s brand image is a strong predictor of brand attractiveness and the decision to become employed by that company (Powell, 1991).

An unexpected result is that instrumental attributes negatively influence the intention to promote the organization, as participants’ references to Emergency in terms of instrumental attributes (e.g., salary-related issues) increase, the likelihood that they will promote it decreases.

Although this negative association is not shown by the correlation coefficients in Table 2, the partial correlation between instrumental attributes and the intention to promote the organization, controlling for symbolic attributes, turns out to be significant and negative (i.e., $- .22, p < .03$).

This evidence is somewhat unexpected given the work of Highhouse et al. (1999), Cable et al. (2000) and LIEVENS ET AL. (2001) who demonstrate that organizational attractiveness is affected by employer brand associations like salary, career opportunities, organizational structure, and location. Other studies (e.g., Slaughter et al., 2004) suggest that potential workers are attracted in the first phases of the recruiting process by the prestige, image, and social identity of the firm, suggesting that potential workers associate both instrumental and symbolic attributes with the employer’s brand image.
This negative effect might be linked to the distinctive features of the NPO we investigated, or to the specific characteristic of the convenience sample. Another possible explanation is linked to MacNeela’s (2008) line of reasoning, according to which direct care volunteers might benefit “their career prospects through acquiring frontline skills” (p. 136). Our study did not include explicitly such an item among the instrumental attributes and therefore we are not able to pick up this possible benefit. Further investigations are thus needed to explore the conditions in which the EB model, traditionally applied in the private corporate sector, may show its usefulness within the nonprofit context.

The study should be considered as the first attempt to extend EB to NPOs and, of course, it has some limitations that should be taken into account in reading the results. First, all data were gathered at one point in time and therefore it is not possible to infer cogent causal relationships, neither can we rule out reverse causation. Second, measures of all variables were collected with a unique self-report questionnaire, thus raising concern in terms of common method bias. Third, the convenience sample was recruited on a voluntary basis, thus resulting in groups of people with different levels of involvement with Emergency and also motivation toward the research itself, and this leaves the door open to self-selection bias. Finally, the results presented may be seen as limited to the context of Italian NPOs.

However, the selection of instruments with high reliability and demonstrated validity to some extent offsets these limitations (Spector, 1987), and the use of structural equation modeling, that permits simultaneous testing of multiple relationships, provides an acceptable degree of rigorously to the analysis performed. Thus, the consequent implications for NPOs that we infer from the analysis should be seen as promising.

Our preliminary results are nevertheless useful from a managerial point of view: they suggest that using the EB model in NPOs requires some adjustments and in particular with regards to the use of symbolic and instrumental attributes. Brand attractiveness seems to be positively affected only by symbolic attributes, whereas brand promotion is driven by symbolic attributes and negatively affected by instrumental ones. However, symbolic attributes seem to be predominant as they also drive attractiveness, which affects organizational identification and lastly promotion, thus activating a deep, psychosocially intense, and less utilitarian path toward employer branding. On the contrary, in line with the findings of Liao-Troth and Dunn (1999), pushing attraction campaigns that center on instrumental attributes may actually be ineffective on the attractiveness and reduce the intention of its members to promote the NPO instead.

Another unexpected result is the lack of difference in the levels of identification among the respondents who had participated in at least one mission with Emergency, those who had applied for future missions, and respondents who were not involved with Emergency’s activities. All participants, regardless of the involvement level, show a high degree of identification with Emergency. This result may be seen as contingent on the measure we used for identification — only one visual item (i.e., the degree to which the two circles overlap) that represents the intensity of identification but not the characteristics (i.e., contents) with which one identifies with the organization. All three groups identify with Emergency with the same level of intensity, but the measure does not tell us which characteristics determine this level of identification. The use of a single-item scale to measure a complex concept such as identification, then, even if consistent with the literature (Haslam, 2004; Shamir & Kark, 2004) and also a useful choice in order to keep the online questionnaire complete but also quick to administer, may constitute another limitation of this study. So, a multi-
component identification scale could be used in future studies (e.g., Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwenerkerk, 1999). Another limitation is the low number of participants and the convenience sample (e.g., people who had positive experiences with Emergency), which may have caused a general social desirability bias in favor of a high level of identification with Emergency.

As already stated above, the investigation was carried out with a relatively small convenience sample connected to only one organization. Indeed, this is a major caveat that should be kept in mind in the interpretation and generalization of our results. Further research with larger, randomized samples would have gone farther toward ensuring the validity of the results. Given the amount of variance explained by the variables included in our study, we also suggest that further measures should be taken into account. As an example, the general construct of satisfaction as a predictor of identification and promotion, as indicated by Kuenzel and Halliday (2008) and by Arnett et al. (2003), who found that satisfaction with the organizational experience is a strong predictor of identification and of pro-social behavior like word-of-mouth and donations, or as a mediator between identification and leaving intentions as suggested by Van Dick et al. (2004). In particular, a limitation of the study regards the different knowledge that the three groups of respondents have of Emergency. Respondents with high involvement, in fact, had a direct knowledge of the actual working conditions, their answers could thus have been influenced by the perceived distance between ideal brand image and actual everyday work. The use of mediator variables such as job satisfaction may help to clarify these two distinct elements that may contribute to general attitudes toward the organization and to behavioral intention to promote it.

Future research could also focus more strictly on the differences between the two sides of Emergency as a place for volunteering or as a workplace, in order to understand what factors attract aid workers, volunteers and activists. For example, the activists at Emergency who are involved in promoting a peace culture could be researched with respect to factors like responsibility and group ideology (Sarrica & Contarello, 2004). Qualitative methods could provide further insights on the motives that attract employees and volunteers to NPOs.

Overall, we believe our study shows that the EB model may be adapted to NPOs, it may provide useful psychosocial insights to this domain and it could enhance their ability to attract and retain volunteers and employees. The focus for managers should be on developing marketing campaigns and Human Resources policies that emphasize symbolic attributes such as sincerity, cheerfulness, competence, excitement, prestige and perhaps teamwork, and on enhancing identification of volunteers and other staff members with the organization, given the mediation role that identification may play between promotion, attractiveness and the actual intention to support and promote the NGO.

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REFERENCES


Employer branding in NPOs is a relatively new area of research. This study investigates the potential impact of employer branding on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The findings suggest that employer branding can positively influence employees' perception of the organization, leading to increased job satisfaction and organizational commitment. This is particularly important in the nonprofit sector (NPOs), where employees often have a strong sense of mission and social responsibility.

Key findings:
- Employer branding contributes to job satisfaction in NPOs.
- NPO employees value a strong organizational identity and mission alignment.
- Branded organizations are perceived as more committed to societal goals.

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