

# THE MAIN ATTRIBUTES OF THE EMPLOYERS' ATTRACTIVENESS - A CROSS-NATIONAL ANALYSIS ON ROMANIA, ITALY AND ARMENIA

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**Abstract:** *In the context of a globalized society, companies need to differentiate themselves on the labour market in order to attract the best candidates. The aim of this study is to identify the main attributes of the employer's attractiveness for the students and graduates from Romania, Italy and Armenia, and to demonstrate that there are significant differences between the levels of importance attributed to the items by respondents depending on their nationality. We conducted a quantitative research on a total sample of 375 subjects. The results are in line with some of the previous research conducted in other countries.*

**Keywords:** *employers' attractiveness, cross-national analysis, work-life balance, career development*

## 1. Introduction

In the knowledge economy, the “human capital” is the most important source of competitive advantage. Thus, maintaining a good reputation on the labour market has become crucial for companies (Cappeli, 2001; Sivertzen, Nilsen and Olafsen, 2013). In the context of a globalized society where one organization can operate in several countries with different cultures and levels of economic development, adapting employer brand strategies to the country in which it operates is crucial. Although there are some studies on employers' attractiveness conducted in different countries (e.g. Arachchige and Robertson, 2011; Alniaçık et al., 2014; Reis and Braga, 2016), we still do not have a clear answer to the question of how the development level of a country may influence the perception of candidates on the employers' attractiveness. The purpose of this study is to identify the main factors that influence the decision of the applicants when choosing a specific employer and to identify if the perception of potential employees on the employer's attractiveness varies from one country to another.

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## 2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

The concept of employer branding was defined for the first time by Ambler and Barrow (1996, p. 187) as *“The package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company”*. It refers to all the efforts of a company to communicate to current and potential employees that it is a “desirable place to work” (Berthon et al., 2005). A strong employer brand can positively impact potential employees’ expectations and current employees’ experiences (Moroko and Uncles, 2008, p. 171). Applying branding principles to human resource management contributes to increasing the company's attractiveness as an employer. Companies that are perceived as an “attractive employer” on the labour market attract the most valuable candidates (Turban and Cables, 2003).

The attractiveness of employers relies on awareness, differentiation and relevance (Moroko and Uncles, 2008). Organizations should communicate to potential employees the benefits they can get as employees of the company exactly the same way as they communicate to potential consumers the benefits they can get from using a product or service. Employer attractiveness refers to the benefits that potential employees think they might get by working in a particular company (Berthon et al, 2005).

Berthon et al. (2005) developed the employer attractiveness (EmpAt) scale that consists of instrumental and symbolic attributes which allow candidates to differentiate an organization from another when they are looking for a job. Instrumental attributes refer to useful benefits such as benefits and compensation package, flexible work schedule etc., while symbolic attributes refer to intangible benefits: fun work environment, support, recognition from management etc. (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003). Berthon et al (2005) state that it is crucial for companies to be aware of the factors that contribute to increasing their attractiveness as employers. However, these factors may vary from one country to another. Thus, multinational companies should adapt their employer brand strategies depending on the country in which they operate, which is quite difficult given that many companies have branches in several countries.

Studies on the importance given by potential candidates to different attributes of employers' attractiveness are not numerous and most of them are based on the scale of Berthon et al (Roy, 2008; Arachchige & Robertson, 2011; Sivertzen et al., 2013; Reis and Braga, 2016). Moreover, there are very few cross-national research studies on this topic (e.g. Baum and Kabst, 2013; Alniaçik et al., 2014;). According to our knowledge, no researcher has applied the EmpAt scale in a cross-national research in Romania, Italy and Armenia. More than that, no studies have examined the variables “work-life balance” and “work schedule flexibility” as a factor of employers’ attractiveness yet. Thus, the hypothesis of the study is that *potential employees from Romania, Italy and Armenia assign different levels of importance for different factors of the employer's attractiveness* (H1).

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Data collection and Sampling

For this study, three countries with different levels of economic development were

selected. Thus, the research was carried out in Italy, Romania and Armenia. According to the International Monetary Fund ([www.imf.org](http://www.imf.org)), Italy is a country with advanced economy and it is on the 8th place in the world by GDP growth, Romania is an emerging county and it is on the 49th place and Armenia is a developing country, being 134th by GDP growth. The primary data were collected in May-October 2018 by applying a survey based on a standardized questionnaire to students and graduates from Ancona (Italy), Brasov (Romania) and Yerevan (Armenia). The questionnaire was self-administered and took 10 minutes to complete. The respondents could ask for clarification from researchers. Given that the questionnaire was administered in the official language of each country, in order to eliminate translation problems and difficulties in understanding the items, the questionnaire was pre-tested on 8 students and graduates from each country, and some items were changed for an easier understanding. A convenience sample of 375 people participated in the study. The sample was composed of 122 students and graduates from Ancona, 131 respondents from Brasov and 122 participants from Yerevan.

### **3.2. Measurements**

The questionnaire is based on the "Employer Attractiveness" (EmpAt) scale developed by Berthon et al. (2005). We consider this tool to be suitable for this research, as this scale has already been tested in several international studies and has had a good reliability. However, we considered that the scale should be updated, because in recent years the work schedule flexibility and the work-life balance have become increasingly important for people looking for a job (Nadler et al., 2010; Kucherov and Zavyalova, 2012; Twenge and Kasser, 2013; Buzza, 2017). Compared with previous generations, millennials appreciate more the leisure time (Meriac, Woehr and Banister, 2010). Buzza (2017) states that millennials are more attracted to jobs that involve a high level of work-life balance. At the time when Berthon et al (2005) developed the EmpAp scale, the majority of those who now belong to the Generation Y had not yet entered the labour market. Therefore, the scale did not include any variable relating to the leisure time. We considered that this is an important issue and introduced the following items: "work schedule flexibility" and "work-life balance". There were also some minor changes to the items, resulting in a 26-variable scale. The overall reliability of the scale was examined using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which is good ( $\alpha = 0.864$ ). All variables from the scale were measured using the following question: 'How important are the following items to you when considering potential employers?'. The answers were ordered on a 5-point Likert scale, where 5 means 'extremely important' and 1 means 'not important at all'. The questionnaire comprised five demographic questions and one question about the current employment status.

### **4. Statistical Analysis and Results**

We analysed the data using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 20). The mean age of the participants was 24.6 years (range: 20-35; SD = 3.18). Most of the respondents (91.5%) were unmarried and 56% were female. More than half of the respondents (53.8%) did not work and were looking for a job, 13.1% of participants wanted to change their

employer because they were not satisfied with the job and just one-third of respondents (33.1%) were satisfied with their job at the time of data collection.

To test the hypothesis, we applied Kruskal-Wallis test, because it allows simultaneous testing of the differences between more than two groups (Constantin, 2006, p. 172), as in our case there are three countries. It has been found that, except for three items, there are significant differences between levels of importance attributed to the items by respondents depending on their nationality. The difference was not significant in the case of the importance given to the following variables: “Q10 Working in an exciting environment” (Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)= 0.123); “Q17 Opportunity to apply what was learned at college/university” (Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)= 0.569) and “Q18 Opportunity to teach others what you have learned” (Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)= 0.184). Therefore, the hypothesis (H1) is partially supported.

However, if we compare the mean scores of responses between two countries, other similarities stand out. Thus, we compared the mean scores of responses given to each item, using independent samples t-test. Table 1 shows mean scores of employer attractiveness items by each country and the t-test results by comparing the responses from Romania and Italy and from Romania and Armenia. The results show that there are more similarities when comparing two groups than by comparing three groups simultaneously. It seems that the perception of the Romanian respondents is closer to that of the Armenians (the importance given to 12 items does not differ significantly) than that of the Italians (the mean scores to 6 items does not differ significantly).

Table 1  
*Mean scores and t test results of employer attractiveness items by country*

|   | Country | N   | Mean | SD*   | Mean Diff. | t      | Sig (2 tailed) |
|---|---------|-----|------|-------|------------|--------|----------------|
| Q1 Recognition/appreciation from management                 | Romania | 131 | 4.26 | .770  |            |        |                |
|   | Italy   | 122 | 3.83 | .757  | .432       | 4.490  | .000           |
|   | Armenia | 122 | 4.15 | .746  | .112       | 1.173  | .242           |
| Q2 A fun working environment                                | Romania | 131 | 3.60 | .893  |            |        |                |
|   | Italy   | 122 | 3.75 | .894  | -.159      | -1.412 | .159           |
|   | Armenia | 122 | 4.04 | .847  | -.446      | -4.067 | .000           |
| Q3 A springboard for future employment                      | Romania | 131 | 4.30 | .838  |            |        |                |
|   | Italy   | 122 | 4.03 | .738  | .265       | 2.660  | .008           |
|   | Armenia | 122 | 4.71 | .489  | -.415      | -4.768 | .000           |
| Q4 High level of personal responsibility                    | Romania | 131 | 3.95 | .773  |            |        |                |
|   | Italy   | 122 | 3.81 | .775  | .143       | 1.465  | .144           |
|   | Armenia | 122 | 4.63 | .563  | -.677      | -7.910 | .000           |
| Q5 Feeling proud that you work in a particular organization | Romania | 131 | 3.40 | 1.050 |            |        |                |
|   | Italy   | 122 | 4.16 | .885  | -.767      | -6.259 | .000           |
|   | Armenia | 122 | 3.80 | .878  | -.406      | -3.326 | .001           |
| Q6 Gaining career-enhancing experience                      | Romania | 131 | 4.44 | .646  |            |        |                |
|   | Italy   | 122 | 4.20 | .833  | .230       | 2.467  | .014           |
|   | Armenia | 122 | 4.67 | .552  | -.237      | -3.127 | .002           |

|   | Country | N   | Mean | SD*   | Mean Diff. | t      | Sig (2 tailed) |
|---|---------|-----|------|-------|------------|--------|----------------|
| Q7 Mentoring programs/supervisor support                          | Romania | 131 | 4.18 | .836  |            |        |                |
|   | Italy   | 122 | 3.55 | .834  | .626       | 5.960  | .000           |
|   | Armenia | 122 | 4.15 | .746  | .028       | .281   | .779           |
| Q8 Good employer leadership style                                 | Romania | 131 | 4.39 | .819  |            |        |                |
|   | Italy   | 122 | 3.72 | .893  | .668       | 6.207  | .000           |
|   | Armenia | 122 | 4.70 | .556  | -.316      | -3.561 | .000           |
| Q9 Supportive and friendly colleagues                             | Romania | 131 | 4.39 | .780  |            |        |                |
|   | Italy   | 122 | 4.03 | .823  | .357       | 3.538  | .000           |
|   | Armenia | 122 | 4.38 | .607  | .012       | .139   | .890           |
| Q10 Working in an exciting environment                            | Romania | 131 | 4.32 | .816  |            |        |                |
|   | Italy   | 122 | 4.20 | .738  | .116       | 1.180  | .098           |
|   | Armenia | 122 | 4.40 | .570  | -.081      | -.909  | .364           |
| Q11 Innovative employer – novel work practices/forward-thinking   | Romania | 131 | 4.13 | .788  |            |        |                |
|   | Italy   | 122 | 3.84 | .875  | .294       | 2.808  | .005           |
|   | Armenia | 122 | 4.40 | .688  | -.272      | -2.913 | .004           |
| Q12 The organization both values and makes use of your creativity | Romania | 131 | 4.28 | .787  |            |        |                |
|   | Italy   | 122 | 3.98 | .838  | .307       | 3.005  | .003           |
|   | Armenia | 122 | 4.51 | .534  | -.226      | -2.650 | .009           |
| Q13 The organization produces high-quality products and services  | Romania | 131 | 4.07 | .986  |            |        |                |
|   | Italy   | 122 | 3.80 | .915  | .265       | 2.215  | .028           |
|   | Armenia | 122 | 4.24 | .705  | -.169      | -1.558 | .120           |
| Q14 Flexible work schedule  | Romania | 131 | 4.30 | .848  |            |        |                |
|   | Italy   | 122 | 3.42 | .917  | .880       | 7.931  | .000           |
|   | Armenia | 122 | 3.97 | .852  | .330       | 3.091  | .002           |
| Q15 Good promotion opportunities within the organization          | Romania | 131 | 4.41 | .722  |            |        |                |
|   | Italy   | 122 | 4.02 | .828  | .388       | 3.976  | .000           |
|   | Armenia | 122 | 4.67 | .521  | -.260      | -3.263 | .001           |
| Q16 Humanitarian organization – gives back to society             | Romania | 131 | 3.45 | 1.009 |            |        |                |
|   | Italy   | 122 | 3.57 | .792  | -.123      | -1.077 | .283           |
|   | Armenia | 122 | 3.89 | .741  | -.435      | -3.883 | .000           |
| Q17 Opportunity to apply what was learned at college/university   | Romania | 131 | 3.80 | 1.105 |            |        |                |
|   | Italy   | 122 | 3.90 | 1.016 | -.100      | -.748  | .455           |
|   | Armenia | 122 | 4.02 | .744  | -.223      | -1.869 | .063           |
| Q18 Opportunity to teach others what you have learned             | Romania | 131 | 3.90 | .821  |            |        |                |
|   | Italy   | 122 | 3.66 | 1.041 | .237       | 2.015  | .045           |
|   | Armenia | 122 | 3.71 | .886  | .188       | 1.748  | .082           |
| Q19 Acceptance and belonging                                      | Romania | 131 | 4.10 | .840  |            |        |                |
|   | Italy   | 122 | 3.61 | .877  | .493       | 4.556  | .000           |
|   | Armenia | 122 | 3.93 | .779  | .165       | 1.615  | .108           |
| Q20 Possibility of choosing training programs                     | Romania | 131 | 3.94 | .918  |            |        |                |
|   | Italy   | 122 | 3.55 | .882  | .390       | 3.443  | .001           |
|   | Armenia | 122 | 4.14 | .764  | -.200      | -1.880 | .061           |

|  | Country | N   | Mean | SD*  | Mean Diff. | t      | Sig (2 tailed) |
|--|---------|-----|------|------|------------|--------|----------------|
| Q21 Job security within the organization       | Romania | 131 | 4.21 | .848 |            |        |                |
|  | Italy   | 122 | 4.02 | .876 | .182       | 1.672  | .096           |
|  | Armenia | 122 | 4.37 | .718 | -.163      | -1.642 | .102           |
| Q22 Hands-on inter-departmental experience     | Romania | 131 | 3.81 | .805 |            |        |                |
|  | Italy   | 122 | 3.48 | .845 | .326       | 3.132  | .002           |
|  | Armenia | 122 | 3.94 | .806 | -.133      | -1.317 | .189           |
| Q23 Challenging work environment               | Romania | 131 | 3.95 | .849 |            |        |                |
|  | Italy   | 122 | 3.75 | .884 | .200       | 1.833  | .068           |
|  | Armenia | 122 | 2.99 | .886 | .962       | 8.821  | .000           |
| Q24 An above average basic salary              | Romania | 131 | 4.46 | .715 |            |        |                |
|  | Italy   | 122 | 3.79 | .884 | .671       | 6.611  | .000           |
|  | Armenia | 122 | 4.23 | .527 | .229       | 2.876  | .004           |
| Q25 An attractive overall compensation package | Romania | 131 | 4.43 | .785 |            |        |                |
|  | Italy   | 122 | 3.67 | .828 | .755       | 7.451  | .000           |
|  | Armenia | 122 | 3.81 | .696 | .616       | 6.586  | .000           |
| Q26 Work-life balance                          | Romania | 131 | 4.58 | .733 |            |        |                |
|  | Italy   | 122 | 4.27 | .843 | .310       | 3.122  | .002           |
|  | Armenia | 122 | 4.50 | .646 | .080       | .920   | .359           |

SD\* = Standard Deviation

Figure 1 shows the differences between the mean score of each variable by country. Large differences between mean scores obtained by country are caused by the fact that the Armenians, generally, gave high scores to all variables, while the Italians gave low scores. However, it can be seen that in the case of 17 variables out of 26, the tendencies are similar.

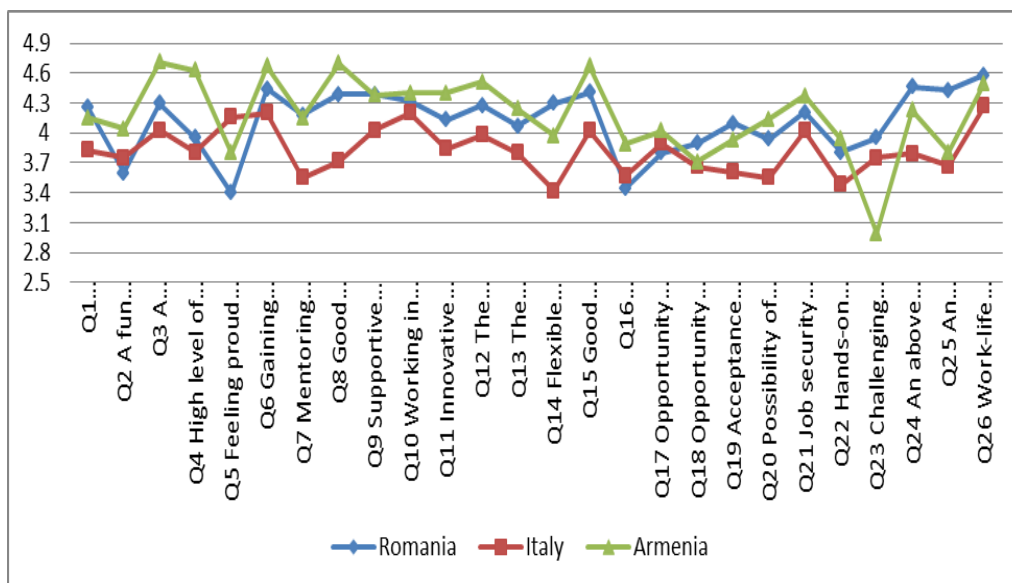


Fig. 1. Differences between mean scores of attributes by country

We considered it necessary to highlight the most preferred and the least preferred attributes by respondents from each country. Table 2 shows the first seven and last seven attributes depending on the level of importance given.

*Most important and least important attributes by country*

Table 2

| <b>Importance of Employer Attributes</b>                  | <b>Romanian Respondents</b>                                 | <b>Italian Respondents</b>                | <b>Armenian Respondents</b>               |
|---|---|---|---|
| <b>Most Important Attributes</b><br>(in descending order) | Work-life balance   | Work-life balance                         | Future opportunities experience           |
|   | Good salary   | Gaining career-enhancing experience       | Good employer leadership style            |
|   | Gaining career-enhancing experience                         | Exciting work environment                 | Gaining career-enhancing experience       |
|   | An attractive compensation package                          | Feeling proud to work in the organization | Promotion opportunities                   |
|   | Promotion opportunities                                     | Future opportunities                      | High level of responsibility              |
|   | Good employer leadership style                              | Supportive and friendly colleagues        | Appreciation from management              |
|   | Supportive and friendly colleagues                          | Promotion opportunities                   | Work-life balance                         |
| <b>Least Important Attributes</b><br>(in ascending order) | Possibility to choose training programs                     | Opportunity to teach others               | Inter-departmental experience             |
|   | Opportunity to teach others                                 | Acceptance and belonging                  | Acceptance and belonging                  |
|   | Inter-departmental experience                               | Social Responsibility                     | Social Responsibility                     |
|   | Opportunity to apply what was learned at college/university | Mentoring programs                        | An attractive compensation package        |
|   | A fun working environment                                   | Possibility to choose training programs   | Feeling proud to work in the organization |
|   | Social Responsibility                                       | Inter-departmental experience             | Opportunity to teach others               |
|   | Feeling proud to work somewhere                             | Flexible work schedule                    | Challenging work environment              |

It can be noted that the variable “work-life balance”, the one that was not included in the scale of Berthon et al, is among the top choices of students and graduates in all three countries. In Romania and Italy, this is the most important variable, while for the Armenians it is on the seventh place. Also, career development issues have become increasingly important in these countries, as well as in Australia (Berthon et al, 2005), Sri Lanka (Arachchige and Robertson, 2011). Therefore, in these countries, career

marketing strategies can be applied to attract the most valuable candidates (Grajdieru, 2018). However, Romanian respondents prioritize financial benefits, while for the Armenians and the Italians these are less important. Such differences have also been highlighted in previous studies. Potential employees from Australia (Berthon et al., 2005), Norway (Sivertzen et al., 2013) and Latvia (Alniacik, 2014) have given greater importance to the salary and compensation package than prospective employees from Brazil (Reis and Braga, 2016). We started from the assumption that in countries with a lower GDP per capita, employees will give more importance to wages and financial benefits compared to other attributes. However, by analysing the results of this study, as well as previous studies, a correlation between the countries' level of economic development and the preferences for certain variables could not be made.

On the other hand, the respondents from these three countries gave less importance to opportunities to teach others and to apply the knowledge acquired in college. These results are in line with previous research that used the employer attractiveness scale. Greening and Turban (2010) state that potential employees are more attracted by the socially responsible companies than by the organizations with poor social performance reputation. However, our results show that the corporate social responsibility (CSR) is among the least important attributes of the employers' attractiveness.

## 5. Conclusions

Our study contributes to the existing literature in the field of Employer Branding by identifying the most important employer attractiveness attributes for potential employees from Romania, Italy and Armenia. According to our knowledge, employer attractiveness factors have not been analysed in these countries. It was found that, except for three items, there are significant differences between the levels of importance attributed to the items by respondents, depending on their nationality (H1). Results show that respondents from all three countries have given a similar level of importance to the following variables: "Q10 Working in an exciting environment", "Q17 Opportunity to apply what was learned at college/university", "Q18 Opportunity to teach others what you have learned". However, we have also compared groups two by two and it seems that the Romanians' perception regarding the employer attractiveness attributes is closer to that of the Armenians than that of the Italians.

We have found out that, even if there are large differences between the mean scores obtained by country, in the case of 17 variables out of 26, the tendencies are similar. More than that, the variable "work-life balance", which was not included in the scale of Berthon et al or in other research that has analysed the dimensions of employers' attractiveness, in our research it is among the students' and graduates' top choices in all three countries. For Romanian and Italian respondents, it is the most important factor, while for the Armenians it is on the 7th place. Thus, we consider that the "work-life balance" variable should be included in future research studies on this topic, because for Generation Y the leisure time is very important.

All three nationalities are attracted by the career development opportunities offered by the employer (experience, promotion, future opportunities). For the Italians and the



Armenians, this attribute is more important than economic benefits. However, in Romania, the salary and compensation package remain in the top of preferences. We expected similar results for the Armenian sample, as both countries have a communist past and low wages. By analysing the results of this study, as well as previous studies, we concluded that the level of economic development of a country does not significantly influence the importance that the population attributes to certain items of the employer attractiveness scale. This may be due to globalization and the development of communication channels. Romanian companies should focus on the leadership style and the quality of others employees, because having supportive and friendly colleagues represent an important aspect. Italiann organizations should offer prospective employees an exciting work environment, good colleagues and a reason to feel proud to work in the company. In Armenia, it is important for candidates to have a high level of responsibility and to be appreciated by the management.

Prospective employees of the three groups consider that, compared to other attributes, it is less important to have the opportunity to teach others or to apply what was learned at university. Also, the corporate social responsibility (CSR) is among the least important employer attractiveness attributes for all groups. In contrast to the perception of the Italians, for the Romanians and Armenians it is less important to feel proud to work in a particular organization.

Companies operating in Romania, Italy and Armenia could use the results of this research to adapt their employer branding strategies to the expectations of applicants from these countries.

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