THE MEDIATING ROLE OF BRAND COMMITMENT AND BRAND LOYALTY BETWEEN BRAND IDENTIFICATION AND BRAND CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOUR:EVIDENCE FROM IT COMPANIES IN BANGALORE

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Abstract:

The employeebrand attitudes, which are constituents of internal branding, are of paramount importance in an organization.This paper explores the perspectives on the four main brand attitudes (brand identification, brand commitment, brand loyalty and brand citizenship behavior) which bring about internal branding. The aim of this paper is to determine the relationship between the variables of brand supporting behavior in internal branding among employees and to ascertain whether brand commitment and brand loyalty act as mediators between brand identification and brand citizenship behavior. It empirically assesses the relationship between the various brand attitudes. To achieve its objectives, a quantitative survey conducted with 400 employees from the top ten IT companies in Bangalore, was carried out.It proved statistically that there is serial mediator effect between brand identification and brand citizenship behavior. It empirically shows the relationship between brand identification and brand citizenship behavior as well as the mediational effects of brand commitment and brand loyalty.The implication of this study is that the management can make use of brand identification to directly shape the behavioural attitude of employee branding, which is the employees brand citizenship behavior.

Keywords: Internal Branding, brand identification, brand commitment, brand loyalty, brand citizenship behavior.

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Introduction

Internal branding is increasingly prevalent as some researchers have resolved that it is one of the valuable competitive advantages that a company has. The brand image anticipated by the organization can be realized only by employees who portrayor characterize the organization and the task of getting employees to reflect the organization's brand image and deliver on its promises is a challenge for the business. It has collected both managerial and research attention that focuses on addressing this challenge (Miles & Mangold, 2004). The behavior and attitudes of employees, especially those in the frontline, not only affect external stakeholders, but also shape the organization's brand and reputation in the eyes of the public and other stakeholders. (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007; Bergstrom, Blumenthal and Crothers, 2002).

However, there does not seem to be much agreement on what internal branding is, the attitudes involved in it, how it is initiated and its positive consequences. Hence, the employee branding construct is still not completely conceptualized. In spite of the growing popularity of the concept of internal branding in aligning employees' brand behavior, not much is known of the relationship between internal branding practices and employees' brand behavior. The dearth of research in this area also limits the understanding of what is the appropriate employee behavior that could enhance the organization's brand performance. (Shaari, Hasnizam et al (2012).

Internal branding practices consists of initiatives, which in turn leads to brand supporting behaviors. (Heggde and Tampi (2017). This paper explores the perspectives on thefour main brand attitudes (brand identification, brand commitment, brand loyalty and brand citizenship behavior) which bring about internal branding,based on past research. It then empirically assesses the relationship between the various brand attitudes. To achieve its objectives, a quantitative survey conducted with 400 employees from the top ten IT companies in Bangalore, was carried out.

Some studies have provided empirical evidence for the link between internal branding and employees brand commitment (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005), some have focused on the relationship between internal branding and brand loyalty (Papasolomou and Vrontis, 2006) and others have focused on the influence of internal branding on employees' brand supporting behaviours (de chernatony and cottam, 2005; de chernatony and segal-horn, 2001; Kotter and Heskett, 1992).

The objectives of the paper are as follows:

To determine the relationship between the variables of brand supporting behavior

To ascertain whether brand commitment and brand loyalty act as mediators between brand identification and brand citizenship behavior.

Theoretical Model and Hypothesis
Internal Branding: Defined

Internal branding is defined as an enabler of an organization's success in delivering the brand promise to meet customer's brand expectations set by various communication activities (Drake et al, 2005). Internal branding emerges as a strategy through which organizations encourage their employees, through their engagement, to become involved in the nurturing of a brand (Özçelik, Gaye (2015). The employees' brand attitudes are namely brand identi?cation, brand commitment and brand loyalty. (Punjaisri, Khanyapuss & Wilson, Alan (2007). The behavioral outcome of the study on Internal Brand Management was brand citizenship behavior(Piehler, Rico and Burmann, Christoph (2014).Internal branding brings about the cognitive (brand identification), affective (brand commitment and brand loyalty) and the behavioural (brand citizenship behavior) components of the brand supporting behavior (Heggde and Tampi, 2017).

Brand Identification

The involvement of the human resources function for helping employees in internalizing brand identity has been a developing area of study. A brand needs to have a consistent and continuous identity in order to be trusted and a holistic model for internal brand management focuses on the role of employees in ensuring consistency of the brand identity. (Burmann, Christoph & Zeplin, Sabrina (2005). The organization brand is found to be effective on brand identification from the employees' perspective. (Javanmard, Habibollah and Nia, EnsiyehNemati (2011). The relationship between brand identification, brand commitment and brand loyalty was assessed empirically and one of the findings was that brand identification is a driver of brand commitment, which precedes brand loyalty of employees. (Punjaisri et al, 2009). Brand identification is the employees sense of belonging, which will in turn induce a behavior that strives to improve the external perception of the organization (Punjaisri, et al., 2009; Punjaisri &

Wilson, 2011). The employees will then perceive the successes and failures of the brand as their own and thus brand identification encourages brand-supporting behavior (Vallaster & De Chernatony, 2005).

Brand commitment

Brand commitment of employees is de?ned as the extent of employee's psychological attachment to a brand and the extent to which they experience a sense of identification and involvement with the brand values of the company they work for, and is an important factor for the effectiveness of brand management. (Burmann, Christoph and König, Verena (2011), Kimpakorn, Narumon and Tocquer, Gerard (2009). The organization brand is effective on brand commitment, from the employees' perspective. (Javanmard, Habibollah and Nia, EnsiyehNemati (2011). It is a large contributor to the retention of valuable employees (Du Preez & Bendixen, 2015). Brand commitment has a significant relationship with brand citizenship behavior and the causal link between brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour was empirically validated. (Burmann ,Zeplin& Riley, (2009), Shaari , Hasnizam et al (2012), Burrmann, Christoph & Zeplin, Sabrina (2005). It thus explains the psychological processes that leads employees to show brand citizenship behaviour. (Burmann, Christoph & Zeplin, Sabrina (2005).

Brand identi?cation is the driver of brand commitment, which precedes brand loyalty of employees. (Punjaisri K, E. and Wilson, A. (2009). The affective outcome in the study conducted on Internal Brand Management is brand commitment and the results show that cognitive brand understanding is a key Internal Brand Management outcome which has an effect on affective brand commitment and behavioral brand citizenship behavior. (Piehler, Rico and Burmann, Christoph (2014).

Commitment in a relationship usually works through trust. The relation between brand trust and brand commitment on brand citizenship behaviours of employees was studied, and it was found that brand trust has a significant effect on brand citizenship behaviours and that it mediates the effect of brand commitment on this behaviour. (Erkmen, Ezgi and Hancer, Murat (2015) Also, empirical evidence of the antecedents of employee brand commitment and subsequent brand behavior is established. (King, Ceridwyn and Grace, Debra(2012) Internal branding seeks to achieve consistency with the external

brand and encourage brand commitment and the possibility of brand championship among employees.(Mahnert, K.F and Ann, T., (2007).

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is a measurement of the employees' willingness to stay with the current organization which is closely related to brand commitment. Brand commitment precedes brand loyalty of employees. The mediational effects of brand loyalty have been studied. (Punjaisri, et al., 2009) The effect of internal branding on employees' brand loyalty has been studied and it has a positive effect on their performance with regard to customer attraction. (Javanmard, Habibollah and Nia, Ensiyeh Nemati (2011). Employee brand attitudes are namely brand identification, brand commitment and brand loyalty and they influence the manner in which employees deliver their service. Internal branding influences the attitudes employees have towards the brand. (Punjaisri, Khanyapuss & Wilson, Alan(2007). Hence, it is important to have a high level of identification, commitment, and loyalty towards the brand since they are all interlinked to each other, to achieve employees' delivery of brand promise (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011).

Brand Citizenship Behaviour

Brand citizenship behaviour summaries what it means for employees to 'live the brand'. (Burmann, Christoph& Zeplin, Sabrina (2005). Brand citizenship behavior is one of the three concepts of the internal brand management model. (Burmann, Zeplin& Riley, 2009). The behavioral outcome of the study on Internal Brand Management was brand citizenship behaviour (Piehler, Rico and Burmann, Christoph (2014). It was found that brand knowledge and brand rewards have a significant positive relationship with brand commitment and brand citizenship behavior. Brand commitment has a significant relationship with brand citizenship behavior. Attempts have also been made to examine the relationship between brand knowledge and rewards on employees' brand citizenship behavior and integrating brand commitment as mediation. (Shaari Hasnizam et al (2012).

The antecedents of Brand Citizenship Behavior (BCB) and the role that the frequency of employee contact with customers plays has been examined. (Porricellia, Mathew et al (2014). Brand Citizenship Behaviour is affected by cognitive and affective antecedents. (Piehler, Rico et al (2016). An organization can adopt brand-centered HR practices to

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make employees produce brand citizenship behaviors, thus contributing to customer satisfaction. HR managers can strengthen employees' brand citizenship behaviors by fostering their brand psychological ownership feelings. (Chang, Aihwa et al (2012).

H1. Brand commitment acts as a mediator between brand identification and brand citizenship behavior.

H2. Brand loyalty acts as a mediator between brand identification and brand citizenship behavior.

H3. Brand commitment and Brand Loyalty act at serial mediators between Brand identification and Brand Citizenship Behavior.
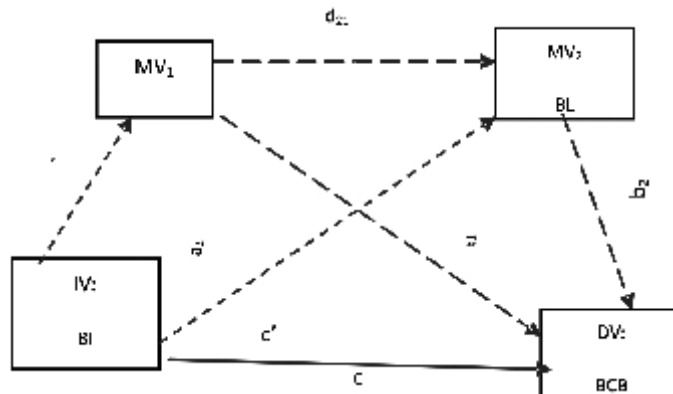
Methodology

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to empirically assess the relationship between the variables of employee brand supporting behavior, namely brand identification, brand commitment and brand loyalty, and brand citizenship behavior. Further, it attempts to find out if Brand commitment and Brand loyalty act as mediators between brand identification and brand citizenship behavior. It looks at the internal branding process from the employees' perspective.

Design/Methodology Approach – On a survey basis, a quantitative survey is carried out with 400 employees from the top 20 IT companies in Bangalore.(http://old.nasscom.in/industry-ranking#serv2)

Sample

The hypothesis was tested from data collected from 400 employees from the top 20 IT companies in Bangalore. Quota sampling was used. The response rate was 80% (500 questionnaires were sent to get 400 responses). The high response rate was due to the fact that most of the data was collected through references.

Limitations

This study was conducted on the IT industrywhich is one among several types of industries in the service sector. Each service industry has specific characteristics which may not be shared by the other service industries. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to other service industries too.

Replicating the relationships of the variables studied and tested in this study can be made in other service industries and cultural contexts. This will help in clarifying the conditions for the generalizations in other parts of Asia as well. Also, longitudinal data will help in furthering the understanding of the variables in this study.

Method

Measures for the key constructs were developed from prior literature. The nine - item scale of brand identification was adapted from Brand identification (*Adapted from Herrbach et al,2004; Mael and Ashforth,1992; O'Reilly and Chatman,1986; Shamir et al, 1998*). It captures the sense of identification of the brand. The scale used by Mohr et al (1996) was adopted by this study to measure employees' brand commitment. The four item scale reflects their attachment to the brand emotionally. The scale given by Boselie and van der Wiele (2002) is used to measure the loyalty of employees to the brand. It shows their intention to stay with the brand. The twelve-item scale of brand citizenship behavior of this study was adapted from Chang et al (2012), which was refined from a procedure of scale development (Hinkin,1998). It measures the extent to which the employees live the brand and are willing to go beyond their call of duty.

All construct items include five-point Likert scales ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" as it is a commonly used scale for measuring attitudes (Kinnear and Taylor, 1996) and respondents understand how to use the scale (Malhotra and Birks, 2000).

Table # Descriptive statistics, reliability test and correlation analysis

	Mean	Sd	BI	BC	BL	BCB
BI	4.34	0.48	(0.92)			
BC	4.28	0.45		(0.72)		
BL	3.34	0.93			(0.90)	
BCB	3.71	0.53				(0.88)
**P<.01						

Regression: Serial Mediator Analysis - BIBCBLBCB

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            M1-BC      M2-BL     M3-BL     M4-BCB    M5-BCB    M6-BCB    M7-BCB
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------
(Intercept) 0.26      -0.59     -0.67     -0.79 *** 1.52 ***  0.85 **  -0.91 ***
            (0.31)    (0.41)    (0.40)    (0.22)    (0.18)    (0.26)    (0.25)
BI          0.97 ***  1.12 ***  0.80 ***  0.83 ***                     1.26 ***
            (0.08)    (0.10)    (0.15)    (0.09)                       (0.06)
BC                              0.32 **   0.14 *              0.78 ***
                                (0.11)    (0.06)              (0.06)
BL                                        0.26 ***  0.66 ***
                                          (0.05)    (0.05)
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------
R^2         0.52      0.44      0.47      0.80      0.56      0.51      0.73
Adj. R^2    0.51      0.44      0.47      0.79      0.56      0.50      0.73
F value     152.14    64.15     182.38    184.54    147.39    380.68    380.68
P value     P<.001    P<.001    P<.001    P<.001    P<.001    P<.001    P<.001
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***P<.001 **P<.01 *P<.05
values inside parenthesis is std. error and other values are coefficient

Mediator test is done as per the guidelines of Baron and Kenny (1986) and Hayes (2012). 7 regression models are employed in totaland it is from M1 through M7. In the given model, Brand Identification (BI) is the independent variable and Brand citizenship behavior (BCB) isthe dependent variable.   Between these, Brandcommitment (BC) and Brand loyalty (BL) are treated as mediator variables. This research attempts to use serial mediator, as per the guidelines given by Hayes (2013).
 C is the total effect, which shows that BI leads to BCB, the coefficient value of which is 1.26. It is given in M7, which is statistically significant. C' is the direct effect which is

.83**. It is shown in M4, which is statistically significant. Indirect effect is computed by ab=C-C', which is, .43**. It is derived from (1.26 from M7 minus .83 from M4). So the hypothesis has been proved that, BC and BL enacts as mediators between BI and BCB. Indirect effect has three paths. The three indirect paths are as follows: -

Ind1 : BI BC BCB

Ind2 : BI BC BL BCB

Ind3 : BI BL BCB

Therefore, the total indirect effect is .43, which is the summation of ind1=.136+ ind3=.211+ ind2=.08. The contribution of indirect effect to total effect is 0.34 or 34% (.43/1.26). Since all the paths, Ind1, Ind2 and Ind3 are significant at least 5% level, the result of the study validated the theoretical model. Thus, it proved statistically that there is serial mediator effect between BI (brand identification) and BCB (brand citizenship behavior).

Discussions and managerial implications

This study supports the studies that have been done previously, that internal branding wields certain amount of impact on the degree to which employees identify with wields a certain amount of impact on how committed they are to the brand, and are loyal to the brand, which in turn, leads to Brand Citizenship Behaviour. Like past research has proven, the relationships among employees' brand attitudes are explored. Employee brand identification is found to positively influence employees' brand commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1990), which is a precursor to brand loyalty (Brown and Peterson, 1993; Reichers, 1985). Though these attitudes are distinct, they are related constructs. Brand commitment and brand loyalty act as mediators between brand identification and brand citizenship behavior.

The implication of this study to management is that it is important that the management takes various internal branding measures to enhance the brand attitudes as well as its distinctiveness to enhance the commitment, so that the employees become committed to the brand and exhibit brand citizenship behavior.Thus, the management can expect employees' commitment when they are successful in inducing employees' brand identification. They can influence employees brand loyalty when they are successful in inducing brand commitment. Inducing Brand commitment and brand loyalty leads to

the employees exhibiting brand citizenship behavior.When employees' brand identification effectively influences employees brand commitment and brand loyalty, the brand citizenship behavior can be more effectively influenced than when brand identification does not successfully influence them. The management can make use of brand identification to directly shape the behavioural attitude of employee branding, which is the employeesbrand citizenship behavior.

Future research directions
The findings of this study suggest many more avenues for future research.This study adds to the current knowledge that internal branding has both attitudinal and behavioural impact on the employees. The study looks into the perspectives of the middle level and senior level employees, who are considered to be the key audience of an internal branding programme. Through the literature developed by HR, many individual aspects associated with employee behaviour, has been studied. However, there is not much clarity on how emotional bonds are developed between employees and brands. This study has successfully provided empirical evidence showing the link between employees' brand supporting behavior. As this study measured all four attitudes together, it could also identify the relationships between the attitudes and how brand commitment and brand loyalty mediated the strength of brand identification on employees' brand behaviours, which is brand citizenship behavior.

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Computation part

IND1, is a1b1= .1364, which is derived from a1=.97 from M1, and b1=.78 from M6, so a1b1=.7566, a1=.97*.14 from M4, which is, .136, which is a1b1

IND3, is a2b2=.2118, which is derived from a2=1.12 from M2 and b2=.66 from M5, a2b2= .7392, .528, is computed from .80 from M3,*.66 from M5,(effect of BC on BL and BL on BC)

IND3= .7392 minus .528= .211, which is a2b2

IND2= a2b2 minus a1b1= .0754 or .08