

## **Internal Marketing and Brand Commitment: An Empirical Review on Employee Perspective in Services Sector**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Internal marketing and brand-related behavior of employees are found as extendedly researched notions across the markets and product scopes. The concept of internal marketing has been referred in empirical studies connected to different variables and propositions. In addition, brand-related behavior of employees have been studied with specific variables as different facets of committed behavior. Brand commitment is one of the main variables found within the domain of brand-related behavior of employees. Studies have discussed employee brand commitment behavior in relation to internal branding and brand citizenship behaviors. Alongside, it is clear that the interrelated nature of internal marketing, internal branding, and brand citizenship behavior on employee brand commitment behavior has been a highlighted research avenue. Meanwhile, service sector brands and firms have been extendedly considered in recently held studies when examining the concepts of internal marketing and employee brand commitment behavior. The main argument found with the said is services are fully engaged with employees as a value delivering component, thus, their commitment is a critical factor for the external customer satisfaction. However, empirical studies still claim to investigate how internal marketing practices and brand-related behaviors of employees are interconnected within the services sector firms. Accordingly, this paper also attempted to examine the empirical insights revealing how internal marketing and employee brand commitment behaviors are interconnected. This Paper further highlights the empirical thoughts shared on service sector as a specific matter based on the literature review carried out. Paper concludes the future research priorities by summarizing the content presented in the paper whilst highlighting services sector as a specific research niche.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Brand Citizenship Behavior, Employee Brand Commitment Behavior, Internal Marketing, Services Sector*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

It has defined the brand commitment in various manner where a common agreement is found emphasizing the notion or relationship with a brand held by a customer resulted by interaction experience (Jones et al., 2010; Mathew et. al., 2012). In general, commitment is referred as a relational construct that motivates customers to be engaged with a brand or a firm that eventually mitigate the perceived risk (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2002). As per some authors, brand commitment has been figured out as an attitudinal disposition whilst some argue that it relates to both attitudinal and behavioral perspectives (Ashley and Leonard, 2009). Usually, brand commitment results favorable outcomes for a brand including purchase intention, long term relationship with the brand and even tolerate the switching cost (Hur et al., 2011; Ilicic & Webster, 2014; Shuv-Ami, 2012). The notion of internal branding and internal marketing specifically highlighted the concern of people or employees as a greater part of the brand or the corporate. The degree of involvement of the employees in service is a significant managerial implication for different services sector companies including financial services (Jayampathi & Dissanayake, 2018). Thus, specific attention is found in the literature explaining the salient nature and the need of considering employee brand commitment as a critical concept within services sector organizations (Morrison, 2009). Empirical evidences are found linking employee brand commitment into internal marketing and branding scope emphasizing the strategic importance of internalizing the brand related values and behaviours (Mangold and Miles, 2007). Alongside, the way how employees engage with the brand related attitudes and behaviors has been able to find an extended attention for empirical studies and managerial implications (Nirmali, et.al.2018). Thus, it is clear that brand commitment is well connected to both internal customers and external customers whereas services sector could be considered as much connected with the employees when it refers to brand commitment aspects. The term employee brand commitment has earned a specific attention as a claimed research scope across the markets and different product categories (Alshuaibia & Shamsudinb, 2016; Ilicic & Webster, 2014; Morrison, 2009).

### **1.1. Scope of the Study**

As per the aforementioned brief, brand commitment is widely connected concept with internal branding practices. There are many empirical investigations proving the critical importance of employees as an integral component of the brand related behaviors to deliver brand values. In addition, the importance of arranging formal strategies within the organization to establish brand related behaviors and attitudes amongst employees is a well claimed argument (Alshuaibia and Shamsudinb, 2016; Ilicic & Webster, 2014; Morrison,2009). It proves that internal branding is the core of employee brand commitment behavior whereas similar priority is being given on holistic humanresource model named brand citizenship behavior as a foundation for brand-committed behavior of the employees. Studies highlight internal branding practices should be consistent with the stated brand values and brand indemnity to form integrated behavior and attitudinal readiness of employees (Ilicic & Webster, 2014). There are empirical evidences highlight the role of employees in services as a significant managerial notion that requires many studies to confirm how internal branding strategies are effective to generate such brand committed behavior. Thus, examining the brand related attitudinal and behavioral aspects of employees is still demanded by contemporary research works whereas services sector is claimed as a significant scope within (Alshuaibia & Shamsudinb, 2016; Jayampathi & Dissanayake, 2018; Nirmali, et.al.2018). Accordingly, this paper attempts to present a comprehensive literature review on employee brand commitment behavior in connection with the related concepts and variables whilst special attention is made on services sector.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Internal Marketing and Organizational Commitment**

Internal marketing can be recognized as a process or strategy that creates a rewarding environment for employees to feel good and perform better resulted through an interactive relationships (Gary, 2009). Accordingly, organizations have to treat the employees as their internal customers, thus, priority should be given to employees in terms of work related conditions and organizational culture. Alongside, internal marketing makes sure to create a system within the organization to treat each function or division assisting others whilst employees are treated as internal customers across the divisions. Employees are facilitated and encouraged to be committed to organization by contributing decisions, systems, improvements and carrying the organizational values into their working style (Preez and Bendixen, 2015). Internal marketing practices like brand citizenship strategies could result strategic gain in different industries including information technology sector (Maitra & Dissanayake, 2015). Thus, internal marketing is a notable strategy in many industries irrespective of highly employee centric businesses like services.

According to Matahen (2010), internal marketing establishes an atmosphere to follow team work culture within the organization which enables employees to develop relationships and iterative commitment to each other. In addition, internal marketing motivates employees to contribute decision making and innovative ideas within the organization resulted by positive work attitude. Specially, services sector organizations need to focus on staff who interact with external customers to deliver best service experience via brand related skills and process knowledge (Nirmali, et.al.2018; Preez and Bendixen, 2015). Empirical evidences prove internal marketing ensures brand related behaviors within the employees to perform better in delivering the promised value and experiences to external customers specially within the services sector (Burmam & Zeplin, 2005; Jayampathi & Dissanayake, 2018; Nirmali, et.al.2018; Preez and Bendixen, 2015; Shaari, Salleh & Hussin, 2012).

The role of employees on brand related behaviors and attitudes is always expressed via the internal branding practices adopted by a firm. It requires a significant communication and training activities to establish a proper set of brand related behaviors and commitments amongst employees (Punjaisri et al. 2008). It finds that holistic branding model is a must to establish a situation where employees commit for the promised brand values including brand citizenship behavior (Burmam & Zeplin, 2005). It refers that firms need to focus on brand centered human resources activities, internal brand communication activities, and brand centered transformational leadership as the major inclusions of internal branding mechanisms resulting employee's committed behavior for a brand (Burmam & Zeplin, 2005). Some studies highlight the importance of brand fit with employees connected to brand values and brand identity (Preez and Bendixen, 2015). In brief, organizations are supposed apply a comprehensive approach to establish internal communication strategy create an atmosphere for employees to improve their behavior in line with the stated brand values (Shaari, et.al., 2012). Studies highlight that employees and brands are connected as an agency whilst services sector is mentioned as a prominent scope which requires holistic strategy to develop brand citizenship behavior and commitment (Jayampathi & Dissanayake, 2018). In addition, the role of organizational leadership is also a critical factor to enhance brand commitment behavior of employees (Morhart, Herzog & Tomczak, 2009).

Meanwhile, commitment has been defined as the intention channel member's to continue a particular relationship and some authors have identified this intention is derived from different motivations and thus have

identified different types of commitment (Geyskens, Steenkamp, Scheer & Kumar, 1996). Out of these commitments affective commitment and calculative commitment came in to discussion since they were identified as the most important for organizational relationships. Both affective and calculative commitments are considered to be psychological states arising from different motivations to maintain a relationship (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Previous studies on affective commitment reflected that the desire to continue relationship and sense of loyalty and belongingness are the motivations for affective commitment. In contrast, calculative commitment is a relationship which arises when the termination or the switching cost of leaving is higher than the retention. This relationship is maintained by considering the costs and benefits (Jaros, Jermier, Koehler, & Sin, 1993). In the context of organizational behavior, commitment is observed as a concept which links employees to the employer. Organizational commitment refers to one of the work related attitude and the degree of involvement of employees towards the organization they work (Schulz, Martin & Meyer, 2017). As per Ferdous, Herington & Merrilees (2013), affective commitment is the most powerful in the performance of both organization and financial. Apart from that, the desire of an employee to retain and work in an organization also arises as a result of affective commitment (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2010).

## **2.2 Brand Commitment of Employees**

Brand commitment is generally defined as the extend of psychological attachment of employees to the brand, which impacts their enthusiasm to put an additional effort to reach the goals of the brand (Safitri, Roy & Irawantoc, 2017). As expressed by Ateke & Nwulu (2019), brand commitment is customers' persistent need to continue a valued relationship. It is also perceived as an conveyed or implied motivation to continue an ongoing relationship. It reflects brand commitment is an important factor for the effectiveness of brand management and in the context of internal branding, brand commitment has been frequently discussed (Tampi & Heggde, 2018). But in the context of corporate branding, brand commitment is discussed as organizational commitment which defines the psychological bond between the employee and the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Commitment is identified as a multidimensional construct by many researchers. In terms of the dimensions of commitment, prior literature identifies several conceptualizations (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2009). Perhaps, the most powerful commitment conceptualization is considered as the Allen and Meyer's (1990) description of affective, continuance and normative commitment and later Keiningham, Frennea, and Aksoy (2015), expands the three components in to five breaking up continuance commitment into economic commitment, forced commitment and espoused habitual commitment.

Affective commitment is defined as the employees with sense of belonging or the emotional attachment and with high involvement in the activities of the organization with the high intention of achieving the organization's goals and willingness to stay with the firm (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001). Employees with high affective commitment have the sense of belongingness and identification with the organization and such employees will stick with the company since they have psychological and emotional attachment to the organization. Affective commitment comprises from the feelings of employees through the trust and strong relationship built upon (Nwulu & Ateke, 2018). Normative commitment can be explained as the employees' obligation to the organization based on the personal belief on their obligation. Normative commitment arises from the employees' recognition that they share significant values towards the organization through intentions and behaviors towards the organization (Reed, Mark, Forehand, & Luk, 2012). In addition, normative commitment create an added value to the organization and the employees with strong normative commitment often avail their energy and skills to the wellness of the organization they work (Ateke & Nwulu, 2019).

As explained by Keiningham et. al., (2015), economic commitment is explained as the balancing of the potential cost of leaving the organization with potential benefits of staying. It's based on a thorough comparison of costs and benefits and the perceived high cost of quitting over the perceived benefits of staying. Hence, perceived switching cost is considered to be a motivation for employees to stay in the organization for a long time even in unsatisfactory situations while fear of change is also another factor which affects economic commitment (Burnham, Freis & Mahajan, 2003). Forced commitment can be described as the perception of employees in the absence of alternatives and different situations in which employees accept to be in the organization (Keiningham, et al., 2015). Moreover, the motives for force commitment are level of dependence, perceived switching cost and the fear of change. According to previous studies, habitual commitment is not guided by the attitudes or intentions of employees. When behaviors turned in to habits, satisfaction does not depend on the materialistic things anymore and that is defined as habitual commitment. Out of all, continuance and normative commitment require a strong focus whereas affective commitment is driven by an internal state of mind (Fullerton, 2003). It is said that commitment leads on factors affecting employee's brand related behavior in internal brand management. Alongside, normative and continuance commitments are likely to lead employee's pro brand behaviors (Piehler, King, Burmann & Xiong, 2016). The organization as a brand is affected by brand commitment from the employees as it results to retain valuable employees in the organization (Preez & Bendixen, 2015). In the review of past literature on brand commitment, many authors have claimed

that brand commitment has a significant relationship with brand knowledge, brand citizenship behavior, brand understanding, brand identification and brand trust (Zuhdiyani, 2018).

### **III. Role Of Brand Commitment: Special Reference To Services Sector**

As per the findings of Kimpakorn & Tocquer (2009), brand knowledge can positively impact on the brand commitment of employees. Some researches have argued that without brand knowledge doubts and uncertainties will occur in an organization which eventually obstruct the brand commitment (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). When employees are fully aware on the brand and its performance and brand values, they will be more committed to deliver brand promises (Zuhdiyani, 2018). Furthermore, Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, & Snoek(1964), proposed that employee's brand knowledge lead for the development of their emotional attachment to the brand hence by providing brand knowledge creates a positive impact on brand commitment. In addition to that, brand commitment has been recognized as an significant result of the distribution of brand knowledge which leads to the productivity and effectiveness of the organization (Burmam & Zeplin, 2005). However, in the field of marketing and service oriented economies organizations need to attract more and more new customers and retain them and to face this challenge organizations need to pay more attention on their employees to ensure high customer loyalty (Morrison, 2009).

Many researchers have appreciated the importance of employees' role in brand supporting behaviors in business organizations (Burmam, Zeplin, & Riley, 2009; Timothy, Aurand, Gorchels, & Bishop, 2005). In understanding the importance of employee's brand related behavior many researchers have argued that brand commitment of employee's is the key determinant factor in understanding how employees adopt brand citizenship behavior (De Chernatony, Drury, & Segal-Horn, 2010). More specifically, it has been suggested that brand commitment has been identified as one of the major determinant in the success of branding as commitment motivates employee's to keep trust on their brands and the organization (Erkmen & Hancer, 2014). According to Burmann and Zeplin(2005), brand citizenship behaviour can be easily strengthened by the employees who are committed to the brand and also they comply with brand related rules and regulations in order to minimize the damage to the brand as well. Furthermore employees with brand commitment are more likely to engage in extra role behaviour in the organization such as representing the brand, recommending it to potential employees and customers, developing it, taking extra responsibilities over the brand and giving suggestions to improve the brand. Thus, employees who are attached psychologically to the brand or the employees with brand commitment, are more likely to enhance the brand through their behavior (Fullerton, 2003). In the past literature on internal branding authors have defined brand commitment as the extend to which employees are physically attached to the brand that influences their likelihood to put an extra effort in achieving the goals of the brand which simply implies the extend of emotional attachment to exert brand citizenship behaviour (Ind, 2001).

However, according to Kelman (1958), three drivers of brand commitment can be identified as; compliance, identification and internalisation. Compliance is identified as the embracement of particular behaviours that are in lined with the brand in order to achieve specific rewards or to avoid some penalties. As described by O'Reilly, Chatman, and Caldwell (1991), commitment based compliance will guarantee the compliance to rules which is a must for brand citizenship behaviour. Identification refers to the acceptance of social influence as a result of being included to the group which determines the brand experience and strong identification will induce brand citizenship behaviour (Burmam & Zeplin, 2005). Internalisation of brand commitment can be identified as the adoption of the core brand values as a guideline principal which determine the self concepts of employees. An employee with higher internalisation will show high brand citizenship behaviours (Maanen & Schein, 1979). It has been proved that, all these three dimensions of brand commitment are not interdependent and the brand commitment of each employee can be created either on any of these dimensions or all three dimensions as the dominance dimension of each employee may differ from one to one (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Thus, Burmann & Zeplin (2005), argued that brand citizenship behaviour of employees is not influenced by all three dimensions in same way.

It has been proved that internal branding practices are not sufficient enough to create employees brand behavior. Thus, more committed employees with sound knowledge on the brand, show more tendency of brand citizenship behavior (Foster, Punjaisri, & Cheng, 2010). Supportively, Burmann and Zeplin(2005) argued brand commitment resulted by brand knowledge and brand citizenship behaviours are key elements in internal brand management in any organization. However, number of studies have attempted to investigate the mediating effect of employee's brand commitment on the relationship between brand knowledge and employees' brand citizenship behaviour (Shaari, et.al.2012). As per the past studies on the relationship between employee brand knowledge and brand commitment, it has been proved that the variables have a positive relationship. Most recent literature has claimed that brand commitment has positively affected on the employee's brand citizenship behaviors (Nirmali, et.al.2018). Therefore, this study is also suggesting to investigate the mediating role of

employee brand commitment behavior on the influence made by brand knowledge on brand related behavior of employees including brand citizenship behavior.

It refers that the dominant paradigm in service marketing is the service profit chain that suggests the existence of a strong link between employees, service quality and company profitability(Heskett et. al., 1994). Services sector branding requires specific attention compared to product sector branding strategy due to intensive completion and brand relationship behaviors expected by the firms(Koththagoda & Dissanayake, 2017). Service quality is one of the prominent matters in service branding that results positive brand relationship behaviors. Therefore, it is not surprising that service quality dominates the service marketing literature and that few researchers have examined the relationships between employees' behavior and brand equity. Actually, it is the customer total experience with a service organization which forms the brand image into the customer' mind. The employees' attitude and behavior have a crucial role in the service brand image formation process. Therefore, employees in service firms not only should understand what the brand stands for, i.e. its identity but, more importantly, employees must be committed to support their brand and deliver consistently its promises to customers (Jayampathi & Dissanayake, 2018). A lack of employee commitment will have some negative consequences like inconsistent messages or negative word of mouth that will impact the clarity and meaning of the brand in the stakeholders' mind (Miles & Mangold, 2004). Employee commitment is an organizational behavior concept largely covered in the management literature. The concept has been applied to different constituencies in an organization, including unions, work group and teams. In brief, people in services play a significant role when it comes to interactive marketing that delivers the moment of truth as promised by the external marketing activities. Thus, employee brand commitment has to be a value adding mechanism in services since customers do judge the entire experiential value based on the moment of truth whereas as employees play a significant component within. However, such brand related behaviors of employees should be motivated through internal marketing strategies which includes many aspects and components. We also suggest to extend further studies to investigate how brand commitment behavior of employees acts as direct and indirect mechanism towards the brand related behaviors in different service sectors.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

As per empirical studies found within the domain of internal marketing, internal branding and the role of employees on brand related behaviors reveal significant knowledge for practices. However, brand related behaviors of employees within the services sector claim specific attention in empirical studies as it finds such exclusive nature compares to other sectors. In addition, conceptual relationships of internal marketing and brand commitment of employees has been investigated by authors in different countries, markets and sectors. But it finds interesting research avenues to examine the impact of internal marketing on brand related employee behaviors in different services like hotels, education, financial services and so on. The major niche of the involvement of employees in different services sectors is quite different as per the expectation of external customers. Alongside, this paper also highlighted the way how brand commitment behavior of employees is a significant matter in services whilst empirical evidences were used to support the discussion. Accordingly, authors suggest to extend the future studies to investigate how internal marketing practices result brand related behaviors and brand commitment role of employees act within the services sector firms. The main argument what we suggest is different services demand unique level of employee involvements at interactive marketing context, thus, the brand related behaviors of employees should be carefully examined to develop service marketing strategies specified to a given service sector.

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