Exploring the Impact of Internal Branding on Employee Brand Citizenship Behavior

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship among internal branding practices and employee BCB. A self-administered questionnaire was used in obtaining data from employees of telecommunication industry. The hypotheses in the study were simultaneously tested on a sample of 254 employees out of 377 distributed, giving the response rate of 68%. SmartPls was used to assess the relationship between the variables under investigation. The findings in the study revealed positive significant relationship between brand training and employee BCB. On the other hand insignificant relationship was found between brand communication and employee BCB. Management implications and direction for future study were provided.

Keywords: Internal Branding, Brand Citizenship Behavior, Brand Training, Brand Communication

INTRODUCTION

Brand management has become a priority among organizations particularly service brands to differentiate their services with other competitors to achieve competitive advantage. Traditionally, branding was mainly focused on customers where emphasis was mainly put on mass media to provide customers with information about brand (Keller, 2009). As a result of the need to build and manage a strong brand, organizations have shifted their branding strategies from customers to their employees (King & Grace, 2009). The change was as a result of the role employees' behavior play in the success of the brand. Therefore, organizations are now focusing on internal brand building in order to align the brand values with the employee’s values to deliver brand promise made customers (Punjaisri, Wilson, & Evanschitzky, 2008; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). The promise made to customers need to be fulfilled at every service encounter, to ensure long term relationship with customers. Therefore, there is the need for consistent delivery of brand promise to customers. Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) argued that consistent delivery of brand promise require employee’s consistent behavior. Hence employee brand consistent behavior is crucial to the success of the brand.

Brand consistent behavior can be either in-role behavior or extra role behavior (Shaari, Salleh, & Hussin, 2012). In-role behavior is viewed as prescribed behavior set up by organization to employees to follow in order to achieve brand goals. While extra role behavior is considered as non-prescribed behavior that is not recognized by the formal reward system which employees voluntarily engage in to achieve brand goals (Shaari et al., 2012). In particular, the present study is on extra role and conceptualized it as brand citizenship behavior (BCB) in line with the argument put forward by Shaari et al., (2012). It was
considered because it is superior in achieving brand differentiation and employees that engage in BCB may not do anything that may tarnish the image of the brand; as such reduce variability of service delivery and deliver the promise made to customers in consistent manner (Shaari et al., 2012; Burmann, Zeplin, & Riley, 2009). In particular Burmann et al., (2009) argued that BCB has impact on customer brand relationship as employees that engage in such behavior are ready and willing to help customers.

Despite the importance of employee BCB, there is still lack of studies conducted on how such behavior can be encourage or enhance among employees particular in the telecommunication industry (Shaari et al., 2012). Chang, Chiang, and Han, (2012) argued that organizations particularly service brands are focusing on internal brand building in order to encourage and enhance employee BCB. Previous studies have provide empirical support to the impact of internal branding on employee BCB (Burmann et al., 2009; Shaari et al., 2012; Morhart, Herzog, & Tomczak, 2009; Chiang, Chang, Han, & McConville, 2013).

However, there are still limited studies conducted on the impact of internal branding factors such as brand communication and brand training on employee BCB. In particular, Morhart et al., (2009) conducted a study on how brand-building behavior can be enhanced among front line employees through the practice of brand leadership. Nevertheless, the study focus only on one internal branding practice, as such practices such as brand training and communication were not included. Moreover, Shaari, Salleh, and Hussin, (2015) study the impact of brand leadership on employee BCB and suggest that further research should include other practices as factors that can be used to encourage and enhance employee BCB. Similarly, King and So (2013) in their study revealed insignificant relationship between brand training and employee brand-building behavior, this made the influence of brand training on employee BCB inconclusive; hence further study is required. Therefore, this study is aimed at unearthing the influence of internal branding on employee BCB. Specifically, the study has two main objectives

1. To examine the influence of brand communication on employee brand citizenship behavior
2. To examine the influence of brand training on employee brand citizenship behavior

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Communication and Employee Brand Citizenship behavior

Brand communication has been argued to be an important internal branding practices that affect the brand-consistent behavior of employees (Burmann et al., 2009). As such organizations are focusing on their employees to feed them with information about the brand just as they inform their customers, so as to deliver brand promise in consistent manner (Shaari, Salleh, & Hussin, 2013). Thomson, de Chernatony, Arganbright, and Khan, (1999) in their research have opined that providing employees with brand knowledge through internal communication enhanced their loyalty, satisfaction, and commitment, therefore affecting their attitudes and behaviors. Hence, providing employees with brand information has been argued to shapes employee’s attitude and behavior as it gives the employee more clear understanding of the brand values their roles and responsibilities as brand representatives (Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2013). Moreover, in line with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) it is assumed that employees that perceived that the organization has provided them with brand information such will motivate them to reciprocate to exhibit BCB to achieve brand goals. Therefore, based on these arguments the present study argued that brand communication have great impact on employee BCB. Hence, the following hypothesis is formulated

H1 Brand communication has significant influence on employee BCB

Brand Training and Employee Brand Citizenship Behavior

Previous studies have established that brand training help to induce employee brand identification, loyalty, and brand commitment, therefore enhance employee brand consistent behavior (Punjaisri, Evanschitzky, & Wilson, 2009; Punjaisri et al., 2008). In particular, Papasolomou and Vrontis, (2006)
argued that organizations through such practice as training develop more qualified and competent employee that exhibit consistent behavior in every service organization. In the same vein, King and So, (2013) opine that internal brand oriented practices such as brand training have great impact on employee brand understanding which may lead to exhibition of pro-brand behavior. Brand training is also argued to be an important practice that enhance employees brand commitment which affect their willingness to exhibit brand citizenship behavior (King & Grace, 2012). Furthermore, in line with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) employees that are provided with required brand training serve as a motivation to reciprocate by exhibiting brand citizenship behavior. As such based on these arguments this study argued that brand training have a great impact on employee BCB. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated.

H2 brand training has significant influence on employee BCB

Based on the above discussions, figure 1 below shows the proposed research framework for this study.

Internal Branding Practices

Brand communication

Brand training

Brand Citizenship Behavior

Helping behavior
Sportsmanship
Brand endorsement
Self-development

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A sample of 254 both frontline and back stage employees from telecommunication industry was used in this study. A stratified probability sampling technique was used to draw the sample from six telecommunication companies. Majority of the respondents were customer contact staff (62%) and about 50% were contract staff. Similarly, the data revealed that majority of the sample have had quite long working experience. In addition, the result indicate that majority (32%) of the respondents have had their first degree or equivalent. And finally, the data shows that majority of the respondent 27% are from customer relations department or unit.

Measures

Brand Citizenship Behavior was defined in this study as employee’s behavior exhibited on voluntary basis to project a number of generic behaviors that enhance the brand identity. The BCB construct was measured using 18 items adapted from Shaari et al. (2012). In particular, BCB is measured as multi-dimensional construct consisting of 4 dimensions. These include:

i. Brand Helping Behavior is refers to as the extent to which employee have positive attitude, friendliness, and helpfulness towards colleagues and customers of the brand (Shaari et al., 2012). Brand helping behavior was measured using 8 items from Shaari et al., (2012) instrument.
ii. Sportsmanship refers to employee’s engagement with the brand without complaining even if such may cause inconvenience and willing to engage for the brand at high cost (Shaari et al., 2012). The dimension was measured using 2 items from Shaari et al., (2012) instrument.

iii. Brand Endorsement this refers to the extent to which the employees recommend the brand to others in non-job-related situations (Shaari et al., 2012). In particular, brand endorsement was measured using 3 items from Shaari et al., (2012).

iv. Self-development refers to employee’s willingness to continuously enhance brand-related skills. It was also measured using 5 items from Shaari et al., (2012).

Brand Communication was defined as a process or method organization follow to provide employees with brand knowledge in order to enhance their brand-consistent behavior. Brand communication was measured using 5 items adapted from Chiang et al. (2013).

Brand training was defined as the systematic and planned effort by organization to develop and provide employees with brand related understanding (knowledge) and skills needed to enhance his or her brand-consistent behavior (BCB) in order to achieve brand goals. The construct was measured using 4 items from Chang et al. (2012) and Punjaisri, Evanschitzky, and Wilson (2009).

Moreover, all the measurements representing three constructs in the present study were joined into one single instrument and employees were asked to rate their responses on 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Procedure

Data in this study were collected using survey research. Questionnaires used in this study were delivered to employees (respondents) using hand delivery. Specifically, the employees were asked to rate the extent to which their organizations provide required brand training and communication and to what extent they exhibit brand citizenship in order to achieve brand goals. The data collected have undergone initial cleaning using SPSS version 18, before it was exported to PLS for path for analysis.

ANALYSES AND RESULTS

Measurement Model

In this study in order to refine and fit data for further analysis, PLS principal component analysis was used. After confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), all the four dimensions of BCB were retained. Although some items with low loadings were deleted or in order to increase the average variance extracted (AVE) or composite reliability as suggested by Hair Jr, Sarstedt, Hopkins, and Kuppelwieser, (2014). It was argued that items with loading of 0.4 to 0.7 should be deleted only if their deletion will increase AVE or CR. Therefore, all items loaded significantly on their respective constructs, hence showing items reliability. Similarly, composite reliability of all the variables is above the minimum threshold of 0.70, hence indicating reliability of all scales used in this study (Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Mena, 2012). In the same vein, the results indicated that the AVE of all the variables in this study has exceeded the threshold value of 0.50. Thus, indicating convergent validity of all scales used in the study.

Moreover, in order to ascertain the discriminant validity in this study, Fornell and Larcker, (1981) criterion was used. As contain in table 1, the square roots of the AVE of all the constructs are higher than the factor correlation, therefore indicating evidence of discriminant validity among the variables in the study.
Table 1 Discriminant Validity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>B-E</th>
<th>BC</th>
<th>BHB</th>
<th>BT</th>
<th>S-D</th>
<th>S-P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B-E</td>
<td>0.905</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC</td>
<td>-0.241</td>
<td>0.822</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BHB</td>
<td>0.466</td>
<td>-0.439</td>
<td>0.801</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BT</td>
<td>0.274</td>
<td>-0.589</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.846</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-D</td>
<td>0.503</td>
<td>-0.456</td>
<td>0.689</td>
<td>0.486</td>
<td>0.724</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-P</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>-0.153</td>
<td>0.595</td>
<td>0.298</td>
<td>0.425</td>
<td>0.823</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The bold values are the square root of AVE

**Structural Model**

The results in this study as shown in table 2 indicated supports for hypothesis 2 while hypothesis 1 was not empirically supported. In particular, the results revealed that brand training strongly influence employee BCB in organization (β= 0.496, t= 6.793). In other words, this has shown that as the organizations provide required training to employees, the employees reciprocate strongly by exhibiting BCB in order to achieve brand goal. Furthermore, the results indicated insignificant relationship between brand communication and employee BCB (β= -0.083, t= 1.292). This indicated that the respondents from the sampled organizations view the brand communication as not adequate, hence affecting their ability to exhibit BCB.

Table 2 Results for Internal Branding and Employee BCB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paths coefficient</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>T Statistics</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BC → BCB</td>
<td>-0.083</td>
<td>0.0643</td>
<td>1.292</td>
<td>Not supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BT → BCB</td>
<td>0.496</td>
<td>0.0730</td>
<td>6.793</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DISCUSSIONS**

The internal branding literatures has established the importance of internal branding as a key processes through which positive employee brand behavior can be encourage. This study has provided the empirical evidence supporting the influence of such practice as brand training on employee BCB. The results of this study shown that brand training have significant influence on employee BCB. Our finding is in line with past studies (Aurand, Gorchels, & Bishop, 2005; Mangold & Miles, 2007; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011) as an important internal branding practice that exert great impact on employee brand attitude and behavior. However, the finding in this study has contradicted the empirical finding of King and So, (2013) in which insignificant relationship was found between brand training and employee brand building behavior. Moreover, the finding have also provided further support to the assumption of social exchange theory Blau, (1964).

In addition, contrary to our expectation brand communication was found not to have significant impact on employee BCB. Our findings has contradicted the findings and arguments of past studies (Burmann et al., 2009; Chiang et al., 2013). One plausible explanation for the present finding may be that the employees are not provided with enough brand knowledge as required to shape their brand attitude and behavior. This argument is further supported by the argument put forward by King and Grace, (2010). They argued that for employees to behave in desired way, brand information must be made enough to them. Another possible explanation to this finding is there may be a gap between the information send to customers and the information employees receive through internal communication. This argument find support to the
argument of Henkel et al., (2007). The researchers argued that in order to encourage employee brand consistent behavior, the brand promised communicated to customers must be made available to employees.

In general, our study has extended the boundaries of knowledge by providing further empirical support to the impact of internal branding practices such as brand communication and training on employee BCB. Moreover, the study has uncover the need to implement internal branding to both frontline and back stage employees in order to encourage them to exhibit BCB. In particular, the study is in line with the underlying assumption of theory in which employee are expected to reciprocate with positive/negative for exchange for providing required brand communication and training. Hence, our study has theoretically revealed the relationship between internal branding practices and employee BCB.

The implication of this study to management practice is that it has reveal the importance of internal branding as a process through which employee BCB can be encourage. As such, management should attempt to use internal branding practice such as brand training to enhance their employee’s brand citizenship behavior. In particular, management should use internal branding as a mechanism to enhance employee’s ability to deliver brand promise made to customers in consistent manner so as to meet customer’s expectations.

Limitation and Future Research Direction

Despite the revealed findings in this study, there are some limitations which may affect its empirical findings. Moreover, some of the limitations serve as a direction for future study. One of the limitations of this study is the cross-sectional nature in which the data in the study were obtained. As such, future research can address this by conducting longitudinal study so as to collect data over two or more times. In addition, the study adopted quantitative method and rely on one single instrument to collect data from respondents. Hence, there is possibility that the respondents may not be willing to answer the questions correctly. Therefore, future research can combine both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to carry out in-depth investigation on the effect of internal branding on employee BCB. Similarly, the study was conducted on employees from telecommunication industry which is one out of many industries in the service sector. As such, this may limit the generalization of the findings in the study as other industries may have specific nature not shared by others. Thus, future research should consider other industry within the service sector. Furthermore, the study focused on two internal branding practices, therefore future study is suggested to include other determinant of BCB such as brand leadership, recruitment, and reward in their model. Similarly, further research is also suggested in another context so as to further validate the concept of employee BCB.

CONCLUSION

The main objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between internal branding and employee BCB. In particular, the study is aimed at examining the impact of such practices as brand communication and brand training on employee BCB. Therefore, two hypotheses were formulated and empirically tested. The empirical results have provided support to the impact of brand training on employee BCB and insignificant was found between brand communication and employee BCB. Hence, the study has contributed to the body of knowledge by further providing validating empirical evidence about the relationship between internal branding and employee BCB.

REFERENCE


