



Managing employee attention and internal branding



Gordon Liu^{a,*}, Wai Wai Ko^b, Chris Chapleo^c

^a School of Management, University of Bath, Claverton Down, Bath BA2 7AY, United Kingdom

^b Southampton Business School, University of Southampton, Highfield, Southampton SO17 1BJ, United Kingdom

^c Bournemouth University, The Business School, Executive Business Centre, 80 Holdenhurst Road, Bournemouth BH8 8EB, United Kingdom

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Internal branding
Brand orientation
Employee brand-building behaviors
Attention-based view
Inter-functional communications
Nonprofit organizations

ABSTRACT

We extend the marketing literature on internal branding by developing a theoretical framework to explain the processes whereby brand orientation affects in- and extra-role employee brand-building behavior from the theoretical perspective of the attention-based view. The results of a survey of 314 UK-based nonprofit organizations show that brand orientation leads to the development of internal branding mechanisms, which in turn fosters in-role employee brand-building behaviors. We also find that internal branding mechanisms mediate the effects of brand orientation on extra-role employee brand-building behavior, as there exists an inverted U-shaped relationship between internal branding mechanisms and extra-role employee brand-building behaviors. Furthermore, our result shows that the inverted U-shaped relationship between internal branding mechanisms and extra-role employee brand-building behaviors flips to a concave upward curve when strong interfunctional communications exist.

1. Introduction

Internal branding refers to brand-building efforts that focus on promoting a brand inside an organization to motivate the employees to transform the brand promise¹ into reality (Punjaisri, Evanschitzky, & Wilson, 2009; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006). Increasingly, organizations both in the US and worldwide (Caterpillar, Southwest Airline, etc.) are investing significant resources in internal branding (Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010; Punjaisri et al., 2009). For example, a recent study by the Canadian Marketing Association shows that < 75% of front line employees encountered internal branding related initiatives in 2000, compared to over 90% in 2010 (McQuillan & Oddie, 2011). The objective of this research is to deepen our understanding of how internal branding influences employees' contributions to their organizations' brand-building efforts.

To implement internal branding, organizations must build their employees' knowledge of the brand promise, and scholars highlight the important role that brand orientation (e.g. Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010; Urde, Baumgarth, & Merrilees, 2013) and internal branding mechanisms (IBMs) (e.g. Mitchell, 2002; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007) play here.

Brand orientation refers to organizations' focus on building and sustaining their brand promise (Ewing & Napoli, 2005; Napoli, 2006). For example, King, So, and Grace (2013) find that foreign hotels in China implement brand orientation by ensuring that the hotel service quality matches their customer's concept of the brand promise. IBM refers to concrete internal communication and training activities to build their employees' awareness and understanding of the brand promise (Mitchell, 2002; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006). For example, Punjaisri and Wilson (2011) study the IBM of Thailand's hotel industry and identify a range of activities (daily briefings, newsletters, etc.) related to internal brand promise communication. Although some scholars have implied that brand orientation can support the IBM development (e.g. Hankinson, 2001; Urde, 1999), none have used empirical data to examine this. Such insight is critical for organizations to engage in internal branding.

Internal branding entails employees transforming the brand promise into reality, which helps to shape customers' perceptions about the organization's brand (Miles & Mangold, 2005). Prior studies call this concept of employees' actions determining customers' brand promise perceptions "employee brand-building behaviors" (EBBs), which en-

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: g.liu@bath.ac.uk (G. Liu), W.Ko@soton.ac.uk (W.W. Ko), cchapeo@bournemouth.ac.uk (C. Chapleo).

¹ Brand promise defines as an explicit promise of benefits between an organization and its key stakeholder group, which organization conveys through its public messages (Morhart et al., 2009; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). For example, Southwest Airline's brand promise is the highest quality of customer service – "positively outrageous service" (Miles & Mangold, 2005).

hance an organization's brand-building efforts (King et al., 2013; Morhart, Herzog, & Tomczak, 2009). There are two types of EBBB: in- and extra-role EBBB.² In-role EBBB occurs when employees meet the standard prescribed by their organizational role as brand representatives³ (Morhart et al., 2009). For example, Miles and Mangold (2005) suggest that Southwest Airlines employees treat their customers with warmth, respect, and responsiveness in line with their company's brand promise of a "positively outrageous service". Extra-role EBBB occurs when employees go beyond their prescribed role of acting according to the brand promise when interacting with customers for the good of the organization's brand (Miles & Mangold, 2004; Morhart et al., 2009). For example, Spector and McCarthy (2012) suggest that Nordstrom employees often report doing whatever it takes to serve customers and sharing their experience with their colleagues to improve the customer brand experience. Previous studies on internal branding tend to treat in- and extra-role EBBB as similar (e.g. Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010; King & Grace, 2010), and it remains unclear whether IBM has differential effects on in- and extra-role EBBB. Clarifying this might help managers who are in charge of implementing internal brand mechanisms to promote EBBB.

Furthermore, prior studies show that work environments induced by specific factors (i.e. autonomy) can influence employees' attitudes toward supporting their organizations' internal branding efforts (e.g. Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006). Interfunctional communication takes place between employees in different functional departments (Hulland, Nenkov, & Barclay, 2012). Therefore, a high degree of interfunctional communication creates a high quality, effective work environment (Fisher, Maltz, & Jaworski, 1997; Hulland et al., 2012), which may in turn influence the internal branding. For example, Rouziès et al. (2005) suggest that effective communication between employees from the sales and marketing departments leads to sales-marketing integration, enables the marketing-staff to convey the brand promise, and help the salespeople to close orders and treat customers according to the brand promise. However, no studies, to the best of our knowledge, have examined exactly how an interfunctional communication-induced work environment affects internal branding. Such insight helps managers to improve internal branding implementation.

To address these research gaps, we apply the insights of the attention-based view that argues that an organization's decision-makers' behaviors depend on where they focus their attention, so the organization can establish strategic priorities to regulate this (Ocasio, 1997) to develop our theoretical framework (see Fig. 1). We test our theoretical framework by analyzing data collected from 314 UK-based nonprofit organizations. Our results make several important contributions. First, our study extends the internal branding literature (e.g. Ewing & Napoli, 2005; Urde, 1999) by explaining how an organization's focus on building and sustaining its brand promise affects their concrete communication activities to promote the brand promise internally. Second, we add to the internal branding literature (e.g. Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010; King & Grace, 2010) by examining the differential effects of IBM on promoting the in- and extra-role EBBB. Thirdly, by considering interfunctional communication as pivotal in influencing the impacts of IBM on EBBB, our study adds to the internal branding literature by examining the effect of an unexplored work environment on internal branding (e.g. Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006).

² The in- and extra-role performance concept originated in the management literature (e.g. Bateman & Organ, 1983) to describe two types of work behaviors: 1) those related to a formal job role (in-role performance) and 2) those that exceed the formal job role (extra-role performance). In this study, we follow the suggestion of previous scholars to use the in-/extra-role performance concept to describe employees behaviors that contribute to organizations' brand-building efforts (e.g. Morhart et al., 2009).

³ Brand representatives are individuals who behave consistently with the brand promise when interacting with customers (Morhart et al., 2009).

2. Theory and hypotheses

2.1. Attention-based view of internal branding

The attention-based view describes how organizations regulate and distribute the decision-makers' attention, which consists of three major components: "decision-makers", "procedural and communication channels" and "attention structures" (Barnett, 2008; Ocasio, 1997). Decision-makers are individuals within an organization who make decisions about performing certain tasks (i.e. customer service) at their discretion. Procedural and communication channels include various administrative procedures (i.e. personnel evaluation) and communication activities (i.e. company newsletters) set up by the organizations. Attention structures are contextual factors (i.e. organizational culture) that reflect organizations' strategic priorities. According to the attention-based view, decision-makers behave according to where they focus their attention, which can be influenced by the organizations' procedural and communication channels (Barnett, 2008; Ocasio, 1997). For example, employees are more likely to focus on providing high quality service to customers when the organizations emphasize the importance of customer service in their communications to their employees (Baker, Rapp, Meyer, & Mullins, 2014; King et al., 2013). Furthermore, attention structures provide a context for guiding organizations' procedural and communication channels development. For example, organizations with a strong innovative culture (that consider innovation a strategic priority) are more likely to design administrative procedures and communication activities with a strong emphasis on encouraging innovation activities (Chatman & Jehn, 1994). In this study, we apply the attention-based view to explain the relationships among brand orientation, IBM, and in- and extra-role EBBB.

Effective internal branding involves employees making conscious decisions to focus on transforming the brand promise into reality when interacting with customers (Baker et al., 2014; Morhart et al., 2009). According to the attention-based view, employees are decision-makers regarding the internal branding. EBBB reflects the employees' role as decision-makers who choose to support the organizations' brand-building efforts (Miles & Mangold, 2004; Morhart et al., 2009). Meanwhile, the procedural and communication channels represent various administrative procedures and communication activities that the organizations set up to influence the decision-makers (Barnett, 2008; Ocasio, 1997). IBM is organizations' procedural and communication channels, according to the attention-based view, because IBM includes both "internal communication tools" and "training programs" (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011), which reflect "communication activities" and "administrative procedures" (respectively), based on the procedural and communication channels concept. Organizations set up IBM to focus their employees' attention on the brand (e.g. Mitchell, 2002; Papsolomou & Vrontis, 2006). According to the attention-based view, organizations' procedural and communication channels influence the decision-makers' attention focus (Ocasio, 1997). Following this logic, we propose a relationship between IBM and in- and extra-role EBBB.

We expect the relationship between IBM and in-role EBBB. IBM focuses on using various internal communication tools to instruct employees about the brand promise (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011; Punjaisri et al., 2009). When organizations deliver strong, consistent information about the brand promise via their internal communication channels, they influence their employees' attention toward delivering brand promise. Therefore, employees are more likely to become brand representatives and treat customers in a way that is consistent with the brand promise (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007).

Hypothesis 1. Internal branding mechanisms have a positive effect on in-role the employee brand-building behaviors.

We expect the relationship between IBM and extra-role EBBB. To encourage extra-role EBBB, organizations need to find ways to increase their employees' attention level significantly. This means that it is

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5109477>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5109477>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)