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Exploring the Impact of Internal Marketing and Job Satisfaction on Internal Brand Equity

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Abstract

This study examines the role of internal branding in shaping employee performance and organizational culture, emphasizing the impact of job satisfaction, internal marketing, and brand orientation on internal brand equity. Internal branding ensures that employees align with the company's brand values, positioning them as brand ambassadors both inside and outside the organization. Job satisfaction influences employees' motivation and commitment to brand goals, while internal marketing treats employees as internal customers, ensuring they are well-informed and engaged with the brand's mission. Brand orientation integrates the brand's identity and vision into organizational culture and practices. Empirical data were collected through questionnaires distributed to employees in food and pharmaceutical firms, offering insights into how organizations can enhance internal brand equity by fostering a brand-oriented work environment. Findings indicate that while brand orientation and internal marketing significantly influence internal brand equity, job satisfaction does not have a direct impact. However, job satisfaction and internal marketing positively affect brand orientation, suggesting that improving these factors strengthens brand orientation, which in turn enhances internal brand equity. The results highlight brand orientation as a crucial intermediary linking job satisfaction, internal marketing, and internal brand equity. When employees experience job satisfaction and engagement through internal marketing efforts, they are more likely to adopt and embody the brand's orientation, indirectly boosting internal brand equity. These insights provide strategic value for companies aiming to enhance financial performance by refining internal branding strategies, fostering stronger employee alignment with brand values, improving customer relationships, and ultimately driving business success.

Keywords: Internal Branding, Brand Orientation, Job Satisfaction, Internal Marketing, Brand Equity
JEL Codes: M31, M12, L66

1. INTRODUCTION

A brand represents the culmination of all the impressions consumers form, leading to a distinctive position in their minds, which is shaped by both perceived emotional and functional benefits (Raj & Jyothi, 2011). It serves as a primary differentiator among competing offerings, making it a critical factor in determining an organization's success. Effective brand management has evolved into a significant area of focus within marketing literature over the past few decades (Noble, Rajiv & Kumar, 2002). This shift is driven by the recognition of how brands influence consumers' perceptions of an organization (Keller, 1998), positioning them as key assets that contribute to long-term success. Brands not only shape consumer behavior but also play a pivotal role in enhancing an organization's financial performance. By creating a strong, favorable image in the minds of consumers, organizations can foster loyalty, differentiate themselves in the marketplace, and drive competitive advantage. Kerin and Sethuraman (1998) further emphasize that the strategic management of brands directly impacts financial outcomes by reinforcing customer trust and establishing a strong market presence. As organizations increasingly acknowledge the power of branding, its role in shaping consumer perception and driving financial performance becomes even more apparent, solidifying brand management as a cornerstone of modern marketing strategies. Branding originally emerged as a method for distinguishing tangible products, but over time, its applicability has expanded to include differentiation of people, places, and organizations (Peters, 1999). This evolution underscores that branding is not limited to physical goods but is also a powerful tool for distinguishing entities such as firms and individuals (Levitt, 1980).

Recognizing the traditional role of branding in creating differentiation, organizations are increasingly leveraging this concept to build a robust internal brand identity. By integrating the brand into the organization's core values and aligning employees with these values, companies aim to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage (Pringle & Thomson, 2001). This internalization of the brand fosters a deeper connection between employees and the organization's brand values, enhancing cohesion and commitment. As a result, the corporate brand becomes more than just a market differentiator—it evolves into a strategic asset that drives long-term success and resilience in a competitive landscape. By embedding brand values into organizational culture and practices, companies can not only improve internal alignment but also reinforce their market position and achieve lasting competitive benefits. For an organization to achieve external success, it must first establish internal coherence, as employees need to understand precisely how to engage with audiences to become more customer-focused (Mudie, 2003). Organizations that develop successful brands often have a culture that aligns various departments towards a shared commitment to branding.

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Creating a brand-driven culture requires significant time and effort to cultivate the desired mindset among employees. This investment results in several intangible benefits, including reduced price sensitivity, increased customer satisfaction, fewer customer defections, a larger share of customers' spending, and a higher likelihood of repeat purchases (Knapp, 2000). These outcomes reflect the effectiveness of a strong internal brand culture in fostering customer loyalty and enhancing brand equity. Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize that customers value their relationships with branded products and the marketing agents and institutions that manage these brands (Alexander et al., 2002). The connection between customers and their branded possessions contributes to their overall brand experience and satisfaction, reinforcing the importance of maintaining a cohesive and customer-centric brand culture within the organization. By aligning internal practices with brand values, organizations can better meet customer expectations and build lasting relationships that drive long-term success (Imran et al., 2021).

In the past decade, considerable attention has been directed towards the construct of brand equity, which refers to the additional value or utility a brand name adds to a product (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). The concept of brand equity is defined in various ways, highlighting the importance of maintaining a long-term perspective in brand management. Despite differing opinions on the precise definition and foundation of brand equity, most perspectives recognize it as a strategic concern, even if this is often implied rather than explicitly stated. As a result, many companies have made significant efforts to adopt a strategic approach to brand management (Wood, 2000). Despite the increasing interest in brand equity, there remains a limited body of literature on internal brand equity. Research focusing on the internal dimensions of branding within organizations is sparse (e.g., Lynch & de Chernatony, 2004). To the best knowledge of the authors, there has been little exploration into how factors such as internal marketing and job satisfaction impact internal brand equity. This gap underscores the need for further research in this area.

This study aims to address this gap by investigating the influential factors affecting internal brand equity through a proposed model. The study will begin with a literature review to provide a foundation for understanding the relevant concepts and theories. Based on this review, hypotheses will be developed and discussed. The methodology and results will be presented, followed by a summary of the findings and their managerial implications. The study will conclude with an identification of its limitations and suggestions for future research directions. This structured approach will contribute to a deeper understanding of internal brand equity and offer practical insights for organizations looking to enhance their internal branding strategies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of brand equity has been extensively debated in both marketing and accounting literature, resulting in various definitions. Feldwick (1996) provides a straightforward classification of brand equity's different meanings, which includes: the total value of a brand as a distinct asset on a balance sheet, a measure of the strength of consumers' attachment to a brand, and a description of the associations and beliefs that consumers hold about the brand. Building on this, Baumgarth and Schmidt (2009) introduce the concept of internal brand equity by drawing an analogy with externally focused customer-based brand equity. They define internal brand equity as "the incremental effect of branding on employees' behavior" and describe it as the driving force arising from the esteem of the brand among the brand owner's own staff. This internal brand esteem is a significant precursor to employees' willingness to support the brand, both in their organizational roles and in their general behavior, both now and in the future. Previous research has shown that brand equity is a crucial antecedent of customer loyalty (e.g., Vogel et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2004). This implies that cultivating internal brand equity is essential for fostering employee loyalty. In other words, strong employer brand equity can enhance employee retention and satisfaction (Backhouse, 2004). Therefore, it is vital for business owners and managers to understand the factors influencing internal brand equity to design and deliver strategies and offers that align with market demands and organizational goals. By focusing on the elements that impact internal brand equity, organizations can better engage and retain their employees, ensuring that their workforce remains committed to the brand and supportive of its objectives.

Urde (1999) defines brand orientation as "an approach in which the processes of the organization revolve around the creation, development, and protection of brand identity through ongoing interaction with target customers, with the goal of achieving enduring competitive advantages in the form of brands." This concept can be seen as a distinct type of marketing orientation, characterized by a branding strategy that focuses on the relationship between the brand and its buyers (Urde, 1999; Hankinson, 2001; Baumgarth, 2009). Supporting this notion, Trice and Beyer (1993) demonstrated that elements of brand orientation significantly impact corporate culture. Corporate culture, according to Williams and Attaway (1996), is one of the most critical drivers of employee behavior and attitudes. For this reason, it is essential for corporate culture to be aligned with brand values (Piercy & Peattie, 1988; Hatch & Schultz, 2001). Aligning corporate culture with brand values ensures that employees are not only aware of the brand's identity but are also motivated to embody and support these values in their behavior and attitudes. This alignment is crucial for fostering a strong internal brand culture that can enhance employee engagement, drive brand loyalty, and ultimately contribute to the organization's overall success.

Baumgarth and Schmidt (2009) highlighted the substantial influence of a brand-oriented corporate culture on internal brand equity in their proposed model. They conceptualized brand orientation as a distinct type of corporate culture, aligning with the three levels of organizational culture identified in Schein's influential model (1992). This perspective underscores how a strong brand orientation within corporate culture can significantly enhance internal brand equity. Dennis (1995) defines internal marketing as a strategic management approach aimed at attracting, developing, motivating, and retaining employees by providing work products that meet their needs. This approach is widely recognized for its role in encouraging employees to adopt and exhibit market-oriented behaviors (Gronroos, 1981; Gummesson, 1991). Gronroos (1990) further argues that internal marketing can positively influence employees' attitudes and behaviors and contribute to shaping the corporate culture. Supporting this, Lee and Chen (2005) found that internal marketing has a significant impact on organizational culture.

Berry and Parasuraman (1991) describe internal marketing as treating employees as internal customers and designing job products to meet their needs. This definition aligns with the view that internal marketing serves as a means to motivate personnel towards customer consciousness and a marketing-oriented approach (Gronroos, 1985). Gronroos (1990) proposed seven key components of internal marketing, including training, extensive external communication, management support, international communication, human resource management, market segmentation, and market research. Additionally, Tansuhaj et al. (1998) outlined five aspects of internal marketing: training, communication, employee retention, incentives, and recruitment. These components collectively influence the promotion and reinforcement of corporate culture. By integrating these elements, internal marketing plays a crucial role in fostering a corporate culture that aligns with brand values and enhances internal brand equity. A review of the relevant literature reveals that much of the research on internal marketing has concentrated on employee motivation and satisfaction. Internal marketing plays a crucial role in translating the brand promises made to recruits into organizational culture, thereby influencing brand orientation. According to Frook (2001), internal marketing is essential for embedding the brand promise into the organizational culture, which helps cultivate a workforce dedicated to the organization’s goals and values. Wilson (2001) further emphasizes that corporate culture and related marketing communications significantly affect brand perception in the minds of customers. By viewing employees as internal customers, it can be inferred that internal marketing also impacts employees' brand orientation. Hence, it is proposed that: The relationship between organizational culture and employee job satisfaction has been a subject of ongoing debate. Numerous studies provide supporting evidence for this relationship (e.g., Kerego & Mthupha, 1997; Field & Abelson, 1982). Job satisfaction is often perceived as an evaluation of the organizational context, while organizational culture is described as the work environment context (Kerego & Mthupha, 1997). Kline and Boyd (1994) investigated the relationship between organizational context and job satisfaction and found that various aspects of the work environment could significantly influence job satisfaction. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume the existence of a relationship between organizational culture and job satisfaction, as supported by various studies (e.g., Hellreigel & Slocum, 1974). In light of this, exploring the relationship between job satisfaction and internal brand equity, as a culture-related construct, becomes pertinent. Investigating how job satisfaction interacts with internal brand equity could provide valuable insights into how organizational culture and employee attitudes contribute to brand equity. It has been argued that one of the primary functions of a brand is to enhance customer satisfaction, which can subsequently predict future consumer behavior toward the brand (Mittal & Kamakura, 2001). Zhou et al. (2008) suggest that marketing orientation can significantly impact a firm’s performance by influencing employee job satisfaction. This is based on the premise that every employee within an organization has the potential to contribute something valuable to the end customer. Marketing orientation, in turn, helps gather and amplify these individual efforts, creating a cohesive organizational contribution (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993). By fostering a marketing-oriented approach, organizations can align employee efforts with customer expectations, ultimately improving both brand equity and overall performance.

3. METHODOLOGY

To test the hypotheses, a structured questionnaire was developed to explore the impact of job satisfaction, internal marketing, and brand orientation on employees' internal brand equity. The questionnaire was carefully designed with items adapted from established scales. For job satisfaction, it utilized measurement scales developed by Hackman and Oldham, focusing on various dimensions of job satisfaction. Items related to internal marketing were based on the work of Caruana and Calleya, as well as Tsai, capturing different aspects of internal marketing practices. Scales for brand orientation and internal brand equity were derived from Baumgarth and Schmidt, ensuring that the measures aligned with the theoretical constructs under investigation. To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, it was reviewed by three marketing professionals who evaluated the items for representativeness, specificity, and clarity. The final version of the questionnaire was structured into two main sections. The first section gathered demographic information from respondents, while the second section employed closed-ended five-point Likert scales to measure various constructs, with responses ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

The study focused on managers and marketing experts from food and pharmaceutical companies with central offices in Tehran. This choice was motivated by the competitive nature of these industries and the relatively high number of companies operating within them compared to other sectors. A convenience sampling technique was used to select 120 managers and marketing experts from 60 companies. Since the analysis was intended to focus on companies rather than individual responses, the collected data was aggregated at the company level. The survey instrument was a self-administered questionnaire comprising 43 items, including three items designed to capture the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

4. RESULTS

Table 1 provides insights into the relationship between internal marketing, job satisfaction, brand orientation, and internal brand equity through descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. The

results show that internal marketing has a strong positive correlation with internal brand equity ($r = 0.75$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that effective internal marketing practices—such as internal communication, employee development, and organizational support—significantly contribute to strengthening the brand equity perceived internally by employees. This finding supports earlier studies that emphasized internal marketing as a foundational component in aligning employee attitudes with brand values (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006; Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003).
Additionally, internal brand equity also shows a high correlation with brand orientation ($r = 0.691$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that organizations that embed brand-related values deeply into their culture and employee conduct tend to develop stronger internal brand equity. This is aligned with the findings of Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010), who noted that internal brand equity is amplified when employees consistently understand and represent brand values.
Job satisfaction also positively correlates with internal brand equity ($r = 0.279$, $p < 0.05$) and internal marketing ($r = 0.28$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that when employees are satisfied with their roles, they are more likely to engage with and support internal branding efforts. While the relationship between job satisfaction and brand orientation is weaker ($r = 0.187$) and not significant at the 0.05 level, the positive trend still indicates a directional connection worth exploring further.
Overall, the mean values indicate that employees perceive all constructs positively, particularly brand orientation ($M = 4.34$) and internal brand equity ($M = 4.18$), reflecting a strong internal branding climate within the organization.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation

Variable	Mean	S.D.	JS	BO	IBE	IM
IM	4.07	0.672	0.28*	0.74**	0.75**	1
IBE	4.18	0.529	0.279*	0.691**	1	----
BO	4.34	0.583	0.187	1	----	----
JS	3.21	0.549	1	----	----	----

*Note: * indicates significance at 0.05, ** at 0.01 level.
Table 2 presents the path coefficients from the structural model, revealing the direct effects of internal marketing, brand orientation, and job satisfaction on internal brand equity and brand orientation. The path from internal marketing to brand orientation ($\beta = 0.843$, $t = 11.932$) is statistically significant and strong, confirming that internal marketing initiatives significantly enhance brand-oriented behavior among employees. This is in line with the view that internal marketing plays a foundational role in shaping how employees internalize and deliver the brand promise (King & Grace, 2006).
Similarly, internal marketing shows a robust and significant influence on internal brand equity ($\beta = 0.618$, $t = 5.114$), reinforcing the premise that consistent internal communication, employee empowerment, and strategic HR practices lead to stronger employee alignment with brand values.
The positive and significant effect of brand orientation on internal brand equity ($\beta = 0.251$, $t = 2.214$) further supports the idea that when employees are guided by brand-centric thinking, it enhances the strength of the brand within the organization (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007).
On the other hand, the path from job satisfaction to internal brand equity is negative and non-significant ($\beta = -0.042$, $t = -0.602$), indicating that satisfaction alone may not directly influence how employees perceive or contribute to brand equity. This might suggest that while satisfaction is important for retention or morale, it does not necessarily equate to brand-aligned behavior.
Likewise, the relationship between job satisfaction and market orientation is also non-significant ($\beta = 0.162$, $t = 0.2681$), which implies that the motivational impact of satisfaction might not strongly translate into externally-focused brand or market engagement in this context.
Overall, Table 2 highlights internal marketing as the most influential driver in the model, significantly shaping both brand orientation and internal brand equity. These findings echo prior studies such as those by Terglav et al. (2012) and King et al. (2010), which emphasized the mediating and reinforcing role of internal brand-building mechanisms through strategic internal communication and cultural alignment.

Table 2: Path coefficient of the research model

Path	β	t-value
BO → IBE	.251	2.214
IM → IBE	.618	5.114
IM → BO	.843	11.932
JS → IBE	-0.042	-0.602
JS → MO	.162	0.2681

5. CONCLUSIONS

Previous research has established that brand orientation impacts internal brand equity (Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2009). This article seeks to extend this understanding by identifying additional factors that influence internal brand equity within organizations. Building on existing research and empirical studies, it proposes a comprehensive conceptual framework that outlines the key components and antecedents of internal brand equity. This framework aims to provide a deeper understanding of how various elements contribute to the development and strength of internal brand equity in organizational settings. The results indicated that the proposed model is highly significant. The model demonstrated a positive impact of brand orientation on internal brand equity, with a β coefficient of 0.236 and a t-value of 2.069. This finding aligns with previous research by Baumgarth and Schmidt (2009), suggesting that as an organization's brand orientation increases, employee loyalty to the brand also rises. This increased loyalty can lead to better alignment of employee behavior with the organization’s brand, ultimately enhancing employee performance in meeting customer expectations. However, the results also revealed that job satisfaction did not have a significant direct relationship with internal brand equity, with a β coefficient of -0.039 and a t-value of -0.579. Despite this, job satisfaction had a modest positive effect on internal branding, with a β coefficient of 0.157 and a t-value of 2.44. This finding highlight that while previous research has primarily explored the impact of internal marketing on job satisfaction (e.g., Kameswari & Rajyalakshmi, 2012), the reverse relationship between job satisfaction and internal branding also appears to be significant. The findings support the hypothesis that internal marketing serves as a significant antecedent of internal brand equity, with a β coefficient of 0.63 and a t-value of 5.27. This conclusion is notable as it fills a gap in existing research, which has not previously explored this specific hypothesis. The results suggest that organizations can enhance their brand's presence in employees' minds by promoting internal branding practices throughout the organization. Additionally, the study revealed a strong positive relationship between internal marketing and brand orientation within organizations, with a β coefficient of 0.859 and a t-value of 12.195. This indicates that fostering internal marketing efforts can significantly bolster brand orientation. Consequently, the article recommends that organizations focus on increasing the internalization of their brand among employees by encouraging them to adopt and exhibit market-oriented behaviors. This approach could help in strengthening the brand's alignment with employee actions and attitudes. This study represents a pioneering effort to examine the impact of job satisfaction and internal branding on internal brand equity. However, further research is necessary to confirm these findings and provide additional validation. The study's constraints include a relatively small sample size and the potential for sampling bias, which may affect the generalizability of the results. Conducted within Iran, the analysis was based on a dataset of 60 samples, suggesting a need for future research in different countries and with larger sample sizes to enhance the robustness of the findings. Additionally, due to the study's cross-sectional nature, which captures data at a single point in time, longitudinal studies are recommended to assess variations and changes in results over time.

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