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

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Abstract

In recent years, internal branding has emerged as a crucial topic in the marketing field, gaining increasing recognition for its impact on both organizational culture and employee performance. Internal branding involves aligning employees with the company's brand values, ensuring they act as brand ambassadors in their interactions both inside and outside the organization. This study provides valuable insights into how key factors such as job satisfaction, internal marketing, and brand orientation play a vital role in shaping employees' internal brand equity. Job satisfaction refers to how content and motivated employees are in their roles, which in turn affects their alignment with the brand's goals. Internal marketing emphasizes the importance of treating employees as internal customers, ensuring they are well-informed and engaged with the brand's mission and values. Brand orientation focuses on embedding the brand's identity and vision into the organization's practices and culture. To explore these dynamics, empirical data were gathered through questionnaires, which were distributed to employees working in food and pharmaceutical firms. The results offer a deeper understanding of how organizations can enhance internal brand equity by fostering a supportive and brand-oriented work environment, thereby boosting employee engagement and loyalty to the brand. The empirical findings of the study revealed that while both brand orientation and internal marketing significantly influence internal brand equity, job satisfaction does not have a direct impact on internal brand equity. However, the analysis further demonstrated that job satisfaction and internal marketing have a direct and positive effect on brand orientation. This suggests that by enhancing job satisfaction and internal marketing efforts, organizations can strengthen brand orientation, which in turn indirectly contributes to improving internal brand equity. The results underscore the importance of brand orientation as a critical intermediary in the relationship between internal marketing, job satisfaction, and internal brand equity. In essence, when employees are satisfied with their jobs and are engaged through internal marketing initiatives, they are more likely to adopt and embody the brand's orientation. This alignment indirectly enhances internal brand equity, as employees become more effective brand ambassadors within the organization. These findings provide valuable insights for companies seeking to boost their financial performance. By better understanding the key drivers of internal brand equity—specifically the role of brand orientation—organizations can refine their internal branding strategies, leading to improved employee alignment with brand values, stronger customer relationships, and ultimately, enhanced financial outcomes.

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,

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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.

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.

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: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	S.D.	JS	BO	IBE	IM
IM	4.11	0.658	0.31^{*}	0.77^{**}	0.78^{**}	1
IBE	4.20	0.514	0.302^{*}	0.709^{**}	1	----
BO	4.39	0.569	0.200	1	----	----
JS	3.18	0.561	1	----	----	----

The table provides descriptive statistics for four variables: Job Satisfaction (JS), Burnout (BO), Internal Brand Equity (IBE), and Internal Motivation (IM). The mean scores indicate that Internal Motivation (IM) averages at 4.11 with a standard deviation of 0.658, suggesting a relatively high level of internal motivation among respondents with moderate variability. Internal Brand Equity (IBE) has a slightly higher mean of 4.20 and a lower standard deviation of 0.514, indicating that respondents generally perceive their internal brand equity positively, with less variation in their responses compared to IM. Burnout (BO) shows the highest mean score of 4.39 with a standard deviation of 0.569, reflecting a relatively high level of burnout among respondents, again with moderate variability. Job Satisfaction (JS), on the other hand, has a lower mean score of 3.18, with a standard deviation of 0.561, suggesting that job satisfaction is somewhat lower on average and varies moderately among the respondents. The correlations between these variables reveal several significant relationships. Internal Motivation (IM) and Internal Brand Equity (IBE) are strongly correlated, with a coefficient of 0.78, which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. This indicates that higher levels of internal brand equity are associated with higher levels of internal motivation. Similarly, IM and Burnout (BO) show a strong positive correlation of 0.77, also significant at the 0.01 level, suggesting that as burnout increases, so does internal motivation—a relationship that might seem counterintuitive and could warrant further investigation to understand its context fully. The relationship between IM and Job Satisfaction (JS) is moderately positive, with a correlation of 0.31, significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that increased internal motivation is associated with higher job satisfaction. The correlation between IBE and Burnout (BO) is 0.709, showing a strong positive relationship, suggesting that higher internal brand equity perceptions are linked to higher levels of burnout. IBE and JS also have a moderate positive correlation of 0.302, significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that as internal brand equity increases, so does job satisfaction, albeit to a lesser extent. The relationship between Burnout (BO) and Job Satisfaction (JS), however, is weaker, with a correlation of 0.200, which is not statistically significant, indicating a non-significant relationship between these two variables. In sum, the data suggests that internal brand equity and burnout are strongly associated with internal motivation, while job satisfaction is moderately influenced by internal motivation and internal brand equity. The weak and non-significant relationship between burnout and job satisfaction may imply that other factors are at play in mediating this relationship. Overall, the correlations underscore the interconnectedness of internal motivation, brand equity, and burnout within the workplace, with job satisfaction being influenced by these factors to a lesser degree.

Table 2: Path coefficient of the research model

Path	β	t-value
BO□IBE	.236	2.069
IM□IBE	.635	5.276
IM□BO	.859	12.195
JS□IBE	-0.039	-0.579
JS□MO	.157	.2444

The table presents the path coefficients (β) and corresponding t-values for the relationships in the research model, indicating the strength and significance of these paths. The path from Burnout (BO) to Internal Brand Equity (IBE) has a positive coefficient of 0.236 with a t-value of 2.069. This suggests a positive and statistically significant relationship, indicating that as burnout increases, internal brand equity also increases, although the effect size is moderate. The path from Internal Motivation (IM) to Internal Brand Equity (IBE) is stronger, with a coefficient of 0.635 and a t-value of 5.276. This indicates a strong and statistically significant positive relationship, suggesting that higher internal motivation is strongly associated with higher internal brand equity. The path from Internal Motivation (IM) to Burnout (BO) shows an even stronger relationship, with a coefficient of 0.859 and a t-value of 12.195. This highly significant result suggests that internal motivation has a substantial positive impact on burnout, which might imply that higher motivation could be associated with higher levels of burnout, potentially due to increased engagement or pressure.

Conversely, the path from Job Satisfaction (JS) to Internal Brand Equity (IBE) has a negative coefficient of -0.039 with a t-value of -0.579. This relationship is not statistically significant, indicating that job satisfaction does not have a meaningful impact on internal brand equity in this model. Finally, the path from Job Satisfaction (JS) to Motivation (MO) has a positive coefficient of 0.157 with a t-value of 2.444, suggesting a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship. This indicates that higher job satisfaction is associated with increased motivation, but the effect size is relatively modest compared to other paths in the model. Overall, the model shows that internal motivation plays a crucial role in influencing both burnout and internal brand equity, while the impact of job satisfaction on internal brand equity is minimal. However, job satisfaction does have a moderate influence on motivation.

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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