

A Critical Evaluation of Interdependence between Internal Branding, Internal Marketing and Organizational Commitment

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Abstract—The purpose of this article is to critically evaluate the interdependence between internal branding, internal marketing and organizational commitment. Although there has been much research on Internal Branding, Internal Marketing and Organizational Commitment, the aim of present paper is to develop a theoretical model showing the interdependence and relationship impact and effects between the three variables, i.e., Internal Branding, Internal Marketing and Organizational Commitment. The variables which we have proposed for model development are following: Internal Marketing (Empathy, Consideration, Benchmarking, Job Quality, Upward Communication and Information Sharing), for Internal Branding (Internal Communications, Training Support, Leadership Practices, Reward & Recognition and Recruitment Practices) and Organizational Commitment (Belongingness, Job Satisfaction, Optimism and Quality of Work Life). The present paper would go about showing the dyadic analysis, followed by a development of theoretical model between the three variables based on the related literature review.

Keywords: Internal Branding, Internal Marketing, Organizational Commitment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, none of the sectors exists within the marketplace that does not contain, or depends upon a service component. Under such circumstances, the employees become a critical resource with a vital role in long-term success (Dunne & Barnes, 2000), through their involvement and contribution in serving customers and achieving customers' satisfaction. The proportion of customer-oriented employees in the organization's workforce brings a significant difference to its competitive position in the marketplace (Varey, 2001). To have satisfied customers the organization must also have satisfied internal customers i.e., the employees (George, 1977). Satisfied employees show a precondition for satisfied customers. (Rosenbluth & Peters, 1992) and (Ewing & Caruna, 1999) opined even further and said that the needs of the customer should come second to those of employees, as

customer needs will only be successfully met after those of employees have been satisfactorily met.

This idea of satisfied employees for the benefit of satisfied customers has been accepted now all across and is being more explored by both academicians and practitioners, through the concepts of internal marketing, internal branding and organizational commitment.

Keeping in mind, two objectives of this paper have been proposed: (1) to analyze concepts of internal marketing (IM), internal branding (IB) and organizational commitment (OC) on a parallel basis, and define their scopes and correlated dimensions – Most of the research done so far have dealt with dyads of those concepts. For example, the relationship between IB and OC/Affective Commitment (Almgren & Goransson, 2012); (Christopher.A.J., 2014), the effects of IM on OC (Caruana & Calleya, 1998; Abzari M. et al, 2011 ; Farzad A. et al., 2008; Vazifehdooost H. et al., 2012) and relationship between IM and IB were studied. The triad of IB, IM and OC is a subject that to date has not received any attention. Dyads are easy to create and prove, but a triad requires interrelationship to be proved between them.

(2) to propose the dimensions that combines the three before mentioned concepts –

Till date the majority of researchers have explained internal marketing with respect to their specialization. A holistic approach is missing and therefore a new direction is needed to be explored.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The three concepts – IB, IM, and OC, are analyzed and described in terms of their definitions, objectives, activities, and dimensions. More attention is given to internal marketing, as this area is not unanimously defined. Therefore, different approaches and understandings of internal marketing are explained. Areas of internal branding and organizational

commitment are given lesser attention since they are relatively unanimously understood by both academicians and practitioners.

2.1 Internal branding

Internal branding is generally implemented in service sectors, e.g., charity organizations (Hankinson, 2004), financial service organisations (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006), hospitals (Gapp & Merrilees, 2006), airlines (Chong, 2007), hotels (Punjaisri & Willson, 2009, 2011) and shared-service call centres (Burmamann & Konig, 2011).

Internal branding is about aligning employees' behaviour with brand values by promoting and educating them about the brand values (Aurand et al., 2005). Burmamann and Konig (2011, p.376) note that what is perceived behind internal branding is the significant role of employees in building the brand. A study on internal brand management in shared-service call centres conducted by Burmamann and Konig (2011) suggests that communicating brand messages via the communication media, training activities and leaders can encourage employees to feel that they are part of the brand.

Moreover, these brand-oriented communication activities were found to be "more important than empowerment and promotional prospects" (Burmamann & Konig, 2011, 374). Morhart et al. (2009) conducted a study with 269 customer-contact employees.

Leaders may influence internal branding by, for example, persuading employees to support the brand (Burmamann & Zeplin, 2005); facilitating behavioural changes consistent with the desired brand (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006) and being responsible for defining and driving a corporate brand's identity (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2009). The study shows that communicating brand value through leaders' characteristics can build employee actions to even go beyond the brand representative roles assigned by their organisation.

Internal branding in a service sector pays particular consideration to the role of customer-contact employees (e.g., Gapp & Merrilees, 2006; Punjaisri & Willson, 2011). A study on internal branding in the hotel industry by Punjaisri and Willson (2011) found that communicating the brand through training and communication activities has a positive impact on the attitude and behaviour of customer-contact employees in their delivery of the brand promise. The study shows that internal branding activities (e.g., training programmes, daily briefings, group meetings and notice boards) encourage employees' sense of belonging to the brand and the alignment between employees' delivery of the brand and the brand promise (Punjaisri & Willson, 2011). Furthermore, in the healthcare case study of Gapp and Merrilees (2006), positive impacts of internal branding activities on employees' behaviour were found. The study shows that employees view the organisation as a quality or healthy environment and delivery these values to patients as the result of internal branding activities. However, the study suggests that an

organisation's brand must be specifically communicated to each group of employees in a simple and convincing way, which is easy for the employees to understand and believe in (Gapp & Merrilees, 2006). Moreover, Gapp and Merrilees (2006) stress that an organisation must not over-promise the brand in order to ensure that its employees are capable of fulfilling the promise.

Overall, the discussion above suggests that internal branding is generally implemented in service industries in order to communicate, express and embed brand values among employees. The existing studies have found that internal branding activities have positive impacts on employees' behaviour. That is, when internal branding activities are implemented in service organisations, employees are likely to behave in alignment with the brand of their organisation.

Employees are the vital link in building relationships with all the stakeholders as they are required to convey the significance of the brand and act as brand ambassadors. Analysis shows that internal branding is related to organizational factors such as OCTAPACE culture, communication and information, management support, leadership, teamwork, HR processes, engagement, citizenship behavior and employer brand equity. (Raj & Jyothi, 2011)

Internal branding is the process of exposing employees to branding communication so that they better identify with the core brand values. This study further, aimed to investigate the role of internal branding as a device to promote and enhance a service employee's quality commitment. Quality commitment is the employee's identification and loyalty with brand's quality goals. Survey conducted in this regard showed moderately positive impact of internal branding on service employee's quality commitment. (Yeboah et al, 2014)

Bergstrom et al. (2002, p.135), on the other hand, refer to three main activities of internal branding: communicating the brand effectively to the employees, convincing them of its relevance and worth and successfully linking every job in the organisation to support the brand essence. In the field of internal branding, communication, culture, employment and the motivation of stakeholders play a crucial role. Communication seems to be an important aspect in the literature on internal branding (Aldisert, 2002; Guaspari and Webster, 2003; Ind, 2003). Ind (2001), for instance, suggests that the concept of internal branding begins with structuring the brand idea. The brand idea consists of a core idea, an emotional idea, a functional idea, a comparative idea and values. Besides communication, culture is to be taken seriously (de Chernatony and Cottam, 2006). Another dimension that has to be taken seriously by destination managers is employment and training. Usually the HR department handles this task since it plays an important role in the internal branding process (Ind, 2003; Aurand et al., 2005; Graeme et al., 2005).

A recent study by Pappasolomou and Vrontis (2006) has found that internal branding influences employees' brand loyalty and their willingness to remain with the brand (Reichheld, 1996). It is further noted that authors view brand identification as a precursor to commitment (Burmans and Zeplin, 2005) and to loyalty (Brown and Peterson, 1993; Pritchard et al., 1999).

However, the effectiveness of internal branding on creating brand-supporting attitudes and behaviors may be moderated by a range of factors relating to the individual (personal factors) and the work environment. Factors such as age (Simons and Enz, 1995), length of service (Van Woerkom et al., 2002) organisational climate (Steers and Porter, 1983), supervisory support (Susskind et al., 2007) and perceived autonomy (Tomer, 2001) have all been explored in relation to motivation but have not been examined in relation to their impact on internal branding and the resultant employee brand identification and employee brand loyalty. Therefore this study set out to explore the views of service employees in a service industry with respect to their identification, commitment and loyalty to the corporate brand as a result of internal branding activities taking account of the employees' personal and job specific (situational) characteristics. (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2010)

Grace (2007) found three mechanisms that provide employees with essential knowledge to deliver in compliance with brand promise; training, exposure to customer and market related information and work environment. Another model was presented in this regard that classified internal branding tools and programmes into four major groups i.e. training, orientation, briefings and group meetings (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007). Yet another broader prospect was presented by contemporary researchers McLaverty, McQuillan, & Oddie (2007) who divide internal branding strategies into seven major groups including internal communication, training support, leadership practice, reward and recognition, recruitment practices, sustainability factors and others. However, these seven groups represent best practices and are not uniformly implemented in all organizations.

Based on the literature the present study identified five dimensions of internal marketing factors internal communication, training support, leadership practice, reward and recognition, recruitment practices.

2.2 Internal Marketing

Gronroos (1981), one of the scholars who early introduced the term "internal marketing", defined the term as the behavior of selling a corporation to its internal customers (employees) under the principle that highly satisfied employees will help create a market-oriented and customer-centered corporation and, consequently, encourage employees with customer-oriented awareness (Bernstein, 2005; Longbottom et al, 2006). Greene et al (1994) hypothesized that internal marketing refers to the application of marketing philosophy and methods to employees who serve customers in order to utilize and

conserve employees and guarantee they strive to finish tasks and duties. Therefore, the concept of internal marketing notices employees as internal customers and their work as internal "products", and, consequently, dedicates efforts to the design of products that better satisfy employee needs and wants (Longbottom et al, 2006).

Research reveals that the concept and the action of an organization's internal marketing upgrade employee job satisfaction Tansuhaj et al (1991); Rafiq and Ahmed (2000) Conduit and Mavondo (2001) and this in turn improve the organizational performance of the organization (Pfeffer and Veiga (1999); Nebeker et al (2001).

Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) pointed that in the service triangle, the objective of external marketing is to launch commitment, interactive marketing to fulfill commitment, and internal marketing to develop the capability to fulfill commitment. In other words, the three types of marketing in the service triangle are critical to successful service and higher corporate profits. Internal marketing is a communication process, and the purpose is to create the customer-oriented organizational culture (Bernstein, 2005).

Preston and Steel (2002) addressed issues related to internal marketing. They opined that recruiting; training, developing and motivating staff is the important components of internal marketing and felt that it is the external marketing impact of each member of the staff that is the essential focus of an internal marketing strategy. Naude et al (2003) developed three dormant variables that included person, situation, and person x situation and found that location, age, length of tenure, as well as many interaction variables. Paulin et al (2006) tested a model comparing overall and customer-linked antecedents and consequences of employee affective organizational commitment and indicated that co-worker support and the perception of fair treatment are the precursors of customer-linked job satisfaction.

Che Ha et al (2007) viewed internal marketing as an important concept where firms apply marketing tools to attract and retain the best employees which enhance the business performance. They identified 12 constructs of internal marketing inter-functional coordination and integration, customer orientation, marketing like approach, job satisfaction, empowerment, employee motivation, quality of service, employee development, and vision of the organization, strategic reward, internal communication and senior leadership.

Masroor and Fakir (2009) investigated the level of job satisfaction and intent to leave among Malaysian nurses. They suggested that the nursing staffs were moderately satisfied with supervisor, job variety, closure, compensation, co-workers and HRM/management policies and therefore exhibits a perceived lower level of their intention to leave the hospital and the job.

Panigyrakis and Theodoridis (2009) examined a synthesis of internal marketing and investigated its effect on business

performance in a retail context and developed a Structural Equation Model that indicated five dimensions of the internal market construct: formal interaction, reward systems, feedback, internal procedures and policies and internal customer orientation (ICO).

Employees are regarded as corporate partners who assist with firms to provide products and services for external customers. Conduit and Mavondo (2001) divided internal marketing activities into five constructs based on the seven categories proposed by Gronroos (2000), with the five constructs related to one another as revealed in the results of a sample survey (Suzuki et al, 2006). These five constructs are: (1) market training and education; (2) management support; (3) internal communication; (4) personnel management; and (5) employee involvement in external communication. The constructs suggested by Conduit and Mavondo (2001). Many of the studies highlighted the relation between internal marketing and job satisfaction. The factors of internal marketing like pay, coworker support, supervisors, working conditions, job security, promotional aspects, nature of work, employee selection, employee training and development, work design, job definition employee rewards and compensation, fairness, recognition, flexibility, feedback, quality of service, employee development, vision of the organization, strategic reward, internal communication and senior leadership have been concentrated upon by different authors over the years.

Based on the literature the present study identified five dimensions of internal marketing factors: empathy, consideration, bench marking, job quality, upwards communication and information sharing.

2.3 Organizational Commitment

According to psychology literature, several antecedents of organizational commitment exist. Five of the antecedents of organizational commitment are: job characteristics, role states, organizational characteristic, personal relations and group/leader relations (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). Similarly, organizational commitment is linked to job performance in terms of consequences. But at the same time, increase in job satisfaction and decrease in employee turnover were found to be significantly related to the affective dimension of organizational commitment (Jenkins and Thomlinson, 1992). The affective component of organizational commitment is more comprehensively discussed in the field of services marketing. It has been highlighted in a study that internal marketing plays an important role in developing organizational commitment but more notably, the literature review suggests the impact of internal marketing on the affective element of organizational commitment (Caruana and Calleya, 1998). It is also noted in the previous studies that organizational commitment is identified in its affective conceptualization (Sergeant. and Frenkel, 2000). Internal marketing has a significant positive effect on affective component of organizational commitment. Giving employees a vision to believe in, investing in their development and

rewarding them for their efforts i-e practicing internal marketing develops very affirmative feelings for the organization among employees as they feel valued and more respected. These positive feelings build an emotional connection between the employees and organization that ultimately leads to long-term emotional commitment referred as affective commitment in their study (Awan et al, 2015)

The concept of organizational commitment has become a vital research topic in the field of organizational behaviors ever since it was first suggested by Whyte (1956). Porter et al (1974) proposed that organizational commitment is the degree of an individual's identification with, and loyalty to, a specific organization, and includes: (1) value commitment: strong belief in, and acceptance of, organizational objectives and values; (2) effort commitment: willingness to dedicate greater effort to benefit the organization; (3) retention commitment: willingness to remain as a member of an organization (Lambert et al, 2006; Moss et al, 2007).

Buchanan (1974) believed that organizational commitment means an individual is attached emotionally to an organization, including identification with, and acceptance of, organizational objectives and values; mental devotion to, and concentration on, a job role; and loyalty to, and affection for, the organization (Dee et al, 2006). Therefore, the concept of organizational commitment embraces the following employee factors: (1) desire to strive to the fullest in order to represent an organization; (2) desire to remain with an organization; (3) feelings of belonging and loyalty to an organization; (4) acceptance of major organizational goals and values; (5) positive evaluation of an organization.

Allen and Meyer (1990) developed a conceptualization of organizational commitment that encompasses not only affective commitment and continuance commitment but also normative commitment. The latter refers to employees' feelings of obligation to stay with the organization. Such feelings of obligation result from a process of internalization of normative pressures either prior or following affiliation to an organization. This conceptualization of Market orientation 297 organizational commitments led to the development of a 24-item instrument, split into three sections, each of eight items that capture all of the three dimensions (Allen and Meyer, 1990).

3. THE RELATION BETWEEN THREE CONCEPTS

The three concepts (IB, IM and OC) are firstly compared in pairs. Secondly, their common characteristics and main differences are elaborated.

3.1 The Relation between Internal Branding and Organizational Commitment

In a broader sense organizational commitment was defined in terms of identification, involvement and loyalty (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974). Allen & Meyer (1991)

presented three components of organizational commitment: Affective, continuance and normative component. Reichers (1985) in his study to re-conceptualize organizational commitment, further explained commitment as a function of three components; affective, behavioral and cognitive. Commitment can be studied in relation to various foci and most of the available literature focused commitment towards organization. However, concern for quality was identified as an important focus of commitment (Randall, Fedor, & Longenecker, 1990). Moreover, service quality commitment was stated as a behavior of exerting effort and getting engaged with job in order to continuously improve, hence, benefiting the consumer (Peccei & Rosenthal, 1997). Quality commitment is recently defined as the employee's affiliation, identification and participation with organizational quality goals and values resulting in increased work engagement and improvement activities (Jackson, 2004) and as a perseverance of achieving quality in almost everything by organization and that can be achieved by mutual realization and dedication by all members of organization (Williams, 2006). Goffin & Szejczewski (1996) affirmed that many total quality program failed due to lack of commitment.

The study by Aktaou (2015) reveals that internal branding will ensure organizational commitment, regardless whether an employee has an individualistic character or not. This means that an individualistic character does not moderate the relationship between internal branding and organizational commitment. So, the effectiveness of internal branding will not be strengthened or weakened by an individualistic character. However, the correlation matrix showed that individualistic character correlates significant with OCB. Besides, from the four internal branding activities (i.e. training programmes, briefings, group meetings and written communications), only training programmes and group meetings are found to have a direct positive effect on organizational commitment.

3.2 The Relation between Internal marketing and Organizational commitment

The shift towards recognizing internal marketing concept is to ensure that employees feel that top management cares about them and their demands are met. The result leads to successful transformation into positive employee attitudes towards their work including organisational commitment, job involvement, work motivation and job satisfaction (Tansuhaj et al., 1991). Empirically it has been found that a significant relationship between internal marketing and consumer satisfaction exists (Tansuhaj et al., 1987) and between internal marketing and service quality also exists (Richardson and Robinson, 1986). Internal marketing has a resultant positive effect which means that employees will input greater effort rather than lower effort resulting in better satisfaction of the needs and wants of external customers (Berry, 1981; Donnelly et al., 1985; George, 1990; Sasser and Arbeit, 1980).

For an organization the employee's lack of commitment can be harmful, resulting in poorer performance arising from inferior service offerings and higher costs. Internal marketing could be the solution to gain employee commitment, succeeding where traditional internal communications programmes rather have failed (Hogg, 1996). The importance of motivated employees, arguing that this leads to a "cycle of success" that results in increased awareness of employees' roles in customer satisfaction; the integration of employees into winning teams; and a concentration on quality as the core of a service (Schlessenger and Heskett, 1991). The conclusion given by above authors argues that management of service firms need to break out of a "cycle of failure". This is built on management toleration of dis-satisfaction among employees involved in high contact situations with resulting high levels of turnover that in turn lead to a deterioration of service quality and ultimately long run decline of the organisation.

The marketing literature shows that market orientation is an antecedent to organizational commitment. Market orientation consists of three dimensions: intelligence gathering, intelligence dissemination and responsiveness (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993). In the conclusion these authors have only used the affective commitment dimension to measure organizational commitment, research using the expanded organisational commitment construct has also indicated that market orientation is only significantly related to the affective component of organisational commitment. Mankanjee et al. (2006) finds that Internal Marketing is positively related to employee Organisational Commitment.

Also previous researches have showed that successful application of internal marketing could be resulted in positive job attitudes of employees such as job satisfaction, job involvement and organizational commitment (Tansuhaj et al, 1991). This means that internal marketing has also significant impact on organizational commitment and could be tested as one of antecedents of organizational commitment (Mankanjee et al 2006, Kyriazopoulos et al. 2007 and Abzari et al. 2011). Indeed based on social exchange approach, employees will be committed to the organization when they believe that the organization is committed to them (Elanain, 2010). Considering the employees as internal market through internal marketing could improve internal aspects of organizational performance such as job satisfaction, employees' retention and employees' organizational commitment (Lings, 2004).

The relationship between internal marketing and organizational commitment was tested and it revealed confirmation of significant impact of internal marketing on organizational commitment. Indeed it seems that better providing of needs of employees through proper implementation of internal marketing principles could have a positive impact on increasing of employees' interest and commitment to the organization (Barzoki A.S. and Ghujali T., 2013)

In services marketing literature, one can find a direct or indirect affect of some of the internal marketing concept dimensions (examined in an isolated manner) on some categories or dimensions of business performance indicators, primarily: improving service quality, decreasing the rate of personnel turnover, creating customer conscious employees, improving employee commitment to the organization (George, 2009). The resultant positive effect of internal marketing will mean that employees will input maximum rather than minimum effort thereby better satisfying the needs and wants of external customers (Berry, 1981). Wellbeing in terms of six constructs including: a manageable workload; personal control over the job; support from colleagues and supervisors; positive relationships at work; a reasonably clear role and a sense of control of involvement in changes in the organization positively related with affective and normative commitment (Ajay and Sabir, 2009). Research results illustrate that all factors related to internal marketing have a full significant effect on market orientation and organizational commitment. (Abzari et al., 2011)

3.3 The Relation between Internal Marketing and Internal Branding

According to marketing & branding consultant Debra Semans : "Internal branding and internal marketing aren't all that different. Maybe the only difference is that I've been riding the brand wagon and you've been on the customer service train."

Internal Marketing requires an ongoing effort for the care & feeding of customers and employees. Most people think of applying Internal Branding, however, only when they're launching a new brand or revitalizing an old one.

"Companies just do internal branding when they launch a new or changed brand and then assume everyone gets it. But people forget, new people come on board [who weren't exposed to the previous internal branding efforts], and then you get brand creep. The ideal is that it becomes part of the way they do business, their culture ... you have to maintain it in order to maintain delivery of the brand promise to the marketplace."

So Debra recommends Internal Branding be included in an organization's ongoing training program as a "refresher course" as well as part of new employee orientation.

Internal branding is considered as a means to create powerful corporate brands. It assists the organization in aligning its internal process and corporate culture with those of the brand. Management and brand consultants have been key figures in providing valuable insights to the concept of internal branding. Little research has, however, been devoted to exploring the perceptions of the employees. As the concept underlines the role of services employees, their views may be important if management is to implement the most appropriate internal branding programmes.

The objective of internal branding is to ensure that employees transform espoused brand messages into brand reality for customers and other stakeholders. A number of publications have identified that successful internal branding engenders employees' commitment to, identification with and loyalty to the brand. When employees internalize the brand values, they will consistently deliver on the brand promise across all contact points between the company and its stakeholders. To implement successful internal brand building, IM has been suggested as a key instrument. Although IM is regarded as an appropriate approach for communicating the brand internally, communication is not the sole method to ensure the success of the internal branding campaign.

4. COMMON CHARACTERISTICS AND MAIN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE CONCEPTS

At the end of this analysis it should be acknowledged that all three concepts have the following common characteristics: (1) they are all important for the achievement of corporate goals; (2) they are all in strategic relation to the business outcomes; (3) they all target and lead towards more satisfied, loyal and productive employees; (4) they are all based on a win-win paradigm; and (5) they are all oriented towards the same target group, that is employees, although they are labeling them differently (internal market or internal customer for internal marketer; internal branding or branding from inside out; and organizational commitment or collectively employee or individual commitment).

5. CONCLUSION

Marketing may be organized as a function (which is common in organizations), but marketing philosophy is spread throughout the organization. The cross-functional coordination between departments should be encouraged. Marketing experts, for instance, should be involved in job analysis, recruitment and selection activities, performance and compensation management, training and development. Moreover, the impetus for a new interdependence philosophy should come from the decision makers, the responsibility for the dissemination is on the middle management, while everyday implementation should be the responsibility of all employees.

A triad model can be proposed for interdependence between IB, IM and OC as follows:

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