

Developing internal marketing strategies for measuring and managing employee-based brand equity

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to propose a conceptual framework for measuring and managing employee-based brand equity. Drawing upon existing research, the authors argue that internal brand management should be approached from professional and socio-emotional perspectives.

Design/methodology/approach – The study establishes a comprehensive conceptual framework by thoroughly reviewing existing literature on employee-based brand equity and internal marketing. It builds upon existing research while adding unique insights to deepen the understanding of the subject.

Findings – The proposed conceptual framework highlights the importance of both professional and socio-emotional factors in building and managing employee-based brand equity. The framework emphasises the role of employees' emotions, values and relationships in shaping their brand-related behaviours and their functional role in delivering brand promises.

Research limitations/implications – This paper offers a theoretical foundation for future research in internal branding. However, the framework is not empirically tested, and further research is needed to validate and refine the framework. Organisations can develop more effective internal branding strategies that enhance brand equity by recognising the importance of both professional and socio-emotional factors in shaping employees' brand-related behaviours.

Practical implications – Organisations can develop more effective internal branding strategies that enhance brand equity by recognising the importance of both professional and socio-emotional factors in shaping employees' brand-related behaviours.

Originality/value – This study presents a novel approach to internal brand management, introducing a unique, dual-perspective model. This enriches the current body of literature and provides fresh insights for academics and practitioners in the field of marketing and brand management.

Keywords Brand equity, Employee-based brand equity, Professional perspective, Socio-emotional perspective

Paper type Literature review

1. Introduction

Customer needs and desires are changing rapidly, and organisations must be responsive enough to meet these demands while competing with other organisations (Dede and Sazkaya, 2018). In today's competitive and fragmented market, gaining an advantage through tangible, functional benefits is no longer viable (King and Grace, 2010). To differentiate themselves and build a solid competitive position, brands must provide memorable customer experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). This issue is especially pressing in the services sector



(Markovic *et al.*, 2018) because of a service's distinct nature (i.e. intangible, heterogeneous, inseparable and perishable) (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1985).

Due to the increased competition in the service industries, many businesses focus on corporate marketing and developing a strong corporate brand to gain a competitive advantage (Sharp, 1995).

The rise of corporate marketing and branding has increased awareness of the critical role of internal marketing. Companies are increasingly recognising that their employees are not just a part of their organisation but also a vital aspect of their brand. Employees play a crucial role in delivering the brand promise to customers, influencing customer perceptions and ultimately driving customer loyalty and business performance. However, managing internal branding is fraught with challenges. As organisations grow in size and complexity, ensuring consistent brand representation across different employee groups becomes more difficult. Moreover, the increasing diversity of the workforce, coupled with changes in work patterns brought about by digitalisation and remote working, adds further complexity to this task.

Furthermore, to be more market competitive, the emphasis has shifted to “skills and knowledge”. According to Li (2022), this shift raises the value of human capital (such as employees) in terms of organisational competitiveness. Therefore, employees represent a source of competitive advantage for organisations in the business context (Barras-Arrieta and Garcia-Cali, 2020), as well as they play a critical role in brand management (Li, 2022), which could be considered the main source of organisational sustainability (King and Grace, 2010).

The importance of brand management is growing. In short, just as people require a position in society to be respected and asserted, brands must be positioned to affirm the brand's products and the company's influence on the brand (Tien *et al.*, 2019). Brand equity, on the other hand, is regarded as critical of a brand's financial success (Keller and Brexendorf, 2019), as value creation for the company and customers (Aaker, 1992), and as essential to firm success (Oliveira-Castro *et al.*, 2008). Brand equity has been defined and measured in various ways, depending on the brand's perspective. These multiple perspectives can be divided into two broad categories: financial-based brand equity (FBBE) and consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) (King and Grace, 2009). Earlier brand equity research focused more on financial indicators (Tasci, 2020). While CBBE has been the traditional focus of brand management research and practice, King and Grace (2009) draw attention to the third perspective of employee-based brand equity (EBBE). FBBE and CBBE approaches are insufficient to navigate the complex branding landscape of the 21st century. CBBE primarily focuses on the brand's perception in customers' minds. However, it largely overlooks the crucial role of employees in shaping and delivering the brand experience. This gap is becoming increasingly problematic as organisations recognise the importance of every employee–customer interaction in influencing brand perception and loyalty.

Despite the importance of EBBE, scholars acknowledged that little research had been found in the literature (Erkmen, 2018; King and Grace, 2010). This paper expands on previous research to create an integrated model of EBBE antecedents and consequences that distinguishes between a cognitive and an affective pathway to EBBE development. Previous research primarily identified brand-related antecedents (for example, brand commitment) or professional aspects of EBBE (King and Grace, 2012, 2010). Our study recognises the foundational contributions of King and Grace (2009), who explored the topic of EBBE in their seminal works in 2009 and 2010, but since then, the branding landscape has undergone considerable transformation. The digital age, increased transparency and the rising importance of corporate social responsibility have meant that employees are not just

passive receivers of brand messages but active brand ambassadors. Our study recognises and addresses this shift. While King and Grace (2009, 2010) focused predominantly on EBBE's professional dimensions, our study introduces a dual-perspective model that combines professional and socio-emotional factors. We argue that in today's interconnected world, an employee's emotional connection, value alignment and interpersonal relationships within the organisation profoundly impact their brand perception and representation.

Furthermore, given the rapid transformation in customer desires and the competitive marketplace, our research resonates with the current need for brands to provide memorable customer experiences. By emphasising socio-emotional factors, we highlight the role of employees' emotions, values and relationships in shaping brand-related behaviours making our framework particularly relevant for today's businesses. While the H factor in King and Grace's model touches upon some socio-emotive elements, our study offers a more comprehensive exploration. Rather than being mere benefits of EBBE, we argue that these socio-emotive factors are integral components that drive EBBE. They are not analogous to the H factor but serve as foundational pillars in our conceptual framework.

The inclusion of both professional and socio-emotional perspectives of employees in the measurement of EBBE has been largely ignored in the literature. The social perspective is important in creating a friendly environment in the company, which affects employees' confidence and increases their performance (Benraiss-Noailles and Viot, 2020). Meanwhile, the emotional perspective plays an important role in the self-development of employees (Tran *et al.*, 2021). Thus, high emotional attachment drives positive employee attitudes and behaviour towards the brand (Mittal *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, employees' social-emotional aspects increase their performance, further increasing EBBE (Lu and Ishak, 2022). Based on the importance of the social-emotional perspective (Benraiss-Noailles and Viot, 2020; Lu and Ishak, 2022; Mittal *et al.*, 2022; Tran *et al.*, 2021), its inclusion in the model is necessary.

This research explicitly addresses a gap in the internal branding literature, as suggested by the work of King and Grace (2010). By contributing to the literature on the EBBE through three key contributions:

First: The brand equity literature is strengthened by empirically validating a third perspective: EBBE. The paper presents a framework to assist with understanding and building brand equity from an employee perspective, respectively, the professional and socio-emotional perspective of employees.

Second: This paper enriches cognitive psychology by introducing a socio-emotional perspective. It suggests that the employee should view it from a socio-emotional and professional perspective in measuring EBBE.

Third: EBBE is an important perspective that has been ignored in the brand equity literature. Employees play a crucial role in building and maintaining a strong brand, as they are the ones who interact with customers and represent the brand daily. Employees' professional and socio-emotional perspectives are important factors that influence their commitment to the brand, their motivation to deliver high-quality service and their ability to build strong relationships with customers.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Employee-based brand

Brands are an organisation's most valuable (Keller and Lehmann, 2006) and value-adding intangible assets (Iyer *et al.*, 2018). By developing a strong company brand that consistently delivers on its promise, an organisation garners both competitive advantages and financial benefits (King and Grace, 2009). Because of this, firms have focused on building strong

brands through brand management (Devasagayam *et al.*, 2010), which presents the process of administering and promoting the brand through strategic marketing efforts to achieve economic exchanges and expected benefits.

Traditionally, brands have been focused on and managed via external branding practices that focus outward on consumers (e.g. external stakeholders) and their perceptions to drive brand growth opportunities (Smith *et al.*, 2021). However, the importance of internal customers is recognised, as is the need to promote the brand internally (Devasagayam *et al.*, 2010; Kang, 2016). As a result, organisations are motivated to invest in two types of branding strategies and activities: external brand management (i.e. consumer-focused) and internal brand management (i.e. employee-focused).

King and Grace (2010) described that employees are particularly important in brand management because they deliver the functional and emotional values of the brand through their interactions with customers. Furthermore, employees are essential for providing the brand promise; therefore, they strongly influence what customers perceive about the organisation and the brand (Preez and Bendixen, 2019). From the practitioners' perspective, the importance of employees' roles in projecting their brand equity is undeniable. Organisations increasingly encourage their employees to act as brand ambassadors (Chernatony and Cottam, 2006), brand differentiators (Gelb and Rangarajan, 2014), brand allegiances and brand endorsements (King and So, 2014). Summarising the arguments thus far, we could argue that a firm could develop its brand equity through its employees (Burmam *et al.*, 2009; Chernatony and Cottam, 2006; King and Grace, 2009).

EBBE is defined from the employee's point of view. It is based on the differential effect of brand knowledge on an employee's reaction to their work environments and cultures (King and Grace, 2009). For organisations to achieve brand equity, they must ensure their brand is significant and applicable to their employees, leading to them recognising its worth and displaying affirmative work-related conduct (King and Grace, 2009). Frontline employee behaviour represents an important personification of a brand and contributes to brand value co-creation (Smith *et al.*, 2021).

This study adopts King and Grace's (2009) identification-based EBBE, which consists of three main dimensions: internal brand management, employee brand knowledge effects and EBBE benefits. Therefore, this study proposed a conceptual framework based on the work of King and Grace (2009), thus providing a fresh perspective specifically on the topic of internal brand management as well as a starting point for businesses to measure EBBE. This study offers valuable insights into how organisations can foster a stronger internal brand culture by exploring the role of organisational identification and perceived organisational support in shaping employees' attitudes and behaviours towards the brand. Furthermore, by using a combination of measurement tools, organisations can comprehensively understand their employees' perspectives and use this information to enhance their brand equity.

2.2 Internal brand management

Internal brand management adopts a structured and strategic approach to building EBBE. It is grounded in the belief that employees are internal customers, and the same principles that apply to external brand management should be employed internally to engage employees with the brand.

It is a philosophy of valuing and treating employees as an intermediate set of customers inside the firm (Lings and Greenley, 2010; Poulis and Wisker, 2016).

It considers how employees perceive and understand the brand, their knowledge and skills related to brand delivery and their motivation to align their work behaviours with the brand promise.

It encourages building effective relationships with its employees based on a commitment to providing superior value for employees (i.e. the internal market) (Gounaris, 2006). It seeks to promote the brand among employees to exhibit positive attitudes and behaviours towards it and create a workforce committed to delivering what the brand promises (Barras-Arrieta and Garcia-Cali, 2020).

Burmam *et al.* (2009) stated that internal brand management is seen by many as a potential route to acquiring a sustainable competitive advantage. Also, internal branding increases company loyalty and job longevity; it enables employees to serve customers better because they understand the brand promise and encourages employees who believe in the brand to work harder and better (Lee *et al.*, 2019).

In this research paper, we aim to address a gap in the internal branding literature identified by Grace and King (2010). Specifically, their work highlighted the need for further research into measuring and managing EBBE. We aim to build on their insights by proposing a comprehensive model (Figure 1) for measuring and managing EBBE, encompassing professional and socio-emotional perspectives. By combining these two aspects of EBBE, organisations can create a more holistic approach to measuring and managing their brand's reputation. This model is based on the idea that employees are critical organisational stakeholders; they influence how customers perceive the organisation's brands.

By dividing the model of internal brand management into professional and socio-emotional perspectives, organisations can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to effective internal brand management. By paying attention to both aspects, organisations can create a supportive culture, enabling employees to work together effectively and build a strong brand identity. The conceptual framework suggests that both constructs must be measured through several dimensions. From the socio-emotional perspective, measurements such as human factor, management support, employee involvement and organisational socialisation can be used. From the professional perspective, dimensions such as strengthening, motivation, training and development and knowledge dissemination can be used.

The socio-emotional perspective considers employees' emotional attachment to their organisation, reflected in their attitudes, behaviours and communication. On the other hand, the professional perspective focuses on the employees' perception of their organisation's reputation, competence and expertise in the industry.

2.3 Professional perspective

Internal marketing as an "employee-focused" strategy aims at marketing the organisation inwardly to the employees through their jobs as internal products (Akroush *et al.*, 2013). Empowerment, training and development, knowledge dissemination and motivation address the employee satisfaction predictors (Ahmad *et al.*, 2012). In this way, employees become more customer-orientated and strive for higher service excellence (Akroush *et al.*, 2013).

The professional aspect includes activities related to the functional segments of an organisation. These include strengthening employees' knowledge, skills and abilities through training and development programs, promoting employee motivation by providing incentives, increasing the employees' share of information available within their organisation and developing effective communication channels between different levels of the organisational hierarchy.

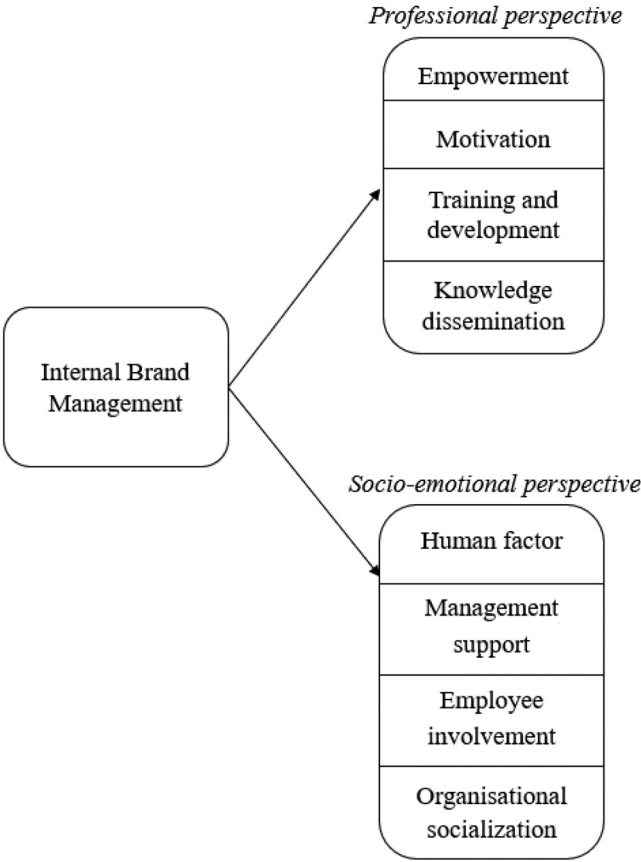


Figure 1.
Proposed conceptual
framework

Source: Authors' own work

Empowerment gives employees the authority and resources to make decisions and take ownership of their work (Lashley, 1995). When employees feel empowered, they are more likely to take risks, be creative and innovate (Rafique et al., 2022), which can contribute to building a strong brand (Soleimani et al., 2022). Empowerment can take many forms, including giving employees autonomy over their work, providing them with the necessary resources and tools (Lashley, 1995) and involving them in decision-making processes (AlMazrouei, 2021). Organisations can create a positive work environment that fosters innovation, productivity and loyalty (Kuo et al., 2010).

Motivation is an essential aspect of employee performance in any organisation. The driving force directs an individual's behaviour towards achieving a particular goal or objective (Robbins and Judge, 2022). In the workplace, employee motivation plays a critical role in determining job satisfaction (Tietjen and Myers, 1998), productivity (Lim et al., 2023), retention rates (Lee et al., 2022), innovation and commitment to achieving the organisation's goals (Hoang et al., 2023). Therefore, when employees feel valued and supported, they are more likely to be motivated to perform well and contribute to the brand's success (Liewendahl and Heinonen, 2020). As a result, organisations

have significantly emphasised understanding and promoting employee motivation to enhance overall performance.

Employees receive *training* to be equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to do their jobs well. On the other hand, *development* focuses on developing the employee's potential for future organisational roles. In addition, training and development can also help employees develop the skills and knowledge necessary to represent the brand effectively. It includes understanding the brand's values, mission, vision and products or services the organisation offers (Sujchaphong *et al.*, 2020).

Training and development can also help to create a culture of learning and continuous improvement within the organisation (Rodriguez and Walters, 2017). By providing employees with the necessary training and development opportunities, organisations can create a positive work environment that fosters innovation and productivity (Rodriguez and Walters, 2017), contributing to building a strong brand. This can lead to increased commitment (Aleem and Bowra, 2020), engagement and loyalty to the organisation.

Knowledge dissemination is an active process of obtaining and providing information for employees (Pokryshkina *et al.*, 2018). By enabling knowledge dissemination among colleagues, companies can create a sense of unity and collaboration, positively influencing the brand image (Kaoud and ElBolok, 2022). Knowledge dissemination benefits the company and individual employees, who can access valuable resources that would otherwise be out of their reach. By providing an open knowledge-sharing platform, companies can ensure their employees are well-equipped to pursue their professional goals. Furthermore, knowledge dissemination can also help to create a more positive reputation for the company in the eyes of potential customers and employees (Bravo *et al.*, 2021).

Knowledge dissemination requires a deliberate effort from leaders and managers within the organisation, who should develop effective communication channels that encourage employees to participate actively in the knowledge-dissemination process (Garas *et al.*, 2012). By creating an environment of knowledge dissemination and collaboration, managers can ensure that employees can access the necessary information to make informed decisions and contribute to successfully realising internal brand goals (Hsiao *et al.*, 2011).

2.4 Socio-emotional perspective

The socio-emotional aspect of EBBE refers to the emotional connections and relationships that employees form with the brand and their colleagues. It highlights the need for organisations to create a positive emotional climate to build a strong brand. This perspective primarily focuses on the affective domain of employees' attitudes and behaviours towards the brand, considering aspects such as emotional attachment, sense of belonging and commitment.

Organisational socialisation is how new employees are integrated into an organisation, becoming familiar with its culture, values and norms (Bauer and Erdogan, 2012). It helps new employees to understand the organisation's culture, values and mission and to develop a sense of belonging and commitment to the organisation (Filstad, 2011). When employees feel connected to the organisation, they are more likely to promote its brand and values to others, thus positively impacting customer perceptions and loyalty. Building a strong EBBE requires a deep understanding of the organisation's culture, values and employee attitudes and a commitment to creating a positive and engaging work environment.

Human factor refers to employees' psychological and emotional characteristics that influence their behaviour and performance in the workplace (Bella *et al.*, 2018). The social and emotional factors that shape human behaviour are not static but dynamic and complex. Individual differences, cultural and societal norms and situational factors influence them.

Understanding the socio-emotional perspective of human factors can help us design systems and interventions that are more effective in shaping behaviour and promoting positive outcomes.

The “H” factor, or the human factor, pertains to organisations acknowledging the humanity of their employees by exhibiting respectful behaviour, fostering cooperation, maintaining clear communication, building trust and promoting teamwork. According to this interpretation, the “H” factor is the channel through which profitable organisation–employee exchanges are realised (King and Grace, 2009).

Employee involvement impacts the organisation’s sustainability (Santoso *et al.*, 2022; Saratun, 2016). It becomes an essential factor in bringing the organisation’s success (Popli and Rizvi, 2015), since it leads to better financial performance, profitability (Choo *et al.*, 2013) and commitment (Nazir and Islam, 2017).

Employees involved with the brand are more likely to feel a sense of ownership and commitment to the organisation. They are more likely to be engaged in their work and go beyond promoting the brand. Employee involvement can take many forms, including participating in brand-building activities, providing feedback on brand initiatives and sharing their experiences with others.

Management support refers to providing employees with emotional, instrumental and informational resources by supervisors, managers or leaders. It can be seen as an extension of social support theory, which emphasises the importance of social relationships and interactions in the workplace for the well-being of employees. One of the key functions of management support is to create a positive work environment that fosters employee engagement and satisfaction.

When employees feel supported and valued, they are more likely to be committed to their organisation and its success and to stay with the company for the long term (Arshad *et al.*, 2021; Chen *et al.*, 2020; Lin and Tsai, 2020; Sepúlveda-Rivillas *et al.*, 2022). Management support can also significantly impact organisational outcomes such as productivity, retention and innovation as employees feel more empowered to take risks and be creative in their work (Tran *et al.*, 2023; Kumar *et al.*, 2018; To and Huang, 2022). Management support also involves creating a work environment conducive to building brand equity. It includes establishing a culture of trust, respect and transparency and encouraging employees to take ownership of the brand (Wassem *et al.*, 2019).

3. Methodology

Our study seeks to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework for EBBE. We utilised systematic review methodologies to maintain the highest level of rigor and thoroughness. Our literature search spanned several databases known for their extensive business and management research coverage, including Emerald Insight, JSTOR and the Web of Science. We included literature published up to January 2023.

The search terms were designed to encompass the broad spectrum of research relevant to EBBE. We used combinations of keywords such as “employee”, “brand”, “equity”, “internal branding”, “employee motivation”, “training and development”, “employee involvement”, “organisational socialisation”, “employee empowerment”, “management support”, “human factor” and “employee involvement”. We conducted a comprehensive search by examining these terms within the articles’ titles, abstracts and keywords. Following the initial search, we performed a multi-stage screening process. First, we screened titles and abstracts for relevance, excluding studies that did not meet our criteria. And lastly, we conducted a full-text review of the remaining articles, further refining our selection. This systematic

approach ensured that only the most relevant and high-quality studies were included in our review.

Furthermore, to ensure the credibility and reliability of our review, we evaluated the quality of the selected studies. This study used a standardised checklist to assess methodological soundness, appropriateness of statistical analysis and the extent to which the results supported each study's conclusions. A data extraction form was developed to gather relevant information from each study consistently. This included study objectives, methodologies used, key findings and implications for EBBE. We employed thematic analysis to interpret the extracted data. This involved coding the data, identifying patterns and grouping these into broader themes related to EBBE. The analysis was iterative, meaning we continually refined our themes as we gained a deeper understanding of the data.

While the crux of this manuscript revolves around synthesising existing literature into a comprehensive framework, it is one step in a more extensive research journey. The literature review, while thorough, serves as a foundation upon which further empirical studies can be constructed. Drawing from the insights unearthed in our review, we have pinpointed several potential avenues for primary research. Both qualitative and quantitative investigations intend to validate, refine and possibly extend the insights encapsulated in our conceptual framework.

In developing our conceptual framework, we sought to create a universally applicable model for measuring and managing EBBE. Rooted in an extensive literature review that spans various industries and geographical contexts, we believe the foundational principles of our framework, specifically the emphasis on professional and socio-emotional factors, are consistent across diverse settings. While the framework is theoretically robust, we acknowledge the merit of empirical validation. Future endeavours might include pilot studies in different sectors or cultures to examine the adaptability and resonance of our proposed model in varied contexts.

However, a qualitative approach involving in-depth interviews with industry stalwarts promises rich insights into our framework's practical implications and challenges. Concurrently, a quantitative trajectory, utilising structured surveys, could statistically test the relationships and assertions embedded within our model. By integrating qualitative and quantitative insights, we aim to mitigate individual biases, bolstering our findings' robustness and generalisability.

Following the analysis, we synthesised the data to draw conclusions and identify gaps in the literature. We used a narrative approach, integrating the findings from different studies to present a cohesive picture of the current state of EBBE research. Following this rigorous, systematic methodology ensured our review was comprehensive, transparent and reliable. This approach facilitated the development of our conceptual framework for EBBE, making a valuable contribution to the literature.

4. Results

The primary nature of our manuscript is conceptual, rooted in the synthesis of existing literature to propose a comprehensive framework for measuring and managing EBBE. Given this focus, empirical results, as seen in primary research studies, are not present. Our aim was not to present new empirical findings but to consolidate, reinterpret and extend existing knowledge. In doing so, we provide a theoretical platform that addresses gaps in current literature and sets the stage for future empirical research.

This paper highlighted a growing recognition among researchers and practitioners of the importance of EBBE as a significant factor in brand management (Li, 2022; King and Grace, 2009). The literature analysis revealed that adequate organisational socialisation plays a

significant role in shaping EBBE. Integrating new employees into the organisation and fostering a sense of belonging and commitment to its culture, values and mission emerged as a key theme (Tang *et al.*, 2014; Allen and Meyer, 1990). The reviewed studies consistently highlighted that employees who experience a positive socialisation process during onboarding are more likely to develop strong affiliations with the organisation (Xu *et al.*, 2019) and become brand advocates (Nguyen *et al.*, 2021).

The H-factor emerged as another significant factor contributing to EBBE. Different studies emphasised that a work environment characterised by respectful behaviour, cooperation, clear communication, trust and teamwork leads to stronger organisation–employee exchanges (Walden and Westerman, 2018; LaGree *et al.*, 2021). Employees who perceive a supportive and respectful atmosphere are more inclined to engage in positive brand-related activities and demonstrate a deeper connection to the organisation's brand (King and Grace, 2012).

Different studies (Sutherland, 2006; Morhart *et al.*, 2009) consistently reported that when employees actively participate in brand-building activities, share their experiences and provide feedback on brand initiatives, they develop a sense of ownership and commitment to the organisation. This heightened commitment translates into increased employee engagement, ultimately contributing to brand promotion and advocacy.

Studies always indicated that employees who perceived strong emotional, instrumental and informational support from their managers demonstrated higher engagement and job satisfaction (Scridon, 2020). Supportive management practices enhanced commitment, productivity, retention and innovation among employees, fostering a positive work environment conducive to building brand equity (Pahlberg, 2009; Nurul Ezaili *et al.*, 2019).

Internal marketing, a strategy focused on marketing the organisation inwardly to employees, plays a significant role. This includes empowering employees, providing training and development, disseminating knowledge and fostering motivation. Empowerment gives employees the authority and resources to take ownership of their work, increasing creativity and innovation, positively impacting brand building (Zhang and Bartol, 2010). Motivated employees contribute to job satisfaction, productivity and commitment to organisational goals, ultimately influencing brand success (Bin Majid and Hanaysha, 2018; Dartey-Baah, 2010). Training and development equip employees with the knowledge and skills to represent the brand effectively and create a culture of continuous improvement (Scridon, 2020). Knowledge dissemination fosters unity, collaboration and a positive brand image, enabling employees to access valuable resources to support their professional growth (Liu, 2022). Effective utilisation of these professional aspects can enhance employees' commitment, loyalty and engagement, contributing to the brand's overall strength.

Regarding professional factors, (Akroush *et al.*, 2013) found that employees' understanding of the brand's strategic positioning significantly influences their ability to represent the brand accurately and consistently in their roles. Moreover, a study by Ahmad *et al.* (2012), Sujchaphong *et al.* (2020) highlighted the importance of continuous training in equipping employees with the skills and knowledge needed to deliver the brand promise effectively. These findings suggest that organisations aiming to enhance EBBE should adopt a holistic approach that addresses both socio-emotional and professional aspects of their employees' brand-related behaviours.

5. Discussion

This paper expands on previous research to create an integrated model of EBBE antecedents and consequences that distinguishes between a cognitive and an affective pathway to EBBE development. King and Grace (2010) identified a void in the existing literature on internal

branding, which the present study endeavours to fill. Previous research primarily identified brand-related antecedents (for example, brand commitment) or professional aspects of EBBE (King and Grace, 2010). Despite the growing acknowledgement of the significance of employees' emotions and feelings within their organisations, the socio-emotional perspective of organisational culture has received limited scholarly focus (Men and Yue, 2019). Including professional and socio-emotional aspects of employees in measuring EBBE has largely been ignored in the literature.

The framework shown in Figure 1 recognises that employees have rational and emotional responses to their work environment and that these responses can affect their engagement and commitment to the organisation's brand. Employees who feel a strong emotional connection to the brand are likelier to be loyal to the company, and its products or services are likely to advocate for it (Magids *et al.*, 2015). The proposed framework provides a comprehensive conceptualisation of how to measure EBBE and, importantly, what dimensions contribute to such equity. Recognised brand equity is an asset that is more valuable than the firm's tangible assets and an indicator of the organisation's future success and sustainability (Boukis and Christodoulides, 2020; Li, 2022). As a result, this article aimed to demonstrate how the EBBE framework enables improved internal brand management practices. The proposed conceptual framework highlights the importance of considering professional and socio-emotional perspectives when measuring and managing EBBE. By doing so, organisations can better understand the factors contributing to their internal brand management and develop strategies to strengthen their brand through their employees.

The professional perspective focuses on employees' skills, knowledge and abilities, as well as their job performance and commitment to the organisation. Companies need employees who have the necessary skills and expertise to deliver high-quality products or services and who can represent the brand in a positive light. Employees who lack the necessary skills or have not received proper training can harm brand equity by providing subpar customer service or making mistakes that negatively impact the brand. On the other hand, the socio-emotional perspective focuses on employees' emotional connection with the organisation and its brand. This perspective can significantly impact brand equity by reflecting employees' engagement and commitment towards the company and its values. Furthermore, the socio-emotional perspective suggests that employees with a strong emotional attachment to the organisation are more likely to promote and advocate for the brand, which can positively impact brand equity. On the other hand, employees who feel disconnected from the brand or have negative emotions towards it can harm brand equity by providing poor customer service or speaking negatively about the brand.

By assessing the professional perspective of EBBE, organisations can identify areas for improvement in employee training and development programs and recruitment and selection processes. By assessing EBBE's socio-emotional perspective, organisations can identify ways to strengthen employee engagement and commitment, such as creating a positive work environment, promoting work-life balance and offering employee involvement and participation opportunities.

6. Implications and future research

Theoretical implications: The study provides a nuanced understanding of EBBE, contributing to internal marketing and brand management literature. The conceptual framework developed in this study proposes a holistic approach towards EBBE, incorporating socio-emotional and professional aspects of employees' relationships with the brand. This integrated view departs from the traditionally fragmented approach, which either overly focuses on brand-related antecedents or professional aspects of EBBE.

In the EBBE framework, including socio-emotional factors, such as emotional attachment to the brand and sense of belonging to the organisation, is a significant theoretical contribution. It acknowledges the crucial role of employees' emotions and feelings in shaping their behaviours and attitudes towards the brand, an aspect previously underemphasised in the EBBE literature. Furthermore, the study underscores the interplay between professional and socio-emotional aspects, suggesting that these two dimensions are not mutually exclusive but interact to shape EBBE.

The proposed framework paves the way for more comprehensive, multidimensional measures of EBBE. The current study suggests that assessing EBBE should not merely focus on employees' skills, knowledge or job performance but also their emotional connections to the brand and the organisation. Integrating these two dimensions in a single framework provides a more complete understanding of EBBE, offering a more robust theoretical foundation for future research.

Practical implications: The study's findings offer practical insights for managers and practitioners interested in strengthening their brand through employees. From a practical standpoint, organisations can utilise our framework to design internal marketing strategies that boost employee engagement, loyalty and advocacy. By understanding the dual role of professional and socio-emotional factors, businesses can craft holistic interventions that cater to their workforce's functional and emotional needs. It can enhance brand performance, customer satisfaction and better financial outcomes.

On the professional front, companies should invest in employee training and development programs to equip their employees with the necessary skills and knowledge to represent the brand effectively. This includes fostering a continuous learning and improvement culture and creating opportunities for knowledge dissemination. From the socio-emotional perspective, companies need to build a positive emotional climate that fosters a strong sense of attachment, belonging and commitment to the brand among employees. This could be achieved by creating a supportive and respectful work environment, fostering cooperation and clear communication and promoting teamwork. By emphasising the significance of socio-emotional well-being in enhancing brand performance, banks can be influenced to craft regulations that prioritise employee mental health, work-life balance and overall well-being.

Lastly, our research underscores the importance of businesses investing in their employees – not just as functional assets but as emotional beings. When companies prioritise employee well-being, it sets a precedent for others, leading to a ripple effect where workforce happiness and well-being become paramount. It can influence public attitudes towards work, promote healthier work environments and improve overall quality of life. By adopting a holistic approach towards EBBE, organisations can better engage their employees, foster loyalty and commitment and ultimately strengthen their brand equity.

Future research: Our proposed conceptual framework for measuring and managing EBBE consolidates existing literature and identifies gaps. It catalyses future empirical studies that can validate, refine or even challenge our proposed model. Moreover, by highlighting the importance of professional and socio-emotional factors, our study opens avenues for interdisciplinary research, combining insights from branding, organisational behaviour and social psychology. Further research can be conducted to test the validity and reliability of this framework in different contexts and industries. Some other future research considerations based on this framework could include the following:

Measurement and metrics: Developing valid and reliable metrics to measure EBBE is essential. Future research could focus on developing better methods to quantify the impact of EBBE on brand performance.

Cross-cultural comparisons: Comparing EBBE across different cultures and countries can improve the understanding of how cultural differences impact employee and brand relationships. Such research can also help businesses tailor their employee-based branding strategies to specific cultural contexts.

Role of leadership: Leadership in building EBBE is critical. Future research can explore how leadership styles, behaviours and actions influence employees' attitudes and behaviours towards the brand.

Overall, these research considerations can help businesses develop a deeper understanding of the role of employees in building brand equity from both professional and socio-emotional perspectives. By understanding the underlying factors influencing employees' attitudes and behaviours, businesses can develop more effective strategies to build and maintain EBBE over time.

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