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The Role of Brand Knowledge in Explaining Relationship between Brand-Centered Communications and Brand Commitment: Evidence from Public Banks Pakistan

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which internal brand communication (IBC) impacts on brand commitment (BC).

Research design, data, and methodology – A structured questionnaire has been built and distributed on a total sample of 650 banking staff working in five public banks in Pakistan.

Results – The findings of PLS-SEM revealed that besides the indirect effect of internal brand communication (IBC) on brand commitment via brand knowledge, the study also exposes a direct positive effect of IBC on brand commitment. This study also reveals that brand commitment is affected by brand knowledge and internal brand communication practices. The result of mediation reveals that brand knowledge partially mediated the relationship between independent and dependent variables.

Practical implications- This study empirically validates that internal brand communication and brand knowledge are prerequisites for brand commitment. Therefore, managers, particularly in-service enterprises, should provide sufficient IBC practices and appropriate brand knowledge to enhance employees' brand commitment.

Conclusions – The comprehensive analysis of the impact of brand knowledge on the proposed relationship. It further adds up to the branding literature, which is mostly qualitative and lacks empirical validation.

Keywords: Brand Commitment, Brand-Centred Communication, Brand Knowledge, Internal Branding, Public Banks, Pakistan.

JEL Classifications: C12, G21, L32, M31, M37.

1. Introduction

The services industry act as a mainstay of the world economies and it is one of the fastest and emerging sectors in the world economy (Zameer, Wang, Yasmeen, Mofrad, & Waheed, 2018). This sector accounts for the largest (65.1%) percentage of world GDP and a major employer of labor in high-income countries. Banks are competing intensely in a highly competitive environment to offer quality services according to customers' expectations (Arokiasamy, 2013). According to Adjei (2014), service companies cannot fight

the intense market competition successfully, without integrating employee commitment in their overall internal branding (IB) programs. Service companies deliberately try to create a better working environment where, commitment and superior brand performance are assured (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006; Vatankhah & Darvishi, 2018).

Employee brand commitment (BC) has been viewed as the most influencing factor in building a strong brand in many industries (Ahn, Hyun, & Kim, 2016; Kemp, Williams, & Bordelon, 2012; Tsang, Lee, & Li, 2011; Tuškej, Golob, & Podnar, 2013). Service organizations need to develop a higher level of employee commitment that leads to brand success and customer satisfaction, however, to instill commitment among employees is still a challenging task for many organizations (Burmman & Zeplin, 2005; Burmann, Zeplin, & Riley, 2009).

Gaining the importance of the commitment construct among managers and practitioners, research studies pertinent to brand commitment is scarce. Although the effect

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of employee commitment on brand citizenship behaviors has already been studied (Tergrav, Ruzzier, & Kaše, 2016). However, still, it remains unclear what drives employees' brand commitment (Tergrav et al., 2016). Likewise, O'Callaghan (2013) contended that studies on commitment have frequently been externally focused while little attention is paid to internally oriented commitment. In spite of all these efforts, the concept of employee commitment towards the brand still appears to be ignored (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2010). Hence, in the extant branding literature, a significant amount of consideration has been given to reconnoitering the antecedents of employee commitment (Tergrav, Ruzzier, & Kaše, 2016).

Caruana and Calleya (1998) cautioned that lack of commitment from workers can be detrimental to a company, resulting in poorer performance arising from lower service standards and higher costs. Thus, banks to succeed, employees' commitment must be ensured (Vazifehdoost & Hooshmand, 2012). Caruana and Calleya (1998), and Farzad, Caruana, and Nahavandi (2008) propounded that companies can achieve such coveted commitment through the effective use of internal branding programs.

In the economic scenario of Pakistan, the services sector contributes one third in employment and accounts for 54% of GDP (Islam, Ali, Aamir, Khalifah, & Ahmad, 2015). Several causes of the lackluster performance of the banking sector in South Asia including Pakistan have been cited by the world bank, low employee commitment is among one of them (Namgyel, 2003). Only a few studies have been conducted to examine the factors affecting employees' commitment in the Pakistani banking sector (UIHaq, Jindong, Hussain, & Anjum, 2014; Imam, Raza, Shah, & Raza, 2013; Ramay, 2012). According to Danish, Humayon, Shahid, and Nawaz (2015) employee brand-building behavior which is a permanent feature of internal branding (IB) needs to be assessed through their attitude such as commitment (Danish, Humayon, Shahid, & Nawaz, 2015).

On the basis of aforementioned discussion regarding commitment, this study investigates internal brand communication (IBC) as an important predictor of employees' brand commitment (Du Preez & Bendixen, 2015; Olannye, 2016). Punjaisri, (2008) argued that IBC has the potential to influence brand performance through its affect on employee's brand commitment.

In the present study employee brand knowledge (BK) is used as a mediator variable to examine the mediating effects of BK on the relationship between IBC and brand commitment. Hence, this has necessitated the need to carry out this study. The main objective of the study is to empirically investigate the mediating role of employee BK on the initial relationship between IBC and BC among banking staff of public sector banks operating in Pakistan.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Employee Brand Commitment

Reviews of the extant literature have shown that the construct of commitment has been studied extensively since the 1960s to understand the relationship between the employee and the organization (Jonsson & Jeppesen, 2012). Brand commitment is a key concept in marketing and brand management perspectives, due to its significant influence on employees attitude and behavior (Buil, Catalán, & Martínez, 2016). In the organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) literature, Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine and Bachrach (2000) reported that organizational commitment (OC) is the most highly recognized determinants of employees organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Likewise, in the instance of service brands, brand commitment (BC) is understood as synonymous with OC (Burmam et al., 2009; King & Grace, 2012; Shaar et al., 2012; Du Preez & Bendixen, 2015). Burmann and Zeplin (2005), and King and Grace (2012) claimed that one of the desired outcomes of IBM effects is brand commitment.

Contrary to positive effects of commitment, a lack of commitment is demonstrated by inappropriate behavior during service delivery with the consequence of eroding customer loyalty, that results in deteriorating firms' brand equity (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2009).

The current study defines brand commitment as the degree to which employee identify with and emotionally attached to the organizations' brand and exhibiting a willingness to put in additional efforts for the organization (brand) to achieve its goals and objectives, and strong desire to remain with the organization (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2010). In order to realize the true benefits of a committed workforce, there is a growing amount of attention in the branding literature to reconnoiter the antecedents of employee brand commitment (Tergrav, Ruzzier, & Kaše, 2016).

2.2. Internal Brand Communication (IBC)

Some scholars viewed brand communication as a useful tool for creating and maintaining a positive brand image and reputation for the business organizations in the external market (Argenti & Forman, 2002; Tench & Yeomans, 2006). While others view it as a relationship management and commitment building function (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006; Jo & Shim, 2005). Researchers argued that IB initiatives start only when appropriate brand information is transmitted to employees in a meaningful way to enable them to deliver a high-quality customer-brand experience in accordance with brand standards (Baker, Rapp, Meyer, & Mullins, 2014).

Internal brand communication is one of the fundamental attributes of brand commitment, and according to few researchers IBC is a precursor of brand commitment and

affects it positively (Bambacus & Patrickson, 2008; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Porricelli, Yurova, Abratt, & Bendixen, 2014).

In this study, IBC refers to as communicating with employees inside a company and to create and implement behavioral changes (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007). To achieve this, it depends on the selection of appropriate IBC practices, which should have the ability to establish employee brand knowledge, strengthen their commitment in order to reflect distinct brand values through their behavior (Brexendorf, Tomczak, Kernstock, Henkel, & Wentzel, 2012; Miles, Mangold, Asree, & Revell, 2011; Du Preez, 2017; Xiong, King, & Piehler, 2013). Contrary to this, ineffective IBC dissemination is believed to have a negative impact on employees commitment (Punjaisri, 2008).

2.3. The Relationship between Brand Communication and Brand Commitment

Internal brand communication dissemination is a conscious effort from the employer to develop a workforce that is highly committed to the set of organizational (brand) goals and values (Dryl, 2017). Chen, Silverthorne, and Hung (2005) noted that those enterprises where there is a higher level of top-down communication prevail among management and employees will generate a higher level of commitment and organizational performance that helps to drive business success. Several notable branding scholars such as Burmann, Jost-Benz and Riley (2009), Chang (2009), Jou, Chou and Fu (2008), and Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) argued that one of the key variables for strengthening brand commitment is IBC and declared that internal branding is primarily worked through effective IBC programs.

Research examining the associations between IBC and brand commitment is limited. Moreover, studies that investigated linkages between communication and commitment have appeared to argue that communication is an antecedent of commitment and effects it positively (Bambacus & Patrickson, 2008; Bregoli, 2013; Burmann, Jost-Benz, & Riley, 2009; de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003; Porricelli, Yurova, Abratt, & Bendixen, 2014).

For instance, the study of Punjaisri, Evanschitzky, and Wilson (2009) revealed that among key drivers of brand commitment, IBC influenced the most. In particular, the study by Zeffane, Tipu, and Ryan (2011), the findings of their evidence that communication seems apparently to have a relationship with employee's trust, and according to these researchers, trust is antecedent to communication, which in turn affects commitment. Likewise, the study of Sharma and Kamalanabhan, (2012) on the perception of Indian public-sector employees provided empirical evidence supporting that IBC has a positive impact on employees' brand commitment. A recent study of Du Preez and Bendixen (2015) and Porricelli, Yurova, Abratt, and Bendixen (2014) found that IBC indirectly influenced employees' brand commitment.

Whereas, Almgren and Goransson (2012) study found the contrary. Thus, it can be concluded that messages from top management contribute to employees' brand understanding and awareness, which is necessary to engender employees' brand commitment (Miles, Mangold, Asree, & Revell, 2011; Xiong, King, & Piehler, 2013). This results in the following hypothesis;

H1: Internal brand communication has a positive significant effect on brand commitment

2.4. The Relationship between Internal Brand Communications and Employee Brand Knowledge

Brand management literature emphasized that employees' brand knowledge is as important as customers' knowledge regarding the organization's products and services. Organizations need to ensure that brand knowledge is adequately developed through internal brand communication practices as both IBC and brand knowledge dissemination are important determinants of employee commitment (Ahn et al., 2016; King & Grace, 2010). More importantly, the higher level of employees' brand commitment is regarded as one of the key outcomes of effective brand knowledge dissemination (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005, 2008; King, 2010; Miles, Mangold, Asree, & Revell, 2011; Xiong, King, & Piehler, 2013). In this study, employee brand knowledge is defined as the extent to which employees understand their organization's brand meaning, knowledge of customers' needs and expectations and understanding of their responsibility to successfully deliver the brand promise (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2009).

Evidently, in the absence of an appropriate brand knowledge will result into role ambiguity and confusion (King & Grace, 2010; Piehler, 2018), that will negatively impact on commitment (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). Past studies indicate that employees' brand knowledge is expected to be increased in the presence of IBC dissemination. For instance, Boukis and Lings, (2017) study the consequences of internal marketing orientation specifically brand communication on employee brand knowledge in the high contact European service industries such as hotels, restaurant chains, and banks, and the result of their study evidenced that IBC dissemination had influenced considerably on employees' brand knowledge.

Therefore, in this study, it is hypothesized that those employees who have sufficient knowledge of the organization's brand due to IBC dissemination enable them to deliver on the brand promise and exhibit brand-aligned behavior. Branding literature pertaining to IB indicates the positive effects of IBC on employees' brand knowledge. Therefore, the following hypothesis is offered.

H2: Internal Brand communication has a significant positive effect on brand knowledge.

2.5. The Relationship between Brand Knowledge and Brand Commitment

Brand knowledge is considered as one of the most important dimensions of brand commitment (Piehler, 2018), in addition to that, this dimension turns up in several internal branding models (e.g. Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2009). More specifically, firms can channelize employees' brand knowledge into their brand attitude (e.g. identification & commitment) and brand behavior (e.g. brand performance) that leads to brand success.

However, mixed results have been reported on the relationship between brand knowledge and brand commitment (e.g. King & Grace, 2012; Terglav, 2017; Xiong, King, & Piehler, 2013). For instance, King (2010) in hospitality and tourism (H&T) industry studied the relationship between organizational BK dissemination and H&T employees' commitment. The results of his study showed that the brand knowledge dissemination had a significant effect on H&T employees' commitment to the brand. Contrary to this, King and Grace (2012), concluded that even though service staff brand-building behavior is considerably affected by their brand-specific knowledge of how to deliver the brand successfully, however, their brand commitment was not influenced by such knowledge. Likewise, the findings of Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2009) demonstrated that employees' brand knowledge insignificantly influences employees' brand commitment. This assertion is further supported by a recent study of Xiong, King, and Piehler (2013), where the researchers found no significant relationship between employee brand knowledge and brand commitment.

On the basis of above discussion, it can be asserted that appropriate' brand knowledge is a prerequisite to enhance employees' brand commitment (Miles, Mangold, Asree, & Revell, 2011; Xiong, King, & Piehler, 2013). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is offered.

H3: Brand knowledge has a significant positive effect on brand commitment.

3. The Mediating Role of Employee Brand Knowledge among Internal Brand Communication and Brand Commitment

In the internal branding context, it is propounded that appropriate and accurate brand knowledge enhance employees brand commitment (King & Grace, 2010; Porricelli, Yurova, Abratt, & Bendixen, 2014 ; Xiong, King, & Piehler, 2013). Internally oriented IBC initiatives drive employees brand knowledge and role clarity, which in turn positively affect the brand commitment of employees (Miles, Mangold, Asree, & Revell, 2011; Xiong, King, & Piehler, 2013). Therefore, banks managers have to make sure that

brand promises and values have the same meaning for all service employees to deliver on customers expectations. Specifically, the current study hypothesizes that IBC dissemination affects employees brand commitment via brand knowledge which acts as a mediator in this study. In earlier studies, brand knowledge has been used as a mediator (e.g. study of Bataineh & Alfalah, 2015; Terglav, Ruzzier, & Kaše, 2016). As such, IBC affects on employees' brand commitment through brand knowledge that is embedded in their memory.

According to marketing and management scholars (e.g. Aseleage & Eisenberger, 2003; Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003; Flynn, 2005), the relationship between internal employees and the company can be better explained by social exchange theory (SET). While numerous facets of social exchange exist, however, the most dominant is reciprocity behavior, where positive and fair exchanges between organization and employee result in favorable attitudes and behaviors (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). SET suggests that usually employees are inspired to engage in a relationship when they perceive that their relationship with the company is established on fairness, and also perceive that their expectations have been met sufficiently (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000; Turnley, Bolino, Lester, & Bloodgood, 2003), which in turn motivates them to build a long-term commitment with the organization and reciprocate with positive attitude and behavior.

Based on the aforementioned discussion, the theoretical interrelationship among IBC and Brand commitment has been established, but there is a lack of study to evaluate the mediating effects of brand knowledge on the proposed relationship between IBC and brand commitment, accordingly, the following hypothesis is offered.

H4: Brand knowledge mediates the relationship between internal brand communication and brand commitment.

4. Method

4.1. Sampling Procedure

The financial industry of Pakistan is divided into banking and non-banking financial sector. Banking sector of Pakistan represents 95% of the financial industry. Pakistan banking sector comprises of public banks, private and foreign banks, Islamic banks, Microfinance Banks (Umrani, 2016). However, only public sector banks have been included in the study for data collection purposes. Five public banks namely, First Women Bank, Khyber Bank, Bank of Punjab, Bank of Sindh, and National Bank of Pakistan are currently functioning in Pakistan. According to state bank of Pakistan (2017) statistics, total 27,585 employees are working in these five public banks and operating through a network of 2,360 branches nationwide.

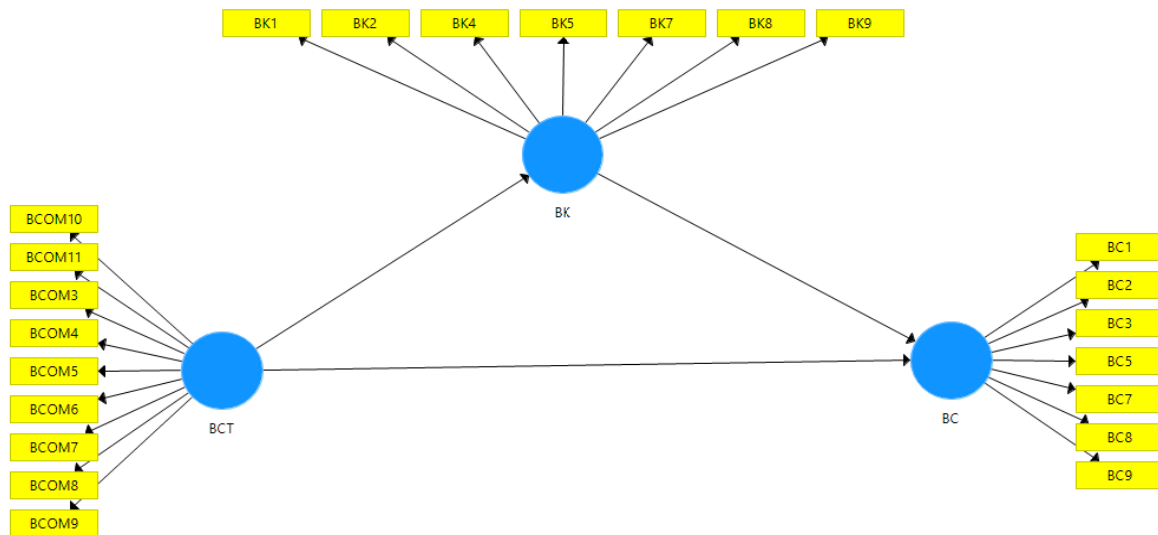


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the effects of Brand Knowledge on the relationship between brand-centered communication and brand commitment

The reason for selecting the banking sector is because it is one of the fastest growing industry in Pakistan, therefore it is suitable to test the model. Further, this industry (1) is a highly resource intensive industry (Low & Lee, 2014), (2) offering highly nonphysical services (Shostack, 1977), and (3) usually involves a relatively long-term relationship with customers (Boshoff & Allen, 2000; Gonzales & Garazo, 2006).

To test the conceptual model, a structured questionnaire on a sample consisted of banking employees from five public sector banks in Pakistan was used. A total of 650 questionnaires were distributed among bank employees, and 150 branches of five public banks functioning in four provincial capitals (Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, & Quetta) of Pakistan were considered on the basis of proportionate stratified random sampling. In total 325 questionnaires were received making the response rate of 50%. Of this number, 62 were unusable thus leaving 263 valid questionnaires, the survey response rate was 40.46%. Summary of the number of public banks and their branches in the country given below.

Table 1: Number of Public Banks and Branches in Pakistan

S. Banks	No. of Employees	Branches Nationwide
1. National Bank of Pakistan (NBP)	1,519	1,422
2. First Women Bank Limited (FWB)	531	42
3. The Bank of Khyber (BOK)	1,405	166
4. Bank of Punjab (BOP)	6,739	480
5. Sindh Bank Limited (NBP)	2,320	250
Total	27,585	2,360

Data from single questionnaires raises the danger of common method bias (CMB), which may cause systematic measurement error and bias in relationship estimation among theoretical constructs (Liang et al., 2007; Podsakoff, MacKenzie,

Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). In an effort to minimize CMB, a few procedural remedies were adopted in this study (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Harman’s single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003) was used, indicating that a maximum variance that is explained by a single factor was only 38.18%, which is less than 50% of the total variance. Thus, it can be concluded that the data in the study is not suffered from CMB bias.

4.2. Measures

The employee brand knowledge used Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2009) reliable 10-item scale to rate an employees’ understanding of their organization’s brand values, exhaustive knowledge of customer’s needs and expectations, and their critical role in delivering the brand promise according to brand standards. The scale used a five-point response format (1= “strongly disagree”, 5= “strongly agree”). Sample item was “I know clearly who is the bank (brand) target customers”.

Similarly, bank employees had to respond to 10 items adopted from the study of Punjaisri, Evanschitzky and Wilson (2009) to measure the extent to which IBC programs inform and reinforce the desired pattern of behaviors among employees to successfully deliver on the brand promise. Sample item was “Briefings contain all essential information for me to provide services according to the brand expectations”. Lastly, brand commitment measurement items were adopted from the study of Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2010). These items showed employees extent of emotional attachment towards the brand, which influences their willingness to exert a great deal of additional effort towards reaching brand goals and objectives. Sample item was “I know this bank (brand) is excellent in its service”.

4.3. Data Analysis and Results

Following data screening and evaluation, the available data has been cleaned to further examine to get reliable and useful results. This study used SPSS version 25.0 for demographic and descriptive analyses, while PLS 3.0 was used for testing the hypothesis. The Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) data analysis technique usually achieves high levels of statistical power with smaller sample sizes, compared to the Covariance Based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM) (Henseler, 2010; Reinartz, Haenlein, & Henseler, 2009).

4.4. Profile of Respondents

A total of 263 questionnaires were received at the end of the data collection process. There were no missing values in all the usable questionnaire. Of the 263 employees who participated in the survey, 67% were male. The age groups of 31-40(35%) and 21-30(32.7) accounted for the biggest portion of the sample, meanwhile, the age group of more than 50 (3.85%) was the smallest in the sample. All educational levels were represented, a very high proportion of respondents (61%) had a postgraduate degree. The majority of the respondents(37.6%) had worked for the banks for 11years or more, while approximately(21%) respondents had work experience between 5 to 10 years, and only(16.7%) respondents had work experience of 5 years or fewer. The profiles of the respondents were analyzed according to gender, age, education, and occupation as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Demographic profile of respondents

Demographic	Frequency (%)
Age	
21-30	86 (32.7)
31-40	92 (35.0)
41-50	75 (28.5)
50+	10 (3.8)
Gender	
Male	175 (66.5)
Female	88 (33.5)
Education	
Graduate	103 (39.2)
Master degree	144 (54.8)
Others	16 (6.1)
Departments	
Operations & Services	64 (24.3)
Middle Mgt	37 (14.0)
Accounts	30 (11.4)
Others	132 (50.1)
Job Status	
Permanent	198 (75.3)
Temporary	37 (14.1)
Contract	28 (10.6)
Work Experience	
2-5 years	44 (16.7)
6-10 years	55 (20.9)
11+ years	99 (37.6)

Table 3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Construct reliability		AVE
			a	p	
Brand Communication	1. The brand standards are constantly reinforced during the briefings.	0.779	0.877	0.881	0.506
	2. The brand promise is constantly reinforced during the briefings.	0.705			
	3. This bank informs me in an excellent way about things that is relevant to my work.	0.730			
	4. I feel encouraged to come up with new suggestions of how to do things.	0.731			
	5. Orientation program triggers my inspirations to appropriately fulfill the brand promise delivery.	0.626			
	6. I like the brand manuals of this bank (brand).	0.698			
	7. During the group meeting, I am clearly informed of the brand mission.	0.766			
	8. I clearly understand my role in relation to the brand mission, after attending the group meetings.	0.637			
	9. Briefings contain all essential information for me to provide services according to brand expectations.	0.716			
Brand Knowledge	1. I know clearly the goals of this bank (brand).	0.758	0.857	0.889	0.523
	2. I know clearly the policies of this bank (brand).	0.753			
	3. I understand that my work is important to the success of this bank (brand).	0.676			
	4. I understand how my behavior can impact this bank (brand).	0.716			
	5. I understand how my own work has made a contribution to the bank (brand) success.	0.632			
	6. I understand my role in delivering the brand promise of this bank (brand).	0.632			
	7. I know the meaning of this bank (brand) for customers.	0.758			
	8. I know this bank (brand) is excellent in its service.	0.713			
	9. I know clearly who are the bank (brand) target customers.	0.642			

Brand Commitment	1. I usually tell my friends that this is a great bank (brand) to work for.	0.821	0.861	0.892	0.539
	2. I am proud to tell others that I am part of this bank (brand).	0.818			
	3. For me this is the best of all possible banks (brands) to work for.	0.747			
	4. I am extremely happy that I chose to work for this bank (brand) over others I was considering.	0.716			
	5. I really care about this bank (brand).	0.615			
	6. I would accept almost any type of job assignment to keep working for this bank (brand).	0.634			
	7. I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that normally expected to help this bank (brand) to be successful.	0.670			
	8. With this bank (brand), I obtain what I look for in my work life.	0.660			

4.5. Measurement Model

PLS involved two stages: evaluation of measurement model (CFA) and assessment of structure model (SEM) (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). The goodness of measurement was evaluated to confirm the reliability and validity of measurement items. Table 2 shows indication of individual constructs reliability, convergent validity, and offers good discriminant validity for all the constructs. This study used CFA analysis to assess measurement model by focusing on the relationship between indicators and their respective constructs.

Further, Table 3 shows the correlations across the variables. As seen in Table 3, all the individual items of reflective constructs in the model, whose standardized loadings are above or at the suggested cut off value of 0.70, thus, considered reliable (Henseler et al., 2009). In addition to that, the Cronbach's Alpha values and composite reliability (CR) values both are good at the prescribed cut off values of 0.70, as required for good research (Nunnally, 1978).

Likewise, criterion convergent validity was also met, because the average variance extracted (AVE) values related to each reflective variable were above the threshold of 0.50 (Henseler et al., 2009). Finally, researchers assessed the divergent validity of reflective latent variables by using a variety of methods. The discriminant validity can be examined by using cross-loading of indicator, Fornell and Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlation (Henseler et al., 2009). Using the HTMT as a criterion involves comparing it to a predetermined threshold. If the value of the HTMT is higher than this threshold, one can conclude that there is a lack of discriminant validity. Some authors suggest a threshold of 0.85, whereas, Gold, Malhotra and Segars (2001) proposed a more liberal value of 0.90.

Table 4: Mean and Fornell & Larcker Test

	Mean	S.D	BComm	Brand Commitment	Brand Knowledge
BComm & Training	3.92	0.58	0.822		
Brand Commitment	4.09	0.54	0.789	0.809	
Brand Knowledge	3.99	0.61	0.747	0.773	0.737

Table 5: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio

	BComm & Training	Brand Commitment	Brand Knowledge
BComm & Training			
Brand Commitment	0.846		
Brand Knowledge	0.789	0.833	

4.6. Hypothesis Testing

To measure the role of mediating variables in any given study, the tests introduced by Sobel (1982), and Baron and Kenny (1986) are most commonly used methods. Similarly, this study employed employee brand knowledge as a mediating variable to estimate the mediation. However, the studies of MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, and Sheets (2002) and Biesanz, Falk and Savalei (2010) criticize these tests and argued that these methods have low power to measure mediation effects as compare to modern techniques, so these methods are no more recommended. Therefore, in this study, we estimated the mediation effect using PLS 3.0 SEM (e.g., Marcoulides & Schumacker, 2013). Table 6 and Figure 1 contain findings concerning our hypotheses of the study. Firstly, internal brand communication ($\beta=0.328, t=5.484, p=0.000$) is found to exert a positive influence on employee brand commitment, hence, H1 is supported. Secondly, the result also showed that IBC ($\beta=0.689, t=19.224, p=0.000$) positively influenced employee brand knowledge, therefore, H2 is also supported. Similarly, brand knowledge ($b=0.533, t=10.298, p=0.000$) is found to have a significant predictor of brand commitment, therefore, H3 is also supported.

To test H4, regarding the indirect effects of brand knowledge on the relationship between IBC and brand commitment, researchers adopted Preacher and Hayes's (2004) approach. In a bootstrap test with 5,000 subsamples (Hayes, 2009; Preacher & Hayes, 2004), the indirect effect was significant ($b=0.368, t=9.206, p=0.000$), and zero was absent from the 99% bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrap confidence intervals (CI lower level=0.295; CI upper level=0.450). Results of the study demonstrated that brand knowledge partially mediated the relationship between IBC and employee brand commitment, thus, H4 is also accepted.

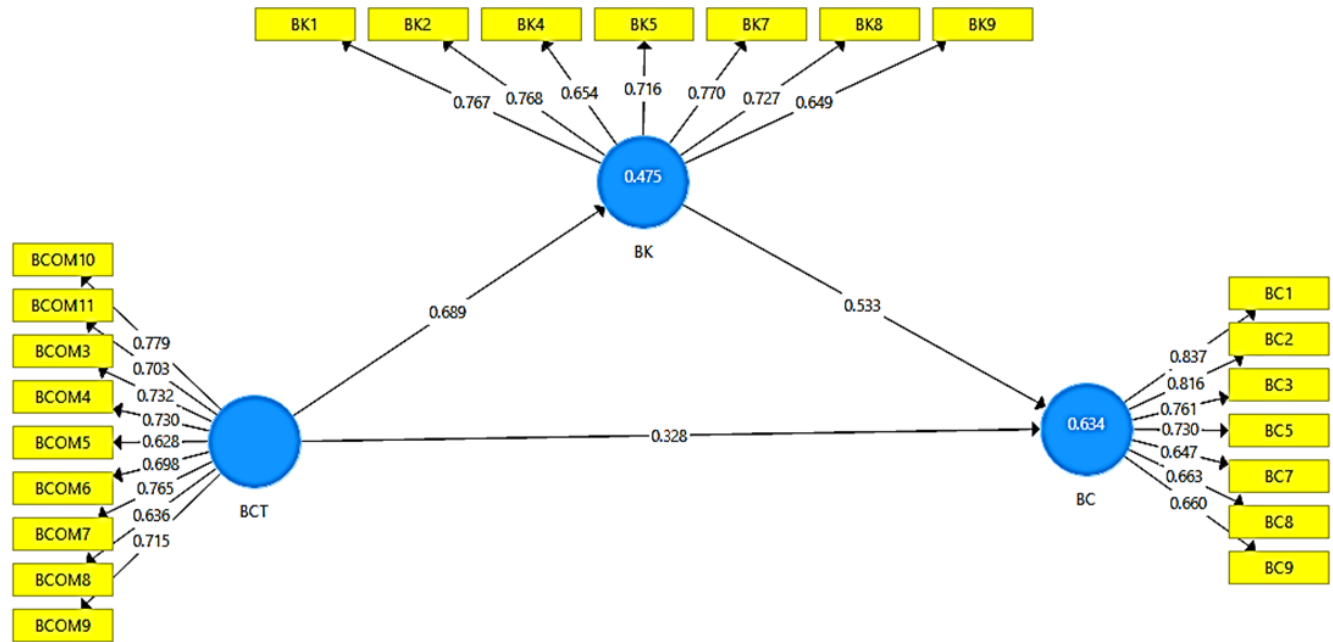


Figure 2: Structural Path Model

Table 6: Path coefficients and hypothesis testing

	Hypothesis	S.Beta	STD Error	T.Value	P Values	0.05	0.95	Decision	Q2	R ²
1	BComm → Brand Commitment	0.328	0.060	5.484	0.000	0.550	0.800	Supported		
2	BComm → Brand Knowledge	0.689	0.036	19.224	0.000	0.075	0.530	Supported	0.229	0.476
3	Brand Knowledge → Brand Commitment	0.533	0.052	10.269	0.000	0.300	0.710	Supported		
4	BComm → Brand Knowledge → Brand Commitment	0.368	0.040	9.206	0.000	0.295	0.454	Supported	0.315	0.582

The R² value also indicates a magnitude value for goodness of fit. In this study, the R² value for the endogenous variable is 0.582 which suggest that the exogenous variables were able to explain 0.582 (adjusted R² of 0.631) variance in brand commitment. It indicates a moderately strong statistical effect of BCom and BK upon BC, indicating goodness of fit for the model. The Q2 value is the cross-validated R². The Q2 for SmartPLS 3.0 is determined using the blindfolding procedure which iteratively removes and predicts values of replacements as the process progresses. The Q2 values for brand knowledge (Q2=0.229) and brand commitment(Q2=0.287) are both greater than the value of zero, thus suggesting that the study model has predictive relevance (Fornell & Cha, 1994).

5. Discussion and implications

5.1. Discussion

This research has provided an empirical link for the association between IBC and brand commitment among

employees of public sector banks in Pakistan. As a result of an in-depth review of the extant literature, the mediating effect of brand knowledge on the relationship between IBC and employees’ brand commitment was hypothesized to provide a better explanation for the proposed relationship in the Pakistani banking sector context. The results of the study evidenced that the relationship between IBC and employees’ brand commitment was significant. This finding was similar to the result of previous studies that capture empirical evidence on the effect of IBC on BK (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006; Thomson, de Chernatony, Arganbright, & Khan, 1999), and brand commitment (Burmam et al., 2009; Du Preez & Bendixen, 2015; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011).

The results of the study also confirmed that employee brand knowledge has partially mediated the relation between IBC and employee brand commitment. Although IBC has a direct impact on employees’ brand commitment, however, the results demonstrated that employee brand knowledge strengthens the relation between IBC and brand commitment. Thus, the researchers believe this study not only confirms the theoretical basis, but it also expands the body of

knowledge on an empirical basis.

The findings of the study also supported the social exchange theory, which suggests that when firms disseminate adequate brand knowledge through IBC dissemination to internal employees, they will reciprocate and exhibit higher brand commitment that further strengthen organization's brand and helps drive business and brand success. Hence, all type of corporate businesses especially banks needs to adopt IBC practices that help employees to build specific brand knowledge to develop favorable brand attitudes and behaviors in order to perform their role as brand ambassadors. Given the scarcity in earlier studies exploring the impact of IBC on employee commitment, researchers consider this particular theoretical effort is a significant one.

5.2. Theoretical contributions

The main objective of this study was to advance the literature pertaining to IBM particularly brand commitment, which is one of the coveted outcomes of internal branding efforts. From a theoretical perspective, the findings contribute to the literature by providing empirical evidence on the direct and indirect effects of IBC on employee brand commitment through brand knowledge as a mediator. The current study elucidates on the less studied construct of brand knowledge. The first contribution of the current study confirms that brand knowledge partially mediated the positive relationship between IBC and brand commitment and also an important precursor of employee brand commitment (Piehler, King, Burmann, & Xiong, 2016; Terglav, 2017). Further, comparison of indirect effects, the results also evidenced that the more organization engage in IBC practices, the higher employees' brand knowledge and commitment to the organization where they work now. Hence, the presence of mediation of brand knowledge to IBC can positively influence employee commitment significantly.

The second contribution of the study is the practical support of the anticipated effect of IBC on employees' brand commitment. Precisely, the results revealed that if IBC dissemination is line with organizations' products, services, and values, it will affect employees brand knowledge (i.e. cognitive) and brand commitment (i.e. affective) which is one of the desirable outcomes of IBM efforts (Piehler, 2018). The third theoretical contribution of this study is the explanation of theoretical interrelationships among the aforementioned constructs through social exchange theory (SET). Following from Blau (1964) SET, the current study proposed that when management is successful in communicating brand values in such a way that translates into specific brand knowledge that is beyond technical know-how, enables employees to understand the brand and expected behaviors related to service delivery, thus, employees are more likely to demonstrate positive attitudes and affectively engage with the brand (King & Grace, 2010). Given the scarcity in earlier

studies exploring the impact of internal corporate brand communication on employee commitment, researchers consider this particular theoretical effort is a significant one.

6. Practical Contributions

The findings of this study offer few practical and managerial implications for organizations. This study has shown that effective brand-centred communication can affect both employee brand knowledge and brand commitment positively (Burmann et al., 2009; Morhart, Herzog, & Tomczak, 2009; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). Employees must also need to understand that the brand is important for the company's success and that their role is critical to the overall brand's success. By making employees aware of internal communication, corporate businesses such as banks can enhance their brand understanding and brand commitment, because it helps employees feel valued and recognized as an important target group. As regards to internal branding, management should use all available IBC tools such as workshops, briefings, group meetings, internal announcements, and top-down internal communication strategy to pass on brand-specific information inside the organization (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005).

Brand commitment has an important role to manage employee brand and work-related behaviors. Especially in-service organizations, where employee behavior is a critical success factor, therefore, managers should work hard to build strong connections between employees and the brand as enduring commitment is a long-term strategy that requires management's support and endless efforts. Similarly, brand knowledge is a prerequisite for employees' affective brand commitment to support the organization's brand building efforts.

However, limited research points out this important aspect of IBM literature, and this study attempted to bridge that gap and highlighted a few critical factors of brand knowledge that has a considerable impact on employees brand commitment. Additionally, managers should check their service employees' level of brand knowledge on an ongoing basis to determine their readiness to strictly meet the service standards as set by the organization.

7. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Despite employing a stringent method to collect and analyze the data through the structured questionnaire, the present study has also a few limitations that future research might like to address. First, as with all types of quantitative studies, the findings of the present study are not generalizable beyond the banking sector. Therefore, to

improve the generalizability of these findings, researchers recommend additional studies need to be conducted in other industries besides banking sector, including larger samples to ensure better generalizability of these findings. Lastly, this study does not include any moderators to affect the brand commitment outcomes. Brand knowledge can be measured more objectively during training sessions.

Appendix

Table7: Harmen's single factor Test

Communalities		
	Initial	Extraction
BCT1	1.000	.362
BCT2	1.000	.297
BCT3	1.000	.406
BCT4	1.000	.399
BCT5	1.000	.345
BCT6	1.000	.375
SMEAN(BCT7)	1.000	.424
BCT8	1.000	.301
BCT9	1.000	.472
SMEAN(BCT10)	1.000	.502
BCT11	1.000	.357
BK1	1.000	.453
BK2	1.000	.495
BK3	1.000	.293
BK4	1.000	.317
BK5	1.000	.409
BK6	1.000	.306
BK7	1.000	.455
BK8	1.000	.396
BK9	1.000	.410
BK10	1.000	.266
BC1	1.000	.604
BC2	1.000	.580
SMEAN(BC3)	1.000	.448
BC4	1.000	.085
BC5	1.000	.371
BC6	1.000	.310
BC7	1.000	.333
BC8	1.000	.339
BC9	1.000	.347

Table 8: Total Variance Explained

Total Variance Explained					
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings	
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance
1	11.456	38.186	38.186	11.456	38.186
2	1.818	6.060	44.246		
3	1.308	4.359	48.605		

4	1.204	4.015	52.620		
5	1.038	3.461	56.081		
6	1.007	3.355	59.436		
7	.967	3.225	62.661		
8	.920	3.068	65.728		
9	.827	2.756	68.485		
10	.794	2.646	71.131		
11	.736	2.452	73.583		
12	.679	2.264	75.847		
13	.626	2.087	77.934		
14	.614	2.047	79.981		
15	.563	1.877	81.858		
16	.529	1.762	83.620		
17	.507	1.691	85.311		
18	.500	1.666	86.977		
19	.431	1.436	88.413		
20	.428	1.425	89.838		
21	.407	1.357	91.195		
22	.384	1.281	92.476		
23	.375	1.251	93.727		
24	.333	1.111	94.837		
25	.306	1.021	95.859		
26	.288	.960	96.819		
27	.282	.939	97.758		
28	.251	.835	98.594		
29	.223	.742	99.336		
30	.199	.664	100.000		

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