

Employee's Brand Fit in Telecommunication Context: Does Internal Branding Matter?

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Abstract: - This study examines the determinants of employee brand fit among employees of telecommunication industry in Nigeria. Specifically, the study determine the impact of brand leadership on employee brand fit. A self-administered questionnaire was used in obtaining data from employees of Nigeria telecommunication industry. The hypothesis in the study was tested on a sample of 254 employees out of 377 distributed, giving the response rate of 68%. SmartPLS was used to assess the relationship between the variables under investigation. The result provided support for the hypothesized relationship for the study. Therefore, brand leadership was found to have significant impact on employee brand fit. As such, organization can motivate, encourage and enhance their employees brand fit by improving on this practice. As enhancing employee brand fit is crucial to the success of organization. Contributions, limitations and implications are discussed.

Key-Words: - Internal branding, employee brand fit, brand leadership, telecommunication

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1 Introduction

Brand management has being viewed as a central issue in enhancing both brand and organizational performance. As a result, branding researchers are calling on brand oriented organizations to internalize their branding activities so as to encourage congruence between employee's value and brand values [1]–[3]. Indeed, employee brand fit has been argued to play an important role in achieving brand goal, as it has great impact on employee's brand satisfaction, identification, brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour [4]–[7]. Certainly, employees who share organization's brand values are more likely to exhibit positive brand consistent behaviour while delivering brand promises to customers. Despite the importance of employee brand fit in achieving brand goals, the question of how it can be enhanced is still not yet answered in branding literatures [5], [8], [9]. This study examine whether the use of internal branding practice such as brand leadership can promote and enhanced employee brand fit so as to achieve brand goals.

Although the adoption of brand leadership has been associated with other employee related output such as brand commitment, brand citizenship, and intention to stay, there is still lack of empirical evidence regarding its impact on employee brand fit [5], [10], [11]. This constitute a key prerequisite of successful internal branding efforts as internal branding has heavily rely on achieving alignment between employee value and the value of the organization's brand [4], [7], [8], [12]. In this context, the role of internal branding practices such as brand leadership requires further consideration in internal branding literatures.

The present study has add significantly to the internal branding literatures by investigating the impact of brand leadership on employee brand fit. Similarly, to the best of researcher's knowledge this is the first studies to be conducted in the Nigeria telecommunication particularly on how brand leadership can be used to enhanced employee brand fit.

This article is constructed in the following ways. First literature review, followed by hypothesis

development and conceptual model development. Next, is methodology used in the study and presentation of research results/findings. And lastly the study discuss the implication of the study findings and provide some insights for future research.

2 Literature Review

Whereas the field of internal branding have documented extensive empirical work on employee brand fit and internal branding practices such as brand leadership there is hardly any empirical work linking brand leadership and employee brand fit. Therefore, the model linking brand leadership and employee brand fit was developed by borrowing from stream of literatures on brand orientation, and internal branding

2.1 Employee Brand Fit

Employee brand fit has been considered by marketing researchers and practitioners to be crucial in determining the attitude and behavior of employees towards the organization's brand [3], [5], [10]. Review of literatures has shown that researchers have used different ways to conceptualized employee brand fit, this result in difficulty conceptualization of the construct [8]. Some researchers view employee brand fit in terms of supplementary and complementary fit. Supplementary fit exists when individual possesses characteristics similar to organization or the brand. The most frequently used characteristic in supplementary fit is individual values and organizational or brand values [13], [14]. Complementary fit occurs when individual or the organization or brand provide what the other party wants [15].

The second perspective of conceptualizing employee brand fit is needs-supplies fit, which occurs when the organization or the brand satisfies individual needs, desires [16]. Furthermore, demand-abilities fit perspective proposes that a fit is said to arise when the individual has the capabilities to meet the organizational demands [15], [17]. According to [15] these two perspectives can be described by expanding complementary fit, therefore they are part of complementary fit. Based on these arguments put forward by researchers, the present study conceptualized employee brand fit to include both supplementary and complementary fit. Therefore, employee brand fit in this study is defined as the compatibility between individual and the organization or brand that occurs when at least one entity provides what the other needs or they share similar values or both [8], [10].

Literatures have established that employee brand fit can be measured either directly or indirectly [18]. Direct measurement allows the individual to rate how their values are compatible with the brand values. The researchers argued that direct measurement is more effective as it focused on subjective or perceived fit, which is based on individual judgment. Therefore strong fit exists one's perceive by employee, regardless of whether there is similarities between employee's values and values of the brand [18]. Indirect measurement in contrast, called objective or actual fit which reflects the compatibility of individual with verifiable organizational characteristics. Therefore, for the purpose of this study employee brand fit will be measured based on subjective judgment of the employee.

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2.2 Brand Leadership

The concept of brand leadership was first coined by [19] in their study of brand-specific leadership. In the study, brand leadership is viewed as the approaches/styles that the leader used to motivate employees to engage in both in-role and extra role behavior. Hence, the researchers argued that there are two approaches or styles which include transactional leadership (TRL) and transformational leadership (TFL) [19].

According to [19] TFL can be defined as a leader's method to inspiring their employees to perform as brand representatives by appealing to their values and personal convictions. The researchers further argued that leaders that used this approached are characterized with such behaviors by performing as a role model and authentically "living the brand values", articulating a convincing and differentiating brand vision and increasing personal participation and pride in the corporate brand. Behave in such a way that inspires employees to represent brand value in their work, including service recovery. Coach and instill individuals to grow into roles as brand representatives. Hence, leaders who used this approach/tactic to motivate their followers are said to be charismatic, inspirational, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration [20].

On the other hand, TRL is seen as a tactic/method to motivate individuals to perform on behalf of the corporate brand through contingency rewards [19]. The researchers further argued that leaders that used this approach possess such characteristics as specifying behavioral standard for all conditions and stipulating rewards once a particular role is met by brand representatives. Giving clarification as to

effective and unsuccessful performance, and punishing employees for not aligned with brand standards set by the core brand values [20], [21]. Therefore, such leaders used contingent reward to encourage positive attitude and behavior [19], [21]. This involves clarifying roles and responsibilities expected to be performed and providing contingent reward for fulfillment of obligations [22].

2.3 Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

Internal branding practices such as brand leadership has been identified as a predictor of employee brand fit [2]. Therefore, using appropriate brand leadership style is seen as a prerequisite of achieving employee's brand fit, as such have a great impact on employees perception on the brand [3], [21]. Furthermore, drawing on trust within the organization, employee's brand fit depends largely on the level of trust the employee's has on the brand specific leaders (Punjaisri et al., 2013).

Likewise, it was argued that leaders in an organization provide employees with a clear understanding of brand values, this enhance not only their brand knowledge but also stimulate their fit with the brand [12], [23]. Furthermore, [24] posited that brand oriented leadership support and enhance the internalization of brand values into individual employees own-self which results in congruence between employee and the organization. Equally, brand leadership has been argued to be a mechanism through which an alignment between brand value and employee value can be achieve [7]. This is because leaders in an organization play an important role in providing employees with clear brand vision, their roles and responsibilities as brand representatives which help to stimulate and enhance their fit with the brand [3], [25].

As argued in internal branding literatures, using appropriate brand leadership style is seen as a prerequisite of achieving employee's brand fit, as such have a great impact on employees perception on the brand (Punjaisri et al., 2013). In particular, it was argued that transformational leaders enhance employees fit with the organization by encouraging and helping the employees to internalized the organization values and to identify themselves with the organization [20], [26]. Hence, based on these arguments put forward, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H: There is significant relationship between brand leadership and employee brand fit.

Thus, the conceptual framework is shown below:

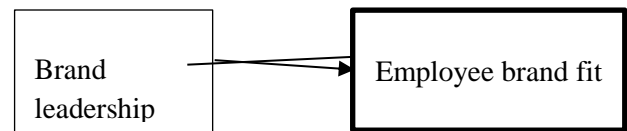


Fig 1 Conceptual Model

3 Methodology

The study used PLS-SEM path modeling to investigate the impact of brand reward and brand leadership on employee BCB [27]. The units of analysis include individual employees of Nigerian Telecommunication industry. Both frontline and backstage employees were included in the study based on the arguments of [28] as all employees are important for brand success. In this study, survey method using self-administered questionnaires were used as an instrument for data collection. The questionnaires were distributed with the help of an officer. A total of 377 questionnaires were distributed and 286 were returned representing 80% response rate. However, only 254 questionnaires were found to be useable in the study.

3.1 Non Response Bias

Non-response bias was tested by comparing early responses (i.e. survey questionnaires returned without a reminder) and later responses (survey questionnaires returned after receiving a reminder) on the key study variables [29]. All the variables including the dependent, and independent variables were subjected to an independent sample t-test to ascertain the existence of any bias among the groups. As such, Levine's test of quality of variance was used to see if the groups differ. In the same vein, based on Levine's test, the two-tailed quality of means t-test was used to see the p value related with the hypotheses, in order to know whether or not there is a substantial difference among the early responses and late responses. The independent samples t-test for quality has indicated that the group mean and standard deviation for early responses and late responses did not differ. In addition, the t-test results has indicated that there is slight difference between the early responses and the late responses. Based on the items in BL ($t=.383$ $p<.702$), and BF ($t=.111$, $p<.912$). Hence, the results shows that these items are statistically different, the differences are quite small and not significant to affect the overall results.

3.2 Common Method Bias

To solve the potential problems of common method bias, we employed both procedural and statistical measure as suggested by [30]. Some of these measures include elimination of item ambiguity,

allowing respondent's anonymity and Harman's single-factor test. Harman's single-factor has been considered as the most widely used technique among researchers to address the problem of CMV. The procedure involves loading simultaneously altogether the variables in the study into exploratory factor analysis and then observes the un-rotated factor solution in order to establish the number of factors that are essential to account for variance in the variables. In the present study, un-rotated factor analysis of all variables has revealed that no single factor accounted for more than 50% of the variance. Therefore, CMV may not be a problem in the study in line with the arguments of [30] and [31], that a common method bias is said to exist where a single factor explains more than 50% of the variance.

3.3 Respondent's Profile

More than half (61.8%) of the respondents were frontline workers and about 32% have worked for more than 5 years. The educational background of the respondents indicate that about 32% have obtained their first degree while only 17% have their master degree. In addition, about 45% of the respondents are permanent staff working in various department with about 26% works with customer relations department.

3.4 Measurement Development

Well established scales were employed to measure the constructs in this study. In all cases, seven-point Likert scales were used as was found to be more reliable than lower scales [32]. In order to measure brand leadership 30 items measures for both transformational and transactional were adapted from the research of [19]. Similarly, employee brand fit was measured based on 4 items adapted from [11].

4 Results

The proposed model was examined using partial least square (PLS) regression with SMART-PLS software. The study used PLS for three reasons. First, the technique is selected in order to avoid normality problem that may arise in the course of data analysis (Hair et al., 2014). Secondly, the analysis involve testing first and second order structures. In particular, the model was treated as reflective-reflective type 1 hierarchical component model Therefore, the dimensions of brand leadership were considered as reflective- reflective first order constructs (HCM) [33], [34].

First as suggested by [27], the study start by achieving measurement model which involves

evaluation for both reliability and validity of the constructs. Internal consistency reliability is ascertained using composite liability. On the other hand, validity is ascertained by examining both convergent and discriminate validity. Convergent validity is achieved when each item has outer loadings above 0.7 or 0.5 and average variance extracted (AVE) of 0.5 and above. In line with Hair et al., (2014) rule of thumb, an indicator with outer loading 0.70 is considered more reliable and acceptable for already developed scale. As such, they further argued that researchers should consider deleting an indicator with outer loading less than 0.70, only if its removal increases AVE and CR. However, items with loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 should be deleted if their deletion increases AVE and composite reliability CR (Hair et al., 2014). Therefore, in line with this argument, items with lower outer loadings were deleted in this study in order to increase AVE and CR. On the other hand, [35] criterion or through loadings and cross loadings of the items are used to assess discriminate validity. Hence, the study examines the discriminant validity using [35] criterion as shown in table 2.

Table 1 Loadings, Reliability and Convergent Validity Values

Variables	Items	Loading	AVE	CR
TSF	TSF1	0.700	0.545	0.929
	TSF2	0.830		
	TSF3	0.702		
	TSF9	0.741		
	TSF11	0.734		
	TSF12	0.845		
	TSF13	0.738		
	TSF14	0.781		
	TSF16	0.693		
	TSF17	0.667		
TSL	TSF20	0.830	0.568	0.886
	TSL5	0.729		
	TSL6	0.865		
	TSL7	0.735		
	TSL8	0.842		
	TSL9	0.644		
BF	TSL10	0.681	0.665	0.887
	BF1	0.803		
	BF2	0.873		
	BF3	0.866		
	BF4	0.710		

Note: TSF=Transformational Brand Leadership; TSL=Transactional Brand Leadership; BF=Brand Fit

Table 2 Discriminant Validity (Fornell and Lacker criterion)

Constructs	BF	TSF	TSL
BF	0.815		
TSF	0.43	0.738	
TSL	0.325	0.463	0.754

Following the achievement of measurement model, the next stage is the structural model testing. The results are presented in table 3. Based on the hypothesis formulated, brand leadership was found to have an impact on employee brand fit. The results show that brand leadership has a positive significant relationship on brand fit ($\beta = 0.423$; $t=2.633$). The R^2 value was 0.61 which suggest that the modeled variables can explain 61% of the variance of employee brand fit.

Table 3 Path Coefficient

Hypotheses/Path	Beta Value	Standard Error	T Statistics	P Values	Decision
BL -> BF	0.423	0.161	2.633	0.009*	Support

* $p < 0.01$

In support of hypothesis formulated, the results revealed positive significant relationship between brand leadership and brand fit.

5 Discussion

The main objective of this study is to investigate the impact of internal branding practices such as brand leadership on employee brand. The results of the study suggest that internal branding practice such as brand leadership have significant impact on employee brand fit. Therefore it is an important practice that can be used to enhance employees brand fit so as to achieve brand goals. As such, our finding provide an empirical support for the proposed relationship between brand leadership and employee brand fit in line with prior research such as [5], [12], [26]

6 Implication of the Study

The results of this study has provided empirical evidence of the link between internal branding practices and employee brand fit. Therefore, the main contribution of this study lies on the provision of empirical evidence showing a link between brand leadership and employee brand fit. From theoretical perspective, the study constitutes a first step in

bringing brand leadership and employee brand fit research in one single model. Acknowledging the lack of studies on how brand oriented organizations can enhance employee brand fit, this study establishes that brand leadership is a key strategy for enhancing employee brand fit.

Indeed, our study has some managerial implications. It is significant for the management of an organization particularly telecommunication to realize the impact of internal branding practice such as brand leadership on employee positive consequences such as brand fit. It is therefore crucial for the management of telecommunication companies to prioritize, promote, and improve internal branding practices in their organization. Specifically, the findings of this study benefit the telecommunication management as it revealed the significant impact of brand leadership on employee's brand fit. Therefore, it is important for the management to realize the influence of brand leadership styles on employee's brand fit.

7 Limitations and suggestions for further research

Implication of the Study

Despite several contributions given by the present study in theoretical, methodological and also practical aspects, as in many other studies, the study is without limitations which need to be identified. Moreover, the limitations may serve as a direction for further research. In particular, one of the major limitation of this study is the cross sectional nature in which the data were obtained over a single time period from telecommunication companies. Therefore, caution should be applied when drawing causal inferences. Therefore, future research may address this limitation by conducting a longitudinal study that involves collecting data over two or more points of time, so as to compare and contrast the findings of this study to be able to draw cause-effect interference appropriately. Similarly, future study can obtain data from many participants (employees, managers/supervisors) independently in order to minimize the measurement errors.

Similarly, the study concentrated on only one internal branding practices, as such other practices such as brand reward, brand communication and brand training were not considered. Therefore, future studies should incorporate these important practices in their research. Furthermore, future studies should incorporate a mediating variable so as to explain why the relationship exist between internal brand practices and employee related output such as brand fit..

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