
Measuring Employees' Brand Commitment in Universities Settings: An Empirical Study in India

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In the past, many service brands have applied a consumer-goods approach for branding to respond to a more competitive environment. Body of research focuses on various components in building a strong brand, but undermines the role played by employees in developing the brand and universities are not an exceptional. The aim of this study is to provide an insight into role played by employees in the process of building a powerful service brand. Employees must be committed to demonstrating the brand values each time a customer interact with the brand. The present research explores the employees' brand commitment in the university settings in India. The dimensions of employers brand (the university's image as seen through the eyes of associates) are used as independent variables for explaining the employees' commitment with respect to university type. Survey approach was adapted using self-administered questionnaire to achieve the research objective. A total of 112 faculties working in Indian universities have been identified (sample size consists of 104 usable observations). The analysis included hypothesis regarding which constructs explains the most in defining employee brand commitment with the help of multiple regression and subsequent multivariate analysis. For universities, research findings illustrate the importance of employee brand commitment in the process of building a strong brand.

Keywords: Brands, Brand equity, Employee Brand Commitment, Multiple Regression

Introduction

Previous research has demonstrated that services organizations need to find ways to establish a positive brand image than consumer goods organization. In service organizations, the trend of making use traditional consumer goods branding tools to leverage service brands faced serious limitations. In fact, the proliferations of brands, fragmentation of media and the specificities of services have increased the complexity of differentiating service brands, with high risk. Henceforth, market saturation and consumer confusion have changed the role of branding dramatically. However, branding literature focused on the brands in the eyes of consumer, few studies have attempted to explore the brands in the eyes of employees.

Despite the growing interest of both academics and practitioners in the “internal branding” concept, there is a still a lack of research to uncover employee interactions. It is agreed that internal branding is about promoting the brand inside the service organization and employees are the key audience. Many scholars have emphasized the specific role of employees in building the service brand and making the brand more relevant. Service brands can taste brand success only if the brand promise is communicated through mass media by its employees. If not so, it may leads to customer dissatisfaction and possibly even to refusal of brand (Bendapudi and Bendapudi, 2005; Berry, 2000). The attention to keep the employees in centre to understand the image of brand and efforts put by employees in cultivating the brand results into strong organizational image.

It is considered essential that all employees have an opportunity to understand the brand as it relates to their roles so that they, in turn, can deliver the brand promise (Gapp & Merrilees, 2006). Moreover, employees can enhance positively the perceptions of consumers relating to the service brand and how a powerful service brand can be formed by employee activities

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service encounter (Berry, 2000; De Chernatony et al., 2003). So the purpose of this study is to improve the understanding of employees’ commitment to their company’s brand and investigate the factors that influence this commitment in the context of Indian Universities. Universities as service brand, have started investing huge amount of money on promoting themselves (Jevons, 2006) and are built through creating awareness, interest and loyalty among internal and external

stakeholders. According to Brookes (2003), it is becoming ever more frequent "...for the economics of running a university...[to be]...comparable to running a business" (p. 139). In this study, the university brand is considered from the employee perspective and not from the customer view to avoid confusion.

This paper begins by covering the literature on employee brand commitment and examines the concept of employer brand. From the exploration of employer brand, the dimensions of employee brand commitment are discussed which is viewed as a critical factor to build a strong brand commitment. The research methodology is then described followed by a discussion of the main findings.

Review of literature

Employee brand commitment

Employee commitment to the organization has been covered comprehensively in the management literature (O' Reilly and Chatman, 1986; Meyer and Allen, 1991). Brand commitment has been considered as an important outcome of the dissemination of brand knowledge and also as resultant of organizational effectiveness and productivity (Fiorito et al., 2007, Meyer et al., 1993)..

In other view, employee commitment is willingness to exert additional efforts to achieve the goals of the organization (Iverson and Mcleod, 1996; Heffner and Rentsch, 2001) considering the value aspects. In the past literature, commitment was refereed as employee efforts, measured by job performance and the frequency with which employees consider leaving, these together in turn have focused the employee commitment

definition in form the affective dimension that is the sense of identification and involvement with the organization.

Past research indicated that if employee perceives the relationship with organization to be a positive one, worthy of maintaining, then the employee displayed high level of commitment

However, Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2009) defined employee brand commitment as, "the degree to which employees identify and are involved with their service brand, are willing to exert additional efforts to achieve the goals of the brand and are interested in remaining with the service organization." Past research indicated that if employee perceives the relationship with

organization to be a positive one, worthy of maintaining, then the employee displayed high level of commitment (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

Employer brand

More recently, some authors like Barrow and Mostley (2005) and Sartain and Shuman (2006) have investigated the functions of a brand from the idea that the brand exists in other stakeholders' minds. According to Ambler and Barrow (1996), employer brand was defined as, "an organization's image as seen through the eyes of its actual and potential employees and should not be confused with the consumers' brand." Employer brand promised employment experience and appealed to those employees who performed best in its culture (CIPD, 2009) and made a clear view of what makes an organization different and desirable as an employer (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004).

Previous literature suggested that positive employer branding increases the applicants' intention to apply. When organizations are perceived as attractive employers due to their performance in regard to quality products and services, treatment of the environment, and issues of diversity, it leads them to attainment of competitive advantage (Daniel et al., 1997). In turn, these employees will become guardians of the brand image and turn into true believers and advocates of the brand. From past literature review, Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2009) identified four dimensions which defined employee brand commitment. The dimensions were: employer brand as employees' brand knowledge, Customer brand as perceived by employees, the employer brand and its competitors and the employer brand as experienced by employees.

Employer brand as experienced by employees

When employees think about the employer brand, they first consider the way in which they experience the brand in their routine work i.e. their encounter with brand. Their experiences are influenced largely by the top management style, human resource management practices and cross-functional coordination among various departments. Yaniv and Farkas (2005) point out that a high degree of person-organization fit may create an internal culture and values where the organization's employees are more likely to behave in the way that organization expects and are more likely to be concerned about customers. This experience as employees models their perceptions and behaviour (Dunmore, 2003; Mitchell, 2003).

Scholars pointed out that strong identification with the organization would induce an employee to stay with the organization (Allen and Meyer, 1990) and would have positive impact on

employee's customer orientation. Even employees perceived the employer brand as moral brand, employee commitment was expected to be high (Morsing, 2006). Past literature drew the line that higher the experience of employees with the employer brand; it would likely to have high level of brand commitment.

Customer brand as perceived by employees

Employee perceptions of the external organizational image occupied in the minds of customers influenced both employee actions (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991) and the level of employee

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commitment to the organizational objectives (Kahn, 1990). In fact, strong organizational image in the eyes of customers provided drive to employees in cultivating brand. Moreover, when employees found the customer brand image to be positive, they were more likely to identify with

brand image to be positive, they were more likely to identify with the brand (Underwood, 2001).commitment to the organizational objectives (Kahn, 1990). In fact, strong organizational image in the eyes of customers provided drive to employees in cultivating brand. Moreover, when employees found the customer brand image to be positive, they were more likely to identify with the brand (Underwood, 2001). As members of the organization, the employee perceptions were influenced by what they think external actors think of them as a brand. It was important to note, however, that employee perceptions of the customer's brand image were not necessarily the same as the image that the customers actually have of the company (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991).

Employer brand and its competitors

Branding literature suggested that the importance of symbolic functions increases when functional differences between brands are limited. Often within the same industry job related factors were similar and therefore it was very difficult for organizations to differentiate themselves as employers from their competitors (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003). In fact, the term “employer branding” suggests the differentiation of a firms' characteristics as an employer from those of its competitors. The employment brand highlights the unique aspects of the firm's employment offerings or environment.

In such an environment, using employer branding to convey the symbolic benefits of working with an organization can be especially useful for developing a favorable employer image. In support of this contention, Lievens and Highhouse (2003) found that symbolic trait inferences of organizations have incremental value over and above instrumental job and organizational attributes like pay or benefits in explaining a company's perceived attractiveness as an employer.

Employees' brand knowledge

According to Keller (1998), brand knowledge consisted of a brand node in the memory with a variety of associations organization of these one's memory had a influence on how is recalled, which influences an behaviour as well as decisions. While 1998) related brand consumer, it is equally employee. That is,

“In fact, in universities settings specifically in higher education brand knowledge dealt with cognitive and affective components i.e. brand meaning, knowledge customer needs and expectations and employee understanding of their responsibility to deliver the brand promise.”

linked to it. The brand nodes in significant brand information ultimately individual's brand related Keller (1993; knowledge to the relevant to the the key to

employees being able to deliver the brand promise is brand knowledge. Consistent with the consumer view, if employees were void of brand knowledge, they were not able to behave in the manner desired by the organization, nor were they able to make brand related decisions. Such employee behaviour, in contrast to the consumptive behaviour of consumers, was manifested in work related behaviour is centered around delivering on the brand promise. In fact, in universities settings specifically in higher education brand knowledge dealt with cognitive and affective components i.e. brand meaning (Palacio et al., 2002). It also included knowledge of customer needs and expectations and employee understanding of their responsibility to deliver the brand promise.

Hypothesis of the study

Based on our literature analysis mentioned in above section, we formulated the following hypotheses based on the structural model (Figure I):

H_1 : Employee brand commitment is significantly different across various university types.

H_2 : Employee brand commitment can be significantly explained by an Employees' brand knowledge.

*H*₃: Employee brand commitment can be significantly explained by Employer brand and its competitors.

*H*₄: Employee brand commitment can be significantly explained by Customer brand as perceived by employees.

*H*₅: Employee brand commitment can be significantly explained by Employer brand as experienced by employees.

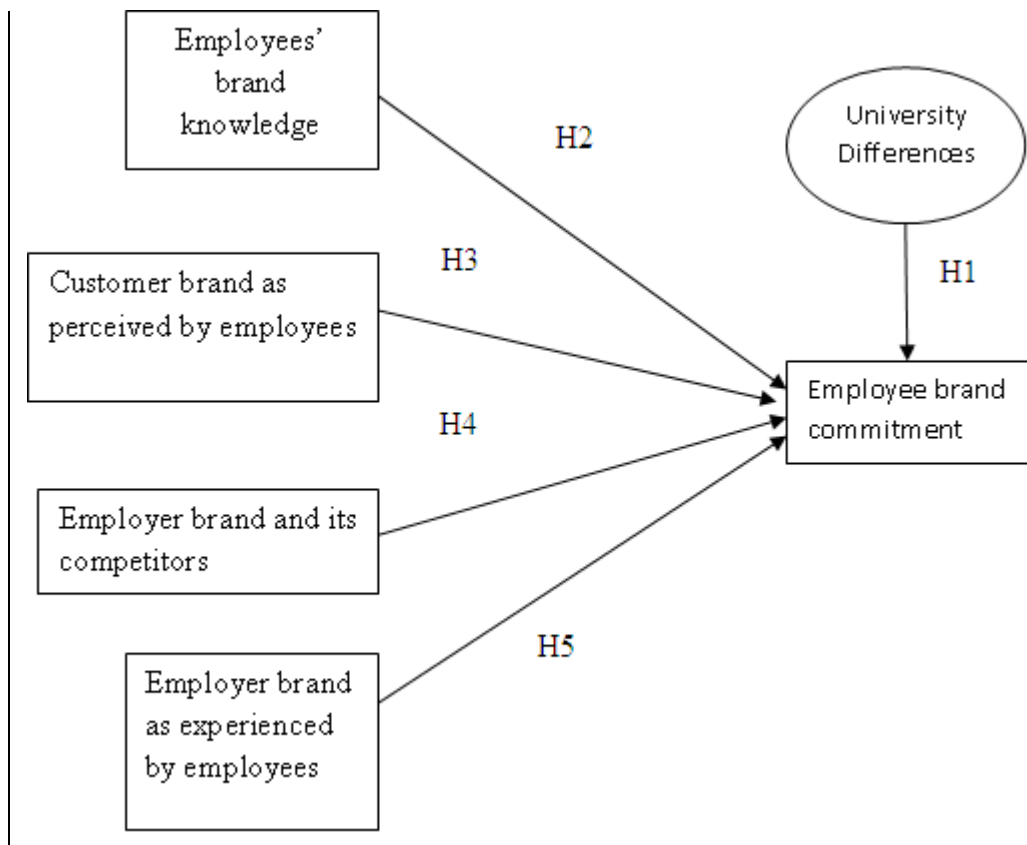


Figure I: Structural model lining dimensions of employer brand and employee brand commitment

Research Methodology

The sample

The data reported in this paper were collected as a part of large study designed to analyze employee brand commitment and brand equity for universities in India. Research adopted the survey approach. The unit of analysis was the employees of university. To determine the sample size, researcher has taken 95% level of confidence at 4% tolerance error as population was unknown. With this, it was found that required sample size was about 98, while the actual number of respondent was 103 higher than the threshold. A structured non-disguised questionnaire was designed to gather the data required for this research. The questionnaire was administered to a

convenience sample of 103 employees. The pilot testing was carried out among 20 respondents and minor modifications were made. The employees were given as much time as needed to complete the questionnaire. Employees were asked to fill the questionnaire at their own place where they could comfortably complete it, at their own convenience.

The survey measures

Measures used in the current research were either borrowed or adapted from earlier studies. The questionnaire was divided into three sections where in the first section includes basic demographics of population and next section includes the employee brand commitment scale, followed by brand equity scale. The employee brand commitment scale consists of nine statements aimed at capturing the employees' efforts. Each answer was recorded on a five-point Likert-type scale, verbally anchored by "strongly agree" (1) and "strongly disagree" (5). The nine employee brand commitment statements were adapted from the study carried out by Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2009). The measures of employee brand commitment included items relating to identification, involvement and loyalty.

Data analysis and major findings

The data were obtained from 103 employees. Out of them, 28 are working in Government University (27.2%) while 75 are working in private university (72.8%). Most respondents are married (n=75, 72.8%); dominated by age group of 20-35 (n=92, 89.3%); are postgraduates (n=50, 48.5%) and doctors (n=22, 21.4%); with balance in level of teaching i.e. graduate and postgraduate. Sample is dominated by male (n=73, 70.9 %) and have their own homes (n=72, 69.9%).

Cronbach's alpha was computed to ascertain the extent to which items making up each variable shared a common core

Prior to examining the relationship between employee brand commitment and factors explaining it, the strength of the scale was assessed by examining its reliability. The instrument was then subjected to the computation of coefficient alpha (Cronbach, 1991).

Cronbach's alpha was computed to ascertain the extent to which items making up each variable shared a common core. In reliability analysis, the alpha (α) coefficient was calculated to find out the internal consistency of the items on the scale. It was found 0.805 for employee brand commitment which was more than 0.6 (Nunnally, 1978) which confirms that the scale shows good internal reliability. The reliability results for other constructs are shown in table II.

Table II
Reliability Statistics of constructs

	Variable	Number of Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
1.	Employee brand commitment	9	0.805
2.	Employees' brand knowledge	9	0.857
3.	Employer brand and its competitors	3	0.671
4.	Customer brand as perceived by employees	4	0.859
5.	Employer brand as experienced by employees	14	0.964

Difference analysis of employee brand commitment across different university type

To examine the differences in employee brand commitment across different university types, univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. In fact, ANOVA is used when the objective is to assess group differences on single metric dependent variable (Hair et al., 2008). In order to test employee brand commitment, average of all statements was taken as dependent variable. In this study, employee brand commitment was consisted of nine statements. The resulting F-statistics as shown in table III revealed a significant difference between university types with respect to employee brand commitment (F value=35.603 , sig.=0.000) which supports H1.

Table III
ANOVA table on employee brand commitment

Independent variable	d.f.	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intercept	1	242.576	1208	0.000*
University type	1	7.149	35.603	0.000*
Error	101	0.201		
$R^2 = 0.261$ (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.253$)		* $p < 0.001$		

In addition to this, separate univariate ANOVA tests were conducted to examine whether there were university type differences in dimensions of employee brand commitment. Results showed that dimensions of employee brand commitment i.e. employees' brand knowledge ($F=33.335$, sig.=0.000), employer brand and its competitors ($F=48.297$, sig.=0.000), customer brand as perceived by employees ($F=44.736$, sig.=0.000), and employer brand as experienced by employees ($F=60.288$, sig.=0.000) were found significantly different in university type (table IV).

Table IV
ANOVA table on dimensions of employee brand commitment on university type

Independent variable	F	R²	Sig.
Employees' brand knowledge**	33.335	0.248	0.000*
Employer brand and its competitors**	48.297	0.336	0.000*
Customer brand as perceived by employees**	44.736	0.312	0.000*
Employer brand as experienced by employees**	60.288	0.380	0.000*

*p<0.001; **dependent variable

In order to understand the relationship between employee brand commitment and its dimensions with respect to university type, multiple regressions was performed. In this, employee brand commitment (average score) was taken as dependent variable and the dimensions of service brand as independent variables.

Significant predictors of employee brand commitment among State Government University

In order to identify significant predictors of employee brand commitment in state government university, simultaneous multiple regression was conducted. The model containing all four dimensions was significant, $R^2 = 0.868$, $F(4, 23) = 37.886$, $p < 0.05$. Among these four dimensions, Customer brand as perceived by employees (sig.= 0.584) and employee brand and its competitors (sig.= 0.939) were found to be non-significant predictor of employee brand commitment (H3 and H4 is not supported). The predictability of the other two variables was in the following descending order: Employee brand as experienced by employee ($\beta=0.649$, $p < 0.05$) and Employees' brand knowledge ($\beta=0.467$, $p < 0.05$) that is H5 and H2 is supported respectively. Table V presents the result of the simultaneous regression tested for government university employee.

Table V
Results of the simultaneous multiple regression tested for government university employees

Variables	B	t	Sig.
1. Employer brand as experienced by employees	0.649	3.045	0.006**
2. Employees' brand knowledge	0.467	0.009	0.011*
3. Employer brand and its competitors	0.078	2.783	0.939
4. Customer brand as perceived by employees	-0.100	-0.555	0.584

Notes: $F=37.886$ ***; $dfs = 4, 23$; $R^2=0.868$, $Adj. R^2 = 0.845$ * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Significant predictors of employee brand commitment among deemed/private University

In order to identify significant predictors of employee brand commitment in deemed/private university, simultaneous multiple regression was conducted. The model containing all four dimensions was significant, $R^2 = 0.739$, $F(4, 98) = 21.053$, $p < 0.05$. Among these four dimensions, Employees' brand knowledge ($\text{sig.} = 0.523$) and Employee brand as experienced by employee ($\text{sig.} = 0.199$) were found to be non-significant predictor of employee brand commitment (i.e. H2 and H5 is not supported). The predictability of the other two variables was in the following descending order: Customer brand as perceived by employees ($\beta = 0.333$, $p < 0.05$) and Employee brand and its competitors ($\beta = 0.241$, $p < 0.05$) i.e. H3 and H4 is supported. Table V presents the result of the simultaneous regression tested for government university employee.

Table V
Results of the simultaneous multiple regression tested for deemed/private university employees

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	Sig.
1.Customer brand as perceived by employees	0.333	2.713	0.008**
2.Employer brand and its competitors	0.241	2.017	0.047*
3.Employer brand as experienced by employees	0.215	1.295	0.199
4.Employees' brand knowledge	0.068	0.643	0.523

Notes: $F = 2.0531$ ***; $df_s = 4, 70$; $R^2 = 0.739$, $Adj. R^2 = 0.520$, * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Discussion & implications

Collected data were analyzed using SPSS software package. Univariate analysis of variance was performed to assess the group differences across university type. It was found that university differences were significant in employee brand commitment. After that separate multiple regressions was employed to test the relationships for university type i.e. state government university and private/deemed university. For state government university, regression analysis results showed that two variables were significant i.e. employee brand as experienced by employee and employees' brand knowledge with model fit of $R^2 = 0.868$. On the contrary, for private/deemed university, regression analysis results showed that two variables were significant i.e. customer brand as perceived by employees and employee brand and its competitors with model fit of $R^2 = 0.739$

In summary, it was found that state government university employees display higher brand commitment in comparison with private/deemed university. One of the possible explanations for

this is that employer brand perceived by an employee was found significant in the case of state government university. It may be possible that employees working in the conventional university may convince the way they experience the brand. More importantly, they view that working in conventional university is characterized as high job security, upward mobility (intrinsic rewards), higher extrinsic rewards, upward and downward communication, promotion satisfaction, trust in supervisors, and the philosophy of university. While, in private/deemed university, employees perceive low level of job security, get lesser opportunity for upward mobility etc.

Moreover, employees' brand knowledge was significant in Government University and the idea is that employees fully understand what the brand is and their role in delivering on the brand promise as it is incomplete in case of private/deemed university. Employees working in private/deemed university may understand the brand values and meanings but it is not sufficient for them to be committed and support the brand.

However, in private/deemed university, customer brand as perceived by employees was found significant and not in state government university. The possible explanation is may be private universities are putting more efforts in creating awareness, interest and loyalty among target students. Also, private universities recently invest heavily in communication activities to create a desired image, and demonstrate an institution's excellence and relevance. The focus of university must be on promoting brand among students and accordingly they allocate efforts and resources. Henceforth, employee perceive university brand as more as customer brand.

“Employees' brand knowledge was significant in Government University and the idea is that employees fully understand what the brand is and their role in delivering on the brand promise as it is incomplete in case of private/deemed university”

In addition to this, employees working in private/deemed experience that their university faces highly intensive competitive pressure in comparison with Government University as private universities have continuous pressure in terms of admissions and fees structure. From a practical perspective, the results of the study imply that administrators (including deans) in private universities should enhance the brand

Moreover, private universities can stress on intrinsic motivators such as research magazines, funding for research etc. that can be proved influential in creating high commitment.

In short, education managers of universities need to give utmost importance to continually and consistently communicate the message, so as employees fully understand the value of university. They are advised to avoid commoditization of educational programs and certificate for mere profits that eventually dilute the employer brand. This study contributed to the conceptualization of drivers of employer brand commitment from employee's perspective. Particularly administrators must take caution regarding value propositions offered by university that strengthen the brand image in the minds' of employees who are critical of success of university.

Limitations and further research

The main limitations of the study were that data were obtained only from universities operated in Gujarat. With this, another limitation of this research is that we explored relationship between the employee brand commitment and employer brand; however the time constraints did not allow us to analyze existing different stakeholders working in universities. Therefore, extending this research to other stakeholders like non-teaching staff, supporters etc., would help us in understanding these phenomena completely. In fact, this study did not consider the emotional bonds (cognitive dimension) between employees and employer brand to understand the commitment. In addition, future research that examines the relationship between the employee brand and commitment in understanding brand equity that would promote employee brand-building activities.

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