

Exploring managers' perspectives of the impact of brand management strategies on employee roles within a service firm

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of Paper	This study examines the impact of brand management strategies on the employee role in the deliverance of the service experience consistent with the brand from a management perspective. In doing so, furthers our understanding of an area that, to date, has received little empirical attention.
Design/Methodology	Case study approach with data gathered via in-depth interviews with managers of a service organization.
Findings	Several themes identified provided the foundation for discussion, namely, direction, involvement, employees selection, relevance, employee satisfaction, flexibility, management role, comprehension of differences, influencing role, control, foundation, internal marketing, management role, enhancers and element of control. The themes of relevance and comprehension of differences had not previously been considered in the literature and therefore explored in depth.
Limitations/ Implications	Limitations of a case study methodology include insufficient precision (i.e. quantifiable), objectivity and rigor. The development of a case study database and the formalisation of the interview process increased the likelihood of trustworthiness and credibility in the results.
Practical Implications	Emergence of new themes in relation to the implementation of brand management strategies provided a framework upon which managerial implications are identified.
Value of Paper	In-depth interviews conducted with managers that weren't experts in the brand management field, yet were responsible for supporting brand management initiatives. The contribution of this paper is embedded in the insights afforded through research in an applied setting, providing an opportunity to identify emergent issues not previously discussed

INTRODUCTION

Consumers in countries such as the USA, Western Europe, Australia and Japan now spend more on services than they do on tangible goods, as is evidenced by the substantial contribution (higher than 70%) of service industries to GDP and employment in these countries (Martin, 1999). Referred to as deeds, efforts and performances (Bateson & Hoffman, 1999), services are essentially activities or benefits that are offered by one party to another that are intangible and do not result in the ownership of anything (Kotler, Chandler, Brown & Adam, 1994). As such, it becomes difficult for the service provider to readily display or communicate the service to the target market (Berry & Yadav, 1996; Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1985). Furthermore, as humans largely produce service performances, potentially no two-service performances are identical in every respect and the provision of consistent service quality can become difficult to achieve (Zeithaml et al., 1985).

Unlike the marketing of goods, the role of the service provider/ employee in the consumer's evaluation of the service experience is paramount. In fact, "researchers point out that for many services the experience itself is the key perceptual event from the customer's point of view" (Padgett & Allen, 1997, p. 17). Employees constitute the interface between a brand's internal and external environment and can have a powerful impact on how consumers perceive the brand and the service organisation (Schneider and Bowen, 1985; Balmer and Wilkinson, 1991, Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; McDonald, de Chernatony and Harris, 2001). It is, therefore, essential that employees' behaviour is consistent and, thus, reinforces the service brand's advertised benefits. This study therefore examines, from an operational management perspective, the impact of brand management strategies on the role of the service employee, and in doing so, makes a unique contribution to our knowledge in this domain of research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For more than four decades, academics in marketing have emphasized the market concept (the philosophical foundation of market orientation) as being a cornerstone of marketing thought (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993). Market orientation puts the customer at the centre of overall activities of the organization and is regarded as a pivotal factor in securing and maintaining market leadership in today's competitive environment (Pulendran, Speed and Winding II, 2000).

A shared belief among academics and a growing body of empirical evidence supports the proposition that market orientation is positively associated with superior performance (Webb, Webster and Kreppa, 2000; Pulendran et al, 2000) as well as being synonymous with the term customer orientation (Shapiro, 1988; Deshpande, Farley and Webster, 1993). However, Gummesson (1991) argues that market orientation does not occur simply because management identifies it as their new strategy. Market orientation only becomes alive when all members of an organization are aware of how employees contribute to revenue through excellence in customer relations and actively promotes this through the performance of the employees.

Furthermore, Gummesson (1991) argues that if an organizational culture is focussed on the customer, then employees must be aware of what being customer focussed means, in relation to the roles and responsibilities of their jobs. Organizations can help employees reduce role conflict and ambiguity, thereby increasing job satisfaction and commitment to the organization, by enabling a market-oriented environment (Jones, Busch and Dancin, 2003; Sigauw, Brown and Winding II, 1994; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). When market orientation is embraced throughout the operation, the resulting culture is one that reflects the characteristics that accommodates and, thus, satisfies changing consumers' desires and expectations.

However, satisfying consumer desires and expectations, based on traditional tangible product related benefits of an organisation, is not sustainable for a service operation. “Strong brands are the surrogates when the company offers no fabric to touch, no trousers to try on, no watermelons or apples to scrutinize, no automobile to test-drive” (Berry, 2000,p 128). As such, in service organisations, branding plays a unique, yet very important role, in increasing consumer’s trust of an intangible purchase (Berry, 2000) and a perceived variable level of quality as the service is reliant on human interactions (de Chernatony and Segal – Horn, 2003).

According to Berry (2000), branding represents the foundation of services marketing for the 21st century, given the inherent difficulty in differentiating products that lack visible characteristics. Service organizations need to focus, not only on enhancing the functional aspects of their product, for example the servicescape, but also on creating an emotional bond between the product and consumer that reflects the consumer’s desires and expectations (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001). Consistent with market orientation, successful brand management requires a customer focus. As such brand management is dependant on an organisation being customer focussed (de Chernatony and Dall’Olmo Riley, 1997) and is therefore emphasised as being a key element of market orientation.

The limited physical evidence in a service brand means that the development of services depends on the culture of the organisation and the training and attitudes of its employees (de Chernatony and Segal – Horn, 2003). As such, in many cases, due to the nature of services, the actions and behaviours of the service employee *are* the actual service being purchased by the consumer (e.g, hairdresser, doctor, actor, sales consultant). In fact, Sundaram and Webster (2000) advocate that customer evaluations of services are based on their interactions with employees. Not only the

employee's expertise, but also their ability to build and maintain relationships with customers, becomes an inseparable part of the service offering.

With the increasing emphasis on ensuring consistency between the projected brand or service image and consumer's own perceptions of the service encounter (Bachman, 2001), the role of employees, as representing a source of customer information (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001), needs to be considered. Employees constitute the interface between a brand's internal and external environment and can have a powerful impact on how consumers perceive the brand and the service organisation (Schneider and Bowen, 1985; Balmer and Wilkinson, 1991, Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; McDonald et al, 2001). It is, therefore, essential that employees' behaviour is consistent and thus reinforces a brand's advertised benefits. If inconsistent, the credibility of the brand will be undermined (Samli and Frohlich, 1992). The crucial role of employees and their subsequent responsibilities in the achievement of positive consumer perceptions is illustrated in Figure 1.

--- take in Figure 1 ---

Incorporated within Zeithaml and Bitner's (1996) Services Marketing Triangle is an adaptation of a similar triangle proposed by Lovelock, Patterson, and Walker, (2001) who suggest at the heart of the triangle is the organisational strategy. As is illustrated in Figure 1, the core outcomes of the organisational strategy are service quality, customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. Achievement of the organisation's objective is only realised when the external marketing (projected brand image) is consistent with the actual consumer's experience (consumers' perceptions) and, to achieve this, internal resources need to be carefully considered and deployed. One such important resource that is consistently attributed to organisational performance is the employee (Harris and Ogbonna, 2000; Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1999; George, 1990; McDonald et al, 2001).

According to McDonald et al (2001), as well as providing an interrelated and comprehensive network of consumer perceptions, the brand also plays an important role in providing a central focus for all employees. By ensuring employees are knowledgeable in customers' expectations, they in turn will be prepared for meeting those expectations. This thinking is reinforced in research with leading edge brand consultants or 'brand experts', conducted by de Chernatony and Segal-Horn (2003), in the development of their services branding model. In particular, the key themes identified in their research as being necessary for successful management of service brands, namely Focussed Position, Consistency, Values and Systems, underpin the significance of the employee. Specifically, the themes are concerned primarily with the service encounter, the motivation of staff and the marketing/operation interface. Organisations, according to Harris and de Chernatony (2001), need to clearly communicate the brand's purpose to employees to inspire and assist them to understand their role in relation to the brand. In other words, the brand message needs to be conveyed internally so that employee behaviour is guided.

As organisations strive to consistently deliver superior service quality in line with the brand promise, thereby engendering customer satisfaction and achieving a competitive advantage, the role of brand management in a market oriented service operation, becomes a focus for the entire organisation. In an increasingly competitive environment, the ability of the employee to positively (or negatively) impact an organisation's success, gives rise to employees being considered to be central (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001) to the brand building process. It, therefore, becomes crucial to consider the implications of brand management inside the service organisation (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001) and the alignment of the internal (employee) actions with the external (consumer) perceptions.

Furthermore, in order to understand the implications of the adoption of brand management strategies, it is necessary to explore the findings of the literature within an identified service organisation that employs market oriented brand management strategies. In particular, as management support is considered to be the single most important component in guiding employee behaviour (George, 1990; Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; Pulendran, Speed and Winding II, 2000), investigation as to managers' perspectives of internal (employee) awareness of the brand is warranted.

Using managers as the population of interest for this study is in contrast to previous studies. In the past, researchers have used several exploratory methods to add to the extant literature of brand management, namely case analysis (e.g. Simoes and Dibb, 2001), senior brand consultant or brand expert in depth interviews (e.g. de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1997, 1998, 1999) or have conceptualised theories based on the review of the literature (e.g. Mc Donald et al 2001). In contrast, this research employed a case study methodology consisting of in-depth interviews with managers that weren't experts in the brand management field, yet were responsible for implementing or supporting brand management principles as they related to their employees.

When suggesting that the managers in this study weren't experts in the brand management field, the definition applied was consistent with that employed in several published brand papers (e.g. de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1999; McDonald et al., 2001; Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; de Chernatony and Segal – Horn, 2003). That is, in these studies brand experts were considered to include brand consultants from advertising, design, marketing and brand management, and market research (de Chernatony and Segal- Horn, 2003). The managers interviewed in this study were classified as operational management with no direct marketing or brand management responsibility e.g. Food and Beverage Manager, Training Manager, yet

responsible for employee behaviour. By conducting the research in an applied setting, the opportunity to identify emergent issues identified by non-brand expert views not previously discussed in the literature was enhanced and, it is on this basis, that the contribution of this paper is highlighted.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A review of the literature highlights the significant impact that the adoption of a market oriented business philosophy can have on any business, in particular that of service operations. Further to this, the importance of harnessing the power of successful brand management strategies to successfully position a service organisation in a very competitive market is highlighted. In both the adoption of market orientation and brand management practices, the role of the employee is advocated. However, in order to ensure the effective adoption and implementation of these practices, service organisations must consider practical implications.

As employees have been implied in the literature to represent a vital ingredient in the implementation of such strategies (e.g. Gummesson, 1991), consideration must be given to the impact of market oriented brand management strategies on the employee role in an applied setting. More specifically, through the examination of the literature several research questions were developed to facilitate the increased understanding of managers' perspectives of the impact of brand management on the role of the employee within a service based organisation.

RQ1: To what extent do managers believe that a market orientation business philosophy requires employee awareness of the business philosophy?

RQ2: To what extent do managers believe that a market orientation has an impact on employees' roles and responsibilities?

RQ3: To what extent do managers believe that employees should have knowledge of the organization's brand (i.e. objectives, actions and communication campaigns)?

RQ4: To what extent do managers believe that employee knowledge of the brand will lead to appropriate employee behaviour in delivering the brand promise?

RQ5: To what extent do managers believe that the delivery of service quality in alignment with the brand is dependant upon the implementation of systems and procedures?

RQ6: Apart from the implementation of systems and procedures, what other factors do managers believe assist employees in delivering service quality in alignment with the brand promise?

RQ7: To what extent do managers believe that consumer knowledge/awareness is necessary to supplement the systems and procedures implemented to deliver service quality in line with the brand promise?

RQ8: To what extent do managers believe that employee empowerment is necessary to supplement the systems and procedures implemented to deliver service quality in line with the brand promise?

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research methodology chosen to address the research questions of this study was qualitative in nature. As such, a single case study technique was utilized and data was collected via in-depth interviews. Selection of the case, a description of the interview participants and the interview protocol are further discussed.

Case

The selection of managers for this study needed to be drawn from an organization that actively promoted itself as being a service based, market oriented organisation, employing brand management techniques to ensure superior performance. In other words, the research needed to be site specific i.e. a single case design, as it had to focus on a setting where market orientation and brand management strategies take place (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). Further to this, as the research questions posed referred to managers' perspectives, Marshall and Rossman (1999) argue that as human actions, in this case perceptions, are influenced significantly by their setting in which they occur, the study of interest should be conducted in the managers' natural setting. As such, it was important that the participants in this study were selected from the same organization or site i.e. a single case, so as to ensure consistency among the organizational setting.

A case study methodology was deemed to be the most effective methodology based on the argument of Yin (1994) who advocates the use of case studies where the researcher wants to cover contextual conditions, for example organisational culture. Contextual conditions such as organisational culture, was the motivation for Hill and McGowan (1999) using a single case study methodology in their research. In relation to this study, market orientation is seen as a form of organisational culture, characterised by differing organisational characteristics (Harris, 2002) that influence attitudes and behaviours of employees. Further to this, culture in its very nature, is different from one organisation to another (Kennedy, Lassk and Goolsby, 2002). As such, the case study methodology allows the phenomenon, to be described 'in-depth' and 'in the round' (Birley and Moreland, 1998) and in doing so, providing the detail that would otherwise be overlooked if another methodology were chosen e.g. survey.

While there are criticisms or limitations associated with the selection of a single case study methodology, namely, putting “all your eggs in one basket” and fears about the uniqueness of conditions surrounding the case (e.g. special access to a key informant) (Yin, 2003), for the purpose of this study, a single embedded case design was selected for two reasons. Firstly, as manager’s perspectives are influenced by organisational culture, a single case allows for the same organisational influences to be accounted for and, therefore, satisfies the criteria for a unique or extreme case. Secondly, as managers’ perspectives of the impact of market oriented brand management on the employee role has not previously been explored, the criteria for revelatory is satisfied. To aid in the comprehension of a single case design, subunits within the case were selected, satisfying the criteria for an embedded case, as was demonstrated in the Joia (2002) in their application of a single case study research methodology.

The service operation selected for this study was located in Australia, with over 2000 employees and operations that ran 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. The service operation was deemed to be relevant as it actively promoted itself to be market oriented, adopting brand management practices as indicated in their 2003 business strategy,

We are a customer-focussed leisure and entertainment business that uses customer insights to ensure our brand remains relevant to our valued customers (p.3)

Further to this, customer focused thinking was evident in the employee handbook as well as the individual departments operating plans. Having identified the site, it is necessary to specify the population from which the subunits of the case are selected (Zikmund, 1997).

Participants

Having identified the site, it was necessary to specify the population from which the subunits of the case were selected (Zikmund, 1997). The purpose of this study was to explore the perspective of managers who guide or influence employee behaviour. In reviewing the organizational structure of the service organization, it was the middle management and supervisory level that has maximum interaction with employees, thus directing their behaviour. As such, a sample of middle management and supervisors representative of the six sub-cultures or divisions within the service operation, were selected for interviews. These divisions represented were Finance; Hotel; Gaming; Human Resources; Food and Beverage; and Other (Purchasing, IT, Marketing, Surveillance, Public Relations).

Ten interviews were conducted which included six males and four females, ranging in age from 27 years to 55 years. The average years of service was 7.6 years with the minimum being 1 year and the maximum years of service being 18 years. For a profile of the participants refer to Table 1.

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Interview Protocol

The selection of in-depth interviews was deemed to be the most effective method of data collection to address the research questions due to the ability to get large amounts of data quickly, the ability to follow up and seek clarification and the need to rely only on a single primary method for gathering data (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). As the objective of this study is to uncover and describe the participants' perspectives, employment of in-depth interviews as the method for gathering data is deemed as an appropriate and sufficient methodology (Marshall and Rossman, 1999).

So as to ensure this study answered the research questions, as well as to ensure consistency amongst the interviews, a measurement instrument, in the form of a semi structured interview protocol, was developed. Based on the review of the literature, eight umbrella and thirty-six probing questions were developed to aid in the collection of data. The interviews, ranging in duration from 45 minutes to one and a half hours, were audio taped and transcribed for ease of comprehensive and systematic analysis. This included a process of “reduction” and “interpretation” (Marshall and Rossman, 1999).

Finally, so as to ensure discipline rather than relying on intuition (Stake, 1995), satisfaction of tests advocated by Yin (1994) namely, construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability, discipline is afforded and, as such the validity and reliability of this study is increased. Specifically, through the application of multiple sources of evidence, the establishment of a chain of evidence and member checking coupled with strategies such as the use of replication logic, the use of semi-structured interview protocol and a case study database, the findings presented have been subject to disciplined inquiry.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research identified that all managers were able to articulate what market orientation is in their own words, which was consistent with the extant literature. Further to this, they all agreed that the case chosen was a market-oriented organisation. However, to successfully compare and contrast the existing body of knowledge to an applied setting, more depth of understanding was required in relation to employees having knowledge of the market-orientated business philosophy and the organisation’s brand as well as employees’ ability to deliver service quality in alignment with the brand.

For ease of reference, Table II provides an overview of the themes identified in the ten interviews conducted, by research question. They included Direction, Involvement, Employee Selection, Relevance, Employee Satisfaction, Flexibility, Management Role, Comprehension of Differences, Influencing Role, Control, Foundation, Internal Marketing, Enhancers, and Element of control. These themes will each be discussed.

--- take in Table II ---

Direction

The literature suggested that market-orientation of an organisation is positively associated with the superior performance of that organisation (Brown, Mowen and Donovan and Licata 2002; Webb et al 2000; Pulendran et al, 2000). Further to this Kennedy et al (2002) argue that underlying this theme for success is the importance of creating an organisational culture that is focussed on the customer. In other words, a market-oriented organisational culture requires a collective understanding by all employees in order to create and deliver value for the customer.

In turn, the findings of this research suggest that management believe it is important for employees to be aware of the organisation's market orientation as it provided the necessary *direction*, therefore consistent with the literature noted above. For example, one interviewee stated: *"I think it makes it easier for them, knowing where the company is coming from, where it is etc, that we are all heading in the same direction."*

Furthermore, knowledge of the brand, according to Harris and de Chernatony (2001), inspires employees and helps them understand how their roles relate to it. The findings of this research confirm the positive association between employees having knowledge of the brand and the provision of *direction* as it relates to their role in the organisation. Evidence of how knowledge of the brand influences employees' roles

and responsibilities and, therefore, reinforces the need for employees to have knowledge of the organization's brand, is reinforced by this comment, *"If they don't know what it (i.e. the brand) is they cannot deliver the brand promise. Team members must know what the brand is otherwise they are working in the dark."*

For 'ideal performance' the literature suggested that all employees must understand the expectations and requirements of customers (Kennedy et al, 2002; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Narver and Slater, 1990), in order to act appropriately when engaging with a customer. In turn, the findings of this research are consistent with the literature. Managers believe that consumer knowledge or awareness provides employees with the necessary *direction*, should the systems and procedures need to be adapted, to satisfy the requirements of the customer. For example, one participant commented *"Definitely – it changes their whole perception of what they are doing – their place, their fit in it, how important and the level of urgency"*.

Involvement

By seeking to permeate every aspect of the organisations function (Narver and Slater, 1990; Harris and Ogbonna, 2000; Martin, Martin and Grbac, 1998; Varey, 1995), market orientated initiatives demand the *involvement* of employees at all levels of the organisation. This is evidenced in a statement provided by one of the participants when they said, *"we get everyone involved because they are looking at their customer, what their customer would like and what their customer would want"*. The findings of this research, consistent with the literature can be attributed to the expectation that employees are able to act appropriately on their knowledge of customers (Martin et al, 1998).

Employee Selection

In addition to *direction* and *involvement*, again consistent with the literature, this research identified *employee selection* as being another theme that was borne out of managers' belief that a market oriented business philosophy required employee awareness of the philosophy. *Employee selection* in the research was attributed to successful recruitment, training and long term employment of individuals that promoted market-oriented behaviours. As employees are direct participants in the implementation of customer focussed strategies (Brown et al, 2002), and therefore crucial to success, it is imperative that their behaviours support the market orientation of the business. For example an interviewee comment was, "*you can train them to do different roles but you would expect they have the qualities required to work in a market oriented organization... We can teach the skill – it is much more fundamentally important to get somebody with the right cognitive thinking*".

Relevance

In making employees aware of the market orientation of the business, the findings of this research also identified the need for the information provided to be *relevant* to the employees to ensure successful transfer of knowledge. *Relevance*, as it relates to employees, is not a theme that has previously been explored in the market orientation or brand management literature. This research found that, while managers believed it was necessary for employees to be aware of the organisation's business philosophy, it was important for the information provided to be meaningful and relevant to the audience. The need for relevant information to be provided is evidenced in the following statement, "*They need it (market orientation) interpreted into how it affects them in order for them to grasp it and use it*" (Interviewee comment).

One explanation for this new finding is that some of the literature pertaining to employees, market orientation and implementation (e.g. Harris, 2002) and brand management and implementation (e.g. Mc Donald et al 2001) is conceptual in nature, and therefore, not empirically tested. As such the identification of facilitating factors for successful implementation of market orientation or brand management have not been uncovered. Without the insight afforded when conducting research in an applied setting, it is difficult to speculate the impact of knowledge pertaining to market orientation on different employees.

Another explanation for this new finding is that *relevance* maybe a case specific barrier, (relevance is described as a barrier for without it, market orientation is perceived to be rejected by employees). Harris (2002) argues that given the diversity of barriers, it is not surprising to find evidence that the development of market orientation is far from universal. He goes further to say that different management teams, in response to the diversity of potential barriers, will develop individual forms of market orientation. In other words, the identification of *relevance* in this research study maybe attributed to the individual development of market orientation as it pertains to this organisation and the environment in which it operates and, therefore, may possibly not be generalised across all market oriented organisations.

Employee Satisfaction

This research also identified that the impact of market orientation on employees' roles and responsibilities was not only the *direction* provided but also the *employee satisfaction* that followed. Again this finding was consistent with the literature, which concludes that by providing employees with clear guidance and *direction*, the potential for role conflict and confusion dissipates, resulting in increased job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Jones et al 2003; Siguaw et al, 1994).

For example, evidence of one interviewee's belief that market orientation has an impact on employees' roles and responsibilities in the form of employee satisfaction is provided in their following statement. *"I believe if they do (i.e. have awareness of market orientation and how it relates to their roles and responsibilities), they have better job satisfaction because customers react better to them. They also place greater value on their own activities – their own work"*.

Flexibility

The market orientation literature advocates the need for responsiveness to information pertaining to customers (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). Underlying responsiveness is the theme *flexibility*, as *flexibility* is needed to be able to respond to different customer situations as they appear. By making employees aware, de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley (1999) believe employees should be able to retain the flexibility to deal with different people and different situations, while still conforming to the organisation's objectives. This research is consistent with the literature with managers promoting the fact that a market orientated business philosophy provides employees flexibility, in respect to their roles and responsibilities as is evidenced in the following statement provided by one of the participants, *"Employees have learned to become more flexible.... how can we make the customer's stay more enjoyable – the adaptability – the flexibility"*.

Management Role

The findings of this research also identify the specific role of managers in making employees aware of the brand as being imperative. The evidence of this thinking is apparent in statements such as, *"I think we (managers) have become the distributors"* and *"If you want to deliver to your team, if you want your team to be*

heading in the one direction, yes you (as a manager) need the brand to provide the direction and leadership” (Interviewee comments). The literature only touches on the support role of management in making employees aware of the brand (George, 1990; Varey, 1995; McDonald et al 2001). However, the emphasis management role was afforded in this research, supported by the research of Jones et al (2003) in the market orientation literature, who advocates management leading by example and being careful to show commitment to organisational goals and values, suggests management role, in this research, makes a significant contribution to the current branding literature.

Comprehension of Differences

For knowledge to be transferred successfully, from manager or organisation to employee, it must be presented in a manner that the recipient understands. The findings of this study, therefore suggests that it is necessary to *comprehend the differences* amongst employees, and act accordingly, when making them aware of the brand. For example, *“Literacy is a challenge for my department – here is some reading material – if they can’t understand a written word, how are they going to understand the concept of brand”* (Interviewee comment). As was the case with *relevance*, the need for organisations to consider the differences of employees, whether that is in roles or responsibilities or intellectual capability, was not apparent in the literature.

A possible explanation for this new finding lies in the source of information used as a basis for the existing body of knowledge pertaining to brand management research. As has been previously discussed, researchers have used several exploratory methods to add to the extant literature of brand management, namely case analysis (e.g. Simoes and Dibb, 2001), senior consultant or expert in depth interviews (e.g. de Chernatony and Dall’Olmo Riley, 1997, 1998, 1999) or have conceptualised theories

based on the review of the literature (e.g. Mc Donald et al 2001). In contrast this research was conducted in an applied setting.

Influencing Role

The literature suggested that by employees having knowledge of the brand it would guide employee behaviour (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001) and help ensure consistency in service delivery (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1999), motivating employees to act in a service oriented manner (George, 1990; Rafiq and Ahmed, 2000). By guiding and helping employees to carry out their roles and responsibilities, knowledge of the brand plays an *influencing role*. Consistent with the literature, the findings of this research suggest that knowledge of the brand influences employee behaviour, thereby helping to ensure the employees behave in a manner consistent with the organisation's goals and values. For example *"I still think that your framework of your choices and activities should be based on foundations of policy and procedure – your actions and responses based on what opportunities are available to you. In terms of selection of those activities, yes it maybe depending on your brand."* (Interviewee comment)

Control

Despite the provision of brand knowledge to help employees behave in an appropriate manner, the literature highlights that there is still a potential for inconsistent service delivery as a result of natural human interaction in the service experience (Rafiq and Ahmed, 2000; de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1999).

The need for consistency underpins the *control* theme identified in this research for without it, participants perceived that there would be no service efficiency. Control is perceived to be engendered through the implementation of systems and procedures as they clearly outlined expectations of the organisation and in doing so, directed

employees' behaviour. In fact, one comment was *"You need policies and procedures to clearly outline expectations - they give you a benchmark"*.

The literature however presents a divided view as to how to deliver service quality consistent with the brand promise. The first position suggests a *controlled* environment is warranted, enabled through careful planning, automation and regular reviews of performance (e.g. Levitt, 1972), thereby attempting to standardize the service encounter to ensure consistency. This is consistent with the findings of this research. In contrast, the second view suggests the employee – customer encounter provides the opportunity to customize the experience to best meet the needs of individual customers (e.g. Berry, 1980).

Foundation

Further to the second view presented, that being a customised approach to delivering service quality in alignment with the brand, the findings of this study perceived systems and procedures to represent the base or foundation upon which other factors, for example, knowledge of the brand, are built. Systems and procedures were considered a necessary resource to guide employee behaviour, but rather than be the exclusive factor, they were seen as a complementary factor that provides a foundation upon which to build. As such, they were not considered to be definitive, sometimes requiring alternative actions to be taken depending on the situation. For example, *"When you have a large team you need to provide appropriate structure and guidance/instructions to team members to allow them to understand where their limits are and what is expected of them. At the same time I am forever saying, don't ever let a system stop you from delivering service"*.

Therefore, while the findings of this research are consistent with both positions in the literature, the findings suggest that the positions i.e. control and customisation, are a

matter of degree of both rather than absolute adherence to either position. As such, the theme of *foundation* was identified in this research as representing the amalgamated position of control and customisation.

Internal Marketing

Further to systems and procedures, *Internal marketing*, the method by which to align, motivate and integrate employee efforts towards the effective implementation of organisational initiatives as they relate to the customer, is considered to be an essential tool to ensure the consistent delivery of service quality (George, 1990; Rafiq and Ahmed, 2000, Asif and Sargeant, 2000). Organisations need to communicate what the brand stands for so as to encourage the employees to deliver the promise.

The findings of this research are consistent with the literature, identifying specifically training and internal communication as two aspects of internal marketing that enhance the systems and procedures already in place. One participant commented how *“Training and internal communication – definitely. The more people who are aware of what is happening in the progress of the business, the better they can manage situations.”* Managers believed that internal marketing helped employees in delivering service quality in alignment with the brand as it increased their awareness of the organisation’s objectives and their subsequent role within it.

Enhancers

Furthermore, if an employee believes that information, for example customer knowledge, that is important to fulfilling their performance expectations is not widely distributed, employee’s role ambiguity increases (Babin and Boles, 1996). This in turn negatively impacts employee’s ability to be customer oriented (Jones et al,

2003). Therefore, the provision of customer knowledge or being customer aware *enhances* the systems and procedures, thereby decreasing role ambiguity. The findings of this study are consistent with the literature, as it is believed that the provision of customer knowledge or being customer aware *enhances* the systems and procedures. Providing customer knowledge adds depth to the impersonal systems and procedures as is evident in the following statement *“It would be too process oriented (without customer knowledge) – employees would have no ownership of it.”*

Element of control

Martin et al (1998) believes that to effectively involve employees in the market oriented business philosophy requires a culture that encourages employee empowerment. In doing so, employee empowerment is believed to increase efficiencies as employees coordinate their own activities across functions and all areas are customer focussed (Martin et al, 1998).

Inconsistent with the literature, this research found that while managers believed providing additional resources other than systems and procedures were necessary to guide employee behaviour, an *element of control* was still needed to ensure employees behaved in a manner that was consistent with the brand promise. For example *“I worked in an organisation that promoted empowerment and it created chaos”* (interviewee comment). One possible reason for this finding is the perceived difficulty in establishing the universal boundaries for empowerment. Coupled with this is the inherent difficulty in managing a subjective process i.e. what is empowerment to one person maybe different to another and is largely defined by individual employees.

It is evident, from the previous discussion, that this study has identified themes that not only expanded the existing body of knowledge but also made significant and unique contributions to the extant literature. Furthermore, this study proposes a model so as to consider these contributions and to enhance our understanding of the impact on the role of the employee in the market-oriented strategy of brand management.

--- take in Figure II ---

When considering this model it is apparent that themes identified in this study, in conjunction with the themes previously identified in the literature, can be segmented into one of the four sections. These sections include a) Business Philosophy and Organisational Strategy; b) Enablers of Organisational Strategy; c) Employee Outcomes; and d) Organisational Outcomes.

The first section represents much of what was articulated in the literature i.e. market orientation represents a business philosophy and that an element of the philosophy is the organisational strategy of brand management. The second section encompasses themes that were consistent in both the literature and this study as being enablers to aid in the realisation of the service organisation's strategy. The three themes considered being enablers of the brand management organisational strategy include Systems and Procedures, Management Role and Internal Marketing. Systems and Procedures are considered an enabler through the provision of control and establishing a foundation. The support of management and their role in enabling the organisational strategy is grounded in their ability to provide relevance and identify and comprehend the differences amongst their employees. Finally, Internal Marketing, in this study, was considered an enabler through tools such as internal communication and training. The third section is concerned with the outcomes of adopting such a strategy as it relates to employees. The majority of the themes identified in this study define this section. The dominance of themes within this

section suggests that the adoption of a brand management strategy internally as well as externally, has a tremendous influence on employees. This influence can be both positive and negative and, as such, consideration as to how to engender these outcomes is paramount. In other words, the opportunity to generate a positive response from employees by internalising the brand can be as easily a negative response if the enablers mentioned previously are not effective. The final section that Figure 2 depicts is the organisational outcome. Provided the enablers referred to in section two are effective, the employee outcomes in section three are likely to be realised. That being the case, employee satisfaction is likely to increase which will influence employee behaviour. As such, the outcome from the organisation's perspective is that the service quality delivered is consistent with the brand and, therefore, the employees are delivering on the brand promise as defined by senior management.

CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

As service organisations seek to maintain a competitive advantage in a rapidly changing and competitive market, market orientation, and more specifically brand management, have been widely discussed in the literature and industry as a means to engender such an advantage. Despite the depth of discussions about market orientation and brand management in the literature, limited consideration has been given to the application of such principles in an applied setting. More specifically, what impact does the realisation of market orientation and brand management strategies through the service encounter have on the employees' role?

As such, this study has specifically explored manager's perspectives as to the impact on the employee in the realisation of the market oriented brand strategy in order to engender superior organisational performance, as managers were perceived to shape the desired behaviour of employees (George, 1990; Pulendran et al., 2000;

Harris and de Chernatony, 2001). A case study approach was deemed the most appropriate method to collect the data as it, not only provided the depth and richness of understanding of the phenomenon, it also allowed the moderating effect of organisation culture on employees attitudes and behaviours to be consistent across all participants.

With respect to employing a case study methodology, the inherent limitations that are generally associated with this method include insufficient precision (i.e. quantifiable), objectivity and rigor (Yin, 1994). As such, the development of a case study database, multiple sources of evidence used and the formalisation of the interview process increased the likelihood of trustworthiness and credibility in the results. Furthermore, the limitations inherent in employing a single case study methodology, namely “putting all your eggs in one basket” was acknowledge and thus several sub units of the case were analysed to minimise bias.

The findings of this research, in large, are consistent to the extant literature, with several themes, namely relevance and comprehension of differences, making a unique contribution to the theory. This contribution was afforded as a result of conducting the research in an applied setting with participants that were not marketing experts, rather managers that were charged with the responsibility of implementing, internally, marketing practices. As such, several managerial implications were identified, namely

- For employees to be aware of the appropriate behaviour to adopt in a service encounter, management must identify effective means by which to communicate these standards in a meaningful and relevant way.
- Management should be mindful at all times of the differences within the service employees in relation to the ability to comprehend information as well as what information different roles and responsibilities require

- Management should be actively involved with service employees through the adoption of an internal marketing philosophy (i.e. training and communication), providing continual information necessary for successful completion of their roles and responsibilities as well as acting in a manner that is consistent with what is required of the service employees
- Management should ensure the successful recruitment and subsequent training of service employees that possess customer focussed qualities

As the results from this research can only be generalized to theory in light of the characteristics inherent in the adoption of case study methodology, further research in this area is suggested. In particular, to further enhance the understanding of manager's perspectives of what is required, i.e. methods, for employees to effectively deliver service quality that is aligned with the brand; other organisations need to be considered. In doing so, this will increase our understanding of what themes are organizationally specific and what themes are inherent in all organisations that try to make brand principles operational. Further research in this area has the potential to develop empirically tested themes that all brand focussed organizations need to consider when wanting to ensure there is alignment between the external customer's perceptions of the brand experience and the internal, service providers perceptions of the brand experience. Finally, further research could enhance the understanding of the employees' role in brand management strategies within a service firm, if a more comprehensive multiple perspectives was explored, incorporating the insights of both front of house and back of house employees as well as senior managers. The resulting factor would be the identification of implications that impact all key stakeholders.

In conclusion, this study contributes to our understanding of managers' perspectives as to the impact on employees' roles in the realisation of the market-oriented strategy

of brand management. The approach of this study to an applied setting appears to be the first attempt to understand the implications of market orientation and brand management from an operational management perspective, as previous research has focussed on the perspectives of senior management or expert views. The research conducted in this thesis provides a foundation to understand the implications of applying theory in practice, in particular, from an operational perspective.

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Table I

Profile of Participants

Interview	Division	Sex	Age	Duration of employment
1	Human Resources	Male	38	2
2	Finance	Male	28	6
3	Gaming	Female	27	10
4	Food & Beverage	Male	32	4
5	Other	Male	50	15
6	Hotel	Female	55	18
7	Other	Female	28	3
8	Hotel	Female	38	10
9	Gaming	Male	33	7
10	Food & Beverage	Male	40	1

Table II**Themes perceived to underpin the employees role in the brand management of a service firm**

Theme	Frequency of mention by interviewees
Research Question 1: To what extent do managers believe that a market orientation business philosophy requires employee awareness of the business philosophy?	
Direction	10
Involvement	6
Employee Selection	2
Relevance	3
Research Question 2: To what extent do managers believe that a market orientation has an impact on employee's roles and responsibilities?	
Direction	10
Employee Satisfaction	9
Flexibility	5
Research Question 3: To what extent do managers believe that employees should have knowledge of the organisation's brand (i.e. objectives, actions and communication campaigns)?	
Relevance	9
Direction	8
Management Role	6
Comprehension of Differences	4
Research Question 4: To what extent do managers believe that employee knowledge of the brand will lead to appropriate employee behaviour in delivering the brand promise?	
Influencing Role	6
Direction	7
Research Question 5: To what extent do managers believe that the delivery of service quality in alignment with the brand is dependant upon the implementation of systems and procedures?	
Control	10
Foundation	7
Research Question 6: Apart from the implementation of systems and procedures, what other factors do managers believe assist employees in delivering service quality in alignment with the brand promise?	
Internal Marketing	9
Management Role	7
Research Question 7: To what extent do managers believe that consumer knowledge/awareness is necessary to supplement the systems and procedures implemented to deliver service quality in line with the brand promise?	
Direction	7
Employee Satisfaction	6
Enhancers	4
Research Question 8: To what extent do managers believe that employee empowerment is necessary to supplement the systems and procedures implemented to deliver service quality in line with the brand promise?	
Element of control	8

Figure I

SERVICES MARKETING TRIANGLE
Figure 2.2 Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996, p. 23

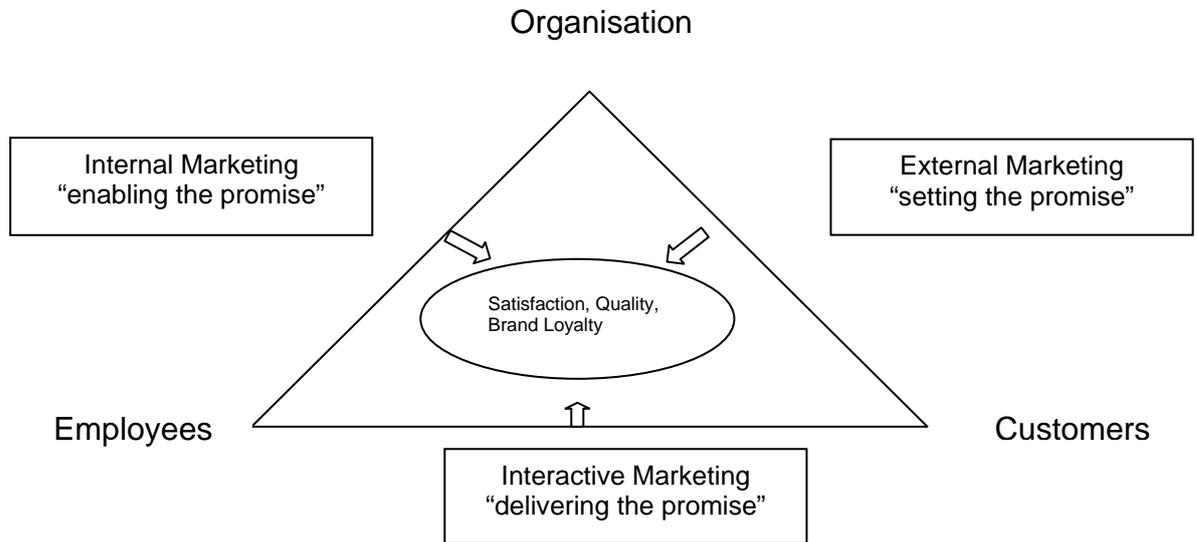


Figure II
Exploring managers' perspectives of the impact of brand management strategies on employee roles within a service firm

