

“One size doesn’t fit all”

Tourism & Hospitality Employees’ Response to Internal Brand Management

Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the effect of internal brand management (IBM) practices on tourism and hospitality employees’ ability to demonstrate brand supportive behaviours. A model which includes *brand knowledge dissemination*, *role clarity*, *brand commitment* and *brand supportive behaviour* is proposed. To provide further insight, the study examines the impact that hierarchical roles have on employees’ responses.

Design: A quantitative research methodology was adopted resulting in the development of a self-administered online survey instrument. Using a national database of service employees, respondents were invited to participate in the online survey, resulting in the completion of 137 surveys.

Findings: While all paths were significant in the overall model, differences were found when comparing front line and management models. Overall, *brand commitment* played a more significant role in the front line model, whereas *role clarity* was not shown to be significant in the management model with respect to influencing *brand supportive behaviour*.

Implications: The results suggest the tourism and hospitality employee market is not homogenous. IBM has a positive effect on all employees but it is what they choose to do with that information that differs. Managers should endeavour to develop brand committed front line employees, while the management employees should be encouraged to apply their brand knowledge, thereby ‘leading by example’.

Originality/Value: An IBM strategy should be paramount in the tourism & hospitality industry given the critical role the employee provides to a guest’s overall experience and assessment of the brand. This study empirically validates the effects of IBM, identifying differences in responses based on hierarchical position which has ramifications for practitioners and academics in developing best practice.

Introduction

The tourism and hospitality (T &H) industry is classified as a labour intensive, service based, industry that relies on the abilities and intentions of employees to drive organisational initiatives. Increasing competition within the sector, combined with the significance of the customer-employee interaction in the provision of a hospitality service, has resulted in a heightened awareness amongst practitioners and academics to better appreciate how to attract, maintain and motivate employees (e.g. King & Grace 2006). Employees have a powerful effect on how consumers perceive an organisation (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001) and, subsequently, how the organisation performs in the long term.

While it is the responsibility of the marketing department to market the hospitality brand through external marketing communication channels, the success of the brand is largely contingent on the ability of the employees to deliver what has been communicated (Simoes & Dibb, 2001). It is for this reason that Kandampully and Duddy (2001) promote the need for tourism managers to identify innovative ways to extend employee behaviour, going beyond their job description, in order to exceed customer expectations. In the context of T & H, employees constitute the interface between a brand's internal and external environment, thereby making it essential that employee behaviour is consistent and, thus, reinforcing the brand's advertised benefits. If inconsistent, the credibility of the brand is undermined (Samli & Frolich, 1992).

In a quest to uncover precursors to positive employee behaviours in the T & H industry, previous studies have examined the role of leadership (e.g. Gill & Mathur, 2007), the role of work status (e.g. Cho & Johanson, 2008) and the role of empowerment (e.g. Kazlauskaite et al., 2006). While underpinning the majority of these studies is the notion of communication and sharing information, more recently, there has been a particular emphasis in the hospitality industry on knowledge sharing (e.g. Hu et al., 2009) to enable employees to meet and/or exceed the expectations of their customers (Paraskevas, 2001). However, to date, very limited research has been done with respect to exploring employee knowledge from a brand perspective in the hospitality industry. According to Laroche and Parsa (2000), external brand management is the least understood in the hospitality industry. Therefore, as a relatively new stream of brand management, it is not surprising that internal brand management (IBM) is yet to be thoroughly explored in the context of T & H.

Notwithstanding this paucity, the importance of such an investigation is paramount given the critical role that the hospitality employee provides to a guest's overall experience (Curtis & Upchurch, 2008) and subsequent evaluation of the hospitality organisation's brand (Grace & O'Cass, 2005). Furthermore, Baum (2008) asserts that the management of 'talent' in T & H today, because of the industry's diversity and inherent labour market challenges (e.g. high turnover), warrants a more inclusive and open minded approach to training and development. IBM is suggested, here, to be such an approach. In particular, enhancing employee skills and knowledge sets, or 'soft skills', beyond the technical requirements is considered not only a T & H industry requirement (Baum, 2008), but also necessary for the brand promise to be delivered (King & Grace, 2008).

In recognition of the importance of IBM to service brand success and the engagement of T & H employees, the objective of this study is to measure IBM effects on employees. In doing so, this study will inform the T & H literature with respect to the application of IBM, as well as enlighten practitioners to the importance of "nurturing their employee's mental contributions much more than their manual input" (Kandampully & Duddy, 2001, p.43). Specifically, in this study, an empirical examination of a network of relationships pertaining to the effects of IBM, which includes *brand knowledge dissemination*, *role clarity*, *brand commitment* and *brand supportive behaviour*, is undertaken. In addition, by comparing these relationships across hierarchical positions, we enhance our understanding of the way in which employees at different levels in the organisation, with different responsibilities and issues, respond to IBM efforts. In doing so, this study goes beyond the general validation of relationships amongst IBM constructs, by making statistical comparisons of the model over two distinct employee groups.

Theoretical Development

In contrast to physical goods, the role of the employee in a consumer's evaluation is emphasised in the context of a T & H service experience. Often, the limited physical evidence in a hospitality service means that the service experience is an outcome of the culture of the organisation as well as the training and attitudes of its employees (de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003). It is from this perspective that Heskett et al. (1994) emphasise the significance of service employees acting as catalysts to realise profitable outcomes, as reflected in the *Service Profit Chain*. Heskett et al. (1994) promotes that it is only through a positive internal

service culture, resulting in the retention and improved productivity of employees, that customer satisfaction, loyalty and profitable outcomes can be realised. As such, the significance of managing the service employee's customer orientation is amplified.

Customer consciousness is particularly relevant in a hospitality organisation given that the consumers' service experience is a significant contributor to revisit intentions. Employees are considered a central source of customer information. Therefore it is imperative that employee behaviour reinforces the brand's communicated benefits. In fact, it is argued that service brand success can be only realised if the employee market is participatory, exhibiting positive attitudes and behaviour (Papasolomou & Vrontis, 2006). de Chernatony et al. (2006) advocate influencing employee behaviour through the internal communication of brand values to enable employee comprehension as well as acceptance and internalisation. It is insufficient to simply train hospitality employees, rather they need to understand and support the service to be fully committed to delivering the brand promise (Ottenbacher, 2007). It is for this reason, de Chernatony and Cottam (2006) promote the driving force for a successful brand is the underpinning provided by an informed and highly brand literate employee market.

According to Keller (1998), brand knowledge consists of a brand node in the memory with a variety of associations linked to it. The organisation of brand nodes in one's memory influences how brand information is recalled, which ultimately influences an individual's behaviour as well as brand related decisions. While Keller (1993; 1998) relates brand knowledge to the consumer, it is equally relevant to the employee. That is, the key to employees being able to deliver the brand promise is, brand knowledge. Consistent with the consumer view, if employees are void of brand knowledge, they are not able to behave in the manner desired by the organisation, nor are they able to make brand related decisions.

In the context of this study, *brand knowledge dissemination* is concerned with providing the context with which the external brand identity is made relevant to each employee (Lings & Greenley, 2005). Given that employees require relevant and meaningful information to exhibit desired behaviours, the dissemination of brand knowledge is important. Drawing on the content provided by the organisation's brand identity, *brand knowledge dissemination* equips employees with knowledge to satisfy customer expectations that are formed as a result of the brand's communicated identity. Communication of information with respect to the service offering, customers needs and wants, product and service benefits and characteristics,

as well as the corporate aims and strategies (Lings & Greenley, 2005), all contribute to the clarification of employees' roles within the work environment. *Brand knowledge dissemination* is, therefore, defined as *the extent to which an employee perceives brand knowledge is transferred from the organisation to the employee, in a meaningful and relevant manner.*

Receiving information about the brand has been found to contribute to the provision of employee direction (King & Grace, 2005), as well as a commitment to the brand that is lacking when only technical, job related information is provided (King & Grace, 2008). In particular, the ability to identify antecedents to such commitment has been found to be 'urgent' with respect to reducing employee turnover in some hotel industries (Kazlauskaitė et al., 2006). Providing guidance to hospitality employees in handling challenging service encounters, leading them in the right direction and communicating with them in an open and honest manner enhances employee satisfaction (Chathoth et al., 2007), which, in turn, affects positive attitudinal change. Therefore, the result of *brand knowledge dissemination* is believed, here, to consist of two dimensions that ultimately affect the way that employees respond to IBM, namely *role clarity* and *brand commitment*.

In the context of this study, *role clarity* can be defined as *the level of clarity an employee has of their role as a result of having brand knowledge.* Providing employees with clear guidance and direction, as premised through the provision of appropriate brand knowledge, has the potential for role conflict and confusion to dissipate. If an employee believes that information that is important to fulfilling their performance expectations is not widely distributed, an employee's role ambiguity increases (Babin & Boles, 1996). Given that employees, having brand knowledge is considered to be important for providing direction with respect to their roles (King & Grace, 2005), *role clarity* is considered a relevant outcome upon which to assess employee brand knowledge.

To ensure that employees also have a genuine desire to deliver the brand promise, the level of employee *brand commitment* is considered an important outcome of the dissemination of brand knowledge. When employees exhibit commitment to their hotel, such commitment is believed to be driven by the desire of the employee to support the hotels goals and values (Kazlauskaitė et al., 2006). If the employee perceives the relationship with the organisation to be a positive one, worthy of maintaining, then the employee has a high level of

commitment to the brand. Commitment, in this sense, is considered to be a key variable in determining organisational success (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) as employees' feelings of belonging influences their ability to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to achieve the organisation's goals (Castro et al., 2005). *Brand commitment*, therefore, is defined as *the psychological attachment or the feeling of belonging an employee has towards the brand*. As such, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: *Brand Knowledge Dissemination* will have a significant positive effect on *Role Clarity*

H2: *Brand Knowledge Dissemination* will have a significant positive effect on *Brand Commitment*

Ultimately, however, the benefits of these outcomes can only be realised in the exhibition of employee behaviour. As such, consideration as to the actions of employees as a result of such *role clarity* and *brand commitment* provides for a more holistic appreciation of the impact of IBM. Thus we hypothesize that:

H3: *Role Clarity* will have a significant positive effect on *Brand Supportive Behaviour*

H3: *Brand Commitment* will have a significant positive effect on *Brand Supportive Behaviour*

Employees' exhibition of *brand supportive behaviour* reflects the 'extra role', or non prescribed employee behaviour that's consistent with the brand values of the organisation. Such behaviour that extends beyond formal role requirements has been found to be essential for hospitality organisational success. Hospitality employees exhibiting helping behaviours have been associated with organisations that exhibit operational efficiency as well as high levels of customer satisfaction and perceived quality (Walz & Niehoff, 2000). T & H customers frequently rate excellent service as being attributed to employees that demonstrate discretionary effort in the service encounter (Harris et al., 2003). Appreciation of the hypothesized relationships between the constructs previously discussed is represented in Figure i.

----Insert Figure i here-----

When considering the effectiveness of IBM practices, the population of interest should naturally reside in an employee domain. However, despite some of the internal brand

literature capturing both management and front line employees perspectives (e.g. de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006), limited comparative analysis within the employee group has been conducted. This is somewhat surprising given the innate internal structures of an organisation, organic or prescriptive, as reflected in organisational charts. While it has been hypothesised, and somewhat supported, that employee perceptions of the organisation are influenced by variables such as tenure and function (e.g. Naude et al., 2003), limited research has been conducted to appreciate the impact of such differences in the context of IBM. Research that has endeavoured to assess the perceptions of employees within different hierarchical positions has found that perceptions often differ between front line or lower level management and that of senior managers (Zhou et al., 2004). Therefore, in light of this finding and subsequent discussion, the research question that guides this study is

Research Question: To what extent do responses to the dissemination of brand knowledge differ between front line and management employees?

Research Design

The research methodology was based on the development of a survey questionnaire, executed in an online format that assessed employees' perceptions, attitudes and behaviour with respect to the application of IBM practices. Quantitative research was determined to be the most appropriate given the large number of T & H employee related studies that adopt this approach (Lucas & Deery, 2004) as well as the need to investigate relationships between constructs and the strength of these relationships.

The majority of the scale items were drawn from existing scales, demonstrating reliability and validity. For example, *brand commitment* (BC) items were drawn from larger organisational commitment scales of Ganesan and Weitz (1996) and Maltz and Kohli (1996), while *role clarity* items were drawn from Singh and Rhoads (1991), Kohli and Jaworski (1994) and Moorman (1995). In relation to *brand supportive behaviour* (BSB), the literature (e.g. Burmann & Zeplin, 2005) provided guidance to the development of these items. Finally, *brand knowledge dissemination* (BKD) items were drawn from internal marketing scales of Foreman and Money (1995), Conduit and Mavondo (2001) and Lings and Greenley (2005) with some items also being developed specifically for this study. Prior to survey development, all items were thoroughly scrutinised by an expert panel (marketing and management

academics and scale development experts) to ensure that items effectively represented the construct definition. As a result, no changes were recommended to the presented items. Items used in the survey are presented in Table i.

Employment of a non-probability, purposive sampling technique was deemed necessary as the population of interest was employees that work in the T & H industry. An Australian market research database of individuals that had 'opted in' to receive and participate in market research projects was used to generate a random sample, thus increasing the potential for a diverse sample that could be generalised to other studies. Respondents were selected based on a T & H employment industry classification criterion.

Eight hundred email invitations were sent, resulting in 137 completed surveys (i.e. 17% response rate). Respondents were predominantly female participants (i.e. 70.8%) with a spread of age group representation (e.g. 18 – 25 19.9% to 36 - 40 8.1%). The gender and age characteristics of the sample (i.e. predominantly female and young) were consistent with a number of other T & H studies (e.g. Chiang et al. 2008; O'Leary & Deegan, 2005; Matzler & Renzl, 2007). There was relatively consistent representation between respondents that held entry-level positions (44.5%) and middle level management positions (46.7%), with only 8.8% of respondents holding senior management positions. The majority of the sample was in full time employment (50.7%), with casual and part time employment representing 22.1% and 27.2% respectively. In comparison to the population demographics, the sample reflected consistencies with respect to predominance of females and split across position classification. With respect to age, the sample demographics were skewed towards younger respondents which Wildes and Parks (2005) attribute to the nature of the industry and its attraction as 'temporary' employment solution. Data, after satisfying preliminary analysis requirements, was analysed using Partial Least Squares (PLS). Data was then divided into two groups, namely front line employees (n = 61) and management employees (n = 76) and appropriate comparative analysis conducted (e.g. Chin, 2002).

Preliminary Analysis

Bivariate correlations between the items within each construct were inspected and all coefficients fell within an acceptable range for factor analysis of .30 to .90. Table i presents the results of the exploratory factor analysis by providing factor loadings, reliabilities, and

variance explained associated with each construct. With the exception of *role clarity*, all scales were unidimensional, exhibiting high variance explained and strong reliabilities i.e. Cronbach's alpha ranging from .84 to .90 (see Table i). The EFA for *role clarity* yielded a two factor solution, which, upon examination, revealed one factor reflecting generic role clarity items, with the other factor reflecting *role clarity* items specific to the brand. Collectively, the seven item scale reported strong reliability evidenced by Cronbach's alpha of .79. As such, the preliminary analysis indicated that all items were valid and reliable measures for their respective constructs.

----Insert Table i here-----

Convergent validity is achieved if the average variance explained (AVE) in items by their respective constructs is greater than the variance unexplained (i.e., $AVE > .50$) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In order to assess the constructs for convergent validity, the squared multiple correlations from the reliability analysis were used to calculate the average variance explained. This resulted in all factors having an average variance explained (AVE) greater than or equal to .50, meeting the recommended criteria for convergent validity. The calculated AVE for each of the factors is as follows: *brand knowledge dissemination* (.59), *role clarity* (.71), *brand commitment* (.60) and *brand supportive behaviour* (.51). On confirming the suitability of the data for further analysis, composite mean variables were then computed and the resulting means and standard deviations appear in Table ii.

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Having computed the composite measures, an assessment of discriminant validity, as recommend by Gaski and Nevin (1985), was initiated, in that if the correlation between two composite constructs is not higher than their respective reliability estimates, then discriminant validity exists. Construct correlations were examined and compared to the reliabilities calculated via Cronbach's alpha in the preliminary data analysis. Correlations ranged from .47 to .73 and the reliabilities ranged from .84 to .90. The comparison of individual bivariate correlations between constructs revealed that no correlations were higher than their respective reliabilities. This being the case discriminant validity was verified.

PLS Analysis

Partial Least Squares (PLS), used in the analysis of structural equation modelling, is a multivariate technique that allows for the estimation and examination of paths between latent variables that are measured via multiple indicators. The strength of this analysis lies in its ability to cope with small sample sizes and the abatement of the hard assumptions of multivariate normality (Bontis, 1998; Kroonenberg, 1990). In terms of sample size, Cassel et al. (2000) found that there was very little effect on PLS estimates when increasing the sample size from 50 to 200. In addition, they also found that PLS was robust against skewed distributions, multicollinearity and model misspecifications thus providing evidence that the normality assumption is not a prerequisite for PLS analysis. While LISREL and AMOS are widely used structural equation modeling tools within the marketing domain, the advantages of PLS have begun to be realised with an increasing number of PLS applications within the literature (e.g. Pecotich et al., 1998).

Results

In consideration of the proposed relationships presented in Figure i, the analysis reveals all paths to be significant. As reflected in Table iii, the individual R^2 calculated for each endogenous variable indicates that the exogenous variable explained a significant proportion of variance in each latent variable and is, therefore, greater than the recommended level of .10 (Falk & Miller, 1992). The R^2 with respect to *role clarity*, *brand commitment* and *brand supportive behaviour* is .43, .33 and .56 respectively resulting in the variance accounted (AVA) for model of .44. In other words, the data shows that 43% of the variance in *role clarity* is explained by the provision of *brand knowledge dissemination*, while *role clarity* and *brand commitment* explains 56% of the variance in *brand supportive behaviours*. In addition, *brand knowledge dissemination* explains 33% of the variance in the employees' level of commitment to the brand.

As all of the R^2 are greater than the recommended level, each path was examined to assess their level of significance. The value of the product of path coefficient and the correlation coefficient enabled the variance due to path to be calculated (Falk & Miller, 1992). All path

variances are greater than .015 and the bootstrap critical ratios are greater than 1.96, indicating that all paths has significant positive effects as predicted.

----Insert Table iii here-----

After establishing the hypothesised relationships in the model are significant for the entire sample, the two employee groups (front line and management) were assessed to identify whether there were any differences as a result of position classification. The data file was split in two groups reflecting position classification. This resulted in one data file containing 61 cases (front line) and the other file containing 76 cases (management). Prior to comparing the differences, each data file was analysed separately via PLS.

Model results – Front Line

Consistent with the overall model, the front line employee model demonstrates all R^2 to be greater than the recommended level of .10 (Falk & Miller, 1992) for all of the predicted variables and the AVA for the endogenous variables is .41. The data shows that 33% of the variance in *role clarity* is explained by *brand knowledge dissemination* which also explains 25% of the variance in *brand commitment*. *Role clarity* and *brand commitment* explains 67% of the variance in *brand supportive behaviours*. Path variances exhibited bootstrap critical ratios greater than 1.96, indicating that these paths have significant positive effects.

Model results – Management

An examination of the management model reveals a consistent pattern with respect to strong R^2 as previously reported, with an AVA of .47. *Brand knowledge dissemination* accounts for 52% of the variance in managers' *role clarity*, while accounting for 44% of the variance in *brand commitment*. Collectively, *role clarity* and *brand commitment* accounts for 45% of the variance in *brand supportive behaviours*. Path variance, with the exception of one, demonstrates critical ratios greater than 1.96. With the exception of the hypothesised link between *role clarity* and *brand supportive behaviours*, all paths for the management model exhibit significant positive effects as predicted.

To examine the differences between the two groups of employees, the front line and management models were further compared to determine whether there were any differences in strength of the relationships in the model i.e. paths. Chin (2002) provides a means by which such an examination can be conducted, via a test considered to be equivalent to a t-test. The results of the one-tailed t-tests, are shown in Table iv. Tests with t values greater than ± 1.64 were deemed to be significantly different. While the path from *role clarity* to *brand supportive behaviour* is not significantly different between the two models, the paths from *brand knowledge dissemination* to *role clarity* and *brand commitment* are significantly stronger for the management model. The path from *brand commitment* to *brand supportive behaviour* is significantly stronger for front line employees.

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Discussion

The results presented for the overall model provide empirical support for *brand knowledge dissemination* having a significant positive effect on T & H employees' *role clarity* and *commitment* to the brand. Such knowledge effects make a significant positive contribution to employees exhibiting *brand supportive behaviour*. Many aspects of a service encounter require non-mandated actions on behalf of the employee so as to ensure customer satisfaction (Deluga, 1994). As customer expectations are formed as a result of brand communications, it is imperative that employees are capable of responding in an appropriate manner. Through the dissemination of brand knowledge, that is above and beyond the communication of standards and procedures and traditional skills based training, employees have a level of certainty with respect to what is required of them as well as are more committed to and, therefore, active in, bringing the brand to life.

So as to provide for more insight into the effects of IBM, examination of the differences in employee response by position classification was deemed to be necessary. The reason being was that front line and management employees have a different relationship with the brand based on their responsibilities within the organisation. As such, it should not be assumed that all employees will respond in the same manner. The results of this study suggest, in fact, that in responding to IBM initiatives, employees are not a homogenous group.

Both the front line and the management models showed significant paths emanating from *brand knowledge dissemination*; however both paths were stronger for managers. In such a highly casualised workforce, it is not surprising to find that management reflect a stronger response to *brand knowledge dissemination*. This is attributed to the fact that employees, who are not full time, often expect less from the organisation when compared to their full time colleagues (Cho & Johanson, 2008). Brand knowledge, which is a higher order form of knowledge when compared to basic standards and procedures, is seen to have more effect on those that expect more from the organisation i.e. managers in full time positions. Such a finding contributes to the current debate in the literature as to whether differences between part time and full time workers attitudes towards their jobs actually exist. While Cho and Johanson (2008) identify inconsistencies in the literature with respect to differences between work status, the findings, here, suggest that while both groups demonstrate significant positive effects as a result of IBM, the management employee effect is significantly stronger.

In contrast to the significant positive effects of IBM on all employees (i.e. *role clarity* and *brand commitment*), the subsequent behavioural outcomes of such effects are different when comparing front line and management employees. While the front line employee model reflected ‘pro’ brand behaviour being resultant of an appropriate level of *role clarity* and *commitment* towards the organisation’s brand, the management employee model only showed a significant positive effect as a result of *brand commitment*. While management employees may increase their level of understanding as to their role in delivering the brand promise as a result of IBM activities, such clarity is no guarantee that they will, in turn, use this knowledge to act in a brand supportive manner. It is only through their allegiance to their organisation in the form of *brand commitment* that we see management employees acting in a brand supportive manner.

With the majority of the front line employee respondents working on a casual or part time basis (i.e. 67%), this finding was consistent with Cho and Johanson (2008) findings that affective organisational commitment had a greater effect on pro organisational behaviours for part-time workers in contrast to fulltime workers. This is attributed to the lower expectations of part-time employees of their employer to the extent that when there is a perception that the organisation cares about their contribution, as evidenced, in this case, through the provision of IBM, part time employees demonstrate a stronger commitment and subsequent behaviour (Cho & Johanson, 2008).

The fact that management employees are only demonstrating *brand supportive behaviours* once they are committed to the brand is of particular concern, given their role in leading and developing front line employees. King and Grace (2006) clearly advocate the responsibility of hospitality managers in the transference and application of brand knowledge to employees, for without management support and promotion of brand initiatives, the likelihood of front line employees being aware of their brand role is diminished. In addition to hospitality managers having knowledge and internalising the mission, goals and objectives of the organisation, they have a responsibility to “pass them down” to the front line employee (Gill & Mathur, 2007, p.332). In other words, *brand supportive behaviour* needs to be encouraged and modelled wherever possible, and that is the responsibility of management.

It could be argued then that T & H managers, having responsibility for employees, have a duty to conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent with the brand promise. Unlike front line employees, *brand supportive behaviour* should not be discretionary behaviour, rather it is a requirement for those employees that are responsible for managing others within the organisation. The findings of this study indicate that management employees only act in a brand supportive manner once they are committed to the organisation. This may be attributed to the fact that management employees, because they are often removed from regular direct customer interface, perceive that it is not their responsibility to deliver the brand promise. Rather the front line employee does this and management’s job is to facilitate that process. While facilitation is a key responsibility of management, it is important that there is an appreciation that the success of such internal service encounters is often underpinned by leading by example (King & Grace, 2006). Therefore, managers need to appreciate that their role involves the exhibition of *brand supportive behaviour*. Without such an appreciation, waiting for managers to develop brand commitment before they ‘walk the talk’ has the potential to slow the momentum of any brand building activity.

Limitations and Future Considerations

As with all research, it is important to acknowledge and learn from the limitations of the study. In doing so, the limitations are highlighted for the purpose of establishing the study’s boundaries as well as identifying areas for future research, yet in no way do they negate the study’s findings. Firstly, as data was collected online with only employees that worked in the T & H industry, it could be suggested that the results can only be generalised to this sector of

the much broader service industry. While it was the intention of this study to specifically examine how T & H employees respond to IBM, generalising the results to other service related industries (e.g. health services) with similar characteristics (i.e. high contact, limited tangible evidence, labour intensive) may demonstrate similar results. However, caution is recommended when generalising results beyond this to other service related industries.

It should also be noted that the selection of an online administered survey is not without its limitations. For example, unrepresentative population, limited coverage, emails being sent to the wrong address and unknown respondents were issues identified in this study but were addressed through the utilisation of a national market research database that could be segmented by employment industry and whose participant information is updated regularly. In construction of the survey instrument, sample integrity issues such as incomplete responses or missing data was addressed through the adoption of mandatory completion fields.

While it is not uncommon to find research or academic instruction classifying T & H into one sector or industry based on the premise of shared characteristics or no clear demarcation of purpose (e.g. Nickson, 2007), future research should consider replicating this study in separate T & H subsectors (e.g. restaurants, hotels, airlines, theme parks). Such research may inform the debate on how T & H organisations are different and whether different management approaches are required to address shared issues such as poor employment image and low retention. Such segmented research will allow identification of relationships between employee response to IBM and any context specific influences such as organisational culture, level of service and the size of the organisation.

While the sample size represented a reasonable response rate, a larger sample might also provide a more diversified age and gender segmentation. Despite a number of T & H studies samples being dominated by female respondents, limited consideration appears to be given to exploring whether gender differences are apparent. While the predominance of female respondents may be considered a mirroring of T & H labour force reality, studies that have explored gender differences with respect to employee work attitudes have presented differing results. For example, Salazar (2000) and Burke, et al. (2008) both report no significant differences in work attitudes amongst hospitality employees by gender. In contrast, Peterson (2004) reports organisational commitment and discretionary behaviour to be more strongly associated with female employees. Given that the premise of this study is to realise a more

productive workforce, future studies would bode well to explore gender differences so as to inform practitioner actions with respect to the application of IBM.

Implications

In recent times, there has been much discussion amongst academics and practitioners about the need for employees to have knowledge of the brand if they are to deliver the brand promise. Such an initiative is considered here to be critical to the success of T & H organisations given the significant role employees play in the service encounter. However, as IBM, and in particular, the empirical investigations of such a theory are only in its infancy, investigation into its effects in a T & H context have yet to be explored. This study addresses this paucity, providing empirical validation that *brand knowledge dissemination* has a significant positive effect on an employee's *role clarity* and *brand commitment*, resulting in *brand supportive behaviour*.

Acknowledgement that the employee market is not generic simply by nature of their hierarchical responsibilities, contributes to T & H and marketing knowledge through the evaluation of differences in responses to IBM across position classification. These differences are best explained by the level of involvement within each hierarchical position. Management employees, simply by the nature of their job, are more involved in the whole organisation, as opposed to just their department. As a result, their requirements from IBM activities are more complex. In contrast, the role of a front line employee is more simplified and not as demanding with respect to the provision of resources for successful role execution. Simply knowing to who and how to direct ones energies is sufficient for front line employees to deliver the brand promise. Given that management often have to implement brand management strategies as well as deliver the brand promise, their information needs and, therefore, expectations, extend beyond the two dimensional, who and how approach, towards a multifaceted, who, how, what, where and why approach.

While the dissemination of brand knowledge is considered paramount for all employees, care must be taken to ensure such knowledge is used as intended. It is important that while managers may be physically removed from day to day contact with customers, having a more management, as opposed to customer service focus, they remain cognisant of their role and responsibility as a manager to exhibit *brand supportive behaviour*. Managers must be

accountable for their continuous promotion and active support of ‘pro’ brand behaviour (King & Grace, 2006) given their ability to influence employees’ attitudes (Wayne et al., 1997). Managers need to be aware that *brand supportive behaviour* is not discretionary management behaviour, given their responsibility to lead and direct front line employees. Managers that don’t ‘walk the talk’, rather relying on front line employees to act in a brand supportive manner may, in fact, be detrimental to the long term success of the T & H brand. Furthermore, front line employees’ positive response to the receipt of internal brand information requires acknowledgment of their efforts by management if such brand supportive behaviour is to continue.

From the previous discussion several practical implications come to the fore, namely,

- In a service based organisation, where employee requirements are often un-prescribed, the provision of brand knowledge is seen as a significant contributor to an employee’s *role clarity* and *brand commitment*. Therefore, irrespective of organisational size, an IBM strategy should be a requirement for all T & H organisations that covet a productive and contributory workforce.
- For managers to exhibit *brand supportive behaviours* from the commencement of their employment, explicit instructions need to be forthcoming. In other words, as part of a manager’s job description, given their responsibility to effectively manage front line employees, brand values and how they relate to that management position should be effectively communicated.
- To ensure management accountability, key performance indicators (KPIs) should incorporate measures with respect to IBM. For example, in addition to labour cost or cost of goods sold KPIs, management success should also be measured in terms of areas of responsibility reflecting brand values as well as recognition and support of employees exhibiting *brand supportive behaviour*.
- Acknowledging that not all managers, despite instruction and measurement, will ‘walk the brand talk’, a bottom up, whole of organisation, IBM approach is required. This will ensure that important brand knowledge will get through to the front line along with the necessary support and acknowledgement for ‘pro’ brand behaviour regardless of whether their direct manager acknowledges their efforts.
- Finally, with affective *brand commitment* being the most significant indicator of *brand supportive behaviour*, T & H organisations would bode well to invest in the

development of such a commitment in all employees. While employee commitment in any sense is good for T & H organisations that suffer from high turnover, *brand commitment*, should be a priority. Not only does it address such operational implications as service consistency and cost, it also ensures that the employees that remain with the company are productive, contributing to organisational goals as opposed to just taking home a salary and filling a shift.

Conclusion

In the competitive T & H environment, any opportunity to obtain a competitive advantage should be pursued with vigour. In the services industry, brand management, (in particular IBM), is one strategy that provides organisations the opportunity to stand out from the crowd. However, while the internal dissemination of brand knowledge has been shown to be a powerful influencer of T & H employees' *role clarity* and *brand commitment*, appreciation that the employee group is not homogenous in their response is warranted. Subsequently, action is required to ensure that once employees receive such knowledge they modify their behaviour according to their roles and responsibilities. Without such behaviour modification, the IBM strategy is rendered meaningless and ultimately, the desire for competitive advantage is not realised.

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Figure i The Effect of Brand Knowledge Dissemination

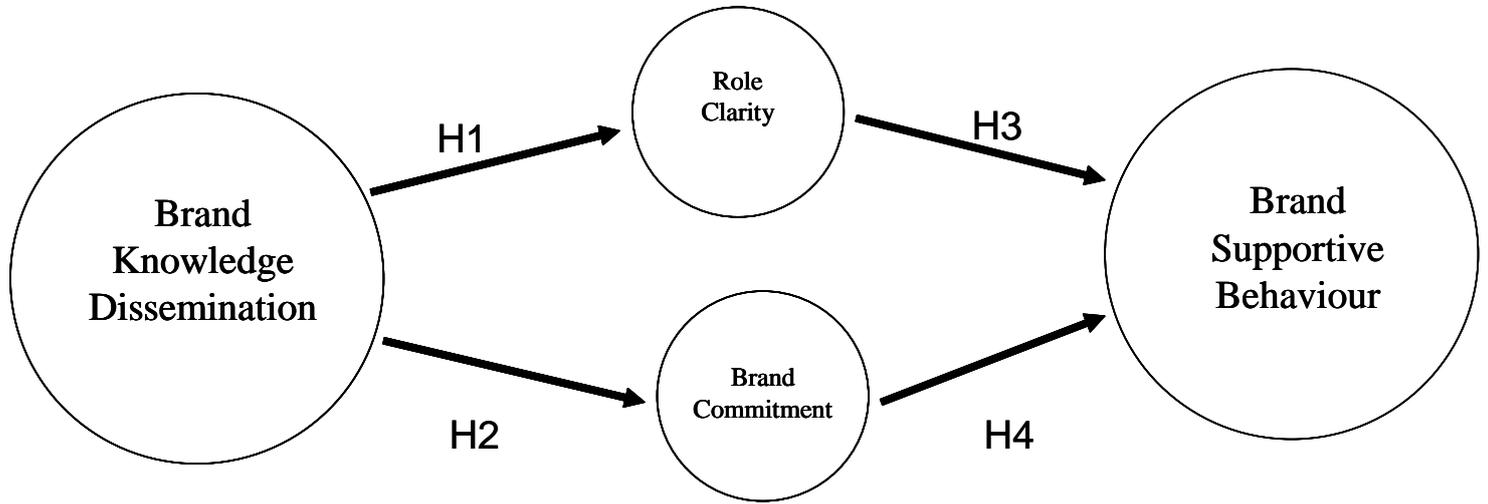


Table i: Preliminary Analysis of Constructs

CONSTRUCT	EFA Load	EFA Load	Alpha
Brand Knowledge Dissemination	Variance Explained 61.4%		
Organisation communicates its brand promise well to its employee		.77	
Organisation teaches us why we should do things and not just how		.79	
Organisation communicates the importance of my role in the brand promise		.78	
Manager regularly reports on issues affecting work environment		.84	
Manager regularly meets with employees to report on whole of organisation issues		.72	.84
Role Clarity	Variance Explained 79.1%		
Brand information improved understanding of my job	.95		
Understand what is expected because of brand information	.97		
Know how to make specific job decisions because of brand information	.91		
Know how I should behave while on the job		.72	
Know how to handle unusual problems and situations while on the job		.88	
Know exactly what output is expected on the job		.94	
Know what is expected to achieve in the job		.82	.85
Brand Commitment	Variance Explained 72.3%		
Proud to be a part of the organisation I work for		.88	
Really care about the fate of the organisation I work for		.91	
Values are similar to those of the organisation I work for		.85	
Put in extra effort beyond what is expected to make organisation successful		.88	
Feel like I fit in		.73	.90
Brand Supportive Behaviour	Variance Explained 67.1%		
Take responsibility for tasks outside own area if necessary		.78	
Consider the impact on the brand before communicating or taking action		.83	
Regularly recommend the organisation to family and friends		.82	
Pass on knowledge of brand to new employees		.85	
Always interested to learn about brand and what it means for my role		.81	.87

Table ii: Composite Variable – Means and Standard Deviations
n = 137

CONSTRUCT	Mean	Standard Deviation
Brand Knowledge Dissemination	4.57	1.52
Role Clarity	5.72	1.08
Brand Commitment	5.31	1.58
Brand Supportive Behaviour	5.77	1.21

Table iii Partial Least Squares Results for the Overall Model n = 137

Equation	Predicted variables	Predictor variables	Hypothesis	Path	Variance ^a due to path	R ²	Critical Ratio ^b
1	Role Clarity	Brand Knowledge Dissemination	H1	.66	.43	.43	10.30
2	Brand Commitment	Brand Knowledge Dissemination	H2	.56	.33	.33	9.15
3	Brand Supportive Behaviour	Role Clarity	H3	.21	.12	.56	2.81
		Brand Commitment	H4	.62	.45		7.29
AVA ^c						.44	

^a These are only interpreted if the R² is greater than 0.10.
^b Bootstrap estimate divided by bootstrap standard error.
^c Average Variance Accounted for.

Table iv Comparison of path coefficients via t-tests

Paths	Front Line n=61		Managers n=76		t value	Result
	Paths	St Error	Paths	St Error		
BKD - RC	.57	.10	.72	.06	10.77	Significantly stronger for management*
BKD - BC	.50	.09	.67	.06	12.54	Significantly stronger for management*
RC – BSB	.25	.09	.23	.15	1.12	no significant difference
BC – BSB	.66	.10	.51	.12	5.35	Significantly stronger for front line*

Indicates support for both paths being significant*

BKD – Brand Knowledge Dissemination; RC – Role Clarity; BC – Brand Commitment; BSB – Brand Supportive Behaviour