Internal Branding among SMEs and Employees' Supporting Behaviours in Ghana

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Abstract
The purpose of the study is to understand the internal branding process from the employees' perspective among SMEs in Ghana; and also to assess the relationship between internal branding and employees' delivery of the brand promise as well as the relationships among their brand identification, brand commitment and brand loyalty. The study sampled SMEs across various industries from the databases of the Association of Ghana Industries and the National Board for Small-Scale Industries. The SMEs are based on the classification according to the Ghana Investment Promotion Council's industry classification. This study sampled 128 SMEs employees within the cities of Accra and Tema. From the statistical analysis conducted the study found out that internal branding has positive and significant impacts on employees' brand identification (0.64, $p < 0.01$), brand commitment (0.21, $p < 0.01$), and brand loyalty (0.34, $p < 0.01$). Also, the result of this study indicates that employees' brand identification has a significant effect on employees' brand commitment (0.55, $p < 0.01$). This concludes that management can expect their employees' commitment when they are successful in inducing employees' brand identification. Similarly, management could influence employees' brand loyalty when they are successful in securing employees' brand commitment. All these positive brand attitudes, again, could be influenced partly by effective and successive internal branding programmes.
Keywords: Internal Branding, Employee Behaviour, and SMEs

1. Introduction

Brand management is an area where small- and medium-size enterprises (SME) studies have received little attention from researchers (Abimbola and Vallaster, 2007; Krake, 2005; Wong and Merrilees, 2005; Mowle and Merrilees, 2005; Inskip, 2004) in spite of the fact that 95 to 99 percent of businesses are considered as SMEs worldwide (OECD, 2005). Although the literature on SMEs' marketing is well developed (Carson, 1990; Carson and Cromie, 1990; Carson and Gilmore, 2000; Gilmore et al., 1999; Gilmore et al., 2001), this work does not touch upon branding. Additionally, a large amount of research has been carried out on branding in the context of the large firm only (Aaker, 1991; Aaker and Keller, 1990; Srivastava and Shocker, 1991).

Yet, the importance of branding for SMEs was often recommended (e.g. Abimbola 2001; Opoku et al. 2007). However, nowadays several re-searchers suggest that branding is important in SMEs as well (Abimbola 2001; Rode & Vallaster 2005; Wong & Merrilees 2005), remembering, however, that entrepreneurs need to take an unconventional approach to branding, but can still build a strong brand (Boyle 2003). Berthon et al. (2008) argue that SME marketers can creatively manage and leverage the full potential of their brands even with constrained budgets. The question is which brand management principles, practices or philosophies are most amenable to SMEs. Brand management receives little or no attention in the daily run of affairs in SMEs (Krake 2005). SMEs lack financial resources and brand management is not given the priority it needs for a strong brand image (Opoku et al. 2007). According to Opoku et al. (2007, p. 362), "Brands are symbols around which social actors, including firms, sup-pliers, supplementary organizations, the public, and customers construct identities. Reasons why branding is essential for SMEs were widely presented, including, for example, competitive environment (Mowle & Merrilees 2005; Kollmann & Suckow 2007). Internal branding is essential in operationalising a brand orientation and ensuring employees share the characteristics of the brand that are essential in implementing brand-building activities (Santos-Vijande et al., 2012). However, in the area of internal branding among SMEs there is dearth of work that needs to be done. Notwithstanding the growing interest of both academics and practitioners in the internal branding concept, there is still a lot of work to be done to provide answers to what, why and how internal branding is done among SMEs.

Notably, all studies were carried out within the developed countries with some carried out in some Asia countries. There is a death of research in Africa and for that matter Ghana on internal branding of SMEs from the perspective of employees. This provide a valuable insight worth researching into, to find out whether the concept of internal branding from the perspective of employees of SMEs has value when applied in the context of Africa and in Ghana especially. Based on the above, the objective of this paper is to understand internal branding from employees' perspective among SMEs in Ghana where the people are different from Americans, Europeans and Asians. It is also important to note that African countries also have different culture-specific issues. This is an indication that the personality traits of Ghanaians are different from the Europeans, Americans and Asian people; thus, this study may lead to different results from the past studies. The study provides insights into how internal branding among SMEs should be taught by academicians in Ghana and practiced by management of SMEs, what

outcomes management can expect and what factors can interfere with the success of internal branding campaigns

2. Objectives of the study

The main objective of this paper is to understand internal branding from employees' perspective among SMEs in Ghana. To achieve the purpose of the study, the following specific objectives are outlined:

- To examine the relationship between internal branding and employees' brand identification
- To examine the relationship between internal branding and employees' brand commitment
- To examine the relationship between internal branding and employees' brand loyalty
- To examine the relationship between internal branding and employees' brand performance in delivering the brand promise
- To examine the relationship between brand identification and employees' brand commitment
- To examine the relationship between employees' commitment and employees' brand loyalty.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Internal Branding

Internal branding is defined as the systematically planned management of behaviour, communication, and symbolism utilised by an organisation to attain a favourable and positive reputation with target audiences for an organisation (Einwiller & Will, 2002). Such brand management processes help employees to articulate organisational goals and objectives effectively and deliver the brand promise to customers. Internal branding motivates and stimulates employees by providing guidelines of acceptable brand behaviour for employees to emulate in their day-to-day behaviours (Dandridge, Mitroff, & Joyce, 1980).

Organisations need to understand how to develop a mutual understanding and sense of commitment within employees (Posner, Kouzes, & Schmidt, 1985; Silverthorne, 2004). Internal branding focuses on ensuring employees understand the objectives, positioning, and features of the expected brand promise (Wise & Zednickova, 2009), and is viewed as one of the major tools for aligning values of the organisation and brand values with those of employees (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007, 2011; Urde, 1999).

According to Jacobs (2003), internal branding is aimed at attaining inimitable sustainable competitive advantage through employees which is harder for competitors to copy. There is indeed a need for organisations to create an organisational climate that facilitates effective implementation of organisational goals and strategy (Hong & Kaur, 2008). Thus, through internal branding, organisations can ensure the espoused brand values that set customers' expectations are enacted and delivered by employees (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). Employees, however, need to be comfortable with their role in the organisation and the espoused brand values for them to live the brand effectively (Maxwell & Knox, 2009; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2005). Internal branding requires the implementation of an internal communications programme to motivate and inspire employees to support organisational values and the brand vision (Malmelin & Hakala, 2009). Organisations need to facilitate internal brand building by initiating and facilitating behavioural changes consistent with the desired brand identity (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2005).

3.2 Internal branding effects on employees' attitudes and behaviour

Internal branding has emerged as to assist an organisation in promoting the brand inside, namely to employees (Ahmed and Rafiq, 2003) with an aim to ensure the congruence between internal and external brand messages (Mitchell, 2002). That is, it ensures that brand messages (i.e. brand promise) are transformed by employees into reality that reflect the customers' expected brand experience (Boone, 2000). Some authors (Drake et al., 2005; Mitchell, 2002) purport that the creation of internal branding is through the practice of internal marketing (IM). The review of different authors' proposition of an IM mix (Ahmed et al., 2002; Berry and Parasuraman, 1991; Gummesson, 1991; Tansuhaj et al., 1991), provide support to recent studies (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007; Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2006) within the internal branding context that argue for the coordination between HR and internal communication disciplines to successfully achieve internal branding's objectives.

H1: Internal branding has positive relationship with employees' brand identification

H2: Internal branding has a positive relationship with and employees' brand commitment

H3: Internal branding has a positive relationship with employees' brand loyalty

3.3 Brand identification and Commitment in the internal branding process

The studies of internal branding (Papasolomou and Vrontis, 2006a, b; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007) have purported that internal branding and/or its tools (i.e. training and internal communications) could induce employees' brand identification, brand commitment, and brand loyalty. However, it is noted that only the study of Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) has made a distinction among the three attitudes; other studies did not investigate these attitudes within one study. For example, identification, and loyalty are believed, by some authors (Legge, 1995; Mowday et al., 1982; Porter et al., 1974), to constitute employee commitment – affective commitment, in particular. Some

authors have, on the contrary, considered them as separate constructs (Loveman, 1998; Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Silvestro, 2002).

A group of authors (Benkhoff, 1997; Peccei and Guest, 1993) have criticised the assumption of Porter et al. (1974) that identification, extra effort and desire to remain are the components of commitment. These authors believe that components should be considered as separate concepts. From the organisational behaviour literature, Ashforth and Mael (1989) argue that although some authors may equate organizational commitment with organisational identification and/or the latter is the facet of the former, their review of the frequently used measure of commitment suggests that identification is not presently defined by commitment. The study of Mael (1988) that the measurements of identification and commitment supported that these two constructs are differentiable. According to this group of authors, identification refers to a sense of belonging to the group and a perception of being intertwined with the group's fate; they see themselves as personifying an entity (Mael and Ashforth, 1992, 1995; Tolman, 1943).

For example, employees who identify themselves with the brand perceive the success or failures of the brand as their own (James et al., 1977). They take pride in their group membership and this is likely to trigger behaviour that enhances an external image of the brand and its organisation (Oakes and Turner, 1986). Kelman (1958) and O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) consider identification with the brand identity as a driver of brand commitment. Similarly, brand identification is argued to be an antecedent of employees' brand commitment, which is defined as "the extent of psychological attachment of employees to the brand, which influences their willingness to exert extra effort towards reaching the brand goals" (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005, p. 284). Hence, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H4: Brand identification has positive relationship with employees' brand commitment

3.4 Brand loyalty in the internal branding process

The term "commitment" has been used extensively in the internal branding context (Ind, 2001). Most research (Benkhoff, 1997; Bloemer and Odekerken-Schro¨der, 2006) has explored employees' loyalty in terms of length of service, resonating with the continuance or calculative commitment construct. Loyal employees are found to exhibit a relatively stable and conscious tendency to engage in a relationship with their employer (Bloemer and Odekerken Schro¨der, 2006). Similarly, Reichheld (1996) conceptualises loyalty as a willingness to remain with the present company.

Employees' loyalty is critical to the capability of service organisations to respond effectively to customer needs. It drives down costs through reduced recruitment and training expenditures and all the cost efficiencies which accrue from skilled workers who are up to speed and familiar with both the tasks at hand and their customers, thereby improving an organisation's profits (Reichheld, 1996; Reichheld and Sasser, 1990; Rust et al., 1995). In agreement with other studies within marketing (Brown and Peterson, 1993) and within organisational behaviour (Reichers, 1985; Labatmediene et al., 2007), Pritchard et al. (1999) argue that commitment is a key precursor to loyalty or retention. Hence, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H5: Employees' commitment has positive relationship with   employees' brand loyalty.

3.5 Brand performance in the internal branding process

Ultimately, internal branding aims at inducing employees' behavioural changes to support the delivery of the brand promise (Ahmed et al., 2003; Boone, 2000; Drake et al., 2005). Although a number of authors support this argument, there is a lack of empirical evidence to affirm the link between internal branding and employees' brand performance in delivering the brand promise. In general, most publications in the internal branding context from both internal communications and human resources assume that, when committed employees make an effort to deliver on the brand promise, they fulfil the expectations of customers towards the brand (de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003). However, the assumption that employees' brand attitudes influence their behaviours in supporting the delivery of the brand promise is yet to be supported empirically. The recent study of Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) depicted the mediating effect of the three attitudes on the link between internal branding's tools and employees' brand performance. However, they investigated the influences of these tools separately despite supporting the coordination between training and internal communications. Therefore the sixth hypothesis is given as:

H6: Internal branding has a positive relationship with employees' brand performance in delivering the brand promise

4. Research Methodology
4.1 Sampling the population

The study sampled SMEs across various industries from the databases of the Association of Ghana Industries and the National Board for Small-Scale Industries. This study sampled 128 SMEs employees within the cities of Accra and Tema. The SMEs are based on the classification according to the Ghana Investment Promotion Council's

industry classification. The composition of the sample is indicated in Table I. The sample has been restricted to these two cities in view of the fact that most businesses in Ghana are situated within the two cities. In this study, a cross-sectional survey design is used.

Table I

Industry	Number of firms	Percentage
Manufacturing	33	22
Agriculture	6	4
Construction and mining	23	15
Hotel and hospitality	12	8
Information and communication	21	14
Pharmaceutical and medical services	15	10
Wholesale and retail trade	16	10.7
General business services	24	16
Total	150	100

RESULTS

Table 2 shows the summary statistics of the 128 employees of SMEs sampled for the study. The sample was made of 86 male employees of SMEs representing 67.19 % of the sample while the female employees of SMEs were 42 representing 32.81% of the sample.

This indicates that majority of SMEs employees are males. However, female employees of SMEs in the wholesale and retail trade were more than their male counterparts. Majority of the employees of SMEs were in the age group of 41 – 50 with most of SMEs employees having attained tertiary education.

Table 2: Summary statistics of owners/managers of SMEs

	Male	%	Female	%	Total
Industry					
Manufacturing	16	72.73	6	27.27	22
Agriculture	4	66.67	2	33.33	6
Construction And Mining	13	65.00	7	35.00	20
Hotel And Hospitality	9	75.00	3	25.00	12
Information And Communication	17	80.95	4	19.05	21
Pharmaceutical And Medical Services	9	60.00	6	40.00	15
Wholesale And Retail Trade	6	46.15	7	53.85	13
General Business Services	12	63.16	7	36.84	19
Total	86	67.19	42	32.81	128
Age	7	5.47	3	2.34	10
20 - 30	27	21.09	12	9.38	39
31 - 40	16	12.50	9	7.03	25
41 - 50	24	18.75	17	13.28	41
51 - 60	12	9.38	1	0.78	13
60 and above	86	67.19	42	32.81	128
Educational Background					
Tertiary	49	38.28	25	19.53	74
Senior High	12	9.38	7	5.47	19
Junior High	25	19.53	10	7.81	35
Total	86	67.19	42	32.81	128

A structural equation modelling was employed for confirmatory factor analysis and path analyses. The researcher followed the two-step approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). In the first stage, the measurement model was analyzed to ensure sufficient reliability and validity of the constructs. In the second stage, the hypotheses of the relationships between constructs were tested. Model fit criteria suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999) were used for both the measurement and the structural model: x^2/df, goodness of fit (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit (AGFI), comparative fit index (CFI), root mean square residual (RMR), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Acceptable models should have $(x^2)/df \leq 3, AGFI \geq 0.80, RMR \leq 0.10, RMSEA \leq 0.10$ and GFI and CFI greater than 0.90.

Reliability and validity of measures

To assess the initial reliability of the measures, Cronbach's alpha for all the construct was calculated and found to

be 0.89. Next, a confirmative factor analysis (CFA) with Amos 5.0 Graphics software for the measurement model with four constructs was performed. Patterns fitting indicators are listed in the Table 3.

Table 3: Measuring patterns fitting overall indicators

Variables/Indicators	Brand Identification	Brand Commitment	Brand Loyalty	Brand Performance
CMIN/DF	1.42	1.96	1.91	2.12
RMR	0.02	0.01	0.03	0.02
GFI	0.89	0.90	0.94	0.97
AGFI	0.91	0.92	0.93	0.93
IFI	0.93	0.88	0.87	0.99
CFI	0.91	0.91	0.94	0.90

Table 3 indicated that all criteria met the recommended values in the measuring patterns and related Factor loadings were all more than 5%, and the significance level is 0.000.

Structural Model

According to the research hypotheses, a structural equation modeling was developed to assess the statistical significance of the proposed relationships between internal branding and its dimensions. Table 4 shows the model overall fittings indicators.

Table 4: The Model Fitting Indicators

Variables	Indicators
RMR	0.001
PCFI	0.61
IFI	0.94
CFI	0.91
TLI	0.93
NFI	0.93
AGFI	0.89
GFI	0.92
RMSEA	0.03
CMIN/df	1.89

Amos output results (Table 4) in model standard estimation section indicate that path analysis model is a suitable model. CMIN/df is 1.89 which is acceptable. RMSEA rate is equal to 0.03 which is appropriate, GFI and AGFI and other three variables of NFI, CFI, TLI and IFI rate are all more than 90%. And finally RMR rate indicate approximately zero rate. Fitting indicators for all patterns is in the acceptance area and these indicators reveals a good pattern fitting by data and the collected data support the pattern well. Path coefficients of the conceptual model is presented in Table 4.

Table 5: Path coefficients of the conceptual model

Path	Conceptual model
Internal branding → brand identification	0.642*
Internal branding → brand commitment	0.213*
Internal branding → brand loyalty	0.341*
Internal branding → brand performance	0.346*
Brand identification → brand commitment	0.551*
Brand commitment → brand loyalty	0.298*

Note: *Significant at 0.01 level

From Table 5, internal branding has positive and significant impacts on employees' brand identification (0.64, $p < 0.01$), brand commitment (0.21, $p < 0.01$), and brand loyalty (0.34, $p < 0.01$), lending support for H_1, H_2 and H_3. Also, H_6 is supported as the result suggests the positive and significant influence of internal branding on employees' brand performance (0.35, $p < 0.01$). Also, the result of this study indicates that employees' brand identification has a significant effect on employees' brand commitment (0.55, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, employees' brand commitment is found to have a positive influence on employees' brand loyalty (0.30, $p < 0.01$), lending support to both H_4 and H_5. Following Baron and Kenny's (1986) argument for testing steps of mediating effects, the result reveals that the first two steps of the mediating model are fulfilled. That is, internal branding has a significant relationship with employees' brand performance (the outcome) and employees' brand attitudes (the hypothesised mediators).

5 Discussions and managerial implications

Literature has recently introduced the internal branding concept as an enabler of employees' delivery of the brand

promise through its influences on their behaviours and attitudes. The present study provides empirical evidence supporting that internal branding that coordinates training and internal communications has a positive impact on employees' brand identification, brand commitment, and brand loyalty. In particular, employees' brand identification was found to be influenced most by internal branding. This study supports previous studies that internal branding exerts certain degrees of impacts on the extent to which employees identify with, are committed to, and loyal to the brand. Also, this study provides empirical evidence supporting the assumption that internal branding exerts certain degrees of influences on the extent to which employees behave in ways that are consistent with the delivery of the brand promise.

The results of the study is consistent with past studies in different disciplines (i.e. marketing, and organisational behaviour), the result dictates the relationships among employees' brand attitudes. Employees' brand identification is found to positively influence employees' brand commitment (Allen and Meyer, 1990), which is a precursor to brand loyalty (Brown and Peterson, 1993; Reichers, 1985). As such, although these attitudes are distinct, they are, somehow, related constructs. The model that takes account of the relationships between brand identification and brand commitment, and between brand commitment and brand loyalty has better goodness-of-fit index than those that take no account of these relationships. Another implication for researchers within the internal branding context is the mediating effects of employees' brand identification and brand loyalty on the link between internal branding and their brand performance. This study suggests that management can expect their employees' commitment when they are successful in inducing employees' brand identification. Similarly, management could influence employees' brand loyalty when they are successful in securing employees' brand commitment. All these positive brand attitudes, again, could be influenced partly by effective and successive internal branding programmes. It should be noted that the recruitment process is also important as well as training. However, according to Punjaisri and Wilson (2007), recruiting employees whose values fit with the organisation's as proposed by some authors (de Chernatony, 2001) was found to be difficult by the participating management

6. Conclusion

This study adds to the current knowledge that internal branding has both behavioural and attitudinal impacts on employees' delivery of the brand promise. While most of the existing research focused on management's and brand consultants' perspectives, this study has looked at the perspectives of customer-interface employees' who are considered the key audience of an internal branding programme. Also, it has successfully provided empirical evidence showing the link between internal branding and employees' brand-supporting behaviours, which was previously based on a mere assumption that when employees are committed, they will deliver on the promise. As this study measured all three attitudes together, it could also identify the relationships among these attitudes and how they mediated the strength of internal branding's effect on employees' brand behaviours. However, the study was carried out in Ghana, entailing the issues of culture specific. Therefore, replications of the relationships suggested in this study in different SMEs and cultural contexts would help clarifying the boundary conditions for generalizations to theory. Moreover, longitudinal data would improve an understanding of the mechanisms influencing different attitudes of employees and their behaviours in delivering the brand performance.

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