Internal Branding : Developing a Predictive Model for the Indian Service Sector

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to develop a predictive model to explain the internal brand building phenomenon in service sector organizations from the banking, IT, and health sectors. This research applied the grounded theory methodology to identify the factors that had a critical role in the internal branding outcomes. Total interpretive structural modeling or TISM was conducted to determine the hierarchy and interlinkages among these factors. Further one-way ANOVA analysis was conducted to study whether the factors identified were relevant in the same manner across service sectors. Finally, internal branding factors were empirically validated. The major factors identified are: Organization Size, Change or Continuity, Marketing Approach, Organizational Empathy, Organizational Protocols, Customer Connect, Industry Potential, and Internal Branding Tools. The findings of the TISM framework provided a clear understanding of the interplay between the management style and the degree of empathy toward the staff, and both these factors impacted the outcome of the overall marketing approach, customer connect, and also internal branding tools. Several significant managerial implications are drawn from this study. It provided suggestions on how to factor in a specific context, complexity, and attributes of organizations as they develop their internal branding strategy and how best to integrate the same with the brand values and their external marketing efforts.

Keywords : internal branding, branding framework, brand-building efforts, grounded theory, TISM, Indian service sector

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Internal branding is the set of strategic processes that align and empower employees to deliver the appropriate customer experience consistently. It focuses on building and strengthening an employee's bond with the firm and fostering a long-term employee-employer relationship. Internal branding refers to three things: communicating the brand effectively to the employees, convincing them of its relevance and worth, and successfully linking every job in the organization to delivery of the 'brand' (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011).

It is an endeavor of the internal brand initiative that every employee should understand what type of job behavior is expected from him/her and how his/her inputs can contribute to the company's success. The core objective of internal branding is the attainment of competitive advantage not through easily replicated core business practices and policies but through people (Jacobs, 2003). Internal branding activities are seen as being as

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important as external branding activities in communicating and delivering the brand promise to the customer (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). Punjaisri and Wilson (2011) highlighted the importance of internal branding on employees' brand identification, commitment, and loyalty. The study also emphasized that the role of personal variables : age, educational background, and length of service with the brand should also be taken into account.

Moreover, employees play a critical role in delivering the brand to the external customer. There is an increasing need to explain how the various internal branding factors play a significant role in delivering the outcome. Moreover, considering the crucial role of employees in reducing the variability of services brands, various authors have recognized the importance of internal brand management as a process to align staff behavior with the desired brand values. The concept, though relevant to all firms, gains significant prominence in the context of service delivery firms, where a key challenge is to overcome the variability at the 'moment of truth.'

The services vertical has been rapidly growing across the world over the past few years, and it is known to have the greatest contribution to global business output while also being the sector that offers employment to more people than in any other sector. However, service sector organizations struggle to retain their best employees and thus fail to ensure that they deliver the brand promise reliably across the board. How an employee behaves and delivers service at the intersection with the customer is extremely important for any service organization. A bad customer experience can not only harm the specific experience but can also lead to the organization having to pay a much bigger price, sometimes concerning future opportunities of conducting business with that customer (Mishra, 2010).

Despite the growing interest in internal branding, very little research has been undertaken on the subject from the organization's perspective. This research provides additional context and information to organizations to better understand and act on the various elements that impact their ability to connect their employees with their brand.

An attempt is made to use the identified factors to develop a model and validate the same through empirical data across three verticals in the service sector. The research considers empirical data from banks, the IT sector, and the healthcare industry in India and involves the application of grounded theory and then developing a diagraph through TISM (total interpretive structural modeling) and validating the same with regression analysis.

The specific research objectives of this study are: to identify the elements of internal branding and its components ; to develop a framework for internal branding in the Indian services sector ; and application and validation of the internal branding factors in select service sector organizations. The findings of this study would offer practical application and, therefore, can become a useful tool for any organization to apply in building a strong, customer-focused brand.

Literature Review

Brands can be described in terms of personality, character, attitudes, motivations, and even emotions. They acquire meaning not only for the external customer but also for employees who deal with the brand daily and thus represent it to the public in general and customers specifically. These differences may be rational and tangible, related to the brand's product performance, or more symbolic, emotional, and intangible, related to what the specific brand represents.

Branding is about adding a higher level of emotional meaning to a product or service, thereby increasing its value to customers and other stakeholders. Branding involves focusing organizational resources on specific tangible and intangible attributes that differentiate the brand, making it more attractive, meaningful, and compelling. Thus, branding ensures that it stays true and relevant to the defined target audience identified by the organization. On the other hand, internal branding is the inter-departmental and multi-directional internal communications effort carried out to create and maintain an internal brand. Internal branding can be defined as the set of strategic processes that help in aligning and empowering employees for delivering fitting customer

experience steadily and sustainably. Internal branding attempts to achieve consistency with the external brand and encourage brand commitment.

A comprehensive, proactive, and responsive internal branding program can create a virtuous cycle of evolution within an organization. When employees are clear about the company's orientation and intentions, they are likely to be more efficient, productive, and responsible for the tasks assigned to them. When employees understand the values and are aligned with the core values, they have a better appreciation of their roles and higher commitment to delivering the brand promise, resulting in higher brand performance. The three core elements of internal branding are: reflection of brand values to consumers by committed employees ; the realization of the brand promise communicated to the internal and external market; and the importance of multi-direction. A key element of successful internal brand building is communication. Communication aims to influence employees' brand knowledge and understanding attitudes and behaviors. The impact of internal branding on employees' attitudes and behavior is maximized when they are satisfied with their workplace. Thus, the top management should be aware of not dealing with internal branding in isolation, and all efforts of internal branding would fail if the work environment is not in sync with the employees and the brand values (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2017).

Internal branding processes include, but are not limited to, internal communications, training support, leadership practices, reward and recognition programs, recruitment practices, and sustainability factors. All of these techniques focus on improving the employees' connection with and understanding of the business strategy and its implementation within the organization. The desired outcomes of internal branding are achieved through the dissemination of brand ideologies, internal brand communication, brand-centered HR (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2009), and brand leadership (Morhart et al., 2009). One of the important outcomes of internal branding is to increase employees' organizational commitment. This, in turn, results in increased job satisfaction, increased job performance, and a lower turnover of staff. Therefore, internal branding exerts its influence in two ways. Firstly, it influences the degree to which employees of the organization perform their role to meet the brand promise. Secondly, it also influences the attitudes employees have towards the brand. This, in turn, affects employees' performance and productivity (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2017).

The Indian Service Sector

In the last two decades, the services sector has expanded rapidly all over the world. The service sector is the fastest-growing sector in India, it has the highest labor productivity, and it is projected to continue to grow at a fast pace. Focusing largely on Indian service-oriented firms, where employees deliver the brand promise directly to the customer in the form of a service delivered, there is little work done in studying the entire lifecycle of the internal branding effort – how and where it commences and what outcomes are delivered at the end of the effort. Different firms also, presumably, rank and prioritize their efforts in line with their specific industry contexts and work on their customized mix. The impact of this difference in priority and weightage by industry has not been studied in the past.

Since the focus is the Indian service sector, the present study has considered three verticals: banks, IT, and health, which represent different aspects of the service sector in the country. Thomas and Rodrigues (2020) conducted a study on five public sector banks to study the causal relationship between internal marketing and brand promise delivery. The study results confirmed that internal marketing practices had a significant effect on brand promise delivery of public sector banks through the mediation effect of its job-related attitudes of organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior.

In their paper, Panda and Swar (2016) tried to bring out various insights into the priority of customers for different services offered by different types of banks. Thus, their findings suggested banks to re-orient their strategies using the importance-performance analysis.

Typically, organizations find it challenging to understand what aspects and elements of internal branding are critical to focus upon. Knowledge of a clear set of factors and focus areas would enable a firm to comprehend what all would impact its brand amongst its internal stakeholders, thus helping it make informed decisions regarding its internal branding approach. However, while a lot of information is available on the internal branding techniques and activities, comprehensive models of internal branding that underline the important factors affecting internal branding are scarce, although Burmann and Zeplin's study (2005) is an exception. Literature has been rather unclear, however, on the subject of how internal branding can be effectively developed in an Indian service provider organization. A review of the literature on the subject reaffirms the need for a framework that would outline the inter-relationship among the factors that impact internal branding in a given context of an organization. This research study is an attempt to decode these factors and establish their significance in a typical service organization set up from the organization's perspective.

Methodology

Exploration of Factors

To achieve the research objectives, this research work follows a step-wise approach. The research objective -1 is to explore the factors that impact internal branding across services in general. A series of workshops centered on comprehending internal branding and aligning internal and external branding was conducted on topics like supporting organization structures and tools and techniques that enable a robust strategic internal branding function in any firm. This study was conducted during 2016 – 2017. A comprehensive, open-ended questionnaire was administered to the attendees of these workshops to extract thought units regarding their understanding and assessment of factors impacting internal branding. A total of 55 responses were collected. Respondents included professionals working primarily in services firms across various levels of hierarchy. Further, 14 in-depth interviews were conducted with industry experts in such a way as to enable the factors to emerge from the responses.

The contents of the responses collected were analyzed using the grounded theory approach to collate factors from the data collected. Further, a thorough literature review was also done to identify elements that impact internal branding decision-making. Application of the grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in this specific instance is pertinent, given its strength in determining the factors from the data collected from the respondents. The purpose of grounded theory is to elicit fresh understandings about patterned relationships between social actors and how these relationships and interactions actively construct reality (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Thus, grounded theory investigates the actualities in the real world and analyzes the data without any preconceived hypothesis.

To draw the theoretical elements from the raw data, the key points in the raw data are marked with a series of codes. The codes are grouped into concepts, and from concepts, categories are formed. Categories form the basis for the creation of theory or, in other words, reverse engineered hypotheses (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Through the initial open coding process, the interview transcripts and questionnaire responses were broken into smaller thought units. The open coding mechanism was followed. Then, categories, the second element of grounded theory, are defined as higher in level and more abstract than the concepts they represent (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This was done through axial coding wherein the thought units were regrouped into emergent categories, which for our study are the factors that impact internal branding, as shown in Table 1.

As a next step, a 42-statement questionnaire using a 5 - point Likert scale, ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree* was designed to confirm the relevance of these 12 factors. Eleven experts did the content validity check. After their suggestions, the questionnaire was reduced to a total of 31 statements, which were subsequently

Table 1. *List of Factors Impacting Internal Branding*

S. No.	Factors
1.	Organization Size
2.	Organization Scale
3.	Change or Continuity
4.	Crisis Communication
5.	Marketing Approach
6.	Management Style
7.	Organizational Empathy
8.	People Management Approach
9.	Organizational Protocols
10.	Customer Connect
11.	Industry Potential
12.	Internal Branding Tools

Table 2. *Values of Cronbach's Alpha*

S. No.	Factors	Cronbach's Alpha
1.	Organization Size	0.698
2.	Change or Continuity	0.782
3.	Marketing Approach	0.833
4.	Management Style	0.760
5.	Organizational Empathy	0.637
6.	Organizational Protocols	0.548
7.	Customer Connect	0.538
8.	Industry Potential	0.573
9.	Internal Branding Tools	0.679

administered to a set of 210 respondents across branding, communication, marketing, and management, from 20 service sector firms. The respondents varied across various levels, from junior executives to senior decision-makers, and judgment sampling was used to collate the responses.

Next, factor analysis was carried out to identify the best set of factors using SPSS 20.0. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for these items as well. A total of 12 factors were identified, but only nine factors with loading greater than 0.5 and Eigenvalue greater than 1 were considered in the final list of factors, as shown in Table 2.

Developing a Framework for Internal Branding : Linkages and Hierarchy of Factors

The application of interpretive structural modeling (ISM) has been known to help map complex relationships between factors in complex situations. For this research, we applied a modified version of ISM called the total interpretive structural modeling or TISM (Sushil, 2012). The TISM approach improves upon the interpretive aspects of ISM by building a knowledge base of logical interpretations of each observable relationship.

The attribute enhancement structure was used for designing the TISM questionnaire. Data about the interlinkages among the nine identified factors was collected through a questionnaire. Out of 65 questionnaires, 48 complete responses were collected from experts and practitioners in the field of branding, marketing, and corporate communications. The sequential step-wise process (Sushil, 2012) was followed that starts right from identifying the elements whose relationships are to be modeled, stating the contextual relationship between the elements, and ends with the utilization of interpretive matrices to fully interpret each paired comparison; and then the paired comparisons are converted to a reachability matrix. Lastly, the level partition is carried out to know the placement of elements level-wise.

Six levels were determined, as shown in Table 5. As depicted in Table 3, a self-structural interaction matrix (SSIM) was developed using the understanding of the relationship gathered between different factors, where 1 signifies that a relationship exists between two factors and 0 signifies that there is no relationship. While in Table 4, a transitive relationship is shown with 1*.

Finally, the elements are arranged graphically in levels, and the directed links are drawn as per the relationships shown in the reachability matrix. The final diagraph (Figure 1) is translated into a binary interaction matrix form.

The connective and interpretive information is used to derive the TISM. The nodes in the diagraph are filled by the interpretation of the factors. The interpretation in the cells of the interpretive direct interaction matrix is depicted by the side of the respective links in the structural model. This leads to the total interpretation of the structural model by interpreting its nodes and the links.

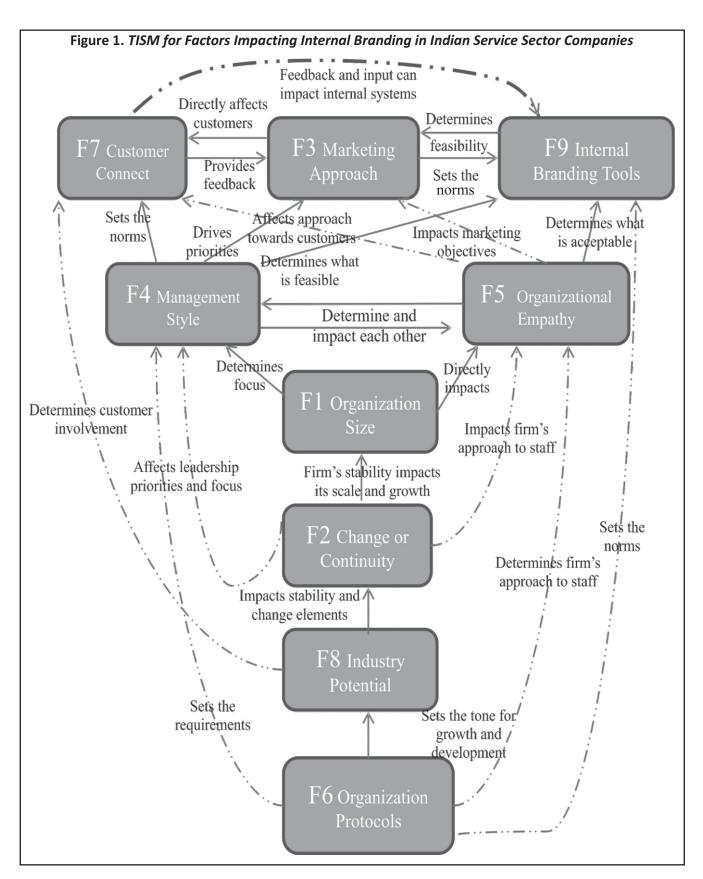### Table 3. *Self Structural Interaction Matrix (SSIM)*

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	F9
F1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0
F2	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0
F3	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0
F4	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
F5	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1
F6	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0
F7	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0
F8	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0
F9	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1

Table 4. *Transitivity Matrix*

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	F9
F1	1	0	1	0	1	1*	1	1*	1*
F2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1*	1*	0
F3	0	0	1	1	1	1	1*	1*	0
F4	1	0	1*	1	1	1*	1	1*	0
F5	0	1	1	1*	1	1	1	1	1
F6	0	0	0	1*	1	1	1	1*	1*
F7	0	0	1*	0	1	1	1	1	0
F8	0	0	1*	0	1	1*	1	1	0
F9	1	1	1*	0	0	1*	1	1*	1

Table 5. *Final List of Factors and Levels*

	Factor	Level
F1	Organization Size	3
F2	Change or Continuity	4
F3	Marketing Approach	1
F4	Management Style	2
F5	Organizational Empathy	2
F6	Organizational Protocols	6
F7	Customer Connect	1
F8	Industry Potential	5
F9	Internal Branding Tools	1

Figure 1. *TISM for Factors Impacting Internal Branding in Indian Service Sector Companies*

The TISM framework reveals that Organizational Protocols is the basic factor that influences internal branding. This implies that various aspects internal to a firm form the basis of its actions and how it would connect with its employees on communicating and interpreting the brand for them. If various firms in an industry are employee-centric and have a positive approach, then it is highly likely that the industry is on a positive growth curve, which would mean that there are new opportunities in the industry.

The interplay between the management style and the firm's degree of empathy toward its staff is a significant aspect of the framework. Both these factors impact the outcome of the overall marketing approach. Further, the management style and approach adopted by the management, in keeping with the strategic goals and vision of the organization, would impact how the organization approaches its marketing function and its overall touch points with both external and internal customers. If an organization is undergoing a significant change, the focus should be on critically managing the management approach towards the connect with the employees, and at the same time, ensure a high degree of empathy towards the staff members so that their immediate concerns or issues about the changes are addressed at all times. This would ensure a minimal negative impact on how the staff perceives the brand. The factors and their interlinkages are in line with previous academic research.

The TISM diagraph provides an overall picture of the linkage of the interaction of different factors that affect internal branding in the service sector. It can thus become a base for developing a robust approach to creating a solid brand among employees and internal stakeholders.

Relevance of Identified Factors for the Selected Verticals

(i) *Sample.* The study applies convenience sampling to identify the verticals and the specific organizations within each of the three verticals. Further, judgmental sampling was used within each organization to determine specific respondents with at least 8 years of total corporate experience and a minimum of 5 years of experience working in branding and related areas. The respondents included middle to senior-level managers working in the fields of internal branding, corporate communications, marketing, employee engagement, media management, content writing, and branding strategy. It also included senior management with at least 15 years of work experience involved in key strategic roles in their organizations.

(ii) *Sampling Procedure.* A 21 statement survey was designed, with each statement representing one of the identified factors, while ensuring that respondent bias should be avoided. The respondents were asked to rank their opinions on each of the statements on a scale of 1 to 5. They were also asked to rank internal branding within their organization on a similar scale. This questionnaire was set up online to be easy to administer and make it convenient for the respondents to respond. Out of 543 potential respondents, a total of 406 responses were received from 13 individual companies across the three sectors. This indicated a response rate of 74.8%.

The proposition states that various identified factors apply to the internal branding elements across any service sector organization. It is through these factors only that an organization should ideally plan and execute its internal branding strategy and approach. The null hypothesis states that there is no difference between how the identified internal branding factors impact Indian service sector organizations that operate in different industries.

✎ **H0 :** Internal branding factors might not always have a similar impact and relevance across different industries in the service sector.

✎ **H1:** Internal branding factors have a similar impact and relevance across different industries in the service sector.

(iii) *One-way ANOVA Analysis.* One-way ANOVA analysis was conducted to study whether the factors identified apply in the same manner across all the three service sectors. In our results, if the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis and instead conclude that the random sample supports the hypothesis that population means are different. In other words, all the factors we identified might not necessarily apply to the three verticals. In other words, the factors identified might not apply in the same manner across companies working in different verticals in the service sector.

After the ANOVA, the results of the post hoc tests were examined to identify the differences. The post hoc analysis indicates that for all factors, except F2, the health sector behaves differently from the IT and banking sectors. This implies that while factors that impact internal branding might have a certain degree of similarity across IT and banking sectors, the factors that impact internal branding in the health sector are not the same and stand out differently.

The next part of our study works on the analysis to empirically validate the internal branding factors that are identified for the specific sectors. For the same, a set of sector-specific hypotheses for each factor were developed and tested with regression analysis.

Organization size represents a characteristic of the organization and is not a behavioral or an operational element that the organization can considerably change. The issues of whether larger firms are superior in performance to smaller firms, or vice-versa, and whether older firms are superior in performance to younger firms, or vice-versa, have generated large amounts of theoretical and empirical research in the economics, management, and sociology disciplines. Hence, we hypothesize :

✤ **H1 :** Organization size impacts the internal branding realization in an organization.

Change or continuity can potentially determine the extent and amount of disruptions, interruptions, or alterations that employees have to deal with, as part of their every interaction with the organization and the brand. In the context of the changing economic, social, and political context, organizations may need to reassess the relevance of their stakeholders and focus on the emergence of other stakeholders. Hence, we hypothesize :

✤ **H2 :** The extent of change or continuity that an organization face impacts its ability to develop internal branding realization among its employees.

The marketing approach encapsulates how an organization is connecting with its stakeholders: both external and internal – towards the achievement of its planned goals. Marketing orientation is about developing both a set of attitudes and practices that aim to maximize the company's adaptability to the market. Hence, we hypothesize :

✤ **H3 :** Brand supporting marketing approach impacts the internal branding realization in an organization.

The management style comprises components including the intent and behavior of the management, the subordinates' perceptions of the supervisor's behavior, and the resulting satisfaction and productivity of the subordinates. There is ample empirical evidence, for instance, to suggest that employees respond quite negatively to supervisor mistreatment by engaging in behaviors that are harmful to the organization and its members (Thau et al., 2009). Hence, we hypothesize :

✤ **H4 :** Brand supporting management style impacts the internal branding realization in an organization.

Organizational empathy as a factor represents the degree to which employees perceive the organization to be empathetic and responsive to their situations and requests, both as individual employees as well as a collective set of stakeholders in the organization. Empathy involves understanding the perspective of the other as well as caring, a bodily or emotional response to the other (Atkins, 2013). Hence, we hypothesize :

↳ **H5 :** Organizational empathy towards its employees impacts its ability to develop internal branding realization among them.

The organizational protocols represent a mix of various aspects of how an organization operates and how its culture evolves and connects with its employees. In that sense, this is not a simple factor but a representative of many elements of how an organization is run. However, as part of the initial study and application of grounded theory, this factor brought together various underlying defining elements of an organization's everyday behavior and hence was clubbed as one for this research. Hence, we hypothesize :

↳ **H6 :** Brand supporting organizational protocols impact the internal branding realization in an organization.

Customer connect in the context of a service sector organization incorporates the various touchpoints that the customer can interact with the organization, the delivery of the service being only one such touchpoint. The customer experience encompasses the total experience, including the search, purchase, consumption, and after-sale phases of the experience, and may involve multiple channels. Hence, we hypothesize :

↳ **H7 :** Customer connect platforms impact the internal branding realization in an organization.

Industry potential has the potential to impact both employee morale and employee feel-good for their brand within that industry. Meffert (2000) defined industry image as a set of associations that is firmly anchored, condensed, and evaluated in the minds of people concerning a group of companies, which, from the point of view of an individual, supplies the same customer groups with the same technologies for the fulfillment of the same customer needs. Hence, we hypothesize :

↳ **H8 :** Industry potential impacts an organization's ability to develop a strong internal branding realization among its employees.

Internal branding tools bring together tools, techniques, media, channels, themes, messages, and modes of interaction that an organization develops to connect with its employees. Hence, we hypothesize :

↳ **H9 :** Structured and well-set-up internal branding tools impact the internal branding realization in an organization**.**

(iv) *Regression Analysis.* The regression equation for internal branding is as shown below. The dependent variable is: Impact of internal branding and explanatory variables: F1 to F9.

$$IB_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 F1_i + \beta_2 F2_i + \beta_3 F3_i + \beta_4 F4_i + \beta_5 F5_i + \beta_6 F6_i + \beta_7 F7_i + \beta_8 F8_i + \beta_9 F9_i + u_i$$

Discussion

Predictive Model for All Three Sectors

The results for each of these tests and associated analysis for each sector are presented in Table 6. As shown in Table 7, in the case of the banking sector, all the factors emerge as significant; while in the case of the IT sector, one factor is not significant; and in the case of the health sector, four of the nine factors are not significant. The factors that do not emerge significantly can perhaps be omitted from the equation. The F-statistic is significant at an α value of 0.05.

Table 6. *Model Summary*

	Model	R^2	Adj R^2	F	Sig.
Banking Sector	1	0.517	0.479	13.677	.043
IT Sector	1	0.581	0.551	19.10	.037
Health Sector	1	0.432	.395	11.507	.025

Table 7. *Coefficients : All the Three Service Sectors*

	Banking Sector		IT Sector		Health Sector	
	B	Sig	B	Sig	B	Sig
(Constant)	3.623	.000	3.491	.000	4.010	.000
F1 – Organization Size	.477	.021	.346	.039	.201	.054
F2 – Change or Continuity	−.505	.015	−.243	.101	.075	.039
F3 – Marketing Approach	.564	.042	.479	.021	.266	.021
F4 – Management Style	.977	.004	.778	.005	.194	.041
F5 – Organizational Empathy	.526	.051	.392	.018	.293	.006
F6 – Organizational Protocols	.986	.007	.973	.003	.158	.106
F7 – Customer Connect	.957	.003	.378	.058	.127	.247
F8 – Industry Potential	−.469	.003	−.046	.391	.125	.259
F9 – Internal Branding Tools	.538	.049	.430	.042	.369	.006

The overall model is a reasonable fit that determines that factors F1 to F9 impact the dependent variable of internal branding. One could argue that a higher value for R^2 would have provided a better representation of the impact of factors on internal branding. However, it is expected that studies that attempt to predict human behavior typically have lower values for R^2, ranging between 0.4 and 0.65. While companies in these different sectors might approach internal branding differently, the overall model seems to resonate well with employees across these sectors, validating the relevance of the combined effect of these factors in impacting internal branding in each of their specific contexts.

Change & Continuity and Industry Potential have negative beta values. This implies that when the pace and level of change in an organization are high, it has a negative impact on internal branding. Similarly, a high level of the growth potential of the industry is likely to have a negative impact on the internal branding in the banking industry, which could be primarily because a high potential and growing industry provides the employees multiple options to move around in their jobs, thus typically leading to a lower level of bond and connect with any specific organization or brand that they are working with. Management Style, Customer Connect, and Organization Protocols seem to be the most critical for strengthening internal branding in a bank. If one further analyzes these factors, it becomes apparent how a bank's philosophy defined and conveyed by the management has a profound impact on how employees absorb and understand the same and put it into action about customer service delivery. Customer connect becomes a very critical factor for banks since retail bank employees interact with customers on an everyday basis, and the response and interaction with customers has a huge bearing on their 'feel-good' about their brand (Haksever & Render, 2013). Indian public sector banks should understand that it is imperative to get their employees' behavior aligned with their marketing objectives by benchmarking (Thomas & Rodrigues, 2020) internal marketing practices.

In the IT sector, Industry Potential is not significant. Table 4 indicates that the regression value accounts for close to 60% of the total variance, and the F-statistic is significant at an α value of 0.05. This means that the overall model is a good fit, and all the factors, F1 to F9, are significant. However, since the significance values of these two factors (F2 and F8) are low, we can assume that both pace of change and industry attractiveness do not significantly impact internal branding in the context of the IT sector. The factors that seem to be the most important are Organizational Protocols and Management Style. Thus, for an organization in the IT industry, focusing on these factors will likely have the maximum impact on internal branding and how it is absorbed and understood within the organization.

The model also presents a reasonable fit for the health sector, though it explains a lesser degree of variance at 43%. The F-statistic is significant in this case as well. The regression analysis results show that the impact of the identified internal branding factors on the health sector stands out and is different from the impact on both banking and IT sectors. The factors: Organizational Empathy and Internal Branding Tools are most significant for α value of 0.05.

In the case of the health sector, four of the nine factors are not significant: F1, F6, F7, and F8, and interestingly, none of the coefficients are negative in value. The drivers in the health sector are different since the service is about saving lives. Hence, the model provides a reasonable framework for the health sector and acknowledges that this sector presents its unique character, which implies how internal branding can be approached for organizations working in this sector. The most relevant factors, in this case, are F9 and F5: Internal Branding Tools and Organizational Empathy.

The healthcare sector emerges different from the other two sectors about the relevance of various identified factors that impact internal branding. The role of organizations in the health sector is dedicated to restoring health and preserving life, with an increased focus on the prevention of illnesses. The provision of health services has long been centered on altruistic principles, and those principles take precedence over all other aspects of operational nuances of the health organization's business. What works for one person may or may not work for another, which also makes it difficult to standardize and personalize care. In delivering unique and differentiated brand experiences, healthcare providers should effectively position the organization and its brand as valued health contributors (Kemp et al., 2014).

Table 8 provides a snapshot of how the data and analysis either accept or reject the null hypothesis for each of the sectors.

Table 8. *Summary of Results for All the Three Verticals*

Factor	Null Hypothesis - H0	Banking Sector	IT Sector	Healthcare Sector
F1	Organization Size does not affect internal branding.	H0 is rejected	H0 is rejected	H0 is rejected
F2	Change or Continuity do not impact internal branding.	H0 is rejected	H0 is accepted	H0 is rejected
F3	Marketing Approach does not affect internal branding.	H0 is rejected	H0 is rejected	H0 is rejected
F4	Management Style does not impact internal branding.	H0 is rejected	H0 is rejected	H0 is rejected
F5	Organizational Empathy does not affect internal branding.	H0 is rejected	H0 is rejected	H0 is rejected
F6	Organizational Protocols do not affect internal branding.	H0 is rejected	H0 is rejected	H0 is rejected
F7	Customer Connect does not affect internal branding.	H0 is rejected	H0 is rejected	H0 is rejected
F8	Industry Potential does not affect internal branding.	H0 is rejected	H0 is rejected	H0 is rejected
F9	Internal Branding tools do not impact internal branding.	H0 is rejected	H0 is rejected	H0 is rejected

Managerial and Theoretical Implications

Every organization needs to develop a strong brand, not just for its customers but also for its employees who are required to deliver the brand promise. This research recognizes that involving employees is of critical importance in developing a competitive advantage, through better quality of service, with the brand promise and approach, and this, in turn, would lead to enhanced performance and higher brand equity over a while. The findings suggest that a big change can have a big impact on the strength of the understanding of the brand amongst the employees. Hence, from the organization's perspective, it should focus primarily on internally communicating and explaining the change and linking it back to the brand's core promise and values. The study thus provides necessary inputs to an organization to better understand how a new context can trigger a connection with employees and re-establish the brand connection with them.

Moreover, the managerial or practical implications of the study are that the policymakers of the Indian public sector banks should recognize the significance of getting their employee behavior aligned with their internal branding strategies and ensuring that the brand promises are duly delivered to their employees.

The theoretical implication of the study provides practitioners with suggestions and ideas on how to factor in a specific context, complexity, and attributes of their organization as they develop their internal branding strategy, and how best to integrate the same with the brand values and their external marketing efforts. The study has very clearly defined the base factor and factor linkages that connect the various factors that impact internal branding. An organization can understand the interlinkages and implications and apply the same in its unique context to build a strong internal brand among its employees.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Future Research

This study focuses on experts from across industries that are primarily service-oriented and in urban metros. A wider sample covering a greater variety of firms from across the country's geography will likely add credence to the study. Further, expanding the scope of the study to a wider range of firms and also bringing in a mix of both the internal branding strategy designers and an employee perspective will also add greater depth and relevance to this leg of the study. Further studies and repeat surveys can only help further confirm the results of this effort. Since the study identifies the factors that impact internal branding in this study, there is an opportunity to use this knowledge to create a mechanism to evaluate the efforts an organization puts into its internal branding efforts.

Authors' Contribution

Dr. Pooja Sehgal conceived the idea and developed qualitative and quantitative design to undertake this empirical study. Dr. Sarika Kaushal extracted highly reputed research papers, filtered these based on keywords, and generated concepts and literature relevant to the study. Prof. Mahim Sagar verified the analytical methods and supervised the entire study. Dr. Pooja Sehgal conducted the interviews and field study. The numerical computations were done by Dr. Pooja Sehgal using SPSS 20.0. Dr. Sarika Kaushal wrote the manuscript in consultation with Prof. Mahim Sagar.

Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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