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Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jretconser

Antecedents of brand citizenship behavior in retailing

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 26 January 2014

Received in revised form

5 June 2014

Accepted 7 June 2014

Available online 1 July 2014

Keywords:

Retailing

Internal brand management

Brand citizenship behavior

ABSTRACT

There has been increased interest in retail branding yet there is a dearth of internal branding research in this industry. The purpose of this study is to explore the antecedents of Brand Citizenship Behavior (BCB) in a retail environment. The role that the frequency of employee contact with customers plays will also be examined. A further aim is to give guidance to retailers on how they should develop an internal branding management strategy. A conceptual model provides a foundation for the study. A literature review of the brand citizenship behavior and the related constructs was undertaken to inform the model. The results show support for the hypothesized relationships. Significant differences between managers and associates as well as between full-time and part-time associates were found. Recommendations are presented to retailers.

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1. Introduction

Both practitioners and academics agree that employees in service industries play a key role in building a brand and in its eventual success (Miles and Mangold, 2004). Morhart et al. (2009) contend that “customers’ perceptions of a service brand depend highly on the behavior of frontline staff”. Thus, customers’ image and experience of a brand is often influenced by the way employees behave and perform on the job (de Chernatony et al., 2003). Terms such as “brand ambassadors” (Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2006), “brand champions” (Fram and McCarthy, 2003; Morhart et al., 2009), and “living the brand” (Burmman and Zeplin, 2005) have been used to capture the spirit of desired employee behavior. These behaviors form part of a larger concept termed brand citizenship behavior (BCB) (Burmman and Zeplin, 2005).

Retailing differs from other service industries because of the regular, extensive interaction between employees and customers as well as the fact that the retailer’s brand is usually different from the portfolio of manufacturers’ brands offered for sale (Burt and Sparks, 2002). According to Ackfeldt and Coote (2005), retail employees are boundary spanners with multiple roles to fulfill, are evaluated on the productivity and quality of their performance, and are typically young and inexperienced workers. Thus, in a

retail environment, BCB should be regarded as an important determinant of a customer’s experience of the brand.

Prior research on the antecedents to organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) is extensive (Jain et al., 2012; Yi et al., 2013), but research on BCB is limited and there is even less focus on the retail industry. In a major study in this field, conducted in German service industries, only 15.1% of the sampled employees worked in retail and 12.3% had contact with customers (Burmman et al., 2009). In another study, conducted among employees working in Australian service industries, 53.8% of respondents were middle or senior managers, thus having limited customer contact (King and Grace, 2012). Two other studies had a greater focus on service staff but were conducted in the hotel industry in Taiwan and Malaysia (Chang et al., 2012; Shaari et al., 2012).

The paucity of research in this field motivated this research and its purpose is to explore the antecedents of BCB in a retail environment. The role that the frequency of employee contact with customers plays will also be examined.

2. Theory and hypotheses

BCB is based largely on the theory of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) which is the notion that “organizations need their employees to engage in discretionary behaviors beyond formal job requirements” (Uçanok and Karabati, 2013, p. 89). The term was coined by Organ (1964) based on Barnard’s (1938) ideas of “willingness to cooperate” and “innovative and spontaneous behaviors” (Katz, 1964). In their review of theoretical and empirical research on OCB, Podsakoff et al. (2000) identify seven common

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dimensions, viz. helping behavior, sportsmanship, organizational loyalty, organizational compliance, individual initiative, civic virtue and self-development. They also identify four major categories of antecedents of OCB: employee characteristics (such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment), task characteristics (intrinsically satisfying work), organizational characteristics (such as a cohesive group) and leadership values (such as articulating a vision, providing an appropriate model and fostering the acceptance of group goals). [Bettencourt et al. \(2001\)](#) studied service-oriented OCB among customer contact employees based on the conceptualization of OCB by [van Dyne et al. \(1994\)](#). They found that the antecedents which best predicted different aspects of OCB were context dependent. More recently, these concepts have been borrowed by researchers in the field of marketing, particularly in the study of brand management. Thus, OCB becomes BCB and organizational commitment (OC) becomes brand commitment (BC).

2.1. Brand citizenship behavior

By changing the focus from colleagues to customers and the organization as a whole to the brand, [Burmam and Zeplin \(2005\)](#) map the seven dimensions of OCB identified by [Podsakoff et al. \(2000\)](#) into a marketing context and thus conceptualize BCB. This was later tested by [Burmam et al. \(2009\)](#) and distilled into three dimensions, viz. willingness to help (brand acceptance, BAcc), brand enthusiasm (brand proselytization, BPro) and propensity for further development (brand development, BDev).

Based on the work of [Burmam and Zeplin \(2005\)](#), and [Sun et al. \(2007\)](#), [Chang et al. \(2012\)](#) identify three dimensions of BCB, viz. helping behaviors and brand consideration, brand sportsmanship, and self-development of brand enhancement. Using the instrument developed by [Burmam et al. \(2009\)](#), [Shaari et al. \(2012\)](#) identify four dimensions of BCB, viz. helping behavior, sportsmanship, self-brand-development, and brand endorsement. In sharp contrast to other researchers, [King and Grace \(2010\)](#) do not believe the [Burmam and Zeplin \(2005\)](#) argument to be sufficient and consider OCB and BCB to be synonymous. They developed their own uni-dimensional scale of BCB.

The competing approaches adopted by [Burmam and Zeplin \(2005\)](#) and [King and Grace \(2012\)](#) both have merit but the balance of evidence clearly supports a multi-dimensional rather than uni-dimensional view of BCB. It would appear that these dimensions are contextually sensitive with the nature of the service, the location of the study and the measuring instruments all being potential contributors to this sensitivity. In this study, BCB will be measured as a second order reflective construct measured by BAcc, BPro and BDev.

2.2. Antecedents of brand citizenship behavior: employee characteristics

Under the category of employee characteristics, [Podsakoff et al. \(2000\)](#) report that OC is the most commonly identified antecedent of OCB. In the case of corporate brands, such as that of a retailer, BC is seen as synonymous with OC ([Burmam and Zeplin, 2005](#); [Burmam et al., 2009](#); [King and Grace, 2012](#); [Shaari et al., 2012](#)). This leads to the first hypothesis:

H₁: Brand commitment (BC) is an antecedent of brand citizenship behavior (BCB).

None of the identified studies used job satisfaction (JS) as an antecedent of BCB. However, according to [Podsakoff et al. \(2000\)](#), it is a well-established antecedent of OCB under the category of employee characteristics. Both the studies by [van Dyne et al.](#)

(1994) and [Bettencourt et al. \(2001\)](#) which were used in the conceptualization of BCB, used JS as an antecedent of OCB. This leads to the second hypothesis:

H₂: Job satisfaction (JS) is an antecedent of brand citizenship behavior (BCB).

2.3. Antecedents of brand citizenship behavior: leadership values

[Podsakoff et al. \(2000\)](#) identify leadership values as an antecedent to OCB. This includes articulating a vision, providing an appropriate model, and fostering the acceptance of group goals. In marketing terms, internal brand management (IBM) encompasses these concepts and may be argued to be an antecedent to BCB. In fact, all of the identified studies ([Burmam et al., 2009](#); [Chang et al., 2012](#); [King and Grace, 2012](#); [Shaari et al., 2012](#)) use some form of IBM as an antecedent to BCB.

IBM is a sub-set of internal marketing that is focused on developing, strengthening and maintaining the organization's brand. It is a concept that emerged in the 1970s when [Berry et al. \(1976\)](#) proposed that employees are internal customers who needed to be satisfied. The concept has evolved over the last three decades to become a multi-dimensional concept ([Gezen et al., 2007](#); [Jou et al., 2008](#)). While some authors believe that internal marketing is operationalized through internal communication ([Chang and Chang, 2009](#); [Jou et al., 2008](#); [Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007](#)), others believe that the most important dimension is training ([Farzad et al., 2008](#); [Gezen et al., 2007](#)), and yet others propose internal marketing research as the important dimension ([Lee and Wen-Jung, 2005](#); [Wildes and Parks, 2005](#)). As such, internal marketing is seen as mainly a human resource function which includes training and educating ([Gray, 2006](#); [Zampetakis and Moustakis, 2007](#)), rewarding and motivating ([Lee and Wen-Jung, 2005](#)), and the recruitment of employees ([Arnett et al., 2002](#)). These initiatives are designed to help employees to effectively interact with customers.

[Burmam and Zeplin \(2005\)](#) view IBM as being a combination of three levers. First, brand-centred HR management ensures a personal identity – brand fit through recruitment, selection and promotion of employees. This is followed up by the organizational socialization of employees by way of orientation, training, social functions and mentor programs to ensure the informal transmission of brand identity. The second lever is reinforcing the brand among employees by generating brand awareness and understanding through internal communications, the more traditional role of internal marketing. The final lever is brand leadership which is encouraged at all levels of the organization so that employees are “living the brand”. [Burmam and Zeplin \(2005\)](#) contend that with these levers in play, IBM creates BC, which in turn results in BCB. Following [Burmam et al. \(2009\)](#), internal brand management is modeled as a second order formative construct predicted by the three levers, viz. brand identity (BI_d), brand communication (BCom) and brand leadership (BLead).

[King and Grace \(2012\)](#) agree with the organizational socialization aspect of IBM, but argue that relationship orientation (between the organization and its employees), and employee receptiveness (the psychological characteristics of employees) are additional components. Again they develop a competing model in which the components of IBM not only create BC (and thus BCB), but can also create BCB directly, i.e. BC mediates the relationship between IBM and BCB. This results in the following hypotheses:

H₃: Internal brand management (IBM) is an antecedent of brand commitment (BC).

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