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Internal Services Brand Orientation: Comparing the Perspectives of Managers, Employees, and Customers

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ABSTRACT

Brand orientation plays an important role in creating competitive advantage. The success of a brand depends on the extent of the harmony between managerially advocated brand orientation, effective implementation of the brand orientation by staff, and appreciation of the brand orientation by customers. This requires brand orientation to be implemented during each touch point of the service delivery process, as the delivery of the brand is experienced by consumers in a process of co-creation with the service provider.

To have a successful brand orientation, it is necessary to examine the perceptions of management, contact personnel, and consumers to discover if there is a consistent understanding of the brand orientation by these three parties. Perceptions of brand orientation should be aligned among these three groups because inconsistencies might have a negative effect on building a strong brand that would in turn impact brand performance, ultimately leading to a weaker service brand.

Drawing from the literature, this research develops scale measurements to examine the relationships among internal brand orientation and its antecedent dimensions from the perspectives of contact personnel, managers, and customers of a service firm. The dimensions included to measure brand orientation are brand commitment, brand citizenship, positive word-of-mouth, affective brand commitment, brand image, attitude toward brand, and customer perceptions of brand performance. A seven-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree) was utilized. Because the data were collected for a convenience store chain and from its managers, personnel, and customers, the statements were modified accordingly. Positive relationships were hypothesized between the perceptions of brand orientation and its dimensions and perceptions of brand performance and customer outcome.

After building a survey instrument and pre-testing it, the researchers administered the final survey to the contact personnel, managers, and customers of the family-owned convenience store chain. The finalized survey for customers was administered online through invitations on the social media channels of the convenience store chain (Facebook and Twitter), which were linked

to the survey. Employees were contacted directly with an e-mail invitation and link. A total of 2,738 customer and 232 employee surveys were appropriately completed and used in the data analysis. The SEM-PLS analyses reveal significant relationships among the brand orientation dimensions.

Based on the Three Promises and Services Branding Triangle framework that suggested comparisons of perceptions between managers and contact personnel (internal), managers and customers (external), and contact personnel and customers (interactive), an ANOVA test was utilized. The results revealed that external and interactive brand orientation gaps exist in the perceptions of personnel, managers, and customers, but not between managers and personnel. The study helps to fill an existing void in the brand orientation literature.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ceren Ekebas-Turedi (Ph.D., Old Dominion University) is an Assistant Professor of Marketing and Teddy Jacobi Scholar at Purdue University - Northwest. Her research focuses on consumer behavior, consumer emotions, sensory marketing and green marketing. She has publications in marketing and consumer psychology journals, presented various papers in national and international conferences and received internal and external grants.

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