

EFFECTS OF INTERNAL BRAND KNOWLEDGE DISSEMINATION ON THE EMPLOYEE

Rafael Bravo ^a

Universidad de Zaragoza

José M. Pina ^b (corresponding author)

Universidad de Zaragoza

Beatriz Tirado ^c

Banco Sabadell

a: Facultad de Economía y Empresa, Universidad de Zaragoza. Gran Vía 2, 50005, Zaragoza, Spain. e-mail: rbravo@unizar.es Telephone: +34 876554669

b: Facultad de Economía y Empresa, Universidad de Zaragoza. Gran Vía 2, 50005, Zaragoza, Spain. e-mail: jmpina@unizar.es Telephone: +34 876554693

c: Banco Sabadell, Av. Juan Carlos I 59-61, CP 50009, Zaragoza, Spain. e-mail: TIRADOB@bancsabadell.com Telephone: +34 976791964

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Structured Abstract

Purpose: This study examines the internal brand knowledge dissemination process in the banking sector and its effects on employees. Specifically, it focuses on the key roles of employee identification with both the organization and with the customer as antecedents of behaviors supportive of the brand, that is, employee citizenship behaviors and recommendation behaviors.

Design/methodology/approach: An empirical study was carried out in a major Spanish bank. Data gathered from a survey of 315 employees were analyzed through SEM.

Findings: The results showed that employees' perceptions of brand value congruence are key in explaining their identification with both the organization and with the customer. However, the employees' perceptions of the brand's authenticity explained only their recommendations of the bank as a good place to work.

Originality/value: These findings contribute to the advance in the current knowledge of the role of variables such as brand authenticity and employee-customer identification in internal brand management. From a managerial viewpoint, the results provide insights into the importance of employees' perceptions and attitudes when it comes to brand knowledge dissemination.

Keywords: brand knowledge dissemination; organizational identification; employee identification; brand citizenship behavior; retail banking

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1. INTRODUCTION

The banking industry has undergone multiple changes in the last decade. Bank employees suffered the effects of the 2008 economic crisis and the consequent restructuring of the sector. Its continuous mergers and acquisitions, the drastic reduction in costs and number of branches, and the loss of customer confidence in banks are among the factors that caused employees to lose confidence in banks (Lee *et al.*, 2019).

These are times when corporations must address internal brand management to revitalize the brand in the eyes of their employees. Internal branding processes are pivotal in influencing the employee's motivation to project the desired organizational image (Miles and Mangold, 2004). However, research into the topic is still scarce in areas of both academic and managerial interest. Most previous literature has focused on the impact of organizational actions and communications on employees' attitudes toward organizations, and comparatively less attention has been paid to how these actions and communications might affect employees' relations with clients (Anaza and Rutherford, 2012; Korschun *et al.*, 2014; Anaza, 2015).

In the present study, we contribute to the deeper understanding of internal brand management by analyzing the effects of brand knowledge dissemination on employee identification with both the organization (employee-company identification) and with the customer (employee-customer identification). We propose that brand knowledge dissemination, through brand authenticity and brand value congruence, affects not only employee-company identification but may also affect employee-customer identification. From this basis, we develop a model that provides an integrative view of key factors that lead to positive, pro-company employee behaviors aligned with corporate brand goals. Employee-customer identification might be

insufficient to explain how brand knowledge dissemination may determine certain employee behaviors. By including this dual perspective of employee identification with both the company and its clients, the study contributes by providing a better understanding of the effects of brand knowledge dissemination on employees.

From the banking perspective, the study of brand knowledge dissemination on employee identification with both the bank and the customer is particularly important. Employees are key in delivering the brand promise to the customer in banking services. Brand knowledge dissemination may affect the two types of identification in different ways. Moreover, there is a scarcity of evidence of the specific effects of many of the individual relationships that have been examined in the banking sector. For example, while researchers have acknowledged the key role that marketing communications may play in employees' brand perceptions (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001), the effect of brand knowledge dissemination on constructs such as employees' perceptions of brand authenticity remains unexplored in banking.

This work starts from the brand knowledge dissemination literature stream and goes on to examine the roles exerted by employees' identification with the organization and with the customer (Anaza and Rutherford, 2012). In addition, an analysis is made of the effects of these variables on employees' brand citizenship and recommendation behaviors, which are key indicators of bank management in practice.

The results of the present study complement conceptual models of brand knowledge dissemination and empirical works that have examined the effects of internal brand management. Specifically, an analysis is made of the key dual perspective of employee identification with both the organization and the customer in the process of brand knowledge dissemination. From the managerial perspective, this work allows an assessment to be made of the relative importance of employees' perceptions of brand authenticity and brand value congruence in their attitudes and behaviors toward the bank and its customers. Understanding

these variables may help managers detect problems, foster supportive behaviors in their employees, and optimize resource allocation in internal brand management.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Conceptual background

The relationship between employees and the organizational brand has been studied in different fields and from various perspectives in the academic literature. Organizational research has focused on concepts, such as corporate identity, identification with, and employee commitment to, the organizational brand. In contrast, research in marketing has developed concepts such as internal marketing, internal branding, employer branding, and employee-based brand equity. These different approaches have studied internal brand management from different angles.

Regarding internal brand knowledge dissemination, the academic literature has highlighted the importance of the brand being perceived as authentic and congruent with its employees' values. Brand authenticity refers to the genuineness of the brand (Napoli *et al.*, 2014); whereas brand value congruence refers to the similarity between the brand's values and those of the stakeholders, for example, consumers and/or employees (Goldsmith and Yimin, 2014). Baker *et al.* (2014) showed that brand authenticity and brand value congruence are key factors in the explanation of customers' perceptions of service performance. They are also closely connected to the concepts of identity similarity between the individual and the brand and identity trustworthiness included in the model proposed by Bhattacharya and Sen (2003). These authors proposed that these factors enhance the attractiveness of a company and consequently increase customer-company identification.

In turbulent times managing brand authenticity and brand value congruence may be crucial for organizational success. For instance, in the COVID-19 crisis, employees need to receive clear messages from their employers. While many organizations define their brands in terms of

transparency or efficacy, some have failed to transmit this clear message, which has harmed their brands' authenticity and brand value congruence in the eyes of their employees.

One of the goals of internal brand dissemination is to make the employee identify with the organization. In this sense, employee identification with the organization is linked to pro-company behaviors (Punjaisri *et al.*, 2011; Buil *et al.*, 2016). However, organizational actions and communications may also affect employee-client identification, which, in turn, may also explain pro-company behaviors. In fact, the employee's identification with the client plays a key role in understanding behaviors that go beyond his/her obligations as an employee (Korschun *et al.*, 2014; Bravo *et al.*, 2016). Corporate citizenship behaviors are an "extra" that employees undertake to help their organizations and their colleagues. Internal brand management may ultimately lead employees to develop these types of behaviors and speak well about the brand within their own environments (Burmam and Zeplin, 2005).

To explain how brand knowledge dissemination fosters employee behaviors consistent with the brand's values, we propose the model shown in Figure 1. Following Baker *et al.* (2014), we anticipate that brand knowledge dissemination will directly influence employees' perceptions of the brand's authenticity and congruence with their values, factors that can, in turn, lead to employee behaviors favorable to the organization. Building on this framework, we expect that employee-company identification will mediate the effects between employee perceptions and behaviors (Ngo *et al.*, 2019). In addition, the model contributes to knowledge in the field by examining a dual perspective of employee identification: his/her identification with the organization and his/her identification with the customer (Anaza and Rutherford, 2012).

- Insert Figure 1 about here -

The proposed model is consistent with the theory of the hierarchy of effects, that is, the behavior of individuals can be understood as a chain of relationships that involve cognitive, affective,

and conative factors (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). While this theory has been applied mainly in advertising, it can also help to explain other chains of effects derived from communications that link individual perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors toward products and brands (Barry and Howard, 1990; Wijaya, 2012). Thus, our model starts from the effects of internal communications on employees' perceptions of brands. These perceptions trigger emotional responses related to employee identification with the bank and its customers, which eventually lead to employee responses such as brand citizenship behaviors and recommendation of the bank as a good place to work.

Furthermore, based on social and relational theories (Kelman, 1958; Blau, 1964; Tajfel, 1978), we expect that the brand knowledge internally disseminated by the bank will positively influence employees' feelings of employee-company and employee-customer identification, which should eventually lead them to adopt behaviors aligned with the goals of the organization.

Social identity theories explain the process of socially categorizing oneself to a socially collective group; whereas relational identity theories explain how an individual defines him/herself in terms of a specific role relationship (Anaza and Rutherford, 2012). These theories have formed the basis of previous models that have focused on employees' behaviors, where the collective group is the organization, and the specific role relationship is the relationship between employees and customers (Baker *et al.*, 2014; Anaza, 2015; Ngo *et al.*, 2019).

2.2. Influence of brand knowledge dissemination on employees' perceptions of the brand and on employee-company identification

The dissemination of information about the brand within the organization is the cornerstone of internal branding strategy (Baker *et al.*, 2014). This communication effort is expected to have

a direct impact on both employees' perceptions of brand authenticity and brand value congruence.

Brand authenticity is a construct developed in the marketing literature mainly in the 2010s (Napoli *et al.*, 2014; Baker *et al.*, 2014; Schallehn *et al.*, 2014; Morhart *et al.*, 2015, Fritz *et al.*, 2017; Oh *et al.*, 2019). However, the construct still lacks a solid conceptualization, which makes it difficult to clearly identify its antecedents and consequences (Moulard *et al.*, 2021; Södergren, 2021).

Moulard *et al.* (2021) proposed that individuals may judge brand authenticity based on whether a brand fits in with a socially determined standard (true-to-ideal), the actual state of affairs (true-to-fact), and the company's motivations (true-to-self). The present study is based on the widespread acknowledgment that brand authenticity is linked to consumers' subjective evaluations of the genuineness of a brand (Napoli *et al.*, 2014). It is a construct that can determine individuals' behaviors by evoking positive perceptions such as genuineness, integrity, and honesty (Baker *et al.*, 2014; Matthews *et al.*, 2020), which may lead consumers to form emotional bonds with brands (Fritz *et al.*, 2017).

In the banking sector, the dissemination of the brand's mission and values has been found to positively affect corporate identity attractiveness (Bravo *et al.*, 2016), which leads us to conclude that it might also influence employees' perceptions of brand authenticity and brand value congruence. Although the relationship between these two variables has not been specifically examined in this setting, bank employees will perceive the bank's brand as authentic if there is appropriate brand knowledge dissemination. Taking the view that brand authenticity is a subjective construct, we might expect that employees' perceptions of the authenticity of a brand will be formed by their knowledge of and their interpretation of the information transmitted by the brand (Oh *et al.*, 2019). Thus, better internal marketing communications might create a distinctive and genuine image of the brand in employees' minds

(Baker *et al.*, 2004). Where entities internally communicate relevant information about a brand, their employees can internalize the brand's values (Morhart *et al.*, 2015; Oh *et al.*, 2019), which can contribute to the creation in their minds of the uniqueness of the brand.

Thus, the first step for a brand that wants to be perceived as authentic by the company's employees should be to communicate internal messages consistent with the brand's values (Baker *et al.*, 2014; Fritz *et al.*, 2017). Hence:

H1: Brand knowledge dissemination has a positive effect on brand authenticity

Brand congruence has been extensively examined both from the customer perspective (Goldsmith and Yimin, 2014) and from the employee perspective (Sirianni *et al.*, 2013; Baker *et al.*, 2014). It has been defined as the individual's perceptions of the similarity between a brand's attributes and his/her self-image (Goldsmith and Yimin, 2014). In the case of internal branding, this involves an alignment between corporate values and those of the employee (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos, 2014).

When an individual feels that his/her values relate to those of another entity, (s)he embarks on a validation process of his/her own values (Marstand *et al.*, 2018). Internalization by employees of the brand's values in their new self-conceptions will be more likely if they perceive changes in their environments consistent with their own value systems (Baker *et al.*, 2014). The internalization of brand values should not be left to chance; the company should bring this about through consistent brand communication activities (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; Chong, 2007; Herhausen *et al.*, 2020). It is significant that banks have encountered many challenges in their internal (mergers/changed working practices etc.) and external (financial crises/COVID-19) environments in recent years; these have affected the emotions and loyalty behaviors of their clients (Arguello *et al.*, 2019). In this setting, brand knowledge dissemination may help

employees accommodate clients' new requirements through reliance on the brand's values.

Hence:

H2: Brand knowledge dissemination has a positive effect on brand value congruence

To spread brand values, organizations must foster activities that allow employees to identify with the brand (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011). Although the literature has focused mostly on employee-company identification, identification can also occur at the employee-customer level (Anaza and Rutherford, 2012; Anaza, 2015).

Both types of identification, employee-company, and employee-customer are based on the theories of social and relational identification. Social identification theory proposes a sense of unity, that is, individuals' self-concepts are defined in terms of the group to which they belong (Tajfel, 1978; Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Thus, organizational identification is an emotional state that makes employees feel reflected in and defined by their organization and as part of the unit (Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos, 2014).

Brand management is a tool that can enhance the employee's identification with his/her organization (Bravo *et al.*, 2016). Employees will identify more with the organizational brand if they perceive the brand as authentic and believe that they share the same attributes as the brand (Ngo *et al.*, 2019). The literature suggests that employees tend to identify more with organizations that have effectively internally disseminated greater brand knowledge (Chang *et al.*, 2012; Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos, 2014). Consequently, they are more likely to regard the organizational brand as genuine and identify with its values. Specifically, we propose that both brand authenticity and brand value congruence will have positive effects on employees' identification with the values of the organization (Marstand *et al.*, 2018). Hence:

H3a: Brand authenticity has a positive effect on the employee's identification with the organization

H3b: Brand value congruence has a positive effect on the employee's identification with the organization

As previously stated, relational identification theory proposes that individuals define themselves in terms of a specific role relationship. In the case of the relationship between employees and their customers, this type of identification has been defined as the degree to which employees perceive they share a certain similarity with their clients (Anaza and Rutherford, 2012; Korschun *et al.*, 2014).

Employee-customer identification is especially important in the service sector, as in this sector, it is the employees themselves who transform the brand promise into reality (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011; Buil *et al.*, 2016). Due to the high number of interactions that take place between employees and customers, mutual understanding develops over time, which creates solid bonds (Anaza and Rutherford, 2012).

Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), focusing on the customers' viewpoint, argued that organizations should create and maintain a solid identity that, in turn, is perceived by the client as familiar, attractive, prestigious, and trustworthy. Building the brand with the customer in mind is part of the customer orientation approach, widely used in the banking sector (Bravo *et al.*, 2016). Thus, as in the case of employee-company identification, employees' perceptions of the authenticity of the brand, and brand value congruence, should make them identify more with their customers, resulting in greater employee alignment with the organization's goals. Hence:

H4a: Brand authenticity has a positive effect on the employee's identification with the customer

H4b: Brand value congruence has a positive effect on the employee's identification with the customer

The level of employee-company identification can directly impact how employees convey organizational identity to clients (Lichtenstein *et al.*, 2010; Anaza, 2015). Thus, internal brand

management in service companies may have a hinge effect on employee-customer interactions (Baker *et al.*, 2014). These interactions can exert a strong influence on the formation of customers' beliefs about the organization (Netemeyer *et al.*, 2012).

As in other service sectors, the service offered to bank customers is inextricably linked to their employees' efforts (Jamal and Adeloworo, 2008; Garas *et al.*, 2018). An employee who feels highly identified with his/her organization will arguably put more effort into his/her interactions with its customers and feel more identified with them. As Jamal and Adeloworo (2008) argued, where the client perceives similarities between him/herself and the provider, this facilitates bilateral communication between the parties, removes interpersonal barriers, and raises their respective levels of trust in and identification with each other. Hence:

H4c: The employee's identification with the organization has a positive effect on his/her identification with the customer

2.3. Influence of employees' perceptions of, and identification with, the brand on employee behaviors

Employees' perceptions of the brand and their identification with both the organization and its customers may exert an effect on two key behavioral variables, brand citizenship behaviors, and brand recommendation behaviors.

Corporate citizenship behavior was defined by Burmann and Zeplin (2005) as that employee behavior through which the company brand "comes to life." It has also been defined as brand citizenship behavior. Corporate citizenship behavior is a key element for organizations as it aligns employee behavior with the brand's identity and its organizational values (King and Grace, 2010). It leads to enhanced employee performance in service delivery (Baker *et al.*, 2014) and greater customer loyalty (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011; Sirianni *et al.*, 2013). In the

banking sector, internal marketing actions have been found to positively affect corporate citizenship behaviors (Awwad and Agti, 2010).

In general, employees will be more likely to perform service-oriented citizenship behaviors when they perceive higher congruence between their values and those of the organization (Baker *et al.*, 2014; Kim *et al.*, 2019). Social influence theory (Kelman, 1958) proposes that employees who share the brand's values adopt behaviors in line with these values. Indeed, some studies have shown the positive benefits of brand value congruence in different work performance indicators such as motivation, confidence levels, and stress, etc. (Siegal and McDonald, 2004).

Although the empirical evidence is scarce compared to that in the value congruence field, the literature suggests that when employees perceive the organizational brand to be authentic, they adopt corporate citizenship behaviors (Baker *et al.*, 2014; Kim *et al.*, 2020), become more motivated, and increase their identification with the brand (Baker *et al.*, 2014). In addition, those employees who most strongly perceive the brand to be authentic are those more likely to know most about the brand. Thus, it has been shown that employees with greater brand knowledge exhibit favorable behaviors toward their employing entity (Ngo *et al.*, 2019). Hence:

H5a: Brand authenticity has a positive effect on brand citizenship behaviors

H5b: Brand value congruence has a positive effect on brand citizenship behaviors

Regarding the relationships between employee-customer and employee-company identification and brand citizenship behaviors, some authors have found that those employees who identify most with their organizations incorporate their organizational identities into their self-concepts and are more motivated to adopt brand citizenship behaviors (Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos, 2014; Buil *et al.*, 2016). Drawing on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and social identity

theory (Tajfel, 1978), we expect brand citizenship behaviors to be fostered by both employee-company identification and employee-customer identification.

Social exchange theory proposes that employees feel the need to make an extra effort toward the company to reciprocate the perceived benefits they receive (Blau, 1964; Chang *et al.*, 2012). Employees who identify with their organizations are committed to the company, have internalized its organizational values, and are more willing to convey its brand values in a manner consistent with the image that the company wants to project (Du Preez *et al.*, 2017; Kim *et al.*, 2020). Consequently, these employees will be likely to adopt brand citizenship behaviors aimed at helping the company and its customers (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011; Buil *et al.*, 2016; Ngo *et al.*, 2019). In a way, they become brand ambassadors.

Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) proposes that employees who feel strongly identified with their clients will also tend to adopt behaviors that will positively impact on their commitment to their companies, their client-based orientation and their work performance (Anaza and Rutherford, 2012; Korschun *et al.*, 2014). Thus, we propose that employee-company identification, and employee-customer identification, will have a positive impact on corporate citizenship behaviors:

H5c: Employee-company identification has a positive effect on brand citizenship behaviors

H5d: Employee-customer identification has a positive effect on brand citizenship behaviors

In addition to influencing the adoption of brand citizenship behaviors, internal marketing efforts can decisively influence employees' perceptions of the company as a good place to work (Du Preez *et al.*, 2017). When employees externally promote their organizations, it is assumed that they hold favorable brand perceptions and identify with, and are committed to, the brand (Kashive and Khanna, 2017). If the organizational image is positive, employees are more likely

to recommend the company to third parties than if its image is less favorable (Van Hove and Lievens, 2009).

Brands that are perceived as authentic have managed to build positive associations in consumers' minds (Morhart *et al.*, 2015), which increases the likelihood of a recommendation. In addition, as with brand citizenship behaviors, greater employee-company value congruence motivates employees to recommend their organizations. From the customer viewpoint, Jamal and Adeloworo (2008) found that when a customer perceives congruence between his/her values and a specific employee's values, this increases his/her loyalty toward that employee. Similarly, the employee's perceptions of congruence between his/her values and the brand's values should influence his/her intentions to recommend the brand. Hence:

H6a: Brand authenticity has a positive effect on recommendation intentions

H6b: Employees' perceptions of brand value congruence have a positive effect on recommendation intentions

Through their behaviors, employees can create a positive working climate and communicate positive brand messages to customers and workmates (King and Grace, 2008). Employees who strongly identify with their organizations will be more committed to and adopt behaviors aimed at strengthening (e.g., positive word-of-mouth) the brand (Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos, 2014).

Organizational identification is a very strong motivational factor; it encourages employees to help in the brand-building process and to spread positive views about the brand (Lichtenstein *et al.*, 2010). In this approach, organizational identification has been defined as a variable that has major effects on employees' attitudes and behaviors, such as job performance, leaving intentions, and adoption of brand-oriented and customer-oriented behaviors (Anaza and Rutherford, 2012; Löhndorf *et al.*, 2014; Buil *et al.*, 2016).

The organizational literature suggests that employees tend to recommend more those organizations with which they feel identified, which more commonly is the case when they feel supported in their work (Kashive and Khanna, 2017). Similarly, while few previous studies have examined this relationship, we propose that greater employee-customer identification will be reflected in higher recommendation intentions. As mentioned previously, customer-orientation approaches are common in most organizations. Those employees who identify more with their customers will probably feel a greater need to solve their problems in line with the objectives of the company. Identification with the organization and with the client should go hand in hand (Anaza and Rutherford, 2012; Anaza, 2015), and should lead to greater recommendation intentions:

H6c: Employee-company identification has a positive effect on recommendation intentions

H6d: Employee-customer identification has a positive effect on recommendation intentions

3. METHODOLOGY

The empirical study consisted of an analysis based on a survey of the bank's employees. The study focused on Banco Sabadell, a major Spanish bank with 23,458 employees at the time of the study. Using data from a single bank allowed us to control external variables related to varying brand identities and managerial practices. Before carrying out the survey, a series of interviews with bank managers was undertaken to discover how the bank internally manages its brand. In addition, the interviews were also useful in that we were able to check to what extent the variables analyzed in the proposed model were of interest to the bank's managers. The interviews were conducted with six managers from different departments/areas responsible for internal brand knowledge dissemination, specifically, marketing, brand management, HR, communications, employer branding, data analysis, talent and culture.

The survey was carried out in the second half of 2019. Data obtained from the survey were used to test the proposed model. Employees from the bank's northern division and corporate center were contacted via the bank's email system to ask them to participate in an online survey. Most employees from the northern division (a total of 758) were previously employed by other banks that have merged with Banco Sabadell in recent years. Hence, the staff in this division are quite culturally heterogeneous, and the bank is particularly concerned about ensuring they are provided with effective, adequate brand knowledge.

Some 316 responses were received and, after an initial screening, only one was eliminated due to incoherence. Thus, the final sample was composed of 315 employees; 74.6% of the sample belonged to the branch network, and 25.4% to the corporate center. 50.0% were managers, and 50% were lower-graded employees; 51.9% were male, and 48.1% were female. The average number of years of work experience was 15.64. These variables were included in the model as control variables.

The constructs were measured on scales extracted from the previous literature (Anaza and Rutherford, 2012; Baker et al., 2014; King and Grace, 2010), using 10-point Likert-type formats (Table 1). Common-method bias was controlled through procedural and statistical methods (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Regarding the procedural methods, the respondents were informed that their responses were anonymous, that the data were confidential, and that they would only be used at an aggregate level. The dependent and independent variables were displayed on different pages of the electronic survey to minimize order effects and prevent the respondents from inferring cause-effect relationships. As to the statistical methodology, we conducted an empirical test using EQS 6.2 to compare the goodness-of-fit of the proposed model with the goodness-of-fit of a model where every item loaded onto a single construct. Covariance-based structural equation software such as EQS and LISREL have been widely used in the previous literature to compare models based on their goodness-of-fit-indexes (Hair *et al.*, 2019). The

findings showed that, for the proposed model, the RMSEA was below the commonly applied threshold of 0.08 (RMSEA = 0.062; 90% interval confidence 0.052 - 0.071), and that the incremental fit indexes were higher than the minimum value of 0.9 (NNFI = 0.920; CFI = 0.939), while the opposite was the case for the one-factor model (RMSEA = 0.113; 90% interval confidence 0.105 - 0.121; NNFI = 0.729; CFI = 0.759). Satorra-Bentler scaled chi-square also performed better for the proposed model (286.623 vs 765.051), which favors our proposal and argues against the existence of serious concerns regarding common-method bias.

- Insert Table 1 about here -

4. RESULTS

To test the model's hypotheses, we employed partial least square (PLS) regression with SMART-PLS 3 software (Ringle *et al.*, 2015). This methodology is suitable when variables are non-normally distributed, as in our study. Although PLS estimates causal and structural models simultaneously, the process should be undertaken in two steps, analysis of the measurement model and analysis of the structural model.

Prior to running the model, the validity, dimensionality, and reliability of the scales were tested. As can be seen in Table 2, all factor loadings were statistically significant and above the common threshold of 0.7. All the scales were unidimensional, and all Cronbach's *alpha*, composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) values, were above the respective thresholds of 0.8, 0.7, and 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2018). It is important to note that the recommendation construct was not included in the analyses as it was composed of a single indicator. These results allow us to conclude that the model has no problems in terms of the convergent validity and reliability of the scales.

- Insert Table 2 about here -

Discriminant validity was confirmed that the square root of the AVEs in all cases was higher than the inter-construct correlations (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Table 3 shows that the AVEs for any two constructs were greater than any of the squared correlations. In consequence, we concluded that there were no problems in terms of the discriminant validity of the scales.

- Insert Table 3 about here –

Having confirmed the validity and reliability of the scales, we ran the structural model through a bootstrap resampling technique with 5,000 subsamples. The R^2 values for the dependent variables were far above the critical threshold of 10%. In addition, the Q^2 values (Stone-Geisser test) were positive, which supports the predictive relevance of the model (Falk and Miller, 1992). These values, and the standard parameter values of the structural model are on Table 4.

- Insert Table 4 about here –

The results related to hypotheses H1 and H2 showed that brand knowledge dissemination exerts positive, significant effects on brand authenticity ($\beta=0.779$, $p<0.05$) and brand value congruence ($\beta=0.807$ $p<0.05$). These results support hypotheses H1 and H2.

The results showed that brand authenticity does not impact employee-company identification ($\beta=0.184$, $p>0.05$), rejecting H3a. On the other hand, brand value congruence does exert a positive, significant effect on employee-company identification ($\beta=0.547$, $p<0.05$), which supports hypothesis H3b. Similarly, it was found that the employees' perceptions of the brand's authenticity do not significantly affect employee-customer identification ($\beta=-0.107$, $p>0.05$), whereas brand value congruence again exerted a positive, significant effect ($\beta=0.243$, $p<0.05$). It was also shown that employee-customer identification is also determined by employee-company identification ($\beta=0.439$, $p<0.05$), which rejects H4a and supports H4b and H4c.

Hypothesis H5 proposed that brand authenticity, congruence, and employee-company and -customer identification determine employee corporate citizenship behaviors. The results did

not show that brand authenticity explained these behaviors ($\beta=-0.048$; $p>0.05$). Therefore, hypotheses H5a is rejected. However, brand value congruence ($\beta=0.360$; $p<0.05$), employee-company identification ($\beta=0.410$; $p<0.05$), and employee-customer identification ($\beta=0.161$; $p<0.05$) exerted positive, significant effects on corporate citizenship behaviors, which supports H5b, H5c, and H5d.

Finally, brand authenticity ($\beta=-0.355$; $p<0.05$), brand value congruence ($\beta=-0.160$; $p<0.05$) and employee-customer identification ($\beta=-0.422$; $p<0.05$) exerted positive, significant effects on recommendation intention. On the other hand, the results showed that employee-customer identification had a negative effect on recommendation intention ($\beta=-0.078$; $p>0.05$). These results support H6a, H6b, H6c, and reject H6d.

Having confirmed the validity and reliability of the scales, we ran the structural model through a bootstrapping procedure, which tests the significance of path coefficients using 5,000 iterations of subsamples automatically generated by the PLS algorithm (Chin, 1998). The R^2 values for the dependent variables were far above the critical threshold of 10%. In addition, the Q^2 values (Stone-Geisser test) were positive, which supports the predictive relevance of the model (Falk and Miller, 1992). These values, and the standard parameter values of the structural model, are in Table 5.

- Insert Table 5 about here –

As can be seen in Table 5, the effects of the employees' perceptions of brand value congruence on corporate citizenship behaviors are mediated both by employee-company identification ($\beta = 0.225$; $p < 0.05$) and, to a lesser extent, by employee-customer identification ($\beta = 0.039$; $p < 0.05$). Similarly, the interaction between these three variables is also significant ($\beta = 0.039$; $p < 0.05$). However, only employee-company identification mediated the effect of brand value congruence on recommendation intention ($\beta = 0.231$; $p < 0.05$).

As for authenticity, none of the indirect effects showed a significant coefficient. Therefore, the direct effect of authenticity on recommendations, proposed in hypothesis H6a, was not mediated by employee-company identification or employee-customer identification.

Finally, it is also noteworthy that the results provided support for the chain of effects between congruence, employee-company identification, employee-customer identification, and citizenship behaviors, with mediation effects significant at 95% in all the variables that play a mediating role in the model.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Theoretical Implications

This work shows the importance of internal brand knowledge dissemination in encouraging employees: to perceive brands as authentic and coherent with their values; to develop employee-company identification; and to align their behaviors with the values that the brand represents (Baker *et al.*, 2014; Ngo *et al.*, 2019).

As with Baker *et al.*'s (2014) model, the results obtained in this study showed that brand knowledge dissemination has positive effects on employees' perceptions of brand authenticity and brand value congruence. The effect of brand knowledge dissemination on brand authenticity is higher in our study, which might indicate that bank brands need to make more internal marketing efforts to make their employees perceive that the brand is authentic in comparison to brands from sectors, such as hospitality, the setting of Baker *et al.*'s (2014) study.

We also found support for the hypothesis that employees' perceptions of brand value congruence have direct effects on brand citizenship behaviors. However, unlike Baker *et al.* (2014), we found that brand authenticity did not affect brand citizenship behaviors. The real importance of brand authenticity for banks may be the potential it has for increasing recommendation intentions.

Employee-company identification and employee-customer identification emerged as key constructs in the study. These results are in line with those of other works where both factors are interrelated (Anaza and Rutherford, 2012; Korschun et al., 2014; Anaza, 2015). The effect of employee-company identification on citizenship behaviors is very similar to that reported by Ngo *et al.* (2019).

The differential effects of both types of identification on employee recommendation intention are particularly surprising. While employee identification with the organization and its customers are interrelated, the identification types are not as similar as the previous literature assumed (Anaza and Rutherford, 2012; Anaza, 2015). One type of identification does not necessarily imply the other exists. Both operate differently, and they may have different consequences. When the analyzed outcome relates mainly to the organization (recommendation of the bank as a good place to work), it might be expected that the main determining type of employee identification would be with the organization. However, based on the previous literature, we also expected that employee-customer identification would have a positive effect on recommendation, which was not found in this study. The current banking situation, in general, may help to explain the differing effects of both types of identification on employees' recommendations. No matter how much employees may identify with the customer, they would not recommend any bank as a good place to work given the current state of the industry. This does not imply that these employees have low levels of identification with their banks. In fact, they may feel identified with their own banks, but, they would not recommend the industry as a good place to work due to the current situation in the whole sector. Hence, enhancing both employee-company and employee-customer identification should be priorities for the employer, more so than the traditional goal of creating the perception of the organization as a desirable place to work (Foster *et al.*, 2010; Bravo *et al.*, 2016).

Another factor that might explain the differences found between the identification types is employees' professionalism. Sirianni *et al.* (2013) proposed that employees' professionalism may influence their brand evaluations regardless of employee-company alignment. In spite of the fact that some employees may feel that their bank has let them down and would not recommend it as a good place to work, they are committed to delivering good service to their customers because of their professionalism. This may explain why, even when employees' identification with their customers is high, this has no positive effect on their recommendation to work in the bank.

This professionalism may also explain why no significant relations were found between brand authenticity and employee-customer identification and between brand authenticity and corporate citizenship behaviors. Even if the employees do not perceive the brand as particularly authentic, their professionalism ensures that they do their best to serve the customer and help the organization beyond their normal obligations as employees.

Finally, contrary to our expectations, we found no significant effect of brand authenticity on employees' identification with the organization. This may be a result of the numerous mergers and acquisitions that have taken place in the banking sector. Many banks are staffed by employees who worked previously for other banks that have disappeared as a consequence of different integration processes. These subsumed banks had their own identities and, therefore, current employees may feel confused and/or still partly identified with the bank they used to work for. Thus, they may actually perceive the brand identity of the new bank to be authentic, but they do not feel particularly identified with it. Should this be the case, we advise that this may cause an imbalance between employee-company and employee-customer identification, which can create risks (Anaza and Rutherford, 2012). For instance, high employee-customer identification and low employee-company identification might cause employees to give unnecessary discounts and act mainly for the customers' benefit instead of in pursuit of

organizational goals. In any case, it is important to highlight the findings that what really explains employees' identification with the bank is brand value congruence, and the main effect of authenticity is on employees' recommendations to work at the bank.

5.2. Managerial Implications

In unfavorable economic contexts, such as that which looms on the horizon, internal brand management may be a powerful tool to regain trust of and motivate employees (Buil *et al.*, 2016). Effective brand dissemination throughout the organization is an essential requirement to build brand knowledge in the employees' minds (Yu *et al.*, 2018) and make them behave in accordance with the brand's values (Ngo *et al.*, 2019).

The internal brand management process should pay special attention to determining how brand knowledge is disseminated to all employees. Without brand knowledge, employees will be unable to transform the brand's vision into reality (King and Grace, 2008, 2010). A company's ultimate goal is that its customers exhibit positive behaviors toward the entity; therefore, it must ensure that the content of the internal brand knowledge disseminated is consistent with the image that the organization wishes to project (Yu *et al.*, 2018).

Financial entities, such as that analyzed in this work, believe that it is very important to determine what factors lead to higher employee NPS, which represents the intentions of employees to recommend the bank as a good place to work. The word-of-mouth transmitted by current employees is a widely used technique in staff recruitment. The results indicated that to achieve both employee recommendations and the adoption of other extra-role behaviors, it is essential to achieve high employee-company identification.

Brand authenticity continues to be a cornerstone of successful businesses, and this study revealed the importance for the banking sector of building brands that their employees perceive to be authentic. Banking entities should work on this aspect if they want to improve their

employees' NPS. However, our results showed that, depending on the indicator or construct that the organization wants to improve, individual brand dissemination messages should focus on just one indicator/construct in any one given communication. If the bank wants to improve its employees' NPS or recommendations, the message should focus on brand authenticity. However, if the bank wants to foster employee-company identification, employee-customer identification, and/or brand citizenship behaviors, then the message should focus on brand value congruence. Given the importance of brand value congruence, organizations should focus on their employee selection processes on recruiting candidates with values similar to those of the organization and its customers. Banks that wish to promote extra-role behaviors should be aware of the key indicators: employees' perceptions of brand value congruence and employee-company identification and find ways to enhance them.

5.3. Limitations and further research

The present study has provided important information on how internal brand knowledge dissemination affects employee identification and employee behaviors in a major Spanish bank. To verify the consistency of the results, our main recommendation is that the study should be replicated in other settings. European banks compete in a similar framework, established by the European Central Bank. However, internal branding may differ across banks and countries, so this issue should be examined in future studies.

In addition to brand citizenship behaviors and recommendations, future research might also address other dependent variables. For example, the employee engagement construct has recently attracted the interest of marketing scholars in the organizational literature in examining the relationship quality between brands and employees and its impact on organizational outcomes (He *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, employees' perceptions of brand authenticity and brand value congruence may vary depending on the organizational brand value under consideration. As indicated in the interviews, employees may agree with certain brand values but disagree

with others. An interesting avenue for further research would be to analyze the differential effects of each value.

It would also be interesting to examine the effectiveness of the brand knowledge dissemination process based on the different hierarchical levels of the bank. Future research should focus on understanding how brand dissemination works at different organizational levels and how this ultimately affects the customer experience.

Although our sample did not seem to be significantly affected by common-method bias, it should be noted that the use of a sole sample of self-report data prevents us from discarding the existence of this problem at a 100% confidence level. Educationally qualified employees such as those who participated in this study may provide more reasoned answers than general samples of customers. However, they may also be prone to report better attitudes toward the bank due to social desirability (Jakobsen *et al.*, 2015). Some authors, such as Fuller *et al.* (2016), have claimed that common-method bias is a general problem in business research but that it does not represent a serious threat to the validity of research findings. Nonetheless, this is an important concern in academic research, and academia should move toward longitudinal studies and/or studies that combine different sources of information to analyze individuals' perceptions (Jakobsen *et al.*, 2015; Fuller *et al.*, 2016; Hultand *et al.*, 2018).

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Figure 1. Conceptual model

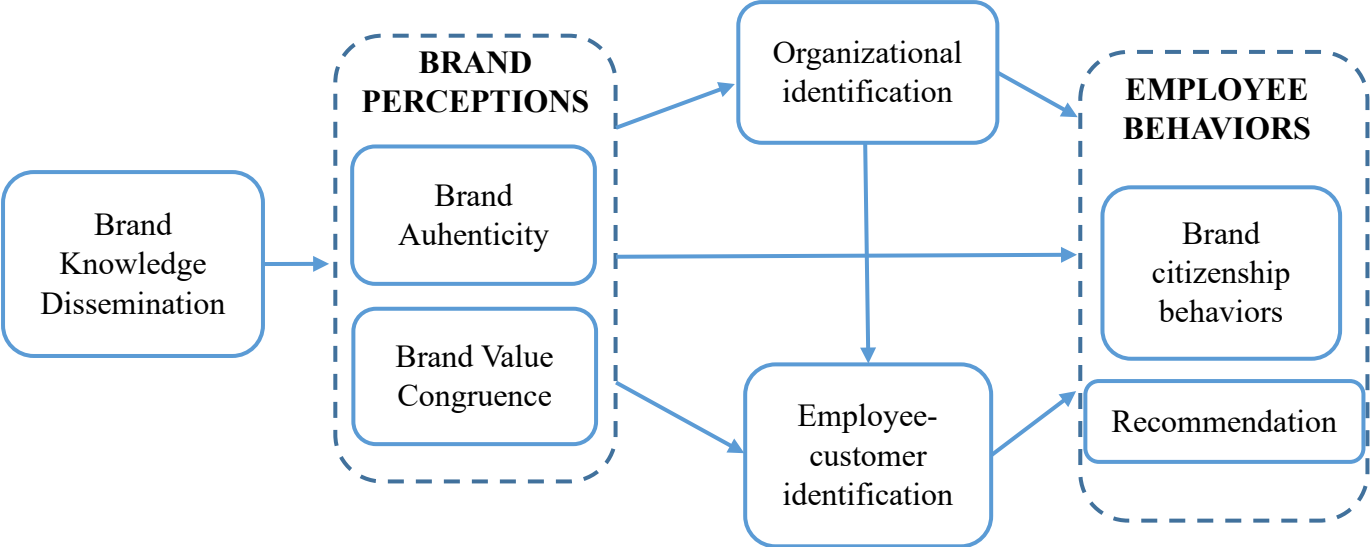


Table 1. Composition of the scales

Scales		Mean	St. Dev.
BRAND KNOWLEDGE DISSEMINATION based on Baker et al. (2014)			
<i>KNOW1</i>	BS communicates its brand message well to its employees.	7.69	1.74
<i>KNOW2</i>	BS explains the importance of my role in delivering the brand message.	7.60	1.98
<i>KNOW3</i>	The information provided to me when I started at BS helped me understand the goals of the brand.	6.90	2.36
BRAND AUTHENTICITY based on Baker et al. (2014)			
<i>AUTHEN1</i>	The BS brand acts in accordance with its values and beliefs.	7.87	1.75
<i>AUTHEN2</i>	The BS brand has integrity.	8.03	1.71
<i>AUTHEN3</i>	The BS brand is not fake	7.83	1.79
BRAND VALUE CONGRUENCE based on Baker et al. (2014)			
<i>CONGR1</i>	My attachment to this brand is based first and foremost on the similarity of my values to those represented by the brand.	7.33	2.25
<i>CONGR2</i>	The values represented by our brand are more than just words; they influence my day-to-day behavior.	7.17	2.30
<i>CONGR3</i>	In BS, we have a clear idea of what our brand stands for; brand identity and brand promise are well defined.	7.59	1.86
EMPLOYEE IDENTIFICATION WITH THE BANK based on Anaza and Rutherford (2012)			
<i>IDORG1</i>	The BS successes are my successes	7.83	2.07
<i>IDORG2</i>	When someone praises BS, it feels like a personal compliment	8.17	1.79
<i>IDORG3</i>	I am very interested in what others think about BS	8.27	1.56
EMPLOYEE IDENTIF. WITH THE CUSTOMER based on Anaza and Rutherford (2012)			
<i>IDCLI1</i>	I feel attached to my customers	8.25	1.54
<i>IDCLI2</i>	I identify with my customers	8.21	1.50
<i>IDCLI3</i>	I feel good when I am of service to my customers	8.76	1.26
BRAND CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOR based on King and Grace (2010)			
<i>CITIZ1</i>	My behaviors are consistent with the brand values of BS	8.57	1.30
<i>CITIZ2</i>	I consider the impact on the BS brand before communicating or taking action in any situation.	8.26	1.56
<i>CITIZ3</i>	If given the opportunity, I pass on my knowledge about the BS brand to new employees.	8.01	1.87
EMPLOYEE RECOMMENDATION based on Calleja et al. (2019)			
<i>RECOM</i>	Would you recommend BS as a place to work?	7.79	1.98

Note: All factors were measured by means of ten-point Likert-type scales.

Table 2. Results of the reliability and convergent validity analyses

	Factor loadings	Cronbach's <i>alpha</i>	CR	AVE
DISSEM1	0.911	0.854	0.912	0.776
DISSEM2	0.909			
DISSEM3	0.820			
AUTHEN1	0.963	0.960	0.974	0.926
AUTHEN2	0.967			
AUTHEN3	0.957			
CONGR1	0.938	0.922	0.950	0.865
CONGR2	0.940			
CONGR3	0.911			
IDCLI1	0.904	0.856	0.912	0.776
IDCLI2	0.899			
IDCLI3	0.838			
IDORG1	0.901	0.884	0.928	0.811
IDORG2	0.925			
IDORG3	0.875			
CITIZ1	0.873	0.829	0.897	0.745
CITIZ2	0.871			
CITIZ3	0.844			

Note: CR: Composite Reliability; AVE: Average Variance Extracted.

Table 3. Results of the discriminant validity analysis

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
DISSEMINATION (1)	0.881						
AUTHENTICITY (2)	0.779	0.963					
CONGRUENCE (3)	0.807	0.809	0.930				
ID. CLIENT (4)	0.353	0.381	0.479	0.881			
ID. ORGANIZATION (5)	0.636	0.646	0.718	0.549	0.901		
CITIZENSHIP (6)	0.585	0.561	0.684	0.543	0.713	0.863	
RECOMMENDATION (7)	0.658	0.717	0.701	0.349	0.707	0.548	1.000

Note: Figures on the diagonal present the AVE values. Off-diagonal figures represent the constructs' squared correlations.

Table 4. Results of the structural model

Hypotheses		β	R^2	Q^2
H1: Dissemination – Authenticity	Supported	0.779*	0.607	0.532
H2: Dissemination – Congruence	Supported	0.807*	0.652	0.537
H3a: Authenticity – Id. Organiz.	Not supported	0.184	0.546	0.418
H3b: Congruence – Id. Organiz.	Supported	0.547*		
H4a: Authenticity – Id. Client	Not supported	-0.107	0.342	0.236
H4b: Congruence – Id. Client	Supported	0.243*		
H4c: Id. Organiz. – Id. Client	Supported	0.439*		
H5a: Authenticity – Citizenship	Not supported	-0.048	0.603	0.412
H5b: Congruence – Citizenship	Supported	0.360*		
H5c: Id. Organiz. – Citizenship	Supported	0.410*		
H5d: Id. Client – Citizenship	Supported	0.161*		
H6a: Authenticity – Recommendation	Supported	0.355*	0.643	0.602
H6b: Congruence – Recommendation	Supported	0.160*		
H6c: Id. Organiz. – Recommendation	Supported	0.422*		
H6d: Id. Client – Recommendation	Not supported	-0.078*		

Note: * significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 5. Results of the mediation analyses

Estimated Relationships	β	Mediation
Authenticity – Organiz. Id. - Customer Id.	0.081	Not significant
Congruence – Organiz. Id. - Customer Id.	0.240*	Partial
Authenticity – Organiz. Id. - Citizenship	0.076	Not significant
Authenticity - Customer Id. - Citizenship	-0.017	Not significant
Congruence – Organiz. Id. - Citizenship	0.225*	Partial
Congruence - Customer Id. - Citizenship	0.039*	Partial
Authenticity – Organiz. Id. - Customer Id. - Citizenship	0.013	Not significant
Congruence – Organiz. Id. - Customer Id. - Citizenship	0.039*	Partial
Organiz. Id. - Customer Id. - Citizenship	0.071*	Partial
Authenticity – Organiz. Id. - Recommendation	0.078	Not significant
Authenticity - Customer Id. - Recommendation	0.008	Not significant
Congruence – Organiz. Id. - Recommendation	0.231*	Partial
Congruence - Customer Id. - Recommendation	-0.019	Not significant
Authenticity – Organiz. Id. - Customer Id. - Recommendation	-0.006	Not significant
Congruence – Organiz. Id. - Customer Id. - Recommendation	-0.019	Not significant
Organiz. Id. - Customer Id. - Recommendation	-0.034	Not significant

Note: * significant at $p < 0.05$