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Internal Branding of a University Business Through Building and Gaining from Employee-Based Brand Equity

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ABSTRACT

Like other businesses, universities spend to build their brands, but rarely measure the sources and benefits of brand equity, especially employee-based brand equity (EBBE). We borrowed from an EBBE model, the Associative Memory Network Theory, social information processing, and exchange theories to examine the impact of brand-related information generated and disseminated to employees in a private African university on role clarity, brand knowledge, brand commitment, and four EBBE benefits. Cross-sectional data was collected from 588 lecturers, administrators, and technical staff. Structural equation modeling results revealed that brand information generated and disseminated impacted role clarity, brand knowledge, and commitment. Brand commitment impacted three EBBE benefits: brand citizenship behavior, employee intention to stay in organization and spread positive word-of-mouth. Role clarity and brand knowledge were significant mediators. Thus, for sustainability, university managers should communicate explicitly through frequent verbal brand communications and orientation, and implicitly through behaviors that reflect brand prestige.

KEYWORDS

Information generation and dissemination; employee-based brand equity; brand knowledge; role clarity; brand commitment; brand citizenship behavior

1 Introduction

As global boundaries shrink caused by technological advancements, competition amongst universities increases. The technological advancements increase students' choices to study at many national and international public and private universities even at the comfort of their homes. Service brands, including university brands are sustainably thriving in the competitive market environment. Brand equity in the service sector needs continuous building and measurement considering that productivity in the sector compared to the product sector is growing faster and contributing more to balanced and sustainable economic growth in African and Asian countries (Lee & McKibbin, 2018, Osei et al., 2022). Brand equity is “the value that the consumer ascribes to a brand” (Murad et al., 2011, p. 403) or “the differential effects that brand knowledge has on consumers' positive response to the marketing of that brand” (Keller, 2013, p. 69). Brand equity projects a brand's strength and produces benefits such as trust, perceived

risk reliever, quality pointer, and a differentiator. A strong brand equity provides confidence in choosing a service brand over another (Murad et al. 2011) and can guarantee brand preference, willingness to pay a premium price and general market performance (Duh & Uford, 2019).

With the idea that a brand's strength lies in what consumers know, believe, and feel about a brand, there has been greater focus on external brand marketing, management, and measurement, i.e. mainly on customer-based brand equity (CBBE). The importance of internal brand marketing in building and gaining from brand equity in the form of employee-based brand equity (EBBE) has not received equal attention. This is particularly important in a service sector, where employees are paramount in delivering on the brand promise (Boukis, Gounaris & Lings, 2017). In a service context, Punjaisri et al. (2011) describe internal brand marketing as a process by which service organizations seek to elicit employee behaviors that are congruent with brand promises through cognitive (brand knowledge), affective (brand identification and commitment) and conative (brand enactment) stimuli.

Being one of the first scholars concerned about brand equity building and measurement from an employee perspective, King and Grace (2010) developed and tested a model of the sources and outcomes of EBBE. They contend that when brand-related information is generated and disseminated by studying and correcting employees' attitudes and capabilities regarding the delivering of a brand promise, employees' brand knowledge will be built, their brand roles will be clarified, and they will be able to perform their brand roles and responsibilities successfully and happily. King and Grace's (2010) EBBE model further suggests that the brand-related information generated and disseminated to employees will not only improve role clarity but may lead to brand commitment.

Role clarity and brand commitment were hypothesized as positive drivers of EBBE benefits, such as employee satisfaction, brand citizenship behavior, intentions to stay with an organization and willingness to spread positive word-of-mouth about the organization (King & Grace, 2010). Whether these will apply to a service brand such as a university brand, needs examination. Moreover, and despite the four identified dimensions of EBBE benefits, King and Grace (2010) studied the EBBE benefits as one dimension. They also assert that brand commitment is "an important indicator of employee brand knowledge effects" and role clarity, both of which are derived from brand-related information disseminated to employees (King & Grace, 2010, p. 946). However, they did not examine the mediating roles of brand knowledge and role clarity in the relationships between knowledge dissemination and brand commitment.

The Associative Memory Network Theory (AMNT) as Supornpraditchai et al. (2007) explain, when brand information is generated and disseminated to employees, the information becomes nodes, capable of triggering brand knowledge, clarifying employees' brand roles and building positive brand attitudes. All these according to the social information processing and exchange theories can lead to a number of benefits. For example, the information processing theory states that when an organization's role models and leaders disseminate quality and credible information to followers like employees, brand knowledge (awareness and image) is gained, and positive perceptions and attitudes are formed. These all lead to brand citizenship behavior, which is an EBBE benefit (King & Grace, 2010, Nguyen, Lu, Hill & Conduit, 2019). According to the

exchange theory, if organizations do their part to generate and disseminate valuable information in addition to openness and employee support, employees get role clarity and reward organizations in terms of brand trust, satisfaction, and overall brand commitment (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, Nguyen et al., 2019) which is one of the four EBBE benefits suggested by King and Grace (2010).

Adapting King and Grace's (2010) EBBE model, applying ideas from the AMNT, social information processing and exchange theories, this study was aimed at achieving three objectives:

- (1) examine the extent to which brand-related information generated and disseminated to employees impacts role clarity, brand knowledge, and in turn brand commitment.
- (2) test the mediating effects of brand knowledge and role clarity in the relationship between knowledge dissemination and brand commitment.
- (3) Assess the extent to which brand commitment leads to four EBBE benefits (employee satisfaction, brand citizenship behavior, intentions to stay with an organization, and willingness to spread positive word-of-mouth about the organization).

To achieve these objectives, we studied a private university which has a high brand ranking in Africa. Employees in private universities tend to report greater brand role clarity than those of public institutions (Judson et al., 2008). While universities' success would depend on the quantity and quality of students and staff enrolled and employed, respectively, the brand intelligence provided to employees and their brand equity-building efforts will also be very important (Murad et al. 2011). For example, Colladon and Grippa (2020) contend that brand intelligence guides the monitoring of positive/negative brand associations which are strong drivers of brand equity (Keller, 2020).

The study starts with literature review and discussions on relevant theories from which hypotheses are developed. The methodology used to test the hypotheses are then discussed, followed by the results presentation and discussions. The study ends with implications and areas of further studies.

2 Literature review

2.1 *Essence of branding a university business*

Keller (2013) defines a brand as a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors. Sammut-Bonnici (2015) defines a brand as "a set of tangible and intangible attributes designed to create awareness and identity, and to build the reputation of a product, service, person, place, or organization. Considering the increasing competition in the higher education market from the growing number of public and private universities (Panda, Pandey, Bennett & Tian, 2019), universities are recognizing the importance of building a strong brand. A strong university brand is a differentiator among universities within localities, nations, regions, continents, and globally. The strong brand appeals to prospective students, their parents, advisors, and

quality staff, all of which result in increased market share and survival potential of the university (Ningrum, Kusumawardani & Kurniawan, 2020). A strong brand equity mostly measured in terms of brand awareness and image can place universities as institutions of choice (Shahijan, Rezaei & Guptan, 2018), reduce students' price sensitivity and increase their willingness to pay a higher price/fee (Chauke & Duh, 2019), should a university decide to increase fees.

Considering the benefits of brand equity, universities, especially the private universities, are beginning to engage in integrated marketing techniques in their advertising and promotional efforts to build brand equity (Judson et al., 2008). Universities focus on preparing messages of their perceived best qualities and/or the qualities they believe students look out for in choosing a university. These messages are passed on to students, parents etc., through adverts and other forms of broadcasting (Pharr, 2016) to build brand awareness and image (i.e. brand knowledge structure) (Shahijan et al., 2018). Brand knowledge structure, according to Keller (2020), is an important source of brand equity from which several financial and non-financial benefits flow. The development of a brand is usually seen from the perspectives of customers, as the principal function of the marketing/sales department in organizations (Al-Shuaibi et al., 2016), and rarely from the perspective of employees. Researchers are therefore suggesting the internal marketization of an institution's brand to all employees. The recognition of employees as important internal stakeholders with the capacity of influencing the development of an organization's brand and brand equity has led to the conceptualization of EBBE (King & Grace, 2010, Awan et al., 2018).

2.2 Conceptualization and benefits of EBBE

King and Grace (2009, p. 130) define EBBE as "the differential effect the knowledge of a brand has on an employee's response to their work environment". It is very important that an employee understands what the organization's brand value components and implications are, so that delivery manner/pattern of a brand's promise are effective (Erkmen & Hancer, 2015). When employees hold a strong brand knowledge, they improve customers' brand attitude, perceptions, and experience (Bookies & Christodoulides, 2020). According to Bookies and Christodoulides (2020) report, EBBE is the added brand value that employees perceive they are receiving from their efforts and participation in building a company's brand. Some of these added values can be role clarity, employee brand satisfaction, willingness to share positive word-of-mouth and intention to stay with the organization (King & Grace, 2010). EBBE is also conceptualized as the extent to which an organization's brand identity has been interpreted by employees in such a way that the employees would be able to successfully deliver on the organization's brand promise through their job performance (Bookies & Christodoulides, 2020).

Employees, according to the Resource-Based Theory (RBT), are important assets and source of sustained competitive advantage if well informed, trained, and managed. The theory contends that organizations should not rely only on brands and external resources for success but should position themselves strategically based on the use of all their resources and capabilities, including employees for competitive advantage (Vomberg, Homburg & Bournemann, 2015). Concerned that a firm's profitability is often measured mainly from product-market perspective, Wernerfelt (1984, p. 172) highlights that

resources are both tangible and intangible assets that include “brand names, in-house knowledge of technology, employment of skilled personnel, trade contacts, machinery, efficient procedures, capital, etc.” Thus, while brands are viewed as important resources, the RBT projects employees and their services as another important resources (Vomberg, Homburg & Bournemann, 2015). Managers of organizations should therefore develop policies and guidelines that improve employees’ knowledge, morale, loyalty, and commitment. These will affect their daily discharge of duties and ultimately their organizational effectiveness (Davis & Simpson, 2017).

Following the RBT postulation that employees are also significant resources that contribute to a firm’s competitive advantage and eventually market performance, researchers have empirically examined the benefits generated from building brand equity through internal market orientation or through building brands from employees’ perspective (i.e. EBBE). In Australia, King and Grace (2010) found that the benefits generated from EBBE were employee satisfaction, positive word-of-mouth about the organization, employee intention to stay in the organization, good brand citizenship behavior and brand allegiance. Tavassoli et al. (2014) assert that a strong EBBE can result in employees and executives to accept lower pay because they are proud and get intrinsic benefits of being part of the organization. EBBE also encourages employees to endorse their company’s brand to family and friends (King & Grace, 2010). These spill over to enrich customer-based brand equity, which in turn generates a range of benefits, such as customers brand preference, willingness to pay premium price, good attitude toward brand extension and repurchase intention by customers (Duh & Uford, 2019). Further, Duh and Uford (2019) found that EBBE increased the degree to which CBBE impacted customers’ brand preference and their willingness to pay a price premium by 4% and 18%, respectively. Considering the benefits of EBBE, researchers are studying how EBBE can be built. We found three theories and a model that suggest how EBBE can be built.

2.3 Theories and models suggesting how EBBE is built and hypotheses development

The Associative Memory Theory, the Social Information Sharing and Social Exchange Theories and King and Grace’s (2010) model were found useful in suggesting how EBBE is built.

2.3.1 Associative memory theory and King and Grace’s (2010) EBBE model

Franzen et al. (2001) report that the human brain is made up of neurons that transfer information among each other as neurotransmitters. This is captured in the Associative Memory Network Theory (AMNT), which posits that information is stored in the human brain as nodes and connected to each other by links. In an organizational setting, information of an organization’s brand given to employees who are internal customers are stored as nodes in the memory of the employees. Applying the AMNT, Supornpraditchai et al. (2007) view a brand as an important node which once activated in terms of exposure, spreads to other nodes connected to the brand name like its product experiences, attributes, substances, product categories, and advertising campaigns showcasing the brand. The information is not only activated in the minds of customers, but when information about a company’s brands are generated and disseminated to

employees, they become nodes that build on brand attitude, perception, knowledge structure and clarify employees' roles in delivering services and building good relationships with external customers. While King and Grace (2010) show that information generation leads to its dissemination, Nguyen et al. (2019) found that brand leadership activities including information dissemination drive employee brand knowledge. Thus,

H1: Information generation about university brand increases information dissemination to the employees

H2: Information dissemination to university employees positively impacts employee brand knowledge structure of the university brand.

The network of brand information and brand worth in the memories of employees also enables employees to be committed to the organizational brand (Supornpraditchai et al., 2007), which King and Grace (2010) found to be an important driver of EBBE benefits. King and Grace's (2010) EBBE model delineates the mechanisms by which internal brand management practices (e.g. information generation, dissemination, and role clarity) lead to brand commitment, before impacting EBBE benefits. Their model suggests that information generated and disseminated to employees about a company's brand will lead to role clarity and brand commitment, both of which are significant drivers of EBBE benefits. King and Grace (2010, p. 949) define information generation as the "extent to which an employee perceives that the organization generates information via employee feedback (informal and formal)" and information dissemination as "the extent to which an employee perceives that brand knowledge is transferred from the organization to the employee in a meaningful and relevant manner." Role clarity is defined by King and Grace (2010, p. 949) as "the level of clarity an employee has of their role as a result of having brand knowledge" and brand commitment as "the psychological attachment or the feeling of belonging an employee has toward an organization."

King and Grace (2010) did not examine how much the disseminated brand information impacted employees' brand knowledge structure, which Nguyen et al. (2019) describe as a cognitive processing of information that enables employees to understand how to "live the brand". The brand knowledge is recognition and recall of brand attributes and benefits (brand awareness) and various associations linked to the brand (brand image) (Keller, 2013). Brand Knowledge reportedly reduces role ambiguity and increases brand citizenship behavior. It also mediates in the relationship between information disseminated and EBBE benefit, such as brand commitment and citizenship behavior (King & Grace, 2010, Nguyen et al., 2019). Thus,

H3: University employees' brand commitment will be positively impacted by information dissemination.

H4: Information dissemination to university employees will have a positive impact on role clarity on delivering on the university brand promises.

Using the human associative memory theory, Supornpraditchai et al. (2007) also suggest that knowledge of employees of their employer's brand can impact employees' intention to stay with the organization. They assert that employees add value to an organization much more when the memory of the organization's brand in their minds is favorably positive and unique. These are made possible when employees are fed with correct and adequate brand information. Conducting a study in a service industry, Erkmen (2018) found that internal brand communication improves brand knowledge and role clarity of employees and their commitment to the brand. This suggests that role clarity can mediate in the relationship between information dissemination and brand commitment. Even in a non-service industry, Awan et al. (2018) found that information dissemination enables role clarity and employees to deliver on brand promises, all of which lead to retention of employees in the organization. While King and Grace (2010) found that it is role clarity that mediates in the relationship between information dissemination and EBBE benefits, Nguyen et al. (2019) findings suggest that it is employee brand knowledge. Guided by the AMNT and these empirical studies, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H5a: Employee brand Knowledge structure of the university brand will mediate in the relationship between information dissemination and brand commitment.

H5b: Employee brand role clarity on delivering university brand promises will mediate in the relationship between information dissemination and brand commitment.

2.3.2. *Social information processing and social exchange theories*

The proposition of the social information processing theory as Nguyen et al. (2019) explain, is that people's perceptions and subsequent behavior are formed from informational content generated from surrounding activities, leaders, and role models in the environment the person works in. The information is constructed and interpreted through "cognitive processing of the observed in-group activities". Following this theory, employee brand knowledge has been defined as "the cognitive representation of distinct brand identity in employees' memory" (Terglav et al., 2016, p. 3) built from information processed from internal branding activities and brand leadership (Nguyen *et al.*, 2019). Employees' strong understanding of what the brand means and how their services contribute to providing a satisfying brand experience to customers (i.e. role clarity) forms a brand knowledge that does not only generate favorable brand attitudes but can strengthen employees' brand commitment (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2009). He (2022) also found that when employees are equipped with brand knowledge, their roles are clarified, they identify with the brand, all of which drive brand commitment and EBBE. Thus,

H6: Employees' knowledge of their university brand has a positive impact on their brand commitment.

H7: Employees' role clarity on delivering on their university brand promises will positively impact their brand commitment.

The brand commitment is demonstrated in the delivery of brand promises and leads to EBBE benefits and organizational market performances (Duh & Uford, 2019, King & Grace, 2010, Nguyen et al., 2019). The four EBBE benefits as outlined by King and Grace (2010) are guaranteed following the prescription of the Social Exchange Theory (SET), whose main foundation is reciprocity. The SET posits that if there is compliance of parties in a relationship to the “rules” of exchange, it would evolve into mutual commitment, loyalty, and trust. The SET suggests that the relationship begins with a party giving an input into a relationship to receive an output from same relationship (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The input or output can be either a positive or negative outcome. This implies that an individual will reciprocate positively to positive treatment and negatively to negative treatment. In our case and as postulated by King and Grace (2010) and Nguyen et al. (2019), when organizations disseminate valuable information/inputs about the worth of an organizational brand, educate employees on how to further nourish the brand and deliver on its promises, there would be role clarity, brand knowledge, and brand commitment. From these, four EBBE benefits (employee satisfaction, brand citizenship behavior, employees’ intention to stay in the organization and spread positive word of mouth) are generated (King & Grace, 2010).

Burmann et al. (2008, p. 266) define employee brand citizenship behavior as “the intention of each employee to voluntarily exhibit certain generic (brand- and sector-independent) behavioral characteristics outside of the formally defined role expectation system, which strengthen the identity of the brand.” Employee satisfaction is defined as “the level of satisfaction an employee receives from their job as a result of realizing what they want and value from their work,” while employee intention to stay in an organization is “the future intention of an employee to stay in their current place of employment” (King & Grace, 2010, p. 949). King and Grace (2010, p. 949) define employee willingness to spread positive word-of-mouth as “the extent to which an employee is willing to say positive things about the organization and readily recommend the organization to others.”

Even though King and Grace (2010) operationalized EBBE benefits in terms of employee satisfaction, intention to stay in the organization and spread positive word-of-mouth and brand citizenship behavior, they examined EBBE benefits uni-dimensionally and the extent to which brand commitment impacted all four EBBE benefits. This study will examine the impact of brand commitment on all four EBBE benefits. The brand commitment, according to Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2009), is developed when employees understand their role in brand building and have brand knowledge. Bookies et al. (2017) also suggest a relationship between employee brand knowledge and commitment to deliver on the brand promise. Nguyen et al. (2019, p. 172) also suggest that when employees are aware of the brand values (brand knowledge), and have adequate in-role and extra-role coaching from organizational leaders, they do not only “develop an understanding of how brand promises can be delivered” (role clarity) but they will “live the brand,” be committed to the brand, and in turn, “exhibit behaviors to support the brand beyond their normal duty” (brand citizenship behavior). This citizenship behavior, according to King and Grace (2010) is one of the EBBE benefits. From these studies and the suggestions of the SET, the following are hypothesized:

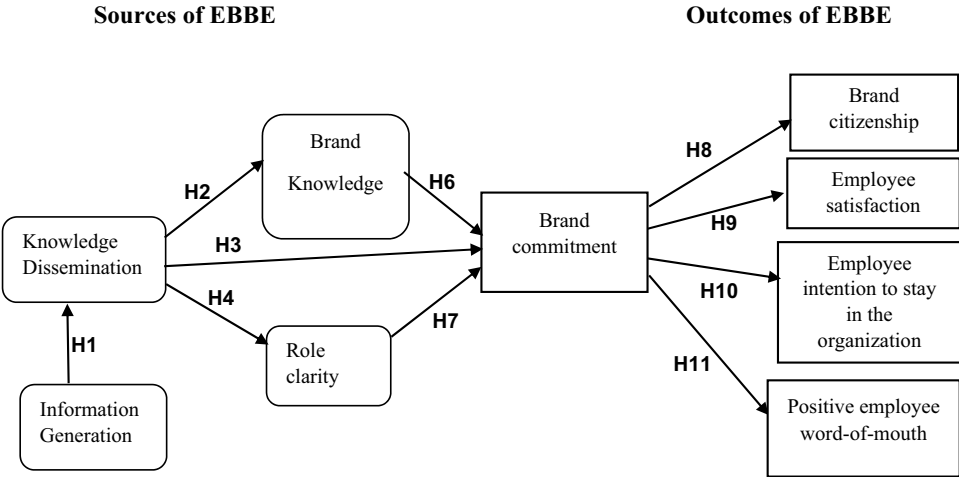
H8: University Employees’ brand commitment has a positive impact on their brand citizenship behavior.

H9: University Employees’ brand commitment will positively impact the brand satisfaction.

H10: University Employees’ brand commitment has a positive impact on their intention to stay in the organization.

H11: University Employees’ brand commitment will positively influence their willingness to spread positive word-of-mouth about their organization.

The hypotheses are presented in Figure 1. The conceptual model in Figure 1 proposes that the brand information generated and disseminated to employees will positively impact brand commitment through brand knowledge and role clarity (H1-H4). Thus, brand knowledge and role clarity will mediate in the relationship between information dissemination and brand commitment or directly impact brand commitment (H5-H7), which is a hypothesized positive driver of four EBBE benefits (employee satisfaction, brand citizenship behavior, intentions to stay in the organization and willingness to spread positive word-of-mouth) (H8-H11). The next section discusses the research methods used to test the conceptual model and hypotheses.



NB = H5 is a mediation hypothesis

Figure 1. Conceptual model. NB = H5 is a mediation hypothesis

3. Methods

3.1 Research design and data collection

Considering the nature of the research objectives, a quantitative descriptive research design was used. The study used purposive and stratified non-probability sampling to obtain adequate proportions of all categories of staff (academic and non-academic) of a private university in Nigeria. The university was ranked the best Nigerian private university in 2018, despite being at its 16th year of existence. In 2020, The World University Ranking (TWUR) ranked the private university within the best 401–500 and within the best 101–150 best young university globally (TWUR, 2020). The sustainability of these rankings will become challenging if the sources and outcomes of the university's EBBE are not studied and appropriately managed. Moreover, out of the more than 164 universities operating in Nigeria, which is Africa's strongest economy, most of them are private universities fiercely competing (Suleiman, Hanafi & Taslikhan, 2017).

Murad et al. (2011) note that private universities are putting more efforts to build brand equity. It would therefore be important to examine how employees are contributing to these efforts and what the universities would gain in return. The members of staff were informed of the aim of the study and assured of the confidentiality of their responses in the first page of the questionnaire. After obtaining permission to conduct the study from the university Heads, a cross-sectional study was conducted with self-administered questionnaires delivered face-to-face to respondents in their offices.

The measurement of the constructs (information generation, information dissemination, role clarity, brand commitment, employee satisfaction, brand citizenship behavior, intention to stay in organization and willingness to spread positive word-of-mouth) was adapted from King and Grace (2010), while the scale measuring employee brand knowledge was adapted from Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2009). The constructs were measured with a five-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree as did King and Grace (2010). Table 1 has the items used to measure the constructs, the means, and standard deviations.

3.2 Data analyses

The data analyses started with descriptive statistics, after which the measurement model was assessed. Partial Least Squares (PLS) Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using PLS-SEM, version 3 software was used to test the hypotheses. The PLS-SEM was preferred over the covariance-based SEM, because it is viewed as most suitable for SEM, especially for complex models (Hair et al., 2021) and its ability to automatically test mediations within the model (Nitzl, Roldan & Cepeda, 2016). Therefore, the mediation effects of employee brand knowledge and role clarity in the relationships between knowledge dissemination and brand commitment were automatically tested in the structural model. The measurement model assessed constructs' reliability using composite reliability, validity in terms of convergent and discriminant validities and model fit (Hair et al., 2021). The convergent validity was measured using factor loadings and average variance extracted. Discriminant validity was measured with the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlation (Hair et al., 2017). Following Henseler et al. (2015) suggestion, model fit was tested with SMMR and rms Theta, whereby SRMR values less than 0.10 and rms Theta values below 0.12 indicate good model fit.

Table 1. Constructs' items and convergent validity (factor loadings).

Items	Factor loadings
Information Generation	
In the organization I work for, management interacts directly with employees to find out how to make them more satisfied	0.694
In the organization I work for, we do a lot of employee research	0.734
When at work, my manager tries to find out what we as employees want from the organization	0.727
The organization I work for, gathers information from employees' feedback	0.614
Knowledge Dissemination	
The organization I work for communicates its brand promise well to its employees.	0.717
Skill and knowledge development of employees happens as ongoing process in the organization I work for	0.825
The organization I work for teaches us why we should do things and not just how we should do things.	0.843
The organization I work for teaches us why we should do things and not just how we should do things	0.867
The organization I work for communicates the importance of my role in delivering the brand promise	0.818
My manager regularly reports back to us about issues affecting our work environment.	0.752
My manager regularly meets with all of his/her employees to report about issues relating to the whole organization.	0.818
The information provided to me when I was employed helped me to understand my role in the context of what the organization is trying to achieve.	0.748
Brand Knowledge	
I am aware of how my organization achieves its goals through its brand	0.823
I am familiar with what my organization's brand stands for	0.895
I have a clear sense of my organization's vision	0.923
I know which attributes of our brand differentiate us from our competitors	0.905
I know the importance of my organization's goals in delivering the brand promise	0.877
Role Clarity	
I know how I should behave while I am on the job.	0.807
I know how I am expected to handle unusual problems and situations while on the job.	0.866
I know exactly what output is expected of me on the job.	0.847
I know what I am expected to achieve in my job.	0.847
Information about my organization's brand improved my basic understanding of my job.	0.543
I understand what is expected of me because I have information about my organization's brand.	0.785
I know how to make specific decisions for my job because I have information about my organization's brand.	0.700
I know how to deliver the brand promise for the organization I work for.	0.724
Brand Commitment	
I am proud to be a part of the organization I work for.	0.933
I really care about the fate of the organization I work for	0.729
I am willing to put in extra effort beyond what is expected to make the organization I work for successful	0.850
Brand Citizenship Behaviour	
I take responsibility for tasks outside of my own area, if necessary, e.g. following up on customer requests etc.	0.689
I demonstrate behaviors that are consistent with the brand promise of the organization I work for.	0.811
I consider the impact on my organization's brand before communicating or taking action in any situation.	0.808
I show extra initiative to ensure that my behavior remains consistent with the brand promises made	0.696
If given the opportunity, I pass on my knowledge about my organization's brand to new employees.	0.777
I am always interested to learn about my organization's brand and what it means for me in my role.	0.829
Employee intention to stay	
I plan to be with the organization I work for, for a while	0.707
I plan to be with the organization I work for five years from now.	0.917
I would turn down an offer from another organization if it came tomorrow	0.904
I plan to stay with the organization I work for	0.850
Positive Employee Word of Mouth	
I am encouraged to speak positive things about my organization.	0.825
I am motivated to recommend my organization to friends and other family members.	0.725
I enjoy talking about my Organisation.	0.802
If someone is looking for a place to study, I generally advise him/her to apply in my Organisation	0.839
I have recommended my organization to people a number of times.	0.864

Note. Employee satisfaction was deleted from further analyses because of poor factor loadings and reliability.

Table 2. Mean, reliability, convergent (AVE) and discriminant validity (heterotrait-monotrait ratio).

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Mean	SD	CR	AVE
1 Brand citizenship									4.0	0.7	0.9	0.5
2 Brand commitment	0.854								4.1	0.9	0.8	0.5
3 Brand Knowledge	0.481	0.535							2.9	1.1	0.9	0.8
4 Employee intention to stay in the company	0.285	0.618	0.729						2.2	1.1	0.9	0.7
5 Information Generation	0.269	0.754	0.692	0.731					2.4	1.1	0.7	0.4
6 Knowledge Dissemination	0.329	0.704	0.520	0.343	0.716				3.1	0.9	0.9	0.6
7 Positive employee word-of-mouth	0.724	0.863	0.480	0.343	0.510	0.684			3.4	0.9	0.9	0.7
8 Role clarity	0.757	0.897	0.887	0.493	0.623	0.603	0.646		3.6	0.8	0.9	0.6

Note. SD = Standard deviation; CR = Composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted; Employee satisfaction was deleted from further analyses because of poor factor loadings and reliability.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Usable data was collected from 588 respondents from which 455 (77.4%) of the respondents were males, while females were 133 (24.6%). This reflects the very high male dominated staff composition in the private university where the study was conducted. Up to 60.4% of the respondents were young adults within the age range of 18–35 years old, while 39.6% of the respondents were adults between the ages of 36–50+ years old. In terms of qualification, 51.9% were undergraduate degree holders, considering that non-academic staff were also surveyed and 48.1% were postgraduate degree holders. Up to 91.7% of the university employees were full-time staff, with 65.3% being lecturers, 20.4% being administrators and 14.3% being technical staff. These reflect the diversity of the respondents surveyed.

4.2 Measurement model

As aforementioned, the measurement model tested the constructs' reliability, validity, and model fit. Except for employee satisfaction, all the constructs had a good reliability with composite reliability ranging between 0.7 and 0.9 and all within the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2017). Employee satisfaction was deleted from further analyses because of poor composite reliability figure of 0.4. Convergent validity, measured with factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE) was good with factor loadings and AVE figures all greater than the accepted 0.4 (Hair et al., 2017) (Table 1).

Discriminant validity was also good with all the correlation coefficients lower than the recommended 0.9 (Hair et al., 2017) (Table 2). The model fit was good with SMMR of 0.089 and rms Theta of 0.092, all within the recommended 0.1 and 0.12 thresholds, respectively (Henseler et al., 2015).

4.3 Structural model

The structural model tested the hypotheses, and the results are in Table 3.

The results in Table 3 show that except for employee satisfaction that was deleted from further analyses, 10 hypothesized relationships were significant and thus supported.

Table 3. Structural model results.

Hypotheses	Path Coefficients	T Statistics	P Values	Model Explanatory Power
H1 Information Generation -> Knowledge Dissemination	0.707	35.338	0.000**	Brand citizenship (56.9%)
H2 Knowledge Dissemination -> Brand Knowledge_ structure_	0.521	22.916	0.000**	Brand commitment 68.8%
H3 Knowledge Dissemination -> Brand commitment	0.376	10.915	0.000**	Intention to stay (4.6%)
H4 Knowledge Dissemination -> Role clarity	0.558	16.359	0.000**	Word-of-mouth (65.8%)
H5a Knowledge Dissemination -> Brand Knowledge structure-> Brand commitment	0.238	4.523	0.023*	
H5b Knowledge Dissemination -> Role clarity -> Brand commitment	0.485	7.854	0.000**	
H6 Brand Knowledge structure -> Brand commitment	0.456	7.622	0.000**	
H7 Role clarity -> Brand commitment	0.870	14.509	0.000**	
H8 Brand commitment -> Brand citizenship	0.754	30.607	0.000**	
H10 Brand commitment -> Employee intention to stay in the company	0.215	3.581	0.025*	
H11 Brand commitment -> Positive employee word-of-mouth	0.811	35.314	0.000**	

** = Significant at 99% confident level; * = significant at 95% confident level.

Specifically, H1 posited that information generated will positively impact information disseminated. With ($\beta = 0.707$; $p < 0.01$) obtained, this hypothesis was supported.

Hypotheses H2-H4 proposed that information disseminated to employees with positively impact brand knowledge (H2), brand commitment (H3), and role clarity (H4). The results in Table 3 show that all these hypotheses were significant and supported with ($\beta = 0.521$; $p < 0.01$), ($\beta = 0.376$; $p < 0.01$), and ($\beta = 0.558$; $p < 0.01$), respectively.

Hypotheses 5a and 5b were about the mediating role of brand knowledge (H5a) and role clarity (H5b) in the relationship between knowledge dissemination and brand commitment. The results in Table 3 show that both hypotheses were supported with ($\beta = 0.238$; $p < 0.05$) and ($\beta = 0.485$; $p < 0.01$), respectively.

Hypotheses H6 and H7 stipulated that brand commitment will be positively impacted by brand knowledge (H6) and role clarity (H7). With ($\beta = 0.456$; $p < 0.01$) and ($\beta = 0.870$; $p < 0.01$), respectively, both hypotheses were supported.

Hypotheses H8 –H11 hypothesized that brand commitment will positively impact brand citizenship (H8), employee intentions to stay in the university (H10) and willingness to spread positive word-of-mouth (H11). The results in Table 3 show that all the hypotheses were supported with ($\beta = 0.754$; $p < 0.01$), ($\beta = 0.215$; $p < 0.05$), and ($\beta = 0.811$; $p < 0.01$), respectively, even though with varying strength.

The tested conceptual model explained 68.8% of brand commitment, 56.9% of brand citizenship behavior, 4.6% of intentions to stay in the organization and 65.8% of willingness to spread positive word-of-mouth about the organization (Table 3). Hair et al. (2017) suggest that explanatory powers of between 10% and 25% are weak, 26%–50% are moderate and 51% and 75%+ are strong, especially for consumer behavior studies. Therefore, and except for intention to stay in the organization, the tested conceptual model of this study had moderate and strong explanatory powers, depending on the outcome construct.

5 Discussion, implications, limitations, and areas of further study

This study adapted King and Grace's (2010) EBBE model and applied ideas from the Associative Memory Network Theory, social information processing and exchange theories to examine the extent to which brand-related information generated and disseminated to employees of a private university in Nigeria impacted role clarity, brand knowledge, brand commitment, and four EBBE benefits. The study also examined whether role clarity and brand knowledge mediated in the information dissemination and brand commitment relationship. The results showed that brand information generated positively led to its dissemination, which in turn significantly impacted role clarity and brand knowledge. These support the findings of Bookies et al. (2017) conducted in the U.K and in restaurant, hotels, banking, travel agencies, and airline service sectors. Specifically, Bookies et al. (2017) found that in all these sectors, internal market orientation given to employees, including intelligence generation and dissemination enhances employee-job-fit (i.e. role clarity), brand knowledge and brand identification. These mean that when information is generated and disseminated, important cognitive (brand knowledge), conative (role clarity) and affective (brand identification and commitment) parts of performing tasks and attachment to the systems are achieved.

Our results also support a study conducted in Turkey and amongst five-star hotel workers by Erkmén (2018). He found that internal brand communication and not external communication nor employees' experiences with a brand significantly impacted role clarity and brand knowledge. The impact of role clarity and brand knowledge on brand commitment was also tested in the current study, especially as Erkmén (2018) did not find a direct relationship between internal brand communication and brand commitment. As did Koo and Curtis (2020) in the case of brand knowledge and Xiong, King and Piehler (2013) in the case of understanding brand role, the current study found that both role clarity and brand knowledge significantly impacted brand commitment. It was also found here that both role clarity and brand knowledge mediated in the brand dissemination-brand commitment relationship. This is an indication that even though internal communication did not directly lead to brand commitment as Erkmén (2018) found, intelligence disseminated does indirectly impact brand commitment through the knowledge they are equipped with about the brand, and through clarification of the roles that employees are to play related to the brand promise delivery. How much the brand commitment leads to EBBE benefits was examined.

It was found that the intention to spread positive word-of-mouth ($R^2 = 0.658$) and brand citizenship behavior ($R^2 = 0.569$) were most impacted by brand commitment, while the willingness to stay working with the university ($R^2 = 0.046$) was least impacted by brand commitment. These results enrich King and Grace's (2010) finding by specifying the types of EBBE benefits impacted by brand commitment. From a human resource standpoint, it is concerning that although the private university's employees agreed that they are committed to the university brand with ($M = 4.1$), this minimally drives them to stay working for the university. Or could the employees' brand commitment be a continuance or normative commitment, which Piehler et al. (2016, p. 1578) report to be requirement focused and as reflecting "the costs of leaving the organization or a perceived obligation to remain, respectively". Further studies should test these aspects of brand commitment. Also needed will be the investigation of what will motivate staff

retention in the private university, since brand commitment measured in the current study have minimal impact. For example, even though an organizational brand can be a good and enduring relationship builder, Iglesias et al. (2015) found that human resources practices and policies, such as training, promotion, evaluation, and compensation can also enhance relationship building with the organization to the point of retention.

The findings of this study have theoretical and managerial implications. Theoretically, this study contributes in the fields of marketing intelligence development, brand management strategies (Iglesias et al., 2015, Colladon & Grippa, 2020) and human resources management (King & Grace, 2010) by measuring and revealing the sources and benefits of EBBE which have been limitedly studied, especially in the context of universities. The borrowing of ideas from the AMNT, social information processing and exchange theories to enrich King and Grace's (EBBE) model exposes important paths through which internal brand communication or internal market orientation can lead to varied EBBE outcomes for organizational benefit. The resultant conceptual model developed and tested can be used to measure the sources and benefits of EBBE in other product and services contexts and in other countries.

Managerially, the study contributes by revealing the importance of information generation and knowledge dissemination in the overall performance of an organization through EBBE building and measurement. With information generation and dissemination having chain effects, managers should seek ways to communicate explicitly through frequent verbal brand communications and orientation and implicitly through behaviors that reflect the brand identity and prestige. One of the ways to explicitly educate employees about the brand for better internalization is through brand storytelling (Erkmen, 2018). From this, employees can develop brand love and identification, all of which can enhance brand commitment (Bookies et al., 2017) and expected internal (employees' effort to communicate to their peers the corporate brand values) and external (customer orientation or predisposition to serve customers and satisfy their needs) EBBE benefits (Bookies & Christodoulides, 2020, p. 46). From these benefits emanating from internal marketing intelligence generation and dissemination, brand managers should not see the task of brand equity building, measurement, and management to be only the task of the marketing department. They should also constantly work with the human resource department to build and benefit from brand equity. The findings of this study should motivate managers of the university institutions to put into place adequate cognitive internal management practices (information generation, knowledge dissemination, role clarity) and an affective internal brand management (brand commitment) strategies and practices to enjoy the varied EBBE benefits. This is particularly important in the current highly competitive private university environment in Nigeria.

While this study makes important theoretical and managerial contributions, there are some limitations. The first is possible social desirability bias that may stem from the self-reporting of brand commitment, brand citizenship, willingness to spread positive word-of-mouth and other performances. Behavioral and performance constructs like these, according to Bookies and Christodoulides (2020) tend to be over-reported. Future research can seek other ways to measure these types of constructs. One such way can be experimental manipulations with an experimental and a control group. Another limitation is the examination of mainly employee-based factors in determining brand

commitment and EBBE benefits. For example, brand leadership, cultural (Bookies & Christodoulides, 2020) and relational (e.g. brand trust and brand love) factors in the organization can also contribute to brand commitment and overall EBBE. These constructs should be factored into our integrated model to enrich the explanation of brand commitment and EBBE. Since we studied only the explicit brand communication, further studies can additionally factor in implicit brand communication as conceptualized by Erkmén (2018).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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