

Full Length Research

# Effect of Internal Branding on Employee Brand Supporting Behaviors: Empirical Evidence from the Higher Education Institutions of Ethiopia

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of internal branding activities on the brand support behavior of employees at Welega University. The researcher used internal brand communication and brand-centered training and development activities as a feature of internal branding. This study followed a descriptive study design supported by a deductive study approach. The subjects of the survey consisted of all employees of the University. A dedicated, unlikely sampling procedure was used to track the last respondent. Data were collected from 346 respondents using a structured survey using a 5-point Likert scale. The findings of the association analysis show that the descriptive variables were statistically significant. The results of root cause analysis show that internal branding attributes, or the practice of internal brand communication, have a greater impact on the brand support behavior of university employees than on brand-centric training and further development activities. In addition, the results show that internal branding attributes are positively correlated with employee brand support behavior and that the university has excellent experience with these attributes, employees are very likely to support the brand.

**Keywords** – Internal branding, brand centered training, brand supporting behaviors, Higher education, Wollega University, Ethiopia

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## INTRODUCTION

An internal brand provide organizations with better strategic opportunities for better performance, shared values, and shared knowledge (King & Grace, 2008). Internal branding helps companies focus on brand value by cooperating and engaging in a consistent brand message so that employees understand the brand value and provide customers with the full promise of the brand (Urde, 2003; Karmark, 2005; Mosley, 2007 & de Chernatony&Cottan, 2006).Soni et al. (2009) described the brand as a way to convey the essence and spirit of a company to stakeholders. Kunerth& Mosley (2011) and Ansari &Riasi(2016) found that internal branding relies on the marketing theory of the brand image shows that the organization is associated with the employment; brand consists of individuals' perceptions about what is distinctive, central and sustainable through the organization as a workplace (Dineen& Allen, 2016).

Nowadays, companies are increasing their brand value by cooperating and committing to a consistent brand message in order for employees to understand the value embodied in the brand and brings the brand promise to their customers (Judson et al., 2006 &Boone, 2000). A brand message loses its credibility if it is not supported by coordinated employee behavior (Schiffenbauer, 2001). University staffs have a significant impact on the public representatives of higher education institutions in terms of staff status, research outcomes and world-class education (Naude& Ivy, 1999; Ivy,

2001). If employees do not have a clear understanding of the institution's brand, their behavior may reflect their own value rather than the university's brand value.

In emerging markets, universities are increasingly recognizing the importance of corporate branding and emphasizing the role of employees in the branding process (Istileulova, 2010). In emerging countries like Africa, research centers for multinational corporations are becoming increasingly attractive. These companies typically want to work with the university's academic staff to maintain close ties with universities in emerging markets in order to recruit promising graduates first (Lohr, 2006). When a university attracts these multinationals in today's competitive environment like other service providers (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007), the university discriminates against what sets brands and employee performance apart from other competitors. Therefore, internal branding should be used to promote employee understanding and incorporation of brand value into the work (Judson et al., 2006; Whisman, 2009).

However, applying the concept of developed countries in the context of developing countries may cast doubt on the applicability of the theory. This is because most of the theoretical models used to predict the impact of internal branding are based on assumptions about the behavior of workers in developed countries, whereas most workers in developing countries do not. Furthermore, by adding alternative insights to views in higher education, this research is expected to contribute a significant managerial implication for universities in developing countries like Ethiopian and for others.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Companies use their internal branding to persuade their employees to support the corporate brand. Internal branding training promotes an organization's commitment and commitment to the company's core values and conveys brand value to employees (Baker, 2009 & King et al., 2012). Training and development efforts also contribute to employee motivation, job satisfaction and work ethic (Chatzimouratidis et al., 2012). In addition, employee branding uses the organization's systems and internal marketing activities to motivate employees to support their brand (Miles & Mangold, 2004).

A study by Punjaisri & Wilson (2007) shows that internal branding directly affects an employee's adherence to brand promises and the employee's attitude towards the brand, which in turn affects employee performance. When an organization embraces a brand at the cultural level and uses corporate value as a compass for decision making and the development of brand promises, it can strengthen its supportive behavior (Evans et al., 2012).

In the university context, employees and scholars can play an important role in the branding process. Foster et al. (2010) noted that extensive research was conducted on the processes required to facilitate branding behavior. However, few studies are available in developing countries in this area. Existing literature focuses on research dealing with corporate branding and how universities design corporate identities (Melewar & Akel, 2005; Balmer & Liao, 2007; Atakan & Eker, 2007; Celly & Knepper, 2010).

In addition, the model presented in this context categorized internal branding tools and programs into four main groups: training, orientation, briefings, group meetings (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007). Another broader perspective is the modern researcher (McLaverty et al., 2007), who divides internal branding strategies into seven key groups, including internal communication, training support, leadership practices, rewards and awareness, recruitment practices, sustainability factors, and more. However, these seven groups represent best practices and are not consistently implemented in all organizations. Consequently, according to Karmark (2005), internal branding from a marketing and communication-based perspective consists of two key aspects: brand-centric training and development activities and elements of internal brand communication. The underlying mechanism of the relationship between internal branding activities and employee branding support remains ambiguous, suggesting that further investigation is needed to clarify.

Recently, some researchers have been studying internal brand communication in higher education institutions, and their research is not primarily administrative staff (Judson et al., 2006 & 2009) or academic staff that should be considered a major resource university and must be managed (Balmer & Liao, 2007). The perspective of academic staff on the brand of educational institutions in developing countries is overlooked. In addition, one of the biggest concerns is that the university's internal branding is based on knowledge imported from the business. Thus, it raises the question of the applicability. For this reason, this study aims to help fill this gap by choosing Ethiopia as a setting for exploring the concept of internal branding in the context of higher education in developing countries.

### **Review of Related Literature**

#### **Theoretical Review**

#### **Concepts of Internal Branding**

Punjaisri & Wilson (2011) states that internal branding is to ensure that the brand's promises are fulfilled by employees

and reflect the expressed brand value that drives customer expectations. However, in order to satisfy customers, it is important for the company to provide what the brand promises to provide to the customer (Tosti & Stotz, 2001). Punjaisri & Wilson (2007) agrees that internal branding has become an important process in aligning employee behavior with brand value. According to Vallaster & de Chernatony (2004), internal branding programs can facilitate brand-supporting behavior by matching employee behavior with the brand message conveyed to customers. Terms such as internal branding, employee branding, internal branding, and relationship marketing are widely used in marketing materials and take into account the involvement of internal stakeholders in the organization's mission and planning. According to Tosti & Stotz (2001), internal branding focuses on communicating the company's core brand value to its employees. Employee branding uses the organization's systems and internal marketing activities to motivate employees to support their brand (Miles & Mangold, 2004). Employees need effective training and motivation to interact with customers to ensure customer satisfaction (Mosley, 2007)

Companies use their internal brand to persuade their employees to support the corporate brand. According to Schultz (2003), having employees support a corporate brand means having them provide what the brand promises to consumers. In brand literature, the relationship between a brand and its employees is conceptualized as a living brand (Ind, 2007; Karmark, 2005; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). When employees live the brand, they internalize those values and allow consumers to naturally deliver the brand's promises.

There are several authors in the literature who pay attention to employee behavior as a result of internal branding (Burmamann & Zeplin, 2005; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2005 & 2006; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007 & 2011). In general, the more management uses internal branding, the more likely it is that employee behavior will support the brand. Consistent with the study by Judson et al. (2006), internal branding activities may help employees better understand the brand value of their respective universities and use these brand values in their daily work.

However, some terms are used to refer to employee behavior through internal branding. Vallaster & de Chernatony (2006), uses the term "brand-friendly behavior" to describe employee brand-related behavior when it comes to the effects of internal branding. Punjaisri & Wilson (2011) argue that internal branding activities lead to brand identification, engagement and employee loyalty, which in turn leads to brand performance. According to Punjaisri & Wilson (2009), employee brand support behavior is the ability of dedicated employees to understand the value of the brand and meet the customer's brand expectations set by the brand's promises.

### **Brand-centered training and development activities**

Training is a planned and systematic effort to change or develop knowledge / skills / attitudes through the learning experience in order to achieve effective performance in an activity or series of activities (Pinnington & Edwards, 2005). Brand-centric training is a great opportunity to understand brand values and align employees with their principles (Aurand et al., 2005; Ind, 2007). Brand-centric training processes should focus on creating value-defined programs, as brand value can help organizations achieve their overall goals (Aurand et al., 2005; Pappasolomou & Vrontis, 2006; Ind, 2007). According to a survey conducted by Punjaisri & Wilson (2011), employees will appreciate the value of the brand and the know-how to deliver it through training activities.

In addition, brand-centric training and development programs need to be implemented to ensure that employees understand the value of the brand from the moment they join the company (Wilson, 2001; Karmark, 2005; Ind, 2007). There is a general consensus that employee brand support behavior can change based on talent activity (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Aurand et al., 2005). A study by Orlando et al. (2005), employees appear to be more active in branding and tend to incorporate this image into their business activities when some people are involved in the internal branding process.

Moreover, according to Gotsi & Wilson (2001), there is an agreement that internal communication of brand value can facilitate the behavior of employees who support the brand organization. They have recruitment guidelines, performance evaluations, training, and compensation structures are inconsistent with brand value, they will send inconsistent messages about what actions are really important to the company (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). Ind (2007) also argues that the behavior of employees who support brands in different organizations can differ depending on how the organization's brand equity is related to human resource activities. According to an empirical study by Punjaisri & Wilson (2007), training activities were the only activities identified by managers and employees to be suitable for developing and improving brand-compliant behavior among employees.

### **Internal Brand communications**

Internal brand communication refers to brand information that communicates with employees and informs them about the core aspects of the brand (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). It approves the creation of employees with greater sense of

responsibility, sense of responsibility, and sense of responsibility. Internal communication plays an important role in the internal marketing function. Understanding employee information and knowledge is an important factor. Internal communication refers to the flow of information from the manager to the lower level employees and vice-versa the information should have technical detail about the tasks and especially more related with brand information. Once employees understand the brand and its value, it's easy to get involved and meet promised customer expectations (Anand, 2014).

From a marketing and communication-based perspective, these values should also be communicated in the employee's internal communication activities to ensure that the employee communicates the brand value to key stakeholders (Karmark, 2005). Karmark (2005) supports corporate brands by 1) understanding the brand, 2) providing the brand, 3) representing the brand, 4) representing the brand, etc. He further argues that behaviors that support an employee's brand can be viewed from at least two perspectives. 1) From a normative and value-based perspective, employees are through cultural management, that is, to represent and / or become a brand, and 2) from a marketing and communication perspective, employees are for communication activities. It is only expected to understand and provide the brand to. The mechanisms of these perspectives are designed to convey brand value through 1) brand-centric training and development activities and 2) internal communication (Karmark, 2005).

Patla&Pandt (2013) found that management's attempts to implement an in-house branding program to reduce customer complaints and increase employee engagement with customers are hampered by a lack of communication of corporate value. In addition, lack of general communication and improved training were identified as key barriers to building an effective internal branding program (Punjaisri& Wilson, 2011). They suggested that the success of an internal branding program can be achieved through an organization's messaging system, a channel that encourages employees to receive and deliver messages with embedded company values. Miles et al. (2011), it turns out that maximizing the desired brand image requires defining the desired brand image based on corporate value, and these values need to be effectively communicated through the organization's messaging system.

### **Employees' Brand supporting behavior**

As stated by Wallace et al. (2009) refers to talented employees who are living brands, brand champions, and brand ambassadors who make their brands concrete to their customers through actions that support them. Furthermore, according to Wallace et al. (2011), frontline service worker performance consists of in-role, extra-of-role, and anti-role (interfering) behaviors. The latter means negative frontline performance that goes against the brand message conveyed, such as complaining about work.

In-roll and extra-roll brand behaviors are two aspects used in the literature to describe behaviors that support a brand (Erkmen & Hancer, 2015). Actions within the in-role are essential, expected, and form the basis for ongoing performance evaluation. If it does not manifested, it will affect the rewards given and can lead to sanctions. However, or organized citizenship behavior is a positive and discretionary behavior that is not specified in the in-role description, is not recognized by the formal reward system, and will cause a penalty if not performed. However, extra-of-role or organized citizen behavior is positive and arbitrary behavior not specified in the in-role description and will be penalized if not recognized and observed by the formal reward system. In addition, the dynamic environment of an organization may not allow all forms of desired behavior from employees that can improve the adaptability of an organization to changes in the environment (Srivastava, 2008).

Previous research suggests that successful internal branding can turn an employee into a brand master. According to King & Grace (2012) and Lohndorf& Diamantopoulos (2014), brand championships are measured by employee emotional involvement and brand citizenship behavior (extra-role), and employee brand building behavior (extra-role). In addition, existing studies on internal branding have shown that it has a significant positive impact on employee in-role behavior (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011) and extra-role behavior (brand / organizational citizenship) (Ozcelik & Findiki, 2014). In addition, King & Grace (2012) points out that socialization of an organization (internal branding structure) has a significant positive impact on the behavior of extra- roles (brand citizenship).

### **Employee brand support in universities**

Educational institutions need to coordinate their organization's brand equity and activities to encourage employees to support brand behavior. Judson et al. (2006) and Boone (2000), notes that what a brand promises to its employees is as important as what a brand promises to its customers. A study by Judson et al. (2006 and 2009), employees who show behavior in favor of the university brand have been found to be employees who have a clear understanding of the university brand value and apply these brand values to their daily work. It should be noted that if academic staff do not have a clear understanding of the institution's brand, their actions reflect their own value, not the university's brand value (Baker & Balmer, 1997; Jevons, 2006; Whisman, 2009).

In addition, if the institution's brand characteristics are not represented, the institution's brand will be unreliable (Stensaker, 2005). Therefore, universities are nicely applicable to align worker conduct with emblem value. Without assist for worker conduct, the brand message loses its credibility (Judson et al., 2006). Moreover, as Boone (2000) discovered, branding messages to employees are just as important as messages to customers. Apart from investing money in external promotion and marketing, it is significant to ensure that employees are involved in such activities in order to keep the brand alive (Boone, 2000). Stensaker (2005) also trusts that universities need to align employee behavior with brand value; because if the institution's employees and students don't feel part of the branding process, "even the most creative branding is unreliable."

Several empirical studies (Naude & Ivy, 1999; Ivy, 2001) show that in older and well-known universities, staffs are based on staff reputation, research achievements, and top-quality education. In addition, Baker & Balmer (1997) points out that communication is important in managing the brand behavior of university staff. Whisman (2009) also emphasizes that the role of university staff is to be the university's biggest fan. University marketing and branding activities appear to be the result of the transition to internal university business and the rapid intensification of competition (Henkel, 1997; Gumpert, 2000; Belanger et al., 2002; Brookes, 2003; Stensaker, 2005).

## Empirical Review

Gapp & Merrilees (2006) conducted a healthcare survey focusing on the impact of internal branding activities on the behavior of employees of the company. Research shows that employees see the organization as a quality work environment, and this is the result of internal branding activities through delivering brand values to employee and organized communication network in the organization. However, this study suggests that your organization's brand needs to be specifically communicated to each group of employees in a simple and compelling way that employees understand and believe.

Punjaisri (2007) the role of internal branding in fulfilling employee brand promises. This research aims to clarify their perception of their role and the technologies that enable them to fulfill their brand's promises. A case study approach that uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods has been selected. According to a detailed interview, employees believe their behavior is important to the brand, and the results of a survey of 699 respondents are between internal branding tools and fulfilling the brand's promises shows a positive relationship. These measures affect an employee's brand attitude: brand identification, brand involvement, and brand loyalty.

Punjaisri et al. (2008) investigate the impact of internal branding on employee compliance with brand promises: implications for strengthening customer-brand relationships. The purpose of this survey is to investigate employee perceptions of the branding process within the company. Analysis of the interview transcript revealed three main topics. It is an internal branding mechanism, internal branding outcomes, and possible mitigation factors. Both internal communication and training programs are recognized as central mechanisms of internal branding. The impact of these mechanisms on expected results was mitigated by personal and context variables. This survey focused only on customer interface employees. However, the service brand requires all employees in all organizations to be involved. In addition, this study focused only on the hospitality industry. Further generalization of these results should be done after research with other industries in the service sector. This is because some of these industries may have different degrees of interaction between customers and workers.

Punjaisri & Wilson (2009) internal branding: an enabler of employees' brand-supporting behaviors. The purpose of this study is to understand the internal branding process from an employee's perspective. Experiences empirically assess the relationship between internal branding and employee fulfillment of brand promises, as well as brand identification, brand engagement, and brand loyalty. The design is based on the census and is quantitatively surveyed on 699 customer interface employees in five large hotels. Findings show that internal branding has a positive impact on employee attitudes and behavioral aspects in fulfilling a brand's promises. Employee brand engagement is not considered an intermediary between internal branding and employee brand performance because it has no statistically significant relationship with employee brand performance. In addition, this study shows that brand identification is the driving force behind brand engagement that precedes employee brand loyalty.

Al Olayan (2011) explored the employee's contribution in communicating the brand meaning and brand values to customers of the organization. Based on the employee-customer interaction, customers develop attitudes about the brand and thus decide to choose the company and remain loyal. The study suggest that the institution today's working environment they have to train employees especially how to interact with customers, however, most companies never say how employees should fulfill their brand promises. The purpose of this survey was to clarify how employees convey the value of their brand to their customers. The findings of the study showed that employees believed in the brand had significant influence on customers when it came to communicating the brand values to customers.

Shamaila & Sahar (2012) impact of internal branding on quality engagement of service workers: A study of the education sector in Pakistan. The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of internal branding as a means of

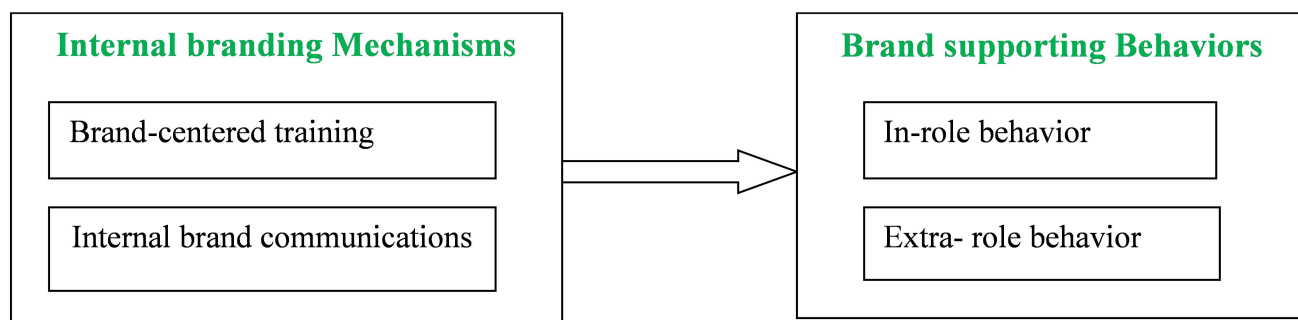
facilitating and improving service agents' quality efforts. A related study showed a modest positive impact of internal branding on the quality efforts of service employees. In addition, we found relatively weak evidence that employee age, name, and experience also have some impact on the level of branding and quality engagement within the company.

Researchers like Balmer & Liao (2007) & Whisman (2009) deal with the internal branding of higher education institutions. Their studies focus on administrative staff or students but not on academic staff who should be seen as the primary and must be managed and explained with due care and competence. Nevertheless, there is little empirical research on employee brand support behaviors and its determinants in the university context, especially in developing countries such as Ethiopia. As a result, the impact of internal branding on employee brand support and how employees support the institution's brand remain unclear.

Sally et al. (2018), impact of internal branding on the brand support behavior of Egyptian bankers' employees. This study aims at the effect of internal branding on behaviors that support the brand (in-role and extra-role). Proposes a model that explores the relationship between internal branding and employee branding behavior, conveyed through role clarity, emotional commitment, and continuity commitment, and provides insights on how employees can become brand champions. A single descriptive cross-sectional study design was used to collect data from 400 frontline bankers. They used confirmatory factor analysis to test the validity of the scale and structural equation modeling to test the research hypothesis. The results of this study showed that internal branding did not have a direct and significant impact on employee behavior (in-role and extra-role). However, this effect was only brought about by the clarity of the role and the emotional involvement of the employees.

### Conceptual Framework

Internal branding activities from a marketing and communication-based perspective (Karmark, 2005) consist of two key aspects: a brand-centric training and development activity element and an internal brand communication element. Therefore, research is needed to clarify the relationship between employee branding support and internal branding activities.



Source: Adopted from Punjaisri, Wilson and Evanschitzky, 2008

### Research Design and Methodology

This study was used in both descriptive and descriptive study designs. A quantitative research approach was used to collect the data. Data were collected from primary sources with the help of a questionnaire structurally designed on a 5-point Likert scale. The target group for this study consisted of all staff at the University of Wallega. Samples are selected using a targeted sampling technique, with a total sample of 384. For analysis SPSS version 24 and Microsoft Excel were used. Descriptive and inference statistics were used.

### DISCUSSION

This study will enriched the concept of internal branding which was the overlooked study area in African particularly in Ethiopian context. In addition, this study extends the knowledge of the financial industry, which most studies focus on, beyond the education sector. In addition, this study extended knowledge beyond schools of Western thought, thereby examining the application of concepts in different cultural contexts. In essence, this study provided empirical evidence of the impact of internal branding on employee brand-supporting behavior. It also provides empirical evidence to support most authors' beliefs that internal branding forms employee branding.

**Table 1.** Demographic variables

No	Variables	Category	Frequency	Percent
1	Gender of the Respondents	Male	246	71.1
		Female	100	28.9
		Total	346	100
2	Age of the Respondents	18-29	3	.9
		30-45	180	52.0
		46-60	137	39.6
		Above 60	26	7.5
		Total	346	100
3	Educational background of the Respondents	Degree	109	31.5
		Masters	157	45.4
		Assistant Professor	45	13.0
		PhD and above	35	10.1
		Total	346	100
4	Average monthly income of the Respondents	5,001-7,000	119	34.4
		7001-10,000	144	41.6
		10,001-15,000	66	19.1
		More than 15,000	17	4.9
		Total	346	100

As indicated in the table 1 above, the findings of the study related to demographic characteristics of the gender composition shows 226 (71.1%) were male, while the remaining 100 (28.9%) were female. with regard to the age category, respondents whose age interval is from 30-45 years consists the majority of the participants which accounts to 180 (52%), followed by the age interval from 46-60 years which accounts to 137 (39.6%), the age above 60 makeup of 26 (7.5%) and the remaining 3 (9%) of the respondents were between 18 and 29 years. The majority of study participants i.e. about 157 (45.4%) were masters degree holders and followed by 109 (31.5%) first degree holders and about 45(13%) were assistant professors and 35 (10.1%) of them had PHD and above educational back ground. The average monthly income of the respondents earned 5,001-7,000 EtB which accounts to 119 (34.4%), followed by those who earned 7,001-10,000 EtB which accounts to 144 (41.6%), 66 (19.1%) earned 10,001-15,000 EtB, while the remaining 17 (4.9%) respondents were found earned above 15,000 EtB.

**Table 2.** Inter-correlations results of variables; N=346

No	Pearson Correlations		EBS	BCT	IBC	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Employee Brand Supporting	Correlation Coefficient	1.000			3.88	.612
2	Brand Centered Training	Correlation Coefficient	.476**	1.000		3.25	.842
3	Internal Brand Communication	Correlation Coefficient	.798**	.332**	1.000	3.82	.723

The results of the Pearson Correlation Coefficient show that there is a significant positive relationship between internal brand attributes and the behavior of employees' brand support. As shown in table 2, the magnitude of association ranges from 0.332 to 0.798.

- ✓ The correlation coefficient between brand centered training (BCT) and employee brand support (EBS) behaviors was 0.476, and
- ✓ The correlation coefficient between internal brand communication (IBC) and the behavior of employees' brand support was 0.798.
- ✓ The highest magnitude of association is exists between **IBC** and **EBS** with coefficient value of 0.798 and the result is statistically significant at (P <0.01).
- ✓ The correlation between the two dimensions of internal branding also showed a positive, statistically significant correlation between the two variables with a correlation coefficient of 0.332 and 0.476.
- ✓ The mean values for EBS, BCT, and IBC were 3.88, 3.25, and 3.82, and the standard deviations were 0.612, 0.842, and 0.723, respectively.

**Table 3.** Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics			
					F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.829 <sup>a</sup>	.687	.685	.344	376.664	2	343	.000

As shown in table 3 above, the regression result demonstrates that the internal branding attributes have a strong relationship with employee brand support behaviors. The regression result shows that the practice of brand centered training and internal brand communication account for 0.687 i.e. 68.7% of employee brand support behaviors. The result is that if these internal branding attributes are positively related to the employee's brand support behavior and the university has good experience on these attributes employees highly tend to support the brands. Therefore, a brand support behavior of employees of Wollega University is the function of the assessment of internal branding.

**Table 4.** ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	88.899	2	44.449	376.664	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	40.477	343	.118		
	Total	129.376	345			

F statistics shows the overall significance of the model. Since the F value is found to be 376.664, the internal branding dimensions (the model) significantly predict employee brand support behaviors at high degree of significance (0.000). The interpretation of this finding is that the aligned internal branding attributes is significant to the assessment of the employee brand support behaviors.

**Table 5.** Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.989	.108		9.180	.000
	Brand Centered Training	.173	.023	.238	7.421	.000
	Internal Brand Communication	.609	.027	.719	22.463	.000

The current study finding shows internal brand communication has got a higher Beta coefficient value of 0.719 (71.9%) and brand-centered training and development activities have a lower coefficient of correlation of 0.238 (23.8%). The implication of this result revealed internal branding attributes, this means that the practice of internal brand communication has had a greater impact on the brand support behavior of Wallega University employees than on brand-centric training and development activities.

The results of the correlation coefficient are parallel to the findings by Burmann et al. (2009), which shows that the essential features of internal branding are the implementation of internal communication and training programs should be seen as a long term process that leads to employee commitment and on-brand behavior. Similarly, Punjaisri et al. (2008), with internal branding training that integrates brand awareness, communication strategies, and providing brand promises to customers, employees consider themselves part of the brand, have an interest in the brand,.

## Summary of Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

### Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of internal branding on the branding behavior of frontline workers in higher education in the context of Ethiopia. With regard to the practices of internal branding of the University, the findings related to demographic characteristics of the gender composition, 226 (71.1%) were male, while the remaining 100 (28.9%) were female. Respondents whose age interval is from 30-45 years consists the majority of the participants which accounts to 180 (52%) and followed by the age interval from 46-60 years. The majority of respondents were about 157 (45.4%) were masters degree holders and whereas 35 (10.1%) of them had PHD and above educational background. The average monthly income of the majority respondents were between 7,001-10,000 EtB which accounts to 144 (41.6%) and followed by those who earned 5,001-7,000 EtB which accounts to 119 (34.4%), whereas 17 (4.9%) respondents were found earned above 15,000 EtB.



Pearson's results of a correlation coefficient analysis show that there is a significant positive relationship between internal branding attributes and the brand support behavior of employees with a significance level of 0.01.

The results of the survey show that brand-centric training and development activities, and internal brand communication with a coefficient of determination of 0.687 (68.7%), have a significant impact on the brand support behavior of university employees.

Internal brand communication, one aspect of internal branding, has been found to have a greater impact on employee brand support behavior in the university with the coefficient value of 0.719 (71.9%). As per the analysis, brand centered training and development activities have lower effect with the coefficient value of 0.238 (23.8%).

## CONCLUSION

The study finding implies that as the university works by focusing on brand centered training and development activities, and on internal brand communications; to communicate company's brand value with employees and constantly train them on their unique brand value that should be interpreted in everyday activities such as brand standards. This improves the alignment of employee brand support and behavior with brand value, fulfills brand promises, and reduces potential fluctuations in the customer's brand experience.

In addition, research results show that the overall effectiveness of internal branding influences the degree of employee behavior that supports the successful implementation of promised brand value. On the one hand, universities can use internal branding to directly shape their brand support behavior so that they are in harmony with their brand value.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Internal communication and brand-centric training and development programs should be used together to enhance the understanding and knowledge of internal branding about its key role in the promised brand offering.
- Universities need to clearly communicate their promised brand to their employees and educate them on what they can expect to do while serving. At the same time, training programs need to be implemented to enhance the correct patterns of brand support behavior among employees.
- In general, higher education intuition requires more effective use of internal branding to align employee brand behavior with the university and brand. This may be related to certain internal brand communication techniques and brand-centric training and development activities.

## Future Research Directions

It should be recognized that this study focuses on higher education, which is one of several types of institutions in the service sector. Still, in the non-education and non-financial services industry, there is room for researchers to expand and enhance their internal branding knowledge. Researchers will find that the reproduction of the relationships tested in this study in various service industries and cultural contexts will help clarify the boundary conditions for generalization of theory in other parts of Africa and universities in Ethiopia.

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