Brand Empowerment and Brand Consistent Behavior: Mediating Role of Brand Psychological Ownership and Employee Brand Understanding

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This study aimed to investigate the connection of brand empowerment with employee brand understanding, brand psychological ownership, and brand consistent behavior. Secondly, mediating role of brand psychological ownership and employee brand understanding in the relationship of brand empowerment and brand consistent behavior was also examined. Survey method was used to collect data from 274 employees of banking sector through multistage sampling. Measures of Brand Consistent Behavior Scale (King, Grace, & Funk, 2012), Employee Brand Understanding Scale (Piehler et al., 2016), Brand Psychological Ownership Scale (Chang et al., 2012), and Brand Empowerment Scale (King, So, & Grace, 2013) were used. Results affirmed the positive relationship between brand empowerment with brand psychological ownership and employee brand understanding. Moreover, brand psychological ownership and employee brand understanding had positive relationship with brand consistent behavior of the employees. Findings further indicated that the relationship of brand empowerment and brand consistent behavior was mediated by brand psychological ownership and employee brand understanding. Implications of the study were also discussed.

Keywords. Brand empowerment, brand consistent behavior, employee brand understanding, employee brand empowerment

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Most of the marketing campaigns focused on the external communication in between organization and customers that communicates brand promises. In response, customers develop brand expectation in his or her mind. No doubt, it can be easily managed in manufacturing through product quality and reliability. Contrary, in services, it is very much difficult to manage customer expectation due to the nature of intangibility and heterogeneity. Here, the manager role is very much decisive to align employee brand behavior with brand promise communicated. In response to the importance of employee behavior in services, branding literature turned from external brand management towards internal brand management. Abundance of literature discussed on the external perspective of branding where brand management activities orbited around customers. With the importance of internal customers in services marketing, academia and practitioners feel the important of employees in brand management. For the reason, internal branding is now considered as starting point towards external marketing.

Internal branding literature is more focused towards employee brand related attitudes and behaviors where researchers are more focused towards employee brand commitment that is the brand related attitude of the employee and its impact on brand related behaviors (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018; Piehler, 2018; Quaratino & Mazzei, 2018). Brand related behavior of employees include employee brand loyalty, brand citizenship behavior, brand endorsement or the combination of all in the construct of employee brand equity (Altaf, Mokhtar, & AbdGhani, 2019; Altaf & Shahzad, 2018; Burmann, Jost-Benz, & Riley, 2009). Limited studies focused on the other brand related attitudes and behaviors of the employees that is brand psychological ownership and employee brand understanding (Piehler et al., 2016). Moreover, researchers also insisted to work on the antecedents of critical psychological states on the employees that includes brand psychological ownership and employee brand understanding (Altaf, 2018; Altaf, Mokhtar, & Ghani, 2017b; Piehler et al., 2016). To keep in view of all the gaps in literature, the first objective of the study is to examine the relationship among brand empowerment, employee brand understanding, brand psychological ownership and brand consistent behavior. Second objective of the study is to examine the mediating role of critical psychological states of the in the relationship between brand empowerment and brand consistent behavior. In the area of internal branding, limited studies focused on the brand empowerment and its relationship with brand psychological ownership, employee brand understanding and brand consistent behavior. On the same vein, Xiong et al. (2013) stated that "researchers often take employee brand

understanding for granted and draw direct relationships between organizational practices and the desired outcomes of employee brand-related attitude and behaviors" (p. 350). Same as, brand psychological ownership is also a new construct, hence, limited studies explored the relationship with other constructs. To keep in view of all, this study checks the relationship of employee brand empowerment with brand consistent behavior with the mediating role of brand psychological ownership and employee brand understanding.

This study focused on the banking sector of Pakistan because the Pakistani banking sector is suffering disconnection in between brand perception promises and the actual delivery on ground (Baig, 2015). Banking sector of Pakistan is trying to bridge this gap. Therefore, there is a need to develop the roadmap to meet or exceed the expectation of customers during employee-customer interaction. In this context, long-term success can be developed through the understanding of brand and the employee ability to perform through consistent brand related behavior (Ahmad, 2010). This research will provide a roadmap to the banking sector of Pakistan to devise a plan to minimize the discrepancies in employee brand related behavior.

Brand consistent behavior is the dominant concept to enhance internal brand equity (Quaratino & Mazzei, 2018) and provide the strongest foundation for competitive advantage (Shaari, 2012). It is the employees extra mile or non-prescribed brand related behavior of the employees. Brand consistent behaviour is an exhibition of employee behavior that is ahead of the formally articulated requirement of their jobs (Beckett-Camarata, Camarata, & Barker, 1998). Brand consistent behavior is non-prescribed, extra-role employees' behavior constant with the brand values communicated (Burmann et al., 2009). Hence, the significance of brand consisting behavior is discretionary in nature (Barroso, Castro, Armario, & Río, 2005). Researchers in the field of internal branding defined brand consistent behavior non-prescribed employee behavior towards brand. Hence, its employee deliberations towards brand are directed in such a manner that the employee delivers brand promise in a suitable way without caring his formal job description. This behavior is very much crucial because it is the soul of the brand that injects life in the brand. Moreover, researchers defined brand consistent behavior as a number of generic employee behaviors that enhance the brand identity (Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010), employee engagement with the brand in the way that the employees are attitudinally and behaviorally ready to deliver brand promise (Baker, Rapp, Meyer, & Mullins, 2014), employee consideration towards brand in order to deliver brand promise in an appropriate manner when the employee goes beyond their formal jobs

(Shaari, 2012) and non-enforceable, functional, extra-role behavior that contributes the performance of the brand (Quaratino & Mazzei, 2018).

As per Pierce, Kostova, and Dirks (2003), psychological ownership is the state in which individual feels that the target of ownership or a piece of that target is theirs. Chang et al. (2012), defined brand psychological ownership as employee psychological experience that produces positive brand attitude and cognition, such as a feeling of possession towards a corporate brand that leads towards selfless spirit towards brand-related activities. Brand psychological ownership was conceptualized and measured with three dimensions. The first dimension of the brand psychological ownership is congruence between brand image and individuals that is the "feeling of efficacy and effectance as the ownership that permit individual in organisation to explore and alter the environment and then satisfy their internal need of efficacy (Pierce et al., 2001). The second dimension is the employee responsibility for maintaining brand image where individual develop sense of ownership towards target, a sense of accountability may be prompt to protect and defend their ownership rights (Van Dyne & Pierce, 2004). The third dimension is the brand value effectiveness where individuals devote their resources and energy to tangible and intangible targets that may potentially become their own targets of like home (Van Dyne & Pierce, 2004).

Chang et al. (2012) contended that the employee having brand psychological ownership might produce positive attitude towards the corporate brand, and as a whole the employees defend the corporate brand. Because, brand psychological ownership is the critical psychological state of the mind, hence therefore, critical psychological states of the employees directly facilitate the behavior of the employees (Oldham & Hackman, 2010). Empirically, Chang, Chiang, and Han (2012) investigated the link in between brand psychological ownership and brand related behavior of the employees. Moreover, this relationship was also investigated by Mokhtar et al. (2018), Altaf (2018), Chang, Chiang and Han, (2015) and Chiang (2009). Hence, we can postulate the relationship in the banking sector of Pakistan as:

Employee brand understanding is defined as an increase of the insight of employee perception regarding their roles and responsibilities in the brand success as well as their skill to deliver to brand promise (Xiong et al., 2013). In other words, employee brand understanding is the cognitive representation of the brand in the mind of employees (Piehler et al., 2016). Employee brand understanding is conceptualized and measured through three dimensions. The first dimension is employee perceived brand knowledge that is defined as

the extent to which employees perceive that they know what the brand represent and are capable of delivering the brand promise (Baker et al., 2014). In other words, it is an understanding of brand promise communicated, what brand stands for and how to deliver brand promise communicated. According to Xiong et al. (2013), employees consider brand knowledge as a heuristic cue in order to tackle unexpected situations in service encounters. The second dimension is employee perceived brand importance that is defined as the degree to which an employee perceives that brand is important for organizational success. King et al. (2013) also highlight the importance by stating, "it is necessary that employee should be aware the brand values and such values of brands are interpreted in meaningful and relevant way to the employees" (p. 378). The third dimension is employee perceived role relevance that is the employee perception to which an employee considers his or her role is relevant to the brand success. The last dimension of employee brand understanding is brand confidence that is the familiarity about the behavior that they need to perform in their daily work routine with strengthening brand (Piehler et al., 2016). Lee et al. (2006) claimed that a good understanding of organisational strategy better prepares employees to identify how their roles can add values in the brand. Similarly, employee brand understanding is also a critical psychological state of an employee that further develop employee brand related behavior that reflects the process of job characteristics theory, where critical psychological states develop employee individual and work behavior. In branding literature, the relationship was explored and tested by Xiong et al. (2013). Later, the relationship is verified by Piehler et al. (2016), Altaf et al. (2017), Altaf (2018), and Piehler (2018). Hence, we can hypothesize this relationship in the banking sector of Pakistan.

Empowerment is an important but concept if an organisation needs the service-oriented culture along with brand-oriented culture. Therefore, in the study, Brand Empowerment is considered for investigation. Empowerment is the state where the authorities give power and discretion to make job-related day-to-day decision (Bowen & Lawler, 2006) that affects initiation and determination of employee task-oriented behavior (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). In services, service employees who are responsible for delivering the services can respond to the customer needs and wants efficiently and effectively (Lee, Nam, Park, & Ah Lee, 2006; Lytle, Hom, & Mokwa, 1998). Furthermore, Oldham and Hackman (2010) claims that empowerment makes employee more customer focused, responsible and responsive towards the customer that further improves employee self-image and

organisational image. Hence, it is more important that organisation should empower employees because the employees who interact with customers need to have flexibility to make a decision on the point of interaction to make their customers happy (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996). Similarly, in branding literature, brand empowerment is employee brand related to the autonomy. It is the brand related autonomy of the employee where he or she can make brand related decisions independently. Employees not only need to recognize about the role in brand management but also need empowerment and support to make brand related decisions (King et al., 2013) that foster brand related attitude and behavior of the employee that is employee brand equity. As per job characteristics theory, empowerment develops employee's critical psychological states where employees first develop their understanding about brand related meanings and their behavioural requirements to protect the brand through their behavior. Empirically, the relationship has been tested by various researchers where found positive relationship in brand empowerment and employee brand understanding (King et al., 2013; King & So, 2013) and also found some non-significant relationship Altaf (2018). Same as employee brand understanding, Pierce, Kostova, and Dirks (2003) identified empowerment as a major determinant of ownership. Same in brand literature and as per job characteristics theory, brand empowerment is also a source of brand psychological ownership. Based on the past researchers and job characteristics theory, we can hypothesize positive relationship of brand empowerment with employee brand understanding and brand psychological ownership.

In preceding discussion linked brand empowerment to brand psychological ownership and employee brand understanding that further linked towards brand consistent behavior of the employee. Both brand psychological ownership and employee brand understanding are employee's critical psychological states of the employees that links brand empowerment towards brand consistent behavior. As per job characteristics theory, core job characteristics (Brand empowerment) develop critical psychological states of the employees that further develop brand consistent behavior of the employees (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Hence, it can be hypothesize that critical psychological states (Brand psychological ownership and employee brand understanding) mediates the association of core job characteristics (brand empowerment) and employee personal and work related behavior that is brand consistent behavior. Moreover, internal branding practices can enhance the employees' understanding about brand (Ieong & Lam, 2016). No doubt, autonomy is the employees' independence related to the decision making. When he or she feels

independence in decision making, they feel that they are well prepared to accomplish the explicit and implicit promises communicated by brand (Nguyen et al., In Press). This type of employee's perception bout brand cam positively influences the behavior of the employees and allowing them to perform their in-role and extra-role behavior (Altaf et al., 2019). Based on above literature following hypotheses were formulated.

Hypotheses

1. Brand psychological ownership has a positive relationship with brand consistent behavior.

2. Employee brand understanding is positively associated with brand consistent behavior.

3. Brand empowerment is positively related with employee brand understanding.

4. Brand empowerment is positively related with brand psychological ownership.

5. Employee brand understanding mediates the relationship between brand empowerment and brand consistent behavior.

6. Brand psychological ownership mediates the relationship between brand empowerment and brand consistent behavior.

Method

Sample

A sample of 274 employees age ranged 21 -56 years ($M = 28.31$, $SD = 1.35$), consisted of 59.03% (162) male and 40.97% (112) female respondents. The data was collected from Meanwhile, 24.13% of the respondents belong to the 21-24 year age group and 21.05% of the respondents belong to the age group between 25-28 years; while, 30.09% from the age group of 39-42; 15.10% were the 33-35 age group and 9.63% of respondents were above 35 years old. Moreover, 47.19% of the respondents were at their initial careers while 36% were middle-level managers and 16.81% hold high level management positions. The designation of the employees included 29.20% (80) officer grade OG-3, 28.10% (77) OG-2, 23.72 % (65) were OG-1, and 18.98% (52) were more than OG-1 which includes assistant vice president, regional managers, and presidents. In addition, job experience ranged from 1-20 years ($M = 8.59$, $SD = 1.21$). In terms of

education level, 10.13% of the respondents had first level of education that is matriculation while 18.74% (63) of the respondents had intermediate certificates; 27.14% of respondents graduated with a bachelor degree, and 43.71% had master degree. Only one respondent had a PhD degree.

Instruments

Brand Empowerment Scale. Brand empowerment was measured through the five items of Brand Empowerment Scale with single dimension was acquired from the study of Morhart, Herzog, and Tomczak (2009) and King et al. (2013). All of the items were rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 6 = *Strongly Agree* and high score indicate high level of employee brand empowerment and low scores means that employees has less empowerment related to the brand decisions. The reliability of the original scale reported by authors was .75 (Morhart et al., 2009) and .73 (King et al., 2013). In the present study, the composite reliability of the brand empowerment scale was found to be .81.

Employee Brand Understanding Scale. To measure employee brand understanding, 13 item Employee Brand Understanding Scale (Piehler et al., 2016) comprising of four dimensions that is brand confidence, brand knowledge, brand relevance, and behavioral relevance was used. All of the items were rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 6 = *Strongly Agree* and high scores reflect high level of employee brand understanding. All the items loaded on single factor and averaged into factor score (α = .93; Piehler et al., 2016). In the present study, the composite reliability of .90 was achieved for the total scale.

Brand Psychological Ownership Scale. Brand psychological ownership construct was measured by Brand Psychological Ownership Scale (Chang et al., 2012) consisting of three dimensions that is brand value effectiveness, employees' responsibility of maintaining brand image, and concurrence between brand image and individual. Responses were acquired on 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 6 = *Strongly Agree* and attainment of high scores on this scale indicate high level of brand psychological ownership of employees. For the three dimensions of Brand Psychological Ownership Scale, Chang et al. (2012) reported the reliability of congruence between brand image and individuals, responsibility for maintaining brand image, and brand value effectiveness as .82, .79, and .81, respectively. In the present study, the reliability coefficient of .91 was attained for this scale.

Brand Consistent Behavior Scale: Brand consistent behavior considering as an outcome variable of the study that is the extra mile behavior of an employee. To measure the construct, Brand Consistent Behavior Scale (King et al., 2012) comprising of 3 items was used. King et al. (2012) considered brand consistent behavior as an important dimension of employee brand equity but in the present study, the construct was considered as uni-dimensional. All the items were responded on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 6 = *Strongly Agree* and elevated scores on this scale exhibit high level of brand consistent behavior of employees. All the items of Brand Consistent Behavior Scale were loaded on a single factor and average into one composite score (α = .93; King et al., 2012). In the present study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient of .83 was acquired for this scale.

Procedure

For data collection, 500 questionnaires were distributed through proportionate stratified random sampling and 100 bank branches were selected for this purpose based on the proportion of bank branches. In the second stage, employees selected from each branch were selected randomly based on their attendance sheets. Government-owned banks, private banks, Islamic banks, and foreign banks were selected for the survey in the third step, and 5 employees from each branch were selected through simple random sampling with the help of RAND Table.   Only the frontline employees were considered for data collection because they are directly responsible for service delivery. All type of employees were considered for data collection regardless of gender, income, and education. Additionally, all types of employees were selected that are from their initial career to top level along with any type of job status. As the study is focusing the employees from their initial career to top level, therefore, all the employees are considered who just started their career to the employees who are near to the retirement. From 500 distributed questionnaires, only 296 questionnaires were returned back. After removal of all the problematic questionnaires, 274 questionnaires were considered for further data analysis. A total 152896 employees were working in 28 commercial banks of Pakistan so as per Krejcie and Morgan (1970), sample size was sufficient to represent the population. All the ethical guidelines were followed. First, the approval was acquired from the respected branch and bank before data collection. Second, the purpose and the confidential statements were given on the first page of questionnaires booklet that assures that the data would be kept confidential and used for academic purpose only. Survey method was

used to collect data through personal administration with the support of enumerators. The data were collected from four cities of Pakistan (Lahore, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi & Multan).

Results

Outer Model Measurement

The data are analyzed using Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Before going to the PLS-SEM, all the preliminary tests are conducted through SPSS version 20 and results are found satisfactory. In the second stage the data is shifted to the PLS-SEM software *Smart* PLS 3.2 where outer loadings, composite reliabilities (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) and Cronbach's Alpha values were tabulated to confirm validity. In the last stage, all the structural relationships, direct and indirect relationships, are analyzed.

Table 1 represents outer loading of the study model, AVE and CR values. All the items loading values are ranging from .70 to .85, AVE values are ranging from .54 to .78 and all the CR values are ranging from .81 to .91 that fulfilling the threshold level suggested by Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2016).

Table 1

First Order and Second Order Constructs, Loadings, AVE, and CR (N = 274)

First Order	Second Order	Loadings	AVE	CR
Brand Consistent Behavior	Uni-Dimensional	.74-.80	.59	.83
Brand Empowerment	Uni-Dimensional	.70-.79	.54	.81
Concurrence between Brand Image & Individual		.81-.81	.65	.82
Responsibility of maintaining brand image		.76-.83	.68	.81
Brand Value Effectiveness		.75-.80	.63	.81
Brand Psychological Ownership				
Concurrence between Brand Image and Individual		.87	.78	.91
Responsibility of Maintaining Brand Image		.90		
Brand Value Effectiveness		.87		

Continued…

First Order	Second Order	Loadings	AVE	CR
Brand Confidence		.79-.82	.61	.89
Brand Knowledge		.80-.85	.69	.85
Brand Relevance		.76-.83	.66	.82
Behavioral Relevance		.79-.80	.68	.81
	Employee Brand Understanding			
	Brand Confidence	.81	.71	.90
	Brand Knowledge	.85		
	Brand Relevance	.81		
	Behavioral Relevance	.89		

In addition, the discriminant validity are assessed by using the criteria suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). All the bold values represent the square roots of AVE that are greater than the correlation values of all the respected relationships (See Table 2).

Table 2

Discriminant Validity (N = 274)

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Brand Empowerment	**.76**	.65	.61	.63
2. Brand Psychological Ownership	-	**.88**	.71	.82
3. Brand Consistent Behavior		-	**.77**	.67
4. Employee Brand understanding			-	**.84**

Note. Bold values are the square root of AVE

Structural Model Measurement

As for as the structural relationships are concern, brand empowerment significantly influence brand psychological ownership ($\beta = 0.630$, $t = 15.80$, $f^2 = .65$) and employee brand understanding ($\beta = .60$, $t = 16.00$, $f^2 = .57$). Same as, employee brand understanding significantly influence brand consistent behavior with values ($\beta = .62$, $t = 9.01$, $f^2 = .28$) and also brand psychological ownership significantly influence brand consistent behavior with values ($\beta = .12$, $t = 1.79$, $f^2 = .57$). All the values confirmed proposed hypothesis of the study. Here, f square or effect size shows the strength of the relationship in between particular exogenous latent variable with endogenous latent variable. It can be estimated by the criterion suggested by Cohen (1988) where the effect size should be small, moderate and substantial if the values is *f*-square is 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35.

Table 3

Path Analysis (N = 274)

Paths	β	S.E	t	Decision	f²	Q²	R²
H1: BPO → BCB	0.12	0.07	1.79	Supported	.04	.30	.53
H2: EBU → BCB	0.62	0.06	9.01	Supported	.28		
H3: BEm → EBU	0.60	0.03	16.00	Supported	.57		
H4: BEm → BPO	0.63	0.04	15.80	Supported	.65		

Note. Cohen (1988) proposed effect size 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 as small, moderate and large respectively. BEm = Brand Empowerment; EBU = Employee Brand Understanding; BPO = Brand Psychological Ownership; BCB = Brand Consistent Behavior.

To determine the mediating role of employee critical psychological states in the relationship between brand empowerment and brand consistent behavior, specific indirect relationship were checked through *Smart* PLS 3.2. Results show that employee brand understanding mediates the relationship between brand empowerment and brand consistent behavior. Similarly, brand psychological ownership also mediates the relationship between brand empowerment and brand consistent behavior with values. All the indirect relationships are supported.

Table 4

Mediating Role of Employee Brand Understanding and Brand Psychological Ownership (N = 274)

Direct & Indirect Paths	β	SE	t	LLCI	ULCI	Decision
BPO → BCB	0.12	0.07	2.79	.06	.11	Accepted
H5: BEm → EBU → BCB	.37	0.04	8.22	.29	.44	Mediation
H6: BEm → BPO → BCB	.08	0.04	3.77	.01	.16	Mediation

Note. BEm = Brand Empowerment; EBU = Employee Brand Understanding; BPO = Brand Psychological Ownership; BCB = Brand Consistent Behavior.

Importance Performance Map Analysis

Importance performance map analysis has the capacity to identify the key improvement areas where practitioners can focus to improve the level of dependent variable. As per Figure 1, performance of all the variables is same. As per importance of the variable, employee brand understanding is most important variable and the brand psychological ownership is the least important variable. Brand empowerment is also an important variable that is near to employee brand understanding. Here, organizations need to more concentrate on the employee brand understanding and employee brand empowerment

because still there is margin to increase the performance. Concentrating on brand psychological ownership is not beneficial for the banking sector of Pakistan because it is already performing at high level.
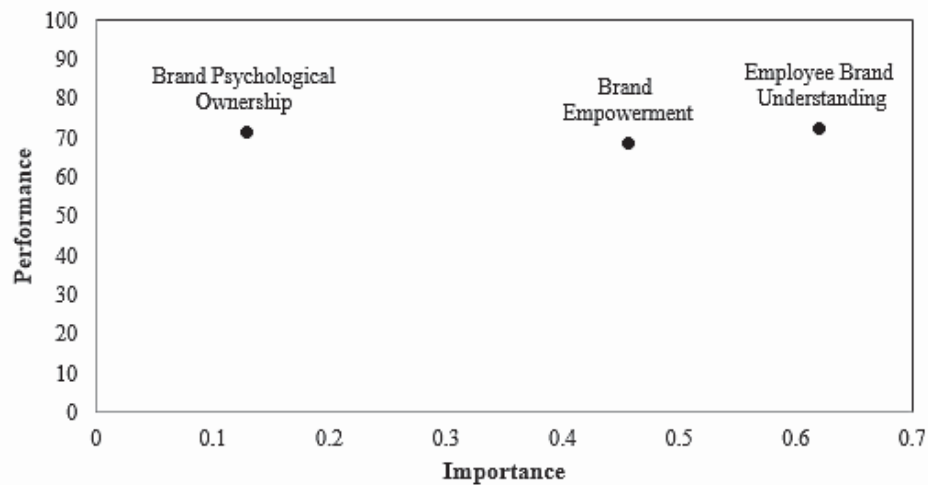

Figure 1. Importance Performance Map Analysis: Importance and performance of Independent variables according to depending variable.

Discussion

The aim of the study was to observe the relationship of brand empowerment with brand consistent behavior of employees with mediating role of brand psychological ownership and employee brand understanding in the banking sector of Pakistan. To attain the objective, the data were collected from the employees of banking sector of Pakistan. Evaluating the relationship among all the variables and checking the mediating role of employee critical psychological states was the prime objective of the research. Brand psychological ownership and employee brand understanding were the psychological states of the employees and this study investigated, how brand related empowerment effects employee psychological states that develop brand consistent behavior of the employees.

Relationship between variables showed the first mediating variable that is brand psychological ownership has positively predicted brand consistent behavior of the employees thereby supporting hypothesis 1. Moreover, the second mediating variable of the study i.e., employee brand understanding also positively predicted brand consistent behavior of the employees that accepted our hypothesis 2. Results indicated that brand empowerment positively predicted employee brand understanding that support hypothesis 3 and

also brand empowerment positively predicted brand psychological ownership that further support hypothesis 4. Moreover, findings of the study endorsed proposed hypothesis 5 that suggests that employee brand understanding mediates in the relationship between brand empowerment and brand consistent behavior. Likewise, the present study also highlights the mediating role of brand psychological ownership in the relationship of brand empowerment with brand consistent behavior, hence, providing support for hypothesis 6.

The first hypothesis of the study suggests the positive relationship of brand psychological ownership and brand consistent behavior of the employees. In the present study, the association of brand psychological ownership with brand consistent behavior was found significant positive as per past studies (Chang et al., 2015; Chiang et al., 2013) but the effect size is small. The results of the study are aligned with the job characteristics theory as suggested by Hackman and Oldham (1976) where critical psychological states develop employee personal and work related behavior. In the case, employee brand understanding has important role in creation of brand consistent behavior of employees in the banking sector of Pakistan. This relationship was tested before in multiple contexts. Chang, Chiang, and Han (2012) tested the relationship on hotels located in Taiwan while Chiang et al. (2013), tested on food-drink, franchisee organization and retailers in Taiwan. Both studies found significant connection of brand psychological ownership with employee brand equity.

The second hypothesis of the study suggests the positive relationship of employee brand understanding and brand consistent behavior of the employees. The relationship was constituted based on the studies (See Mokhtar et al., 2018; Piehler et al., 2016; Xiong et al., 2013) where the relationship was also found significant positve. This study results are aligned and found significant positive. Moreover, it is aligned in the case of banking sector of Pakistan (Mokhtar et al., 2018). Xiong et al. (2013) conceptulized and tested the brand understanding in the hospitality sector of Austrlia where the relationship of employee brand understanding was tested with employee brand equity and found significant relationship. Later, the relationship was verified by King and So (2013) in the hotel industry of China. Moreover, Piehler et al. (2016) tested the same relationsip on Austrlian service employees and later Piehler (2018) tested it on German tourism service. In both cases, the results are consistent with the present study.

The third hypothesis of the study suggests the relationship of brand empowerment and employee brand understanding. The

relationship was constituted based on job characteristics theory where empowerment develops employee's critical psychological states where employees first develop their understanding about brand related meanings and their behavioural requirements to protect the brand through their behavior (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Hackman & Oldham, 1975). Moreover, the study of Altaf and Shahzad (2018) also constituted the relationship in the banking sector of Pakistan and found the positive relationship. In the present study, the relationship was also found significant positive which means that employee develops brand related understanding when they have brand related empowerment. Hence, the results of present study are also in line with the past studies and as per job characteristics theory.

The fourth hypothesis of the study discussed the relationship of brand empowerment and brand psychological ownership. In the present study, the relationship of brand empowerment with brand psychological ownership of employees is significant positive in the Pakistani banking sector. The relationship of empowerment is tested in different sector, industries and in different countries as well. Brand empowerment also significantly influence brand psychological ownership in the banking sector of Pakistan (Altaf & Shahzad, 2018; Mokhtar et al., 2018). In the case of Korean hotel industry, the empowerment was tested with employee commitment and satisfaction where the relationship was significant with employee commitment and non-significant with satisfaction (Lee et al., 2006; Lytle et al., 1998). Also, the relationship was significant in the case of Asian fast moving consumer goods (Kaufmann et al., 2012). Henkel et al. (2007) investigated the relationship of empowerment with quality of behavioral branding and found significant relationship in German and Swiss Companies where the data were collected from senior marketing managers.

The fifth hypothesis of the study discussed about the mediating role of employee brand understanding in the relationship of brand empowerment and brand consistent behavior. The relationship was constituted based on the job characteristics theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1975) where critical psychological states of the employees mediates the relationship of job characteristics and work related behavior of the employees. Autonomy or brand empowerment is a job related character that develops employee brand related understanding that is the critical psychological state of the employee. Employee brand understanding is tested as a mediator in the relationship of brand related communication (internal and external) and brand consistent behavior (Piehler, 2018) and found the mediating role of employee brand understanding in the relationship. Same in the case when the

mediating role was explored in the relationship of brand empowerment and brand consistent behavior, the relationship was found significant and in line with job characteristics theory.

The last hypothesis suggested the mediating role of brand psychological ownership in the relationship of brand empowerment and brand consistent behavior. The relationship was constituted based on the job characteristics theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1975) where critical psychological states of the employees mediates the relationship of job characteristics and work related behavior of the employees. The brand psychological ownership is also a critical psychological state of the employee and also tested by many researcher as mediator in the relationship of brand-centered HRM and brand citizenship behavior (Chang et al., 2013) and in the relationship of corporate branding and brand citizenship behavior (Chiang et al., 2013). Moreover, in banking sector, the mediating role of brand psychological behavior in the relationship of brand empowerment and employee brand equity was tested by Altaf and Shahzad (2018). All the findings of past studies supported current study relationship. Hence, in the process of brand empowerment towards brand consistent behavior of employees, brand psychological ownership plays a mediating role.

Limitation and Suggestions

The study is focused on the brand empowerment in the banking sector of Pakistan and describes the impact of brand empowerment on brand consistent behavior. Banking sector of Pakistan have five categories of banking i.e. public sector banks, private sector banks, agricultural banks, industrial banks and foreign banks. This study provides the overall view of brand empowerment in the banking sector of Pakistan but not as per each categories. Hence, it is recommended to examine the level of brand related empowerment in each of the category and to investigate the effect of brand empowerment on brand consistent behavior separately.

Implications

This study offers an avenue for researchers to explore the internal brand management strategies with the help of brand related empowerment, brand understanding, brand psychological ownership and brand consistent behavior in the banking sector of Pakistan.

Theoretically, this study shows the light on the importance of brand empowerment and check the sole relationship with employee critical psychological states that were overlooked in past literature. Practically, this study is helpful for the practitioners and strategist in banking sector to show how they can protect their brands image and align the behavior of the employee with brand promise communicated with the help of brand empowerment, brand understanding, brand psychological ownership. No doubt, the banking sector is very sensitive because of it nature and strict standard procedures are followed in order to protect customer but the banking sector need to extricate employee empowerment related to monetary and non-monetary than tried to award them non-monetary related decision making empowerment.

Conclusion

The results of the study confirms the positive relationships of brand psychological ownership and employee brand understanding with employee brand empowerment and brand consistent behavior of employees in Pakistani banks. No doubt, both of the variables has significant positive impact on brand consistent behavior of employees in banking sector of Pakistan but here brand psychological ownership does not have the strong impact on brand consistent behavior as compare to the employee brand understanding because the effect size of brand psychological ownership is low as compare to employee brand understanding. Moreover, both brand psychological ownership and employee brand understanding mediates the relationship in between brand empowerment and brand consistent behavior of the employees in the banking sector of Pakistan.

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