

1.0 Introduction

This conceptual paper aims to explore the *impact of corporate identity on employee brand citizenship behaviour*, within in a retail setting. For a retail organisation, brand reputation and customer's brand perception are of great significance as they are regarded as main contributors towards organizational performance, customer retention and sustainability. The importance of employees within service organisations is regarded as disproportionate due to the extensive interaction between employee and customer. The constructs of corporate identity and internal brand management are well documented, however brand citizenship behaviour is regarded as relatively under-researched. This study aims to complement and extend the work of existing academics on the subject area.

2.0 Literature Review:

The literature on service and corporate branding has acknowledged the influences of staff on the brand perceptions of existing and potential customers through their interactive roles in delivering brand values during the services and operations (Fetscherin and Usunier 2012, Rindell and Strandvik 2010, Balmer, 2001a, Balmer 2009; Olins, 2000). Therefore the main focus of internal branding are the employees and their perception about the corporate brand identity. Although the importance of employee perception is vital, yet each and every employee brand experience varies, depending upon the corporate culture, internal communication and brand commitment (Bruman et al, 2005; Foster et al, 2010, Gilani 2011). Therefore, the corporate brand experience of customers would also vary when they interact with the 'brand ambassadors' of the corporate brands (Ind, 2001; Balmer 2012; Punjaisiri et al, 2009). This concerns not only the interactions between customer-facing staff and existing and potential customers but also those between the customer-facing staff and the back office staff (Porricelli et al, 2014; Punjaisiri et al, 2009; Bruman et al, 2009).

The initial attention to the value and antecedents of strong corporate brands has been extended to investigate in more depth the roles played by corporate identity, corporate personality, corporate culture, employees, leadership, among others, in the corporate branding process (Melewar, 2009; King and Grace 2008; Foster et al, 2010).

There are a variety of benefits from a well-conceived corporate identity strategy. It provides management with a holistic framework for conceptualizing and aligning the many different activities by which companies express who they are and what they stand for (Kaufmann 2012, Bickerton 2000). This expression is perceived positively by the employees of the organisation who then become the voice of the organisation (Bruman et al, 2009; Gilani 2011). These different activities involve corporate communication, managing organizational identity, marketing strategy, and internal as well as external marketing of the organisation. Thus, corporate branding provides a solid foundation for developing a coherent and engaging promise to all stakeholders, especially its internal customers, its employees (Abratt and Keyn, 2012).

2.1 Corporate identity context:

In the recent few decades, many prominent authors (Melewar and Jenkins, 2002; Melewar, 2003; Abratt, 1989, Abratt and Keyn, 2012; Cornelissen et al, 2012) have presented a number of theoretical models that have significantly contributed to the development of the corporate identity literature, with their theory developed over time through the iterative development of theoretical models. Such models span decades of

theoretical development (Kennedy, 1977; Dowling, 1986; Abratt, 1989; Stuart 1988; Alessandri, 2001; Bick, Jacobsen and Abratt, 2003; Brown, Dacin, Pratt and Whetten, 2006) and cluster into a number of perspectives concerning the construct (Balmer, 1995).

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In its broadest sense the role and purpose of corporate identity within strategic management for a firm is to reveal its philosophy and strategy (Leutheser and Kohli, 1997). Corporate identity is a strategic manifestation of an organisation's corporate level vision and mission that is underpinned by the strategies that the corporation employs (Melewar and Woolridge, 2001).

The behaviour of employees is seen as having a major influence on how external stakeholders perceive the corporate brand and make sense of its identity and image (Anixter, 2003; Hatch and Schultz, 2001). The importance of employees in the corporate branding literature has been extensively highlighted (e.g. de Chernatony and Harris, 2000; Harris and de Chernatony, 2001), as Ind (1998, p. 324) argues that "employees have the potential to make or break the corporate brand". Therefore, close alignment of the employees with the organisation's brand values may provide an organisation with a sustainable competitive advantage (Pringle and Thompson, 2001). Furthermore, it is important to note that at the heart of corporate branding is the idea of "nurturing" existing employees as well as attracting and recruiting the right candidates in the first instance (Ind, 1998). However, "potential and current employees" as a key stakeholder group of the corporate brand have been overlooked in the existing corporate branding literature (Hatch and Schultz, 2003).

Employees represent the most direct receptors of CIM, since a strong internal corporate image may bring important benefits for the company in terms of employees' motivation, performance, retention or willingness to spread positive information about the company. For example, human resource practices concerning salaries and bonuses, working conditions or the possibilities of developing a career within the company have a clear impact on employees' intention to stay and disposition to spread positive word of mouth (WOM) (Coelho & Augusto, 2008). Other CIM decisions involving culture management, organizational strategy and structure determine the working environment and conditions for employees, which will subsequently explain employees' behaviours and attitudes towards the company (Lichtenstein, Netemeyer, & Maxham, 2010). A suitable atmosphere determines their willingness both to continue in the same company and to talk about the advantages of working there. Visual identity and brand personality can also affect employees' attraction to the corporate identity. Thus, when employees perceive that the corporate brand is attractive, they will feel more attached to the company and may be more prone to spread positive WOM (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006; Wheeler et al., 2006). All in all, proper management of the corporate identity may result in outcomes such as retaining employees and their positive WOM (Lievens et al., 2007).

2.2 Role of employees in retail branding:

Both practitioners and academics agree that employees in service industries play a key role in building a corporate brand and in its eventual success (Miles and Mangold, 2004). Morhart et al. (2009) contend that "customers' perceptions of a service brand depends highly on the behaviour of frontline staff". Thus, customers' image and experience of a brand is often influenced by the way employees behave and perform on the job (de Chernatony et al., 2003). Terms such as "brand ambassadors" (Vallaster and

de Chernatony, 2006), “brand champions” (Fram and McCarthy, 2003; Morhart et al., 2009), and “living the brand” (Burmam and Zeplin, 2005) have been used to capture the spirit of desired employee behavior. These behaviors form part of a larger concept termed brand citizenship behaviour (BCB) (Burmam and Zeplin, 2005). Retailing differs from other service industries because of the regular, extensive interaction between employees and customers as well as the fact that the retailer's brand is usually different from the portfolio of manufacturers' brands offered for sale (Burt and Sparks, 2002). According to Ackfeldt and Coote (2005), retail employees are boundary spanners with multiple roles to fulfill, are evaluated on the productivity and quality of their performance, and are typically young and inexperienced workers. Thus, in a retail environment, BCB should be regarded as an important determinant of a customer's experience of the brand. Prior research on the antecedents to organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) is extensive (Jain et al., 2012; Yi et al, 2013), but research on BCB is limited and there is even less focus on the retail industry.

2.3 Employees Brand Citizenship Behaviour:

Brand citizenship behavior (BCB) is relatively a new concept that explained how employees could improve their brand delivery performance by aligning their attitude and behavior to the organization's brand. Brand citizenship behavior is employees' willingness to exert extra effort that goes beyond its basic functions that projects the brand consistent behavior. Employees with high brand citizenship spirit are willing to give 'their all' towards accomplishing self-satisfaction and organizational objectives. Such behavior also shows that employees are highly aware of the brand, committed enough to deliver the brand promises and loyal to the brand (Punjaisiri and Wilson, 2007).

Brand citizenship behaviour (BCB) is regarded by academics as a derivative of organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) (Yi et al., 2013; LePine et al., 2002; Organ, 1988). Organizational citizenship behaviour can be defined as the extra-role behaviour's employees engage in and all behaviour's that promote successful performance of the organization (Christ et al., 2003; Organ, 1988). Academics have attempted to express the behaviour organisations desire of their employees coining terms such as 'brand ambassador' (Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2006) and 'living the brand' (Burmam and Zeplin, 2005). Podsakoff (2000) explores the relationships between citizenship constructs; conceptualizing seven dimensions of organizational citizenship. Burmam and Zeplin (2005) expand, proposing the construct of brand citizenship behaviour; identifying individual employee behaviors deemed to enhance brand identity. Podsakoff (2000) and Burmam and Zeplin (2005) distinguish employees exhibiting loyalty, self-development, sportsmanship, helping, initiative and psychological ownership as enhancing the brand and demonstrating brand citizenship behaviour. There is consensus among academics concerning the role of employees in delivering the brand promise, viewing employees as a determinant of customer brand experience. It is considered to be of greater significance within retail banking and service organisations due to extensive interaction between employees and customers. (Punjaisiri and Wilson, 2007; Burmam and Zeplin, 2005; Porricelli et al., 2014, Foster et al., 2010, Erkmen and Hancer, 2014)

Many academic authors agree that the extra role of the employees is more meaningful for the brand survival and could become one of the differentiation tools (Ind 2001; Foster et al. 2010; Punjaisir et al., 2009; Melewar and Jenkins, 2002; Poriccelli et al. 2014). Burmam and Zeplin (2005) term the extra-role brand behavior as brand citizenship behavior (BCB). Brand citizenship behavior is defined as “the employees'

voluntary basis to project a number of generic employee behaviors that enhance the brand identity” (Burmam & Zeplin, 2005, p. 282). Brand citizenship behavior is a measure of the employee willingness to exert extra effort that goes beyond its basic functions i.e. projecting the brand-consistent behavior. Hence, the researchers essentially outlined the employees’ brand-consistent behavior that could be a part of ‘living the brand’ as proposed by Ind (2001).

However, it is assumed that employees commit to the organization’s brand only if their management demonstrates that their behaviors are also consistent with the brand values. In order for internal branding to succeed in the organization, a leader should understand, support, and consistently commit to the internal branding process (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006).

Throughout internal branding, employee behaviour and corporate branding literature academics have sought to understand how organisations can enhance and encourage their employees to live the brand and demonstrate brand supporting behaviour’s. Key antecedents of brand citizenship behaviour are understood by academics to be commitment, trust and job satisfaction (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007; Punjaisri et al., 2008; Porricelli et al., 2014; Erkmen and Hancer, 2014; Wallace et al., 2013) Theories interpreting employee commitment highlight brand values as precursor, suggesting that employees whose personal values are aligned to that of the brands, demonstrate enhanced brand loyalty. Burmann and Zeplin (2005) outline employee commitment as an emotional attachment with the brand, this supports the theory of psychological ownership explored by Chiang et al. (2013). Due to the significance of the attachment that psychological ownership creates between the employee and the organization, it is found to have a positive effect on brand citizenship behaviour Chiang et al. (2013).

Previous studies exploring brand citizenship behaviour consider commitment to be a major influence, however Erkmen and Hancer (2014) also advocate the role of trust as key driver of BCB. Brand trust serves to explain employee loyalty intentions to a brand; Morgan and Hunt (1994) cite components such as integrity and honesty as being central to creating trust. According to Erkmen and Hancer (2014) trust in a brand directly effects employee commitment, they are regarded as being byproducts of internal branding initiatives and have a positive impact on brand citizenship behaviour. Bowden (2008) found that trust enhanced the employee’s relationship with the organization and increased their commitment to the brand.

In addition to brand commitment and trust, Porricelli et al. (2014) also explores the relationship between job satisfaction and brand citizenship behaviour. Podsakoff (2000) regards job satisfaction as an employee characteristic of organizational citizenship behaviour. Bateman and Organ (1983) define job satisfaction as the way the employees feel about their job, considering a sense pleasure, achievement and pride as causal factors. Porricelli et al. (2014) states that job satisfaction is a key antecedent of brand citizenship behaviour. Christ et al. (2003) cites job satisfaction as being influential in encouraging employees to engage in additional supporting activities. Chen (2006) supports this identifying a positive relationship between enhanced job satisfaction and employee loyalty intentions.

It is widely agreed that internal branding is instrumental in enhancing employee trust, commitment and job satisfaction. Porricelli et al. (2014) regards internal branding as an antecedent of Brand Citizenship Behaviour. (Figure 5) represents the conceptual model devised to depict the influence of internal branding components on the drivers of brand citizenship behaviour. Specifying employee brand identification, brand communication and brand leadership as influencing mechanisms of internal branding. Practitioners concur finding that communication; training, integration and leadership are all

encouraging elements within internal brand management. (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011; Burmann and Zeplin, 2005; Cravens and Oliver, 2006, Willmott, 2002; Podsakoff, 2000)

Proposed conceptual model:

Academics define brand citizenship behaviour as the extra-role behaviour's employees engage in and all behaviour's that promote successful performance of the organization. The study found values, communication, leadership, incentivisation and feedback to be key factors influencing employee's motivation to engage in brand supporting activities. Literature review identified brand commitment, brand trust and job satisfaction as determining influences on employee behaviour intentions.

The study identified a relationship between corporate identity, values and internal communication. The literature review indicates that internal communication of corporate identity and brand values combined with internal branding activities serves to influence employee's commitment, trust and job satisfaction. The research highlighted the roles of leadership, incentivisation and feedback as having a bearing on employee's behaviour and attitude.

Given the literature review, it is quite evident that there are clear linkages between corporate identity management and employee brand citizenship behaviour. Almost all of the literature on internal branding, corporate identity, brand communication, and brand image has a clear mention of the role of employees and how these brand identity activities impact on brand perception of the employees which makes them a better and confident advocate of the corporate brand they serve as the ambassadors for.

Figure 2.2 Proposed conceptual framework model should be added here

Figure 2.1 represents the proposed conceptual model for this research that has been compiled after the initial preliminary literature review and in the light of research objectives for this thesis. The conceptual framework model illustrates the impact of corporate identity on employee BCB through its internal branding process that clearly contributes towards the brand image and brand commitment of the employees which are the vital ingredients of retail employee brand citizenship behaviour.

After exploring the relationship between corporate identity, internal brand management and brand citizenship behaviour a conceptual model of brand citizenship behaviour has been devised. The conceptual model serves to visually represent the interplay between corporate identity, internal brand management, brand citizenship behaviour and the determining influences identified resulting this study.

Research methodology:

The literature review will consist of examining academic contributions on retail corporate identity, retail employee branding, services marketing, retail branding and organisational psychology. A thorough literature review would identify a proposed theoretical model indicating relationships amongst the predefined constructs of corporate brand identity (e.g. corporate communication, culture, visual, and behaviour) and proposed constructs of BCB (employee brand perception, commitment, and trust). A series of constructs would be proposed, along with their associated measurement scales, in adapting existing established constructs from their respective literature to the retail corporate branding context.

The first stage of qualitative research analysis through indepth interviews with the retail corporate directors would craft and revise the theoretical model reflecting the

relationship between the corporate brand identity constructs that directly impact on brand citizenship behaviours of retail employees. The revised theoretical model would then be tested by using empirical data drawn from the retail sector and statistical data analysis using Structural Equation Modelling via a software Mplus to evaluate the dimensions of retail corporate identity and BCB constructs, through researching and testing the hypothesised relationships between its specific dimensions.

Data analysis:

In this regard, structural equation modelling is applied to analyse the data collected from approximately 350-400 retail employees across 35-40 retail stores. This allows a statistical examination of the constructs deployed in the study, a thorough investigation of the hypothesised relationships between constructs, and an examination of the goodness-of-fit between the proposed structural model and the data collected. The subsequent analysis of the study's research findings allows for the modification of the initial framework of retail corporate branding to arrive at a modified definition for the construct.

In summary, the three stages focus on three main issues: a) the development of a theoretical model for the construct; b) the development and testing of newly adapted measurement scales previously not researched; c) the empirical testing of the retail corporate brand citizenship behaviour theoretical model and the hypothesised relationships between its constructs.

Theoretical Implications:

This research attempts to expand current understanding in the corporate image formation debate and how it has a great influence on its employee's behaviours. It aspires to make a theoretical contribution in two main areas: corporate brand identity in the context of BCB, by empirical testing, and secondly by conceptualisation and operationalization of constructs representing the impact of CBI on BCB.

The proposed contributions of this research would expand current understanding in the corporate brand identity management debate and identify how it has a great influence, if any, on its employee's brand behaviours.

The outcomes of the proposed research would identify the impact and influence of corporate identity on employee brand citizenship behaviours in a retail organisation and would devise a conceptual framework model for the impact of the process. The proposed research would further empirically test the conceptual model representing the impact of corporate identity on BCB for retail firms and confirm the constituents of the model and their interplay. The proposed research would explore the dynamism of the retail corporate branding and have a structured approach towards this exploratory research. The outcomes of the research would further explain the retail identity management process and its influence in employee brand perception.

In particular, this study advances the existing views on corporate branding identity management, extends it towards retail sector, and provides a comprehensive structural model, which incorporates corporate branding mix elements and corporate identity factors that constitute the retail corporate brand. This research also brings new insights on the current conceptualisation and operationalisation of the constructs such as the corporate image, corporate identity mix elements, corporate communication, and corporate culture.

Practical Implications:

It also aims to make managerial implications for decision-makers in terms of what should shape their approaches to the management of their companies' corporate brands.

In terms of managerial implications, this study suggests that managers should understand that corporate identity formation and management process is a complex and a dynamic phenomenon, since it is determined by multiple corporate identity and communication factors. It suggests that decision-makers should be cautious about designing and implementing corporate identity strategies as it directly impacts on the perception of the customers and all related stakeholders of the corporate brand. In addition, it asserts that managers should regularly assess what associations individual stakeholders hold about their organisations' identities, what their personality values are, and how similar individuals' associations and their self-image perceptions to what their companies' intend to convey. By doing so, this study comments that organisations may have the advantage of responding to consumers' expectations in the right time in a right manner by creating the right kind of brand identity. This research also highlights that integrated communication can be the key for decision-makers to reduce the risk of possible inconsistencies between intended corporate associations and consumers' attributions about companies' identities.

The proposed research would also be very beneficial to the different service organisations that have employees as their brand ambassadors. The research would help the managers and directors of the services organisation in understanding the details of how an organisation's corporate brand identity helps their employees becomes true brand citizens and the value these employees attach to the corporate brand they serve. The research would also assist the corporate managers and directors in identifying the different factors that facilitates and contributes towards making their employees efficient and productive brand citizens who would then play a positive role in shaping and re-shaping the corporate brand.

Limitations:

Although the proposed research focused on brand citizenship behaviours of any employee serving an organisation, this research would predominantly focus on employees of retail organisations. Hence the focus and scope of this research is limited to the retail organisations. This is purely because retail organisations are one of the main organisations where corporate brands and employee brand citizenship are quite volatile and interdependent on influencing each other significantly.

Originality:

This research is original and there has been no attempt on linking corporate brand identity to brand citizenship behaviours and that too in a retail set up. It would be the first time to devise the constructs of retail corporate brand identity that directly contribute towards their employee brand citizenship behaviour and the conceptual framework model therewith. The testing of the different relationships amongst the different constructs would also be unique and never attempted before.

The proposed research is innovative and original because there has not been any academic research on the subject of retail corporate brand management. The academic literature lacks any significant contribution on this subject and the proposed research would definitely pave way for further research directions on the subject of retail corporate branding.

Conclusion:

In summary, corporate identity is the reflection of the culture and values of the organization. It is regarded as a central determinant of brand reputation, customer loyalty and employee commitment. Within service organisations, i.e. retail organisations; the role of the employee is crucial due to the extensive interaction between the employee and the consumer. As a result organizations desire their employees embody the brand and demonstrate brand citizenship behaviour's. Organisations aim to influence employee behaviour's through internal brand management in order to maintain consistency of engagement across the brand. Internal brand management serves to educate and communicate the mission and values of the brand to the organization. It is vital that employees identify with and understands the identity of the brand in order to effectively fulfill the brand promise. Previous research suggests that when employees identify with the organisations they work for they exhibit greater satisfaction, commitment and trust.

Literature exploring and analyzing the constructs of corporate identity, internal brand management and have expanded and sought to interpret influences on employee behaviour and organizational performance.

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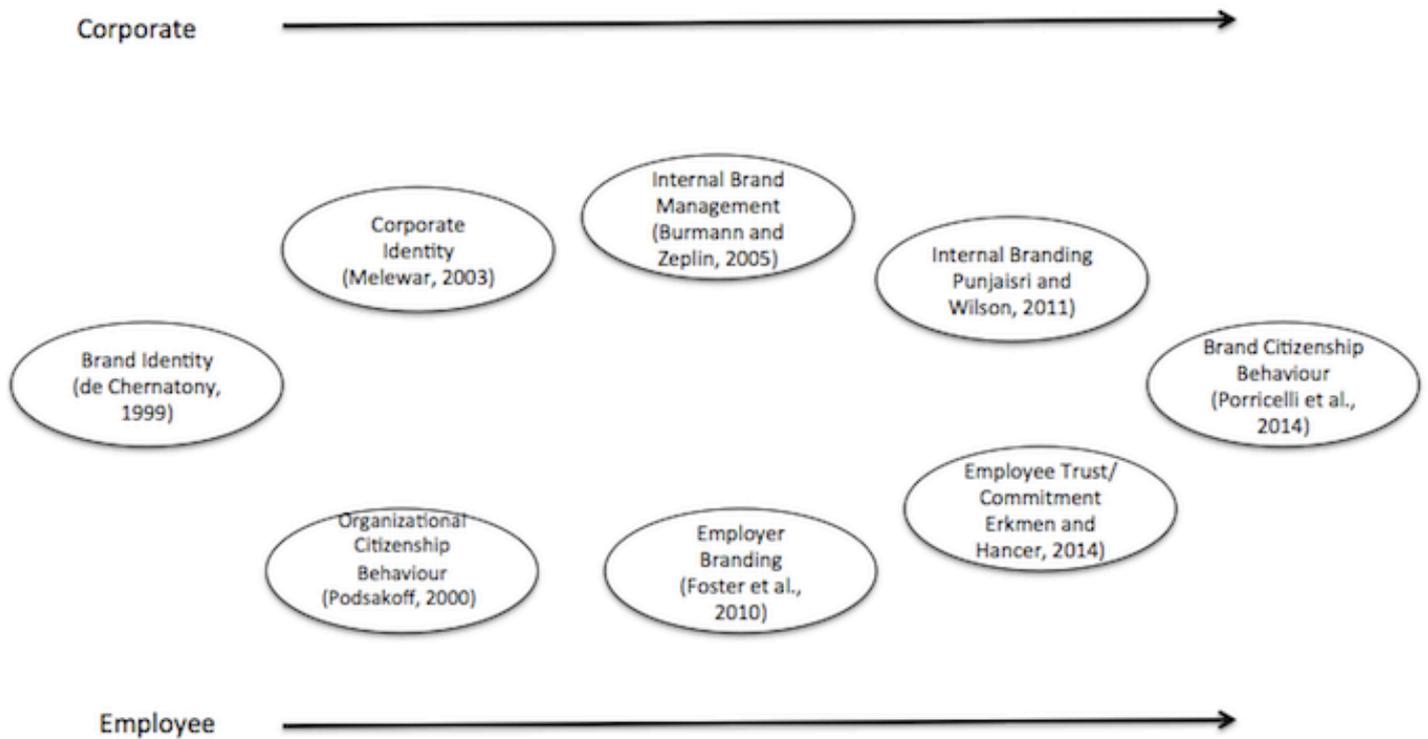


Figure 2.1: Convergence of studies on corporate identity and employee branding towards BCB.

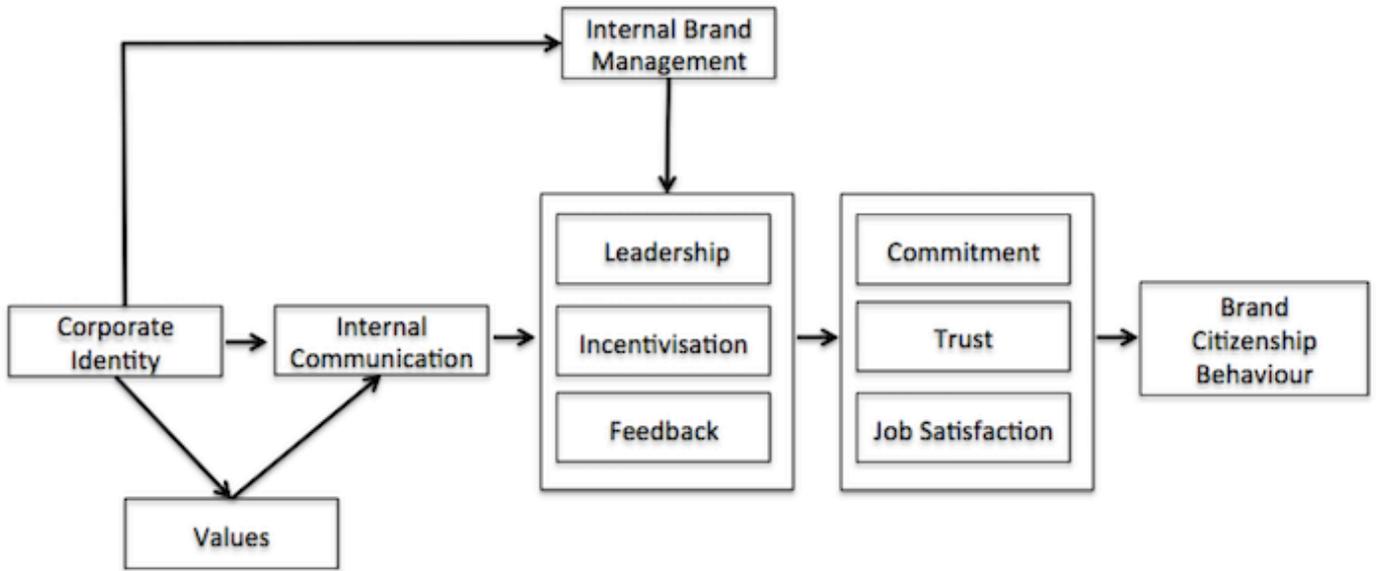


Figure 2.2 : Proposed conceptual model representing impact of corporate identity on BCB.