

THE STUDY OF INTERNAL BRANDING EDUCATION FOR EMPLOYEES TO ENHANCE THE BRAND VALUE: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY WITH A FOCUS ON ENGINEERING SMES IN PUNE

Sanjay Kulkarni¹, Dr. Kirti Dang Longani²

¹Ph.D. Scholar, Ajeenkya DY Patil University.

²Guide and Professor, School of Management, Ajeenkya DY Patil University.

Abstract

A company's strong brand is a valuable asset, but so are its passionate employees. Internal branding education is a business strategy tool to empower and inspire employees to "live" the brand promise rather than just uphold it. The term "brand ambassadorship" describes the level of brand advocacy that employees exhibit or how much they behave as if they are the Brand Ambassadors of the company.

Objectives: The study's objectives are to understand internal branding education from the viewpoint of employees among Engineering SMEs in Pune. Also, to know the aspects employees consider vital for delivering their organization's brand promise to the end customers. The study also evaluates the impact of internal branding education on employees for presenting themselves as brand ambassadors for all external stakeholders to enhance the overall brand value.

Research Approach & Research Design: The study used an empirical research approach, and responses from 150 employees of engineering SMEs in the city of Pune were acquired through survey questionnaires and interviews. Various literature sources were researched and thoroughly analyzed to assess research findings accurately. Statistical approaches like percentage, regression analysis, and ANOVA were utilized to test the hypothesis (impacting the enhancement of the brand value significantly).

Findings: It is found that internal branding education has a favourable and considerable impact on employees and empowers them as brand ambassadors for improving the overall brand value.

Managerial Implications: If management effectively focuses on internal branding education characteristics like Leadership, Work culture, Motivation, Internal training, etc., they may anticipate their employees' brand commitment and understanding of brand promise. When management effectively secures employees' awareness of their brand promises, they will positively enhance the brand value.

Keywords: Internal Branding Education, Employees, Brand Ambassador, Engineering SMEs, Brand Value

1. Introduction

Any business must create a distinct and compelling brand since it is what consumers recall and is drawn to. The relationship between a brand and its employees is vital in how it is presented and how people perceive the brand. For years, branding has been used to influence how customers view businesses. Internal branding is essential in the digital age because businesses and employees are each other's online brand extensions. Internal branding education allows employees to speak for the entire brand, including its identity, values, positioning, available products or services, target market, etc. (Figure 1). Internal branding allows them to serve as brand ambassadors, helping to develop desired brand positioning and disseminate the right brand image in the marketplace. An internal branding plan motivates employees to promote and strengthen the brand.



Figure 1: Internal Branding: The Key to Brand Success

Source: Achim Wirtz (March 27, 2014). Internal Branding: The Key to Brand Success. <http://hrbranding.org/internal-branding-achim-wirtz/>

The following are the critical components of internal branding;

Brand Value

The guiding ideas that influence every aspect of a business are its brand values. Brand values might include leadership, integrity, passion, diversity, quality, dependability, support, fairness, sustainability, etc.

- They impact how the target market views the brand and engages with consumers.
- Brand values aid in conveying qualities and traits to target audiences and internal stakeholders.
- Brand values are the foundation for all brand narratives, deeds, behaviours, and decision-making processes (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Brand Value

Brand Value:

Why it is Important for Every Business? (October 9, 2021) <https://www.designerpeople.com/blog/branding/brand-value/>

Brand Commitment

The idea of brand commitment is related to consumers' loyalty to a specific brand within a product category and is becoming more and more significant in consumer behaviour. The awareness that brand commitment contains both a behavioural and an attitudinal dimension is frequently used to represent brand loyalty.

Brand Promise

The brand promise is a specific, recognizable, unique value or experience every customer may anticipate receiving. When brand promises are delivered, they can represent specific products or entire businesses. When empty, they turn into parodies and split the target audience from the brand.

- It creates the impression of a powerful, noticeable, and coherent presence.
- Every employee is aware of the standards that the company and they have set.
- It builds a reputation for the business consistent with the brand promise.
- A consistent experience is provided to customers.

Brand Mission and Vision

The company's approach to achieving the desired future is created by the vision and mission statements, which are essential instruments for strategic planning. They are motivators that keep everyone on task and working toward a common goal. The business's plan is made clear through the vision and mission statements, providing employees with a sense of identity and belonging.

Brand Story

Brand positioning and customer engagement strategies leverage brand stories to interact with consumers. Brand stories help external stakeholders understand the brand's values and identify what the brand stands for. It gives employees more authority so they can relate to the brand more profoundly and achieve the communication goals.

Internal Communication

Information on brand development efforts and updates on marketing activities are shared internally through communication. Internal communication's objective is to facilitate an effective exchange of information within a company between divisions and employees. It might involve anything from updating staff members on promotion campaigns or a forthcoming event to conducting an organization-wide engagement or culture review.

The position of brand ambassador entails an emotional component in addition to its intellectual component. Brand ambassadors are glad to work for their firm and genuinely believe in the brand. Brand ambassadors need to understand the company's principles and what they entail. They must comprehend how these brand ideals are translated into physical assets across the organization, especially in light of their position. In SMEs, internal branding education is also significant. Even with limited resources and staff, SME marketers may creatively manage and maximize the potential of their brands. Employees can apply Brand management ideas, principles, or methods as brand ambassadors for SMEs.

2. Literature Review

The terms of brands, internal branding education, and brand value are provided at the beginning of this section of the paper.

2.1 Brand

A brand is considered the amalgamation of all the apparent functional and emotional aspects of a good or service (Bergstrom et al., 2002). A company's brand provides a unique manner to set its products apart from its rivals (Aaker, 2009). The brand represents the products or services and conveys the benefits of utilizing a particular product above competing products in the same market. It is regarded as a product or service that a customer thinks to have distinctive benefits beyond the price and functional performance or a symbol designed to set one company's goods apart from another (Kapferer 1997). The art of branding comprises the ability

to forge a distinctive image of a company's goods in the minds of the intended market (Keller, 2013).

2.2 Internal Branding Education

Internal branding education refers to all company initiatives to educate staff about its brands and their core principles. It typically relates to three things: effectively communicating the brand to employees, helping them comprehend its value, and ultimately tying all organizational efforts together to execute the brand promise (Bergstrom et al., 2002). Making employees capable of appreciating and acknowledging organizational brand values is the goal of internal branding education (Mitchell, 2002). By delivering signals to all stakeholders and controlling behaviour, communication, and symbols, internal branding education is described as a carefully planned and implemented process of building and sustaining a favourable image and, therefore, a good reputation for the firm as a whole (Einwiller & Will 2002, p. 101). Internal branding education is crucial for operationalizing a brand orientation and ensuring that staff members share the brand attributes necessary for brand-building activities (Santos-Vijande et al., 2012).

2.3 Brand Value

Brand value developed for business customers indirectly improves brand competitiveness through marketing focus. The ability of brand value to combine market orientation with strategic brand positioning helps to achieve brand competitiveness (Suraksha Gupta, David Gallear, John Rudd and Pantea Foroudi, 2020). The guiding principles that direct a company's brand's internal Culture and outward relationships are known as brand values. (Chris Outlaw, 2019). These ideals, like environmental preservation, diversity, teamwork, or transparency, serve as the foundation for the brand's operations. Brand values are fundamental components of the brand's core identity that give the brand's existence and actions meaning (Matthew, 2022). Employee enthusiasm for the organization's work will increase via internal branding initiatives that establish the brand values. (Drake et al., 2005). Continuing education, employee development initiatives, and consistent internal communication accomplish recognition and support the organizational brand. (Aurand et al., 2005).

2.4 Brand Promise

Customers turn to a brand because, according to O'Malley (1991), they anticipate experiencing the brand values that are expressed through a promise so that owning the specific brand matches their values. According to Schultz and Schultz (2000), employees who interact with customers must act in a way that is consistent with the brand values contained in the form of a brand promise. Any discrepancies in how personnel behave during service transactions create difficulty in managing how customers see the brand and its performance (Clemes, Mollenkopf, & Burn, 2000). Failure to fulfil the promise over time has a negative impact on how customers grow their commitment and trust.

2.5 Employees as Brand Ambassadors

Long-term employees have a plethora of internal experience to draw from and are likely to have developed close relationships with their employers. They will likely stay with their employer forever, making them perform better as brand ambassadors. Good brand representatives should know the company's values and what they imply (Frank Goedertier, 2005). An army of passionate brand ambassadors is more effective. Content and loyal employees are likelier to promote the business and become advocates and supporters (Scott Klinger, 2021). A company's brand promises to customers are fulfilled not just through its

goods and services but also through the brand ambassadors, who act as walking billboards for the company (Dr. Praveen Pillai, 2014).

Research Gap

Even though 95% to 99% of businesses globally are categorized as SMEs, academics haven't given small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) studies much attention in the area of internal branding education (Abimbola and Vallaster, 2007; Krake, 2005; Mowle and Merrilees, 2005; Inskip, 2004). There have been numerous presentations on the benefits of internal branding education for SMEs, such as the competitive climate (Mowle & Merrilees 2005). This paper aims to comprehend internal branding education from the viewpoint of employees who can serve as brand ambassadors with the requisite brand knowledge for Engineering SMEs in Pune. The study offers information on internal branding among Engineering SMEs on aspects employees believe crucial for providing their organization's internal branding education and training.

3. Aim & Purpose of the Study

This study investigates how employees view their company's brand in relation to their roles and responsibilities. The study also looks at how employee internal branding education affects or improves the organization's brand value in terms of how customers perceive it. The main aim of the research, therefore, is to identify the effectiveness of internal branding education on employees in enhancing the overall brand value in the market environment.

4. Objectives

The following objectives are the precise focus of this research study:

- 1) To study whether employees of Engineering SMEs understand their organization's brand and what it represents.
- 2) To know the aspects employees consider vital for delivering their organization's internal branding education.
- 3) To identify the effectiveness of internal branding education on employees in enhancing the brand value by becoming the brand ambassador

Research Question

With a focus on the above-stated objectives, we address the research question as follows;

RQ1: "Does the effect of internal branding education on the employees enhance the brand value in Engineering SMEs in Pune city?"

5. Research Background

This study focuses on the various facets of internal branding and how it affects employees' motivation. The study has focused on independent variables, i.e., Leadership, Work culture, Motivation, and Internal training. This study aims to determine how much understanding employees possess about the aspects like Brand values, Brand commitment, Brand promise, Products or Service offerings, etc.

6. Research Design and Method

The research design is based on Quantitative Research. The data collected for this investigation is organized using an empirical research style. The primary data were collected from 150 respondents via convenience sampling. A well-structured survey questionnaire was distributed via email to collect the primary data. Various books, articles, journals, and websites are used to gather secondary data. A questionnaire based on the Likert scale was used to collect the data.

Hypotheses

The following hypothesis was formed for the study;

H0: "Internal Branding does not significantly impact employees in enhancing the brand value by becoming a Brand Ambassador."

H1: "Internal Branding does have a significant impact on employees in enhancing the brand value by becoming a Brand Ambassador."

Statistical Techniques

Statistical tools, including percentages, and tabular and graphical methods, are used to analyze the data. The regression analysis and ANOVA are used to evaluate & test the hypothesis. The information is gathered and examined using Pie charts and Bar charts to display and present the data.

7 Data Analysis and Interpretation

7.1 Testing of Hypothesis

The relationship between the independent and dependent variables, and to evaluate the study hypothesis, multivariate regression analysis and ANOVA tests are used. The study's results showed a positive relationship between the dependent variable (enhancing the brand value by acting as a brand ambassador) and the independent variables (Leadership, Work culture, motivation, and Internal training of internal branding education). The regression model's results are as follows:

Table 1: Table showing Linear Multivariate Regression Model

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error of the Estimate
1	.050 ^a	0.003	-0.004	8.27856

Interpretation

In Table 1, it is revealed that the multiple correlation coefficient (R) is 0.050, and the coefficient of determination (R Square) is 0.003. The model explains 0.3% of the variation in the dependent variable. The standard error of the estimate is 8.27856, showing actual scores of enhancing brand value. The significant value of internal branding education variables is 0.000, which is less than 0.05, and R has a determined positive value, indicating a strong and distinct correlation between the dependent variable of improving the brand value proving the validity of the alternative hypothesis.

Table 2: ANOVA Table

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	581.996	2	290.998	0.597	.00552 ^b
Residual	74112.675	152	487.583		
Total	74694.671	154			

Interpretation

In Table 2, it is revealed that the overall model is significantly helpful in enhancing brand value by becoming the brand ambassador. Reflected values are $F(2, 152) = 0.597$, and $p < .05$. Therefore, it is inferred that internal branding education variables significantly impact brand value by becoming the brand ambassador.

7.2 Analysis Based on Questionnaire

Table 3: Table showing Demographic Variables of the Respondents

Demographic Variables		No. of Respondents	Percentage
Gender	Male	105	70%
	Female	45	30%
Designation	Executives	105	70%
	Manager	33	22%
	Chief Executive Officer	3	2%
	Head of Department	5	3%
	Other	4	3%
Age Group (Years)	20 – 25	33	22%
	26 – 35	58	39%
	36 – 45	42	28%
	46 & above	17	11%

Interpretation

Table 3 shows that 70% of male respondents and 30% of female respondents. The majority, 70% of respondents, were executives, followed by 22% as managers. Only 2% of the respondents were Chief Executive Officers (CEO). Highly 39% of the respondents were of the age group of 26 to 35 years. 28% were between the age group of 36 and 45 years. Just 11% of the respondents were above 46 years.

1. What does the internal branding strategy your company apply to benefit employees and build brand value?

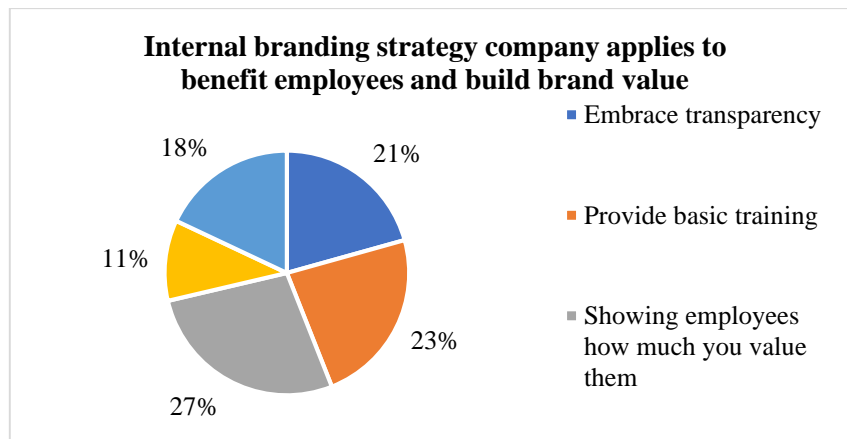


Figure 3: The Figure shows the Internal Branding Strategy Company Applies to Benefit Employees and Build Brand Value in Engineering SMEs

Interpretation

As shown in Figure 3, 27% of the respondents believed that the internal branding strategy their company applies for expressing to employees how much company management values them. 23% of the respondents thought that the company deploys an internal branding strategy as a part of the internal training process, followed by 21% who felt that the internal branding strategy company applies to establish transparency within the cross-sectional groups. 18% of

them agreed that the strategy is a part of internal communication and engagement. Only 11% said that the strategy is to encourage content creation across the team.

2. What would be your objective as a brand ambassador of your company?

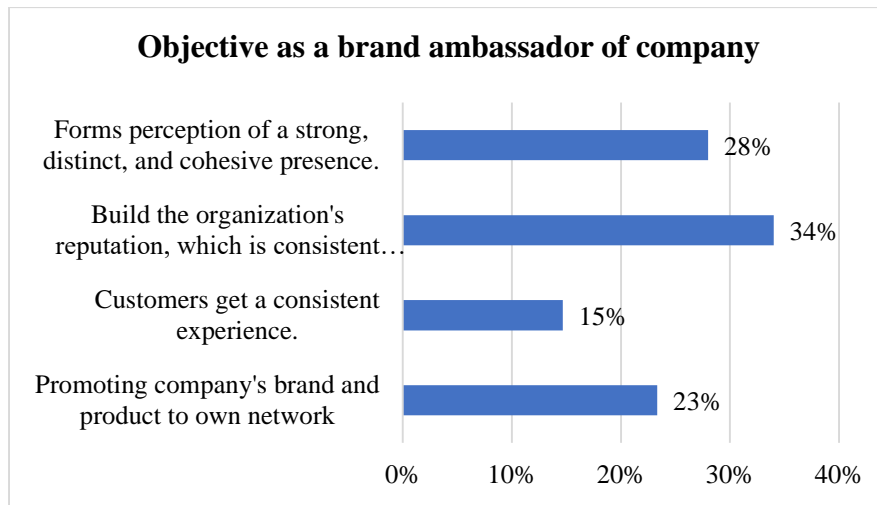


Figure 4: The Figure shows Employee's Objective as a Brand Ambassador of the Company in Engineering SMEs

Interpretation

Figure 4 reveals that the highest 34% of the respondents agreed that their objective as a brand ambassador of the company is to build the organization's reputation, which is consistent with the brand promise. In contrast to that, 28% of the respondents approved that their objective is to form a perception of a strong, distinct, and cohesive brand presence in the focused markets. 23% of the respondents established that their objective as brand ambassadors of the company is to promote the company's brand and product to their network, and 15% of the respondents feel that they aim to deliver a consistent customer experience.

3. Do internal branding education help employees increase the brand value of your company by acting as brand ambassadors?

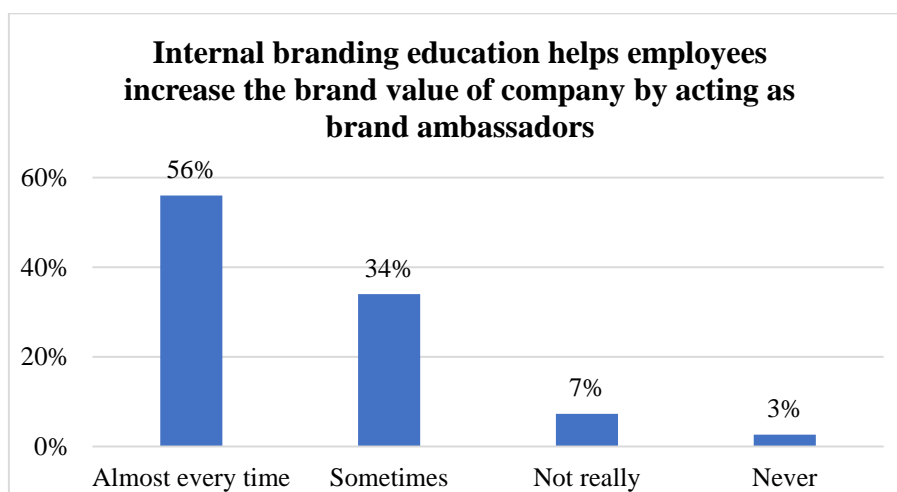


Figure 5: The Figure shows Internal Branding Education helps Employees Increase the Brand Value of a Company by Acting as Brand Ambassadors in Engineering SMEs

Interpretation

Figure 5 illustrates that the majority of 56% of the respondents considered that internal branding education helps employees increase their company's brand value by acting as brand ambassadors almost every time. In comparison, 34% of the respondents believed that sometimes internal branding education helps employees increase brand value. 7% of the respondents believed that internal branding education does not allow employees to improve their company's brand value by becoming brand ambassadors. And, 3% of the participants consented that internal branding education never supports employees in increasing their company's brand value by serving as brand ambassadors in the case of Engineering SMEs.

4. How do you perceive your leadership management?

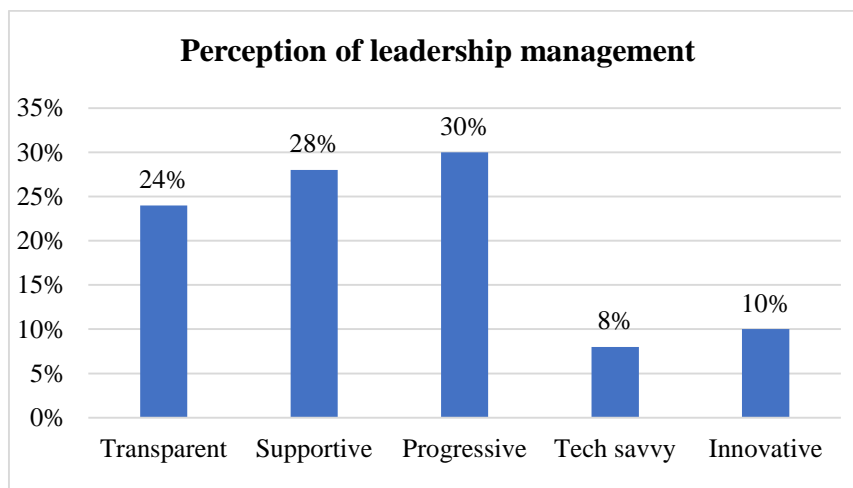


Figure 6: The Figure shows Employee's Perception of Leadership in Engineering SMEs

Interpretation

As displayed in Figure 6, the highest 30% of the respondents perceived their leadership management as progressive. 28% of the respondents feel it is supportive. 24% of the participants said it is transparent, while 10% believed that their leadership management is innovative. Only 8% of the respondents feel that their leadership management is tech-savvy.

5. How do you find work culture in your company?

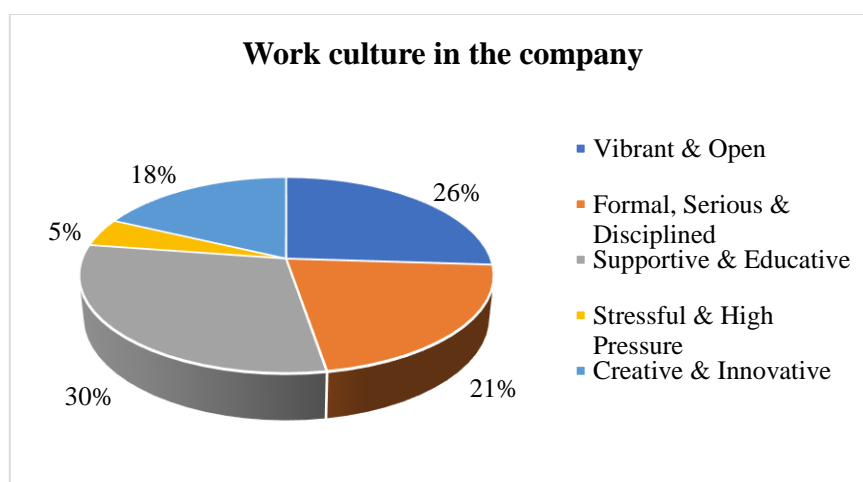


Figure 7: The Figure shows work Culture in the Engineering SMEs

Interpretation

Figure 7 represents that the highest 30% of the respondents believed there is a supportive and educative work culture in their company. 26% of the respondents thought there is a vibrant and open work culture, while 21% ascertained that they have formal, serious and disciplined work culture in their company. 18% of the participants answered that creative and innovative work culture exists in their company. Merely 5% conveyed that they have stressful and high-pressure work culture in their company.

6. What kind of motivation do you get from your leadership management?



Figure 8: The Figure shows the Kind of Motivation Employees got from Leadership Management

Interpretation

Figure 8, shown above, illustrates that 35% of the respondents answered that they get motivated by leadership management to improve their abilities to become brand ambassadors. 21% said to upgrade skills & expertise in their domain. Similarly, the other 21% believed they get motivation due to their involvement in decision-making processes. 17% of the participants said that they get motivated and encouraged to understand things other than their role & responsibility for different business functions and external communication. 6% said that they got motivated to display their extracurricular skills.

7. For which of the following aspects, internal communication & engagement happens in your company within the inter-department by the senior management teams?

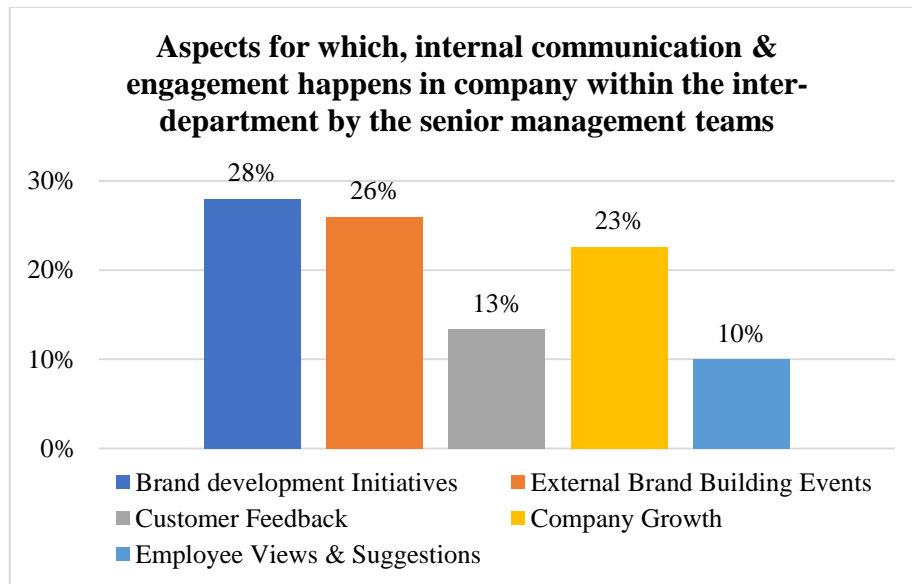


Figure 9: The Figure shows the Aspects in which Internal Communication & Engagement happens in the Engineering SMEs within the Inter-department by the Senior Management Teams

Interpretation

As represented in Figure 9, the majority of 28% and 26% of the respondents, respectively, believed that brand development initiatives and external brand-building events are the aspects for which internal communication and engagement happen in their company within the inter-department by the senior management teams. 23% of the respondents considered that company growth is the aspect for which internal communication and engagement happen in their company. Whereas 13% and 10% agreed that customer feedback and employee views & suggestions, respectively, are the aspects for which internal communication and engagement happen in their company within the inter-department by the senior management teams.

8. For which of the following aspects do you get internal training?

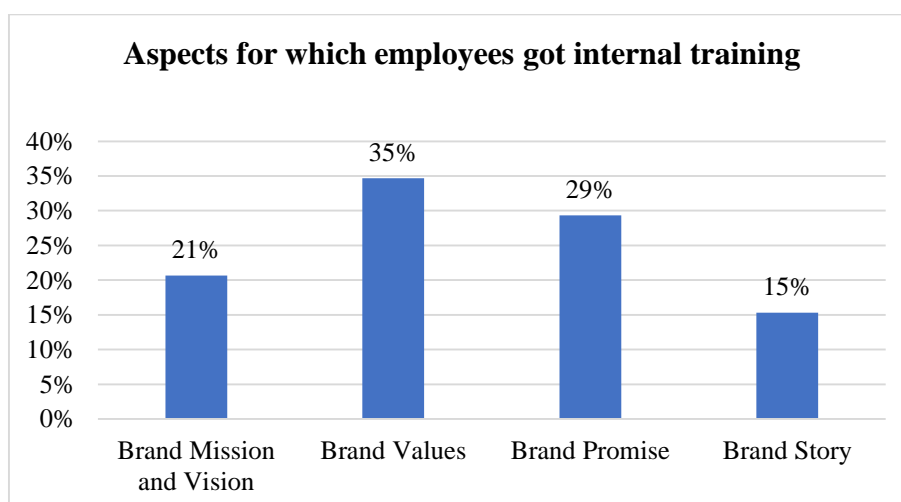


Figure 10: The Figure shows the Aspects for which Employees got internal training

Interpretation

As shown in Figure 10, the majority of 35% of the respondents ascertained that the aspect for which employees got internal training is brand values which are followed by 29% who thought

that brand promise. 21% believed that brand mission and vision is the aspect for which employees got internal training. Whereas 15% of them agreed that the facet for which employees got internal training is the brand story.

6 Findings

The relationship between the dependent and independent variables was investigated using multivariate regression analysis, which was also utilized to evaluate the study hypothesis. The multiple correlation coefficient (R) is 0.050, and the coefficient of determination (R Square) is 0.003. The model explains 0.3% of the variation in the dependent variable of enhancing the brand value by becoming the brand ambassador. The standard error of the estimate is 8.27856, which tells us that actual scores of enhancing the brand value by becoming the brand ambassador are typically within about 8.28 from the predicted scores, in the sense of a standard deviation. The significant value of internal branding education variables is 0.000, less than 0.05. This value indicates a significant influence of internal branding education variables, namely Leadership, Work culture, motivation, and Internal training, on enhancing the brand value, proving the validity of the hypothesis. The overall model is significantly helpful in the explanation of enhancing the brand value by becoming the brand ambassador, $F(2, 152) = 0.597$, Where $p < .05$.

70% of male respondents and 30% of female respondents were there. The majority, 70% of respondents, were executives, followed by 22% as managers. 39% of the respondents were of the age group of 26 to 35 years. Just 11% of the respondents were above 46 years. 27% of the respondents believed that the internal branding strategy their company applies to benefit employees and build brand value is to show employees how much their company value them in case. The highest 34% of the respondents agreed that their objective as a brand ambassador of the company is to build the organization's reputation, which is consistent with the brand promise. 28% approved that they aim to form a perception of a strong, distinct, and cohesive presence. The majority of 56% considered that internal branding education helps employees increase their company's brand value by acting as brand ambassadors almost every time.

The highest 30% of the respondents perceived that there is progressive leadership management in their Engineering SMEs. A maximum of 30% of the respondents believed that there is a supportive and educative work culture in their company, followed by 26% who thought that there is vibrant and open work culture. Most of the 35% of respondents answered that the motivation they got from leadership management was to improve their abilities to become internal brand ambassadors of their company's brand. The majority of 28% and 26% of the respondents, respectively, believed that brand development initiatives and external brand-building events are the aspects for which internal communication and engagement happen in their company within the inter-department by the senior management teams. Most 35% of the respondents ascertained that the element for which employees got internal training is brand values.

7 Theoretical & Managerial Implications

Utilizing internal branding education strategies and internalizing brand attitudes can help organizations increase employee retention. These initiatives are not simply the responsibility of brand managers but also a shared obligation of all employees. To effectively carry out these initiatives, brand management and human resource interventions must work together. The findings showed that implementing internal branding education has a favourable impact on brand value by making a person a brand ambassador, which favourably affects brand attitudes, such as brand commitment and brand identification. These attitudes, in turn, have a favourable impact on employee retention. Another finding indicated that brand commitment was positively impacted by internal branding education. Investigating internal branding initiatives

such as internal communication, orientation and training, and feedback can increase employee brand loyalty.

8 Conclusion

For any company, investing in human resources is a substantial cost. The evaluation of the relationship between employee service and customer satisfaction will determine the return on investment. The brand's value can be determined if the customer can observe how the employee upholds those ideals while providing service. Organizational practices are assessed by evaluating the company's practices. Similarly, internal branding education procedures can be evaluated by assessing employees' perceptions of an organizational brand.

According to the study, companies can make their employees brand ambassadors by imparting consistent internal branding education addressing various aspects related to brand communication, brand values and brand promise. Showing employees how much their employer values them is the internal branding strategy that the companies use to increase brand commitment and employee motivation. Building a reputation for the firm that is consistent with the brand promise and creating the impression of a powerful, distinct, and unified presence are significant goals for a brand ambassador. Employees who have received internal branding education help their companies build stronger brands all the time. As per the survey findings, a significant percentage of employees feel that their organization has friendly and educational work environments, as well as progressive leadership and management. They are motivated by upper management to develop their skills so they can represent the company's brand internally. The brand promise and brand values are some of the important aspects for which employees receive internal training.

10. Limitations and Future Studies

10.1 Limitations

Following are a few of the limitations of the study that were highlighted and noted:

1. The study might have been more insightful if it had been conducted in different cities/states with different cultures resulting in more holistic conclusions.
2. Due to a fixed budget, limited time, and other resources, the research had to be limited to Engineering SMEs in Pune.
3. Only one researcher had access to the tools for both data collection and analysis. The study process most likely reflected the researcher's personal beliefs and attitudes.

10.2 Future Studies

The following notions for future research can be made:

1. It would be helpful to increase the sample size to a larger scale to increase generalizability. Comparable research projects could be conducted in other cultural settings and states to widen the topic.
2. Additional quantitative impacts that could explain the connection between the participants and variation in the numerous internal branding components require clarification through research.
3. Future research can be developed by studying the impact of internal branding with a broad scope and a broad scale of primary data to provide more reliable research results. By including other variables, including environmental elements, social issues, financial considerations, and their impact, this study is made more valuable for researchers as well as in terms of the consequences of the research findings.
4. Similar research can be conducted in the same field as the current study but focusing on a different class of brands. Comparing brands, ranging from well-known to niche, may provide exciting study topics and widen the concept landscape.

5. Consideration should be given to how internal branding education might be researched from an entrepreneurial standpoint.

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