

# Aligning employees' attitudes and behavior with hospitality brands: The role of employee brand internalization

Lina Xiong<sup>a,\*</sup>, Ceridwyn King<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Human Dimensions of Natural Resources, Warner College of Natural Resources, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO, 80523, USA

<sup>b</sup> School of Sport, Tourism and Hospitality Management, Temple University, 1810 North 13th Street, Speakman Hall 306, Philadelphia, PA, 19122, USA

## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Employee brand internalization  
Employee brand-aligned attitudes and behavior  
Relationship orientation  
Hospitality brands  
Internal brand management (IBM)

## ABSTRACT

Benefits of having unique hospitality brands can only be achieved to the extent that employees are knowledgeable and capable of aligning with, and demonstrating those brand values in their thoughts and actions during service encounters. To facilitate this, informed by organizational learning literature, motivation and social exchange theories, we propose and examine an employee brand internalization mechanism with a US-based hotel employee sample. With strong results, we suggest that regardless of organizational size or resources, hospitality organizations that seek to build a respectful and trusting social environment which promotes positive social exchanges with employees, stimulates employee internalization of the brand which enables the development of employee extra-role brand-aligned attitudes and behavior.

## 1. Introduction

As products become more homogeneous and customers become more skeptical towards advertising, the differentiation effect accentuated through unique brands becomes more important in helping organizations stand out in the market (Chen, Lam, & Zou, 2011; Keller, 1998). This effect is even more prominent in the hospitality industry (King, 2017) as a strong brand can help define the service product, indicate potential service quality, and ease customers' anxiety in making purchase decisions before actual consumption (Buil, Martínez, & Matute, 2016; Grace & O'Cass, 2005). However, it can be challenging for hospitality organizations to "prove" externally communicated brand values to customers considering the final brand experience is co-created by customers and employees, making brand experience transactions more dynamic than tangible goods transactions (Berry, 2000; Brodie, Whittome, & Brush, 2009; Henkel, Tomczak, Heitmann, & Herrmann, 2007; Kim Jin-Sun, & Kim, 2008). As such, the importance of employees' brand-aligned behavior, which provides immediate evidence of brand reality to customers, is emphasized (Hartline, Maxham, & McKee, 2000; Xiong & King, 2015). When employees deliver service that is aligned with customers' prior brand expectations during "moments of truth", customers are more likely to perceive consistency between the externally communicated brand promise and their brand experience, such that they will be more likely to maintain and carry on their prior positive attitudes towards the brand (Henkel et al., 2007; Punjaisri &

Wilson, 2011). For example, in seeking to inform customer brand perceptions, Virgin America promotes the brand characteristics of clever (smart, cheeky and witty), provocative (bold and unconventional), and friendly in their advertising. However, the branding effort doesn't stop there. Virgin America also provides corresponding brand training and guidelines to help align employees' job performance with the externally communicated brand (e.g., highlighting certain vocabulary and communication styles that accentuate the clever, provocative, and friendly brand characteristics to employees).

Consistent with the experiential intelligence argument from Baum (2006), hospitality jobs require not only the technical aspects, but also emotional and aesthetic dimensions to create a truly memorable experience for customers. However, brand knowledge that is necessary for employees to create brand-aligned experiences is considered tacit in nature (King & Grace, 2009) and difficult to grasp, as it deals with feelings, values, and personality, more so than objective data. Furthermore, employee efforts in bringing the brand to life have been characterized as volitional, extra-role behaviors, requiring significant employee internal motivation (Xiong & King, 2015). For these reasons, building a brand-aligned workforce remains a challenge for many hospitality brands. To address this, internal brand management (IBM) research has recently focused on examining psychological states that employees develop as a result of internal branding practices (e.g., Buil, Martínez, & Matute, 2018; Chang, Chiang, & Han, 2012; Piehler, King, Burmann, & Xiong, 2016). However, knowledge with respect to how

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [lina.xiong@colostate.edu](mailto:lina.xiong@colostate.edu) (L. Xiong), [ceridwyn.king@temple.edu](mailto:ceridwyn.king@temple.edu) (C. King).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2019.06.006>

Received 26 November 2018; Received in revised form 20 June 2019; Accepted 22 June 2019

1447-6770/© 2019 CAUTHE - COUNCIL FOR AUSTRALASIAN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY EDUCATION. Published by Elsevier Ltd All rights reserved.

employees' understanding of the brand (Xiong, King, & Piehler, 2013) informs such psychological states (e.g., employee perceived brand value fit, perceived brand responsibility) and subsequent brand-aligned behavior is less clear. This mechanism that enables employees to transform brand knowledge into brand action is considered critical, given that it offers important theoretical and practical insights for cultivating a brand-aligned workforce. Further, in consideration of the common unfavorable work conditions that are characteristic of tourism and hospitality jobs (e.g., long and irregular work hours, higher work volume during holidays, etc.), comprehension as to what organizational actions can be taken to enhance employees' internalization of the brand is also necessary.

Acknowledging the importance of such insight, several notable IBM studies have attempted to examine this issue. However, these studies lack a holistic view that integrates antecedents and outcomes of employee brand internalization. For example, several studies draw direct links from organizational initiatives to employee brand attitudes and behavior (e.g., Chang et al., 2012; King & Grace, 2012; Xiong & King, 2018) without accounting for why and how employees would respond in a favorable manner. Other studies examine how employees' brand perceptions affect their subsequent brand attitudes and behavior (e.g., Löhndorf & Diamantopoulos, 2014; Xiong et al., 2013; Xiong & King, 2015) without providing insight into what organizational factors promote such desired employee brand perceptions. More recently, Erkmen, Hancer, and Leong (2017) and Buil et al. (2016; 2018) have provided a relatively holistic view that integrates organizational factors, employee perceptions of the organization/brand, and employee job performance. However, the organizational factors (e.g., human resource management, internal brand communication and training, etc.) adopted in these studies are heavily influenced by the specific size of the organization and/or the resources available to them, thus limiting the generalizability of such studies. In addition, the employee perception factors (e.g., organizational identification and work engagement in Buil et al., 2016, 2018) do not consider employee perceptions of the brand and their relationship to it, which is considered critical for understanding whether employees will deliver the specific brand promise.

Therefore, in seeking to build on these previous studies that have focused on specific aspects of IBM or have sought to understand the phenomena through an organizational behavior lens, we draw on both the organizational behavior and IBM literature to provide a comprehensive understanding of how a hospitality organization can cultivate a brand-aligned workforce. Specifically, we argue that the provision of an organizational environment that activates an employee's brand internalization mechanism can encourage employees to develop positive attitudes towards the brand, thus supporting their brand-aligned behavior. We further argue that this organizational environment should treat employees as "human beings", and not just as another organizational resource that can be deployed as management sees fit. This organizational environment can be built regardless of the specific size of the organization or the resources available to them. The following sections present relevant literature and theories that inform the conceptual model, research design and methods, as well as present strong empirical results from a US-based hotel employee sample, thus supporting the proposed model.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Employee brand-aligned attitudes and behavior

In order to demonstrate the unique brand values to customers, hospitality brands need competent and motivated employees who can perform in a brand-aligned manner (Buil et al., 2016; Löhndorf & Diamantopoulos, 2014). To effectively reflect this coveted extra-role employee attitude and behavior that transforms the brand promise into brand reality for customers, King, Grace, and Funk (2012) developed the concept of employee-based brand equity that encompasses both

brand-aligned employee attitudes and behavior including employee brand advocacy, brand allegiance and brand-consistent behavior. While identifying the outcomes that brand-focused organizations covet from their employees, as reflected in the employee-based brand equity is straightforward, encouraging and guiding these outcomes is less so. This is because the brand knowledge employees are required to possess to realize such outcomes is considered tacit in nature. Furthermore, high contact service encounters can be characterized by their variability, making achievement of brand-aligned experiences for customers extremely challenging. Acknowledging these potential barriers, we draw upon multiple literature streams that describe employee learning, employee job perceptions, work motivation, and environment-person fit, to propose an employee brand internalization mechanism. This mechanism depicts how employees can transform brand knowledge in a way that enables them to develop brand-aligned attitudes and consistently exhibit brand aligned behavior. We present the theoretical foundation for this mechanism in the follow section.

### 2.2. Theoretical foundation for employee brand internalization

As suggested in the knowledge management literature, employees go through a knowledge development chain in order to succeed in their jobs and contribute to the organization's competitive advantage (Holsapple & Joshi, 2002; Shin, Holden, & Schmidt, 2001; Tseng, 2012). Specifically, employee knowledge development begins with employees acquiring and selecting appropriate information from both the internal and the external environment such as co-worker and customer feedback. Employees then internalize the selected information into their knowledge base and externalize the knowledge in their job performance to contribute to the organization's success (Shin et al., 2001; Tseng, 2012). This internalization is consistent with Job Characteristics Theory (JCT) (Hackman & Oldham, 1975, 1976) that suggests that employees develop critical psychological states such as perceived job knowledge, meaningfulness, and responsibility that engender subsequent personal and work outcomes based on their perceptions of the job design. If employees fail to internalize knowledge of the job or do not perceive the meaning or relevance of their jobs, they are less likely to be motivated to deliver good performance (Oldham & Hackman, 2010). In the context of hospitality brands where brand knowledge is considered to be more tacit in nature than explicit job procedures, employees' brand knowledge further requires employees' own accumulated experience, intuition, and judgment based on the brand information provided by the organization (King & Grace, 2009; Murray & Peyrefitte, 2007; Xiong et al., 2013). Thus, based on the knowledge management literature, JCT, and previous IBM studies, we propose that in order to motivate employees to develop extra-role brand-aligned attitudes and behavior, employees need to internalize the brand and their perceived brand knowledge (i.e., the extent to which employees comprehend the brand values and promise) serves as the first step in brand internalization.

### 2.3. Employee brand internalization factors

While it is necessary for employees to comprehend the brand and its values in order to behave in a brand-aligned manner, such knowledge does not guarantee that employees are committed to doing so. Both King and Grace (2012) and Xiong et al. (2013) found that the possession of brand knowledge does not guarantee positive brand attitudes and behavior. Rather, considering the voluntary nature of coveted brand-aligned attitudes and behavior (King & Grace, 2009; King et al., 2012; Xiong et al., 2018), based on motivation theories, we argue that in addition to employees perceiving that they possess the prerequisite brand knowledge, they also need to perceive a reason to justify their extra-role behavior and develop their willingness to go the extra mile (King & Grace, 2009; Ryan & Connell, 1989; Xiong et al., 2013). Without such internal motivations, employees may feel reluctant to use

their “soft skills” to contribute to the brand’s success (Baum, 2008; King & Grace, 2008; Parker, Wall, & Jackson, 1997). This brand motivation perspective is well-articulated in Xiong and King (2015) based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Organismic Integration Theory (OIT) (Ryan, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000). These theories suggest that the critical step in developing enduring internal motivations from external stimuli is to establish strong connections between the individual and the externally imposed goal/target (i.e., achieving brand success is meaningful to me). When individuals perceive such connections, they are more likely to internalize the target value, experience strong internal motivation (as if it is propelled by intrinsic stimuli), and yield higher performance and wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Without such connections, individuals may still perform to secure rewards or to avoid punishment, but this passive state tends to induce declining persistence and wellbeing. Following this theoretical thinking, we present two important employee-brand connections that have rarely been explored in relation to employee perceived brand knowledge, namely, employee perceived brand responsibility and employee perceived brand value fit.

Job responsibility is a well-discussed concept in organizational behavior literature. Defined as the extent to which an employee perceives his or her personal accountability for the job outcome, it is suggested that employees need to care about the job and take responsibility for the job outcome in order to develop a perpetuating cycle of positive employee work motivation and performance in the future (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Thus, it is widely accepted that higher perceived job responsibility contributes to higher job performance. However, the concept of job responsibility has been examined extensively in goods-manufacturing contexts (e.g., Brown, Pierce, & Crossley, 2014; Dreher, 1981; Marks, Mirvis, Hackett, & Grady, 1986), where employees tend to have task-based jobs with clearly prescribed job procedures, responsibilities, scheduling, deadlines, etc. In contrast, hospitality jobs tend to entail more than just adhering to formalized service standards and procedures. Rather, employees are often required to pay close attention to customers, handle unexpected situations, and are expected to provide prompt responses to various customer demands and complaints (Karatepe, Beirami, Bouzari, & Safavi, 2014; Lashley, 1995). Further in the context of hospitality branding, employees from different departments need to work together as a coherent team to deliver a consistent brand experience for customers. In these situations, although employees may have different specific tasks, they are all held to the same brand standards. Thus, employees need to look beyond their specific tasks and consider how their responsibilities affect the whole brand experience for customers.

Acknowledging the importance of identifying strong motivators for employees’ extra-role brand-aligned attitudes and behavior, Xiong et al. (2013) examined employee perceived brand role relevance (e.g., “With my behavior I can affect brand success.”) and perceived brand importance (e.g., “Our brand is an important asset of our organization”) as critical employee brand perceptions that promote their extra-role brand actions. In a similar vein, Xiong and King (2015) suggest employee perceived brand meaningfulness (e.g., “Delivering the brand promise is very meaningful to me”) is a strong motivator to employees’ brand supporting attitudes and behavior. However, these concepts focus on how employees perceive their own brand performance is relevant to the brand success, in contrast to taking personal responsibility for the brand. Thus, we argue that employee perceived brand responsibility is a unique and strong employee motivator that can sustain extra-role employee efforts over time. Consistent with the aforementioned employee knowledge development chain (Shin et al., 2001; Tseng, 2012) and JCT (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), we propose that employees need to have sufficient knowledge of the brand in order to develop personal responsibility to build the brand, as well as engender subsequent brand-aligned attitudes and behavior as reflected in employee-based brand equity. We present the following hypotheses:

**H1.** Employee perceived brand knowledge has a positive impact on

employee perceived brand responsibility.

**H2.** Employee perceived brand responsibility has a positive impact on employees’ brand-aligned attitudes and behavior.

In addition to employees possessing a sense of responsibility with respect to the brand, employee perception of their fit with the brand is also considered a necessary element in their brand internalization mechanism. Recent internal branding research has established the strong and positive role of employee-brand value fit (i.e., the extent to which an employee perceives a fit between the brand values and his or her personal values) in promoting positive employee brand attitudes, including brand-based role identity internalization (Morhart, Herzog, & Tomczak, 2009), employee pro-brand motivation (Xiong & King, 2015), organizational identification (Löhdorf & Diamantopoulos, 2014), and employee brand identification (Helm, Renk, & Mishra, 2016). These results are consistent with the extensive employee-organization value fit literature which suggests that higher employee-organization value fit is correlated with better employee-organization relationships (e.g., higher organizational identification, job satisfaction, and intention to stay) (Cable & Edwards, 2004; O’Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991; Schwartz, 1992).

However, despite being a well-established construct, antecedents that promotes employees to recognize and enhance their perceived value fit with the organization/brand has not been explored extensively. For instance, general person-organization fit literature has suggested several main factors that can contribute to the development of employee-organization fit such as job characteristics beliefs, employee personality, the intensity to which organizational values are emphasized, and the extent to which organizational socialization processes help employees to comprehend the values and norms (Chatman, 1989; Ehrhart, 2006). However, very few studies have provided empirical evidence to support such propositions. Thus, based on the employee learning process perspective, we argue that employee-brand value fit is an important employee brand internalization factor that requires employees’ sufficient knowledge of the brand promise and values. In addition, Ehrhart (2006) argues that employees tend to perceive a higher person-job fit when they know more about their jobs. This argument was developed based on signaling theory (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011; Spence, 1973) which suggests that job candidates use available job information to inform their attraction to the job. Employees’ evaluation of person-job fit follows a similar process whereby more information contributes to higher perceived job fit. Intuitively, higher job knowledge contributes to employees’ comfort level at performing their jobs, which helps them to perceive a better fit between the job and themselves. Indeed, through two customer service context studies, Ehrhart (2006) demonstrated that employees express higher fit when they know more about their jobs. Thus, following this logic, we argue that higher perceived brand knowledge will contribute to employee perceived brand value fit, presenting the following hypotheses:

**H3.** Employee perceived brand knowledge has a positive impact on employee perceived brand value fit.

**H4.** Employee perceived brand value fit has a positive impact on employee brand-aligned attitudes and behavior.

In summary, articulating how employees internalize the brand is crucial to motivate employees’ extra-role brand-aligned attitudes and behavior for hospitality organizations. Based on organizational behavior literature and the growing IBM research, we identified three critical factors and their relationships that enable employees to internalize the brand, namely *employee perceived brand knowledge*, *employee perceived brand responsibility*, and *employee-brand value fit*. Employee perceived brand knowledge should serve as the foundation for employees to perceive their responsibility in building the brand, as well as their perceived fit between the brand and themselves. While perceived brand

knowledge builds employees job knowledge base, the latter two factors are considered necessary to motivate employees' extra-role brand-aligned attitudes and behavior.

Although it is important to articulate how employees devote effort transforming tacit brand knowledge into specific brand-aligned performance, it is also necessary to identify organizational environmental factors that can stimulate such employee effort. Internal branding literature has identified several important organizational factors that can promote positive employee brand attitudes and behavior. For example, brand training and communication (Buil et al., 2016; Chang et al., 2012; Erkmen et al., 2017), brand-oriented or transformational leadership (Buil et al., 2018, 2016; Morhart et al., 2009; Vallaster & Chernatony, 2005) and brand-oriented Human Resource practices (Burmans, Jost-Benz, & Riley, 2009; Chang et al., 2012) have all been shown to have a positive impact on employees' brand attitudes and behavior. However, hospitality organizations can vary in size, resources, and practices, and many may not have the capacity to implement these aforementioned internal branding practices. Nevertheless, the organizational expectation for these employees to be brand-aligned still prevails. Therefore, consideration is given to an organizational factor that is not predicated on organizational size nor available resources. As such, we argue that all hospitality organizations should seek to build a strong, supportive and respectful organizational environment where employees develop quality relationships with the organization/brand, namely, relationship orientation.

#### 2.4. Relationship orientation

According to May, Gilson, and Harter (2004), individuals can derive meanings from positive interactions and enhanced social identities. When individuals receive rewarding interpersonal interactions in the workplace, they are more likely to experience a sense of purpose in their work. If employees do not perceive a friendly, trustworthy and cooperative organizational environment, any attempt to achieve positive organizational outcomes from employees are likely to fail. In the hospitality industry where jobs can be demanding and mentally draining (Kim, 2008), it is crucial that organizations treat employees as human beings (the "H" factor) in order to build positive organization-employee exchanges (King & Grace, 2009). Thus, relationship orientation, defined as *the extent to which an employee perceives the organization exhibits positive behaviors towards employees* (King & Grace, 2012, p. 474), is identified as an organizational factor that can stimulate employee brand internalization.

Relationship orientation emphasizes that organizational success is contingent on a reciprocal relationship between employees and the organization (King & Grace, 2009). This notion evolved from social exchange theory (He, Li, & Harris, 2012; Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996) which suggests that when employees perceive they are being treated with trust and respect, they are more likely to reciprocate to the organization with superior performance through actively learning, as well as connecting and identifying with the organization/brand. Thus, organizations need to care for the welfare of employees, communicate well, and be cooperative to establish successful organization-employee relationships that enable positive employee outcomes (Judge, Piccolo, & Iles, 2004; Wallace & de Chernatony, 2009). More recent studies have repeatedly demonstrated the importance of building positive organization-employee relationships. For instance, Lu, Capezio, Restubog, Garcia, and Wang (2016) showed that employees are more likely to achieve service excellence through relational psychological contracts (e.g., an employee believes his/her employment with the organization is long-term, with growth potential and job security, and non-monetary benefits) than transactional psychological contracts (e.g., an employee believes his/her employment with the organization is short-term, narrow-focused, highly materialistic and monetarily focused). In fact, transactional psychological contracts were shown to have a negative relationship with employees' service performance, both in-role and

extra-role (Lu et al., 2016; Zagenczyk, Restubog, Kiewitz, Kiazad, & Tang, 2014).

Thus, with a high level of relationship orientation, employees are more likely to reciprocate by developing higher perceived responsibility in achieving brand success. This supportive and respectful environment can also enhance the organizational socialization process, which helps employees to identify and enhance their perceived value fit with the brand (Ehrhart, 2006). In addition, when there is a strong relationship orientation in an organization, employees are likely to seek and receive support from the organizational environment (e.g., supervisors and co-workers) (Xiong & King, 2018). As a result, employees are more likely to internalize the brand values by obtaining appropriate brand knowledge, developing a sense of personal responsibility of building the brand, as well as recognizing and enhancing value fit with the brand. Thus, we present the following hypotheses:

**H5.** Relationship orientation has a positive impact on employee perceived brand knowledge.

**H6.** Relationship orientation has a positive impact on employee perceived brand responsibility.

**H7.** Relationship orientation has a positive impact on employee perceived brand value fit.

As relationships develop over time, influenced by frequency of interaction, as well as perceived level of investment, it is important to acknowledge that in a hospitality organization, by nature of employee position, relationship orientation may be perceived differently by employees as a result of their job tenure (years working for the brand), job status (part-time or full-time) or positions within the organization (from entry positions to senior management) (King, 2010). Thus, these attributes are controlled for in this study to accentuate the main effects among focal concepts has reflected in the seven hypotheses and shown in Fig. 1.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Measures

Relationship orientation emphasizes employee perception that they are treated with respect and dignity so that they will be more likely to reciprocate with discretionary brand building effort (Corace, 2007). We adopted six measurement items from King and Grace (2012) focusing on employees perceiving a respectful and supportive organization environment to measure relationship orientation. An example item is "I feel that I am a respected and valued member of the organization I work for". Employee perceived brand knowledge was measured with three items from Piehler et al. (2016). An example item is "I know what our organization's brand stands for". Employee perceived brand responsibility reflects how employees perceive their responsibility with respect to achieving the organization/brand's success. We adopted three items from the job characteristics survey (Hackman & Oldham, 1975) and adapted them for an internal branding context. An example item is "Whether or not the brand promise is delivered is clearly my responsibility". Employee perceived brand value fit is captured through respondents' overall evaluation of the brand-self value fit following previous literature (e.g., Morhart et al., 2009). Three reflective items were adopted from person-organization fit studies by O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) and Moynihan and Pandey (2008). They were further adjusted to fit an internal branding context. An example item is "My values are similar to those represented by the brand."

Further, we adopted the employee-based brand equity scale (11 items) developed by King et al. (2012) to measure employees' brand-aligned attitudes and behavior. Following King et al. (2012) and Xiong et al. (2013), this construct is operationalized as a higher-order construct with three dimensions namely, brand endorsement (i.e., positive external communication), brand allegiance (the desire to maintain

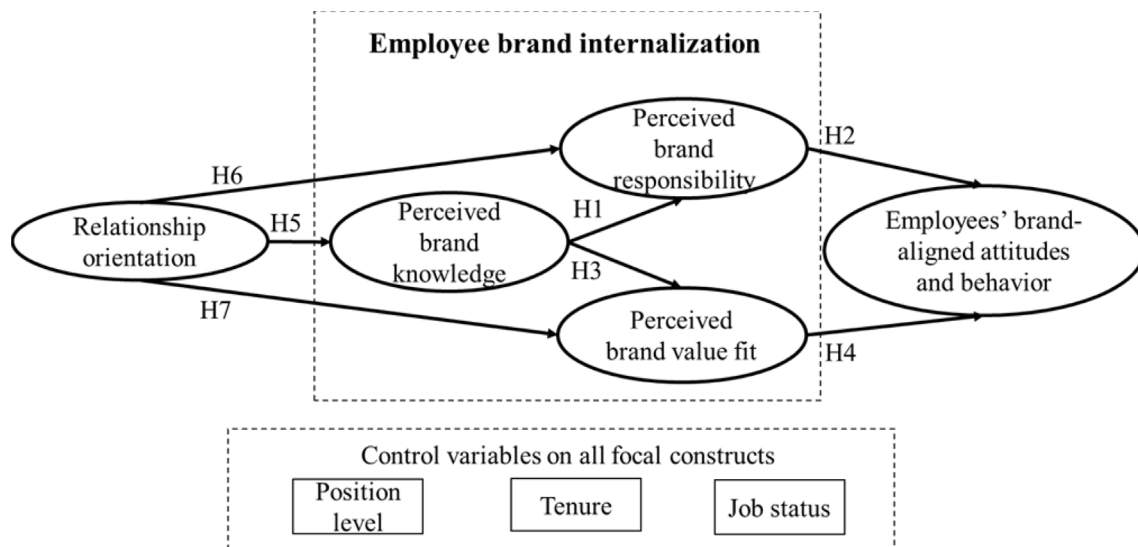


Fig. 1. Conceptual model of employee brand internalization.

relationship), and brand consistent behavior. This measurement scale has demonstrated good reliability in King et al. (2012) with Cronbach's alpha value of 0.89, and Xiong et al. (2013) with Cronbach's alpha value of 0.90. Following previous studies, this measurement was operationalized as a second-order construct.

In order to evaluate the face validity of adopted measurement items, we conducted a pilot study with a convenience sample, from the authors' informal network, of 56 service employees who have similar characteristics to those of the target population. These respondents did not perceive any problems with completing the survey or with any survey items. We also conducted Bartlett's test of sphericity and the results suggested that correlations among items are adequate to generate valid factor structures. Thus, a total of 26 measurement items along with demographic and job classification questions were included in the final online survey questionnaire. Measurement items for focal constructs were measured on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7).

### 3.2. Sample and procedures

In order to obtain hospitality employee insights, we worked with a marketing research firm to solicit responses from US based hotel employees. The examination of a hotel context is considered necessary for two main reasons. First, as international hotel brands are actively expanding to new territories, it is critical to maintain the brand promise across markets to avoid potential customer confusion or dissatisfaction (Huang & Cai, 2015). Employees, being the conduit between a brand promise and a brand reality, play a significant role in the success of such brand expansions. Second, new types of hotel brands, such as boutique and lifestyle hotels are increasingly gaining popularity in the marketplace (Jones, Day, & Quadri-Felitti, 2013). Unlike the "cookie-cutter" chain brands, these new types of hotel brands emphasize unique brand experiences for customers in seeking to stand out from the crowd (Aggett, 2007). Building a sustainable competitive advantage through such distinctive appeals of independent hotels, or any branded hotel for that matter, can only be achieved to the extent that employees are able to demonstrate these brand values to customers during service encounters. Thus, the understanding of how hotel employees develop brand-aligned attitudes and behaviors through internalizing the brand is considered a critical priority for hotel brands to achieve success (Hartline & Jones, 1996; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007).

Working with a marketing research firm, we were able to request current US based employees as the sampling frame. An online

questionnaire was developed and hosted through the marketing firm's survey website. The marketing research firm identified 7421 panel members that fit our criteria and sent email requests with the survey link to these identified US based hotel employees. 420 employees attempted the survey, and 186 valid responses with no missing values were collected, rendering a 44 percent response rate. Although it is commonly held that a bigger sample size is more likely to produce better results for testing structural models, it is necessary to consider model complexity and model characteristics in deciding an appropriate sample size (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). According to Iacobucci (2010), when variables are reliable and effects are strong, a smaller sample can be adequate for a structural equation modeling analysis. She further suggested that a sample size of 150 should be sufficient for a proper solution. Since most of the items in the current study are adopted from existing scales with good measurement reliability and validity, the total of 186 valid responses collected are deemed acceptable to be used in the following analysis. Out of the 186 valid responses, 59.7 percent of the respondents were female. Average age was 36.9 (s.d. 13.5), with 50.5 percent of respondents below the age of 33. 65.6 percent of the respondents work in their current hotels full-time and 39.6 percent of the participants have worked there for one to three years. 46.2 percent of all participants were holding entry level positions (e.g., customer service agent, assistant front desk agent, etc.). 32.8 percent of the hotels were three-star or below, 41.4 percent were four-star hotels, and 25.8 percent were five-star and above. We have included the profile of respondents in Table 1.

To address common method bias issues due to the self-report nature of surveys, following MacKenzie and Podsakoff (2012) and Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003), we applied several measures in survey design and data analysis to evaluate and limit common method bias. First, distributing and collecting surveys through a third-party marketing firm helped ensure anonymity and confidentiality of responses, which has been shown to limit social desirability effect. Second, a four-item marker variable (intention to purchase foreign products) that is not theoretically related to the focal constructs was included to assess common method variance. Third, two attention filter questions were embedded in the online survey. Respondents who failed to select the designated responses (e.g., "please select *somewhat disagree* to proceed") were automatically dropped by the online survey system. Such responses were not included in the final dataset as these respondents might not have paid sufficient attention to survey questions as intended. We also provided additional descriptions of focal constructs and context such as brand promise and brand-aligned

**Table 1**  
Respondent profile (N = 186).

Variable	Results	Response details (percentage)
Gender	Male	40.3
	Female	59.7
Age	Average: 36.9 (s.d.:13.5)	
	Length of employment	
Length of employment	Less than 1 year	9.7
	1–3 years	36.6
	3–5 years	21.5
	More than 5 years	32.3
Work status	Casual	4.8
	Part time	29.6
	Full time	65.6
Position classification	Entry level	46.2
	Supervisor	26.9
	Middle management	19.9
	Senior Management	7
Star ranking	Six Star and beyond	2.7
	Five Star	23.1
	Four Star	41.4
	Three Star	23.7
	Two Star	6.5
	One Star	2.7

performance in respective survey questions to help reduce respondents' cognitive effort in understanding questions. We further performed a series of t-tests and chi-square tests to evaluate potential non-response bias between responses from the first 50 respondents and the last 50 respondents. No significant difference was found.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Measurement model check and hypothesis testing

As described above, employee brand-aligned attitudes and behavior (i.e., employee-based brand equity) was operationalized as a second-order construct in the conceptual model. Although the adoption of a higher-order model can provide a parsimonious description of theoretical relationships, a good fit of the corresponding first-order model needs to be achieved before applying a higher-order model analysis (Marsh, 1991). Thus, we checked both the first-order and second-order based measurement models using AMOS 23 with maximum likelihood estimation. The first-order based measurement model yielded a good model fit with  $\chi^2 = 562.789$  ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $df = 277$ );  $\chi^2/df = 2.03$ , CFI = 0.932, TFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.075, SRMR = 0.052. Details of the measurement items and corresponding properties in the rigorous first-order based model are listed in Appendix 1. As shown in Appendix 1, Tables 2 and 3, all item loading values were above 0.6, all composite reliability (CR) values were above 0.8, and all average variance extracted (AVE) values with one exception of perceived brand responsibility (AVE = 0.59) were above 0.6. Thus, convergent validity was supported (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2006). Discriminant validity was established as the square roots of each factor AVE scores (as shown in the correlation matrix bold diagonals) are larger than the respective between-construct correlations

**Table 2**  
First-order measurement model check.

	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Relationship orientation	0.925	0.674	<b>0.821</b>						
2. Brand knowledge	0.902	0.753	0.631	<b>0.868</b>					
3. Brand responsibility	0.812	0.592	0.483	0.661	<b>0.769</b>				
4. Brand endorsement	0.917	0.734	0.64	0.624	0.465	<b>0.857</b>			
5. Brand consistent behavior	0.883	0.716	0.559	0.543	0.825	0.781	<b>0.846</b>		
6. Brand allegiance	0.9	0.695	0.653	0.674	0.694	0.613	0.49	<b>0.834</b>	
7. Brand value fit	0.924	0.803	0.57	0.659	0.59	0.682	0.65	0.584	<b>0.896</b>

NOTE: CR refers to composite reliability. AVE refers to average variance extracted.

**Table 3**  
Second-order measurement model check.

	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5
1. Brand value fit	0.924	0.802	<b>0.896</b>				
2. Relationship Orientation	0.925	0.674	0.653	<b>0.821</b>			
3. Brand knowledge	0.902	0.753	0.585	0.631	<b>0.868</b>		
4. Brand responsibility	0.813	0.593	0.493	0.483	0.569	<b>0.770</b>	
5. EBE	0.885	0.721	0.795	0.718	0.721	0.718	<b>0.849</b>

Note: EBE refers to Employee-based brand equity, which measures employee brand-aligned attitudes and behavior.

(Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2006; Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Common method bias was assessed through Harman's one-factor test by subjecting all items to an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Five factors were revealed and none of the factors explained more than half of the variance. In addition, the correlations between the marketer variable and the focal constructs ranged from 0.059 to 0.311, suggesting limited common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

With a good fit achieved with the first-order measurement model, we further checked the measurement model fit with employee-based brand equity being operationalized as a higher-order construct. This second-order based model also yielded a good model fit with  $\chi^2 = 608.974$  ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $df = 285$ );  $\chi^2/df = 2.14$ , CFI = 0.923, TLI = 0.912, RMSEA = 0.078, SRMR = 0.064). Convergent and discriminant validity were confirmed using the same evaluation methods as in the first-order based measurement model check above. A detailed look at CRs, AVEs, and between-construct correlations is presented in Table 3. With a good measurement model achieved, the seven hypotheses were examined through a structural equation model using AMOS 23 with maximum likelihood estimation.

With respect to hypothesis testing, in addition to the focal constructs, we included three control variables, namely, employees' current position level (from entry level to senior management), job status (part-time or full-time), and tenure (years working for the brand). The structural model fit statistics are  $\chi^2 = 843.196$  ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $df = 408$ );  $\chi^2/df = 2.07$ ; CFI = 0.91; TLI = 0.90; RMSEA = 0.076; SRMR = 0.066. All hypotheses were supported and strong effects among the constructs were identified as shown in Table 4.

This conceptual model explains 81.7 percent of variance in employees' brand-aligned attitudes and behavior (as measured by employee-based brand equity), 44.1 percent of variance in brand knowledge, 51.7 percent of variance in brand value fit, and 40.4 percent of variance in brand responsibility. Employee perceptions of a supportive and respectful organizational environment (i.e., relationship orientation) directly influenced the employee brand internalization mechanism in terms of what employees know about the brand ( $\beta = .62$ ), their perceived personal responsibility to the brand's success ( $\beta = 0.23$ ), and their assessment as to how their personal values fit with the brand's values ( $\beta = 0.47$ ). Employee perceived brand knowledge contributed to perceived brand responsibility ( $\beta = 0.48$ ), and perceived brand value fit ( $\beta = 0.33$ ). In addition, all of the brand internalization

**Table 4**  
Path coefficients, t-value, and significance.

Hypothesized paths	coefficient	t-value	p	Result
H1: Brand knowledge → Brand responsibility	.48	4.65	***	Supported
H2: Brand responsibility → EBE	.46	6.56	***	Supported
H3: Brand knowledge → Brand value fit	.33	3.88	***	Supported
H4: Brand value fit → EBE	.59	8.04	***	Supported
H5: Relationship Orientation → Brand knowledge	.62	8.15	***	Supported
H6: Relationship Orientation → Brand responsibility	.23	2.30	*	Supported
H7: Relationship Orientation → Brand value fit	.43	5.43	***	supported

Note: \*\*\* refers to  $p < 0.001$ ; \* refers to  $p < 0.05$ ; EBE refers to employee-based brand equity which measures employees' brand-aligned attitudes and behavior.

factors contributed to employees' brand-aligned attitudes and behavior, showing the strength of the proposed employee brand internalization mechanism in a nomological network.

With respect to control variables, position level showed a positive impact on relationship orientation ( $\beta = 0.28$ ,  $t = 3.57$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that employees with higher level positions are more likely to perceive a supportive and respectful organizational environment. In addition, job status showed a positive impact on perceived brand knowledge ( $\beta = 0.17$ ,  $t = 2.56$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), suggesting employees with full time job positions are more likely to have better brand knowledge. In addition, the Fig. 1 also implies indirect effects from relationship orientation and employee perceived brand knowledge on employees' brand-aligned attitudes and behavior. Thus, we performed a post-hoc analysis to examine the implied indirect effects using a bias-corrected bootstrap method to generate confidence intervals for statistical inference in mediation analysis (MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004). The results suggest that relationship orientation has a significant indirect effect (90% C.I. [0.28, 0.61]),  $p < 0.05$  on employees' brand aligned attitudes and behavior. Perceived brand knowledge also has an indirect effect on employees' brand aligned attitudes and behavior (90% C.I. [0.21, 0.51]),  $p < 0.05$ .

## 5. Discussion and implications

The findings of this study provide strong empirical evidence supporting the critical role of employee brand internalization. When employees perceive that the organization trusts them to do a good job and shows them respect, they are more likely to internalize the brand knowledge, perceive responsibility for the brand's success and feel that their values align with the brand. As a result, employee-based brand equity is realized as reflected in extra-role employee brand-aligned attitudes and behavior. The current research presents several theoretical contributions to hospitality marketing and management research.

First, drawing upon Job Characteristics Theory (JCT), Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and its sub theory, Organismic Integration Theory, as well as the person-job fit literature, we propose and test a nomological network of employee brand internalization. Without understanding how employees internalize the brand, it is difficult for organizations to identify whether employees are aware of the brand's vision and the extent of employee brand engagement. Although this argument has been explored by several IBM studies, our findings provide consistent and strong empirical evidence to solidify the brand internalization mechanism. For example, Morhart et al. (2009) demonstrated that employees are more likely to deliver both in-role and extra-role behaviors that support the brand when they develop role identity internalization (i.e., employees internalize their role identity as brand representatives). However, they treated the internalization mechanism as one general construct based on social identity theory without

articulating factors composing this mechanism. Chang et al. (2012) introduced a concept of employee brand psychological ownership and suggested similar reflective factors including perceived responsibility in maintaining the brand image, the effectiveness/competency in conveying brand values to customers, and the congruence between the brand image and the employees. However, such factors were revealed through a statistical approach (exploratory factor analysis) based on data collected for brand psychological ownership. The current research, through a more comprehensive and multiple theoretical lens, not only supported, but also extended, these exploratory findings by articulating three critical employee psychological states that reflect employee brand internalization as evidenced with strong empirical results.

Second, this research further enriched comprehension of the mechanism of employee brand internalization, by revealing the links among the three psychological states as well as the significant impact of employee perceived brand value fit and brand responsibility on employees' brand-aligned attitudes and behavior. The results support the fundamental role of employee perceived brand knowledge informing their perceived fit with the brand as reflected in the employee-job fit literature, as well as their perceived responsibility towards the brand as reflected in JCT. In particular, extending employees' general responsibility for their job that is prescribed by organizations, employee perceived brand responsibility entails employees prescribing their own specific responsibilities based on their knowledge of the brand to create brand-aligned experiences for customers. When employees perceive they are responsible for brand success, they are more likely to deliver brand-aligned performance. Further, recent internal branding literature has shown the strong role that employee-brand value fit plays in aligning employees' attitudes and behavior with the brand (e.g., Löhndorf & Diamantopoulos, 2014; Xiong & King, 2015). We contribute to this line of research by demonstrating two significant predictors of employee-brand value fit, namely employee perceived brand knowledge directly as well as relationship orientation, both directly and indirectly.

Third, we demonstrate that a supportive and respectful environment (i.e., relationship orientation) can serve as a catalyst for employee brand internalization and subsequent positive employee attitudes and behavior. Previous research has consistently adopted specific IBM practices as antecedents to engender employee brand-aligned attitudes and behavior, such as leadership (Buil et al., 2018, 2016; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2005), internal communication (Chang et al., 2012; Erkmen et al., 2017), and brand-oriented Human Resource practices (Burmman et al., 2009; Chang et al., 2012). While such assessments are meaningful, they stopped short in assessing employee perceptions of such efforts. Such a paucity, which has been addressed in this study, was considered important to understand why employees respond in a brand-aligned manner in their performance. Additionally, since specific IBM initiatives may vary across organizations and change overtime, the examination of how employees perceive the organizational environment facilitates, or hinders, their brand related actions were deemed important to enhance the generalizability of the results. Regardless of organizational size or availability of resources, the organizational environment exists in all workplaces. Therefore, by demonstrating the strong predictive power of relationship orientation, the results of this study show that tacit organizational cues, which are not resource-dependent, play just as an important role as the more traditional explicit IBM practices that seek to influence employee attitudes and behavior towards the brand. In doing so our results reinforce the findings of King and Grace (2010) as well as Wallace and de Chernatony (2011), who emphasize the importance of human "H" factor, treating employees as human beings, as a critical element in the IBM process.

This research also offers several valuable practical insights for hospitality organizations to achieve and sustain a competitive advantage through a brand-aligned workforce. First, the organizational environment plays a critical role in guiding employees' attitudes and behaviors. A recent news report revealed that some housekeeping

employees didn't clean guestrooms according to the hotel standards in several prominent five-star international hotels in China. A customer-recorded video shows an employee cleaning a glass with a used bathroom towel (USATODAY, 2018). This case suggests that just having service standards and training may not be sufficient to guarantee quality employee performance. Rather, based on the results of this study, we suggest that in addition to having training and standard operating procedures, hospitality organizations need to emphasize the “human” factor by treating their employees with respect and support in order to achieve positive social exchanges with employees. When employees perceive they are a part of something bigger (e.g., advancing the brand values to everyone), being treated with respect and trust, and are immersed in a brand excellence culture, they are more likely to guide their performance voluntarily as the organization intended.

Furthermore, in order to help employees to internalize the appropriate brand values, organizations should systematically integrate these brand values, as well as articulate the desired employee attitudes and behavior, in all employee touch points (e.g., hiring, training, incentives, reporting, evaluation programs, promotion and retention). For instance, internal brand ambassador programs that highlight and reward brand-aligned performance should be encouraged (Schmidt & Baumgarth, 2018). Environmental cues, such as decorations in front and back offices, internal communication newsletters, etc. should also consider integrating the specific brand values to reinforce employees' positive brand perceptions. This implication is timely considering that the US hotel industry in recent years has introduced many new unique brands that target growing market segments as well as to combat the growing competition from Airbnb. For example, Marriott introduced the Moxy brand to cater to millennial travelers who seek affordable, yet stylish, hotel experiences. In a similar vein, Hilton Worldwide introduced Tru brand in 2016 as well. In order to deliver the Now & Wow brand experience to customers, Moxy Hotels emphasize cultivating “high energy, interesting people and an energetic crew” that are aligned with the brand values. This is further reflected in their collaboration with an award-winning improv theatre group in developing a unique employee training program to enhance the fun for both guest staying experiences and employee work experiences (Hotel Business, 2018). Such activities provide strong organization environmental cues that guide employees' brand internalization and subsequent brand-aligned performance.

Second, given the important role of employee perceived brand responsibility, managers should help employees to acknowledge that the brand success is everyone's responsibility through training and communication. For example, brand celebrations, employee appreciation events, sharing excellent brand-aligned performance stories throughout the organization should help build employees' brand competency and enhance their perceived responsibility to the brand's success. In addition, although employees may prescribe their own specific responsibilities with respect to building the brand, it is also necessary to measure their brand-aligned performance and emphasize employee accountability. The employee-based brand equity scale used in this study can be integrated into the evaluation metrics of overall employee performance and, when combined with customer metrics, be shared with employees to solidify employee perceived brand responsibility.

Further, consistently, employee perceived brand value fit is shown to be another critical brand internalization factor. Considering employees with similar values as those of the brand are more likely to deliver the brand in an authentic manner, we suggest that hospitality organizations seek to hire the “right” employees and also acknowledge that “right” employees can be cultivated through a respectful and supportive environment. For example, employees need to feel that they are respected and valued members of the organization, and to be able to trust the management. Consistent with Xiong and King (2018), this suggests that in addition to brand training that provides employees with cognitive knowledge of the brand, it is also necessary to emphasize the emotional/informal links between employees and management. Thus, organizations may seek to apply additional key performance indicators

for measuring managers' effectiveness including their emotional intelligence and their ability to build a supportive and respectful environment for their subordinates to incentivize such practices.

## 6. Limitations and future research

With strong results revealing the employee brand internalization mechanism, we suggest further examination of boundary conditions that can affect such a process. Potential factors including employee personalities, generational differences, and organizational characteristics may serve as moderators or mediators. For example, Xiong and King (2018) suggest that employees with a high proactive personality are less likely to take advantage of formal organizational support initiatives to engender brand consistent behaviors, compared to more passive employees. However, this proactivity may create problems for brands as these employees may not possess appropriate brand knowledge to guide their performance. It would be interesting to explore if a strong relationship orientation can help mitigate this potential negative impact and help employees to act in a proactive but also brand-aligned manner.

Considering the growing multi-generational workforce in hospitality organizations, it would also be interesting to further examine how employees of different generations (i.e., baby boomers, generation X, generation Y) internalize the brand and exhibit employee brand-aligned performance (e.g., King, Murillo, & Lee, 2017; Solnet & Hood, 2008). Park and Gursoy (2012) found that compared to older generations, employees of younger generations tend to place greater value on work-life balance and have lower level of work engagement. In contrast, King et al. (2017) suggested that generational differences may not be as apparent in employees when considering the role of IBM influencing attitudes and behavior. However, it is unclear whether generational differences will affect the relationship orientation→brand internalization→employee brand-aligned attitudes and behavior model. For instance, perceived fit with the brand value may play a more important role in motivating younger employees than rewards and compensation.

Although working with a marketing firm offers efficiency and convenience of data collection from a broad US based hotel employee pool, this method presents several limitations. For example, although we asked respondents to provide information regarding the hotels they work for, due to privacy and employment contract concerns, many respondents chose not to provide such information. Thus, we were not able to identify the location or number of distinctive hotels included in the dataset, limiting our ability to gain further insight of different brands. Future studies are encouraged to identify specific hotel brands and examine how more specific internal branding measures and types of brand (e.g., chain brands and independent brands) affect employee's brand internalization and their subsequent brand attitudes and behavior.

Given the self-report survey design in this study, future studies should attempt to collect data from different sources such as managerial ratings of employee performance. Gathering longitudinal data could also help researchers further address common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Future studies should also attempt to include bigger samples in different contexts to further validate and extend the current theoretical model. In addition, considering the strong role of relationship orientation, another exciting future research area is to investigate what internal branding initiatives (e.g., leadership training, manager awards) can help build such a supportive and respectful environment. For example, Ghosh and Khatri (2018) emphasized the transforming role of servant leadership in shaping the organizational climate in the hospitality sector as employees are more likely to achieve service excellence when they perceive excellent service from their managers. Further, although employee perceived brand value fit is identified as an important brand internalization factor, the reflective measurement adopted in this study can be limiting as a typical service brand is multi-dimensional. An overall reflective evaluation of the brand-employee



value fit may not be accurate in capturing the fit between each of the value dimensions. For example, employees who perceive a different level of fit with each value may reveal a similar overall brand value fit. Thus, further studies are encouraged to explore measuring employee-

brand value fit with a formative measurement approach (e.g., Edwards & Cable, 2009; Zhang & Bloemer, 2008) and identify the specific brand dimensions that really drive or hinder employee-brand value fit.

## Appendix 1

### Construct measurements and properties in the first-order based model.

Item	Description	Standardized loading	t-value ***
<i>Relationship Orientation (coded as RO)</i>			
RO1	I feel that I am a respected and valued member of the organization I work for	.856	–
RO2	I feel that I can trust the management of the organization I work for	.846	14.714
RO3	I feel that the organization I work for trusts me to do a good job	.669	10.294
RO4	I feel that the organization I work for is considerate, (to the best of their ability) of the impact their decisions have on me	.827	14.138
RO5	I feel that the organization I work for is considerate, (to the best of their ability) of the impact their decisions have on my role	.823	14.038
RO6	I feel that the organization I work for treats me like a human being (e.g. with respect, is cooperative, communicates well)	.886	15.943
<i>Employee perceived brand knowledge (coded as BK)</i>			
BK1	I know what our organization's brand stands for	.861	–
BK2	I know our organization's brand promise	.874	15.054
BK3	I know how my hotel's brand affects my day-to-day work	.870	14.957
<i>Employee perceived brand responsibility (coded as RSP)</i>			
RSP1	I feel a very high degree of personal responsibility for delivering the brand promise	.836	–
RSP2	I feel I should personally take the credit or blame for my role in delivering the brand promise	.762	10.314
RSP3	Whether or not the brand promise is delivered is clearly my responsibility	.704	9.543
<i>Employee perceived brand value fit (coded as FIT)</i>			
FIT1	Since joining this hotel, my personal values and those of the hotel's brand have become more similar	.840	–
FIT2	The reason I prefer this hotel's brand to others is because of what it stands for, its value	.931	16.874
FIT3	My values are similar to those represented by the hotel's brand	.915	16.446
<i>Employee-based brand equity (brand endorsement coded as WOM, brand consistent behavior coded as BEH, and brand allegiance coded as STAY)</i>			
WOM1	I say positive things about the organization's brand I work for to others	.885	–
WOM2	I would recommend the organization's brand I work for to someone who seeks my advice	.826	15.048
WOM3	I enjoy talking about the organization's brand I work for to others	.793	13.964
WOM4	I talk positively about the organization's brand I work for to others	.917	18.617
BEH1	I demonstrate behaviors that are consistent with my organization's brand promise	.886	14.63
BEH2	I show extra initiative to ensure my behavior remains consistent with the brand promise of the organization I work for	.839	–
BEH3	I am always interested to learn about my organization's brand and what it means to me in my role	.811	12.956
STAY1	I plan to be with the brand I work for, for a while	.868	–
STAY2	I plan to be with the brand I work for 5 years from now	.849	15.293
STAY3	I would turn down an offer from another organization if it came tomorrow	.660	10.269
STAY4	I plan to stay with the organization's brand	.932	18.116

Notes: \*\*\* means  $p < 0.01$ ; - means paths set to 1.

## References

- Aggett, M. (2007). What has influenced growth in the UK's boutique hotel sector? *Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 19(2), 169–177.
- Anderson, J. C., & Gerbing, D. W. (1988). Structural equation modeling in practice: A review and recommended two-step approach. *Psychological Bulletin*, 103(3), 411–423.
- Baum, T. (2006). Reflections on the nature of skills in the experience economy: Challenging traditional skills models in hospitality. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 13(2), 124–135.
- Baum, T. (2008). Implications of hospitality and tourism labour markets for talent management strategies. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 20(7), 720–729.
- Berry, L. L. (2000). Cultivating service brand equity. *Academy of Marketing Science*, 28(1), 128–137.
- Brodie, R. J., Whitmore, J. R. M., & Brush, G. J. (2009). Investigating the service brand: A customer value perspective. *Journal of Business Research*, 62, 345–355.
- Brown, G., Pierce, J. L., & Crossley, C. (2014). Toward an understanding of the development of ownership feelings. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 35(3), 318–338.
- Buil, I., Martínez, E., & Matute, J. (2016). From internal brand management to organizational citizenship behaviours: Evidence from frontline employees in the hotel industry. *Tourism Management*, 57, 256–271.
- Buil, I., Martínez, E., & Matute, J. (2018). Transformational leadership and employee performance: The role of identification, engagement and proactive personality. *International Journal of Hospitality Management* (in press).
- Burmann, C., Jost-Benz, M., & Riley, N. (2009). Towards an identity-based brand equity model. *Journal of Business Research*, 62(3), 390–397.
- Cable, D. M., & Edwards, J. R. (2004). Complementary and supplementary fit: A theoretical and empirical integration. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89, 822–834.
- Chang, A., Chiang, H.-H., & Han, T.-S. (2012). A multilevel investigation of relationships among brand-centered HRM, brand psychological ownership, brand citizenship behaviors, and customer satisfaction. *European Journal of Marketing*, 46(5), 626–662.
- Chatman, J. A. (1989). Improving interactional organizational research: A model of person-organization fit. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(3), 333–349.
- Chen, X., Lam, L. W., & Zou, H. (2011). Antecedents and performance consequences of integrated brand management in China: An exploratory study. *Journal of Global Marketing*, 24(2), 167–180.
- Connelly, B. L., Certo, S. T., Ireland, R. D., & Reutzel, C. R. (2011). Signaling theory: A review and assessment. *Journal of Management*, 37(1), 39–67.
- Corace, C. J. (2007). Engagement – enrolling the quiet majority. *Organization Development Journal*, 25(2), 171–175.
- Dreher, G. F. (1981). Predicting the salary satisfaction of exempt employees. *Personnel Psychology*, 34(3), 579–589.
- Edwards, J. R., & Cable, D. M. (2009). The value of value congruence. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 94(3), 654.
- Ehrhart, K. H. (2006). Job characteristic beliefs and personality as antecedents of subjective person-job fit. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 21(2), 193–226.
- Erkmen, E., Hancer, M., & Leong, J. K. (2017). How internal branding process really pays off through brand trust. *Tourism Analysis*, 22(3), 309–322.
- Fornell, C. R., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Structural equation models with unobserved variables and measurement error: Algebra and statistics. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 18(3), 382–388.
- Ghosh, K., & Khatri, N. (2018). Does servant leadership work in hospitality sector: A representative study in the hotel organizations. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 37, 117–127.
- Grace, D., & O'Cass, A. (2005). Service branding: Consumer verdicts on service brands. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 12(2), 125–139.
- Hackman, J. R., & Oldham, G. R. (1975). Development of the job diagnostic survey.

- Journal of Applied Psychology*, 60(2), 159–170.
- Hackman, J. R., & Oldham, G. R. (1976). Motivation through the design of work: Test of a theory. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 16(2), 250–279.
- Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., Anderson, R. E., & Tatham, R. L. L. (2006). *Multivariate data analysis*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Hartline, M. D., & Jones, K. C. (1996). Employee performance cues in a hotel service environment: Influence on perceived service quality, value, and word-of-mouth intentions. *Journal of Business Research*, 35(3), 207–215.
- Hartline, M. D., Maxham, J. G., & McKee, D. O. (2000). Corridors of influence in the dissemination of customer-oriented strategy to customer contact service employees. *Journal of Marketing*, 64(2), 35–50.
- He, H., Li, Y., & Harris, L. (2012). Social identity perspective on brand loyalty. *Journal of Business Research*, 65, 648–657.
- Helm, S. V., Renk, U., & Mishra, A. (2016). Exploring the impact of employees' self-concept, brand identification and brand pride on brand citizenship behaviors. *European Journal of Marketing*, 50(1/2), 58–77.
- Henkel, S., Tomczak, T., Heitmann, M., & Herrmann, A. (2007). Managing brand consistent employee behaviour: Relevance and managerial control of behavioural branding. *The Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 16(5), 310–320.
- Holsapple, C. W., & Joshi, K. D. (2002). Knowledge manipulation activities: Results of a delphi study. *Information & Management*, 39(6), 477–490.
- Hotel Business (May 8, 2018). *Moxy hotels partners with upright citizens brigade for employee crew training*. Retrieved on March 2, 2019 from <https://www.hotelbusiness.com/moxy-hotels-partners-with-upright-citizens-brigade-for-employee-crew-training/>.
- Huang, Z. J., & Cai, L. A. (2015). Modeling consumer-based brand equity for multi-national hotel brands—When hosts become guests. *Tourism Management*, 46, 431–443.
- Hu, L. T., & Bentler, P. M. (1999). Cutoff criteria for fit indexes in covariance structure analysis: Conventional criteria versus new alternatives. *Structural Equation Modeling: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 6(1), 1–55.
- Iacobucci, D. (2010). Structural equations modeling: Fit indices, sample size, and advanced topics. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 20(1), 90–98.
- Jones, D. L., Day, J., & Quadri-Felitti, D. (2013). Emerging definitions of boutique and lifestyle hotels: A delphi study. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 30(7), 715–731.
- Judge, T. A., Piccolo, R. F., & Iles, R. (2004). The forgotten ones? The validity of consideration and initiating structure in leadership research. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(36–51).
- Karatepe, O. M., Beirami, E., Bouzari, M., & Safavi, H. P. (2014). Does work engagement mediate the effects of challenge stressors on job outcomes? Evidence from the hotel industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 36, 14–22.
- Keller, K. L. (1998). *Strategic brand management: Building, measuring, and managing brand equity*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Kim, H. J. (2008). Hotel service providers' emotional labor: The antecedents and effects on burnout. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 27(2), 151–161.
- Kim, W. G., Jin-Sun, B., & Kim, H. J. (2008). Multidimensional customer-based brand equity and its consequences in midpriced hotels. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 32(2), 235–254.
- King, C. (2010). "One size doesn't fit all" Tourism and hospitality employees' response to internal brand management. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 22(4), 517–534.
- King, C. (2017). Brand management—standing out from the crowd: A review and research agenda for hospitality management. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 29(1), 115–140.
- King, C., & Grace, D. (2008). Internal branding: Exploring the employee's perspective. *Journal of Brand Management*, 15(5), 358–372.
- King, C., & Grace, D. (2009). Employee based brand equity: A third perspective. *Services Marketing Quarterly*, 30, 122–147.
- King, C., & Grace, D. (2010). Building and measuring employee-based brand equity. *European Journal of Marketing*, 44(7/8), 938–971.
- King, C., & Grace, D. (2012). Examining the antecedents of positive employee brand-related attitudes and behaviors. *European Journal of Marketing*, 46(3/4), 469–488.
- King, C., Grace, D., & Funk, D. C. (2012). Employee brand equity: Scale development and validation. *Journal of Brand Management*, 19, 268–288.
- King, C., Murillo, E., & Lee, H. (2017). The effects of generational work values on employee brand attitude and behavior: A multi-group analysis. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 66, 92–105.
- Lashley, C. (1995). Towards an understanding of employee empowerment in hospitality services. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 7(1), 27–32.
- Löhndorf, B., & Diamantopoulos, A. (2014). Internal branding: Social identity and social exchange perspectives on turning employees into brand champions. *Journal of Service Research*, 17(3), 310–325.
- Lu, V. N., Capezio, A., Restubog, S. L. D., Garcia, P. R., & Wang, L. (2016). In pursuit of service excellence: Investigating the role of psychological contracts and organizational identification of frontline hotel employees. *Tourism Management*, 56, 8–19.
- MacKenzie, S. B., & Podsakoff, P. M. (2012). Common method bias in marketing: Causes, mechanisms, and procedural remedies. *Journal of Retailing*, 88(4), 542–555.
- MacKinnon, D. P., Lockwood, C. M., & Williams, J. (2004). Confidence limits for the indirect effect: Distribution of the product and resampling methods. *Multivariate Behavioral Research*, 39(1), 99–128.
- Marks, M. L., Mirvis, P. H., Hackett, E. J., & Grady, J. F. (1986). Employee participation in a Quality Circle program: Impact on quality of work life, productivity, and absenteeism. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 71(1), 61.
- Marsh, H. W. (1991). Multidimensional students' evaluations of teaching effectiveness: A test of alternative higher-order structures. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 83(2), 285.
- May, D. R., Gilson, R. L., & Harter, L. M. (2004). The psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability and the engagement of the human spirit at work. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 77(1), 11–37.
- Morhart, F. M., Herzog, W., & Tomczak, T. (2009). Brand-specific leadership: Turning employees into brand champions. *Journal of Marketing*, 73, 122–142.
- Moynihan, D. P., & Pandey, S. K. (2008). The ties that bind: Social networks, person-organization value fit, and turnover intention. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 18(2), 205–227.
- Murray, S. R., & Peyrefitte, J. (2007). Knowledge type and communication media choice in the knowledge transfer process. *Journal of Managerial Issues*, 19(1), 111–133.
- O'Reilly, C. A., & Chatman, J. (1986). Organizational commitment and psychological attachment: The effects of compliance, identification, and internalization on prosocial behavior. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 71(3), 492.
- O'Reilly, C. A., Chatman, J., & Caldwell, D. F. (1991). People and organizational culture: A profile comparison approach to assessing person-organization fit. *Academy of Management Journal*, 34(3), 487–516.
- Oldham, G. R., & Hackman, J. R. (2010). Not what it was and not what it will be: The future of job design research. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 31(2-3), 463–479.
- Parker, S. K., Wall, T. D., & Jackson, P. R. (1997). That's not my job": Developing flexible employee work orientations. *Academy of Management Journal*, 40(4), 899–929.
- Park, J., & Gursoy, D. (2012). Generation effects on work engagement among US hotel employees. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 31(4), 1195–1202.
- Piehler, R., King, C., Burmann, C., & Xiong, L. (2016). The importance of employee brand understanding, brand identification, and brand commitment in realizing brand citizenship behaviour. *European Journal of Marketing*, 50(9/10), 1575–1601.
- Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J. Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(5), 879–903.
- Punjaisri, K., & Wilson, A. (2007). The role of internal branding in the delivery of employee brand promise. *Journal of Brand Management*, 15(1), 57–70.
- Punjaisri, K., & Wilson, A. (2011). Internal branding process: Key mechanisms, outcomes and moderating factors. *European Journal of Marketing*, 45(9/10), 1521–1537.
- Ryan, R. M. (1995). Psychological needs and the facilitation of integrative processes. *Journal of Personality*, 63(3), 397–427.
- Ryan, R. M., & Connell, J. P. (1989). Perceived locus of causality and internalization: Examining reasons for acting in two domains. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(5), 749–761.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78.
- Schmidt, H. J., & Baumgarth, C. (2018). Strengthening internal brand equity with brand ambassador programs: Development and testing of a success factor model. *Journal of Brand Management*, 25(3), 250–265.
- Schwartz, S. H. (1992). Universals in the content and structure of values: Theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries. *Advances in experimental social psychology: Vol. 25*, (pp. 1–65). Academic Press.
- Settoon, R. P., Bennett, N., & Liden, R. C. (1996). Social exchange in organizations: Perceived organizational support, leader-member exchange, and employee reciprocity. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 81(3), 219–227.
- Shin, M., Holden, T., & Schmidt, R. A. (2001). From knowledge theory to management practice: Towards an integrated approach. *Information Processing & Management*, 37(2), 335–355.
- Solnet, D., & Hood, A. (2008). Generation Y as hospitality employees: Framing a research agenda. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 15(1), 59–68.
- Spence, M. (1973). Job market signaling. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 87(3), 355–374.
- Tseng, S.-M. (2012). Correlations between external knowledge and the knowledge chain as impacting service quality. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 19, 429–437.
- USATODAY (2018, November 15). *Chinese authorities inspect hotels after video exposes unsanitary cleaning practices*. Retrieved from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/travel/hotels/2018/11/15/hotel-chains-apologize-after-video-exposes-cleaning-practices-china/2012878002/>.
- Vallaster, C., & de Chernatony, L. (2005). Internationalisation of services brands: The role of leadership during the internal brand building process. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 21(1–2), 181–203.
- Wallace, E., & de Chernatony, L. (2009). Service employee performance: Its components and antecedents. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 8(2), 82–102.
- Wallace, E., & de Chernatony, L. (2011). The influence of culture and market orientation on services brands: Insights from Irish banking and retail firms. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 25(7), 475–488.
- Xiong, L., & King, C. (2015). Motivational drivers that fuel employees to champion the hospitality brand. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 44, 58–69.
- Xiong, L., & King, C. (2018). Too much of a good thing? Examining how proactive personality affects employee brand performance under formal and informal organizational support. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 68, 12–22.
- Xiong, L., King, C., & Piehler, R. (2013). "That's not my job": Exploring the employee perspective in the development of brand ambassadors. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 35, 348–359.
- Xiong, L., So, K. K., Wu, L., & King, C. (2018). Speaking up because it's my brand: Examining employee brand psychological ownership and voice behavior in hospitality organizations. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2018.11.006>.
- Zagenczyk, T. J., Restubog, S. L. D., Kiewitz, C., Kiazad, K., & Tang, R. L. (2014). Psychological contracts as a mediator between Machiavellianism and employee citizenship and deviant behaviors. *Journal of Management*, 40(4), 1098–1122.
- Zhang, J., & Bloemer, J. M. M. (2008). The impact of value congruence on consumer-service brand relationships. *Journal of Service Research*, 11(2), 161–178.