An examination of customer relationship management dimensions and employee-based brand equity: A study on ride-hailing industry in Saudi Arabia

Jalal Rajeh Hanaysha [a,*], Mohammed Emad Al-Shaikh [b]

[a] School of Business, Skyline University College, 1797 Sharjah, United Arab Emirates
[b] College of Business Administration, Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, Dammam 34212, Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the effect of customer relationship management (CRM) dimensions on employee-based brand equity. By looking at the past literature, it can be noticed that the majority of earlier studies on brand equity examined it from customers' perspective, while the employees' perspective received less emphasis. Thus, the required data was obtained using a survey tool from 164 employees in the ride-hailing industry in Saudi Arabia. The obtained data was analyzed by the Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling (CB-SEM) method to test the hypothesis and reach at conclusions. The findings showed that CRM in general has a positive effect on employee-based brand equity. Specifically, it was found that CRM organization has a significant positive impact on employee-based brand equity. It was also verified that knowledge management and customer orientation have positive effects on overall employee-based brand equity. Finally, the results confirmed that technology-based CRM has a significant positive impact on employee-based brand equity. These results add to the body of literature on this topic and verify the significance of customer relationship management dimensions in affecting employee-based brand equity.

1. Introduction

The topic of brand equity has received a noteworthy attention from several scholars since the last decades. The examination of brand equity has mainly been centered towards determining the factors that could improve brand value (Dinçer, Bozaykut-Buk, Emir, Yuksel, & Ashill, 2019). Although the concept has many definitions in the previous literature, there is a universal agreement that brand equity symbolizes the tangible and intangible value of a firm's products or services that are devised from the unique name of the brand (Srivastava & Shocker, 1991). A strong brand equity provides noteworthy implications to firms, their clients, and to the investors as well. It enables the service providers to generates several benefits, such as: charging higher prices than the rivals for similar products, maintaining business customers on the long term even though competitors peruse price cutting strategies, and withstanding negative information about the failure of a certain product or service (Gelb & Rangarajan, 2014). High brand equity also permits firms to use the same brand name when they successfully introduce a new product. As the competition has increased recently among

businesses and due to the imitation of a brand's offerings, the acquisition of a reliable and trustworthy brand name has been regarded as the key distinguishing element. According to Augusto and Torres (2018); and Phung, Ly, and Nguyen (2019), a firm that acquires high brand equity tends to have greater trust from its consumers. Moreover, Poulis and Wisker (2016) tested the effect of employee-based brand equity on organizational performance and found that the attachment of employees to a brand represents the main factor that contributes to better financial outcomes.

The service industries are undoubtedly characterized by high intangibility. Therefore, branding represents that main aspect that can differentiate a service firm from its rivals, because a popular brand name can nurture the trust among customers and minimize their financial as well as psychological risks, especially during buying an intangible product or service (Berry, 2000; Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2009; Yang, Wan, & Wu, 2015). Through the review of prior literature, it was documented that frontline service employees play imperative roles in strengthening brand value (Burmann, Zeplin, & Riley, 2009; Vatankhah & Darvishi, 2018), and when their behaviors are compatible with the

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values and attitudes of the brand, it would be easier to achieve organizational success and foster brand strength (Terglav, Ruzzier, & Kaše, 2016). Internal branding was regarded as a strategic marketing approach (Erkmen & Hancer, 2015) which enables employees to develop consistent brand oriented behaviors during the process of serving customers (Özçelik & Fındıklı, 2014). Moreover, the existence of internal branding upsurges the cognitive and attitudinal alignment of the service staff with the promise of the brand (Erkmen & Hancer, 2015), and subsequently stimulates their behaviors towards supporting the firm (Henkel, Tomczak, Heitmann, & Herrmann, 2007; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2017; Yang et al., 2015). Due to the direct interactions among helpline employees and customers, displaying a certain behavior during service delivery tends to a have greater influence on brand perception. Therefore, a consistent behavior among employees represents the foremost significant factor for building brand strength and image (Garas, Mahran, & Mohamed, 2018; Huang & Lai, 2018; Punjaisri, Wilson, & Evanschitzky, 2008).

Recently, the transportation sector has experienced several challenges originating from high degrees of uncertain economic environment, growing rivalry, developments in technology, and rising governmental interventions (Pinar, Girard, & Eser, 2012). To remain competitive, branding and managing customer relationships represent important marketing strategies for firms (Barnes, 2003). The advantages of brand equity in the transportation context have widely been acknowledged in the marketing literature, especially about service organizations. Service delivery staff act as the main personnel who influence service quality perceptions among customers and improve their total experiences with the service provider. A number of scholars (Burmann et al., 2009; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2017) regarded front line service staff as key organizational assets. Their continuous commitment to brand values will ultimately inspire them to accomplish important objectives for the firm (Xiong, King, & Piehler, 2013). Furthermore, customer relationship management was acknowledged in the literature as a key driver of brand equity. According to Lundstrom (2009), customer relationship management is the most feasible option for increasing brand equity. Through customer relationship management, employees can obtain important insights bout customers' needs and expectations and continue to serve them in the best way, particularly, when they have strong brand attachments and get positive feedback from the management.

However, in spite of the significance of employees in inducing brand success, there are limited empirical studies on internal branding (Buil, Martínez, & Matute, 2016; Lee, Hsiao, Chan, & Lee, 2019), and the perspective of employees in the empirical literature on brand equity is still insufficient (Arendt & Brettel, 2010; Erkmen, 2018; King & Grace, 2015). Boukis and Christodoulides (2020) added that there is a relatively scarce research on the determinants of employee-based brand equity, and only few scholars indicated how it can be practically improved. By looking at prior studies on this topic, it is evident that most of them focused on measuring brand equity from customers' perspective. There are only few researches that intended to examine employee-based brand equity, particularly in transportation sector (Rambocas & Arjoon, 2019). Moreover, the empirical research on CRM and employee-based brand equity is very limited. Therefore, this paper is mainly designed to test the impact of customer relationship management dimensions on employee-based brand equity with empirical data from the employees of Careem ride-hailing service in Saudi Arabia. Careem is a popular firm that offers an app-based car service which connects individuals to rides. The firm has an online platform which represents a marketplace of community drivers where customers can request a ride, check the cost, and pay through the desired option. The following section presents the literature review on CRM and employee-based brand equity, followed by is the research methodology. After that, analysis of results, discussion and conclusion, limitations and future research suggestions are presented.

2. Literature review

2.1. Employee-based brand equity

Brand equity can be described in terms of what differentiates a brand among those of its competitors by developing positive customer perceptions and feelings, hence minimizing price sensitivity for the products that carry its name (Gelb & Rangarajan, 2014). The positive perceptions and feelings among customers are attributed to brand recognition, association, and evaluation. Although the prior literature outlined that several groups of stakeholders may possibly be the receivers of this value, most of the available empirical research investigated brand equity from the customer's perspective (Christodoulides & De Chernatony, 2010; Iglesias, Markovic, & Rialp, 2019). The importance of employees in communicating and delivering brand value to the outside stakeholders (for instance customers), particularly in the services industry setting has widely been acknowledged (Punjaisri, Wilson, & Evanschitzky, 2009). Employee-based brand equity is an emerging conception in the branding literature which refers to an employee's level of motivation to work for the vision of the brand alongside with the firm's support of necessary resources to achieve the desired goals (Ghose, 2009). Dinçer et al. (2019) viewed brand equity as a strategic organizational resource that should be studied, assessed and managed frequently.

According to King, Grace, and Funk (2012), positioning and communicating brand equity to external stakeholders is not sufficient for attaining competitive advantages. As the skills and knowledge of employees allow a firm to build its brand image, it is vital to consider employee based perspective to ensure an effective brand management (De Chernatony & Cottam, 2006; King et al. (2012) referred employee-based brand equity to "the differential effect that brand knowledge has on an employee's response to internal brand management". It was also conceptualized by Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010) as the added value that is received by employees based on a firm's efforts to satisfy and meet their needs. This definition necessitates measuring the cognitive and behavioural features of brand equity from the perspective of an individual employee. Overall, employee-based brand equity can be described as the internalization of the basic values of a brand among employees that can be revealed through consistent brand behavior, brand endorsement, and brand allegiance (Lee et al., 2019). A consistent employee's behavior represents the foremost significant factor for building brand equity (Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009; Yang et al., 2015). On the other hand, an employee's brand endorsement exists through developing and sharing a favourable word of mouth about the brand to outside stakeholders. Moreover, brand allegiance was defined by King et al. (2012) as the future intention of an employee to stay with the company.

Prior literature showed that brand name and human capital represent the foremost valuable assets for a firm (Aaker, 1991; Poulis & Wisker, 2016; King & Grace, 2010). Thus, the significance of employees in shaping brand image and values has been noticed by human resource managers and marketing practitioners. Employees play crucial roles in strengthening brand equity and represent an important element in branding (Foster, Punjaisri, & Cheng, 2010), particularly when they are encouraged to act as ambassadors for the brand (Boukis & Christodoulides, 2020; King & Grace, 2009). Employees have also long been recognized as brand distinguishers (Poulis & Wisker, 2016; King et al., 2013). The favourbale associations of frontline employees with the brand of a firm increase their brand value internalization, whereas their favourable brand experiences certify their knowledge about brand aspirations (Kuenzel & Halliday, 2008). According to Karatepe, Ozturk, and Kim (2019), the frontline employees' behaviors and attitudes affect the performance of the firm, because they act as the key personnel who connect it with customers by providing solutions to their issues or responding to their requests in a favourable manner. Some scholars also indicated that a firm which develops its employee-based brand equity

has better abilities to minimize the costs of recruiting (Punjaisri et al., 2009), increase the performance of its employees (Dinçer et al., 2019), minimize the level of turnover (Yadav, Kumar, & Mishra, 2020). It will also enjoy greater economic advantages (Lee et al., 2019).

2.2. Customer relationship management dimensions

CRM is one of the strategic means that allows a company to get better understandings about customers' needs and expectations by learning about their past purchases and brand likings. Parvatiyar and Sheth (2001) conceptualized CRM strategy as a firm's intention to acquire, maintain, and collaborate with key customers in an attempt to deliver superior values for them and to the company. CRM strategy mainly emphasizes on the incorporation of different marketing programs into the functions of a firm's supply chain for the purpose of achieving superior service efficiency while delivering the desired value. According to Alt and Reinhold (2012), CRM is a technology-based process which permits a firm to get necessary information about customers' needs and satisfy them for building profitable relationships. Furthermore, prior researches viewed CRM as philosophical assumption which posits that building an enduring relationship with business customers is the basis for improving brand satisfaction and customer loyalty (Minami & Dawson, 2008). Therefore, business firms have to continuously search for information about customers' needs and expectations and be able to provide them with the desired offerings using diverse communication mediums (Soltani & Navimipour, 2016).

Referring to the resource based view (RBV) perspective, a firm can obtain and sustain its competitive advantages when it focuses on customers while setting the CRM strategy to build profitable relationships with them. Employees have long been regarded as the key resources for a firm which enable it to build and improve its brand value. Past studies also verified that establishing good relationships with key customers can provide the firm with several advantages, such as: increasing customer equity (Chae & Ko, 2016); greater satisfaction among customers and employees (Rahimi & Kozak, 2017; Santouridis & Veraki, 2017), and higher brand loyalty (Nyadzayo & Khajehzadeh, 2016). By implementing CRM successfully, brands can build their capabilities for reacting to different competitors and capitalizing on growth opportunities (Buttle & Maklan, 2019; Piercy, 2009; Roggeveen & Beitelspacher, 2019). The development of these capabilities grants brands with a greater understanding about prime customers' needs, and this consequently permits them to minimize costs, improve customer service, and increase the acceptance of new brand offerings (Yan et al., 2020). Additionally, Müller (2014) indicated that CRM solutions represent the foundations for employee motivation and allows a firm to thrive in uncertain environments. Accordingly, developing a customer oriented culture by collecting, disseminating and acting upon customer information is the core of brand success.

Previous studies documented that CRM can be measured based on a set of elements. In general, the majority of those studies relied on four behavioural components to examine CRM. The components are customer orientation, knowledge management, CRM organization, and technology-based CRM. According to Sin et al., 2005), the stated components should be combined and systematically examined to measure CRM effectiveness and achieve continuous growth in firm performance. Consequently, consistent with the available literature, this paper relied on CRM organization, customer orientation, technology-based CRM, and knowledge management to test CRM in Saudi Transportation context. In the subsequent sections, the literature review on each of the dimensions along with their effects on employee-based brand equity are presented.

2.2.1. Customer orientation

Customer orientation has obtained a remarkable attention in previous researches. It suggests that the success of a brand is contingent on its aptitude to understand and anticipate the requirements and

expectations of customers, and then be able to fulfill them as desired. Customer orientation was conceptualized by Cai (2009) as the willingness to learn about the desired needs and expectations of customers and ability to meet them through persistently delivering superior value over time. In other words, customer orientation primarily focuses on giving priorities to customers, understanding their interests, and taking their preferences into consideration while setting marketing strategies (Jaramillo, Ladik, Marshall, & Mulki, 2007; Lambert, 2010; Stock & Hoyer, 2002). Kim (2008) attributed the failure of CRM adoption to the weaknesses of exhibiting customer orientation. As many companies suffer from intense rivalry in todays' dynamic market environment, there is a universal agreement in prior literature that building robust relationships with customers represents the basis for brand success (Burmann et al., 2009). For this reason, firms should maintain customer orientation throughout their CRM system for the purpose of meeting market expectations and to be able to react to changing customers' needs at the right time (Blocker, Flint, Myers, & Slater, 2011; Ryals & Payne, 2001).

Several firms have incorporated customer orientation into their competitive strategies in order to learn the best ways for prospering in today's volatile and dynamic market environment. In ride-hailing services context, employee training is vital for ensuring safe business operations. Employees should receive continuous training about latest techniques, procedures and road safety. They should also be trained for dealing with customers in a professional manner and providing a quick as well as reliable service. Safety supervisors usually visit popular pickup and drop-off locations, such as health centers and shopping malls to make sure that their staff are satisfied and resolve any existing issues. Prior studies primarily contend that putting high emphasis on customers' needs improves the perception of customers towards a brand by engaging in favourable interactions with the employees, and this ultimately leads to a higher degree of satisfaction among them as well as the employees (Gazzoli, Hancer, & Kim, 2013). However, developing a customer oriented culture calls for employees to understand the brand's values and promise prior to communicating them to customers. Unfortunately, the existing empirical researches did not clearly address the linkages between customer orientation and employee-based brand equity (Boukis & Christodoulides, 2020; King et al., 2012). According to Farrell and Oczkowski (2012), when employees have favourable experiences with the brand or a firm, they tend to be more committed towards serving it in the best ways and adopt a customer-oriented attitude. Boukis and Christodoulides (2020) added that employees who are customer oriented tend to engender higher brand loyalty. Hence, based on the literature that is presented above, the following hypothesis is postulated:

H1. Customer orientation as perceived by employees has a positive effect on employee-based brand equity.

2.2.2. Knowledge management

Several definitions of knowledge management exist in the literature. It was described as the ability to create, organize, store, use and disseminate important information and knowledge within an organization. The rationale of knowledge management is centered towards maximizing organizational effectiveness through the storage of knowledge within the entire system. Hallin and Marnburg (2008) stated that the ability to acquire important customers' information by using advanced technologies, and then sharing the information with employees who need them provide the company with a superior competitive advantage. Earlier researches showed that getting clear information and comprehensive knowledge about target markets allows a company to create profitable customer relationships and improve its brand equity (Sofi, Bashir, Parry, & Dar, 2020; Tseng & Wu, 2014). Furthermore, knowledge management practices help firms in customizing their offerings according to the available data about customers (Sigala, 2005) in an attempt to build enduring relationships with them (Fan & Ku, 2010).

According to Nambisan and Baron (2007), successful firms rely on different communication means to interact with customers and obtain important information about them. In view of that, the success of knowledge management appears through the ability to build better customer relationships and obtain the desired information about target markets for designing effective marketing programs.

Acquiring brand knowledge represents the basis for building brand equity (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Previous studies showed that when employees acquire the right knowledge about a brand, they would have better understandings about their responsibilities and tend to convey the desired brand image (King & Grace, 2009; Piehler, King, Burmann, & Xiong, 2016; Xiong et al., 2013). Therefore, having a proper understanding about the firm enables employees to deal with uncertainties and increases their brand commitment (De Chernatony & Cottam, 2006). According to Erkmen (2018), employees tend to have clear understandings about their roles when they possess adequate knowledge about the expectation of their brand managers. Meanwhile, informing employees about the different brand expectations and values clearly encourages them to adopt these values and consider them while communicating with customers (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2017). Furthermore, Mukherjee and Malhotra (2006) stated that an employee who is confident and aware about his or her role is likely to have higher brand attachment and satisfaction. Therefore, according to the above discussion, the second hypothesis is suggested:

H2. Knowledge management as perceived by employees has a positive effect on employee-based brand equity.

2.2.3. CRM organization

CRM organization is a marketing strategy that focuses on gathering, searching, and storing important customers' information in the database system, and then distribute them across various units or departments to create customized product offerings and strengthen brand value (Sigala & Connolly, 2004; Yim, Anderson, & Swaminathan, 2004). The successful implementation of CRM in all departments of a company enables it to boost its performance, and eventually ensure long term business growth (Wu & Li, 2011). Rahimi, 2017) demonstrated that firms irrespective of their industry context should maintain a customer oriented approach and implement it across their business units to warrant consistency of purpose and fulfill stakeholders' expectations. Previous studies indicated that CRM organization occurs through constructing a proper organizational climate, using modern tools, and setting up a tracking system to ease the operations' processes (Mechinda & Patterson, 2011; Sofi et al., 2020). Moreover, Sheth, Sethia, and Srinivas (2011) added that sustaining a customer-oriented culture urges companies to provide a pleasant work environment, reward and motivate employees when they deal empathetically with customers while delivering the services, take advantage of the contemporary technology and equipment, provoke inspirational leadership, and create efficient systems to manage the complaints of customers (Ma, 2004). These activities tend to have positive effects on staff perceptions and commitment towards the brand. In view of that, employees' roles are considered to be increasingly important to CRM organization and are necessary for implementing CRM successfully to achieve a brand's objectives (Payne & Frow, 2006; Sofi et al., 2020). However, it is hard to find an empirical study in the literature on CRM organization and employee-based brand equity. Accordingly, the third hypothesis is presented:

H3. CRM organization as perceived by employees has a positive effect on employee-based brand equity.

2.2.4. Technology based CRM

The competency of technology-based CRM denotes an ability to use IT infrastructure and diverse applications of information technology for strengthening a firm's relationship with its customers by taking into consideration the management and automation of internal business process in the fields of sales, marketing, and services (Coltman, 2007;

Dubey & Sangle, 2019; Swift, 2001). The majority of business firms use some types of software technologies to facilitate their interactions with customers and acquire the needed information. Meanwhile, a customer-centric culture supported by service tools which possess modern technological features can arouse customers' satisfaction and improve profit margins (Pozza, Goetz, & Sahut, 2018; Sheth et al., 2011). The eventual success of CRM technology is mainly determined by the ability to benefit from technological capabilities and using them effectively to bring customers into the system of the organization (Swift, 2001). On whole, the objective of CRM systems focuses on integrating IT into organizational processes in order to attract potential customers, retain current ones and capitalize on their lifetime values to safeguard long term success and brand growth (Santouridis & Veraki, 2017).

Through the effective usage of information technology to connect and share important information with customers, employees can easily get the needed data and deliver the services efficiently to satisfy brand promise. Furthermore, using innovative technological applications improves employees' satisfaction, brand commitment, and encourages them to stay longer with the brand. The brand commitment can then be translated into greater employee productivity and brand identification. Buttle and Maklan (2019) specified that a successful CRM strategy involves an appropriate exploitation of information technology to reach and satisfy customers. Therefore, relying on advanced technological applications for sharing about a brand's products or services and connecting with customers has been considered to be essential for obtaining the necessary information from the right entities in market targets at the right time and improving an employee's brand attachment (Cao & Tian, 2020; Rapp, Trainor, & Agnihotri, 2010; Stein & Smith, 2009). Karadag and Dumanoglu (2009) added that using the technology at workplace enables employees to improves their service quality and productivity figures. Consequently, the fourth hypothesis for this study is proposed as follows:

H4. Technology-based CRM as perceived by employees has a positive effect on employee-based brand equity.

The above literature review presented diverse ideas about the variables and concepts which will be adopted to examine the linkages between customer relationship management dimensions and employee-based brand equity. The conceptual framework of the present study is illustrated in Fig. 1. Jabareen (2009) defined conceptual framework as a connection or a 'plane' of interrelated concepts which provide a general understanding about a phenomenon. Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 18) also stated that the conceptual framework of a study "explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied—the key factors, concepts, or variables—and the presumed relationships among them".

3. Methodology

The main motive of this research was to test the impact CRM dimensions on employee-based brand equity in transportation context. The sample of the study is comprised of the employees of Careem ride-hailing services company in Saudi Arabia. A quantitative survey was employed for data collection and measuring the constructs from the employees' perspective. Before starting the data collection process, the respondents were given a brief description about the main aim of the study and assured that their answers will be kept confidential. The determination of sample size for the total population was done according to the recommendations of Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table. Moreover, the structural equation modeling (SEM) methodology requires the minimum sample size for completed surveys to be at least 100 (Reinartz et al., 2009) in order to conduct the analysis and test the model. Generally, a total of 164 employees agreed to take part in this study and returned the filled questionnaire within the specific time of data collection. However, the above assumptions for data analysis using CB-SEM were satisfied as the usable responses included about 164
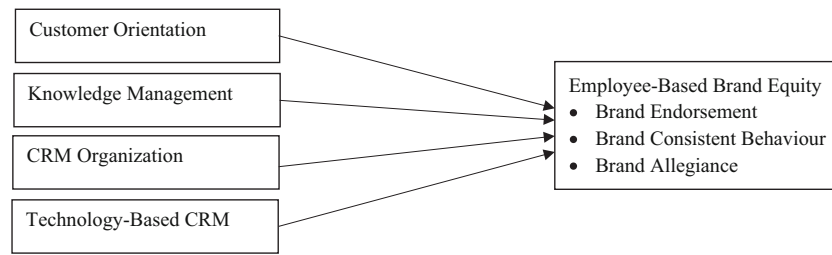
Fig. 1. Conceptual framework.

samples from the participating employees. The majority of the respondent are males and aged between 30 and 45 years old.

The survey instrument was constructed based on prior studies. In other words, the measurement items of CRM dimensions and employee-based brand equity were taken from prior empirical studies on the topic with minimal modification to suit the selected context. In detail, employee-based brand equity was measured using three dimensions: brand allegiance (4 items), brand endorsement (4 items), and brand consistent behavior (3 items). All of these 11 items were adapted from King et al. (2012). By looking at the adapted scales and based on the suggestions of Jarvis, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff (2003), it is evident that the first-order latent factors (measurement items of each dimension) are reflective indicators of the construct/ dimensions and also these first-order dimensions are themselves reflective indicators of an underlying second-order construct (employee-based brand equity). Previous studies also used the same dimensions along with their items as reflective-reflective indicators of employee-based brand equity (Minbashrazgah, Garbollagh, & Varmaghani, 2021; Poulis & Wisker, 2016; Wisker & Kwiatek, 2019). Furthermore, CRM dimensions were measured using a set of items as follows: customer orientation (5 items), knowledge management (6 items), CRM organization (7 items), and technology-based CRM (5 items). All of the measurement items of CRM dimensions were adapted from Sin, Alan, and Yim (2005) and Akroush, Dahiyat, Gharaibeh, and Abu-Lail (2011). A five-point Likert scale (ranging from "1-strongly disagree" to "5-strongly agree") was used for measuring employees' brand equity and CRM dimensions. The final questionnaire was presented to some experts from the industry and academicians in order to build content validity and ensure the clarity of questions. Based on their recommendations, some minor amendments were incorporated. The obtained data was after that analyzed through the Covariance-based (CB)-SEM approach (AMOS 23) method to test the reliability and validity of measurement scales and to verify the hypotheses which were presented in the above literature.

4. Analysis of results

4.1. Common method Bias

As stated above, the collected data were analyzed using the CB-SEM approach. In order to check the likely existence of common-method variance bias among constructs, this paper relied on the CFA and single factor test of Harman (1960), and full collinearity test of Kock and Lynn's (2012). When all of the measurement items of the constructs were constrained to be loaded on one single common factor, the overall variance explained by a general latent variable was lower than the Harmin's threshold value of 50%, indicating that the final model is considered free from common method bias. Additionally, all of the Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) in a full collinearity test were less than 5, suggesting that there is no indication of existing pathological collinearity (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

4.2. Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics which include mean values, standard deviations, minimum and maximum for selected variables are presented below in Table 1. As it can be seen in the table, the mean values ranged from 3.502 to 4.213. It also shows that the lowest value for standard deviation is registered at 0.568, while the highest value is 0.890. The descriptive analysis also showed that the minimum value provided in the answers of all items is 1, while the maximum value is 5.

4.3. Measurement model

According to Hair Jr., Black, Babin, Anderson, and Tatham (2010), CB-SEM relies on the concept of model fit in order to verify the reliability and validity among the measurement items of constructs. The initial measurement model which was estimated using CB-SEM (AMOS 23) provided an adequate fit for the data as all of the fit indices are in the tolerable range (χ^2 = 280.787, df = 192, GFI = 0.824, AGFI = 0.768, RMSEA = 0.066, CFI = 0.930 and TLI = 0.915). Table 2 shows the reliability and validity analyses for all of the measurement scales. As it can be seen in the table, the Cronbach's alpha for the measurement scales surpassed the tolerable value of 0.6, which means that all the measurement items are considered reliable (Nunnally, 1978). Additionally, the composite reliability for all of the CRM dimensions and employee-based brand equity exceeded 0.7 (Hair Jr. et al., 2010), which gives an indication for strong internal consistency among the items; thus, construct reliability is established. Furthermore, in order to estimate the convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) was calculated. Based on the recommendations of Hair Jr. et al. (2010), AVE is considered acceptable when it surpasses 0.50. As displayed in Table 1, the AVE values for all of the CRM dimensions and employee-based brand equity are more than 0.5, and this confirms that the convergent validity assumptions are not violated. Lastly, the redundancy among measurement items was estimated based on the multicollinearity test via the calculation of variance inflation factor (VIF). Overall, the statistical test revealed that the values of VIF for all constructs are less than 5, which means that the variables are free of multicollinearity issues (Hair Jr. et al., 2010).

As mentioned by Hair Jr. et al. (2010), the minimum tolerable value for the factor loading of an item indicator is 0.5. Overall, the statistical results showed that few items from the constructs were removed because they had factor loadings below 0.5. In detail, three items which were

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and correlations.

Construct	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
1. Customer Orientation	4.213	0.646	1	5
2. Knowledge Management	4.069	0.568	1	5
3. CRM Organization	3.502	0.689	1	5
4. Technology-Based CRM	3.784	0.693	1	5
5. Employee-Based Brand Equity	3.810	0.625	1	5
6. Brand Endorsement	3.799	0.623	1	5
7. Brand Consistent Behavior	3.817	0.822	1	5
4. Brand Allegiance	3.814	0.890	1	5

Table 2
Factor loadings of items.

Construct	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Customer Orientation	CO1	0.825	0.818	0.828	0.618
	CO2	0.859			
	CO4	0.661			
Knowledge Management	KM1	0.838	0.735	0.729	0.508
	KM2	0.676			
	KM3	0.612			
	KM4	0.707			
CRM Organization	CRMO1	0.537	0.821	0.804	0.512
	CRMO2	0.714			
	CRMO3	0.820			
	CRMO4	0.761			
Technology-Based CRM	TBCRM1	0.843	0.886	0.895	0.741
	TBCRM2	0.892			
	TBCRM5	0.846			
Employee-Based Brand Equity	BE	0.806	0.857	0.845	0.645
	BCB	0.737			
	BA	0.862			
Brand Endorsement	BE1	0.712	0.808	0.856	0.668
	BE2	0.785			
	BE3	0.938			
Brand Consistent Behavior	BCB1	0.792	0.793	0.693	0.532
	BCB2	0.661			
	BCB3	0.802			
Brand Allegiance	BA1	0.948	0.865	0.878	0.783
	BA3	0.817			

used for measuring the dependent variable (employee-based brand equity) were deleted due to lower loadings. Similarly, three items from the scale of CRM organization and another two items for knowledge management were deleted due to lower loadings. Furthermore, two of the measurement items of technology-based CRM and another two items for customer orientation were removed due to low factor loadings (see Table 2). Therefore, all of the remaining item indicators achieved acceptable factor loadings values of higher than 0.5 (Hair Jr. et al., 2010). These results provide further support for the existence of convergent validity and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

Additionally, the discriminant validity among all constructs was evaluated according to the suggestions of Fornell and Larcker (1981). In order to meet discriminant validity assumptions, the square root values of AVE must be greater than the maximum squared correlation with any other construct (Hair Jr, Sarstedt, Hopkins, & Kuppelwieser, 2014). As it can be seen in Table 3, all of the dimensions of CRM and employee-based brand equity met this criterion. Alternatively, the correlation among constructs was estimated using the heterotrait–monotrait Ration (HTMT) formula, which balances the disattenuated construct score creation. Based on the cut-off value of 0.9, the analysis confirmed that

the discriminant validity assumptions are achieved and all of the dimensions of CRM and employee-based brand equity fulfilled the stated assumptions.

4.4. Structural model

Before testing the suggested hypotheses, the structural model was estimated using the CB-SEM method. It is important at this stage to ensure that the fit indices in the model meet the threshold values before proceeding for further analysis. Primarily, the factor loadings of residual items of each construct surpassed 0.50. Some items were eliminated in order to reach at an adequate fit for the model. In general, the analysis as shown in Fig. 2 reveal that the structural model which is derived from AMOS software achieved a reasonable fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 280.787$, df = 192, GFI = 0.824, AGFI = 0.768, RMSEA = 0.066, CFI = 0.930 and TLI = 0.915).

After achieving an adequate fit for the data and the model, the next step was to verify the postulated hypotheses. The statistical analysis as shown in Table 4 reveal that the four proposed hypotheses are confirmed. In detail, the findings indicate that customer orientation (β = 0.415, C.R. = 3.067, $p < 0.05$) positively and significantly affects employee-based brand equity; consequently, H1 is accepted. The statistical tests also reveal that knowledge management (β = 0.378, C.R. = 2.994, $p < 0.05$) positively and significantly affects employee-based brand equity; therefore, H2 is supported. Furthermore, the results showed that CRM organization has a positive effect (β = 0.206, C.R. = 1.988, $p < 0.05$) on employee-based brand equity, hence, supporting H3. Lastly, the impact of technology-based CRM on employee-based brand equity is positive and statistically significant (β = 0.216, C.R. = 1.980, $p < 0.05$), accordingly, H4 is accepted. In total, the four dimensions of customer relationship management jointly explain 93.6% of overall variance in the employee-based brand equity.

5. Discussion and conclusion

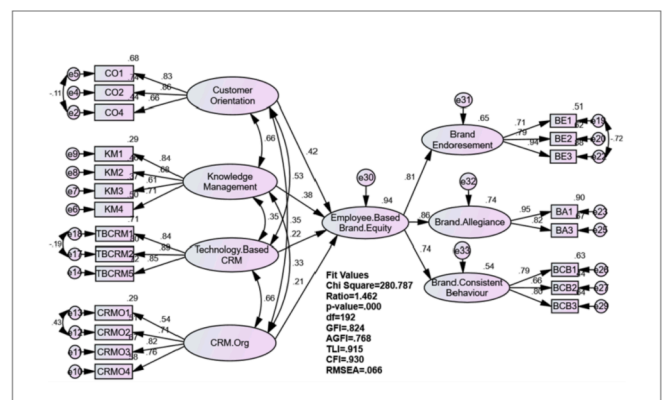The primary objective of this paper was to empirically test the impact

Fig. 2. Structural model.

Table 3
Discriminant validity.

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	5
1. Technology-Based CRM	**0.860**							
2. CRM Organization	0.662	**0.715**						
3. Knowledge Management	0.354	0.330	**0.713**					
4. Customer Orientation	0.530	0.354	0.663	**0.786**				
5. Employee-Based Brand Equity	0.706	0.621	0.698	0.753	**0.803**			
6. brand consistent behavior	0.521	0.457	0.588	0.629	0.737	**0.729**		
7. Brand Allegiance	0.609	0.535	0.688	0.736	0.802	0.635	**0.884**	
8. Brand Endorsement	0.569	0.550	0.643	0.687	0.801	0.694	0.695	**0.817**

Table 4
Results of hypotheses.

	Hypothesis		Std. Beta	S.E.	C.R.	*P*-Value
H1:	Customer Orientation	Employee-Based Brand Equity	0.415	0.085	3.067	0.002
H2:	Knowledge Management	Employee-Based Brand Equity	0.378	0.074	2.994	0.003
H3:	CRM Organization	Employee-Based Brand Equity	0.206	0.046	1.988	0.047
H4:	Technology Based CRM	Employee-Based Brand Equity	0.216	0.048	1.980	0.048

of CRM dimensions on employee-based brand equity in the transportation context. The findings showed that the effect of customer orientation on the employee-based brand equity is positive and statistically significant. The result was supported by Boukis and Christodoulides (2020) who found that customer orientation and employee-based brand equity are significantly correlated. According to Gazzoli et al. (2013), customer orientation improves the perceptions of customers and employees about the brand, particularly, when they involve in favourable interactions. This ultimately leads to higher brand satisfaction among both of the employees and customers. Moreover, Fan and Ku (2010) declared that when a firm's employees focus on providing customers with superior services, the overall image of the brand will be improved, and this as a result improves brand performance and employees' commitment. Firms which follow a customer orientation strategy tend to conduct frequent marketing researches in order to gain better ideas about the needs of customers before creating a new product or service. Additionally, spiritual organizations encourage their employees to consider how their work provides a sense of purpose through customer support, and then reward employee who display positive behaviors. This ultimately improves employees' morale, brand attachment, and boosts the levels of productivity.

Moreover, the results confirmed that, in line with prior studies, knowledge management positively affects employee-based brand equity (Nogueira, Santarém, & Gomes, 2020; Richards, Foster, & Morgan, 1998). Xiong et al. (2013) reported that the ability to manage the knowledge about target markets provides a significant contribution to employee-based brand equity. They added that employees must perceive the meaningfulness and relevance of their brand in embracing their roles for acting as brand representatives. Similarly, Altaf and Shahzad (2018) revealed that when employees feel that they acquire enough knowledge about their given jobs or tasks, have personal responsibilities, and recognize the meaningfulness of their work, they tend to achieve higher work qualities. Therefore, the result of this study will increase managers' awareness towards knowledge management in transportation department, and may help them in increasing their employee-based brand equity. Business managers can also use knowledge management as a functional tool for enhancing internal quality control of their businesses, because it can allow them to circulate important customers' data which would be useful for making better strategic decisions and safeguarding higher employee-based brand equity (Fugate, Stank, & Mentzer, 2009).

The outcomes also proved that CRM organization has a positive impact on employee-based brand equity. Yim et al. (2004) suggested that, through putting more emphasis on key customers and implanting it in the firm's CRM system, the whole brand should be designed in a way that can warrant the creation of successful customer-brand relationships. This process requires high brand commitment among employees and willingness to support customers in line with brand values and

vision. Furthermore, Mohammad, Rashid, and Tahir (2013) indicated that in order to ensure a successful implementation of CRM in a firm, it is necessary to redesign and align the organizational process and structure, involve all staff members in the CRM process, and plan for the change in advance. For example, creating a group of teams to manage the process of CRM requires an extensive coordination and integration among employees across diverse units in the firm in order to increase customer value and employee motivation. The structure of the team may encompass cross-functional teams, problem-solving teams, process teams, and customer-oriented teams (Akroush et al., 2011; Grass, Backmann, & Hoegl, 2020). Generally, the finding presented herein reveal that in order to effectively organize the entire organization around CRM requires considering the departmentalization structures, commitment of organizational resources, and ability to manage human capital effectively to reinforce employees' commitment towards the brand.

lastly, the findings confirmed the positive effect of technology-based CRM on employee-based brand equity, and this was supported by AlSaleh (2019) who reported that CRM technology plays a vital role in shaping employee brand equity. Rapp et al. (2010) also verified that the ability to implement CRM technology effectively provides the brand with better marketing capabilities and enable it to engender higher levels of performance. This performance can be attained through employees' allegiance towards the brand and high brand identification. Irvine and Anderson (2008) added that employees can learn about customers' needs and brand value through technological implementation. By capitalizing on the information system and technological features to connect with customers and deliver the services, employees tend to engender greater brand commitment and stay longer with the brand. Moreover, firms that use an advanced IT infrastructure and software technologies frequently tend to enjoy multiple benefits which can be witnessed via greater economic profits and better abilities to compete in target markets (Santhanam & Hartono, 2003). Thus, the application of information technology enables the service providers to automate customer touch-points for acquiring the needed data and interpreting it in the correct manner. On whole, the result suggests that the marketing practitioners in transportation department should utilize information technology for managing customers' relationships and to ensure superior brand commitment and satisfaction among their employees.

6. Limitations and future research

Despite the important contribution provided in this study to the theory and practice on CRM and employee-based brand equity, there are few limitations that can be taken into consideration in future researches. First, this paper focused only on examining the four dimensions of customer relationship management and employee-based brand equity; therefore, similar studies can be conducted in an attempt to identify other predictors. Moreover, the impact of CRM dimensions on each of the employee-based brand equity elements could be examined separately in order to clearly understand which one is more influenced by the CRM dimensions. Third, this study examined the selected constructs in the transportation context; consequently, future researches can test the same model in different contexts. Fourth, this paper is based on a quantitative research approach; thus, future studies on this topic can adopt the qualitative approach or mixed research methods to get better understandings about the importance of CRM dimensions in influencing employee-based brand equity. Finally, the current study was conducted in one country (Saudi Arabia), and this may hinder the findings' generalizability to other regions. Hence, the research framework can be reexamined in different countries to endorse the results and contribute to the empirical literature on this topic.

Appendix A. Factor loadings of remaining items based on CFA results

Construct and Items	Factor Loadings
CRM Dimensions	
Customer Orientation	
In our company, we treat key customers with great care.	0.825
Our company is committed towards meeting the needs and expectations of customers.	0.859
Our company provides customized services/products to our key customers	0.661
Knowledge Management	
Our company fully understands the needs of our key customers via knowledge leaning.	0.838
Our company provides channels to enable ongoing two-way communication between our key customers and us.	0.676
In our company's, we are willing to help customers in a responsive manner, e.g. through interaction and touch points.	0.612
Customers can expect prompt service from employees of our company.	0.707
CRM Organization	
Our company established and monitored customer centric performance standards at all customer touch-points	0.537
Employee performance in our company is measured and rewarded based on meeting customer needs and on successfully serving the customer.	0.714
Our organizational structure is thoroughly designed around our customers.	0.820
Our training programs are designed to develop skills for acquiring and deepening customer relationships.	0.761
Technology Based CRM	
Our company has the right software to serve customers.	0.843
Our company has the right hardware to serve customers.	0.892
Our computer technology helps us to create customized offerings to customers.	0.846
Employee-Based Brand Equity	
Brand Endorsement	
I say positive things about our company (brand) to others.	0.712
I would recommend our company (brand) to someone who seeks my advice.	0.785
I enjoy talking about our company (brand) to others	0.938
Brand Consistent Behavior	
I demonstrate behaviors that are consistent with the brand promise of our company.	0.792
I consider the impact on our company's brand before communicating or taking action in any situation	0.661
I am always interested to learn about our company's brand and what it means to me in my role.	0.802
Brand Allegiance	
I plan to be with the company (brand) I work for, for awhile.	0.948
I would turn down an offer from another company (brand) if it comes at any time	0.817

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