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Employees As Advertisers: On the Effects of Internal Advertising Using a Flexible Online Brand Center Platform

Empleats com a anunciants: sobre els efectes de la publicitat interna mitjançant la plataforma flexible de marca en línia

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The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between attitude construct variables and internal advertising construct variables, brand awareness and brand knowledge, and to explore the effectiveness of a flexible online brand center platform for internal employee communication.

The data consisted of fourteen interviews with 32 employees as participants divided into 5 focus groups based on their job category at the University of Aveiro. The qualitative data derived from the discussion was transformed into quantitative data, counting the number of references associated with each variable. Cochran's Q test was performed to test the heterogeneity of the different blocks of variables and a Multinomial Regression Analysis was conducted to see the effect of job category.

El propòsit d'aquest estudi és explorar la relació entre les variables de construcció d'actitud relacionades amb l'organització i les variables de construcció de publicitat interna, la consciència de marca i el coneixement de la marca, per tal d'explorar l'eficàcia d'una plataforma flexible de marca en línia per a la comunicació interna dels empleats.

Les dades consisteixen en catorze entrevistes de 32 empleats com a participants dividits en 5 grups d'enfocament basats en la seva categoria de treball de la Universitat d'Aveiro. Les dades qualitatives derivades de la discussió s'han transformat en quantitatius, explicant el nombre de referències associades a cada variable. S'ha realitzat la prova Q de Cochran per demostrar l'heterogeneïtat dels diferents blocs de

The relationship between attitude construct variables (i.e., organizational commitment and identification) with the internal brand advertising variables (i.e., brand knowledge and brand awareness), were found to be statistically significant. Furthermore, each of these attitude construct variables and internal brand advertising variables were also found to be statistically significant in their association with the variable measuring willingness to participate in the online brand center platform. Also, it was observed that sex and job category variables influences the attitude construct variables.

The study confirms the previous marketing findings regarding the theoretical explanation of brand integration among employees. The relationship between identification and organizational commitment and the relationship between brand awareness and brand knowledge observed in previous studies were confirmed. Future research may investigate the possible causes of higher identification in teaching staff compared to non-teaching staff, as well as the differences in the psychological variables for men and women. Managerial implications suggest that online brand center may be effective in internal advertising to employees and in turn employees can become advertisers of brands to potential consumers.

Key words: *internal advertising, branding, stakeholder, internal communication, online brand center.*

variables i s'ha realitzat una anàlisi de regressió multinomial per veure l'efecte de la categoria de treball.

Relació entre el compromís organitzatiu, les variables d'identificació amb variables de publicitat interna de marca, el coneixement de la marca i la consciència de marca s'han associat estadísticament a la participació en la plataforma de marca en línia per induir publicitat interna (PBC). A més, s'ha observat que la categoria de sexe i de treball influeix en les variables de construcció d'actitud.

L'estudi confirma les conclusions del màrqueting sobre l'explicació teòrica de la integració de la marca amb els empleats. S'ha corroborat la relació entre la identificació i el compromís organitzacional i la relació entre la consciència de la marca i el coneixement de la marca en estudis previs. En el futur es poden investigar les possibles causes de la identificació més alta en els empleats docents en comparació amb els empleats no docents, així com la diferència en les variables psicològiques per a homes i dones. Les implicacions directives suggereixen que el centre de marca en línia pot ser eficaç en la publicitat interna als empleats i que, al seu torn, els empleats poden convertir-se en anunciants de marques per als consumidors potencials.

Paraules clau: *publicitat interna, marca, part interessada, comunicació interna, centre de marca en línia.*

Brand management has become an area of interest in the marketing discipline over the last decades (Noble *et al*. 2002) in recognition that brands reflect consumers' perceptions of an organization (Keller, 1998). Organizations endeavor to build the value integrated with the brands they create, develop, and nurture. Advertising has been the most essential source to build brands, creating the brand's equity by the advertising's performance gauged by many firms (Ambler, 2000). The interrelationship between advertising and brand equity has attracted considerable interest among researchers and consultants over the years (Vallaster and Chernatony, 2006). But despite the importance of their relationship, the perspectives of managers have not expanded to all types of stakeholders, specifically employee's role in advertising and the brand equity.

The role of advertising has been traditionally known for its focus on potential customers, to create awareness, knowledge, and desire among customers, acquiring brand equity. But most often it has been entirely focused on the consumers and not the employee as a prospective stakeholder who can influence the consumer directly. Most time managers ignore the critical fact that, employees are the prospective people who can make the brand persuading to the target audience. Without the powerful emotional connection of employees to the brands, the interface between the organization and the market through brand equity will not be significant (Dortok, 2006, Harris and Ogbonna, 2000). This study, therefore, examines the role of employees in the advertising of the brand as prospective advertisers themselves to their direct customers. As employees internally advertise, their brand awareness, knowledge, and learning increase, while they start to live the brand and identify themselves to the organization (King and Grace, 2008). Employees' organizational identification is essential for them to be inspired to become as advertisers themselves to the potential customers of the brand. This perspective of employee's as advertisers of the brand will help further understanding of internal advertising, which has received little attention on the effects of advertising on brand creation. We study the effects of internal advertising (with constructs of brand awareness and brand knowledge) to employees on their brands, using a flexible internal online platform, on their relationship with their organization (with constructs of organizational identification and organizational commitment). We use data from employees of a higher education institution on the effects of introducing a new online platform as an internal brand advertising source for their organizational brand and from the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data, we present the results and discuss on the prospects of employees as advertisers of the brand to their target audience.

EMPLOYEE AS A STAKEHOLDER TO RECEIVE INTERNAL ADVERTISING THROUGH INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Advertising has often been concentrated on customers and brand equity by most marketing researchers, despite of the fact that employees are yet another important stakeholder to the organization who can have important effects on customers and brand equity. Advertising can have positive effects on employee mo-

tivation, their organizational commitment and to identify themselves with the organizations (Gilly and Wolfinbarger, 1998), which can in turn help to promise their customers and deliver the brand prospectively. Kotler (1991), states that a successful internal advertising can help "the task of successfully hiring, training, and motivating able employees to serve the customer well".

Internal advertising is the effective communications of the brand to the employees with the objective of making them identify themselves with the brand in order to be able to market and deliver the brand values, products and services to their direct customers. This brand identification will in turn motivate employee engagement through the effective internal communication to achieve the main organizational objectives (Welch and Jackson, 2007). In recent public relations research there is a growing specialization in internal communication, highlighting to rethink the importance of organizations need to evaluate and improve stakeholder approach of employee internal communication (Omilion and Baker, 2014; Ruck and Welch, 2012; Vercic *et al*., 2012). Internal communication is considered as the interdisciplinary function integrating aspects of human resources management, communication and marketing to develop successful employee engagement, loyalty and motivation to the organizational needs (Vercic *et al*., 2012). Internal communication is therefore defined as the "strategic management of interactions and relationships between stakeholders within organizations, peer communication and internal overall organizational communication (Welch and Jackson, 2007), which is essential for strategic internal advertising to meet employees' temporal, informational, and affective needs (Omilion and Baker, 2014). In the present study, within the informational needs we focus on the brand awareness and brand knowledge constructs and as affective needs, the constructs of organizational commitment and identification of employees which are considered as crucial prerequisite for organizational success. We discuss these important aspects in the following paragraphs.

Internal advertising enables the process of the "commitment" to the organization by the employees by starting to living the brand (Ind, 2001). Organizational commitment engages the employees to be loyal to the brand who are found to exhibit a relatively stable and conscious tendency to develop a relationship with their organization and brand equity (Bloemer and Odekerken, 2006). Employee's loyalty is conceptualized as a willingness to remain at the service of the company and to respond prominently to customer needs (Riechheld, 1996). Berry and Lampo (2004) in their study show how loyal employees influence the customers' brand perceptions positively and are able to deliver the brand promise to customers.

To ensure that the employees are able to deliver the brand effectively, the company needs to internally communicate and promote the brand to the employees (Ahmed and Rafiq, 2003), through brand participation and transform the internal message to reflect the customers' expected brand experience (Boone, 2000). Brand participation promotes the practice of internal marketing and creates the positive attitude of employees to provide the brand to the customers (Mitchell, 2002). The internal communication developed through brand participation, creates the brand awareness and brand knowledge to the employees (Lelis, 2018).

EFFECTS OF INTERNAL ADVERTISING

The foremost objective of advertising is to create brand awareness and brand knowledge to a prospective target audience. Through internal advertising of the brand by encouraging employees to participate in the branding process, the organization ensures that the employees develop awareness about the brand and increase their knowledge to be able to deliver the services to the potential customers. The effect of internal communication builds the employees' brand awareness and knowledge to live to the brand and in turn helps to develop the attitudes of commitment and identification to the organization. As the internal communication is strong, encouraging brand participation, it motivates the employees to be committed to the organization. The brand knowledge and awareness of the branding helps the employees in the process of understanding the strategy of the organization, its products, and even reveals the organization's current identity, historical roots, culture, values, essence, vision (Bosch *et al.*, 2004). It promotes easier understanding for the employees, to know for what their organization stands and provides the information needed by employees to increase the organization's image among the external stakeholders and potential consumers. Organizations must therefore, create such supportive environments of intellectual capital and at the same time transmit effectively the knowledge of their brand to their employees (King and Grace, 2008), which can in turn promote their organizational commitment and to identify themselves to the organizational structure. Therefore, we predict that the interconnection of the reflective constructs of brand internal communication, namely, brand awareness, brand knowledge between organizational commitment and identification will be strong and positive. Thus, we predict that:

- *H1*. The internal communication construct, brand awareness, will be positively associated with organizational commitment.
- *H2*. The internal communication construct, brand awareness, will be positively associated with organizational identification.
- *H3*. The internal communication construct, brand knowledge, will be positively associated with organizational commitment.
- *H4*. The internal communication construct, brand knowledge, will be positively associated with organizational identification.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Data was collected from 32 employees working at the University of Aveiro, a higher education institution. Academics are rich sources of tangible ideas for the brands that represent their universities. That is because they establish numerous contacts, present researches and conferences worldwide, exchange artifacts and souvenirs, and hand out items of merchandise from many different meetings

in which they participate. Furthermore, they have direct contacts with students and delegates who are the possible clients for the institution, to whom they have to transfer the positive brand perceptions, aspired from the internal communication of the institution. Therefore, they were considered as appropriate participants for the present study. Besides, the University of Aveiro, was chosen due to its huge IT infrastructure and the fact that all their employees are trained in the use of ICT in all their varied functions.

According to Morgan (1997), the number of participants per Focus group is on average between the five and twelve, with three to five groups being generally considered adequate to achieve results with sufficient information for analysis. The same author also defends on the importance of some homogeneity in the constitution of the groups (a condition that relates, for example, to the statute organization, the socio-economic level, the age and the participants hold one over the other), as participants typically feel more comfortable to express their ideas and opinions when they are in pairs. Therefore, we divided the participants into five groups considering their job category (associate-full professor, senior lecturers, lecturers, non-teaching staff 1 and non-teaching staff 2), where we divided them into 3 groups of teaching and 2 groups of non-teaching staff.

Three groups of teaching staff composed of 17 participants and two groups of non-teaching staff composed of 15 participants, considering that the number of teachers and non-teaching staff in UA are distributed in a ratio of three to two. The teaching staff were composed into groups based on job categories of Associate and full professor with four participants, Senior Lecturers with six participants and Lecturers with seven participants. The sample was totally composed by 18 women and 14 men.

Procedure

The 32 employees of the University of Aveiro as outlined in the previous section into five groups participated in 14 interviews. The average session duration was 107 minutes, of which, in average, 49 minutes were dedicated to the group interview. The five focus groups were set up and the participants (teachers and non-teaching staff) were invited to discuss the subject. The planning of the focus groups (FGs) included the creation of a flexible yet comprehensive script, to ensure that the selected technique would answer the research question, but also as a way to ensure minimum consistency between FGs (Morgan, 1997). Besides the essential presence of a moderator, each session also included a technical observer, who took control of audio-visual equipment. Recordings of all the FGs were fully transcribed and sent to participants for validation. The meeting rooms were prepared previously, with seating in a U formation so that participants could see each other during the whole session. After a brief introduction and topics review, the first themes to be discussed were of a general nature and easy approach, to enable the immediate participation of all (Morgan, 1997). Only then we introduced more specific questions that prompted some reflection.

Afterwards, they were shown a non-functional "online brand" prototype of a Participatory Brand Centre (PBC) to assess the willingness/motivation to participate

in activities that may enhance UA's brand. This was related to an experiment that was done before the interviews. This activity consisted in making different chocolate shapes with the University logo, trying to encourage the employees to understand better the logo. The shapes they built were later implemented to sell the chocolates in the University Boutique. Finally, a discussion about the PBC took place.

Later on, the qualitative information gathered was transformed into quantitative data and was arranged into different variables under the categories "relationship between employee-organization", "relationship between employee-brand created through internal communication via brand participation", "relationship between employee-usage of software to assess the internal communication of the brand from the organization to employees".

Measurements

As previously said the data gathered was qualitative information obtained from 14 interviews. To organize the qualitative data, the web-QDA, an online independent software tool was used which was developed by a group of researchers from the University of Aveiro designed to help organize and analyze non-structured data or qualitative data such as interviews, articles, social media content, among others. The software was used to carry out the content analysis to categorize verbal or behavioral data for the purpose of classification, summarization and tabulation of the collected data. Using the software after an initial and careful reading of the transcripts, common themes were highlighted, in parallel with themes that had already been anticipated (Krueger and Casey, 2000), according to the context of concepts previously outlined. The analysis codes, defined in the planning of the focus groups, were integrated in the software, in order to facilitate the coding process, generating instances from the references considered relevant. However, coded references differ widely: some are sentences or whole paragraphs, others by only one word or expression, depending on the meaning they convey. It is should be noted that considering the criterion of homogeneity on ethnographic nature, the participants were grouped for content analysis rather than extracting information of participants as individuals. Thus, the information was coded relevantly, both in terms of their frequency and their meaning, in one or two individuals, who verbalized them which led to the discussion compared to others. Also, if individuals who did not express their views so strongly, if they expressed their views on the subject resorting to gesture, facial or body, it was not discarded as it was consented in some non-verbal manner.

The data analysis of the focus groups was divided into four different exercises that were, progressively, consolidating the interpretation by triangulation, and supporting the following exercises, in order to ensure the robustness of the results:

1. Representation of focus group activity, using numerical reference indicators, taking into account the codes of analysis;
2. Aggregation of themes / recurring references into categories to examine the frequency with which they appear, in each detail response and throughout the discussion;

3. Intersection of codes of analysis among themselves in order to find answers to research questions that particularize the main research question;
4. Intersection of the analysis codes with the areas of the model, to verify the components thereof.

The correspondence between orientation / detail questions and analysis codes was systematized and served as a framework for all analysis exercises using questions such as indicated below for each of the variables (table 1).

Table 1. Guidance Questions and Codes of Analysis

Guidance Questions		Codes of Analysis
QO1 - What is the AU for the employees who work at it?		**Relationship with the organization**
1.1	What do the employees of this university identify with?	Identification
1.2	Do you consider that UA officials are people committed to the organization?	Commitment
QO2 - What do you know about the organization's brand representation and use?		**Relationship with the brand**
2.1	Can you describe the UA graphic brand?	Brand Knowledge
2.2	Do you know how to access UA brand standards?	Brand Knowledge
2.3	How important is brand graphic standards?	Brand awareness
2.4	Do the employees take ownership of the brand? Identify situations in which you use the graphic markup to apply it to your creations.	Brand awareness
QO3 - Would it make sense to implement an online resource based on the submitted model PBC?		**Relationship with the online platform brand center PBC**
2.5	Personally, what would lead you to participate in such a platform?	Willingness to participate

Source: own elaboration.

The variables under study according to the hypothesis are classified as attitude construct variables (organizational commitment and identification) and internal communication construct variables (brand awareness and brand knowledge). The willingness to participate in the online platform (PBC) was named as such.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The following analysis was made to test our hypothesis and to discover the interconnection between the different constructs under study: Chi-square, Cochran's Q test, Multinomial Logistic Regression, Spearman test of correlation, and the Kruskal-Wallis H test.

The first analysis ran was a chi-square between the two socio-demographic variables: gender and job category to see if they had any type of relation or interconnection. In simpler terms we tried to understand if the observed differences were results of random variations not related to sex. The purpose was to individuate the possible variables to control.

We conducted a Cochran's Q test, the binary version of the Friedman test to find the interconnection between the constructs. We transformed the values coded for the different constructs into binary codes, transforming in 0 the values which were below 15 per cent of the total references of the single responder in each of the variables analyzed, and in 1 the value above the aforementioned percentage. The percentage selected was a result of the investigation of the literature, most of the papers put a cut-off at ten per cent, but after several tests with the alternatives of ten, fifteen and twenty, we determined that fifteen, the middle range percentage, was the more accurate and sensible value for the present study. As the Cochran's Q test was significant, to find a significant between the groups, we had to compute a multiple pair-wise comparison to find the differences between groups. Then we did a Multinomial Logistic Regression, with the purpose of predicting the different variables (brand awareness, brand knowledge, organizational commitment, organizational identification, willingness to participate in a PBC (online platform for brand communication), the job categories and gender were used as predictor variables. This step is considered as an extension of the binomial logistic regression. We ran five multinomial regression analyses: one for gender and then for each of the variables. The outcome that we obtained from this analysis was to compare one group with the other. In this case, the group of male was compared to the female responders and the different job profile under teaching category was compared to the non-teaching group.

In order to test the hypothesis, the Spearman test of correlation was used to analyze the correlation between the internal communication construct variables and the attitude construct variables, in this case the variables were analyzed in terms of number of references reported, not reduced in binary code. Spearman test of correlation was also use to explore the correlation between the willingness to participate in the PBC experience and the other variables such as brand awareness, brand knowledge, organizational commitment, and organizational identification.

In order to understand the effect of sex and job categories on each variable, separately we decided to use a non-parametric test because we did not make any assumption of normality of the distribution of the sample. Specifically, we ran the Kruskal-Wallis H test to understand the effect between the aforementioned factors.

RESULTS

In order to analyze the results, we started first with an accurate description of the data that we collected with employees of the University of Aveiro.

Within the teaching employees the category of Associate and full professors was the one with an average of more references. Women had a higher average

number of total references in the Senior Lecturers and the Non-teaching groups while men had it in the Associate and Full professors and the Lecturers group.

For the different construct variables, identification in Associate and Full professors group was the most referenced variable in average. Male members clearly referenced in average more the construct variables under study than women. Senior Lecturers and Lecturers were the most consistent groups in average number of references per construct variable.

The results for the different construct variables showed that Brand awareness was referenced in average more times than the other internal advertising construct, Brand knowledge. Contrary to the other constructs of attitude variables (organizational commitment and identification), women referenced more in average.

In general, the employees of the UA perceived more advantages than obstacles in the use of the online Participatory Brand Center as a brand internal communication unit. The groups of Senior Lecturers and Non-teaching employees were the ones who referenced in average more advantages, the Associate and Full Professors referenced the same number of obstacles and advantages in average, while Lecturers clearly referenced more obstacles in average. Finally, the willingness to participate in the implementation of the PBC in the UA, was in average higher in the Non-teaching employees while the job category less willingly to participate was the Associate and Full Professors.

Additionally, a chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between job categories and gender. The relationship between these two socio-demographic variables was not significant, $X^2(1, N = 32) = 0.315$, $p = .366$.

To test the heterogeneity between the different construct variables we used the Cochran's Q test which had a p-value of 0,002, indicating that the success rate for at least one construct variable was different from the others. Being this result significant, we proceeded to do the Cochran's Q test by a multiple pairwise comparison. This method requires a Bonferroni alpha adjustment to control the overall experiment-wise error of the test. The difference between the concepts of identification and commitment to the organization was found to be statistically significant with a p-value lower than .001.

In order to predict the different construct variables with the socio-demographic variables we conducted a multinomial logistic regression. Using the construct variables with sex, we could see that all the variables were more likely to be referenced by men than by women: Identification, $X^2(1, N=32) = 6,708$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .253$, $p = .010$; Organizational Commitment, $X^2(1, N=32) = 9,162$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .334$, $p = .002$. Using the construct variables with job category we could find a more irregular and complex result as it is shown in Table 2. Identification was more likely to be referenced by: The Associate and Full professors than by the Non-teaching employees, $X^2(1, N=32) = 20,501$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .513$, $p = .004$; by the Senior Lecturers than by the Non-teaching employees, $X^2(1, N=32) = 20,501$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .513$, $p = .041$;and by the Lecturers than by the Non-teaching employees, $X^2(1, N=32) = 20,501$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .513$, $p = .027$.

Table 2. Multinomial Analysis

	Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% Confidence Interval for Exp(B)	
								Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Associate and full professors	Identification	.910	.319	8.150	1	.004*	2.485	1.330	4.643
	OC	.036	.182	.039	1	.843	1.037	.726	1.481
Senior Lecturers	Identification	.474	.232	4.175	1	.041*	1.606	1.020	2.530
	OC	.269	.139	3.745	1	.053	1.309	.997	1.718
Lecturers	Identification	.508	.229	4.903	1	.027*	1.662	1.060	2.606
	OC	.229	.134	2.928	1	.087	1.257	.967	1.634

Note: Non-teaching was used as the Reference Category.

Source: own elaboration.

A Spearman's rank-order correlation was conducted (Table 3) to determine the relationship between the attitude construct variables (organizational commitment and organizational identity) and the internal communication constructs variables (brand awareness and brand knowledge). We found statistically positive significant relationship between the variables Brand awareness and Brand knowledge ($\gamma_s(30)$= .505, p = .003), Organizational Commitment and Brand awareness ($\gamma_s(30)$= .409, p = .020) and between Organizational Commitment and Brand knowledge ($\gamma_s(30)$= .392, p = .027) as represented in the table below.

**Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations
of the Socio-Cognitive and Co-Creation Variables**

Correlations						
Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Identification	—					
Organizational Commitment	.124	.674**	—			
Brand awareness	.244	.263	.409*	.198	—	
Brand knowledge	-.023	.235	.392*	.338	.505**	—
M	5.56	6.16	5.19	3.75	3.13	1.50
SD	4.96	4.59	4.35	3.72	2.81	1.90

Note: * p < .05; ** p < .01.

Source: own elaboration.

The variable used to explore the PBC experience with the employees of the University of Aveiro was the willingness of participating in the experience. As you

can see in the Table 4, we found positive statistically significant relations between the variables commitment and Willingness to participate (γ_s (30) = .466, p = .007) and Access to Brand guidelines and Willingness to participate. (γ_s (30) = .505, p = .003).

Table 4. Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations of the Variables Analyzed

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
Identification	—				
Organizational Commitment	.124	.674**	—		
Willingness to participate the PBC	.216	.466**	.249	.220	—
M	5.56	6.16	5.19	3.75	2.75
SD	4.96	4.59	4.35	3.72	2.30
Variables	1	2	3		
Visual Identity	—				
Access to brand guidelines	.505**	—			
Willingness to participate in the PBC	.269	.137	—		
M	3.13	1.50	2.75		
SD	2.81	1.90	2.30		

Note: * p < .05; **p < .01.

Source: own elaboration.

A Kruskal-Wallis H test showed that there was statistically significant difference in the variable identification between the different job categories, (X^2(3)= 13,351, p= 0.004, with a mean job category score of 28,88 for Associate and Full Professors group, 18,33 for Senior Lecturers, 19,71 for Lecturers and 10,97 for Non-teaching employees group.

To know between which job category groups the differences were in we ran the Mann-Whitney U test. We found out that Identification was statistically significantly higher in the Associate and full professors group than in the Lecturers (U= 3,5, p= .047), in the Associate and full professors than in the Non-teaching employees (U= 0,0, p= .003) and also higher in the Lecturers group than in the Non-teaching group (U= 21,500, p= .028). The Kruskal-Wallis H test didn't show statistically significant differences for the attitude construct variables used in the different job categories.

On the contrary, the results were statistically significantly for all the construct variables when taking into account the sex. In all the attitude construct variables, male group reported statistically significant values with higher mean ranks than female: Identification (U= 65,000, p= .020), Organizational Commitment (U= 63,000, p= .016). For the internal communication construct variables, we did

not find statistically significant differences, neither for the sex nor for the job categories.

DISCUSSION

Employees as stakeholder of an organization require different conditions and attention to experience the brand and the organization to act as an advertiser of the brand for the potential customer by living the brand within the organization. In our study, we show that internal communication of the brand to the employees through active participation increasing brand awareness and brand knowledge can influence the employees to transfer and express brand importance to the target audience. In the study, an online platform introduced within the organization for brand participation and internal communication of brand is shown as a flexible source of expression and communication between the organization and employees. Such an online tool helps them to express their job's position specific needs, demands, and to live the brand.

Our findings suggest the willingness to participate in such an online protocol as a tool for internal communication. It is shown to have a positive association between developing brand awareness, brand knowledge and the employee attitude construct variables such as, organizational commitment and organizational identification. Additionally, we found that the attitude construct variables were different regarding sex, where men reported higher mean references than women. This could be because, men were shown to be more interested in participating in an online brand center (PBC) in order to receive internal communication on branding within the organization.

Finally, concerning the PBC, lecturers showed more obstacles in the use of the tool in their placement of work in the University of Aveiro. The employees, who are part of this job category group, are employees without permanent contracts. This may be due to the fact that for their place of work and their conditions, participating in the PBC did not increase their brand experience much, taking into account the possibility of their short stay in the organization and that probably they can also have another job in organizations with different aims, and therefore brand structure.

Finally, the findings suggest important managerial implications; firstly, as internal advertising increases among the employees, as important stakeholders, they can be motivated in brand participation and in turn this may affect positively their organizational commitment and identification. Secondly, internal advertising can be promoted by brand participation where brand awareness and brand knowledge can be an effective communication construct to have a positive relationship between the organization and brand in order to transfer the positive brand image to the potential customers. Finally, online branding centers are effective in motivating employees to be internally informed of the brand and act as an important tool in internal advertising.

As limitations of the study, the data was collected from a small University of no more than 15000 students, which limited the participants. Also the study was

hard to conduct in terms of time costs. As a future research study, other sectors and industries can be explored to find the relationship between online brand advertising and employee participation on the effects of brand advertising to the end customers.

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