

Quantitative Assessment of Internal Brand Dynamics in Organizational Contexts

***Irena KENAROVA-PENCHEVA**

*University of Ruse "Angel Kanchev", Ruse, Bulgaria
ikenarova@uni-ruse.bg*

Petar PENCHEV

*University of Ruse "Angel Kanchev", Ruse, Bulgaria
ppenchev@uni-ruse.bg*

Abstract. *This paper explores the internal dynamics of branding in organizations. The emphasis is placed on the relationship between brand orientation, employee responsibilities, and internal brand value. The article is based on the assumption that brand values are not only transmitted outside the company. Employees have to understand, accept and support these values inside the company as well. Internal branding is a key issue in achieving consistency, organizational cohesion and sustainability. The work is based on empirical research conducted in enterprises in the manufacturing industry. Data were collected through a questionnaire completed by employees at different organizational levels. Quantitative analysis is employed to investigate the influence of brand orientation and employees' responsibilities on the value of the internal brand. The results show that a high level of brand orientation is related to a high level of internal brand value. Enterprises in which the brand plays a key role in management practices and internal processes have more positive employees' attitudes towards the brand. In the analysis, it was found that employees' responsibility for the brand has a significant positive influence on internal brand value. If employees feel responsible for the brand and act in accordance with brand values, then the internal brand is stronger and more consistent. The importance of internal communication, management support, and employees' participation in internal branding processes is underlined in the article. The article shows empirical evidence that internal branding is a key issue in achieving organizational cohesion, sustainability, and competitiveness.*

Keywords: internal branding, internal brand value, brand orientation, employee responsibility, organizational identity, organizational behavior.

Introduction

This article presents the results of a dissertation study dedicated to internal branding and the value of the internal brand in an organizational context. In the conditions of increased competition, a dynamic business environment and a growing role of intangible assets, internal branding is being established as a key factor for the sustainable development and competitiveness of organizations. The need for the brand to be not only externally communicated, but also internally understood, accepted and maintained by employees is increasingly evident.

In this sense, the study focuses on the role of brand orientation and internal responsibilities of employees as key determinants for building sustainable internal brand value. Employees are seen as active bearers of brand identity, whose attitudes, behavior and commitment have a direct impact on the strength and consistency of the brand both internally and externally. After presenting the objectives and scientific focus of the article, the next section examines the main theoretical positions and definitions related to internal branding, which build the conceptual framework of the study.

Literature review

Internal branding – definitions

Internal branding refers to the process of creating and managing the brand within the organization in order to ensure that all employees understand, share and support the values, mission and strategic goals of the company. This process includes engaging employees with the brand, promoting a sense of belonging and pride, as well as building an organizational culture that supports and strengthens the brand identity.

In the literature, internal branding is viewed as a mechanism for creating a clear and consistent brand message within the organization, which employees not only understand, but also convey in their contacts with customers and other stakeholders (Ries & Trout, 1981). The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development places a similar emphasis, according to which internal branding is a process of engaging employees with the company's brand so that they understand and support its values, mission and goals. Kotler and Keller (2016) complement this understanding by emphasizing the role of internal branding in creating a culture and work environment in which employees are informed, motivated and engaged with the brand, which allows them to deliver quality products and services. Strong organizations are built through consistency and coherence in brand efforts over time and in all activities, they carry out. Every contact with target customers should reinforce and strengthen the organization's brand position, which also implies a clear understanding of the brand strategy by the staff. All participants in the implementation of the brand strategy must know the target markets and the company's brand positioning in order to be able to support the brand with their actions.

Modern brand management faces many challenges, among which internal branding is increasingly central. In many organizations, the brand is no longer the sole responsibility of marketing departments, but is perceived as a shared value and responsibility of all employees. Conducting internal initiatives, training and surveys helps to build clarity about the role of each employee in maintaining and developing the brand. Brand management is most successful when each member of the organization has a clear understanding of the essence of the brand and the way in which their own actions contribute to or hinder its development. The growing role of employees in presenting individual and corporate brands in contacts with current and potential customers further strengthens the importance of internal branding. From this perspective, internal branding is established as a key factor in the market success of the brand (Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010).

Internal branding may also be considered as a way that provides considerable, yet underutilized, opportunities to motivate employees to share the values and behaviors of the brand. Internal branding is seen to have a two-fold impact on the attitudes of employees, as it, on the one hand, increases their level of job satisfaction and provides an environment that is motivating and inspirational, and, on the other, through internal communications, it makes employees aware of the brand messages, roles, and responsibilities in the implementation of brand strategies. Having understood the content and role of internal branding as a process of management and culture, the next step is to understand the result and the effect of internal branding in the organization, and in this way, the focus is on the concept of internal brand value, which makes it possible to measure the level to which internal branding is adopted by the employees.

Internal brand value

Internal brand value, as defined in the literature, is considered the outcome of successful internal branding. Internal brand value can be defined as the level of employees' awareness, acceptance, and support of brand values. Various definitions of internal brand value are presented in the

literature, each of which addresses the issue from its particular point of view, thus highlighting the importance of internal brand value for organizational sustainability.

Internal brand value can be measured in terms of the level of employees' awareness of brand values, their acceptance of these values, and their communication of these values to customers and other stakeholders. This, in fact, represents one of the most important steps in developing sustainable corporate identity, which, in turn, can positively influence brand perception (King & Grace, 2008). Melewar and Jenkins (2002) consider internal brand value to be generated through internal communications and training. In other words, it is assumed that employees internalize brand values and implement them in their daily activities, thus generating internal brand value for the organization as a whole. Balmer (2017) defines internal brand value as the outcome of the in-depth integration of brand identity into organizational culture. In other words, it is assumed that employees internalize brand values, thus generating internal brand value for the organization as a whole. All these definitions of internal brand value lead to the conclusion that it cannot be generated solely through internal communications, but it also requires the in-depth integration of brand identity into the thought and practice of employees.

The term brand has been recognized and accepted in the field of marketing research. It has been considered an additional value, which is produced by the brand name, brand logo, and other brand attributes. In the same way, the concept of internal brand value can be considered an additional effect of the brand, which is produced on the behavior of the employees. It includes incentives generated by the brand that are reflected in employee behavior, aligning with the brand attributes both internally and externally. High levels of internal brand value are achieved when the employee behavior aligns with the brand identity, and the employee is able to convey the brand messages to the external world in a consistent and committed manner (Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010).

However, recent theories related to internal branding have expanded the concept by emphasizing employees' contribution to brand value. In this view, internal brand value reflects an organization's ability to turn employees into brand conveyors, creating synergy between internal communication and work motivation and strengthening competitive advantages (Tuzovic & Kabadayi, 2021). Having discussed the concept and dimensions of internal branding, the next step is to identify the factors that influence internal brand value. The following section discusses the major determinants of the concept and builds the conceptual framework for the research model and hypotheses.

Key determinants of internal brand value

Internal brand value is shaped by four employee- and organization-related attributes: brand orientation, employees' responsibility toward the brand, internal brand knowledge, and internal brand commitment. This study empirically tests two central determinants—brand orientation and employees' responsibility toward the brand—because they capture the organizational and individual levels most directly and match the available measurement model. Brand orientation is described in the literature as a form of strategic orientation (and, in some accounts, a culture-linked approach) in which the brand has a central role as a foundation for the business model and organizational decisions (Urde, 1994). According to the founder of this concept, it is “a special way of thinking within the company.” Brand-oriented companies incorporate the brand into all their activities, which serves as the foundation for decision-making.

Aaker (2002) contributes to brand identity logic relevant to brand orientation. The brand orientation is “the process by which an organization creates and maintains a unique set of

associations for the brand that the brand developer wants to establish or maintain.” These associations are the meaning of the brand and the promises made to consumers by the members of the organization (Aaker, 2002). Brand orientation is the strategic direction that companies follow in developing and maintaining strong brands, which consequently results in business performance. It is characterized by “dominance of the brand in corporate strategic thinking, the relative constancy, consistency, meaningfulness to the customer/consumer, and distinctiveness of the branding strategy.” Thus, it can be considered a special kind of corporate culture within the model suggested by Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010), which is close to the research presented by Homburg and Pflesser (2000), although in this case, "stepped linear causal models" are presented, while in this research, the concept of brand orientation is presented as a unidimensional summarizing quantity of all "layers" of this construct.

It should be noted that while brand orientation is an organizational-level characteristic, the remaining three factors reflect employee-level perceptions and behaviors. In this research, we focus on employees' responsibility toward the brand as an employee-level construct capturing ownership and accountability, as well as willingness to act in line with brand values. Burmann and Zeplin (2005) developed this construct based on organizational commitment and describe it as the employee's psychological attachment to the brand and the degree to which it guides the desire to behave consistently with the brand and invest effort in achieving branding goals. Related work also links this employee-level attachment to stronger brand-supporting behavior (Qureshi et al., 2022). Clarifying internal brand value and its determinants provides the basis for developing the research model and hypotheses.

Methodology

The present study focuses on two key determinants of internal brand value identified in the theoretical framework: brand orientation at the organizational level and internal employee responsibilities to the brand at the individual level. These factors are considered central mechanisms through which internal branding translates into brand-congruent behavior and sustainable internal brand value.

Research Hypotheses

Corporate culture is widely recognized as a major driver of employee attitudes and behavior and therefore needs to be strategically aligned with brand values. In industrial settings, corporate brands often play a particularly important role, strengthening the link between brand-oriented culture and internal brand value. Therefore, brand orientation is expected to positively influence internal brand value.

On this basis, the following research hypotheses are formulated:

Hypothesis 1. Brand orientation at the firm level has a positive effect on internal brand value.

Previous research shows that internal brand responsibilities significantly influence employee attitudes and behavior. Employees who feel psychologically attached to the brand and perceive personal responsibility for it are more likely to act consistently with brand values. Accordingly, internal brand responsibilities are expected to positively affect internal brand value. Several studies have shown that internal brand responsibilities are a strong driver of employee attitudes and behavior (Jaramillo, Mulki, & Marshall, 2005). They are considered to be an equally strong factor in employee brand-oriented attitudes and behavior (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005). Thus, it is proposed:

Hypothesis 2. Internal brand responsibilities at the individual level have a positive effect on internal brand value.

After formulating the research hypotheses, the empirical design is presented, through which data are collected and analyzed for their verification. In this regard, the general population, the method of sample selection and the data collection procedure are specified, so as to ensure the possibility of reliable measurement of the key constructs - internal brand value, brand orientation and internal brand responsibilities.

Determination of the general population, sample size and data collection

The empirical study was conducted in the "Manufacturing of clothing" sector in Ruse region, the choice of sector being determined by its structural specificity and the importance of the human factor for the quality, reputation and sustainability of organizational practices.

According to the latest data of the National Statistical Institute, in the territory of Ruse region in the Republic of Bulgaria as of 2023, 196 enterprises operated under code 14 of the Classification of Economic Activities (CIE 2025): "Manufacturing of clothing". The economic activity is divided into two subsections: 14.1 "Manufacturing of knitted and crocheted clothing, including socks and tights", where 9 enterprises operate (the term "knitwear" comes from the French verb "tricoter", meaning "to knit"); and 14.2 "Manufacture of other wearing apparel and accessories". Subsection 14.2 is divided into: 14.21 "Manufacture of outerwear, except workwear" (135 enterprises), 14.22 "Manufacture of underwear" (9 enterprises), 14.23 "Manufacture of workwear" (6 enterprises), 14.24 "Manufacture of wearing apparel of treated soft fur and furskins" (0 enterprises in the region), and 14.29 "Manufacture of other wearing apparel and accessories, not elsewhere classified" (37 enterprises). To ensure minimum sector coverage for the region, the target was to include at least 5% of the enterprises (i.e., a minimum of 10 firms).

The method of conducting the survey requires a high degree of willingness to cooperate among the target companies, which is why personal contacts are very important. Therefore, the selected sample is not random, but systematic and purposeful. The enterprises are those with which personal contact can be made. Those companies that agreed to participate in the research received 3 questionnaires to be filled in by a top manager, a brand/marketing/product manager and another employee. To ensure comparability across companies and to capture perceptions from different hierarchical levels, three respondents were selected from each participating enterprise. The inclusion of a top manager and a brand/marketing/product manager ensured representation of strategic and functional perspectives related to brand management. The third respondent was selected from non-managerial staff involved in operational activities within the organization. This employee was required to have at least one year of tenure in the company in order to ensure familiarity with organizational culture and brand-related practices.

The selection of the non-managerial employee was not random; rather, companies were asked to nominate an employee who was actively involved in day-to-day organizational processes but not part of strategic management. This approach allowed the study to capture perceptions of internal brand value from both managerial and operational levels, while maintaining a balanced and structured sampling logic. Limiting the number to one operational employee per firm ensured consistency in data structure across enterprises and prevented overrepresentation of any single organizational level. In this way, a comprehensive picture of the value of the internal brand, perceived by employees in different positions in the company, were be obtained.

Altogether, 20 enterprises took part in the study and they represent 10% of the entire sector "Manufacture of clothing" in Ruse region. By subsectors, they constitute 30% of subsector 14.1

“Manufacture of knitted and crocheted clothing, including socks and tights” and 22% of subsector 14.22 “Manufacture of underwear”. Although three questionnaires were distributed per enterprise (top manager, brand/marketing/product manager, and one employee), the final usable dataset included 50 completed responses due to non-response and/or incomplete questionnaires. The final sample included 50 respondents: 16 top managers, 15 lower-level managers (6 marketing managers, 7 product managers and 2 brand managers), and 19 employees. This distribution allows assessment of internal brand value across different hierarchical levels within the organizations.

Research method

After collecting the input data by filling out the questionnaire from the three respondents from each company, the data were entered and processed.

Data for the tests of Hypotheses 1 and 2, related to the determinants of the internal brand value, were collected from the employee survey. The central concept, the internal brand value, was developed for the study of industrial branding in three industry sectors in Germany (metal production and processing, electrical and electronic engineering, machinery and equipment) by Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010). The dimensions that are also applied in this study were borrowed from there. One of the determinants of the internal brand value, brand orientation, was measured using a reflective scale first used by Baumüller & Baumgarth (2008). Internal brand responsibilities as a concept were introduced by Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010).

Limitations and questions for future research

The sample size and the possibility of bias pose significant limitations to the generalizable empirical findings, as the fact that the fieldwork was conducted in only one area of a single European country. Furthermore, since all variables were measured at a single point in time, it is not possible to assess variations in internal brand value and the causality of the hypotheses. Any future replication of this study should aim for greater geographical diversity, larger samples, and longer studies. Since the research method is based on subjective measurement of variables, their validity is usually questionable. Further research should use a combination of subjective and objective measures. Based on the described measurement instruments and the data collection procedure, the next stage is statistical processing aimed at empirically testing Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2. The analysis includes descriptive indicators, correlation dependencies and regression models, which allow to assess the strength and direction of the relationships between the variables under consideration.

Results and discussions

Statistical analysis of the results obtained from the empirical study

The statistical analysis aims to test the formulated hypotheses and to establish the extent to which brand orientation and internal responsibilities of employees explain the variation in the Internal brand value of the brand. For this purpose, descriptive indicators, Pearson correlation analysis and OLS regression modeling were applied.

Testing Hypothesis 1: Brand orientation at the company level (managers/staff) has a positive effect on the value of the internal brand. In order to confirm or reject Hypothesis 1, the questions from the first section of the questionnaire, which are dedicated to the Internal brand value of the brand (from number 1 to number 9 inclusive), as well as those from the section that examines brand orientation (from number 30 to number 37 inclusive), should be analyzed.

The first group of questions (from 1. to 9.) is dedicated to the Internal brand value of the brand. The questions in it aim to measure the extent to which employees internally perceive, share and defend the values of the brand, as well as actively contribute to building the brand image. They assess the emotional, cognitive and behavioral connection of employees with the brand. This part of the questionnaire allows for analysis of both the general level of commitment and specific brand-supporting behaviors. It has the potential to reveal differences between departments, positions, or even generations in the organization. It is suitable for internal brand culture audits, training, or rebranding.

Questions (from 30 to 37) focus on brand orientation, i.e. whether the brand is fundamental to the orientation of the organization's marketing policy. The emphasis is on the brand as a strategic axis of marketing and overall organizational policy. This section examines the extent to which the brand is embedded in the core of the company's marketing, management and culture, as well as how its role is perceived at all levels. Questions 2, 9, 30 and 31 were excluded from the statistical analysis, as their answers could not be evaluated using a Likert scale. The study uses a five-point Likert scale, through which the qualitative answers of the respondents are transformed into quantitative values, allowing for statistical processing of the data. The ratings are coded as follows:

Table 1. Coding of survey answers and corresponding numerical values

Answer	Value
Yes	5
Rather yes	4
I'm not sure	3
Rather no	2
No	1

Source: Authors' own research.

The scale is symmetrical around a neutral midpoint ("Not sure"), allowing for measurement of the degree of agreement or disagreement with a given statement. Its use is suitable for assessing attitudes and perceptions, providing the opportunity to apply descriptive, correlational, and regression statistical methods.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for Internal Brand Value items (Q1–Q8)

Index	Question 1	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Question 6	Question 7	Question 8
Count	50	50	34	50	50	50	50
Mean	4.10	4.00	3.59	4.20	3.52	4.02	3.82
Std.	0.74	0.81	0.89	0.76	0.93	0.74	0.75
Min	3	2	2	2	1	2	2
Max	5	5	5	5	5	5	5

Note: Std. = standard deviation.

Source: Authors' own research.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for Brand Orientation items (Q32–Q37)

Index	Question 32	Question 33	Question 34	Question 35	Question 36	Question 37
Count	50	50	50	50	50	50
Mean	4.06	3.82	4.20	4.48	3.56	3.32
Std.	0.87	0.72	0.70	0.71	0.79	0.91
Min	2	2	3	3	2	1
Max	5	5	5	5	5	5

Note: Std. = standard deviation.

Source: Authors' own research.

Table 4. Correlation and regression results for Brand Orientation and Internal Brand Value

Method	Coefficient / R ²	p-value
Pearson correlation	0.594	< 0.001
OLS regression (R ²)	0.353	< 0.001

Note: R² = coefficient of determination.

Source: Authors' own research.

Table 5. Descriptive indicators for Internal Brand Value and Brand Orientation

Indicator	Internal brand value	Brand orientation
Mean value	3.91	3.91
Mode	4.00	3.50
Median	3.93	3.83
Variance	0.264	0.252
Standard deviation	0.513	0.502

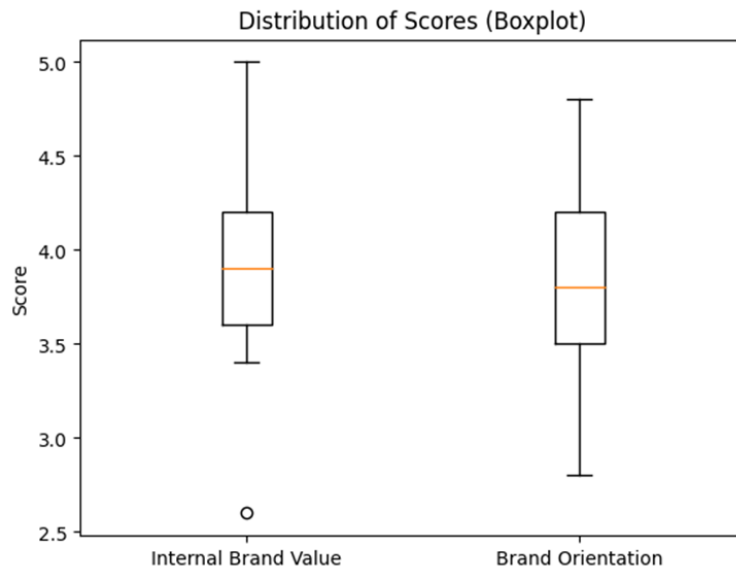
Note: Values are based on a five-point Likert scale.

Source: Authors' own research.

Analysis of variance for the two main variables of internal brand value and brand orientation revealed similar mean values of 3.91. This value is slightly above the neutral point of 3 and reflects a tendency toward the "Rather yes" category and a positive attitude. The mode of internal brand value is 4.00, reflecting a positive evaluation. The mode of brand orientation is 3.50. This reflects some variation in the perceptions of respondents. The median of internal brand value is 3.93 and of brand orientation is 3.83. Both values are close to the mean and reflect a symmetric distribution without skewness. Measures of dispersion revealed low variability of both variables. The variance of internal brand value is 0.264 and of brand orientation is 0.252. The standard deviations of both variables are 0.51 and 0.50, respectively. Both values are below 1 and reflect a clustered distribution of the values without extreme differences between respondents. Overall, the results revealed moderately positive attitudes and a high level of agreement between participants.

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a coefficient of $r = 0.594$ and a probability of less than .001. The results indicate a statistically significant and moderately strong positive correlation between brand orientation and internal brand value. As brand orientation increases, internal brand value also increases. Ordinary least squares regression analysis revealed a positive relationship between brand orientation and internal brand value. Brand orientation explained 35.3% of the variance of internal brand value ($R^2 = 0.353$). The regression coefficient of brand orientation was 0.608 and revealed a probability of less than .001. This reflects a positive relationship between brand orientation and internal brand value. An increase of one point in brand orientation corresponds to an average increase of 0.61 points of internal brand value. The model was statistically significant ($F(1,48) = 26.22$ and $p < .001$).

Figure 1. Distribution of Internal Brand Value and Brand Orientation scores (boxplot)



Note: The boxplots show the median (horizontal line), interquartile range (box), minimum and maximum values (whiskers), and outliers.

Source: Authors' own research.

The boxplot on Figure 1 shows that for both variables the distribution is compact, without significant deviations, and the medians are close to "Rather yes", which confirms the stable positive attitudes. Based on these results, it can be concluded that Hypothesis 1 is confirmed - brand orientation at the company level has a positive and significant effect on the Internal brand value of the brand, with the relationship being stable and supported by low variation in the respondents' assessments.

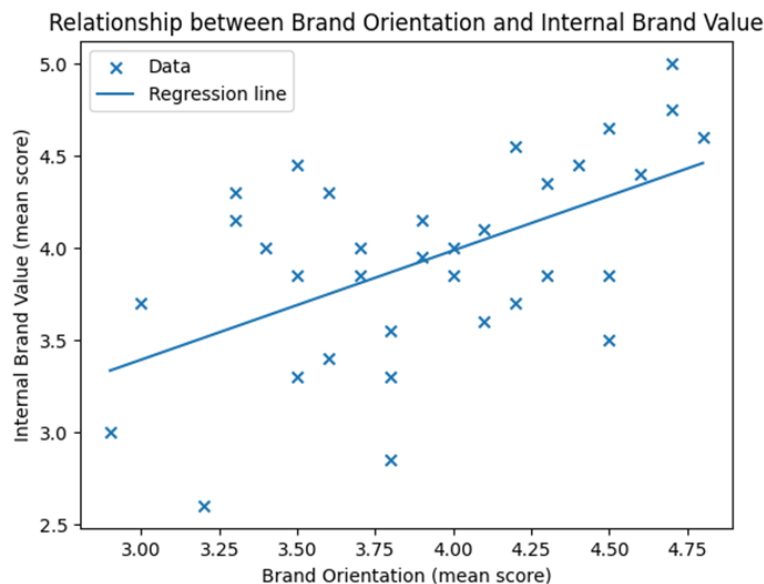


Figure 2. Relationship between Brand Orientation and Internal Brand Value

Note: Each point represents an individual observation. The solid line represents the linear regression fit between brand orientation and internal brand value.

Source: Authors' own research.

A clear upward relationship is seen, i.e. with higher brand orientation, a higher internal brand value is observed, which supports the confirmation of the hypothesis.

Testing Hypothesis 2: Internal responsibilities of employees to the brand have a positive effect on the value of the internal brand.

To test Hypothesis 2, the questions from the first section of the questionnaire “Internal brand value” and the questions from the section dedicated to internal responsibilities of employees to the brand were taken into account again. It includes questions from number 10 to number 17 inclusive. They focus on the internal responsibilities of employees to the brand. These questions are important for measuring the deep emotional and value connection between employees and the corporate brand. Their task is to assess the extent to which employees identify with the brand; perceive it personally and emotionally; are motivated from within, not only by external factors; see a correspondence between personal and brand values and perceive management as the bearer and inspirer of brand culture.

The answers to the first three of them are valued in the same way as the questions in the section on the Internal brand value of the brand. The next two questions – number 13 and 14, are restricted by the condition that they should not be filled in by top managers. The last three questions in the section (number 15, 16 and 17) have four answer options, so they are given values as follows: “Completely true” – 5, “Partially true” – 4, “Partially false” – 2 and “Completely false” – 1. The first two answer options express agreement, and the second two – disagreement. Therefore, the value 3, which in all other questions expresses neutrality, was omitted from the valuation.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics for Internal Brand Value and Internal Responsibilities

Index	N	Mean	Std.	Variance	Min	Median	Mode	Max
Internal brand value	50	3.913	0.513	0.264	2.571	3.929	4.000	5.000
Internal responsibilities	50	4.027	0.621	0.386	2.750	4.125	5.000	5.000

Note: Std. = standard deviation.

Source: Authors’ own research.

Table 7. Correlation and regression results for Internal Responsibilities and Internal Brand Value

Parameter	Estimate	Statistic	p-value
Pearson correlation (R)	0.495	–	< 0.001
OLS regression (R ²)	0.245	–	< 0.001
Constant (a)	2.265	t = 5.366	< 0.001
Slope (b)	0.409	t = 3.951	< 0.001

Note: R = Pearson correlation coefficient; R² = coefficient of determination.

Source: Authors’ own research.

Table 8. Model fit statistics for the regression of Internal Brand Value on Internal Responsibilities

R ²	Adj. R ²	F	p(F)	N
0.245	0.230	15.607	< 0.001	50

Note: R² = coefficient of determination; Adj. R² = adjusted R²; F = F-statistic; p(F) = significance level of the regression model.

Source: Authors’ own research.

Table 9. Descriptive statistics for Internal Brand Value questionnaire items (Q1–Q8)

Indicator	N	Mean	Std.	Var.	Min	Median	Mode	Max
Q1	50	4.100	0.735	0.541	3.000	4.000	4	5.000
Q3	50	4.000	0.808	0.653	2.000	4.000	4	5.000
Q4	34	3.588	0.892	0.795	2.000	4.000	4	5.000
Q5	50	4.200	0.756	0.571	2.000	4.000	4	5.000
Q6	50	3.520	0.931	0.867	1.000	4.000	4	5.000
Q7	50	3.820	0.979	0.959	1.000	4.000	4	5.000
Q8	50	3.980	0.827	0.684	2.000	4.000	4	5.000

Note: Std. = standard deviation; Var. = variance. Values are based on a five-point Likert scale.

Source: Authors' own research.

Table 10. Descriptive statistics for Internal Responsibilities questionnaire items (Q10–Q17)

Indicator	N	Mean	Std.	Var.	Min	Median	Mode	Max
Q10	50	4.120	0.773	0.598	2.000	4.000	4	5.000
Q11	50	4.180	0.774	0.600	2.000	4.000	4	5.000
Q12	50	4.300	0.647	0.418	3.000	4.000	4	5.000
Q13	34	3.618	0.985	0.971	1.000	4.000	4	5.000
Q14	34	3.412	0.925	0.856	1.000	3.000	3	5.000
Q15	50	3.380	1.319	1.741	1.000	4.000	5	5.000
Q16	50	3.720	1.222	1.494	1.000	4.000	5	5.000
Q17	50	4.080	1.147	1.316	1.000	5.000	5	5.000

Note: Std. = standard deviation; Var. = variance. Values are based on a five-point Likert scale.

Source: Authors' own research.

Both indices show good internal consistency: Cronbach $\alpha=0.799$ for “Internal brand value” and $\alpha=0.826$ for “Internal brand responsibilities”. Descriptively, the average internal brand value is around 3.91 (SD $\approx$ 0.51), and the average level of internal brand responsibilities is around 4.03 (SD $\approx$ 0.62), i.e., positive attitudes and personal accountability toward the brand dominate in the sample.

The test of the relationship between the two indicators confirms the hypothesis. The Pearson correlation is $r=0.495$ at $p<0.001$ ($N=50$), which is a moderate positive relationship: the stronger employees' responsibility toward the brand, the higher the assessment of internal brand value. The regression model (OLS) complements this picture: with $R^2=0.245$ (Adj. $R^2=0.230$) and $p<0.001$ for the slope. In practice, this means that a one-point increase in the internal responsibility index (within the same 1–5 scale) is associated with an average of ≈ 0.41 points higher internal value. The explained variation of about 25% is meaningful for organizational behavior research and indicates a real, not only statistical, effect.

From a methodological point of view, it is correct to use averages on ordinal responses, because the scales show good internal consistency and this corresponds to the established practice in such studies. However, the lack of a neutral option in Q15–Q17 probably encourages a more decisive choice, and the non-completion of Q13–Q14 by top managers reduces the number of observations for these two items; in both cases, the application of an average “as available” minimizes distortions. The empirical data support Hypothesis 2: higher internal responsibility of employees towards the brand is clearly and statistically significantly associated with higher internal brand value. The empirical findings provide important insights into the mechanisms through which internal branding contributes to organizational cohesion and sustainable brand development. The statistically significant and positive relationships between brand orientation, internal brand

responsibilities, and internal brand value suggest that internal branding is not merely a communication tool, but a structural and cultural organizational capability.

The confirmation of Hypothesis 1 indicates that when brand orientation is embedded within corporate culture and managerial practices, employees demonstrate stronger alignment with brand values. This finding reinforces the view that brand-oriented culture operates as a guiding framework for employee behavior. In practical terms, organizations that integrate the brand into strategic decision-making, internal processes, and leadership communication are more likely to cultivate consistent brand-supporting behavior across hierarchical levels. Brand orientation, therefore, functions not only as a marketing construct but as a managerial philosophy influencing internal organizational dynamics.

The confirmation of Hypothesis 2 further highlights the importance of employee-level psychological engagement with the brand. When employees perceive personal responsibility toward the brand, internal brand value increases significantly. This suggests that internal branding initiatives should not be limited to informational campaigns or symbolic activities. Instead, organizations should focus on fostering emotional attachment, personal identification, and a sense of ownership among employees. Internal brand value emerges as a behavioral outcome of this psychological alignment. From a broader perspective, the explained variance levels (R^2 values) demonstrate that both organizational culture and individual responsibility meaningfully contribute to internal brand value, although they do not fully determine it. This indicates that internal branding is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by additional factors such as leadership style, internal communication quality, organizational justice, and employee motivation. Consequently, internal brand value should be understood as the result of an integrated system rather than isolated managerial interventions.

The findings also have implications for industrial enterprises, particularly in manufacturing contexts where branding is often perceived as secondary to operational efficiency. The results demonstrate that even in production-oriented sectors, internal brand orientation and employee responsibility significantly affect brand strength. This supports the argument that internal branding is equally relevant in business-to-business and industrial settings. Finally, the results contribute to the theoretical discourse on internal branding by empirically confirming the interconnected role of cultural (brand orientation) and behavioral (employee responsibility) determinants. The study thus supports integrative models of internal branding that combine organizational and individual dimensions, reinforcing the idea that sustainable brand value originates from internal alignment before external communication.

Internal branding in the Bulgarian context

The findings should also be interpreted within the specific economic and institutional context of Bulgaria. Internal branding practices in Bulgarian enterprises, particularly in manufacturing sectors such as clothing production, are often shaped by transitional economic dynamics, resource constraints, and historically centralized management structures. Compared to Western European companies, where internal branding is frequently institutionalized as part of long-term strategic brand management systems, Bulgarian firms may approach internal branding in a more pragmatic and operational manner.

In many Bulgarian manufacturing enterprises, branding has traditionally been perceived primarily as an external marketing function rather than an internally embedded organizational philosophy. However, the empirical results of the present study suggest that even in this environment, brand orientation and employee responsibility significantly influence internal brand value. This

indicates an increasing managerial awareness that brand strength depends not only on market positioning but also on internal alignment and employee engagement. Compared to Western companies, similarities can be observed in the recognition of the importance of employee commitment and corporate culture. However, differences may arise in the degree of formalization of internal branding processes. Western firms often implement structured internal branding programs, including systematic training, internal communication strategies, and performance-based brand metrics. In contrast, Bulgarian enterprises may rely more heavily on informal communication, leadership influence, and personal relationships within smaller organizational structures.

At the same time, the relatively compact size of many Bulgarian firms may offer advantages in fostering direct communication and stronger interpersonal identification with organizational values. Under such conditions, internal brand responsibilities may develop through proximity to management and shared organizational experiences rather than through formalized brand governance systems. Thus, the Bulgarian context presents a hybrid model in which internal branding is evolving from a predominantly external marketing orientation toward a more integrated organizational approach. The results of this study contribute to understanding how internal brand value can develop within emerging and transitional economic environments, offering insights that may differ from findings in highly institutionalized Western branding systems.

Conclusion

The findings provide the basis for a clear summary of the role of brand orientation and internal employee responsibilities as factors affecting internal brand value. This final section of the paper presents a summary of the findings, managerial implications, and limitations and avenues for future research. The research verifies the importance of brand orientation and internal employee responsibilities in the formation of internal brand value. The findings indicate that internal brand value increases when organizational culture is strategically aligned with brand values. It also increases when employees perceive their internal responsibilities for the brand, creating brand-consistent and sustainable behaviors. Internal branding is positioned as a key tool for organizational development, sustainability, and competitiveness. However, certain limitations provide ground for future research. These include the geographical scope and the use of a larger sample and mixed methods of measurement. Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. First, the sample size is relatively small and limited to enterprises operating in a single region of one European country, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Second, all variables were measured at a single point in time, preventing the assessment of causal relationships and longitudinal dynamics of internal brand value. Third, the research relies on subjective self-reported measures, which may introduce response bias. Future research could address these limitations by expanding the geographical scope of the study, increasing the sample size, and employing longitudinal research designs. The inclusion of objective performance indicators and mixed measurement approaches would further strengthen the robustness of empirical findings related to internal brand value.

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