

Article

Internal Branding in Hotels: Interaction Effects of Employee Engagement, Workplace Friendship, and Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Hazem Ahmed Khairy ^{1,*} , Mohamed Fathy Agina ² , Nadir Aliane ³  and Mohammed Ezzat Hashad ¹

¹ Department of Hotel Management, Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, University of Sadat City, Sadat City 32897, Egypt

² Hotel Management Department, Higher Institute for Specific Studies, Heliopolis, Cairo 11771, Egypt

³ Management Department, College of Business Administration, King Faisal University, Hofuf 31982, Saudi Arabia

* Correspondence: hazem.khaiery@fth.usc.edu.eg

Abstract: This study aimed to investigate three variables that may interact with internal branding (IB) in the hotel context: employee engagement (EE), workplace friendship (WF), and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). This study adopted a survey methodology. 385 valid responses were collected from employees of 20 five-star chain hotels located in the Greater Cairo region of Egypt. The data were analyzed using PLS-SEM. The results demonstrated that there is a significant relationship between OCB and WF with EE, in addition to OCB, EE, and WF with IB. The mediating role of EE between OCB and IB, besides the moderating role of WF on the relationship between OCB and EE, was also determined. Contrary to the hypothesized model, results showed an insignificant relationship between WF and IB. This study provides a theoretical contribution to deepen the understanding of the internal branding concept in the context of the hotel industry. Practically, this research may be helpful for hotel enterprises in engendering and sustaining effective internal branding practices, which, in turn, could establish new links between internal and external hotel customers. Study limitations and potential directions for further research were also presented.

Keywords: internal branding; organizational citizenship behavior; employee engagement; workplace friendship; hotels



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1. Introduction

A brand is more than simply a useful tool for managers [1]; it is a strategic necessity that enables firms to increase consumer value and preserve sustainable competitive advantages [2]. The brand of every company is its most precious asset, which, with proper management, can help it gain a significant market share and increase revenues [3]. Companies have had to reconsider their strategies for achieving and maintaining customer satisfaction and loyalty due to the expense of sustaining brands in highly competitive market conditions with a wide range of expectations and declining consumer loyalty. Employer branding and internal branding initiatives were eventually used [4]. Internal branding (IB) looks at employees as brand ambassadors, which calls for them to deliver brand-consistent behaviors and take on the role of brand creator [5]. Employees have a crucial role in developing the company brand, especially in the hotel industry, not just at their workplace but also via contacts with their families, networks, and friends [6]. IB is a significant component in service sectors because a strong brand may increase customers' trust and lower their psychological and financial risks when buying intangible services [7]. IB programs' key objective is achieving organizational cohesion since comfort levels among peers and managers influence employees' engagement, commitment, output, and intention to stay in the organization [8,9].

However, it may be difficult to create a consistent corporate brand in the service industry since services are complicated and intangible [10], as well as being made up of people-based procedures wherein personnel may either improve or harm a corporate brand [11]. Regarding the research gap, there are surprisingly few studies regarding internal branding and its antecedents, perhaps as a result of their roots in different disciplines [12], particularly in the hotel industry context. Furthermore, there haven't been many studies conducted from the perspective of employees on topics related to internal branding [13]. There haven't been many studies, particularly on the impact of friendships at work on employees and organizations [14]. Even though there are a growing number of studies on internal branding, there are demands for further investigations into the organizational elements that help or hinder the targeted outcomes [15]. A healthy working environment among workers increases the likelihood that an internal branding program will be implemented successfully since the strong brand attachment will foster and enforce engagement [16]. Because the comfort levels among peers and supervisors contribute to employees' engagement, cohesion in companies is a fundamental aim for internal branding programs [9]. Therefore, workplace friendship could be a critical part of any internal branding program. Workplace friendship connects colleagues, fosters a positive work atmosphere, and builds a cohesive team [17]. This type of relationship has a strong positive influence not just on group work performance but also on enhanced OCB and decreased harmful behaviors [18]. Consequently, EE, WF, and OCB are critical organizational factors that should be integrated into the body of knowledge of internal branding and, thus, were investigated. Therefore, the current study investigated three variables: organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), employee engagement (EE), and workplace friendship (WF), all of which could interact with internal branding in the hotel context. This study could contribute to a better understanding of the concept of internal branding in the context of the hotel industry. Also, it may help establish new links between internal and external customers of relevant organizations by engendering and sustaining relationships between consumers and products.

This study could contribute to expanding current knowledge in the hospitality literature as well as existing research integrating human resources management and marketing. It could also help hospitality companies understand the power and influence of internal branding in differentiating their services.

This manuscript is organized as follows: A brief review of the variables investigated in this study and the arguments leading to the hypotheses' development were presented first. The materials and methods regarding the study sample were then presented in detail. After that, the study presented the measures adopted in this study and how the data analysis was performed. Discussion of the major results and the implications of the findings in both theory and practice were then presented. Finally, limitations and future research opportunities were presented.

2. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

The brand of any organization depends on a variety of positive organizational behaviors related to its human resources [15,16]. Previous research demonstrated the value of OCB—as an excellent organizational behavior—for firms since it considerably promotes employee engagement, customer satisfaction, and information sharing among the employees [1,18–20]. OCB is defined as “optional behavior” or “optional activity” that is not required as part of a formal employee's job duties but supports the effective functioning of the organization [21]. Moreover, previous literature in numerous industries, including banking [22], the service sector [23], hospitality [24], education [25], and public sector businesses [26], has also proven the relationship between OCB and employee engagement (EE). The OCB-EE nexus is also proven in the leader-member exchange setting [27]. The literature shows that OCB serves an important function for the business since it may improve employee performance and engagement [28]. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: *There is a positive relationship between OCB and EE.*

The labor-intensive hospitality business brings together people from various backgrounds, which fosters friendly relationships among colleagues [29]. Workplace friendships (WF) go beyond simple acquaintanceship but do not include romantic relationships. They entail commitment, trust, and similar beliefs or interests among coworkers [30]. Friends at the workplace are more likely to offer social support, which was discovered to be one of the resources related to improved engagement [31]. Many prior studies have linked the incidence of workplace friendships to employee engagement [27,29]. Employees that are satisfied with their workplace friendships are happier, which contributes to high job engagement. Warm and friendly working environments, as well as support from colleagues, were deemed significant for the working environment and therefore for engagement [12]. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H2: *There is a positive relationship between WF and EE.*

Employee perception of supervisor support has a positive significant impact on WF [32]. Employees are motivated to engage in productive behaviors like OCB when supervisor-employee relationships are built on integrity, honesty, and credibility [33]. If there was a favorable work environment along with positive interaction between coworkers and management, employees would feel at ease and consistently deliver on the company's promise [34]. The association between employees' perceptions of supervisory support and OCB is partially mediated by workplace friendship [35]. Being at ease and supportive of coworkers produced a friendly atmosphere, which in turn promoted improved OCB and less harmful behaviors such as employee engagement [18]. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H3: *WF moderates the relationship between OCB and EE.*

Internal branding (IB) is an important theory in the HR literature that uses marketing concepts to give firms strategies to improve workers' attitudes and behaviors by emphasizing and conveying the organization's key values across the workplace [8,32]. IB is described as a collection of strategies and practices that align and empower employees to consistently offer the optimal customer experience [36]. The underlying concept of IB is that employees are consumers, and their jobs are the product [13]. Implementing IB successfully could enhance organizational engagement with business core values and embed brand values in employees [37]. Furthermore, IB may be used to increase employee engagement since it motivates workers by helping them understand the company's vision and strategy from their point of view [38]. IB ensures employees deliver on the brand promise by shaping employees' brand attitudes and behaviors [8]. The relationship between employee engagement and the effectiveness of IB programs was also highlighted [39]. Employee engagement may motivate and empower employees to support brand fellowship and serve as brand ambassadors [40]. Organizations focus on employee engagement to keep employees on board for a longer period and boost IB [41]. Furthermore, employee engagement and IB are tightly connected, and IB components are also precursors to employee engagement [12]. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H4: *There is a positive relationship between EE and IB.*

Moreover, employees' intrinsic psychological need for belonging and intimate interactions with others leads to the development of friendships at the workplace [42]. The possibility for and prevalence of good workplace connections are thought to be characteristics of person-environment correspondence (i.e., chances to communicate and cooperate with coworkers within the firm, as well as the perception of friendships distinguished by trust, confidence, and a reciprocal desire to connect and interact both within and outside of the workplace) [40,43]. Workplace friendship serves a supporting role by assisting people in developing their professional networks, adjusting to shifting work environments, and

serving as a source of knowledge, including the sharing of resources that improve other employees' performance [40,41]. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H5: *There is a positive relationship between WF and IB.*

For employees to be brand ambassadors, they should display some positive behaviors, such as suggesting the brand to potential customers or supporting preset brand standards when interacting with customers. These behaviors, including both external and internal ones, are regarded as brand citizenship behaviors [44]. The OCB construct was used to develop brand citizenship behavior, which enables employees to engage in positive behaviors that strengthen the company brand (i.e., engaging in IB practices). Additionally, the core and enduring components of a company's brand were often evaluated utilizing OCB-related concepts [45]. Employees' positive attitudes and behaviors are reflected as beneficial brand citizenship behaviors, and there is a direct link between IB efforts and these attitudes and behaviors [46]. Furthermore, maximizing the alignment between organizational values and employees' values encourages positive organizational citizenship behaviors among employees and raises IB [47]. Thus, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H6: *There is a positive relationship between OCB and IB.*

Some research has also suggested that IB aspects, such as negotiating and jointly creating values with employees and management, could improve employee engagement [48,49] and that employee engagement mediates the relationship between IB and employee-related outcomes, i.e., OCB [50]. IB should be a precedent for employee engagement [51]. From a managerial perspective, the fundamental concept is that understanding crucial factors in employee engagement helps the management improve IB methods to include people more effectively in brand value co-creation [52]. Previous research identified various factors that influence employee engagement, such as supportive culture, social support, communication, team and coworker relationships, and working environment, which all come from the OCB cradle [51,53–55]. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H7: *EE mediates the relationship between OCB and IB.*

The conceptual framework of the study is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

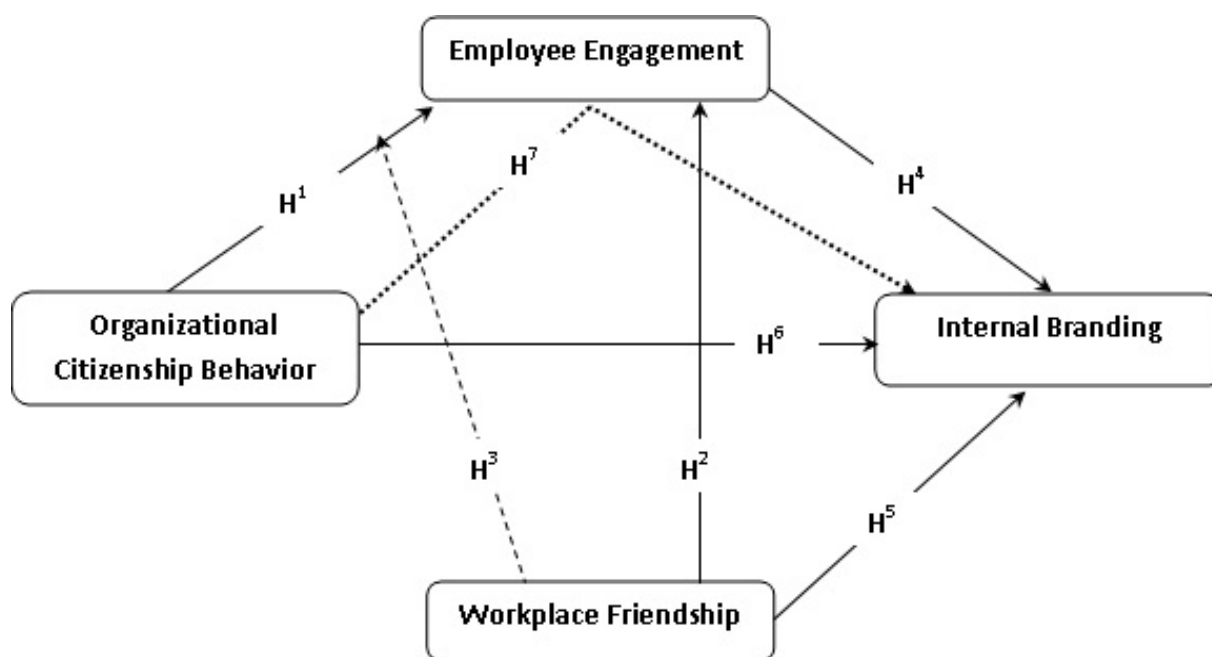


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Survey Instrument Development

To assess employee engagement (EE), a 5-item scale (EE1, EE2, EE3, and EE4) derived from Fleming and Asplund [56] was employed. For example, “Every day at work, I get the opportunity to perform what I do best”, and “My hotel’s mission or purpose helps me feel how much my job is important”. Workplace friendship (WF) was measured using another 5-item scale (WF1, WF2, WF3, WF4, and WF5) derived from Nielsen et al. [57]; for example, “I have the opportunity to create good relationships in this hotel” and “Outside of the hotel, I socialize with my coworkers”. Furthermore, a four-item scale (IB1, IB2, IB3, and IB4) derived from Matanda and Ndubisi [58] was utilized to assess internal branding; for instance, “The brand values of our hotel serve as a guide in how I interact with guests” and “brand values are included in our training in this hotel”. Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) was measured using an 8-item scale (OCB1, OCB2, OCB3, OCB4, OCB5, OCB6, OCB7, and OCB8) that was derived from Podsakoff et al. [59]; for example, “Employee assists others with severe workloads” and “Employee thinks about how his/her activities may affect coworkers”. Prior studies by Dipaola and Tschannen-Moran [60] and Dipaola et al. [61] found OCB to be a one-dimensional construct because organizations, as in the case of hospitality enterprises, are people-helping ones, and thus employees are dedicated to acting in their coworkers’ and guests’ best interests.

3.2. Data Analysis

Participants responded to all items on a five-point Likert scale. SmartPLS was employed to analyze the data. PLS-SEM was used. As stated by Birkinshaw et al. [62], “PLS is most appropriate when sample sizes are small, assumptions of multivariate normality and interval scaled data cannot be made, and the researcher is primarily concerned with the prediction of the dependent variable” (pp. 646–647). For these reasons, PLS-SEM was utilized. A *p*-value of 0.05 or below was considered significant.

3.3. Sample

According to the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism, in 2021, the 30 five-star hotels in the Greater Cairo area of Egypt will employ 23,500 employees. A random sample containing 385 employees from 20 five-star chain hotels located in the Greater Cairo region of Egypt was recruited. Hotels in Egypt are spread across different and very distant geographic areas; for convenience, this study recruited hotels in Egypt’s Greater Cairo region. The five-star chain hotels were chosen because the managerial and marketing practices in the five-star hotels (i.e., EE, OCB, WF, and IB) are of high concern due to the nature of these businesses in terms of large investment and high employment. Responses were collected in June 2021. To guarantee that participants had an accurate view of research variables, employees with less than a year of work experience were not invited to participate. About two-thirds of employees were male ($n = 257$), the majority of whom belong to the <30-year 30-year 30-year-old group ($n = 306$). In addition, most of the employees had a bachelor’s degree (286), and more than half of the employees had 1 to <5 years of experience ($n = 220$). (See Table 1).

Table 1. Respondents’ profile ($n = 385$).

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	257	66.8
	Female	128	33.2
Age Group	<30 years	306	79.5
	From 30 to 45 years	75	19.5
	>45 years	4	1.0

Table 1. *Cont.*

		Frequency	Percent
Education	High/Technical school	50	13.0
	Bachelor's degree	286	74.3
	Master's degree	43	11.2
	Ph.D. degree	6	1.6
Work Experience	From 1 year to <5 Years	220	57.1
	From 5 to 10 Years	144	37.4
	>10 Years	21	5.5

4. Results

4.1. Analysis and Model Testing

The study's suggested model was evaluated using PLS-SEM. The internal consistency reliability was examined using composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha. Table 2 shows that the findings are average and show no problems with reliability or discriminant validity since CR values were over 0.80 and AVE values were over 0.50.

Table 2. Reliability and validity results.

Constructs	Items	Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Employee Engagement	EE.1	0.787	0.809	0.867	0.567
	EE.2	0.746			
	EE.3	0.712			
	EE.4	0.717			
	EE.5	0.799			
Internal Branding	IB.1	0.805	0.747	0.841	0.570
	IB.2	0.788			
	IB.3	0.740			
	IB.4	0.681			
Organizational Citizenship Behavior	OCB.1	0.769	0.911	0.928	0.616
	OCB.2	0.764			
	OCB.3	0.789			
	OCB.4	0.783			
	OCB.5	0.775			
	OCB.6	0.822			
	OCB.7	0.772			
	OCB.8	0.802			
Workplace Friendship	WF.1	0.725	0.802	0.863	0.557
	WF.2	0.788			
	WF.3	0.721			
	WF.4	0.789			
	WF.5	0.709			

Each indicator item's factor and cross-loadings to its corresponding latent construct were extracted and tested for convergent validity. In the model, each item loads more heavily on its constructs. Additionally, Table 3 shows that scale discriminant validity is attained since the elements in the matrix diagonals are always bigger than the off-diagonal elements (these values indicate the correlation between the respective constructs) in their corresponding row and column.

Table 3. Latent variable correlations.

	EE	IB	OCB	WF
EE	0.753			
IB	0.596	0.755		
OCB	0.656	0.557	0.785	
WF	0.726	0.490	0.593	0.747

According to Podsakoff et al. [63], multicollinearity and common method bias were investigated using VIF scores for average block VIF (AVIF) and average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF). Results showed that the values of AVIF and AFVIF were 3.007 and 2.558, respectively. Because the AVIF and AFVIF were less than five, it confirms that there were no collinearity or common method bias issues.

Moreover, the model's predictive relevance (Q^2) was also examined. The values of Q^2 are greater than zero (0.341 and 0.225 for EE and IB, respectively), supporting the assumption that this study model has appropriate predictive power according to Fornell and Cha's [64] criteria. Furthermore, the goodness of fit of the model (GoF) was evaluated. According to Fornell and Cha's [64] criteria, the GoF model in this study is large enough to be considered sufficient for global PLS model validity since the value of GoF is 0.537.

4.2. Structural Model Assessment

Results in Table 4 showed that there is a statistically significant relationship between OCB and EE ($\beta = 0.305$, $p < 0.05$), WF and EE ($\beta = 0.507$, $p < 0.05$), EE and IB ($\beta = 0.405$, $p < 0.05$), in addition, OCB and IB ($\beta = 0.292$, $p < 0.05$). However, an insignificant relationship existed between WF and IB ($p > 0.05$).

Table 4. Path coefficients of research hypotheses.

Hypo.	Relationship	Std. Beta	Std. Error	T-Value	p-Values	Decision
H1	OCB → EE	0.305	0.046	6.693	0.000	Supported
H2	WF → EE	0.507	0.041	12.300	0.000	Supported
H4	EE → IB	0.405	0.065	6.203	0.000	Supported
H5	WF → IB	0.062	0.057	1.085	0.279	Rejected
H6	OCB → IB	0.292	0.065	4.485	0.000	Supported

To determine the size of the effect of the endogenous latent variables, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was also examined. According to Falk and Miller [65], the minimum acceptable value for R-squared is 0.10. Results showed that OCB and EE explain 40.6% of the change in IB, which means that these two variables have a moderate effect size on IB. Also, OCB and WF have a high effect size on EE ($R^2 = 0.610$), which means that the two variables explain about 61% of the change in EE (see Figure 2).

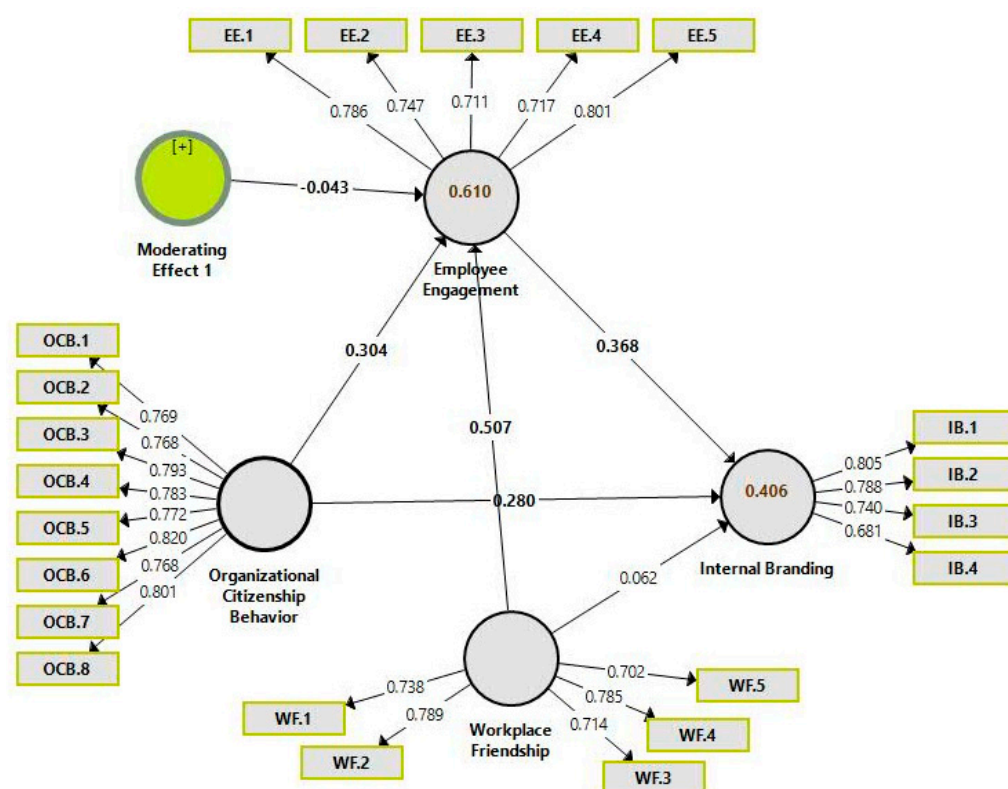


Figure 2. Final model of the study.

The effect size (F^2) of the exogenous constructs was also measured. Following Cohen's [66] criteria, Table 5 showed that OCB has a small effect size on EE ($F^2 = 0.117$) and IB ($F^2 = 0.082$), EE has a medium effect size on IB ($F^2 = 0.157$), and WF has a large effect size on EE ($F^2 = 0.416$).

Table 5. The effect size of the exogenous constructs.

Constructs	F^2	Result
EE → IB	0.157	medium effect size
OCB → IB	0.082	small effect size
WF → EE	0.416	large effect size
OCB → EE	0.117	small effect size

Additionally, moderation analysis was conducted to examine the moderating role of WF on the relationship between OCB and EE (see Table 6 and Figure 3).

Table 6. Moderation analysis results.

		Std. Beta	Std. Error	T-Value	p-Values	Decision
H3	Moderating Effect 1 → EE	−0.041	0.020	2.101	0.036	Moderation

The results in Table 6 indicated that WF significantly moderates the relationship between OCB and EE ($\beta = -0.041$, $p < 0.05$). Figure 3 illustrates that WF dampens the positive relationship between OCB and EE.

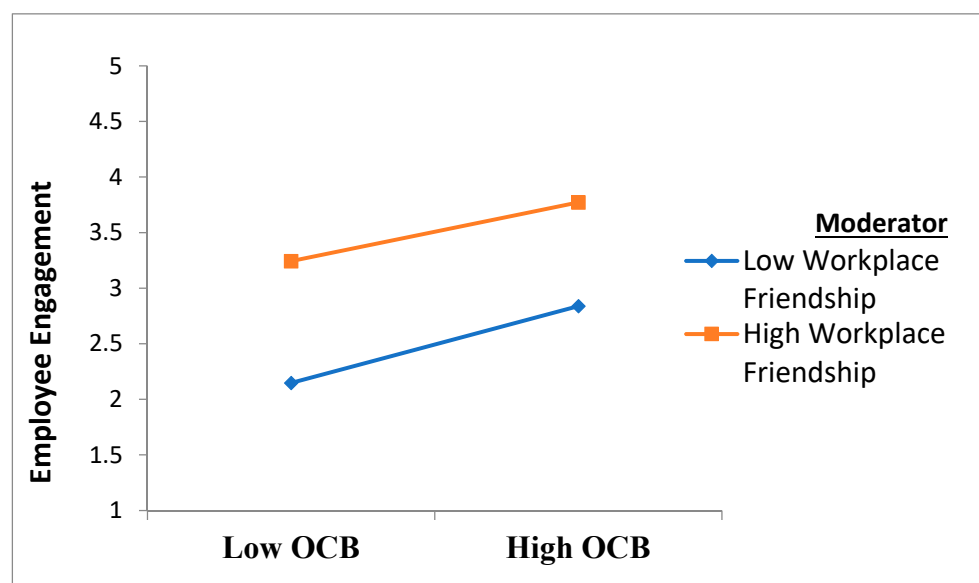


Figure 3. The moderating effect of WF on the relationship between OCB and EE.

Lastly, two steps suggested by Preacher and Hayes [67], namely, bootstrapping the indirect effect (total effect) and then bootstrapping the confidence interval, were used to examine the mediating role of EE between OCB and IB (see Tables 7 and 8).

Table 7. Bootstraps the indirect effect.

The Mediating Role of EE between OCB and IB					
Paths	Std. Beta	Std. Err	t-Value	p-Value	Decision
Indirect effect					
OCB → IB (Path c)	0.124	0.027	4.500	0.000	Supported
Total effect					
OCB → EE (Path a)	0.305	0.046	6.693	0.000	Supported
EE → IB (Path b)	0.405	0.065	6.203	0.000	Supported
OCB → IB (Path c)	0.416	0.055	7.542	0.000	Supported

Table 7 illustrates that the bootstrapping analysis of the indirect effect showed that there is a significant relationship between OCB and IB.

Table 8. Bootstrapped confidence interval.

	IV → Mediator	Mediator → DV		Bootstrapped Confidence Interval				
	Path a	Path b	Indirect Effect	SE	t-Value	95% LL	95% UL	Decision
H7	0.659	0.512	0.337	0.047	7.179	0.245	0.430	Mediation

According to Table 8, the bootstrapping analysis showed that the indirect effect $\beta = 0.337$ (0.659×0.512) was significant with a *t*-value of 7.179. Furthermore, as indicated by Preacher and Hayes [67], the indirect effect of 0.337, 95% bootstrapped confidence interval (LL = 0.245, UL = 0.430), doesn't cross a 0 in the middle, suggesting that mediation exists. The mediation effect is therefore considered to be statistically significant.

5. Discussion

Employees are crucial to the success of a brand because of the nature of the hospitality sector, which involves a high level of employee-customer interaction [68]. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate three factors that may interact with IB in the hotel industry, namely OCB, EE, and WF. To empirically investigate these relationships, a conceptual model was created and tested (see Figure 2). The results from testing the study hypotheses are shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Results of testing study hypotheses.

Hypo.	Relationship	Decision
H1	A positive relationship exists between OCB and EE.	Supported
H2	A positive relationship exists between WF and EE.	Supported
H3	WF moderates the relationship between OCB and EE.	Supported WF dampens the positive relationship between OCB and EE
H4	A positive relationship exists between EE and IB.	Supported
H5	A positive relationship exists between WF and IB.	Rejected
H6	A positive relationship exists between OCB and IB.	Supported
H7	EE mediates the relationship between OCB and IB.	Supported

According to the study findings, OCB has a significant positive relationship with EE. This outcome is consistent with the research of Lyu et al. [24] that established the association between OCB and EE in the hospitality industry. The purpose of OCB is to improve employee skills and abilities, eliminate undesirable and damaging behaviors that impede the organization from operating normally, and raise the performance and efficiency of the company through active coordination [19,63]. Additionally, OCB increases collaboration and information sharing among the staff, and hence, employee engagement [69]. However, this result contradicts Saks' [70] study that criticized the relationship between OCB and EE. OCB differs from EE; OCB involves voluntary activities that go beyond the job requirements, whereas EE is a formal function that an employee is expected to execute.

Findings also revealed that WF showed a significant positive relationship with EE. This is consistent with previous studies [26,69,71]. Employees who are satisfied with workplace friendship are happier, which contributes to a high level of engagement at work. Friends at the workplace are more likely to provide their colleagues with social support, which is one of the most crucial factors that organizations should consider for improving EE. Moreover, WF boosts EE by deepening their sense of belonging; as a result, people become more entrenched or linked, which may lead to higher engagement [14]. When employees experience a pleasant environment at work, good internal relationships with coworkers tend to be increased, which fosters a favorable attitude in them that frequently leads to work engagement [72].

Furthermore, WF dampens the positive relationship between OCB and EE. This finding is consistent with the findings of Guohao et al. [73], who found that when there is a low level of WF, the relationship between OCB and EE is higher, while when there is a high level of WF, it is lower. Friendships at work have a detrimental impact on EE [29]. Having friends at work may be a bad distraction since it tempts coworkers to participate in extra socializing or talks unrelated to their tasks, which has a negative influence on their productivity. It also takes time away from doing job-related activities when people listen to their colleagues. Besides, while some friendships appear to be simple, others may require significant emotional effort to keep up. People who have close friends may believe that they must spend time and effort at work with their friends to preserve their relationships, which lowers their level of engagement at work.

Additionally, the results showed that the hypothesized relationship between EE and IB was supported. The results were consistent with the findings of other studies [12,44,48,53],

which highlighted the tight relationship between EE and IB as well as the fact that the antecedents of EE are also elements of IB. Antecedents of EE are significant variables that aid organizations in enhancing IB strategies and improving employee effectiveness in co-creating brand value [52]. EE is also considered one of the most crucial elements of IB sustainability [74]. However, failing to involve employees in the branding process results in ineffective IB, which may eventually breed brand saboteurs [75].

The study's findings also revealed that WF showed an insignificant relationship with IB. When working together or overseeing one another on a work-related task, WF may become tense. The benefits of friendships are likely to have less of an influence on a person's attitudes and behaviors when they are conflicted about their relationship with a coworker friend [76]. WFs also might prevent people from concentrating only on work-related duties [77]. One can pay attention to a friend's needs specifically by listening to them or giving them advice. Since friends frequently want unanticipated attention, it might be difficult to concentrate on work-related activities [78]. This result, however, contradicts the findings of Juskiw [79], who indicated that good connections between employees and executives improve the IB process' success. Having a good working environment as well as positive engagement among colleagues and managers is an important factor for employees to feel comfortable and be consistent in delivering on the brand promise. Furthermore, WF binds employees together, fosters an exciting work atmosphere, builds a cohesive team, and encourages employees to stay. Employees benefit from workplace friendship because it develops their attachment and emotional connection to the firm, improves their sense of belonging, and, as a result, enhances their devotion to the brand promise [80]. Additionally, the cross-functional contact only encourages hotel staff to express their own opinions about the hotel brand promise to one another. This might lead to employees becoming confused between the hotel brand promise information they receive from their hotel and the information they receive from their peers. However, friendship at work may promote communication among hotel staff members so that they can spread the hotel's brand promise. Employees are therefore likely to form strong emotional ties with the hotel brand and support the hotel's efforts to grow their brand outside of the context of their work.

Moreover, the study findings revealed that OCB showed a significant positive relationship with IB. This result is consistent with other studies [78,81,82], which discovered a causal association between workers' positive attitudes and behaviors and IB efforts. They discovered a link between OCB and IB practices: the more committed the employees were to the brand, the more OCB they demonstrated in their interactions with others within the organization. Additionally, brand image development and sustainability in the hotel industry depend on employees' OCB [7,83], because service personnel are located at the link between brand promise and brand delivery [84]. Also, employees' positive OCB is critical for delivering on the brand promise to consumers and the success of the IB programs [53]. In addition, Ikram et al.'s [41] recent IB study indicated that firms should focus on citizenship behavior for a greater IB effect. Employees' commitment to the brand generates a fundamental motive for making more efforts to distinguish the hotel. They provide these extra efforts by helping and supporting their co-workers and participating in appreciative hotel activities.

Lastly, EE mediates the relationship between OCB and IB. This result is similar to the findings of previous studies [82,85,86], which found that the different components of employer brand, when combined, increase EE in their work and have an effect on OCB. When an organization gives its workers the necessary resources, they experience high levels of engagement, convey positive word of mouth about the firm, display OCB, and report a great brand [8,87–89]. Furthermore, when the hotel treats its employees as internal customers through internal branding, employees tend to return this favor to the hotel brand because they will feel compelled to give back by better contributing to the hotel brand's performance.

For the economic impact of internal branding, internal branding is thought to have a significant impact on the organization's financial success [90]. According to Dunes and Pras [91], a brand management system has a favorable and substantial influence on a brand's mental performance. For hotel businesses, internal branding is beneficial in terms of personnel retention, cost savings, and star rating [92], which, in turn, could improve the hotel businesses' performance, including financial performance. Therefore, the influence on the economy is positively correlated with the hotel industry's financial success as a result of improved internal branding practices.

6. Theoretical Implications

This study makes several theoretical contributions. First, the current study responds to calls for more research on IB, EE, WF, and OCB. The current study's theoretical model contributes to increasing current knowledge in the hospitality and tourism literature as well as previous research merging HRM and marketing. The present research might also help readers understand the internal branding border conditions in the context of hospitality and tourism. This study is also the first attempt to develop and assess a full structural model combining IB with EE, OCB, and WF inside the hotel business in Egypt, one of the Middle Eastern countries. Third, this study offers a theoretical foundation based on Egypt's distinctive culture as a Middle Eastern nation, which might develop Middle Eastern marketing theory.

7. Practical Implications

The study has some managerial implications. First, it is very essential for organizational managers to understand the power and influence of IB in serving differentially; hence, there is a constant requirement to invest in IB. Brand aspects should be used in HRM systems. To create an IB plan, marketing and HR managers must collaborate. This should improve extra-role activities among customer contact personnel, ultimately leading to improved brand citizenship behavior. Second, the managers should understand their strategic roles in the functioning of the hotel industry because this sector is people-driven. Also, the owners of enterprises operating in the hotel industry should consider their staff as strategic partners. The human resource managers in the hospitality sector are recommended to pay special attention to the increase of internal brand activities. It can be done through training and raising staff's understanding of hotel brand identity, hotel brand communication, and hotel brand leadership. Moreover, brand aspects should be used in HRM systems. To create an IB plan, marketing and HR managers must collaborate. This should improve extra-role activities among customer contact personnel, ultimately leading to improved brand citizenship behavior. Third, hotel management should consult organizational psychologists to design and implement training programs for hotel employees that ensure the proper fit between workplace friendship and business outcomes.

8. Limitations and Future Research

The current study is new; however, it does have limitations that will have to be addressed in future studies. First, the study investigated how OCB, EE, and WF interact with IB while ignoring how they interact with other factors such as organizational resilience and social capital. It will be fascinating to examine how these two elements affect the value and distinctiveness of the IB mechanism in the hotel business. Second, due to social desirability bias, longitudinal research is needed to better understand the many cycles and changing patterns of EE, OCB, WF, and IB interaction. The third limitation was that the study was conducted in the hotel industry in the Egyptian context; hence, the current work's generalizability to other nations became a disadvantage. As a result, further comparative research should be carried out.

9. Conclusions

The long-term survival of an organization depends on building a strong brand and increasing performance; thus, internal branding has become an important issue in ensuring effective hotel brand performance. In the context of this realization, the current study suggests and evaluates a study model that investigates how employee engagement, workplace friendship, and organizational citizenship behavior impact the hotel's internal branding. To do so, the study attempted to test seven hypotheses. Based on the data collected from the staff at the 5-star chain hotels in Egypt, the findings revealed that internal branding is affected by employee engagement, workplace friendship, and organizational citizenship behavior. The mediating role of employee engagement between organizational citizenship behavior and internal branding was also reported. Workplace friendship also had a moderating effect on the relationship between organizational citizenship behavior and employee engagement. Specifically, workplace friendship dampens the positive relationship between organizational citizenship behavior and employee engagement. However, contrary to the hypothesized model, results showed an insignificant relationship between workplace friendship and internal branding. By investigating the interaction effects of employee engagement, workplace friendship, and organizational citizenship behavior with internal branding as an intervening construct in the proposed model for the tourism and hotel industries, this study contributes to employee engagement, workplace friendship, organizational citizenship behavior, and internal branding research in the recent literature. This study could help hospitality businesses comprehend the value and impact of internal branding in differentiating their services, which are thought to attract travelers from all over the globe. As a result, the study could also assist industry leaders in developing strategies for competitive advantage.

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