Tomas Bata University in Zlín
Faculty of Management and Economics

Doctoral Thesis

Internal Employee Branding as a Strategic Tool for Building a Brand Image Within the Banking Industry: Evidence from an Emerging Economy

Interní zaměstnanecká značka jako strategický nástroj pro budování silné image značky v bankovním průmyslu: výzkumná studie z rozvíjející se ekonomiky

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Georgina Abra Dzide, Mrs. Harriet Emefa Anane Attor, and my children -Eddie, Victor, Derick & Jayden. To you, my very own Benjamin Yaw Klay (Ghana Road Fund) & Justice Edem Tetteh (CEO of Wellness Ghana). This also goes to Kosi Addom, Andy Kankam, Socrates Ampim, Jonathan Dartey, and Christopher Fianu. My family in Vienna, Cecil Nii Aryee Attoh, Simon Theophilus Attoh, Enid & Raina Attoh.

Your unwavering support and encouragement have been my guiding lights throughout this academic journey; this accomplishment is as much yours as it is mine. Thank you all.

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ABSTRACT

Building a brand image is essential for long-term success and growth in the highly competitive banking industry. In the framework of an emerging economy, this study examines the importance of internal employee branding as a tactical tool for bolstering a positive brand image within the banking industry. This study explores how internal employee branding helps to create a brand image, using data and insights from the banking industry of the chosen emerging economy. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study asks banking employees to complete both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. The study clarifies the relationship between internal employee branding initiatives and the development of a strong, positive brand image within banking organizations using statistical techniques and theme analysis. A total sample of 550 was processed and analyzed through Partial Least Square-Structural Equation modeling through the application sampling techniques. This thesis adopted the two theories particularly the social exchange theory and the brand equity theory. Both probability and non-probability were adopted in this thesis.

The results of the hypotheses showed that twenty of the proposed hypotheses were accepted and four were not accepted. The study revealed that brand appreciation salient, attachment, and consistency had a positive relationship with the dependent variable (brand image). Additionally, a well-thought-out internal branding strategy makes employees feel committed, proud, and belonging, which improves customer experiences and strengthens brand perception in the marketplace. It draws attention to the need for customized internal branding plans that mesh well with the unique organizational culture and context in emerging market environments.

This study adds to the body of knowledge on the theoretical and practical implications of internal employee branding strategies for developing a strong and resilient brand image in the banking sector. It provides direction to banking managers and practitioners on how to use internal employee branding as a strategic tool to improve long-term sustainability, competitive advantage, and brand equity in the fast-moving markets of emerging economies.

ABSTRAKT

Budování image značky je zásadní pro dlouhodobý úspěch a růst vysoce konkurenčního bankovního sektoru. Tato studie zkoumá, v rámci rozvíjející se ekonomiky, význam internal employee brandingu, jako taktického nástroje pro posílení pozitivního image značky v bankovním sektoru. Studie zkoumá, jak interní branding zaměstnanců přispívá k vytváření image značky, a to s využitím dat a poznatků z bankovního sektoru vybrané rozvíjející se ekonomiky. K dotazování zaměstnanců bankovnictví je ve studii použito přístupu smíšených metod - jak kvantitativní průzkumy, tak i kvalitativní rozhovory. Pomocí statistických technik a tematické analýzy studie objasňuje vztah mezi iniciativami interního brandingu zaměstnanců a rozvojem silného a pozitivního image značky v bankovních organizacích. Celkový vzorek 550 respondentů byl zpracován a analyzován pomocí modelování částečných nejmenších čtverců-strukturálních rovnic s využitím aplikovaných výběrových technik. Pro tuto práce byly adoptovány dvě teorie, zejména teorie sociální směny (social exchange theory) a teorie vlastního kapitálu značky (brand equity theory). V této práci byl použit jak pravděpodobnostní, tak nepravděpodobnostní výběr vzorků.

Výsledky testování hypotéz prokázaly, že dvacet z navržených hypotéz bylo přijato a čtyři nebyly přijaty. Studie odhalila, že výrazné zhodnocení, proslulost a konzistence značky měly pozitivní vztah na závislou proměnnou (image značky). Kromě toho dobře promyšlená strategie interního brandingu vyvolává u zaměstnanců pocit závazku, hrdosti a sounáležitosti, což zlepšuje zákaznickou zkušenost a posiluje vnímání značky na trhu. Studie upozorňuje na potřebu přizpůsobení interních plánů značky, které dobře zapadají do jedinečné organizační kultury a kontextu prostředí rozvíjejících se trhů.

Tato studie přispívá k rozšíření znalostí o teoretických a praktických důsledcích strategií interního brandingu zaměstnanců pro rozvoj silného a odolného image značky v bankovním sektoru. Studie poskytuje bankovním manažerům a odborníkům návod, jak používat interní značku zaměstnanců, jako strategického nástroje ke zlepšení dlouhodobé udržitelnosti, konkurenční výhody a vlastního kapitálu značky na rychle se měnících trzích rozvíjejících se ekonomik.

1. INTRODUCTION

Internal employee branding refers to the strategic alignment of employees with the organization's brand values and culture, making them not just workers but brand advocates (Nouri et al., 2016). This introduction aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the critical role of internal employee branding in building a brand image within the banking industry. The significance of internal employee branding becomes apparent in the work (Vallas & Christin, 2018). This study stresses that a cohesive and well-communicated brand can significantly enhance employee engagement and commitment. When employees identify with the brand, they become more motivated and are more likely to deliver consistent customer experiences, ultimately benefiting the brand's image. In today's increasingly complex banking industry, the trust and credibility of financial institutions are pivotal to their success. Foroudi et al., (2019) argue that internal employee branding can be crucial in enhancing trustworthiness and credibility. By fostering a sense of ownership, accountability, and pride among employees, this strategy improves internal operations and strengthens the external perception of the bank as a reliable and trustworthy institution.

A subset of internal marketing, internal employee branding is concerned with the creation, reaffirmation, and upkeep of the brand. The idea was first presented by Berry in 1970. It was suggested in 1976 that workers should view the company as their internal customers and strive for satisfaction. Over three decades, this idea has developed into a multifaceted idea. While some scholars like Chang, (2009), Jou et al., (2008), Punjaisri and Wilson, (2007), and Nahavandi, (2008) believe that internal marketing is operational through internal communications, Gazen, (2007) contends that training is the most crucial component. Furthermore, internal marketing research is the most crucial component (Lee et al., 2005: Wildes et al., 2005; Porricelli et al., 2014). According to King and Grease (2008), internal employee branding is more significant than "internal communication with the brand," and to meet this requirement, a thorough network of cognitive and emotional training is necessary (Porricelli, 2013). Recent marketing initiatives that emphasize internal employee branding must encourage actions consistent with the brand (Helm et al., 2016). It prevents rivals from threatening and imitating the brand's position (in terms of customer loyalty, market share, and premium) by building a strong brand.

The concept of internal employee branding (IEB) has emerged as a response to the recognition that branding is not solely about customers, but also about the employees within a company. It is an extension of the broader brand management concept, which focuses on shaping the perception of a brand in the market (Gao et al., 2020). The idea behind IEB is that employees serve as crucial brand ambassadors for a company. In the late 1990s, there was a growing awareness among leading

companies in Europe, North America, and Asia-Pacific regarding the significance of employer brand awareness. Skilled and motivated employees were recognized as vital to the commercial success of these companies, and the principles of branding were applied to the internal organization. It has become increasingly evident that brands can only make a meaningful impact on consumers when employees actively drive and embody those brands through their behaviors, attitudes, actions, and demeanor (Terglav et al., 2015). In other words, no matter how much a company invests in branding, it will yield limited results if employees do not fulfill their expected and important role in representing and living the brand. Barrow and Mosley, (2011) commented on this trend during that time. It is argued that, when employees feel a strong connection to the company's brand and values, they are more likely to deliver a positive customer experience, which, in turn, contributes to business success. Thus, the early 2000s saw the publication of books such as "The Employer Brand" by Barrow and Mosley, (2011) emphasizing the need for companies to establish a compelling employee brand to attract and retain top talent. Since then, IEB has gained significant momentum. Research indicates that organizations with strong internal branding outperform their competitors in terms of employee engagement, customer satisfaction, and financial performance. This realization highlights the importance of internal employee branding as a means to align employees with the organization's brand and empower them to contribute to its success (Punjaisri et al., 2008).

The banking industry has been witnessing a transformation towards a customer-centric approach Syed & Upadhyay, (2017). Internal employee branding plays a pivotal role in facilitating this shift. Engaging employees as brand ambassadors empowers them to advocate for the bank's customer-centric values. Through consistent, authentic customer interactions, employees become instrumental in shaping positive customer perceptions and fostering lasting relationships, which are essential for long-term loyalty and advocacy. As a service-oriented industry, the banking sector relies heavily on customer interactions and experiences with employees. Hwang et al., (2021) assert that employee behavior and attitudes significantly influence customer loyalty. When employees are aligned with the brand, they provide more consistent and exceptional service, fostering a strong emotional connection with customers. Intertwined with the brand, this personal touch creates a powerful synergy that sets the bank apart from its competitors and positively influences brand image. Furthermore, internal employee branding takes on a new dimension in the age of social media and digital communication. Galanou and Papasolomou, (2017) highlight social media's role in amplifying employee branding's impact. Employee engagement on digital platforms can extend the brand's reach and facilitate real-time engagement with customers. It is a vital aspect of building a relevant brand image in today's technology-driven world.

Amid the ever-evolving landscape of the banking industry, the internal employee branding strategy serves as a linchpin for adapting to change and maintaining a relevant brand image. It encompasses a dynamic process that extends beyond recruitment and training, involving continuous employee engagement and development (Besieux et al., 2018). This adaptability positions banks to respond effectively to emerging trends and challenges in the financial sector while maintaining a consistent brand image. In conclusion, internal employee branding plays a pivotal role in building a brand image in the banking industry. It enhances employee engagement, trustworthiness, and customer-centricity and influences customer loyalty. The insights offered in this study aim to provide a deeper understanding of internal employee branding in building a brand image and its enduring significance in the dynamic banking industry.

1.1 Problem Statement

The banking industry operates in a highly competitive and rapidly evolving environment, where establishing robust internal employee branding would lead to a brand image, which is essential for success (Augusto & Torres, 2018). Numerous factors have led to the growing importance and repute of internal employee branding. There is a distinction between internal branding and employee branding. Internal employee branding is the combination of internal branding and employee branding. Employee branding is a marketing approach that helps employees create positive attitudes about their firm, allowing them to be more effective brand ambassadors (Xiong et al., 2013; Sakka & Ahammad, 2020; Schmidt & Baumgarth, 2018). The idea is to get every employee thrilled about working for your company. Internal branding is the practice of matching employee values with the ideals of the firm (Asha & Jyothi, 2013; Raj & Jyothi, 2011; Gilani & Cunningham, 2017). It is about fostering a culture where everyone works toward the same goal. Employees comprehend the company's goals and, as a result, have a better knowledge of their roles. As a service-oriented industry, the banking sector relies heavily on customer interactions and experiences with employees. Hwang Choe et al., (2021) assert that employee behavior and attitudes significantly influence customer loyalty. When employees are aligned with the brand, they provide more consistent and exceptional service, fostering a strong emotional connection with customers. Intertwined with the brand, this personal touch creates a powerful synergy that sets the bank apart from its competitors and positively influences brand image.

Garas et al., (2018) researched internal corporate branding impact on employees' brand-supporting behavior. Accordingly, this research investigated how employees can become brand champions. It further examines the effect of internal branding on employees' role clarity and brand commitment and the impact of role clarity and brand commitment on employees' brand-supporting behavior. However, the study

only considered frontline employees and hence proposed a study considering the entire employees of the banks. Measuring the effectiveness of internal employee branding initiatives remains a critical challenge. Metrics for assessing the impact of these strategies on employee engagement, customer loyalty, and overall brand image are often elusive. Vallas and Christin (2018) emphasize that understanding how to quantify and evaluate the results of these initiatives is paramount. This issue prompts the exploration of how banks can develop meaningful key performance indicators (KPIs) to gauge the success and impact of their internal employee branding efforts. The challenge of maintaining consistency in internal employee branding and ensuring alignment with the bank's external branding efforts is another prominent issue. Syed and Upadhyay, (2017) shed light on the existence of discrepancies between the brand image projected to the public and the actual experiences customers have with bank employees. This disconnect underscores the need to investigate how banks can harmonize their internal employee branding efforts with their external customer-facing branding, ensuring a seamless and consistent brand image.

Scholars and researchers have carried out several studies considering various viewpoints, either focusing on internal branding or employee branding within the banking fraternity (Siziba, 2016; Du Preez, 2017; Carlson et al., 2012; Muhammad et al., 2020; Garas et al., 2018; Thokoa et al., 2022; Sultan, 2022; De Bruin et al., 2021). Nonetheless, there has been a lack of thorough research that critically examines the interplay between internal branding and employee branding within the banking industry in a developing country. Ozuem et al. (2018) intimate that although frequently practiced and publicized, internal branding is poorly understood and often poorly implemented. Given the need for organizations to adopt a market-oriented social responsibility approach to brand strategy, there is little evidence-based literature to assist in attaining internal alignment (Kim, 2017; Ko et al., 2019; Schaefer et al., 2020). Given this, research of this nature has become very urgent to be carried out since banks are consistently gearing toward the direction of branding as a strategy (Zwakala et al., 2021; Maheshwari et al., 2017; Wedzerai et al., 2020). Arguably, this study aims to fill a known research gap.

Besieux et al., (2018) assert that the ever-evolving nature of the banking industry necessitates internal employee branding strategies that are not only effective but also sustainable and adaptable. Internal branding assists employees in establishing a strong emotional connection with the corporate brand (Leijerholt et al., 2019). Although frequently practiced and publicized, internal branding is poorly understood and, in many instances, poorly implemented (Ozuem et al., 2018). Augusto and Torres (2018) asserted that the absence of a comprehensive framework for implementing internal employee branding strategies within the banking sector is a

significant issue. However, in the quest to create a compelling banking industry, the role of internal employee branding often remains underexplored. Addressing these problems requires in-depth research and the development of practical solutions to enhance the effectiveness of internal employee branding in the dynamic and competitive banking industry. However, despite the growing discussion of internal branding in the literature, an insufficient attempt has been made to examine the drivers of internal employee branding and how it can be harnessed for a brand image, especially in the developing world (De Bruin et al., 2021).

Despite recognizing its importance, banks often grapple with the lack of structured guidelines or roadmaps for the practical execution of internal employee branding initiatives. While internal employee branding has gained recognition as a valuable strategy for building a brand image within the banking industry, several nuanced issues and gaps warrant focused investigation (Muhammad et al., 2020). This gap raises the question of how banks can establish effective, well-defined strategies and methodologies for successfully implementing internal employee branding. Furthermore, although internal employee branding has received some attention in the literature, insufficient research comprehensively examines employees as partners in building a brand image. Despite the obvious importance of internal employee branding in developing a brand image, there are few or scanty empirical studies in this key area within the banking industry from the perspective of a developing economy. Therefore, this study follows this direction by using internal employee branding as a strategy for building a brand image within the banking industry. Research on internal employee branding is predominantly few, especially within the banking industry (Basetsana et al., 2022). From the foregoing, this research investigates how internal employee branding can serve as a strategic tool for building a brand image within the banking industry. Also, there is a lack of empirical studies that quantify and evaluate the effectiveness of internal employee branding (IEB) strategies in building brand image within the banking industry, particularly in emerging economies like Ghana. Prior research has noted the importance of internal employee branding (Terglav et al., 2016), but little empirical evidence exists to support how these strategies translate into measurable brand engagement behaviors and customer perceptions of brand image (Vallas & Christin, 2018). The current study extends existing theories like the Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Homans, 1958) and Brand Equity Theory (Aaker, 1991) to the context of internal employee branding in the banking industry. However, there is a theoretical gap in understanding how these theories apply specifically within the collectivist culture of emerging economies. (Meyer & Peng, 2016).: (Chen et all., 2023). Moreover, the study addresses the gap in integrating internal branding concepts with external customer-centric branding efforts, which has been underexplored in the literature (Terglav et al., 2016). Most existing research on internal employee branding has

been conducted in developed economies, focusing primarily on Western contexts. (Grigore et al., 2024). The collectivist culture of Ghana, which influences workplace dynamics and employee engagement, presents a unique setting. Research shows that cultural values such as collectivism significantly affect how employees engage with internal branding strategies (Hofstede Insights, 2023; Asare & Danquah, 2017), addressing the contextual gap of how IEB strategies should be adapted to fit these values. While many internal branding studies employ qualitative or case studies, this research adopts a mixed-method approach to provide a more comprehensive understanding. Previous research (Sarstedt et al., 2014) emphasizes the importance of quantitative methodologies like Smart-PLS to measure branding's impact, yet there remains a gap in studies that combine both employee and customer perspectives in the data collection process, especially within the context of internal employee branding (Terglav et al., 2016).

These identified gaps guide the current research in exploring how internal employee branding affects brand engagement and image within Ghana's banking industry's unique cultural and economic context.

1.2 Research Questions

The main research question of this study is: How does internal employee branding serve as a strategic tool for building a brand image within the banking industry?

The following sub-questions are outlined from the main research question.

1. What is the relationship between internal employee branding and brand engagement behaviors?
2. What is the relationship between brand engagement behaviors and brand image?
3. How does reward moderate the relationship between engagement and brand engagement behaviors?
4. How do customers perceive the brand image in the banking industry?

1.3 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study Is to investigate how internal employee branding serves as a strategic tool in building brand image within the banking industry.

 Given this main objective, the following specific objectives are outlined:
1. To assess the relationship between internal employee branding and brand engagement behaviors.
2. To analyze the relationship between brand engagement behaviors and brand image.

3. To examine the moderating role of reward in the relationship between engagement and brand engagement behaviors.
4. To identify the customers' perceptions of brand image in the banking sector.

1.4   Justification/Context of the Study in Ghana

Ghana presents a compelling case for examining internal employee branding (IEB) due to its unique cultural nuances. The nation's strong sense of collectivism and community orientation is critical in shaping workplace dynamics. In Ghana, employees often prioritize group harmony over individual achievements, reflecting a profoundly ingrained collectivist culture (Asare & Danquah, 2017). This collectivist mindset will likely influence how employees perceive and engage with internal branding initiatives, making Ghana an ideal setting to explore the impact of IEB on brand engagement behaviors (Hofstede Insights, 2023).

Moreover, Ghanaian society's respect for authority and hierarchical structures significantly affect organizational behavior and employee interactions (Owusu Ansah & Louw, 2019). In such a hierarchical culture, senior management's endorsement of branding initiatives is crucial for fostering employee engagement and alignment with brand values. This top-down approach to communication and implementation can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of internal branding strategies within similar cultural contexts.

Additionally, Ghana's cultural richness and diversity, with over 100 ethnic groups and multiple languages, offer a unique opportunity to examine how different cultural backgrounds influence employee engagement with branding efforts (Azungah et al., 2018). This diversity can help develop more inclusive and effective internal branding strategies catering to a varied workforce, providing nuanced insights often missing in studies conducted in more culturally homogenous environments (Hofstede Insights, 2023).

1.4.1 Distinct Cultural Environment

Ghana's cultural environment sets it apart from other emerging economies, making it a distinctive context for studying internal employee branding. Integrating traditional customs with modern practices in Ghanaian society impacts how businesses operate and interact with employees and customers (Nkansah, 2019). This unique blend can influence how internal branding messages are received and interpreted by employees, who often hold traditional values while adapting to modern corporate practices. Understanding this interplay is essential for tailoring internal branding strategies that resonate with employees' cultural values and enhance brand engagement.

Furthermore, Ghana's strong family ties and social networks extend into professional settings, significantly influencing employee loyalty and commitment to organizational goals (Ayiku & Hackman, 2020). Internal branding efforts that align with these core values can reinforce employees' intrinsic rewards, fostering a stronger brand identity and loyalty. By studying Ghana, researchers can explore how internal branding strategies can leverage these cultural drivers to enhance employee engagement and organizational outcomes.

Finally, the comparative lack of research on Ghana's banking sector, despite its rapid growth and evolving landscape, highlights the need for this study (YuSheng, & Ibrahim, 2019). While emerging economies share certain characteristics, Ghana's specific cultural context remains underexplored in academic literature. Focusing on Ghana addresses this gap, providing fresh insights into how cultural factors influence internal branding in a context distinct from more frequently studied regions like Asia or Latin America. This focus can highlight unique challenges and opportunities Ghanaian banks face, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of internal branding across diverse cultural settings.

1.4.2 Contribution to Ongoing Debate

The inclusion of Ghanaian cultural perspectives adds a valuable dimension to the ongoing debate on internal employee branding and its impact on employee engagement and organizational outcomes. Current literature on IEB often centers around Western contexts, where individualistic cultures dominate (Awan et al., 2018; Garas et al., 2018; King & Grace, 2010). By conducting the study in Ghana, the research can highlight the role of collectivist values in shaping employee perceptions and behaviors related to branding. This cultural perspective can challenge or complement existing theories, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of how IEB strategies should be tailored to different cultural settings. Additionally, Ghana's emphasis on community and collective well-being aligns with broader discussions on the importance of culturally sensitive branding practices that respect and incorporate local values and traditions (Yeboah-Banin & Quaye, 2021). This can lead to more effective and culturally resonant branding strategies in the banking sector and beyond.

In summary, collecting data in Ghana is justified by the country's unique cultural nuances, distinct cultural environment, and the valuable contribution these perspectives can make to the ongoing debate on internal employee branding. By focusing on Ghana, the research addresses an understudied context and enriches the global understanding of how cultural factors influence the effectiveness of branding initiatives.

1.4.3 Study Delimitation

Delimitations are the parameters that a researcher establishes for a research project, determining what to encompass and what to leave out. This aids in focusing the study, making it more manageable and pertinent to the research objective.

By establishing the parameters of the investigation, delimitations increase the validity of the research. The researcher can better control for extraneous variables that would otherwise distort the results when they create explicit criteria for inclusion and exclusion.

The researcher can assess the degree to which its findings can be extrapolated to different groups or circumstances using delimitations. The researcher can give more precise estimates of the generalizability of their findings by mentioning the sample size, geographic area, period, or other pertinent parameters.

Again, the study only considered the points of view of commercial bank employees during data collection for the quantitative approach without taking customers' perspectives. The study's conclusions or results could not be extrapolated because it only included commercial banks in Ghana.

1.5   Doctoral Thesis Outline

The thesis is divided into six distinct sections.

Section 1: Introduces the subject and presents the state of the research area. It also outlines the research questions and objectives of the study.

Section 2: This section presents the theoretical and empirical literature review. It covers a comprehensive review of relevant literature that covers the subject area. It also includes the conceptual framework and definitions of constructs.

Section 3: outlines the methodological approach to be used for the study. This section also introduces the research design upon which the research shall be based, sampling and sample size, data collection tools, and analytic techniques.

Section 4: Presents the empirical findings of the study.

Section 5: Presents a general discussion of the results.

Section 6: Presents a contribution to theory, practice, education, and policy formulation. The conclusion, limitations, and future research direction are also presented.

The last section constitutes the list of references and appendices of the study.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Background

2.1.1 Brand Equity Theory (BET)

The current dissertation recognized the relevance of internal employee branding for building a strong image within the financial industry. Brand Equity Theory posits that the value of a brand is determined by customers' perceptions, attitudes, and loyalty (Datta et al., 2017; Farjam & Xu, 2015). This value, known as brand equity, encompasses elements such as brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand associations (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010). According to Aaker (1991), brand equity represents a given set of assets and liabilities of a given brand together with the brand's name and logos, as well as adding and subtracting the value a product or service provides for the firm or customers. Keller (2003) believes that brand equity is simply the differences witnessed in how customers respond to the marketing activities of competing brands.

According to Aaker (1991), brand equity comprises five distinct components: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other brand assets. On the other hand, Keller (1998) believes that brand equity comprises brand image, brand awareness, reaction to the brand, and brand relationship. Brand equity reflects customers' appreciation, understanding, attitudes, actions, and emotions toward specific brands, often reflected in their experiences when comparing competing brands (Aaker, 1991). The theory suggests that solid brand equity has numerous advantages, including increased customer loyalty, reduced marketing costs, and the ability to command premium prices (Rambocas et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2019). Proponents include David A. Aaker, known for his brand equity model, which includes dimensions such as brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations (Aaker, 1991). Another is Kevin Lane Keller, who developed the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model, focusing on how customer perceptions and attitudes toward a brand are built and managed (Keller, 2016).

2.1.2 The Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social exchange theory is one of the most well-known conceptual viewpoints in management and related disciplines like sociology and social psychology. Social exchange theory emerged from the nexus of sociology, psychology, and economics. The theory was proposed by Hormans (1958), to comprehend how people behave socially in economic endeavors. A sociological and psychological theory called social exchange theory examines how two parties engage socially when they use a cost-benefit analysis to weigh the advantages and disadvantages. The theory also includes economic relationships; the cost-benefit analysis occurs when one party has items the other party values (Roeckelein, 2006). According to social exchange

theory, these computations occur in passionate, companionship, professional, and transitory connections as fundamental as exchanging words with a consumer (McRay, 2015). According to social exchange theory, if the costs of the relationship outweigh the benefits, such as if a lot of time or money is invested into a relationship and not reciprocated, the partnership may be discontinued or discarded (Cook et al., 2013). Although social exchange theory takes many different forms today, they are all based on the idea that participants exchange resources through social exchange relationships. From a dyadic model to a network model with market qualities (Cook, 1977; Emerson, 1987), the theory has undergone progression.

It is important to note that the idea of social behavior is central to the social exchange theory. Despite this, scholars tacitly concur that social behavior matters. Social behavior involves the trade of products, both tangible and intangible, like status or approval signals. Individuals who give generously to others also want to receive generously from them, and those who receive generously from others are obligated to return the favor. This influence process usually results in an equilibrium where the exchanges are balanced. In trade, a party may incur costs in addition to receiving rewards; as profit, the difference between the two approaches maximum, the party's behavior is less likely to alter. Interactions between individuals are defined by various social behaviors (Rubenstein & Rubenstein, 2013). These behaviors include paternal, cooperative, aggressive, mutualistic, and altruistic actions. Social connections can develop among strangers, family members, individuals of the same gender, and across different generations when people engage with one another regularly. Significant streams of SET literature about internal employee branding seem to exist. Scholars who employ social exchange theory can explain many social events post hoc, but their capacity to make useful preemptive predictions about workplace behavior is severely limited (Cropanzano et al., 2017). For instance, the theory has been applied extensively by scholars within the scope of branding (Cook et al., 2013; Cropanzano et al., 2017; Ward & Berno, 2011; Meira & Hancer, 2021; Löhndorf & Diamantopoulos, 2014; Wang et al., 2019).

2.2   Justification/Rationale for Applying the Theories

This dissertation investigated how internal employee branding can serve as a strategy for building a solid brand image in the banking industry. The study used social exchange and brand equity theories to operationalize this objective. These theories were leveraged since the banking industry operates in a highly competitive and rapidly evolving environment, where establishing a robust internal employee branding would lead to a strong brand image, which is essential for its success. As explained below, the two theories applied in this dissertation are necessary and justifiable.

This study adopted the SET because this theory argues that employees tend to be more committed and exhibit desired behaviors when they receive desired benefits from their organizations. Internal branding aims to help employees project a consistent positive image to customers and other stakeholders. The SET is a critical social psychology concept that looks at social developments as a series of interactive exchanges between various people (Cropanzano et al., 2017). The current dissertation explains that social exchange theory is relevant in the context of an organization's relationships with its stakeholders, including employees and customers (Slack et al., 2015). The organization commits stakeholders who offer benefits such as labor and income to the organization and stakeholders who incur the cost of negative externalities.

Using the SET, therefore, helps to gain an in-depth understanding of how organizations' behaviors of adequate financial incentives and compensation, recognition, support, career progression, and other HR practices serve as an impetus for employees to reciprocate by being model workers (Blau, 1964).

As opined by Terglav et al., (2016), reciprocity is a main pivot of SET, and workers exhibiting and practicing high standards of internal branding can be incentivized to help brands realize their brand performance aspirations. This study argues that to gain a deeper appreciation of how internal employee branding serves as a strategy for building a solid brand image in the banking industry, there is a need to adopt a theory that elucidates the psycho-social variables that influence these strategies. This study argues that both the SET and the brand equity theories can be used together since they are complementary and relational. It is argued that employees' commitment and dedication to brands highly depend on the exchange of benefits they receive from the brand, especially regarding adequate financial incentives and compensation, knowledge, recognition, support, career, and progression.

Again, this study argues that using the SET helps to understand how firms' internal branding practices influence the development of psychological ownership of brands and how this reinforces desired brand behaviors and leads to a strong brand image in the final analysis. Employees believe that because their work guarantees a financial benefit, they must give their employer a corresponding set of benefits (McLeod et al., 2021). A two-way partnership is built on mutual benefit and exchange between employers and managers. Accordingly, this study uses the SET and brand equity theory to investigate how internal employee branding can serve as a strategy for building a strong brand image within the banking industry.

As a result of perceiving that the brand is taking care of their welfare and well-being, employees will reciprocate and respond with actions and behaviors desired by their

organizations. This is where the brand equity theory comes in. As opined by authors such as Aaker (1991), Datta et al., (2017), Farjam and Xu, (2015), brand equity comprises four components - brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand associations (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010). All these four components contribute strongly to influencing brand equity, but at the same time, these four components can only be achieved when internal branding is well entrenched and practiced (Hasni et al., 2018). The brand equity theory was employed in this study because, in the final analysis, firms invest in projecting positive images to gain and solidify their competitive advantages. Being able to engender brand loyalty, heighten brand awareness and association, and increase perceived quality results in a high brand image. However, the foundation of brand performance is internal branding. Also, SET can explain and understand internal branding.

The foregoing discussions, therefore, establish a complementary and relational connection between the two chosen theories – SET and brand equity. This is to say that, standing alone, neither of these theories can effectively deal with the study's objective. They explain and help operationalize the study's objective more effectively when employed together.

2.3   Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a foundational structure that outlines the parameters for defining a research question and identifying relevant responses. It connects the underlying theories, assumptions, beliefs, and concepts that inform the research, presenting them in a narrative, visual, or graphical format. This framework establishes the relationships between independent and dependent variables while considering other factors and ideologies that may influence the research design.

In the current study, a conceptual framework has been developed based on a comprehensive review of existing literature, as illustrated in Figure 1 below. This framework guides the investigation and clarifies how various elements interact within the research context. By delineating these connections, the conceptual framework provides a clear roadmap for understanding the dynamics at play and helps to articulate the study's objectives and hypotheses.
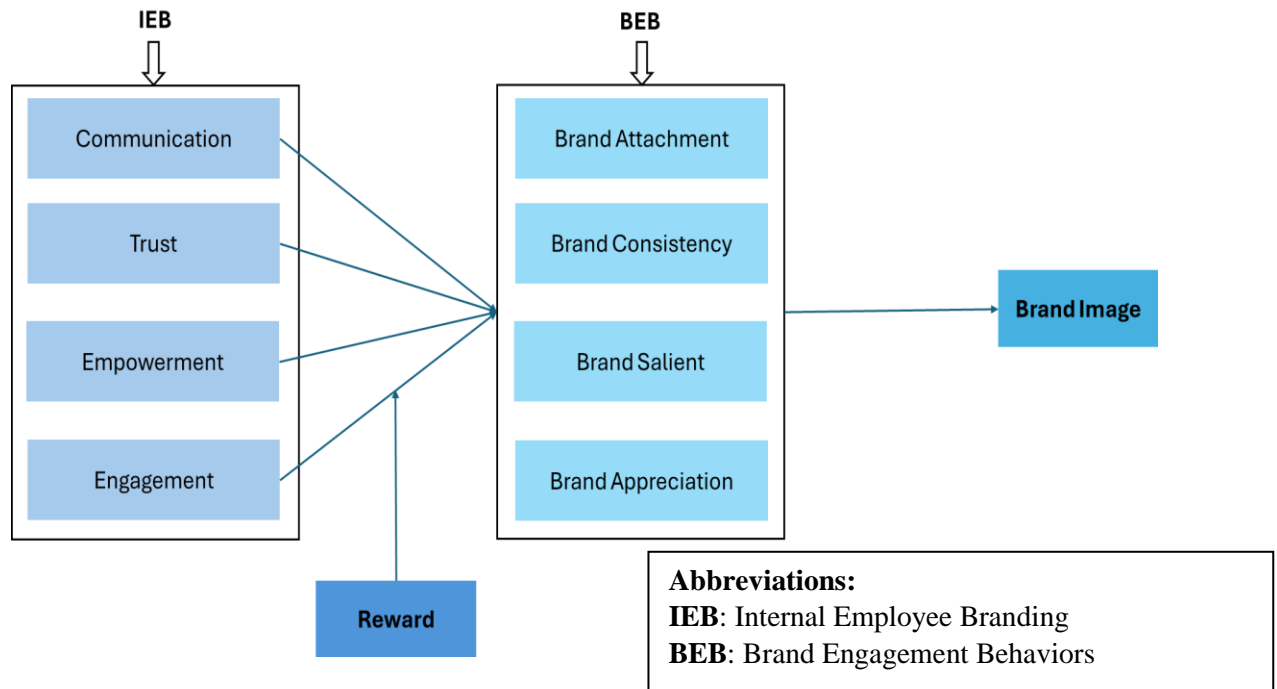
Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual framework of the study.

2.4   Empirical Review

A thorough overview of the literature on the concepts employed in the dissertation is provided in this subsection.

2.4.1 Communication

Communication involves transferring information between entities using various methods, such as words, signals, and behaviors (McCormack et al., 2018). It requires a mutual understanding and shared meaning among the parties involved. In branding, communication refers to how a brand effectively conveys its identity and message to target audiences through diverse channels like advertising, social media, and packaging (Voorveld, 2019). The primary objective is to raise awareness and shape perceptions. Companies employ different strategies, including billboards, commercials, newsletters, and direct interactions, to establish effective customer communication and develop a cohesive brand image. In banking, communication signals and dissemination of information to customers regarding their products and services (Shrestha et al., 2019). The channels include websites, apps, emails, statements, professional and well-presented employees, executive venues, and physical branches to build strong customer relationships. However, central to this definition is information transfer between parties through diverse means, to foster understanding and influence perceptions and behaviors (Shrestha et al., 2019;

Voorveld, 2019). Effective communication is essential for organizations to establish a strong brand presence, engage with customers, and maintain positive relationships. Within the banking industry, Shrestha et al., (2019) conducted a study that investigated the impact of bankers' experience on banking communication in commercial banks. Their research aimed to enhance understanding levels and determine effective communication practices in the workplace. Tran et al., (2016) explored the influence of communication channels on the adoption of mobile banking. Additionally, Paudel et al., (2020) authored a book titled "What Determines Customers' Perception of Banking Communication? Empirical Evidence from Commercial Banks of Nepal," which provided insights into how banking officials communicate with customers and the effectiveness of their techniques and tools in bank development.

Communication, fosters engagement and emotional connections between banks and employees, improving customer satisfaction and service levels. It is essential, to provide direction to employees (Shrestha, et al. 2019). Noteworthy, technological advancements have revolutionized communication in the banking sector, resulting in increased working performance. However, challenges remain, as employee engagement levels are suboptimal, with a notable portion of employees at risk of attrition. These challenges can be attributed to communication gaps, inadequate recognition, and limited developmental opportunities, undermining employees' sense of value and commitment. To address these issues and maximize organizational success, banking institutions should prioritize retention strategies and initiatives to enhance employee engagement (McCormack et al., 2018; Shrestha et al., 2019).

Conversely, the absence of effective communication can have detrimental effects on employees in the banking industry. Poor communication can lead to misunderstandings, errors, and reduced productivity. It can also result in low morale, dissatisfaction, and a higher likelihood of employee turnover. Ineffective communication negatively impacts customer service, hindering client interactions (Born et al., 2014; McCormack et al., 2018; Shrestha et al., 2019). Moreover, it stifles innovation and growth by discouraging employees from sharing ideas and providing feedback. Additionally, inadequate communication increases operational and financial risks, particularly in the context of risk management within the banking sector. It directly impacts consistent branding, customer satisfaction, employee engagement, and organizational success (Hoppe, 2018).

In conclusion, effective communication is indispensable in the banking industry. It plays a vital role in improving the banking system, enhancing employee behavior, and optimizing core banking services. The absence of effective communication can

have adverse consequences, including decreased productivity, low morale, poor customer service, reduced innovation, and increased risks. Banking institutions should prioritize implementing robust communication strategies and tools to overcome these challenges and create a favorable work environment for their employees.

H1a: Communication has a positive relationship with brand attachment.
H1b: Communication has a positive relationship with brand consistency.
H1c: Communication has a positive relationship with brand salient.
H1d: Communication has a positive relationship with brand appreciation.

2.4.2 Trust

Trust is a multidimensional concept of significant importance in various domains (Kammerlohr & Paradice, 2023). Communication involves placing confidence in another person or entity's honesty, integrity, reliability, and credibility. Trust plays a crucial role in branding and shaping consumers' perceptions and emotional connections with a brand (Alhaddad, 2015). It refers to consumers' belief and confidence in a brand's reliability and dependability, leading to brand loyalty and advocacy. In banking, trust pertains to customers' confidence in their chosen bank's ability to safeguard their money and financial information, fulfill promises, and operate ethically (van Esterik-Plasmeijer & Van Raaij, 2017). High levels of trust reduce perceived risks and encourage customer engagement. Trust significantly reduces uncertainty, motivates individuals to engage in activities, and maintains loyalty (van Esterik-Plasmeijer & Van Raaij, 2017). In branding and banking, trust fosters emotional connections, enhances reputation, and drives positive outcomes (Bernarto et al., 2020; Forbes, 2021). The construct of trust has been extensively explored in various fields, including relationships, organizations, consumer behavior, e-commerce, the finance sector, and the healthcare industry (Buck et al., 2021; Kammerlohr & Paradice, 2023; Lounsbury, 2023).

Firms that have proved trustworthy attract great potential, especially human capital. Trusting employees are likelier to advocate for the organization, exhibit loyalty, and be firmly committed to their jobs and customers (van Esterik-Plasmeijer & Van Raaij 2017). It provides a strategic advantage, ranking as the second most important factor in consumers' financial product decisions. Trust fosters agile cultures, enabling confident decision-making and organizational adaptability.

The absence prompts decreased productivity, low morale, poor customer service, reduced innovation, increased risk exposure, and employee burnout. Lack of trust can result in communication breakdowns, misunderstandings, errors, and inefficiencies, diminishing productivity (Kammerlohr & Paradice, 2023; Van Esterik-Plasmeijer & Van Raa, 2017). It can lead to employee frustration,

dissatisfaction, and potential turnover, affecting morale. Moreover, it impairs customer service quality, as employees feel disconnected and ill-informed (van Esterik-Plasmeijer & Van Raaij, 2017). The lack of trust inhibits innovation by discouraging idea-sharing and feedback among employees. Employee burnout, characterized by increased absenteeism, reduced productivity, and difficulty in talent retention, also results from lacking trust (Irabor & Okolie, 2019).

In summary, trust plays a crucial role in the banking industry, influencing multiple aspects from employee engagement to revenue generation. Conversely, the absence of trust has detrimental effects on productivity, morale, customer service, innovation, risk management, and employee well-being.

H2a: Trust has a positive relationship with brand attachment.
H2b: Trust has a positive relationship with brand consistency.
H2c: Trust has a positive relationship with brand salient.
H2d: Trust has a positive relationship with brand appreciation.

2.4.3 Empowerment

Empowerment involves enabling individuals or groups to have control, authority, and autonomy in their lives, decisions, and actions (Tengland, 2008). Branding refers to positioning a brand as a catalyst for personal growth, self-expression, and autonomy, inspiring customers to feel confident and in control through their association with the brand (Hajdas & Kłeczek, 2021). The means to empower employees will mean positioning them to become an inspiration, an automatics brand ambassador for the firm. In the banking sector, empowerment is about providing financial knowledge, tools, and resources to customers/employees, allowing them to make informed decisions and take charge of their financial well-being (George & Zakkariya, 2018). Common features include emphasizing the importance of enabling individuals or customers to have control, authority, and autonomy. They highlight the need to provide resources, support, and opportunities for individuals to improve their lives and make informed choices (George & Zakkariya, 2018; Hajdas & Kłeczek, 2021; Tengland, 2008).

In the banking sector, empowerment greatly influences customer financial well-being, engagement, and loyalty. Banks empower customers by providing financial education, personalized advice, and access to innovative tools and services, enabling them to make informed financial decisions and improve their financial health (George & Zakkariya, 2018). Empowering customers has improved customer satisfaction, as banks deliver better services when customers have the tools and resources for success (Singh et al., 2014). This suggests that empowering customers positively impacts their perception of the bank's services.

In branding, empowerment profoundly influences customers' emotional connection and loyalty. Brands that position themselves as enablers of personal growth, self-expression, and autonomy create a solid emotional bond with customers (Drake, 2017). Empowering customers inspires them to become brand advocates, contributing to a positive brand image and reputation (Shukla et al., 2023). Empowerment also influences brand image, positioning the brand as a trusted partner in customers' personal growth and success (Shukla, et al., 2023). Active user involvement in social media brand communities is strongly associated with intrapersonal and interactional empowerment. Empowered customers feel engaged in their interactions with a brand, strengthening their commitment to the brand.

Employee empowerment is essential in the banking industry, impacting job performance, customer service, employee satisfaction, organizational success, and adaptability (Hajdas & Kłeczek, 2021; Tengland, 2008). By empowering employees, banking organizations can unlock their full potential, leading to improved performance, enhanced customer experiences, and a positive work culture. It fosters employee engagement, cultivates a customer-centric approach, ensures brand consistency, promotes innovation and adaptability, and transforms employees into passionate brand advocates. By emphasizing empowerment, organizations can harness their employees' potential to positively influence the brand image and gain a competitive advantage within the banking industry (George & Zakkariya, 2018; Hajdas & Kłeczek, 2021). Thus, banking organizations must prioritize employee empowerment as a strategic approach for long-term success.

H3a: Empowerment has a positive relationship with brand attachment.
H3b: Empowerment has a positive relationship with brand consistency.
H3c: Empowerment has a positive relationship with brand salient.
H3d: Empowerment has a positive relationship with brand appreciation.

2.4.4 Engagement

Engagement is a concept that holds significance in various domains. It encompasses individuals' active involvement, emotional connection, and commitment toward a specific entity or activity (Kruse, 2012). In branding, engagement pertains to the connection, interaction, and positive customer experiences with a brand (Dodda, 2020). It represents the extent to which customers actively participate, display loyalty, and develop a robust relationship with the brand. A close study also reveals that management and employees cannot be ignored. For instance, within the banking industry, engagement is defined as the degree of involvement, trust, and satisfaction that customers or employees have with their financial institutions (Islam et al., 2020; Dajani, 2015). Engaged employees especially become abreast with the banks' goals, fostering a sense of ownership, commitment, and satisfaction. This, in turn, enhances

the bank's image by creating a positive reputation for exceptional service, building trust with customers, and attracting top talent in the industry (Rana & Sharma, 2019). Remarkably, employee engagement cannot be achieved when organizations ignore values such as effective reward, trust, and transparency, as these elements are essential for fostering a sense of commitment, satisfaction, and active involvement among employees (Jiang & Shen, 2023). Without these foundational values, employees may feel disconnected, demotivated, and untrusting, leading to decreased engagement and negative impacts on organizational performance (Kujala et al., (2022). It entails the level of interaction, personalized service, and responsiveness the bank provides, leading to the establishment of deeper and more meaningful relationships with customers and employees. Despite certain nuances in the definitions employed by branding and banking perspectives, a common ground exists about the fundamental elements of engagement. Both definitions underscore the importance of active involvement, emotional connection, and commitment (Chauhan et al., 2022). They emphasize the significance of building strong relationships and fostering positive experiences to enhance customer loyalty and satisfaction. By prioritizing engagement, the branding and banking sectors can cultivate enduring connections with their target audience, enhancing brand equity and organizational success.

In branding, actively engaging with customers through various channels, such as social media, events, and personalized interactions, enables brands to create a loyal customer base (Ahmad et al., 2012). Engaged customers become brand advocates, promoting the brand to others, and contributing to its positive reputation (Chauhan et al., 2022). Furthermore, when customers and employees are actively involved and emotionally connected with a brand, they develop a sense of trust, loyalty, and attachment (Qaiser et al., 2021). This, in turn, leads to positive brand perceptions, increased brand equity, and a competitive advantage in the market. Furthermore, engagement helps develop an emotional connection between employees and the bank, influencing their attitude toward clients and improving customer satisfaction and service levels ((Ghlichlee & Bayat, 2021). Therefore, engagement serves as a critical driver of a brand image.

Several works have explored the concept of engagement in various fields. Kumar and Pansari, (2014) delve into employee engagement from a marketing perspective, highlighting its potential value. Balain and Sparrow, (2011) conducted a systematic review of the construct of engagement, critically analyzing different perspectives. Mehta and Mehta (2013) review the literature on employee engagement, covering topics such as its management, organizational consequences, and its relationship with other individual characteristics. While engagement is recognized as important in the banking sector, more research specifically focused on this domain is needed.

Chauhan, et al. (2022) examine customer experience in digital banking and suggest future research directions. Kujala et al., (2022) provide a comprehensive literature review on stakeholder engagement. Key literature on the construct of engagement and branding includes (Pansari & Kumar, 2017; France et al., 2016); Veloutsou & Delgado-Ballester, 2018). They respectively explore customer engagement, an integrated model of customer-brand engagement, and new challenges in brand management.

Employees who are not effectively engaged decrease productivity, break poor employee-customer relations and have weak employee habits, a defect to the bank's brand image as disengaged employees are less likely to be productive and efficient. Painstakingly, reduced innovation can be a consequence of the lack of employee engagement, as engaged employees are more likely to contribute new ideas and solutions (Ahmad et al., 2012).

H4a: Engagement has a positive relationship with brand attachment.
H4b: Engagement has a positive relationship with brand consistency.
H4c: Engagement has a positive relationship with brand salient.
H4d: Engagement has a positive relationship with brand appreciation.

2.4.5 The Moderating Role of Reward

Reward is defined as benefits given in recognition of desired behaviors or achievements, serving as incentives to motivate repeated actions (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kotler & Armstrong, 2016; Murayama, 2022). In branding, they are incentives for customers to encourage desired behaviors such as repeat purchases, brand advocacy, or increased engagement with the brand. The forms include discounts, loyalty points, exclusive offers, or experiential benefits. The underlying idea is to enhance the customer experience, foster loyalty, and build a deeper emotional connection with the brand (Hwang & Choi, 2020). the banking sector, intimate, rewards often come in the form of loyalty programs, cash-back offers, interest rate benefits, or perks such as travel miles and gift cards (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016).

In the banking sector, rewards are crucial for customer acquisition and retention, offering incentives such as cashback, travel rewards, and bonus interest rates to attract and retain customers (Komalasari and Budiman, (2018). In branding, rewards help cultivate customer loyalty and foster long-term relationships by creating a sense of value and appreciation (Aaker, 2012; Audrain-Pontevia, & Garnier, 2021). Rewards motivate customers to interact more frequently and deeply, creating stronger relationships and increasing sales (Hwang & Choi, 2020). Rewards create value, driving repeat business and positive recommendations (Zhang & Breugelmans, 2021). Personalized rewards can make a brand stand out by making customers feel valued (Melnyk et al., 2019).

Marketers must understand rewards' role in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors in the competitive branding landscape. This literature review explores the relationship between rewards and key brand-related constructs, including brand appreciation, consistency, attachment, and salience. Brand appreciation refers to consumers' positive evaluations and emotional responses towards a brand. Rewards, such as loyalty programs, discounts, and exclusive offers, have been found to enhance brand appreciation by providing tangible benefits and reinforcing positive brand experiences (Hwang et al., 2019)). For example, research by Melnyk et al., (2019) demonstrated that reward-based promotions significantly increase consumers' perceived value of a brand, leading to higher levels of brand appreciation and loyalty.

Rewards reinforce brand consistency by aligning with the brand's values, personality, and messaging (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016). For instance, loyalty rewards programs that offer consistent rewards and experiences reinforce consumers' perceptions of brand reliability and trustworthiness (Babin et al., 2019). Additionally, research by Delgado-Ballester et al., (2017) found that consistent reward structures contribute to long-term customer relationships and brand loyalty. Brand attachment reflects consumers' emotional connections and loyalty towards a brand. Rewards act as catalysts for strengthening brand attachment by fostering reciprocity, gratitude, and positive affective responses (Vlachos et al., 2017). Studies have shown that personalized rewards and surprise gifts can evoke feelings of reciprocity and deepen consumers' emotional bonds with a brand (Gurviez & Duff, 2018). Moreover, reward-based interactions create opportunities for brands to engage with consumers personally, leading to heightened brand attachment and advocacy (Veloutsou et al., 2020).

Rewards enhance brand salience by increasing brand visibility, memorability, and differentiation (Keller, 1993). Loyalty rewards programs contribute to brand salience by incentivizing repeat purchases and creating ongoing engagement opportunities (Matsui & Hoffman, 2019). Furthermore, research suggests that brands offering unique and exclusive rewards are more likely to stand out in consumers' minds and gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace (Chandon et al., 2015). In conclusion, rewards significantly influence various brand perception and behavior dimensions, including appreciation, consistency, attachment, and salient. By strategically leveraging rewards in their marketing efforts, brands can cultivate stronger emotional connections, foster brand loyalty, and increase brand visibility in the minds of consumers. Based on the above, the below hypotheses are formulated.

H5a: Reward moderates the relationship between engagement and brand attachment.
H5b: Reward moderates the relationship between engagement and brand consistency.
H5c: Reward moderates the relationship between engagement and brand salient.
H5d: Reward moderates the relationship between engagement and brand appreciation.

2.4.6 Brand Attachment

Brand attachment has emerged as fundamental in the field of consumer-brand relationship research over the past two decades (Kessous et al., 2015; Li et al., 2020). Shimul (2022) defines brand attachment as the emotional bond or connection that consumers develop with a brand. It represents a deep and enduring relationship where consumers experience a strong sense of affinity, loyalty, and identification with the brand. In the context of branding, brand attachment refers to the emotional connection and loyalty that customers have toward a particular brand. It signifies the strength of the relationship between consumers and the brand, which is often fostered through positive experiences, shared values, and consistent brand messaging (Taghipourian & Bakhsh, 2015). Similarly, in the banking sector, brand attachment refers to customers' emotional connection and loyalty toward a specific bank or financial institution. It encompasses the trust, satisfaction, and identification that customers feel toward the bank's brand, which is typically established through positive banking experiences, personalized services, and a robust brand reputation (Taghipourian & Bakhsh, 2016). The definitions emphasize the common elements of emotional connection, loyalty, and identification. They underscore the significance of positive experiences, shared values, and consistent brand messaging in cultivating a strong bond between customers and the brand or bank.

Brand attachment is relevant in the banking industry; employees with a strong attachment to the brand are more likely to be motivated and committed to upholding a positive brand image (Shimul, 2022). This alignment between employees' emotions and the brand's values leads to consistent and authentic brand experiences. They are more likely to be brand advocates and ambassadors, positively influencing customers' perceptions. Additionally, brand attachment enhances employees' job satisfaction, commitment, and engagement, contributing to a positive organizational culture and employee retention. Overall, studying brand attachment among employees provides insights into their reward, advocacy, and ability to promote a brand image in the banking industry (Li et al., 2020; Taghipourian & Bakhsh, 2015; 2016).

Brand attachment holds substantial importance in branding and banking for various reasons. It contributes to creating a loyal customer base resistant to competitive offerings, thereby enhancing long-term customer retention and profitability. Brand-attached customers are more inclined to engage in positive word-of-mouth, increasing brand awareness and customer acquisition (Taghipourian & Bakhsh, 2015; 2016). Additionally, brand attachment fosters a sense of trust, credibility, and reputation for the brand or bank, strengthening its market position and competitive advantage (Kessous et al., 2015; Li et al., 2020).

Several studies have explored the construct of brand attachment. Li et al., (2020) investigated the relationship between customer engagement, brand loyalty, and tourism social media, focusing on the roles of brand attachment and customer trust. Kessous et al., (2015) contrasted nostalgic and non-nostalgic brands in terms of consumer-brand relationships. Moussa, (2015) delved into the similarities and differences between brand attachment and brand love. In the banking sector, Levy and Hino (2016) examined emotional brand attachment in customer-bank relationships, while Taghipourian and Bakhsh, (2016) studied the impact of brand attachment on service loyalty.

Despite the extensive research on brand attachment, gaps still need to be addressed. Shimul, (2022) highlighted the need for conceptual clarity and consistency with attachment theory, developing and validating research frameworks, and applying contextual measurements and rigorous methodologies. Ghorbanzadeh and Rahehagh, (2021) also identified a gap in understanding the role of emotional constructs in forming consumer loyalty.

H6: Brand Attachment has a positive relationship with brand image.

2.4.7 Brand Consistency

Brand-consistent behavior ensures that individuals' or organizations' actions, behaviors, and decisions align with the established brand identity, values, and promises. It is crucial in maintaining a cohesive and unified brand image across various touchpoints. According to Henkel et al. (2007); and Mazzei and Quaratino, (2015), brand-consistent behavior involves consistently representing and delivering the brand experience both internally and externally. In branding, brand-consistent behavior refers to the actions and behaviors of individuals within an organization that align with the brand's identity, values, and promises. It is essential for employees to consistently portray the brand in their interactions with customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders, ensuring a consistent brand experience (Henkel et al., 2007). In the banking sector, brand-consistent behavior pertains to the actions and behaviors of bank employees that align with the bank's brand identity, values, and promises. It

encompasses delivering high-quality customer service, upholding ethical standards, and maintaining a consistent brand experience across different customer touchpoints (Muhammad et al., 2020). The definitions emphasize the significance of aligning actions, behaviors, and decisions with the brand's identity, values, and promises. They highlight the importance of consistency in representing and delivering the brand experience internally and externally to customers and stakeholders.

Extensive research conducted by Henkel et al., (2007), Muhammad et al., (2020), and Ravazzani and Mazzei, (2017), among others, highlights the crucial nature of brand-consistent behavior in both branding and banking. This practice serves several important purposes, such as building a strong and cohesive brand image, enhancing brand recognition, and differentiating the brand in the market. Consistency in brand behavior also fosters trust, credibility, and customer loyalty, resulting in increased satisfaction and long-term relationships. Furthermore, it ensures that customers receive a consistent brand experience across various touchpoints, reinforcing the brand's values and promises.

In the banking sector, brand-consistent behavior significantly influences customer trust, satisfaction, and loyalty. When employees consistently deliver high-quality customer service, adhere to ethical standards, and represent the brand consistently, customers develop trust in the bank and its offerings. This trust translates into enhanced customer satisfaction, fostering long-term relationships and positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Muhammad et al., 2020). In the broader context of branding, brand consistent behavior directly impacts brand equity, recognition, and customer loyalty. When employees consistently exhibit behaviors that align with the brand's identity and values, it strengthens its image and sets it apart from competitors (Altaf et al., 2019; Ravazzani & Mazzei, 2017). Consistent brand behavior also fosters customer loyalty, as customers rely on the brand to deliver the desired experience consistently.

Employees as brand ambassadors play a crucial role in shaping customers' experiences and interactions with the brand (Muhammad et al., 2020). Consistently displaying behavior that aligns with the brand's values and promises leads to a consistent and coherent brand experience for customers, fostering customer trust and loyalty. This is particularly important in the banking industry, where a brand image is vital. Brand-consistent behavior also contributes to establishing a positive organizational culture. When employees consistently embody the brand's values and behaviors, it creates shared understanding and alignment within the organization (Henkel et al., 2007; Muhammad et al., 2020; Ravazzani & Mazzei. 2017). This alignment fosters a sense of belonging, engagement, and teamwork, resulting in a positive work environment and improved customer experiences. An organizational

culture supporting and rewarding brand-consistent behavior further strengthens employees' efforts to promote a brand image. Moreover, brand-consistent behavior is closely linked to employee satisfaction and reward. When employees understand and believe in the brand's values and promises, and their behavior aligns accordingly, they derive purpose and fulfillment from their work (Ravazzani & Mazzei. 2017). This alignment positively impacts job satisfaction and reward, increasing employee commitment and dedication to promoting a brand image in the banking industry.

H7: *Brand consistency has a positive relationship with brand image.*

2.4.8 Brand Salient

The term "Brand Salience Behavior" may not be widely recognized in the field of marketing. However, when deconstructed, "Brand Salience" refers to the level of consumer awareness and consideration of a brand during the purchasing process (Hassan et al., 2016; Jraisat et al., 2015). It indicates how readily a brand comes to mind when consumers contemplate buying a specific product or service. In this context, "Behavior" refers to the actions taken by consumers as a result of brand salience (Keller, 2001). Therefore, "Brand Salience Behavior" can be understood as the actions, behaviors, or attributes exhibited by individuals or organizations that make a brand distinctive, easily recognizable, and memorable to consumers (Kubolis, 2014).

In the realm of branding, the concept of brand salience behavior pertains to the behaviors, actions, or characteristics demonstrated by a brand that contributes to its distinctiveness, memorability, and ease of recognition by customers (Hassan et al., 2016). It encompasses specific brand-related behaviors, such as the utilization of unique visual elements, consistent brand messaging, or the creation of memorable brand experiences. These behaviors serve to differentiate the brand from its competitors and establish a strong brand identity (Hassan et al., 2016; Jraisat et al., 2015). Within the banking sector, Sandhe (2016) argues that brand salience behavior encompasses the behaviors, actions, or characteristics displayed by a bank that make it distinctive, memorable, and easily recognizable to customers. These behaviors may include personalized customer service, innovative banking solutions, or a steadfast commitment to ethical practices. By engaging in such brand-related behaviors, banks differentiate themselves from competitors and establish a unique brand identity (Sandhe, 2016). Common definitional features include the significance of exhibiting distinctive and memorable behaviors or characteristics that enable a brand or bank to stand out. They emphasize the necessity of engaging in unique brand-related behaviors that differentiate the brand or bank from competitors and leave a lasting impression on customers (Hassan et al., 2016; Jraisat et al., 2015; Sandhe, 2016).

Numerous studies have investigated the concept of brand salience and its effects. For instance, Hassan et al. (2016) analyzed how differentiated customer service, brand trust, brand commitment, and brand salience influence brand advocacy. Jraisat et al., (2015) investigated perceived brand salience and destination brand loyalty from the perspectives of international tourists. Ghorbanzadeh and Rahehagh, (2021) explored emotional brand attachment and brand love as emotional bridges in the process of transitioning from satisfaction to loyalty.

In the banking sector, Biedenbach et al., (2022) surveyed retail employees in Sweden and demonstrated that organizational resilience and employees' perceptions about technological innovations are critical for enhancing internal brand equity. Zaman et al., (2023) examined how digitalization in banking improves the service supply chain resilience of the e-commerce sector using a technological adoption model approach. Furthermore, Ikeda et al., (2021) discussed bank resilience in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic.

As the bank's face, employees have direct interactions with customers, influencing their perceptions and experiences. Consistently displaying brand salience behavior enhances customers' awareness and recognition of the brand, positively impacting their attitudes, trust, and loyalty. Employees' alignment with brand salience behavior fosters a coherent brand experience, reinforcing the bank's brand image and differentiation. Moreover, brand salience behavior among employees increases their engagement and reward, leading to higher job satisfaction, reward, and commitment to promoting a brand image in the banking industry (Hassan, et al. 2016; Jraisat et al., 2015; Sandhe, 2016).

H8: *Brand salient has a positive relationship with brand image.*

2.4.9 Brand Appreciation

Brand appreciation behavior encompasses the positive actions, behaviors, or attitudes individuals or organizations exhibit toward a brand (Foltz, 2023). It involves expressing appreciation, admiration, or loyalty towards the brand and engaging in behaviors that support and promote its success. Within the realm of branding, brand appreciative behavior refers to the positive actions, behaviors, or attitudes demonstrated by individuals, including customers or employees, towards a brand (Hur et al., 2018). This includes expressing appreciation for the brand through positive word-of-mouth, brand advocacy, brand loyalty, or other supportive behaviors that contribute to the brand's success and reputation. Similarly, in the banking sector, brand appreciative behavior refers to customers, employees, or stakeholders' positive actions, behaviors, or attitudes towards a bank's brand (Björk,

2015). It involves expressing appreciation for the bank through positive feedback, customer loyalty, employee advocacy, or other supportive behaviors that contribute to the bank's success, trustworthiness, and reputation (Hur et al., 2018). Both definitions highlight the significance of positive actions, behaviors, or attitudes toward a brand or bank, emphasizing the importance of expressing appreciation, loyalty, and support, which, in turn, contribute to their success, reputation, and customer satisfaction.

Scholars such as (Bairrada et al., 2019; Locklear et al., 2021) assert the significance of brand-appreciative behavior in both branding and banking. Positive brand behaviors and attitudes enhance brand reputation, loyalty, and customer satisfaction. This led to positive word-of-mouth, brand advocacy, and increased customer retention. Brand appreciative behavior also plays a pivotal role in building a brand image, fostering customer engagement, and attracting new customers (Björk, 2015). In banking, brand-appreciative behavior influences customer loyalty, trust, and satisfaction. When customers exhibit positive attitudes, behaviors, and loyalty toward a bank, it enhances its reputation, credibility, and customer relationships. Positive word-of-mouth, recommendations, and customer advocacy contribute to the bank's success, customer acquisition, and retention (Sweeney et al., 2020). Similarly, in branding, brand appreciative behavior influences brand loyalty, advocacy, and customer engagement (So et al., 2016). When customers and employees exhibit positive attitudes, behaviors, and loyalty toward a brand, it strengthens its reputation, customer relationships, and market position. Positive word-of-mouth, brand advocacy, and customer retention contribute to the brand's success and growth (Locklear et al., 2021).

The inclusion of brand-appreciative behavior in a study on employees' role in promoting a brand image in the banking industry is relevant ((Löhndorf, & Diamantopoulos, 2014). Employees serve as brand representatives, directly impacting customers' perceptions and experiences. Displaying brand appreciative behavior enhances brand awareness and recognition, positively influencing customers' attitudes, trust, and loyalty (Bairrada et al. 2019). Employees' alignment with brand appreciative behavior fosters a consistent brand experience across touchpoints, reinforcing the bank's brand image and differentiation from competitors (Björk, 2015; Löhndorf, & Diamantopoulos, 2014). Moreover, brand-appreciative behavior among employees can increase their engagement and reward, leading to higher job satisfaction and commitment to promoting a brand image in the banking industry (Björk, 2015; Locklear et al., 2021).

H9: *Brand appreciation has a positive relationship with brand image.*

2.4.10 Brand Image

A brand image encompasses the perception, reputation, and associations that customers, stakeholders, and the market have about a brand (Išoraitė, 2018). It represents a brand's overall impression and mental image, characterized by positive attributes, recognition, and differentiation (Abdullahi, 2020). In branding and banking, a brand image refers to the favorable perception, reputation, and associations customers and stakeholders hold about a brand or bank (Abdullahi, 2020; Išoraitė, 2018). It includes the attributes, values, and emotions associated with the brand and its recognition and differentiation from competitors. A brand image contributes to brand loyalty, customer preference, and market success. Specifically, in the banking sector, a brand image reflects the positive perception, reputation, and associations that customers, stakeholders, and the market have about a bank's brand (Yen & Nhung, 2018). It encompasses the trustworthiness, reliability, and customer-centric attributes associated with the bank and its recognition and differentiation from other banks. A brand image enhances customer loyalty, trust, and market competitiveness (Wijaya, 2013).

Brand images are influenced by several variables, such as customer experiences, brand identity, brand positioning, and brand reputation (Išoraitė, 2018; Rodrigues et al., 2011). These factors collectively shape customers' and stakeholders' perceptions, reputations, and associations about a brand or bank. A brand image enhances customer loyalty, preference, and market success by fostering positive brand associations and differentiation.

Several literary works have explored the construct of a brand image in the banking sector. For example, Yen and Nhung (2018) studied the intention of banking services and brand image in Vietnamese banks. Plumeyer et al. (2019) provided a systematic review and practical guidance on measuring brand image, while Ab Hamid et al., (2023) focused on brand attributes, corporate brand image, and customer loyalty of Islamic banks in Malaysia. These works highlight the importance of building a brand image in the banking sector and offer valuable insights into achieving this goal. Employees serve as brand ambassadors and have a significant impact on shaping customers' perceptions and experiences. A brand image represents the bank's reputation, values, and attributes. When employees align themselves with the desired brand image, it enhances brand consistency and fosters customer trust, confidence, and loyalty (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2009).

Additionally, a brand image is crucial in differentiating the bank from competitors. By actively promoting and reinforcing the brand image, employees contribute to the bank's competitive advantage, building brand equity, recognition, and customer retention (Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 2013). A brand image positively impacts

employee engagement, satisfaction, and reward. Employees take pride in being associated with a reputable brand, fostering a sense of purpose and identity (Mael and Ashforth, 1992). This emotional connection motivates employees to go beyond their job responsibilities to promote the brand image, becoming brand advocates (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Homburg et al., 2009). Furthermore, a brand image enhances employee loyalty and retention. Employees who identify with and believe in the brand are likelier to stay with the organization (Riketta, 2005). A positive brand image also attracts top talent, contributing to a positive organizational culture (Backhaus et al., 2006).

3 METHODOLOGY

This describes the several approaches used to carry out the investigation. However, this approach covers topics including the population, sample and sampling process, tools, data gathering methods, ethical issues, and pre-testing of the data collection equipment.

3.1 Research Design

The research design is a general plan and analytical technique selected to integrate the study components logically and coherently, guaranteeing a full investigation of the research problem. There are various kinds of research designs, including exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory (Zikmund et al., 2010). An exploratory study may be conducted initially, often as a pilot project to ascertain whether a study is feasible before moving forward with more extensive research (Fikry & Zainol, 2022). The primary research study is built from the findings of the exploratory study.

The exploratory investigation provides an expanded understanding of a theoretical concept. In general, exploratory studies offer two viewpoints: one on a novel subject and the other on an established one (González & Oviedo, 2019). The underlying study issue is described through descriptive research. A descriptive study aims to broaden the scope of the selected research topic and contribute fresh information. Descriptive studies remove conjecture and supply more knowledge to generalize a theory (Nurmi, 2018). Research conducted to study a problem that is not well-defined is known as exploratory research. It is being done to better understand the current research challenge, but the outcomes will not be definitive. In this type of study, an investigator begins with a broad concept and employs this investigation as a means of pinpointing problems, which may serve as the subject of follow-up studies. In this context, the researcher remains flexible and willing to adjust the approach based on new insights or information. This type of investigation is often carried out during the initial phases of addressing the issue. It can be utilized to develop theories, pinpoint possible directions for further investigation, and gain a deeper comprehension of a subject. Furthermore, exploratory research can be completed rapidly and relatively cheaply. It is frequently called interpretive research or the grounded theory approach. Given this, the current dissertation employed the exploratory research design.

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│        Theoretical and Empirical Literature Review    │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘

┌──────────────────┐                  ┌──────────────────────┐
│ Mixed Research   │                  │ ➢ Research           │
│ Approach         │                  │   questions     &    │
│                  │                  │   Objectives         │
│                  │                  │ ➢ hypothesis         │
│                  │                  │   design             │
└──────────────────┘                  └──────────────────────┘
            ┌──────────────────────┐
            │ Sampling Technique & │
            │ Data Collection tool │
            └──────────────────────┘

┌──────────────────────┐          ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ Data analysis        │          │ Discussion:              │
│ Technique:           │          │                          │
│                      │          │ ➢ Internal Employee      │
│ ➢ Partial Least      │          │   Branding as a          │
│   Square Structural  │          │   strategic tool for     │
│   equation modeling  │ ┌──────┐ │   building a brand       │
│   (PLS-SEM)          │ │Inter-│ │   image within the       │
│                      │ │preta-│ │   banking industry       │
│                      │ │tion  │ │ ➢ Implication      for   │
│                      │ │of    │ │   theory,     practice,  │
│                      │ │Results│ │   academic, and policy  │
│                      │ └──────┘ │   formulation            │
│                      │          │ ➢ Study limitations      │
└──────────────────────┘          └──────────────────────────┘
                     ┌────────────┐
                     │ Conclusion │
                     └────────────┘
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Figure 2: Research design

3.2   Research Approach

The literature describes three primary research approaches: mixed method, quantitative approach, and qualitative approach. The main goal of qualitative research is to utilize qualitative information typically gathered through focus groups, interviews, and observation to shed light on a subject or circumstance. However, non-numeric data from qualitative research which frequently takes the form of text, audio, or video is used to make conclusions about a phenomenon. The antithesis of quantitative research, qualitative research is frequently associated with social science research (Dockalikova, 2014). Qualitative methods emphasize the calibre of the data collected more than the excessive number of participants. Interview guidelines are frequently utilized as the data-gathering strategy. The information obtained from the interviews is interpreted using content analysis. The elements of

both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are included in the mixed approach. The objective of this study was hence achieved using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Sakyi et al., (2020) state that the quantitative research approach uses numerical data from primary or secondary sources that are gathered through surveys and can be quantified to highlight the relationships between the variables or concepts. By using quantitative research, researchers can identify patterns in the variables, establish relationships, forecast how the variables will move, test causal relationships, gauge the strength of relationships, and aid in the generalization of findings (Tawodzera et al., 2022). Because the quantitative technique strengthens the exploratory design and aids in establishing the causal relationship between the study's independent and dependent variables, it was chosen for the investigation. In addition, the quantitative approach was chosen since it allows the results to be extrapolated from the sample to the research population. As a result, the current dissertation employed a mixed approach.

3.3   Population

The group of people about which the researcher wishes to make inferences is known as the study population. Not all individuals make up the population, and typically a bigger set is used to determine the sample size (González & Oviedo, 2019). One crucial requirement for this chapter is the study population. The total number of people in a study area is the population of the study. The population under investigation provides data and information for the research. The study's whole population is also used to compute the sample size (Nurmi, 2018). For data analysis, the study collects data from the study population. The population under investigation for this dissertation comprised employees from some selected commercial banks in Ghana. The population of the study comprises employees of selected commercial banks in the regional capital cities of Ghana. The population includes branch managers, operation managers, frontline employees, tellers, and back-office staff. Among other things, the goal of this type of population is to assist the researcher in gathering precise data and conclusions that will be more helpful for managerial decision-making.

3.4   Sampling and Sampling Techniques

Sampling is the process of choosing the population from which your research will draw data (Pan & Chen, 2019). The sampling technique determines the method used to compute and collect data from the sample size. Sampling facilitates the selection of a sample size from the population for the study. The researcher used both probability and non-probability sampling strategies to provide an impartial and accurate depiction of the dissertation. The researcher used a simple random sample technique to choose the preferred commercial banks that fell under the study's purview. Using this sampling strategy guarantees that each individual in the

population has an equal probability of being chosen for the sample (Hanlon, 2011). This makes it easier to create a sample that accurately represents the entire population, increasing the likelihood that inferences about the population will be true. The utilization of many statistical techniques and inference procedures is made possible by the adoption of simple random sampling. It is possible to draw reliable conclusions about the characteristics of the population from statistical analyses of the sample since it is impartial and representative. There is a degree of confidence with which the findings from the sample may be applied to the total population.

For the quantitative approach, information or data from the employees of these commercial banks was gathered using a convenience sampling technique (Tawodzera et al., 2022; Scholtz et al., 2021; Yüksel, 2012), while information or data from the customers were gathered using a purposive sampling technique through an interview in a form of an unstructured questionnaire. Sakyi et al (2020) found a correlation between the sample size and the research outcomes. This implies that the sample size impacts the population's representation, and as a result, it encompasses all the variables the researcher is measuring.

3.5   Sample Size Determination
The number of observations or subjects included in a study or experiment is known as the sample size (Burns & Bush, 2014). It is the number of people, things, or data points chosen to statistically represent a larger population. The reliability of research findings and their ability to be generalized to a broader population are significantly impacted by the sample size, making it an essential factor to consider. A higher sample size may improve the accuracy of the estimates and result in a smaller error margin. Stated differently, a larger sample size will probably yield results closer to the actual population parameter.

To compute the a-priori sample size conditions and requirements, this study adopted the online sample size calculator (Soper, 2019). This online sample size calculator was used because it was effective in determining the various requirements needed to arrive at an optimal sample size.   More specifically, this online sample size calculating tool can accurately reveal the minimum sample size that is needed to execute studies on multiple regression based on probability levels that the study desires, the quantity of predictors available in the study model, the effect size that the study anticipates as well as the level of statistical power that the study desires. This study considered the following parameters in estimating the sample size for the study. The study anticipated a medium effect size of 0.15 while the level of statistical power desired was 0.8. Again, this study had the number of predictors being 9 while the total number of indicators was 46. Moreover, the probability (alpha) level was 0.05. Thus, based on the online sample size calculator adopted from Soper (2019)

(https://www.danielsoper.com/statcalc/calculator.aspx?id=1), it was established that the minimum sample size needed to effectively model the structural linkages in the model was 113 employees of selected Ghanaian banks. This sample size was utilized based on the recommendation and suggestion of Soper (2015 and 2019) that a sample size of this magnitude is sufficient to facilitate the operationalization of the study's objectives.

3.6   Type and Sources of Data
Research data refers to any information gathered, seen, produced, or created to validate initial study findings. The source of the data is the location from where it was gathered. The types of data describe the various forms of data that are available for use in the study. Primary and secondary data are the two categories of data (Yüksel, 2012). The kind of data that is collected straight from the field is called primary data. Primary data is often gathered using an interview guide or a questionnaire as part of a data-collecting tool. Secondary data is an additional type of information that is typically gathered from sources other than the researcher, such as newspapers, companies, and other researchers. This research utilized both primary and secondary information sources. The researcher conducted a survey to gather data from the selected commercial banks. Given this, this dissertation used both the primary and secondary to execute the objectives of the research.

3.7   Data Collection
The data-gathering methods are covered in this portion of the chapter. The process used by the researcher to collect data for the study is known as the data-collecting method. The researcher requested a letter of concern from the office of the vice dean in charge of Ph.D. studies to conduct this study with the selected institutions because it is solely for academics. The researcher was granted permission to use the organization for the research study by the selected institutions that were chosen. Copies of the questionnaire were personally delivered by the researcher to the employees within the organizations. The questionnaire was given to respondents and collected later to guarantee that they would provide honest responses to the questions and to thoroughly guide and clarify items for better understanding. However, some respondents also requested a soft copy, which the researcher sent through their various social media and other platforms. The data collection period took eight months from February to September 2023.

Again, the researcher also developed a semi-structured questionnaire for the qualitative findings. To gather the needed data or information for the qualitative analysis, customers of the selected commercial banks were interviewed. Before the interview commenced, official permission was sought from the branch managers of the selected banks. Given this, customers were made aware of the objective of the

interview. Each interview lasted for about ten to fifteen minutes. The interview was conducted after the customer had completed their banking transaction and was ready to leave the bank premises. In all, twenty-five customers from the selected commercial banks were sampled for the qualitative interview.

3.8 Definition of Constructs and Literature Sourced

Table 1: Summary of the definition of constructs and literature sourced

S/N	Constructs	Definition	Source of Literature
1	Communication	Communication involves transferring information between entities using various methods or channels such as words, signals, and behaviors to foster understanding and influence perceptions and behaviors. Communication channels within the banks include websites, apps, emails, statements, professional and well-presented employees, executive venues, and physical branches, to build strong customer relationships	McCormack, McLeod, & Harrison, (2018), Voorveld, (2019), Shrestha, Parajuli, & Paudel, (2019
2	Trust	Trust involves placing confidence in the honesty, integrity, reliability, and credibility of another person or entity. In banking, trust pertains to customers' confidence in their chosen bank's ability to safeguard their money and financial information, fulfill promises, and operate ethically	Kammerlohr & Paradice, (2023), Lounsbury, (2023), Van Esterik-Plasmeijer & Van Raaij, (2017)
3	Empowerment	Empowerment involves enabling individuals or	Tengland, (2008), Hajdas & Kłeczek, (2021),

		groups to have control, authority, and autonomy in their lives, decisions, and actions. Branding refers to positioning a brand as a catalyst for personal growth, self-expression, and autonomy, inspiring customers to feel confident and in control through their association with the brand. They highlight the need to provide resources, support, and opportunities for individuals to improve their lives and make informed choices	George & Zakkariya, (2018)
4	Engagement	It encompasses the active involvement, emotional connection, and commitment of individuals toward a specific entity or activity. It entails the level of interaction, personalized service, and responsiveness provided by the bank, leading to the establishment of deeper and more meaningful relationships with customers and employees	Kruse, (2012), Kujala et al. (2022), Chauhan, Akhtar, & Gupta, (2022).
5	Reward	A reward is a stimulus or event that is presented to a person or animal following a desired behavior, to increase the likelihood that the behavior will be repeated in the future. Rewards can include salary, bonuses, promotions, recognition,	Al Badawy, Fahmy, & Magdy (2017), Zarzycki, & Morrison, (2021), Bong, Reeve, & Kim, (2023)

		or other incentives provided to employees to motivate and retain them, as well as to recognize their contributions to the organization's goals.	
6	Brand Attachment	It is the emotional bond or connection that consumers develop with a brand. It represents a deep and enduring relationship where consumers experience a strong sense of affinity, loyalty, and identification with the brand. definitions emphasize the common elements of emotional connection, loyalty, and identification.	Li et al., 2020), Shimul (2022)
7	Brand Consistent Behaviours	It is the practice of ensuring that the actions, behaviors, and decisions of individuals or organizations align with the established brand identity, values, and promises. In banking, it emphasizes the significance of aligning actions, behaviors, and decisions with the brand's identity, values, and promises	Muhammad, Salleh, & Yusr, (2020), Rudkowski. (2021), Thakur, (2022).
8	Brand Salience Behaviour	includes the significance of exhibiting distinctive and memorable behaviors or characteristics that enable a brand or bank to stand out. They emphasize the necessity of engaging	Hassan, Rafi, & Kazmi, (2016), Jraisat et al., (2015) Sandhe, (2016).

		in unique brand-related behaviors that differentiate the brand or bank from competitors and leave a lasting impression on customers	
9	Brand Appreciative Behaviour	Brand appreciative behavior encompasses the positive actions, behaviors, or attitudes exhibited by individuals or organizations towards a brand. It involves expressing appreciation, admiration, or loyalty towards the brand and engaging in behaviors that support and promote the brand's success.	Foltz, (2023), Bairrada, Coelho, & Lizanets (2019)
10	Brand image	A brand image encompasses the perception, reputation, and associations that customers, stakeholders, and the market have about a brand. It represents the overall impression and mental image of a brand, characterized by positive attributes, recognition, and differentiation. It encompasses the trustworthiness, reliability, and customer-centric attributes associated with the bank, as well as its recognition and differentiation from other banks.	Išoraitė, (2018), Yen & Nhung, (2018).

Source:(summary of constructs, definition and literature sources)

3.9   Data Collection Instrument

A collection of questions used to collect data is called a questionnaire, which is a type of research instrument (McLead, 2018). The researcher chose this instrument because it is an inexpensive, efficient, and simple means of gathering data from a huge population (Lavrakas, 2008). The researcher created a systematic questionnaire for the study to collect data from the respondents, who were bank employees. Because organized questions require little cognitive effort, they are a good tool for increasing response rates. In other words, because they are given options from which to select, responders don't need to spend much time answering the question and don't need to think as much. A systematic, closed-ended questionnaire was employed in this investigation. The study adopted survey instruments validated by previous studies with few modifications of the original items to fit the context of the research and the targeted population. The Likert scale, which ranged from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree was used in the questionnaire's design. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather data from the workers of the chosen organizations for additional research. The questionnaire was divided into two sections A and B, where A contains questions on the respondent's profile and B contains questions on the main constructs of the research study. The respondents' demographic data is presented in the first part. Research constructs are covered in detail in the second part.

Table 2: Profile of Respondents Demographics

Details	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	301	54.73
	Female	249	45.27
Age	20-30	125	22.73
	31-40	178	32.36
	41-50	127	23.10
	51 above	120	21.18
Education	SSSCE/Diploma/HND	145	26.36
	Bachelor's Degree	155	28.18
	PGD/Masters/PhD	230	41.82
Company	Fidelity	135	24.55
	GCB	178	32.36
	Ecobank	129	23.45
	Others	108	19.64
Work Experience	1-5	189	34.36
	6-10	253	46.00

	Above 11	108	19.63
Business Location	Greater Accra Region	112	20.36
	Western Region	145	26.36
	Ashanti Region	89	16.18
	Central Region	93	16.91
	Others	111	20.18
Department	Customer service/Frontline	185	33.64
	Operations	165	30.00
	Marketing and Sales	102	18.54
	Others	98	17.81
Sample	**Total**	**550**	**100**

Source: Author's fieldwork , 2024

3.10 Validity and Reliability Issues

One crucial component of research is the validity and reliability of the data. The section discusses the validity and reliability of the study constructs. The data's validity serves as a gauge for its accuracy. This is a very accurate way to gauge how ambiguous the data is. The exact yardstick by which the research is evaluated based on the findings of the analysis is known as validity. The reliability of the data used to represent the variables in the study enabled the researcher to demonstrate the accuracy of the findings. The consistency of the data following testing indicates its reliability. The measuring device's reliability was determined using Cronbach's reliability test, and the suitability of the sample size for this investigation was confirmed by screening each of the individual variables. Convergent and discriminant validity tests are used in the study to assess the validity of the findings. The average variance extracted (AVE) is used to measure convergent validity, or how closely a test relates to other tests measuring the same construct. The average variance extracted (AVE) is used to determine convergent validity. Bagozzi and Yi (1988) state that an AVE of 0.50 or higher is sufficient to determine that a variable has convergent validity. The Fornell-Larcker criterion is also used to evaluate discriminant validity, which gauges how well a set of indicators measures a construct. Fornell and Larcker (1981) established that discriminant validity is confirmed when the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each variable exceeds the correlation coefficients among the latent variables. Tests of reliability were performed on the constructs and measuring indicators. The degree to which the measuring indicators can predict or correlate with the constructs they are used to measure is measured in this context by indicator reliability. The square of each indicator is used to determine the indicator's reliability. Hair et al., (2011) state that an indicator's reliability should be at least 0.70, though 0.40 is acceptable

in situations where the indicator is categorical. The Cronbach alpha and composite reliability are used to evaluate internal consistency reliability, which shows how well a test addresses various constructs and yields similar results that is, how well a test given at various times under similar conditions yields the same result. Cronbach alpha and composite reliability are used to measure internal consistency reliability; a value of 0.70 is considered acceptable (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

3.11 Data Analysis/ Analytical Technique

The approach to the data analysis section of the study describes the process used to analyze the data. The process of organizing, interpreting, and cleansing data using statistical techniques is known as data analysis. The study's goals are examined through the application of structural equation modeling with partial least squares. Research uses Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), a second-generation multivariate data analysis technique. Its ability to test theoretically supported additive and linear causal models accounts for its widespread use (Chin, 1996). To prioritize resources, researchers can use SEM to visually analyze the relationship that exists among variables of interest. SEM is perfect for solving business research problems because it can be used to measure latent variables, which are difficult to measure and unobservable. Although there are many different ways to do structural equation modeling (SEM), this study uses partial least squares (PLS), which is centered on variance analysis and can be performed using PLS graphs and SmartPLS. Because PLS SEM does not assume that the data distribution is normal, it is the perfect method for this kind of research (Vinzi et al., 2010). Robust validity and reliability measurement are also necessary for the PLS-SEM for both the inner and outer models.

3.12 Hypothesis Testing

An assertion regarding the study's population is included in the hypothesis to assess whether empirical evidence from the sample supports this population-related claim. Neuman (2003) defines a hypothesis as a statement that requires verification or serves as a preliminary explanation of the relationship between two variables. The process of testing or validating hypotheses typically involves four main steps: formulating both the null and alternative hypotheses, selecting a significance level, calculating the test statistic, and establishing a decision rule, followed by validation and decision-making. For this study, PLS-SEM version 4.0 was utilized for hypothesis testing.

The measurement model analysis was conducted using the Partial Least Squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). This technique allows for the evaluation of both measurement and structural models. As noted by Hair et al. (2017), Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is widely used in academic research to assess the

influence of institutions on entrepreneurship. In their framework, PLS-SEM was employed to evaluate the variance explained by the internal causes of constructs based on the proposed theoretical model and their associated manifest variables. Because PLS shows a relationship similar to traditional regression coefficients, it is a convenient method for testing moderation effects. In the current study, every construct was represented as a reflective indicator. The computer program SmartPLS was used to run (Ringle et al., 2015). First, the purpose of the structural model was to aid in the definition of the variables and their relationships. Moreover, the measurement model of the constructs was assessed to establish its reliability, validity, and discriminant validity, thereby illustrating the relationships between the constructs (Hair et al., 2017). The standardized pathways were looked at to determine the significance of these relationships. The bootstrap method was used to determine these routes.

3.13 Pre-testing of Data Collection Instrument (Pilot Study)

Pre-testing is a process used to test a set of questions with a sample of respondents to identify and address basic survey design issues (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Because respondents may believe that some questionnaires are unclear, the questionnaire's instructions are too long, or some questions that should have been included were omitted, pre-testing is therefore helpful in identifying questionnaire issues (Roberts-Lombard, 2006). The researcher conducted A pilot study with a total of 98 respondents. This was done to ensure the validity and reliability of the study's constructs study before the main data collection. Questions in the survey that respondents found unclear were clarified (Saunders et al., 2009). By using the Cronbach alpha values, the initial investigation aimed to determine the validity and reliability of the constructs. The pilot study aids in locating any problems, uncertainties, or shortcomings in the research design. Based on feedback and lessons learned from the pilot phase, the researcher can evaluate the viability of data collection tools like surveys and interviews and improve the methodology. This guarantees that the primary research thesis is organized, effective, and able to generate accurate and legitimate findings.

3.14 Variable Measurements

The study items that were employed to gauge the constructs were modified based on previously published research. To provide clarity, each item was scored on a five-point Likert scale with an ordinal scale (1 being strongly agree, 2 agreeing, 3 being neutral, 4 being disagree, and 5 being strongly disagree). Instead of open-ended questions, which require more time and effort to complete, a five-point Likert scale was employed (Leung, 2011). The best measurement scale for this study is the ordinal scale because it allows for the evaluation of respondents' expressions, opinions, and ideas. It makes it possible for the researcher to ascertain whether an

object possesses some of the traits of another subject. Table 3 includes a measurement scale, a summary of construct indicators, and questionnaire items with corresponding literature citations.

Table 3: Measurement of the variables

S/N	Constructs	Operationalization of Constructs Items	Measurement scale (Ordinal)	Source of Literature
1	Communication	CC1. I believe well-planned communication helps in media publicity CC2. I agree, my bank reports and brochures are distinctly presented CC3. I agree, the bank's website is nicely designed and informative CC4. With all credence, effective bank marketing communication tools help in effective communication CC5. I am certain, that communication tools help to promote and create a bank's brand equity	1-(completely disagree) to 5-(completely agree).	McCormack, McLeod, & Harrison, (2018), Voorveld, (2019), Shrestha, Parajuli, & Paudel, (2019
2	Trust	TT1. I believe the integrity of the bank and the employees helps build trust TT2. To my mind, the credibility of the internal employees enables trust-building TT3. I have trust in the information and advice the bank provides TT4. I think the bank provides quality services to its customers TT5. I think the bank provides operational competence.	Same as above.	Kammerlohr & Paradice, (2023), Lounsbury, (2023), Van Esterik-Plasmeijer & Van Raaij, (2017)

3	Empowerment	EM1. I agree that employees are competent enough to do their work. EM2. In fairness, employees are trained enough to have self-determination to make decisions. EM3. In my view, employees are molded in competence building. EM4. I think that; employers help employees to build an excellent Organizational culture. EM5. In my view, the bank provides an enabling environment for employees to perform their roles and extra roles diligently.	Same as above.	Tengland, (2008), Hajdas & Kłeczek, (2021), George & Zakkariya, (2018)
4	Engagement	EE1. In my opinion, the employees are always ready to provide prompt services to clients. EE2. In my view, the bank's overall services exceeded my expectations. EE3. From my standpoint, the clients have a very strong relationship with service providers. EE4. I agree; the banking staff are ready to offer help to customers at any time. EE5. In my opinion, bank officers show respect to clients.	Same as above.	Kruse, (2012), Kujala et al. (2022). Chauhan, Akhtar, & Gupta, (2022).
5	Reward	MM1. I believe; financial rewards energize internal employees to work. MM2. I agree financial rewards serve as a motivator	Same as above.	Al Badawy, Fahmy, & Magdy (2017), Zarzycki, & Morrison,

		for internal employees at the bank MM3. I concur non-monetary incentives enhance and motivate employees' commitment levels. MM4. I agree; financial reward is considered to be an important element of job satisfaction. MM5. In my opinion encouragement from the supervisors provides intrinsic reward to employees to deliver the brand promise.		(2021), Bong, Reeve, & Kim, (2023)
6	Brand attachment behavior (BABE)	BABE1. I believe the Staff is attached to the brand. BABE2. I am certain; that employees are attached to the brand image they help build for the bank BABE3. I believe employees' feelings about the bank's brand are strong.	Same as above.	Li et al., 2020), Shimul (2022)
7	Brand consistent behavior (BCB)	BCB1. I believe that employees demonstrate brand-consistent behaviors BCB2. I agree that employees consider the impact of their actions on the brand before acting. BCB3. I consent that employees show extra initiative to maintain good brand behavior. BCB4. In my opinion, employees regularly recommend their brand to its customers. BCB5.I agree; the existing employees pass on brand	Same as above.	Hassan, Rafi, & Kazmi,(2016), Jraisat et al., (2015) Sandhe, (2016).

		knowledge to new employees who are interested in learning more about the brand.		
8	Brand Salient behavior (BSB)	BSB1. I agree, that employees are aware of the brand BSB2. I feel that the bank's brand is visible to employees BSB3. I believe People's recognition of the bank's brand is key to its KPI (performance) BSB4. I feel people think about the bank's brand first in their financial service choice and decision-making	Same as above.	Foltz, (2023), Bairrada, Coelho, & Lizanets (2019)
9	Brand appreciation behavior (BAB)	BAB1. I believe the internal customers appreciate the brand of the bank. BAB2. I believe the employees recognize the bank's brand strategy. BAB3. In my opinion, Staff are always grateful to the bank's brand.	Same as above.	Muhammad, Salleh, & Yusr, (2020), Rudkowski. (2021), Thakur, (2022).
10	Brand image (BI)	BI1. I agree, that building a brand image is one of the main objectives of the bank BI2. I am certain; that a brand image is considered to be an essential part of achieving a competitive advantage over other banks. BI3. I concur that brand decisions play a crucial role in a company's overall strategy. BI4. I believe that employees place greater value on their brands compared to those of competing firms. BI 5. I believe the firm manages its brand from a	Same as above.	Išoraitė, (2018), Yen & Nhung, (2018).

		medium- and long-term perspective. BI 6. From my standpoint, the firm has a well-coordinated, multidisciplinary team to manage its brand.		

Note: Communication-CC, Trust-TT, Reward-MM, Engagement-EE, Empowerment-EM, Brand Attachment Behaviour-BABE, Brand Appreciation Behaviour-BAB, Brand Consistent Behaviour-BCB, Brand Salient Behaviour-BSB, Brand image-SBI

3.15 Ethical Considerations

The data from this study included ethical considerations like data confidentiality, which was achieved by giving study participants a questionnaire. The authorities of particular institutions authorized the collection of data from the respondents after being notified in writing about the study's objectives. Following approval, the staff's permission was requested so they could participate in the study. They also explained the study's objectives. Only after verbally agreeing to participate in the study and requesting it, were respondents given access to the questionnaire. They received guarantees regarding the confidentiality and secrecy of the information they provided. Before being given the questionnaire to complete, no participant was asked to provide any personal information. They were also informed that participation in the study was voluntary because it was being conducted for academic purposes. The researcher adhered to fundamental ethical guidelines that oversee every phase of the investigation in this investigation. The respondents have been shielded by the researcher from any harm resulting from their participation in the study, including physical, psychological, and social harm. The study respected respondents' right to privacy because the reported data did not include respondents' names. The data collected for the study was kept private and utilized exclusively for that purpose. The respondents were asked to participate willingly and in a way that would allow them to withdraw at any time without suffering any consequences. During data collection, the researcher obtained an introduction letter from the vice dean of the Ph.D. office before data collection.

4 DATA ANALYSIS AND EMPIRICAL RESULTS

This section contains the results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis, the descriptive statistics, and model fittest, which includes the validity and reliability of the research instruments as well as the results of the Reliability and Validity.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics involves the collection, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of data to provide a meaningful summary (Holcomb, 2016; Vetter, 2017). It serves as a foundational tool for researchers, analysts, and decision-makers in various fields, enabling them to gain insights into the characteristics of a dataset (George & Mallery, 2018). The total number of respondents who participated in the data collection was six hundred and twenty respondents of which five hundred and fifty (550) valid responses were used for this study. Out of the total number of 550 valid responses used for this study, 301 were males representing 54.73 percent while 249 of them were females representing 45.27 percent. With regards to age, 31-40 were the highest with a figure of 178 representing 32.36 percent, followed by 41-50 representing 23.10 percent, 20-30 recording 125 representing 22.73, and lastly 51 and above were 120 representing 21.18. The level of education of the respondents was also taken into consideration by the researcher. Given this, respondents with PGD/Masters/PhD were the highest with the figure of 230 representing 41.82 percent, followed by a bachelor's Degree of 155 representing 28.18 percent, and lastly, 145 having Diploma/HND representing 26.36 percent. The companies that these respondents work with are very paramount to the researcher, and therefore, it is important to outline them. GCB was the highest with a total of 178 representing 32.36 percent, fidelity bank with 135 presenting 24.55 percent, Ecobank 129 representing 23.45 percent, and Others 108 representing 19.64 percent. This doctoral thesis also considered the work experience of the respondents during the data collection process. Given this, 253 of the respondents had worked for 6-10 years, 189 of them had 6-10 working experiences, and 108 of them had more than eleven years of working experience within the banking industry. Business locations of the respondents were also taken into account during the data collection process. The capital city (Greater Accra Region) of the country recorded the highest number with 145 representing 26.36 percent followed by the Western region recording 112 presenting 20.36 percent, the central region recording 93 representing 16.91 percent, and the Ashanti region 89 presenting 16.18 percent lastly, Others recorded 111 representing 20.18 percent. The various departments of the respondents were also deemed to be very important by the researcher during the collection of the data. The respondents who work in the customer service/frontline department had the greatest number of 185, representing 33.64 percent; Operations 165, representing 30.00 percent; Marketing and Sales 102, representing 18.54 percent; and 98, representing 17.81 percent.

4.2   Test of Model

The test of model describes the assessment or verification of a statistical or mathematical model. Models are developed in many domains, such as economics, machine learning, statistics, and scientific research, to illustrate correlations between variables, forecast outcomes, or provide an explanation for phenomena that are observed. When a model is tested, its accuracy, dependability, and performance are evaluated. The researcher opted to utilize Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to evaluate the model's fit, following the recommendations of Bagozzi and Yi (1988) and Hair et al. (2019). The model's Dijkstra-Henseler's rho and Cronbach's alpha coefficients were analyzed, as shown in Table 4 below, with all coefficient values surpassing the 0.5 threshold, indicating strong reliability of the constructs as suggested by Bagozzi and Yi (1988) and Hair et al. (2019). The psychometric properties of the underlying items of the constructs were rigorously examined through PLS-SEM. The findings from this doctoral thesis met the criteria for composite reliability, with all Juerskrog's rho (pc) values exceeding the 0.7 threshold. Additionally, Dijkstra-Henseler's rho (ρA) also exceeded the 0.8 threshold, with minimum reliability values ranging from 0.8678 to a maximum of 0.9304, as detailed in Table 4 below. Again, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was also examined through the usage of convergent validity. As revealed in Table 4 below, all the values obtained for the AVE exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.5.

4.3   Reliability and Validity of the Research Instrument

Validity and Reliability are two key ideas in evaluating the caliber of a research tool, like a test, survey, or questionnaire. These ideas ensure that the instruments consistently and accurately measure what they are supposed to. According to Hair et al., (2019), validity and reliability are regarded as significant and may be necessary when conducting multiple studies to produce consistent results. Validity and reliability are related to the measurement scale's accuracy and consistency, respectively. Given this, the researcher ensured that the study's questionnaire was well-developed, free of prejudice and misconceptions, and had reliability and validity.

Ensuring the reliability of a research instrument is crucial for obtaining accurate and consistent results. Reliability refers to the consistency and stability of measurements or responses obtained using a research instrument. The reliability and validity of the study are critical components of this research. Wagner et al., (2013) argue that a lack of reliability and validity undermines research conclusions. To ensure the validity of the primary data, recipients were contacted to obtain the information required to justify the study's conclusions. Furthermore, to ensure the study's reliability/legibility, the researcher used Cronbach's alpha to assess the research instruments of the study.

The degree to which an instrument measures what it claims to measure is a common definition of validity (Blumberg et al., 2005). The degree to which a research instrument measures what it is intended to measure is referred to as its validity (Robson 2011). It is the extent to which the outcomes are accurate. A research instrument's validity is crucial in ensuring that it measures the construct or concept it is intended to measure. Validity in research refers to how well an instrument captures the true and significant nature of the variable being studied. Validity establishment is essential to guaranteeing the reliability and authenticity of research findings. Content validity is the extent to which a research instrument adequately represents the entire domain or content of the construct being measured. Construct validity assesses whether a research instrument accurately measures the underlying theoretical construct it claims to measure. Criterion-related validity evaluates the extent to which a research instrument correlates with a criterion that is considered a gold standard or an established measure. Face validity refers to the extent to which a research instrument appears, on its face, to measure the intended construct.

Cronbach (1951) suggests that a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.7 is indicative of a reliable study. The study's values and figures all exceeded the 0.5 threshold, demonstrating the strength of the construct's reliability coefficients (Hair et al., 2019). Once more, Cronbach's alpha coefficients and Dijkstra-Henseler's rho were used to rigorously evaluate the constructs' reliabilities. Researchers have established that, generally, a Cronbach's alpha value above 0.5 is considered acceptable for reliability testing in such studies. Additionally, this research assessed composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). CR evaluates the consistency among different yet related items, while AVE reflects the extent of variance shared between the scales and their respective constructs.

Table 4: Construct Reliability and Validity

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Communication	0.896	0.908	0.923	0.706
Trust	0.901	0.904	0.927	0.717
Empowerment	0.856	0.867	0.903	0.702
Engagement	0.916	0.918	0.937	0.749
Reward	0.871	0.875	0.913	0.724
Attachment	0.881	0.883	0.926	0.808
Consistency	0.923	0.926	0.940	0.723
Salient	0.859	0.861	0.934	0.877
Appreciation	0.913	0.914	0.939	0.794

| Brand Image | 0.929 | 0.931 | 0.943 | 0.701 |

Source: Author's processing of PLS-SEM 4

Furthermore, the latent constructs' indicator loadings were evaluated and appropriately assigned to the corresponding constructs. According to Bagozzi and Yi (1988), a factor loading above 0.6 is considered the optimal measure or indicator. The results for the indicator variables show minimum and maximum loadings of 0.715 and 0.940, respectively. A summary of all research constructs along with their corresponding loadings (coefficients) can be found in Table 5.0. To assess multicollinearity, the researcher employed the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) to investigate potential common method variance (CMV) across the measurement scales. Additionally, the existence of common method bias (CMB) was evaluated based on guidelines from Bagozzi and Yi (1988). In this study, the items for each construct were carefully designed, and the questionnaire's introductory page assured respondents of strict confidentiality. In other words, the survey was made to guarantee that participants would remain anonymous and have the option to withdraw from the study at any time. Regression analysis uses the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) as a metric to evaluate multicollinearity between the independent variables in a model. When two or more independent variables have a high degree of correlation, it's known as multicollinearity, and it can make it difficult to understand the relative contributions of each variable. All the values obtained for the were within the standard threshold of below 5.0

Once more, to support this claim, the researcher conducted a comprehensive multicollinearity test, focusing on the variance inflation factor, or VIF, to evaluate the proof of common method variance (CMV). As the estimated VIFs (see Table 5) are less than the threshold of ten (10) (Kock & Hadaya, 2015; Salmerón et al., 2020), the results of this post-hoc evaluation demonstrated that CMV is not a problem. Ultimately, the CMB was of no concern.

Table 5: Factor loading and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

Construct	Indicator	Loading	VIF
Communication	CC1	0.789	2.081
	CC2	0.799	2.163
	CC3	0.870	2.634
	CC4	0.855	2.535
	CC5	0.882	3.007
Trust	TT1	0.876	3.258

	TT2	0.799	2.529
	TT3	0.843	2.311
	TT4	0.863	3.150
	TT5	0.851	3.171
Empowerment	EPT1	0.743	1.591
	EPT2	0.829	2.271
	EPT3	0.892	2.997
	EPT4	0.878	2.414
Engagement	EGT1	0.884	3.028
	EGT2	0.771	1.994
	EGT3	0.896	3.490
	EGT4	0.892	3.488
	EGT5	0.878	3.215
Reward	RW1	0.836	2.116
	RW3	0.836	3.419
	RW4	0.915	2.984
	RW5	0.889	1.610
Brand Attachment Behavior	BABE1	0.911	2.830
	BABE2	0.917	2.859
	BABE3	0.868	2.064
Brand Consistency Behavior	BCB1	0.759	1.861
	BCB2	0.874	3.432
	BCB3	0.818	2.356
	BCB4	0.902	3.902
	BCB5	0.868	3.071
	BCB6	0.874	3.245
Brand Silent Behaviour	BSB1	0.933	2.311
	BSB2	0.940	2.311
Brand Appreciation behavior	BAB1	0.880	2.779
	BAB2	0.927	4.046

	BAB3	0.880	2.643
	BAB4	0.877	2.897
Brand image	SBI1	0.813	2.502
	SBI2	0.819	3.095
	SBI3	0.874	4.009
	SBI4	0.833	2.490
	SBI5	0.869	4.073
	SBI6	0.879	3.420
	SBI7	0.769	2.602

Source: Author's processing from PLS-SEM 4

Note: Communication-CC, Trust-TT, Reward-RW, Engagement-EE, Empowerment-EM, Brand Attachment Behaviour-BABE, Brand Appreciation Behaviour-BAB, Brand Consistent Behaviour-BCB, Brand Salient Behaviour-BSB, Brand image-SBI

Table 6.0 presents the findings from the discriminant validity test, guided by the Fornell-Larcker criteria, which suggests an enhancement of the model fit measurement. The Fornell-Larcker criterion, widely employed by researchers in recent studies, was applied in this research. According to this criterion, the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) should exceed the correlations among all other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) (refer to Table 6.0). A preliminary review of the inter-construct correlation matrix and discriminant validity reveals that the bolded figures indicate the correlation coefficients among the observed constructs. As shown in Table 6.0, a construct is considered discriminant when its loaded coefficient value is greater than that of any other observed variable in one row or column. The test verifies that the results are acceptable, giving the researcher the go-ahead to continue with the subsequent investigation of the study.

Table 6: Discriminant Validity-Fornell-Larcker

Constructs	Appreciation	Attachment	Brand Image	Communication	Consistency	Empowerment	Engagement	Reward	Salient	Trust
Appreciation	0.891									
Attachment	0.768	0.899								
Brand Image	0.791	0.769	0.837							
Communication	0.699	0.712	0.741	0.840						
Consistency	0.826	0.798	0.827	0.717	0.851					
Empowerment	0.730	0.797	0.787	0.729	0.770	0.838				
Engagement	0.709	0.759	0.742	0.688	0.750	0.832	0.866			
Reward	0.725	0.653	0.753	0.731	0.695	0.731	0.692	0.851		
Salient	0.713	0.692	0.782	0.678	0.822	0.723	0.723	0.657	0.936	
Trust	0.772	0.771	0.806	0.822	0.799	0.778	0.758	0.791	0.744	0.847

Table 7: Path Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Constructs	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P - values	Decision
Communication -> Appreciation	0.080	0.081	0.047	1.702	0.044	Supported
Communication -> Attachment	0.121	0.123	0.044	2.716	0.003	Supported
Communication -> Consistency	0.077	0.075	0.068	1.134	0.128	Not Supported
Communication -> Salient	0.095	0.096	0.070	1.348	0.089	Not Supported
Trust -> Appreciation	0.323	0.322	0.057	5.682	0.000	Supported
Trust -> Attachment	0.306	0.307	0.065	4.730	0.000	Supported
Trust -> Consistency	0.391	0.395	0.076	5.152	0.000	Supported
Trust -> Salient	0.304	0.304	0.067	4.522	0.000	Supported
Empowerment -> Appreciation	0.165	0.162	0.053	3.078	0.001	Supported
Empowerment -> Attachment	0.377	0.375	0.052	7.183	0.000	Supported
Empowerment -> Consistency	0.235	0.232	0.063	3.726	0.000	Supported
Empowerment -> Salient	0.179	0.177	0.064	2.791	0.003	Supported
Engagement -> Appreciation	0.157	0.157	0.052	2.992	0.001	Supported
Engagement -> Attachment	0.206	0.208	0.051	4.049	0.000	Supported
Engagement -> Consistency	0.193	0.195	0.045	4.251	0.000	Supported
Engagement -> Salient	0.250	0.250	0.055	4.548	0.000	Supported
Reward x Engagement -> Appreciation	-0.034	-0.034	0.016	2.060	0.020	Supported
Reward x Engagement -> Attachment	-0.030	-0.031	0.016	1.857	0.032	Supported
Reward x Engagement -> Consistency	-0.013	-0.015	0.017	0.764	0.223	Not Supported

Reward x Engagement -> Salient	-0.006	-0.008	0.018	0.357	0.361	Not Supported
Attachment -> Brand Image	0.203	0.200	0.049	4.124	0.000	Supported
Consistency -> Brand Image	0.246	0.247	0.072	3.437	0.000	Supported
Salient -> Brand Image	0.267	0.269	0.053	5.000	0.000	Supported
Appreciation -> Brand Image	0.242	0.241	0.056	4.334	0.000	Supported

Table 8: Results of R-Square and Adjusted R-Square

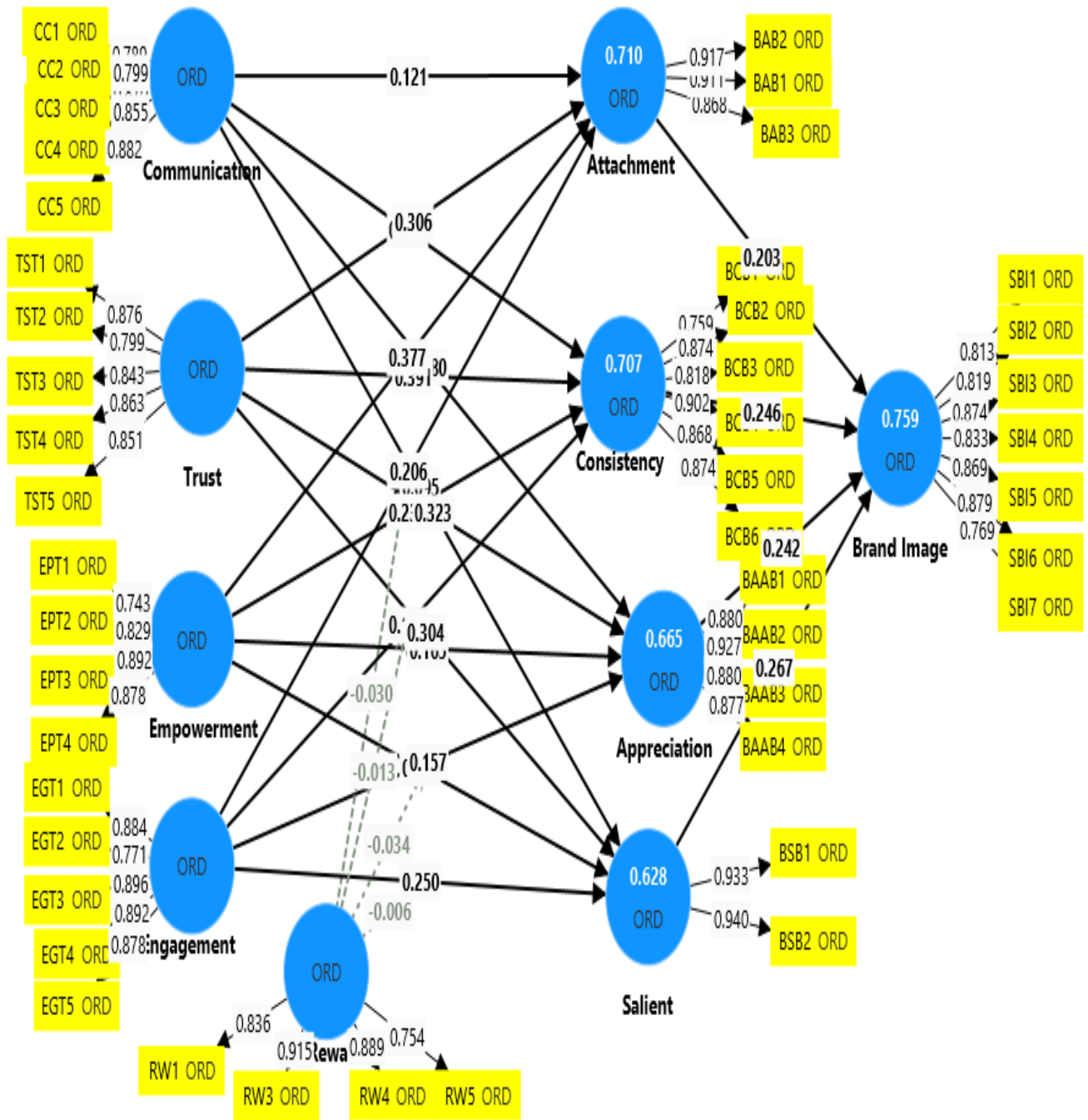| Constructs	R-square	R-square adjusted
Appreciation	0.665	0.661
Attachment	0.710	0.707
Brand Image	0.759	0.757
Consistency	0.707	0.704
Salient	0.628	0.624

Figure 3: Estimated model from PLS-SEM 4.0

4.4 Cohen f^2 and Interpretations

In addition to evaluating the R2 values of all endogenous constructs, Cohen f2, or the change in the R2 value when a specific exogenous construct is removed or omitted from the model, can be used to determine whether the removed or omitted construct has a significant impact on the endogenous constructs (Cohen, 1988). Effect size values are categorized as follows: values of 0.02 or greater indicate a small effect, 0.15 or greater signify a medium effect, and 0.35 or higher represent large effects of the exogenous latent variable, as outlined by Cohen (1988) (Ramayah et al., 2018; Civelek, 2018). The effect size (f-square) is valuable for researchers as it indicates whether an intervention or experimental manipulation produces an effect larger than zero (Hagger et al., 2020).

4.4.1 Interpretation of Effect Size-Cohen's f^2

Cohen's f-square (f2) indicates the structural model's effect size. It calculates a model's exogenous (independent) variable contribution. When an exogenous (independent) variable is removed from the model, the changes in R^2 are analyzed to assess the f^2 effect size. Conversely, if the R2 change is greater, it implies that the exogenous variable's contribution is greater (Cohen, 1988).

Mathematically, it is simply put as;

$$f^2 = \frac{R^2_{include} - R^2_{excluded}}{1 - R^2_{included}}$$

Cohen states that an effect size is small if the f^2 value is less than or equal to 0.02, medium if it is between 0.02 and 0.15, and large if it is greater than or equal to 0.35. On the other hand, a f^2 of 0.00 indicates that such an exogenous variable does not contribute to the model.

Looking upward, table 9 which provides an overview of effect size) using Cohen's f2) displayed estimates in the final column. For example, the relationship between appreciation and brand image was significant with a p-value of 0.000, however, the effect size or Cohen f^2 had a coefficient of 0.069 in Table 9 below, which shows that there is an effect of the variable appreciation to the variable brand image, hence the effect is medium. Furthermore, the relationship between attachment and brand image was 0.000 which implies that there is a positive relationship between the two variables. However, the effect size between them was also medium with a Cohen f^2

value of 0.055. Tables 7 and 9 display the relationship between hypotheses and Cohen f2 of the independent and dependent variables.

Table 9: F-Square (Effect Size)

Constructs	f-square
Communication -> Appreciation	0.006
Communication -> Attachment	0.015
Communication -> Consistency	0.006
Communication -> Salient	0.007
Trust -> Appreciation	0.065
Trust -> Attachment	0.068
Trust -> Consistency	0.109
Trust -> Salient	0.052
Empowerment -> Appreciation	0.019
Empowerment -> Attachment	0.118
Empowerment -> Consistency	0.045
Empowerment -> Salient	0.021
Engagement -> Appreciation	0.020
Engagement -> Attachment	0.039
Engagement -> Consistency	0.034
Engagement -> Salient	0.045
Reward x Engagement -> Appreciation	0.006
Reward x Engagement -> Attachment	0.005
Reward x Engagement -> Consistency	0.001
Reward x Engagement -> Salient	0.000
Attachment -> Brand Image	0.055
Consistency -> Brand Image	0.046
Salient -> Brand Image	0.094
Appreciation -> Brand Image	0.069

5 DISCUSSION OF STUDY FINDINGS

The study's findings are shown in this section. The analysis's findings are then completed using the research questions as a guide. The researcher posits that analyzing the research findings, which significantly affect internal employees, serves as a strategic tool for enhancing brand image within the banking sector. In light of this, the following research questions were put forth to serve as the foundation for a quantitative investigation.

5.1 Discussions of Research Questions

This thesis aims to investigate internal employees as a strategic tool for building a brand image within the banking industry. The findings are highlighted and discussed concerning the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between internal employee branding and brand engagement behaviors?

Internal employee branding is a strategic approach that focuses on cultivating a positive and cohesive corporate culture among employees, aligning their values and behaviors with the overall brand image of the organization. Several drivers contribute to the effectiveness of internal employee branding as a strategic tool for building a strong corporate image. From the study findings, the following drivers, such as communication, trust, engagement, and empowerment, were identified and found useful to contribute to building a brand image within the banking industry through brand engagement behaviors. For internal employee branding to succeed, communication must be transparent and clear. Employees can better comprehend and embrace the brand identity when leadership communicates the company's mission, values, and goals regularly (Wheeler, 2017; Contreras et al., 2020). The results indicate that communication is positively associated with both brand attachment and brand appreciation (Madadi et al., 2022; Hwang et al., 2019). In summary, effective communication strategies foster a consistent, dependable, and emotional bond between a brand and its audience, which greatly increases brand attachment. Establishing robust and enduring relationships with their audience is a more probable outcome for brands that allocate resources toward genuine and significant communication tactics (Doorley et al., 2015; Elliott et al., 2015). On the other hand, communication did not have a significant relationship with brand consistency and brand salient (Chang, 2018; Foroudi, 2019). To summarize this, the absence of a noteworthy correlation between communication and both brand consistency and brand salience could be ascribed to factors like inconsistent messaging or an inability to develop relevant and distinctive communication strategies. To improve brand consistency and salience, brands should carefully

assess their communication strategies to make sure they satisfy the target audience, are delivered consistently, and are in line with their goals.

Also, trust as one of the drivers of internal employee branding has a positive relationship with all the elements of brand engagement behaviors such as brand attachment, consistency, salient, and appreciation (Hoppe, 2018; Suomi et al., 2021). For emotional connections to exist, trust is necessary. When employees trust their employer, they are more inclined to develop a strong emotional connection with the brand. This trust fosters a sense of security and commitment. Employee trust strengthens brand attachment because it increases the likelihood of a deeper sense of connection, loyalty, and pride among those who work for the company (Gill-Simmen et al., 2018; Mittal et al., 2022). Employee brand engagement behaviors are positively influenced by trust, which is a fundamental element. It forges a strong emotional bond, upholds brand consistency via dependable and consistent actions, raises brand awareness and memorability, and fosters an environment of gratitude and acknowledgment. Trust-building and maintenance initiatives within an organization's internal brand environment are likely to pay off in terms of employee engagement and brand-related behaviors.

Again, engagement as one of the drivers of internal employee branding also had a positive relationship with all the elements of brand engagement behaviors such as brand attachment, consistency, salient, and appreciation (Hoppe, 2018; Ahmad et al., 2023). Several factors positively influence employee brand engagement behaviors, and trust is a fundamental driver of these behaviors. It fosters an atmosphere that is favorable to strong emotional ties, dependability, visibility, and favorable perceptions. Establishments that prioritize building trust are likely to see higher levels of brand attachment, consistency, salience, and appreciation from their workforce, which results in a more dedicated and engaged workforce.

Moreover, empowerment significantly influences factors of brand engagement behavior- appreciation, salient, consistency, and attachment affecting brand image (Vander Schee et al., 2020; Quoquab et al., 2021). Once empowerment is applied well in an organizational setting, it substantially impacts several employee brand engagement behavior factors. Positive brand engagement behaviors among employees are greatly influenced by empowerment (Kang & Sung, 2017; Ali et al., 2022). Strengthening brand attachment, elevating brand salience, and maintaining a consistent brand image are all facilitated by it. Businesses that emphasize employee empowerment stand to gain from a more dedicated and engaged workforce, which will enhance overall brand engagement.

Finally, the reward as a moderating variable demonstrates a positive and significant association with brand appreciation and attachment (Hsu & Chen, 2018). In exchange for consumers' brand engagement and loyalty, rewards function as materialized expressions of gratitude. According to Martí-Parreño et al., (2017) and Foroudi, (2019), brands express appreciation and strengthen favorable perceptions of the company by praising and rewarding customers for their ongoing support. By providing distinctive rewards and experiences that appeal to consumers, well-designed reward programs set a company apart from its rivals. In a competitive market, brands that genuinely reward their customers make a lasting impression on consumers and establish themselves as top picks. Reward systems are essential to build positive brand appreciation because they can set a brand apart from competitors, improve perceived value, reinforce positive behaviors, and foster emotional connections. Through the tactical use of rewards, brands can effectively foster long-term relationships based on mutual respect and allegiance with their customers. Again, reward did not have a positive relationship with brand salient, and consistency. The result of the hypothesis is confirmed by the study of (Hassan et al.,2016).

2. What is the relationship between brand engagement behaviors and brand image?

Various components work together to promote positive brand engagement behaviors when developing a brand image. The following are the motivating factors behind brand engagement actions that support the development of a positive brand image: brand attachment, brand consistency, brand salient, and brand appreciation. To add more, brand attachment significantly influences a brand image as per the results obtained. This confirms the previous studies of (Barreda et al., 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2019; Hwang et al., 2019). A brand image is greatly influenced by brand attachment because it builds long-term relationships, ensures consistent representation, tolerates negative information, encourages advocacy and loyalty, and creates emotional connections. All these elements work together to give customers and staff a strong, positive perception of the brand.

Moreover, brand consistency also significantly influences brand image. Chen et al., (2021) and Foroudi, (2019) confirm this assertion. The consistent and unified way a brand is presented throughout all its touchpoints and interactions with stakeholders is known as brand consistency. Across numerous channels and media, it entails upholding a consistent and identifiable brand image, messaging, and visual identity. Consistency is a key component of creating and sustaining a powerful, recognizable, and reliable brand. Brand consistency greatly influences a brand image because it promotes recognition, establishes trust, elevates professionalism, sets a company

apart from its rivals, builds consumer loyalty, facilitates effective communication, and exhibits adaptation and endurance (Eriksen et al., 2023; Abon, 2020). These elements support the brand's overall strength and favorable perception among consumers.

Furthermore, another variable- brand salient positively influences the image brand. This confirms the existing studies of (Ngo et al., 2022; Bangun et al., 2023). The term "brand salience" describes how much consumers consider or observe a brand in different purchasing contexts. This symbolizes how well-known the brand is to consumers when they think about a particular product category or decide what to buy (Hutter et al., 2013; Keller & Kotler, 2022). A brand's overall success is greatly dependent on its brand salience, which is an essential part of brand awareness. Brand salience creates consumer influence, recall, positive associations, marketplace visibility, positive experiences, loyalty, and a consistent presence—all of which contribute to a brand image. Together, these components determine how consumers view the brand as a whole and its level of success.

Lastly, brand appreciation positively influences a brand image. This assertion confirms similar works (Foroudi, 2019; Effah, 2020). The concept of "brand appreciation" refers to the positive attitudes, favorable emotions, and recognition that consumers associate with a brand. It entails identifying and valuing a brand's benefits, features, and overall impact on the customer experience. Brand appreciation is a more profound form of positive regard for the brand than just awareness of it. Brand appreciation fosters favorable perceptions, emotional connections, advocacy from word-of-mouth, recognition of the brand value, consistent positive experiences, alignment with consumer values, and positive image amplification, all of which positively influence a brand image (Effah, 2020; Suo & Huang, 2023). All of these factors work together to help consumers develop and preserve a strong and positive perception of the brand.

Establishing a brand image requires a strong set of brand engagement behaviors, which include all consumer and stakeholder interactions, initiatives, and strategies (Beckers et al., 2018; Farhat et al., 2021). To build feelings of trust, loyalty, and affinity among customers, brands engage in behaviors that try to connect with them emotionally. Brands may develop stronger relationships with their audience and improve their reputation by evoking positive feelings through storytelling, tailored experiences, and sympathetic communication. By showcasing the brand's dependability, openness, and dedication to customer satisfaction, consistent and sincere engagement fosters trust. Establishing credibility helps a brand project a

more reliable and respectable image by demonstrating that it is responsive to customer feedback, takes prompt action to address issues, and keeps its word.

Engaged customers are more likely to turn into brand ambassadors, spreading the word about the company and sharing their positive experiences with others. In the eyes of potential consumers, brand advocates' user-generated content and word-of-mouth recommendations act as strong endorsements, bolstering the brand's reputation and image. Brand engagement behaviors aid in brand differentiation by emphasizing the brand's distinctive value propositions, personality, and market positioning. Brands can create a brand image by using creative campaigns, memorable experiences, and unique communication styles to establish a unique identity that appeals to their target audience. Positive brand experiences increase the likelihood that engaged customers will be happy with their purchases and form deep emotional bonds with the brand (Pansari & Kumar, 2017; Sahin et al., 2011). Recurring business, favorable evaluations, and recommendations from pleased and devoted clients support the brand's reputation as the industry leader. Good engagement tactics keep the brand at the forefront of consumers' minds, which improves brand recognition and recall. Brand salience is enhanced by memorable experiences, recognizable branding components, and interactive content. This makes it simpler for customers to remember and identify the brand in a variety of situations. Companies that help customers feel like they belong build devoted fan bases and improve their reputation as cultural icons. Through fostering community among enthusiasts, endorsing common interests, and advocating for diversity, brands foster a feeling of inclusion that fortifies their reputation and appeal.

Brand salience is the degree to which consumers can quickly recall or keep a brand at the forefront of their minds when making relevant purchases (Frank & Watchravesringkan, 2016). High brand salience makes sure that consumers consistently think about and select the brand, which enhances its perception as a standout and favored option in the marketplace. Successful engagement strategies increase brand salience by increasing the brand's visibility and accessibility to consumers. Examples of these strategies include memorable brand experiences, effective advertising, and a broad brand presence.

Beyond only being recognized or aware of a brand, brand appreciation represents the respect, admiration, and liking that consumers have for it (Bairrada et al., 2018; Park & Kim, 2022). Customers who value a brand are more likely to form loyalties, trust, and emotional bonds with it—all of which are crucial elements of a powerful brand image. Brand appreciation is increased when engagement behaviors are centered around providing exceptional value, creating positive experiences, and

aligning with consumer values. This strengthens the brand's reputation among its target audience.

The term "brand attachment" describes the sentimental ties and relationships that customers form with a brand, which frequently result in steadfast advocacy and loyalty. Employees are more inclined to actively defend a brand against criticism, overlook minor setbacks, and forgive it when they develop an emotional attachment to it. Brand attachment is strengthened by engagement behaviors that promote personal relevance, emotional resonance, and shared values. This reinforces the brand's reputation as one that inspires fervent emotional attachments and steadfast brand loyalty. The maintenance of coherence and uniformity in brand messaging, visual identity, and customer experiences across multiple touchpoints and channels is the essence of brand consistency (Grostøl et al., 2018; Jaakkola, 2024). Maintaining a positive brand image is facilitated by consistent branding, which strengthens brand recognition, trust, and reliability. To improve brand consistency and guarantee that consumers view the company as trustworthy and credible over time, engagement behaviors that respect brand standards, provide consistent brand experiences and reinforce brand values across all interactions are important. By boosting brand visibility, creating emotional connections, encouraging loyalty, and reiterating core values, brand engagement behaviors—such as brand salience, appreciation, attachment, and consistency—all work together to strengthen a brand's reputation. Organizations can create a strong brand narrative that connects with customers and helps them stand out in the crowded market by giving these engagement factors top priority and continuously providing positive brand experiences.

3. How does reward moderate the relationship between engagement and brand engagement behaviors?

Building a brand image starts with internal employee branding (Ahmad et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2017). Internal employee branding makes sure that workers are empowered to provide extraordinary experiences that connect with consumers and stakeholders, ultimately boosting the brand's reputation, loyalty, and competitive advantage (Maylett & Wride, 2017; Hasni et al., 2018). It does this by encouraging brand advocacy, consistency, culture, innovation, and resilience.

Building a brand image is largely dependent on internal employee branding because it has a direct impact on how staff members view, interact with, and represent the company. Employee pride, loyalty, and ownership of the brand are encouraged by internal employee branding. Employees become brand advocates and ambassadors

inside and outside the company when they share and uphold the brand's values. Positive brand advocacy is more likely to come from employees who are enthusiastic about the company when interacting with stakeholders, consumers, and the general public (Merrilees et al., 2021; Thelen, 2020). Their sincere passion and support for the brand built its credibility and reputation, strengthening its overall image. Employee understanding and embodiment of the brand's identity, personality, and promise are ensured through internal employee branding. Employees establish a smooth and consistent brand experience across touchpoints when they routinely fulfill the brand promise in their interactions with customers. Establishing consistency in the brand experience fosters authenticity, dependability, and trust—all critical components of a powerful brand identity. Consumers' favorable opinions of the brand are shaped by their recurring, positive experiences, which increase brand advocacy and loyalty.

Employees who are empowered and engaged are more likely to offer creative concepts, answers, and experiences that set the company apart from competitors (Morgan, 2017). Employee branding on the inside promotes a collaborative, innovative, and ever-improving culture. Companies that encourage their staff to be creative and innovative distinguish themselves from rivals and draw in clients. Building a brand image that is linked to creativity, relevance, and forward-thinking is facilitated by innovative products, services, and marketing initiatives (Holbeche, 2023; Shafique et al., 2020). Building resilience through internal employee branding helps a brand better withstand setbacks, emergencies, and shifts in the industry. Workers who are devoted to the brand's success are more driven to preserve its good name and take proactive measures to resolve problems. Employees who are in line with the brand values act as front-line protectors and advocates during times of crisis or bad press, assisting in the restoration of trust and mitigation of reputational harm. Their genuine and open communication upholds the brand's commitment to stakeholders and integrity.

An external brand's authenticity, dependability, and integrity are reflected in how trustworthy the company is perceived. Employees who have confidence in their company and its leadership are more likely to share the brand's message confidently, live up to the brand's values, and provide consistent customer experiences (Terglav et al., 2016; Sirianni et al., 2013). Good customer-employee relationships strengthen the brand's reputation in the market by confirming its image as a reputable and trustworthy entity. Good internal communication promotes clarity and consistency in brand representation by ensuring that staff members are in line with the company's vision, mission, and values (Garas et al., 2018; Quirke, 2017). Employee comprehension of the brand's identity and goals enables them to effectively convey

these goals to partners, consumers, and other stakeholders, enhancing the messaging and image of the company. Open and honest channels of communication foster authenticity, credibility, and transparency—all of which are critical components of a brand image.

Employees who feel empowered are more driven, creative, and dedicated to providing outstanding customer service. Employees who are granted autonomy, decision-making power, and chances for professional growth take pride in their work and feel a sense of ownership over it, which improves customer relations and brand perception (Das & Baruah, 2013; Kumar & Raghavendran, 2015; Kumar & Raghavendran, 2015). Employees with a sense of empowerment serve as brand ambassadors, promoting the company and upholding its principles in all of their dealings, helping to build a favorable perception of the brand. Employees who are emotionally invested in the company are driven to go above and beyond to further its goals and objectives. Employees are more likely to deliver exceptional customer service, offer creative solutions, and actively take part in brand-building campaigns when they feel appreciated, respected, and engaged. Good employee engagement builds a culture of excellence and excitement that appeals to consumers, improving the brand's reputation as a top employer and supplier of top-notch goods and services (Maylett & Wride, 2017; Amjad & Hashmi, 2023; Mar, 2023). Employees who are motivated are driven to meet goals and perform exceptionally well for the company. Employees are more likely to live up to the brand's values and provide customers with unforgettable experiences when they are driven by things like recognition, professional advancement, and a sense of purpose. Motivated workers are passionate and committed in their interactions, which has a positive effect on how customers perceive the brand and enhances its reputation as a reliable and well-respected organization.

4. How do customers perceive the brand image in the banking industry?

5.2   Findings and Discussions of Qualitative Analysis

This study used thematic content analysis to assess customers' perceptions and opinions of their banks' general service quality and based on the responses of the participants, four main themes were identified (Table 1).

Theme 1: Living the brand promise and being honest
Among the themes identified was living the brand promise and being honest which refers to the extent to which banks are truthful and sincere with their brand promises and responsibilities. It was found that overall, most of the bank customers

interviewed perceived their banks to be genuine and truthful when it comes to making and delivering their brand promises. As captured in Table 4.1, some of the participants indicated that their banks contacted them regularly to provide them with new information, updates on products and services, and even enquire about how they were doing. One of the participants for instance opined that *"Interactions with my bank is sincere, honest and highly educative and helpful" (GCB 1)* and therefore buttressing the fact that on the whole, the participants perceived their banks to live the brand promise and never deviate from what they say they will do. It must however be mentioned that two participants (ZBL 2 and GCB 4) were not impressed with the sincerity of their banks especially in connection to information on the qualifications for credit facilities. This therefore means that banks must ensure that they explain to the perfect understanding of their customers all information relating to credit facilities (especially).

Theme 2: The ability to be creative and keep seeking innovative solutions
Another theme that strongly came out of the thematic content analysis had to do with the ability of banks to be creative and keep seeking innovative solutions (Table 4.1). Being innovative and creative refers to the novel banking solutions, applications, technologies, strategies, and tactics deployed by banks to improve their overall service delivery to their customers. The findings indicate that the participants were generally impressed and satisfied with the innovative practices and technologies employed by their banks. This finding is significant because technological innovations are key to the provision of effective banking services especially in today's world which is replete with different banking tools and platforms such as e-banking and ATMS. Thus, the image of a bank tends to increase when innovative systems, practices, and processes are deployed to improve banking relationships and transactions. As UBA 3 succinctly captured it, *"The nature of my work is such that I often cannot go to the bank to perform banking transactions such as depositing and withdrawing funds. Therefore, I am only interested in dealing with banks that invest in robust and innovative systems such as digital banking platforms. Banks that are innovative and can offer my company customizable solutions tend to have a chunk of our accounts".*

Theme 3: Good at what they do (competence)
Being good at what they do (competence) was found to be another major theme based on the thematic content analysis. Competence refers to the success of banks especially in terms of what they do. This includes the ability to protect and not depreciate depositors' funds, maximizing shareholders' investments, delivering legendary services, take care of their employees, and also, ensuring that their actions

do not affect the environment and communities negatively. Being good at what they do also consists of the quality of influencers, personalities, and celebrities used by various banks to inform, persuade, and inform both existing and potential customers about the banks' unique selling propositions. It is instructive to note that most of the participants found their banks to be good at what they do and competent. This therefore implies that their banks have been able to operate successfully and by extension, making sure that all their banking needs are addressed without hitches. This also means that even when there are service failures, the banks have effective service recovery processes and strategies that help to lessen the effect of any service failure. For instance, ZBL 3 has reported "*I appreciate the speed at which my bank responded to a complaint I made concerning some wrong debits on my account. I called the bank via my mobile phone and my details were taken. The bank representative called me within an hour to walk me through the account statement. The error was identified and rectified within 24 hours. I was very happy with the swiftness, care, and empathy shown by the bank*".

Theme 4: Happy to be associated with their banks (prestige and pride)
The fourth theme identified in this study was found to be the happiness and pride that come with being associated with their banks. Status or prestige refers to the esteemed position that a bank holds and commands from the perspective of customers and therefore attracts customers who identify with the brand. Prestige and pride also refer to the respect that a bank commands in the eyes of its customers and even potential customers. This also refers to the high standards that have been set by the bank. It was found as shown in Table 4.1 that the participants feel a strong connection with their banks and therefore suggest that their bank's image and reputations resonate with them. For instance, ZB4 stated "*I only operate with banks that are perceived as prestigious because I consider myself successful. I do not mind paying higher service charges based on the value that I get being associated with sophisticated and prestigious banks*" (ZB4). It was therefore not surprising that most of the participants were prepared to recommend their banks to their family and friends.

From the foregoing therefore, it can be surmised that banks that are effective in fulfilling and delivering their brand promises at all times, building and developing engaging relationships with their customers as well as developing and identifying with the communities they serve are more able to create a strong brand image. Banks that can effectively communicate and express their unique and specific brand personalities that customers identify with can influence their perceptions and views of the banks' successes. As opined by Van Deventer and Muller, (2023), bank brand personality traits including reliability, competence, and trustworthiness influence

customers' perception of the success of banks. The point is that being perceived as competent, sincere, and innovative is crucial considering that customers tend to trust such a bank in terms of addressing their banking needs and overall service delivery. In the same vein, customers' favorable perceptions of the bank's sincerity, competence, and prestige engender increased bank image and reputation. It must also be mentioned that being perceived as competent and successful inures to banks because customers tend to associate themselves with successful banks and even see the bank's performance and success as their own (Dehdashti et al., 2012).

Table 10: Summary of the qualitative data analysis using thematic content analysis

#	Theme	Theme Description	Sample responses from participants
	Living the brand promise and being honest	• These findings indicate that bank truthfulness, genuineness, and sincerity from the perspectives of bank customers include the extent to which banks are truthful, genuine, thoughtful, and care for their stakeholders – especially customers, vendors, employees, and communities they serve and operate in. • Honest • Sincere • Down-to-earth	*"My bank contacts me frequently to check on our operations and inform us about new offerings and this is usually via physical visitations by Relationship managers, emails, text messages, and phone calls"* (BNK1A) *"Interactions with my bank are sincere, honest high educative, and helpful"* (BNK 2A) *"I hate banks that do not present all material facts when I am applying for a bank loan. There are always hidden charges that I have to pay and which were not disclosed during the loan application and appraisal process"* (BNK3B) *"Some bank relationship managers to open accounts are not truthful about their banks' loan requirements. They promise to give us loans after operating accounts for three months. However, after the three months have elapsed, requests for personal loans are denied based on reasons that are often not understandable. Banks must be truthful*

			right from the onset what they can do and what they cannot do" (BNK 2D)
	The ability to be creative and keep seeking innovative solutions	• Modern • Up-to-date • Contemporary	*"I use all of my bank's innovative and digital banking platforms such email banking, SMS alert, ATM and VISA cards"* (BNK1B) *"I think my bank is at the forefront of technological innovation in the Ghanaian banking industry and because of that I do not remember going to the bank to transact any business…everything is done online and I am highly impressed with their level of innovation and creativity"* (BNK 3A) *"The nature of my work is such that I often cannot go to the bank to perform banking transactions such as depositing and withdrawing funds. Therefore, I am only interested in dealing with banks that invest in robust and innovative systems such as digital banking platforms. Banks that are innovative and are able to offer my company customizable solutions tend to have a chunk of our accounts"* (BNK1 C)
	Good at what they do (competence)	• This measures the success of banks especially in terms of what they have achieved (profitability, number of customers, nature of customers it attracts, and the quality of bank leadership). Competence also consists of the quality of influencers, personalities, and celebrities used.	*"My bank's employees are highly competent and all my interactions with them have turned up good and that is why I have operated with them for over 13 years"* (BNK 3A) *"My bank is highly reliable and responsive…I remember there was a complaint I made to the bank via an email and within 30mins, I received a call from the bank Manager apologizing and putting things right with my statement of account"* (BNK 1C) *"My bank is highly proactive, especially in terms of keeping me informed of any changes to operating hours, loan*

| | | The ability of banks to deliver all their promises without exception, the ability to deliver exceptional service experience, and address customers' financial needs. Successful A leading brand in the industry | *disbursement delays, and general banking information" (BNK 3A)*

"I appreciate the speed at which my bank responded to a complaint I made concerning some wrong debits on my account. I called the bank via my mobile phone and my details were taken. The bank representative called me within an hour to walk me through the account statement. The error was identified and rectified within 24 hours. I was very happy with the swiftness, care, and empathy shown by the bank" ((BNK 3C).

"The recent spate of banking fraud and scams has made me apprehensive and I therefore place a premium on security and safety of my money. I, therefore, focus on competent banks, especially in how they deploy the latest technologies such as two-factor authentication to protect customers' financial information and money. Using reliable technologies to improve the security of funds and data is crucial in how I select and operate with Ghanaian banks" (BNK2A). |
| | Happy to be associated with their banks (prestige and pride) | Sense of pride in being associated with the bank A brand that has high standards and goes to all lengths to maintain and even exceed its standards A highly respected bank | *"I only operate with banks that are perceived as prestigious because I consider myself successful. I do not mind paying higher service charges based on the value that I get being associated with sophisticated and prestigious banks" ((BNK 3D).*

"I have recommended about 5 of my friends to my bank because of the prestige and pride dealing with this incredible bank" (BNK2B)

"I will not hesitate in recommending my bank to family and friends. The bank's service quality is second to none and they |

			hold me in high esteem based on the personal attention I receive anytime I visit the bank'' (BNK 1A)

Source:(Author's fieldwork, 2024)

6   STUDY CONTRIBUTIONS

This chapter discusses the contribution of the thesis to theory, practice, and scientific relevance. This section contains relevant information about the novelty of the research dimensions.

6.1   Theoretical Relevance

The study "Internal Employee Branding as a Strategic Tool for Building a Brand Image in the Banking Industry: Evidence from an Emerging Economy" has several theoretical contributions. Firstly, it addresses a significant gap in the existing literature by focusing on internal employee branding within the banking sector in an emerging economy context. Previous research in this area has primarily concentrated on real assets and external customer perspectives, neglecting the crucial role of internal employee branding. Thus, this study contributes to the literature by providing a rigorous scientific validation of the proposed conceptual framework specifically in the context of emerging economies.

Secondly, this research contributed to the development of a scientifically validated conceptual model that both researchers and practitioners can employ to comprehend and implement effective internal employee branding strategies within the banking sector. The study has a comprehensive model, which enhances the theoretical understanding of internal employee branding, and sheds light on critical success factors that have been overlooked in previous literature. This provides valuable insights into the connections between internal branding, employee communication, trust, reward, engagement, empowerment, brand attachment, brand consistent behavior, brand silent behavior, brand appreciative behavior, and brand image. While previous literature has touched upon these constructs, their relationship with internal employee branding strategies has not been extensively explored. Therefore, this study contributes to the theoretical understanding of how internal employee branding positively impacts brand engagement behaviors and ultimately contributes to building a brand image within the banking sector.

Additionally, the study highlights the significance of internal employee branding as a strategic method for enhancing brand image within the banking industry. By examining the relationship between internal employee branding strategies and critical employee success factors, the research contributes to the theoretical understanding of how internal employee branding initiatives can impact employee reward, engagement, and empowerment. This provides valuable insights for scholars and practitioners seeking to enhance brand image and organizational performance within the banking sector.

Additionally, the contextual relevance of the study is noteworthy. By focusing on the banking industry and the specific challenges and opportunities of an emerging economy, the research provides insights into the applicability and effectiveness of internal employee branding strategies in a low-digitized context. This contextual understanding enhances the theoretical knowledge base surrounding internal employee branding in emerging economies and contributes to the broader understanding of internal branding practices.

In summary, the theoretical contributions of this study lie in filling the existing gap in the literature, developing a scientifically validated conceptual model, emphasizing the importance of internal employee branding, and providing insights into the applicability of these strategies within the banking sector in an emerging economy context. These contributions enrich the theoretical understanding of internal employee branding as a strategic approach to building a brand image within the banking sector in an emerging economy, while also offering valuable insights for practitioners operating in similar settings.

6.2   Practical Relevance

The study "Internal Employee Branding as a Strategic Tool for Building a Brand Image in the Banking Industry with Evidence from an Emerging Economy" holds practical implications for banking professionals and strategists. The findings and insights from this research potentially shape and inform real-world practices in several ways.

One of the core practical implications of this study lies in safeguarding the brand image of banking institutions. The banking sector operates where trust, credibility, and reliability are paramount. By understanding the constructs of communication, trust, reward, engagement, empowerment, brand attachment, brand consistent behavior, brand silent behavior, and brand appreciative behavior, practitioners can develop strategies to effectively manage and protect their brand image. This knowledge will enable banking professionals to align employee behavior with the communicated brand promise, ensuring consistency and coherence between the brand's intended identity and the way it is perceived by customers and stakeholders. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of empowering employees within the banking sector. Empowerment, both monetarily and non-monetarily, plays a crucial role in authorizing employees to make non-monetary decisions that align with the brand. By empowering employees, banks can cultivate a sense of ownership and commitment, fostering a positive work environment and enhancing customer service experiences. This aspect of the study offers practical insights into

how banking institutions can leverage employee empowerment to strengthen their brand and differentiate themselves in a highly competitive industry.

Another practical implication stems from the perspective taken in this study. The emerging economy in the banking sector operates within a specific socio-cultural and economic context, which may differ significantly from developed nations. By focusing on the developing economy context, the research provides tailored insights and recommendations that resonate with the local environment. This information will be especially beneficial for banking professionals in developing economies, as they can utilize these insights to create branding strategies tailored to their local markets' distinct dynamics.

Moreover, the study's findings contributed to the body of knowledge surrounding branding activities and competition within the banking sector. Brand managers and managers in banks will gain an understanding of the significance of internal employee branding in transforming ordinary employees into brand ambassadors. This knowledge will equip them with practical strategies to motivate, encourage, and stimulate employees, enabling them to embody the brand values effectively. By nurturing a strong internal brand culture, banks can create a workforce that is committed to delivering exceptional customer experiences and upholding the brand's reputation.

Lastly, the practical relevance of this study extends to market stakeholders and bankers who often invest in branding activities without substantial research evidence to support their decisions. The findings of this study provide evidence-based insights into the effectiveness and impact of internal employee branding strategies within the banking sector. This evidence serves as a foundation for informed decision-making, enabling stakeholders to allocate resources effectively and prioritize branding initiatives that yield the greatest return on investment.

6.3   Academic Relevance

The study "Internal Employee Branding as a Strategic Tool for Building a Brand Image in the Banking Industry: Evidence from an Emerging Economy" holds significant academic relevance due to the limited availability of empirical research on internal Employee branding within the banking sector of emerging economies. This research aims to bridge this gap and contribute in several ways to the academic knowledge base.

Firstly, the study provides empirical evidence and insights into the various constructs considered, including communication, trust, reward, engagement,

empowerment, brand attachment, brand consistent behavior, brand silent behavior, brand appreciative behavior, and brand image. By examining the relationships between these constructs, the research contributes to theory development and validation within the context of internal employee branding. This will enhance the theoretical understanding of internal employee branding and shed light on the intricate dynamics and interplay of these constructs within the banking sector in an emerging economy.

Moreover, the adoption of the brand equity theory and the Social Exchange Theory as theoretical frameworks adds to the academic significance of this study. By applying these established theories to the context of internal employee branding within the banking sector, the research contributed to theory extension and refinement. This will enable scholars and researchers to better understand and explain the underlying mechanisms and processes that drive employee attitudes, behaviors, and brand outcomes within the specific context of emerging economies.

Furthermore, the academic relevance of this study lies in its potential to serve as a valuable source of reference for researchers, academicians, and students interested in the field of internal employee branding and its application within the banking sector. As empirical studies on internal employee branding in an emerging economy in the banking sector are limited, this research provides a solid foundation for future studies and investigations. The findings, insights, and methodologies employed in this study will inform and guide future research endeavors, enabling scholars to build upon the existing knowledge and expand the understanding of internal employee branding practices within the banking sector.

Additionally, the academic relevance extends beyond the academic community. This study can be valuable for non-professionals who are eager to learn about internal employee branding and its effects on the banking industry. It will provide accessible and valuable information that satisfies their curiosity and offers a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

In summary, the academic relevance of this study lies in filling the existing research gap, contributing to theory development and validation, applying established theoretical frameworks, and serving as a valuable source of reference for researchers, academicians, students, and non-professionals. By addressing the limited empirical research on internal employee branding within the banking sector, this study contributes to the academic knowledge base and stimulates further research in this area, enriching the understanding of internal employee branding practices within the context of emerging economies.

6.4   Conclusion

The research highlights the crucial role that internal branding initiatives play in influencing organizational culture, employee engagement, and brand perception in the marketplace. It focuses on internal employee branding as a strategic tool for developing a brand image within the banking industry, particularly in an emerging economy. Internal employee branding is a strategic necessity for banking organizations looking to stand out from the competition and prosper in competitive settings, as demonstrated by a thorough analysis of empirical data and insights from the banking industry of the chosen emerging economy. The study deployed a PLS-SEM approach to process the data and analysis. The results revealed that elements of brand behavior have a positive relationship with a brand image. Employees who are part of a cohesive internal branding strategy feel more valued and connected, which benefits customers and strengthens the brand's reputation. In general, the study advances our theoretical knowledge of internal employee branding and how it affects brand management in the banking sector. It also provides useful advice for managers and practitioners in the banking industry, emphasizing the value of funding internal branding projects as a tactical instrument for boosting long-term sustainability, competitive advantage, and brand equity.

6.5   Limitations of Study

Although the study on internal employee branding in the banking industry of an emerging economy is thorough, there are a few limitations that should be noted. Due to differences in organizational structures, cultures, regulatory environments, and market conditions, the study's conclusions might not be easily applied to all banking organizations in the emerging economy or to other emerging economies. There could be bias in the selection process and sample size that limits the study. The findings may not be as representative as they could be if the sample size is small and the participants were chosen based on specific organizational roles or demographics. The cross-sectional design of the study, which provides an overview of internal branding strategies and their effects at a particular moment in time, might have some limitations. A more thorough understanding of the dynamics and long-term efficacy of internal employee branding programs may be obtained through longitudinal research.

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Obeng, C., & **Attor, C**. (2022). Interconnection Among Cryptocurrencies: Using Vector Error Correction Model. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Knowledge*, *10*(2), 24-41.

Attor, C., Jibril, A. B., Amoah, J., & Chovancova, M. (2022). Examining the influence of brand personality dimension on consumer buying decision: Evidence from Ghana. Management and Marketing, 17 (2).

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Adzovie, D. E., Adzovie, R. H., **Attor, C**., & Jibril, A. B. (2023). Factors Influencing Students' Patronage of Fast-food Delivery Services Among University Students in Cape Coast, Ghana: A Qualitative Approach. in *conference proceedings DOKBAT 2023 19th international bata conference for ph. d. students and young researchers* (p. 10).

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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OBJECTIVE

To work with a renowned growth-oriented organization with the opportunity to widen my understanding of business operations by learning on the job and using my skills and knowledge to effect change in the world.

EDUCATION

Tomas Bata University in Zlin -Czech Republic. (current)
            (Phd -2020 to 2024)
- Ghana institute of management & Public Administration (GIMPA)
  - MBA Marketing {2017 – 2019}
- University of Professional Studies (UPSA)
  - BSc. Marketing {2010 – 2012}
- Cape Coast Technical University.
  - H.N.D Higher National Diploma in Tourism {2005 – 2008}
- Peki Teacher Training College.
  - Post-Secondary Teachers' Certificate A. {1998 – 2001}
- Bishop Herman Secondary School.
  - Senior Secondary School Certificate {1993 – 1996}

WORK EXPERIENCE

- I.T Now Limited. (Accra, Ghana)
  Managing Director {2016-2020}
  - Control and oversee all business operations, people, and ventures.
  - Prepare and implement comprehensive business plans.
  - Monitoring and evaluating operation and financial performance.

- I.T Now Limited. Kingsway (Accra, Ghana)
  Operations Manager {2014 – 2016}
  - Coordinating all activities of the various departments in the company i.e. Sales, finance, IT, marketing, and logistics.
  - Managing quality assurance programs.
  - Setting and reviewing budgets and managing costs.
  - Inventory management/distribution of goods and facility layout.
  - Tendering and procurement.

- ➢ Sadel Ghana Limited, North LEGON. (Accra, Ghana)
  Operations manager {2012 – 2013}
  - Coordinating all activities of the various departments in the company comprising sales, finance, marketing, IT, and logistics.
  - Managerial roles (Quality assurance, inventory, and distribution, budget, and cost)

- ➢ I.T Now Limited. Osu - (Accra, Ghana)
  Business Development Manager {2008 – 2012}
  - Proposing potential business deals.
  - Analyzing strategic business deals
  - Develop negotiating strategies and positions/examine potentials and estimate partner's needs and goals.
  - Planning of sales and marketing programs
  - Territory management.

- ➢ Radiant Vision Enterprise, Adabraka- Accra.
  Marketing managing {2009 – 2011}
  - Sales of computers and accessories.
  - Liaising with Media/Advertising Organizations
  - Leading marketing research.

- ➢ Multi-Tera Systems, Abeka Lapaz – Accra.
  Marketing Manager {2005 – 2008}
  - Sales of computers and accessories.
  - Liaising with Media/Advertising Organizations
  - Leading marketing research.

- ➢ Anfoega St. Peter & Paul Junior Secondary School
  Subject Teacher {2001 – 2005}
  - English
  - Social studies
  - Religious and Moral Education.

INTEREST
- Market research.
- Management Finance
- Logistics.

- Product development management.
- Brands management.
- Business innovation and development.

REFEREES

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APPENDIX A

Table 11: indirect effect interference of hypothesis

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
Communication -> Brand Image	0.088	0.089	0.041	2.129	0.017
Empowerment -> Brand Image	0.222	0.219	0.041	5.370	0.000
Engagement -> Brand Image	0.194	0.194	0.033	5.819	0.000
Reward -> Brand Image	0.068	0.071	0.038	1.771	0.038
Trust -> Brand Image	0.317	0.318	0.047	6.732	0.000
Reward x Engagement -> Brand Image	-0.019	-0.021	0.012	1.648	0.050

Table 12: Total Effect Interference-Hypothesis

Constructs	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
Communication -> Consistency -> Brand Image	0.019	0.019	0.018	1.039	0.149
Reward -> Salient -> Brand Image	0.014	0.016	0.018	0.764	0.223
Empowerment -> Consistency -> Brand Image	0.058	0.058	0.024	2.388	0.008
Trust -> Salient -> Brand Image	0.081	0.082	0.024	3.359	0.000
Communication -> Attachment -> Brand Image	0.024	0.025	0.011	2.170	0.015
Engagement -> Consistency -> Brand Image	0.047	0.048	0.017	2.741	0.003
Reward x Engagement -> Salient -> Brand Image	-0.002	-0.002	0.005	0.340	0.367
Communication -> Appreciation -> Brand Image	0.019	0.020	0.013	1.484	0.069
Reward -> Consistency -> Brand Image	0.010	0.012	0.016	0.638	0.262
Empowerment -> Attachment -> Brand Image	0.076	0.075	0.021	3.621	0.000
Empowerment -> Appreciation -> Brand Image	0.040	0.039	0.016	2.516	0.006
Engagement -> Attachment -> Brand Image	0.042	0.042	0.015	2.863	0.002
Trust -> Consistency -> Brand Image	0.096	0.096	0.031	3.083	0.001
Engagement -> Appreciation -> Brand Image	0.038	0.038	0.015	2.506	0.006
Reward -> Attachment -> Brand Image	-0.011	-0.012	0.010	1.100	0.136

Reward x Engagement -> Consistency -> Brand Image	-0.003	-0.004	0.005	0.693	0.244
Reward -> Appreciation -> Brand Image	0.055	0.055	0.018	2.986	0.001
Trust -> Attachment -> Brand Image	0.062	0.062	0.021	2.974	0.001
Trust -> Appreciation -> Brand Image	0.078	0.078	0.024	3.263	0.001
Reward x Engagement -> Attachment -> Brand Image	-0.006	-0.006	0.004	1.589	0.056
Reward x Engagement -> Appreciation -> Brand Image	-0.008	-0.008	0.005	1.715	0.043
Communication -> Salient -> Brand Image	0.025	0.026	0.020	1.246	0.106
Empowerment -> Salient -> Brand Image	0.048	0.048	0.020	2.424	0.008
Engagement -> Salient -> Brand Image	0.067	0.067	0.020	3.347	0.000

Table 13: HTMT

	Appreciation	Attachment	Brand Image	Communication	Consistency	Empowerment	Engagement	Reward	Salient	Trust
Appreciation										
Attachment	0.857									
Brand Image	0.856	0.850								
Communication	0.758	0.791	0.798							
Consistency	0.899	0.886	0.892	0.774						
Empowerment	0.822	0.915	0.878	0.820	0.862					
Engagement	0.774	0.844	0.802	0.750	0.815	0.941				
Reward	0.814	0.746	0.835	0.816	0.775	0.845	0.776			
Salient	0.805	0.796	0.874	0.759	0.923	0.840	0.815	0.760		
Trust	0.848	0.865	0.877	0.905	0.875	0.880	0.831	0.892	0.845	
Reward x Engagement	0.595	0.594	0.609	0.654	0.615	0.683	0.675	0.744	0.610	0.716

Cleophas Attor

Internal Employee Branding as a Strategic Tool for Building a Brand Image Within   the Banking Industry: Evidence from an Emerging Economy

Interní zaměstnanecká značka jako strategický nástroj pro budování silné image značky v bankovním průmyslu: výzkumná studie
z rozvíjející se ekonomiky