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The attitudinal and behavioral impact of brand-centered human resource management
Employee and customer effects

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the effects of brand-centered human resource management (HRM) on employees' person–brand fit, brand commitment (BC) and brand citizenship behavior (BCB). In addition, the paper tests effects of BCB on customer satisfaction and citizenship behavior.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected from managers, front-line employees and customers of 22 international tourist hotels in Taiwan. Hierarchical linear modeling was used to investigate relationships between variables.

Findings – Multilevel results reveal positive connections between brand-centered HRM and BCB, mediated by person–brand fit and BC. Positive relationships were also found between BC and BCB, person–brand fit and BCB; BCB and customer satisfaction; and between customer satisfaction and customer citizenship behavior.

Research limitations/implications – When employees' personal values are consistent with brand values, employees will feel a closer connection to the brand and be more willing to dedicate themselves to brand-related activity. The model developed here can be tested in different cultures to ascertain the generalizability of the findings to Western contexts.

Practical implications – Support is provided for the positive effects of brand-centered HRM when employees internalize brand values as their own personal values. Hotel managers should ensure that employees are highly committed to the brand values and willing to deliver services to customers accordingly.

Originality/value – The paper provides measurement developments for person–brand fit and BC and deeper understanding of how brand-centered HRM can lead to positive changes in customer behavior.

Keywords Customer satisfaction, Customer citizenship behavior, Brand attitudes,
Brand-centered human resource management, Person–brand fit

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Over recent years, brand-centered human resource management (HRM) has received increasing attention in the field of management research (Al-Shuaibi *et al.*, 2016; Buil *et al.*, 2016; Chiang and Cheng, 2015; Du Preez *et al.*, 2017). It has been argued that brand-centered HRM

creates a 'personal identity - brand fit' between employees and the organization's brand values (Porricelli *et al.*, 2014, p. 746). Chiang *et al.* (2013) describe brand-centered HRM as a strategy to build brand value, by creating conditions which encourage employees to become highly involved in brand practices and achieve brand-related goals. Brand-centered HRM focuses on developing linkages between all aspects of HRM and brand-related attitudes and behaviors. For instance, recruitment and selection procedures focusing on person – brand fit allow managers to select people whose values, attitudes and behaviors are congruent with brand values. Brand-related training and development activities can improve employees' knowledge, skills and abilities to deliver brand promises to customers. Performance management and reward systems based on brand values can be used to motivate employees to behave and perform in a way that strengthens the reputation of the brand (Aurand *et al.*, 2005; Burmann *et al.*, 2009). Training activities, educational sessions and social activities can be used to communicate brand values and develop employees' sense of attachment to the organization (Buil *et al.*, 2016, p. 258).

Al-Shuaibi *et al.* (2016, p. 155) suggest that it is just as important to market the brand to employees (internal customers) as it is to external customers. To do this, organizations can adopt useful tools and practices (e.g. training and workshops) to develop employees' understanding of the organization's brand identity (Dean *et al.*, 2016; Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2006). Research suggests that when employees engage in brand-centered HRM practices, they will display work behaviors that are consistent with the brand values (Al-Shuaibi *et al.*, 2016; Aurand *et al.*, 2005; Chang *et al.*, 2012; Hurrell and Scholarios, 2014). Hankinson (2009, p. 99) argues that "the successful development of employees' commitment to the organization's brand is important because of its link to the development of appropriate brand behavior". When employees identify with the brand, it is believed that this will create positive brand attitudes and behaviors, such as brand commitment (BC) and brand citizenship behavior (BCB) (Ravens, 2014; Chang *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, it is argued that the attitudinal and behavioral changes will have an impact on both customer satisfaction and customer citizenship behavior. A review of the research literature reveals that studies typically test the effects of brand-centered HRM on employees' brand attitudes at the single level (Burmann *et al.*, 2009; Burmann and Zeplin, 2005). In contrast, this study investigates the effects of brand-centered HRM on employee and customer outcomes, via multilevel analyses.

While it has been argued that the congruence (degree of 'fit') between employee values and brand values will determine whether employees endorse the corporate brand and devote additional psychological and physical effort at work (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005; Yaniv and Farkas, 2005), this is an emerging area of research. This study, therefore, makes several contributions. First, few scholars have developed measures to investigate person–brand fit or BC or investigated relationships with employee behavior. To advance previous efforts and examine links between brand-centered HRM practices, person–brand fit, BC and BCB, measures for person–brand fit and BC are developed. Second, the relationship between brand-centered HRM and BCB has received little attention in the research literature. This study tests this relationship and the mediating effects of person–brand fit and BC. Furthermore, very little empirical evidence is currently available to support the argument that employees with high levels of BC will display BCB (Burmann *et al.*, 2009; Burmann and Zeplin, 2005; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2000). This is also tested. Third, to develop a broader understanding of brand-centered HRM and to help overcome possible problems of bias caused by common method variance (Kidwell *et al.*, 1997), relationships among constructs are examined using a multilevel approach. This is in contrast to the majority of brand-centered HRM studies taking single-level approaches. Fourth, given the lack of research

linking brand-centered HRM and customer effects, a key contribution of this study resides in the inclusion of customer satisfaction and citizenship behavior. Only a very small number of studies have explored the effects of brand-centered HRM on customers (Chang *et al.*, 2012). It is currently unclear how customer satisfaction and customer citizenship behavior may be affected by brand-centered HRM or employee BCB. In the international hotel industry, where customer service and brand image are vitally important, this knowledge is likely to be particularly helpful. Finally, this study is conducted in Taiwan, a relatively collectivistic society. Within collectivist societies, it has been argued that people are more likely to think and feel that they belong 'within groups' and that people will take care of each other in exchange for loyalty (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010). Social identity theory, social exchange theory and service-profit chain theory are used to develop and test a model depicting how employees and customers respond to brand-centered HRM practices.

The following section of this paper presents a review of the research literature and the research hypotheses. This is followed by the research methodology and measures, results of the study and a discussion of the findings. The paper concludes with theoretical and practical implications, limitations and suggestions for future research.

Literature review

Homburg *et al.* (2009, p. 38) describes the service–profit chain (SPC) as "a causal chain" that links employee satisfaction, customer orientation and customer satisfaction to loyalty and firm financial performance. Employee satisfaction and loyalty is, as Homburg *et al.* (2009) argues, the basis for customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, which consequently enhances the profitability and growth of the organization. According to Homburg *et al.* (2009, p. 38), "this conventional SPC logic stands as a widely accepted element of current management wisdom, especially in contexts in which employee-customer interaction occurs". Building on the principles of SPC theory, this study proposes that brand-centered HRM activities will create a causal chain, connecting hotel employee and customer attitudes and behaviors. In hotels, where employee–customer interaction is likely to be high, it is expected that internal brand-centered HRM activities will lead to higher levels of person–brand fit, BC and BCB. BCB is proposed to have a positive effect on customer attitudes and behaviors. Because of the lack of empirical research examining brand-centered HRM and its effects, these propositions remain unexplored. The following section presents a review of existing research literature, hypotheses and the research framework.

Brand-centered HRM and person – brand fit

Brand-centered HRM is a brand-centered strategy that contributes to the generation of brand identity internalization, causing employees to develop positive brand attitudes and engage in positive brand behaviors (Burmann *et al.*, 2009). *H1* proposes a positive relationship between brand-centered HRM and 'person-brand fit'. Person–brand fit refers to the congruence between employees' personal values and brand values (Burmann *et al.*, 2009). To achieve this, brand-centered strategies can be implemented through practices, such as brand training, brand selection, brand development and brand-related rewards. An emphasis on brand values and image can also be integrated into training and development programs, within performance appraisals and in the design of rewards strategies (Snell and Dean, 1992). The recruitment process can also be (at least in part) a branding activity, used to attract applicants with a high person–

brand fit. Empirical evidence suggests that organizations adopting brand-centered HR practices to recruit applicants will be more likely to attract and recruit employees whose personal values are consistent with the corporate brand values of the organization (Chiang *et al.*, 2013). *H1* proposes that employees will experience a greater person–brand fit as a consequence of brand-centered HRM practices:

H1. Brand-centered human resource management positively affects person–brand fit.

Brand-centered HRM, brand commitment and brand citizenship behavior

HRM practices can be divided into 'control' and 'commitment' practices (Whitener, 2001). Control approaches focus on norms, support, rewards and monitoring of employee behaviors, whereas commitment approaches focus on encouraging employees to identify with and accomplish organizational goals. Arthur (1994) argues that HR practices can be used to build organizational commitment and, in turn, positively influence employees' affective performance. Similarly, it is argued in this study that brand-centered HRM encourages employees to become highly involved in brand practices and work harder to accomplish goals. While there is a lack of empirical evidence investigating the relationship between brand-centered HRM and employee attitudes and behaviors, the small number of studies that have explored this tend to find positive links. Ravens (2014) found that brand-centered HRM positively correlated with affective and continuance BC. From an internal brand management perspective, Ravens (2014, p. 90) argues that brand-centered HRM "is a determinant of BC and contributes to elevated BC". Arguments rooted in social exchange theory suggest that when employees feel they are being supported by the organization, they will develop an altruistic attitude and demonstrate altruistic behaviors (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986). Piehler *et al.* (2016) also find that internal brand management has a positive relationship with BC. Building on the small number of brand-centered HRM and internal branding studies that have examined these links, *H2* proposes that brand-centered HRM is a supportive practice (to high commitment HRM) that will have a positive relationship with BC:

H2. Brand-centered human resource management positively affects brand commitment.

Service-oriented organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) has been described as discretionary behavior, outside of formal role requirements (Bettencourt and Brown, 1997). The core difference between service-oriented OCB and BCB is that BCB refers to "employee behaviors that enhance brand identity" (Ravens, 2014, p. 49). Three main characteristics of BCB are identified by Ravens (2014, p. 65). The first is 'brand missionary', referring to honesty and loyalty toward the brand. The second is 'brand acceptance', which suggests that employees will be more likely to comply with rules that relate to brand-related behavior. 'Brand advancement' suggests that employee behaviors will positively influence the brand. Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986) suggests that effective brand-centered HRM practices will foster a mutual trust relationship between the organization and employees via exchange relationships (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005; Leitch and Richardson, 2003). In *H3*, it is proposed that brand-centered HRM practices will invoke a sense of loyalty toward the brand and a desire to comply with rules that relate to brand-related behavior. It is proposed that 'brand advancement' will lead to positive brand-related citizenship behaviors:

H3. Brand-centered human resource management positively affects brand citizenship behavior.

Person–brand fit and brand commitment

Farzaneh *et al.* (2014, p. 675) observe that "empirical evidence has shown that a high level of P-O fit is related to a number of positive outcomes". Farzaneh *et al.* (2014) also find similar outcomes between person–job fit (P-J fit) and organizational commitment (Sekigunchi, 2004). While these concepts do not focus specifically on the brand (as this study does), these findings do highlight how person–environment fit (in its various forms) can have a positive effect on employee attitudes. *H4* proposes that employees with a high person–brand fit will be more willing to support and endorse the brand, enhance brand value and devote additional psychological and physical effort at work (Yaniv and Farkas, 2005). Employees with high person–brand fit will accept organizational brand values, regard brand values as being synonymous with the organization and integrate them into their work life (Yaniv and Farkas, 2005). Previous empirical research has found that person–brand fit positively affects how employees feel about the brand, specifically, their brand psychological ownership (i.e. this is "my" brand). This suggests that person–brand fit causes employees to develop a closer and stronger sense of identification with the brand (Chiang and Cheng, 2015). *H4* proposes that BC is enhanced when employees perceive a high person–brand fit:

H4. Person–brand fit positively affects brand commitment.

Brand commitment and brand citizenship behavior

Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) observe that a wide range of organizational outcomes can be predicted by employee commitment. A number of theories assist in explaining how employees' thoughts and feelings convert into behaviors. These include the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985) and theory of reasoned action (Madden *et al.*, 1992). These theories suggest that intentions to engage in citizenship behavior will materialize when the expected outcomes of the behavior are of value to the employee (Madden, 1986). Ravens (2014, p. 246) argues that "employees who feel an emotional attachment to a brand are more willing to exhibit brand-supportive behavior". It is argued in *H5* that a brand-centered approach to HRM will assist organizations to recruit and develop employees who share the brand values, have a strong BC and are more likely to engage in behaviors that conform to the brand's identity (BCB). According to Ravens (2014, p. 6), "BC is a core driver of brand aligned behaviors since employees with higher commitments to brands exhibit elevated congruence between brand value promise and brand behavior". Few empirical studies have explored BC and BCB. Of those that have there is evidence that BC is an antecedent of BCB (Porricelli *et al.*, 2014). Findings in Du Preez *et al.* (2017, p. 1587) reveal that BC and brand understanding have a significant and positive direct effect on BCB. *H5* builds on this small area of research literature to propose that employees with high brand identity will experience higher levels of BC, leading to BCB:

H5. Brand commitment positively affects brand organizational citizenship behavior.

Person–brand fit and brand citizenship behavior

According to Farzaneh *et al.* (2014), employee attitudes are strongly related to the corresponding type of fit, and organizational commitment is an affective variable that is connected to citizenship behavior. It is proposed in *H6* that person–brand fit will lead to

BCB. Prior research has argued that a good 'fit' between an employee and an organization can have a positive effect on the individual and the organization (Morley, 2007; Schneider, 2001). For example, it has been found that when person–organization fit is high, there are positive changes in employee attitudes and behaviors. These include high job involvement, job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behavior (Judge and Bretz, 1992). Furthermore, evidence from a study of service-workers found that person–job fit, job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behaviors are positively correlated (Donavan *et al.*, 2004). Similarly, in relation to person–brand fit, it is expected that employee attitudes and behaviors will be enhanced when a strong congruence exists between employees' personal values and brand values (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005). *H6* proposes that employees with a high degree of person–brand fit will be more likely to display BCB:

H6. Person–brand fit positively affects brand citizenship behaviors.

The mediating *role* of person–brand fit and brand commitment
H7 proposes that the relationships between brand-centered HRM, person–brand fit, BC and BCB will be correlated. Burmann and Zeplin (2005) suggest that employees with a high brand identity develop BC, resulting in brand extra-role behaviors. Person–brand fit leads employees to become more willing to invest psychological and physical effort to endorse the brand values (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005; Yaniv and Farkas, 2005). Several studies theorize positive links between these concepts, yet few studies have empirically tested them.

Burmann *et al.* (2009) argue that brand-centered HRM is a branding activity which attracts applicants who are more likely to have a high person–brand fit. It is argued that managers can utilize brand-centered HRM to select employees with person–brand fit, who are therefore more likely to feel a sense of BC and display BCB. It is proposed that person–brand fit and BC are mediators in the relationship between brand-centered HRM and BCB:

H7. Person–brand fit and brand commitment mediate the relationship between brand-centered HRM and brand citizenship behavior.

Brand citizenship behavior, customer satisfaction and customer citizenship behavior
BCB has three facets, namely:

(1) voluntary assistance of others and brand consideration;

(2) brand sportsmanship; and

(3) brand self-development (Chiang *et al.*, 2013).

When employees display high-levels of BCB, it not only enhances the efficiency of the organization but can also create greater customer satisfaction (Chang *et al.*, 2012). When customer satisfaction is high, it is expected that customers will engage in spontaneous behavior. Rosenbaum and Massiah (2007) argue that this spontaneous behavior can be in the form of customer citizenship behavior, such as taking the initiative to recommend a product, service or brand to others or voluntarily helping other customers at the time of purchasing products. Yi and Gong (2008) theorizes that employees who display positive service behavior (e.g. BCB) will influence customers' sense of justice, producing customer citizenship behaviors.

Ashforth and Mael (1989) argue that social identity provides individuals with a sense of belonging. The theory suggests that collective identification affects the cognitive awareness of membership in the organization, employee commitment and perceptions of organizational

goals (Hirst *et al.*, 2009; Meyer *et al.*, 2006). Homburg *et al.* (2009, pp. 42-43) examined links between 'employee-company identification' and 'customer company identification'. In their analysis, service-profit chain theory (SPC) and social identify theory provided several explanations. Homburg *et al.* (2009, p. 42) described customer-contact employees as the face of the company, "who transport these core defining characteristics to the customers". Customers will identify more strongly with the company when they have favorable perceptions of the employees they interact with (Homburg *et al.*, 2009). Homburg *et al.* (2009, p. 42) argues that:

[…] because employees who identify with the company are prone to act favorably towards the company, a higher level of employee-company identification should lead to a higher level of customer-company identification.

Homburg *et al.* (2009) refers to an important concept in social identify theory, known as proto-typicality. As previously proposed, when employees identify with the company, they are more likely to conform to its norms and standards and adopt attitudes and behaviors that are encouraged within the organization. Homburg *et al.* (2009, p. 43) argues that "employee proto-typicality perceived by customers leads to customer-company identification".

It is proposed that there will be a positive relationship between employee BCB and customer satisfaction. It is also expected that customers will engage in customer citizenship behavior when they feel more satisfied and experience a sense of 'customer-company identification':

H8. Brand citizenship behavior positively affects customer satisfaction.

H9. Customer satisfaction has a positive effect on customer citizenship behavior.

The research framework for this study is presented in Figure 1. Using hierarchical linear modeling, relationships between brand-centered HRM, person–brand fit, BC, BCB, customer satisfaction and customer citizenship behavior are tested.
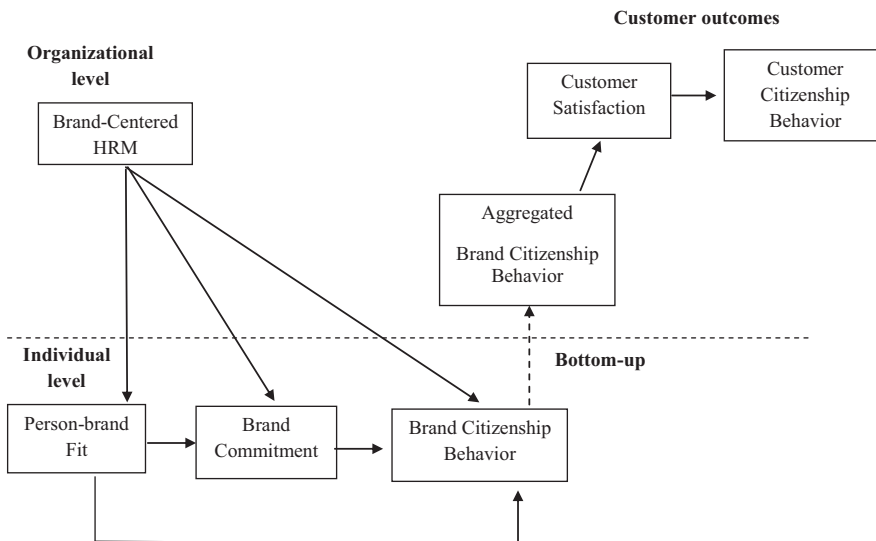

Figure 1.
Research framework

Relationships between person–brand fit, BC and BCB are investigated using individual-level analyses. In the multilevel analyses, the effects of brand-centered HRM on person–brand fit, BC and BCB are tested, in addition to the multilevel mediating effects of person–brand fit and BC. To examine the effects of employees' BCB, relationships are tested between aggregated BCB, customer citizenship behavior and customer satisfaction.

Method

Sample and procedure

The data utilized in this study were collected from questionnaires completed by managers and frontline employees in 22 different international tourist hotels in Taiwan. Brand-centered HRM questionnaires, measuring the degree of brand-related HR practices, were completed by managers. Employee questionnaires were distributed to frontline employees to investigate person–brand fit, BC and BCB. Customer questionnaires measured the degree of customer satisfaction and customer citizenship behavior. All hotels were listed in the Taiwan Hotels Association. International tourist hotels tend to place a strong emphasis on brand management to enhance brand equity and competitive advantage. A total of 450 questionnaires were sent to supervisors and 171 were returned, representing a response rate of 38 per cent. In all, 600 questionnaires were sent to employees and 342 were returned, representing a response rate of 57 per cent. Finally, 450 customer questionnaires were sent and 256 were returned, providing a response rate of 56.9 per cent.

Measurements

All measurement items (including the mean and standard deviation) can be found in Appendix 1. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). This decision was made in light of Dawes' (2008, p. 1) findings, which showed that "five and seven-point scales produced the same mean score as each other, once they were re-scaled".

To measure perceptions of brand-centered HR practices, items from Chang *et al.* (2012) were utilized. Person–brand fit items were borrowed from Burmann and Zeplin (2005) and Chiang and Cheng (2015). Measures of BC were adapted from Burmann and Zeplin (2005) and Meyer *et al.* (2006), and measures for BCB were adapted from the work of Chang *et al.* (2012). Items were borrowed from Chang *et al.* (2012) and Fornell *et al.* (1996) to measure customer satisfaction. Finally, to measure customer citizenship behavior, items from Groth (2005) were utilized.

Mediating effect of person–brand fit and brand commitment

The following process was followed to investigate the mediating effects of person–brand fit and BC (Baron and Kenny, 1986). First, the effect of person–brand fit and BC on BCB was confirmed, followed by brand-centered HRM and BCB and, finally, person–brand fit and BC on BCB. The next step was to examine whether the relationship between brand-centered HRM and BCB was non-significant (or reduced) when person–brand fit and BC acted as predictors of BCB. If supported, then this would provide confirmation of the mediating effect of BC.

Results

Null model

The null model was used to confirm the need to investigate the research questions with cross-level analyses (Raudenbush and Bryk, 2002). The value of the residual variance of the

intercept (τ00) reached a significant level (Hofmann, 1997), indicating that the intercept term varies across groups, and the amount of variance could potentially be explained by the Level-2 predictor. According to the results, τ00 of person–brand fit (0.11, $p < 0.01$), brand CB (0.279, $p < 0.01$) and brand CB (0.102, $p < 0.01$) all are significant, indicating multilevel analysis is appropriate to investigate the relationships.

Aggregation of the constructs

According to James (1982) and Hofmann (1997), researchers need to check between-group variance and within-group variance before aggregation. The results show that the median value of rwg for brand-centered HRM is 0.952, above the acceptable level of 0.6 (James, 1982). The study utilizes ICC(1) and ICC(2) to investigate between-group variance (Raudenbush and Bryk, 2002). The results show that the ICC (1) values for person–brand fit, brand CB and brand CB are 0.215, 0.359 and 0.137, respectively. ICC (2) values for person–brand fit, brand CB and brand CB are 0.792, 0.799 and 0.692, respectively. All values of ICC (1) are above the acceptable level of 0.12 (James, 1982) and all values of ICC (2) are above the acceptable level of 0.6 (Glick, 1985).

Common method variance

In accordance with Podsakoff *et al.* (2003), procedural and statistical remedies are used to attenuate the bias of common method variance. Survey responses for the organization-level variable (brand-centered HRM) and individual-level variables (person–brand fit, BC and BCB) were collected from different sources. Respondents remained anonymous when answering questions. In the statistical analysis, Harman's single factor was used to test the bias of CMV. All individual-level items were concluded to one general factor. The fitness results indicated: x^2/df = 10.41; RMSR = 0.08; CFI = 0.95; IFI = 0:95; and RMSEA = 0.16. This suggests a poor fitness. All individual-level items were then measured according to the proposed model (three-factor model) and results of fitness were: x^2/df = 4.36; RMSR = 0.058; CFI = 0.97; IFI = 0:97; and RMSEA = 0.09, indicating that the fitness of the three-factor model is better than a one-factor model. While the bias of common method is not completely eliminated, the problem of CMV is substantially reduced.

Reliability and validity examination

Validity tests were conducted for individual-level constructs. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to conduct validity tests for person–brand fit, BC and BCB. The results were: x^2/df = 4.3, RMSR =0.059, CFI = 0.97, IFI = 0.97 and RMSEA = 0.09. Cronbach's alpha of PBF, BC and BCB were 0.885, 0952, and 0.915, respectively, indicating the reliability of each individual variable is acceptable. Consistent with Hair *et al.* (2006), the factor loading, average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) were calculated to assess convergent validity. The results of CFA, λ, T, CR and AVE were all above the fitness index (Table I), indicating that convergent validity for person–brand fit, BC and BCB.

Discriminate validity

Jöreskog and Sörbom (1981) argue that there exists discriminate validity between two constructs if $\Phi \pm 1.96$ S.E. excludes 1. Discriminate validity was found among person–brand fit, BC and BCB (Table II).

Descriptive analyses
Of the 171 supervisors, 66 are male (38.6 per cent) and 105 are female (61.4 per cent) (Table III). Most supervisors are middle-aged (26-45, 67.2 per cent) and most supervisors (66.1 per cent) have a college degree. A slightly greater proportion of respondents are middle managers (52.6 per cent), and around one third have worked within the company for more than 9 years (33.9 per cent).

In all, 109 of the 342 employees are male (31.9 per cent) and 232 are female (67.8 per cent). 46.5 per cent of respondents are under the age of 26-35 (Table IV). College or university graduates account for 79.8 per cent and senior high school graduates account for 12.6 per cent of respondents. Most respondents are unmarried (67.5 per cent), in full-time employment (97 per cent) and have been working for approximately 1 year (37.1 per cent).

Correlations
As reported in Table V, brand-centered HRM is significantly related to age ($r = 0.176$, $p < 0.05$). Person–brand fit is significantly related to BC ($r = 0.715$, $p < 0.01$) and BCB ($r = 0.598$, $p < 0.1$), and BC is significantly associated with BCB ($r = 0.731$, $p < 0.01$). The results support the hypotheses. Building on these results, multilevel relationships between brand-centered HRM, person–brand fit, BC, BCB, customer satisfaction and customer citizenship behavior were tested. Furthermore, findings reveal that marriage and age are significantly related to person–brand fit, BC and BCB. Marital status and age are used as control variables.

ANOVA analyses
Findings in Model 2 shows a significant relationship between age and BC (Table VI).Age and marriage (Model 3) have a significant relationship with BCB. ANOVA analysis is utilized to examine the differences. In the individual-level ANOVA models, there are no significant differences for gender in PBF, BC and BCB. There are significant differences in age in two of the individual-level variables, including BC ($p < 0.01$) and BCB ($p < 0.01$). As

Constructs	λ	T	SE	CR	AVE
Person – brand fit	0.64~0.82	12.63–17.93	0.33~0.6	0.882	0.556
Brand commitment	0.75~0.84	16–18.88	0.3~0.4	0.953	0.648
Brand citizenship behavior	0.61~0.81	12.2~18.22	0.39~0.47	0.959	0.561
Fitness index	>0.5	>1.96	–	>0.7	>0.5

Table I.
Convergent validity

Constructs	Person – brand fit	Brand commitment	Brand citizenship behavior
Person – brand fit	1		
Brand commitment	0.79[a]	1	
	(0.03)[b]		
	31.43[c]		
Brand citizenship behavior	0.66	0.77	1
	(0.03)	(0.02)	
	19.04	30.81	

Table II.
Discriminate validity

Notes: [a] = Φ[a]; [b] = SE; [c] = T

Category	No.	(%)
Gender		
Male	66	38.6
Female	105	61.4
Marital status		
Married	93	54.4
Unmarried	75	43.9
Other	3	1.7
Age		
25 years or below	8	4.7
26-35 years old	63	36.8
36-45 years old	52	30.4
46-55 years old	36	21.1
56-65 years old	9	5.3
66 years or above	3	1.8
Education		
Junior high school	7	4.1
Senior high school	29	17.0
College	113	66.1
Graduate school	22	12.9
Position		
Junior manager	51	29.8
Middle manger	90	52.6
Senior manager	30	17.6
Seniority		
Less than 1 year	16	9.4
1-2 years	46	26.9
3-4 years	26	15.2
5-6 years	11	6.4
7-8 years	14	8.2
More than 9 years	58	33.9

Table III.
Descriptive statistics
of supervisors

for BC, means from high to low are: 46-55, 36-45, 56-65, 26-35 and 25 and below. For BCB, means from high to low are 46-55, 56-65, 36-45, 26-35 and 25 and below. There are significant differences in all individual-level variables for marriage, including PBF ($p < 0.05$), BC ($p < 0.01$) and BCB ($p < 0.01$). Higher results are found amongst married employees when compared to unmarried employees in PBF, BC and BCB. In the organization-level ANOVA analyses, there are no significant differences in brand-centered HRM when examining age and tenure.

Multilevel analyses
In the multilevel analyses, *H1* investigates the relationship between brand-centered HRM and person–brand fit. *H2* examines brand-centered HRM and BC, and *H3* proposes that brand-centered HRM and BCB will be related. As seen in Model 1 (Table VI), brand-centered HRM positively affects person–brand fit ($\gamma 01 = 0.325$, $p < 0.05$). Model 2 shows that brand-centered HRM positively affects BC ($\gamma 01 = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$), and Model 3 shows that brand-centered HRM and BCB relate positively ($\gamma 01 = 0.241$, $p < 0.05$). *H1*, *H2* and *H3* are all supported.

Category	No.	(%)
Gender		
Male	109	31.9
Female	232	67.8
Other	1	0.3
Marital status		
Married	103	31.1
Unmarried	231	67.5
Other	8	2.3
Age		
25 years or below	99	28.9
26-35 years old	159	46.5
36-45 years old	52	15.2
46-55 years old	22	6.4
56-65 years old	10	2.9
Education		
Junior high school	5	1.5
Senior high school	43	12.6
College	273	79.8
Graduate school	21	6.1
Seniority		
Less than 1 year	127	37.1
1-2 years	106	31
3-4 years	34	9.9
5-6 years	21	6.1
7-8 years	16	4.7
More than 9 years	38	11.1
Employment		
Full time job	332	97
Part time job	5	1.5
Other	5	1.5

Table IV.
Descriptive statistics
of employees

Individual-level analyses
Model 5 shows that brand–person fit positively affects BCB ($\gamma10 = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$). BC positively affects BCB ($\gamma10 = 0.576$, $p < 0.01$) in Model 4. Model 6 shows that brand–person fit ($\gamma10 = 0.12$ $p < 0.05$) and BC ($\gamma10 = 0.488$, $p < 0.01$) positively affect BCB. *H4*, *H5* and *H6* are all supported.

Customer-level analyses
In Table VII, results are shown for the multilevel effects of aggregated BCB on customer satisfaction and BCB. In Model 1, BCB positively affects customer satisfaction (0.301, $p < 0.05$), supporting *H8*. In Model 2, customer satisfaction positively affects BCB (0.329, $p < 0.01$) providing support for *H9*.

Multilevel mediating effect
In *H7*, it is proposed that person–brand fit and BC mediate the relationship between brand-centered HRM and BCB. Brand-centered HRM is found to significantly affect BCB in Model 3 (Table VI). However, a non-significant relationship is found between brand-centered

Variables	Mean	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Individual level								
(1) Person – brand fit	4.28	0.743	1					
(2) Brand commitment	3.83	0.739	0.715***	1				
(3) Brand citizenship behavior	4.07	0.609	0.598***	0.731***	1			
(4) Gender	1.69	0.499	−0.046	−0.046	−0.017	1		
(5) Marital status	1.72	0.499	0.167***	0.221***	0.188***	0.121**	1	
(6) Age	2.08	0.978	0.221***	−0.121**	0.227***	−0.166***	−0.338***	1
Organizational level								
(1) Brand-centered HRM	3.83	0.403	1					
(2) Age	2.92	0.541	0.176**	1				
(3) Tenure	3.56	1.463	−0.048	0.42***	1			

Notes: ***$p < 0.01$; **$p < 0.05$; *<0.1

Table V.
Means, standard deviation and correlations of research constructs

Models Dependent variable Independent variable	Model 1 Person – brand fit	Model 2 Brand commitment	Model 3 Brand citizenship behavior	Model 4 Brand citizenship behavior	Model 5 Brand citizenship behavior	Model 6 Brand citizenship behavior
Individual level						
Intercept	4.27***	3.84***	4.092***	4.093***	4.092***	4.097***
Person–brand fit					0.45***	0.12***
Brand commitment				0.576***		0.488***
Gender	0.008	0.026	0.052	0.026	0.05	0.019
Marital status	0.06	−0.093	−0.123**	−0.069	−0.09	−0.061
Age	0.096	−0.142**	−0.041**	0.018	−0.054	−0.021
Organizational level						
Brand-centered HRM	0.325**	0.32***	0.241**	0.205***	0.07	0.005
Age	0.076	−0.049	−0.069	0.138**	−0.06	−0.023
Tenure	−0.046	−0.06	−0.023	0.025*	0.005	0.003
Deviance	724.45	735.72	599.41	368.06	483.34	374.21

Notes: Deviance is a measure of model fit. Deviance = −2* log-likelihood of the full maximum-likelihood estimate. ***$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.05$, *<0.1; Organizations $n = 22$; Supervisors $n = 171$; Employees $n = 342$

Table VI.
Multilevel results of the proposed model

HRM and BCB when person–brand fit and BC are also regarded as predictors in Model 6. The results suggest that person–brand fit and BC mediate the relationship between brand-centered HRM and BCB, supporting *H7*.

Discussion
The results indicate that a brand-centered approach to HRM has a positive effect on employee and customer attitudes and behaviors. Employees were found to be more likely to perceive higher levels of person–brand fit, feel committed to the brand and engage in BCB. The results show that person–brand fit and BC both mediate the multilevel relationship

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Model		Model 1	Model 2
	Dependent variable		
Independent variable		Customer satisfaction	Customer citizenship behavior
Customer level			
Intercept		4.068 ***	4.085 ***
Customer satisfaction			0.329 ***
Gender		−0.052	−0.036
Age		0.003	−0.016
Education		−0.026	0.021
Organizational level			
Aggregated BCB		0.301 **	
Gender		−0.515***	
Age		−0.05	
Education		0.001	
Deviance		348.06	225.57

Notes: ***$p < 0.01$; **$p < 0.05$; * <0.1

Table VII.
Multilevel effects of aggregated BCB on customer outcomes

between brand-centered HRM and BCB, highlighting the important role these attitudes play in explaining how brand-centered HRM practices influence work-place behavior. When employees' personal values are consistent with brand values, employees will feel a closer connection to the brand and be more willing to dedicate themselves to brand-related activity. The results reaffirm suggestions made in the research literature that desirable employee behavior can be shaped by implementing a set of brand-centered HRM practices (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005).

Furthermore, the study makes an important contribution to knowledge of how brand-centered HRM can lead to positive changes in customer behavior. When frontline employees exhibit BCB, the results reveal that customers feel more satisfied. Customers will also be more likely to engage in citizenship behaviors, such as recommending the business to family members or colleagues, assisting other customers and providing helpful feedback. The findings shows that employee and customer behavior can be shaped by HR practices, via feelings person–brand fit and BC.

The results provide empirical support for several predictions made in previous studies. The findings support Burmann and Zeplin's (2005) holistic model of internal brand management, in which it is argued that brand-centered HRM leads to BC and employee BCB. In addition, the positive correlation found between brand-centered HRM and person–brand fit corroborates with Hurrell and Scholarios' (2014) findings. Furthermore, the mediating effects of person–brand fit, BC and BCB reinforce findings in Farzaneh *et al.* (2014).

In practice, a number of real cases echo the analytical framework and empirical results presented in this study (e.g. Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, the Southwest Airline, Starbucks, Din Tai Fung, etc.). Take Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, one of the most recognizable luxury hotel brands in the world, to illustrate. This hotel brand is well-known for its high-quality services provided to its customers, thus earning it a reputation as a leading luxury hotel brand worldwide. In his keynote speech at the ALFA 2013 Conference, Mr Jim FitzGibbon, the former president of the Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, explained how the 3P golden rule (i.e. people, products and profits) had been adopted by Four Seasons

Hotels and Resorts in the management of this world-class luxury hotel (8th May 2013). To deliver high-quality services to customers, the hotel first focuses on hiring people who share the brand values, have appropriate attitudes and are willing to behave in a way the hotel expects. Selection procedures usually follow five to six steps and may include the President of the hotel in the final stage. Careful screening processes ensure high person–brand fit, high commitment towards its brand values and BCB among its employees. Also, hiring people with a high degree of person–brand fit can make training and development much easier and more effective, thus enhancing employee brand-specific competencies, bringing greater value to its customers. Furthermore, awards are given to recognize the contributions of employees who deliver services of a high standard to customers. This culture gives the organization a competitive edge in the hospitality industry because when employees share common values with the organization, they are highly dedicated and committed to serve customers in a very personal way, allowing customers to feel 'at home' and welcome. This high level of customer satisfaction leads to customer citizenship behaviors, which in turn can (as argued in this study) be sources of superior profitability, reputation and growth (Talbott, 2006).

Conclusions

This study has examined relationships between brand-centered HRM and customer citizenship behavior in international hotels located in Taiwan. International hotels operate in highly competitive global hospitality industries and, therefore, must pay great attention to how they build and communicate their brand if they wish to attract and retain global customers. Service Profit Chain Theory and Social Identity Theory (Heskett *et al.*, 1997; Ashforth and Mael, 1989) were used to develop a theoretical framework to predict how brand-centered HRM practices influence the attitudes and behaviors of hotel employees and customers. Overall, this study presents convincing support for the positive effects of brand-centered HRM when employees internalize brand values as their own personal values. The findings reflect how employees working in Taiwan, a relatively collectivistic organizational setting, respond to brand-centered HRM practices. While more research is need in Western contexts to assess the generalizability of findings, there are reasons to think that the findings will be transferable to individualistic settings. Peng and Pierce (2015, p. 165) found that feelings of psychological ownership emerged within Chinese culture in much the same way as in a western context. Similarly, as the findings in this study corroborate with predictions and empirical findings from relatively more individualistic contexts (Porricelli *et al.*, 2014), there may (as with concepts such as psychological ownership) be consistencies in how brand attitudes and behaviors develop and materialize in collectivistic and individualistic contexts.

Theoretical implications

In response to calls to build a process model of competency-based HRM (Audenaert *et al.*, 2014), this study demonstrates that brand-centered HRM can lead to desirable outcomes (i.e. customer satisfaction and customer citizenship behaviors) through person–brand fit, BC and BCB (Nishii and Wright, 2008). The multilevel relationship between brand-centered HRM and person–brand fit supports assertions in Chiang *et al.* (2013), that brand-centered HR practices can be used to attract and recruit employees whose personal values are consistent with brand values.

Positive relationships between brand-centered HRM and BC were also found, reaffirming Ravens (2014) hypothesis that brand-centered HRM positively correlates with BC. In addition to finding a positive relationship between internal branding and employees' brand

identification and BC, Punjaisri *et al.* (2009, p. 216) found that internal branding has a positive and significant effect on employees' brand performance. The positive effect of brand-centered HRM on BCB is consistent with both Punjaisri *et al*'s. (2009, p. 216) findings and those in Chang *et al.* (2012), offering further support and validation for the positive behavioral effects brand-centered approaches can have in an organizational setting. Furthermore, person–brand fit and BC were found to positively affect BCB, providing empirical support for Burmann and Zeplin's (2005) holistic model of internal brand management.

Practical implications
The results provide several implications for practice. First, this study demonstrates that to enhance customer satisfaction and brand reputation, hotel managers should ensure that employees are highly committed to the brand values and willing to deliver services to customers accordingly. Second, to have the right people in the hospitality sector, brand-centered HRM can be implemented to help the organization select applicants who share the values of the organization (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005; Kimpakorn and Tocquer, 2010). To enhance brand equity among customers, hotels can recruit employees with a high person–brand fit, through targeted recruitment schemes. Effective decision-making in recruitment is emphasized by hospitality companies, such as the Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts. They have built a strong service culture across the organization in different countries through brand-centered HRM.

Hotels can also develop and reinforce brand values among newly hired and senior employees through the careful design of formal orientation, training, development and communication practices. This can emphasize how brand promises can be delivered to customers. The content of all these practices should cultivate brand-related values and attitudes among employees and customers, thereby leading to desirable behaviors congruent with the brand promise the hotel communicates. Additionally, performance evaluation practices should be based on criteria that evaluate whether or not employees display brand-related traits and attitudes (e.g. agreeableness, service orientation, etc.), behaviors (e.g. customer-oriented behaviors, helping others, team spirit, etc.), as well as performance (e.g. customer satisfaction, profitability, etc.). The balanced scorecard approach to performance management can be designed to integrate these performance criteria. To reward brand-related attitudes and performance, individual incentives and/or group incentives can be implemented to motivate employees.

Finally, the theoretical model and the empirical results found in this study provide educators with a reference framework for teaching service brand management in the hospitality industry. Given the increasing percentage of service sectors included in the gross domestic product of most developed countries, this knowledge creation and diffusion can further contribute to the enhancement of economic growth in these countries.

Limitations and future research
Studies tend to focus primarily on either external branding or internal branding (Aurand *et al.*, 2005; Burmann *et al.*, 2009). To support theoretical development and future empirical testing, it is recommended that these two areas are merged together (Chang *et al.*, 2012). This study has aimed to fill the gap in the existing research literature by bridging internal and external branding management. Future research in different service industries could establish the transferability of the model to other service-related industries. Furthermore, as data were collected from franchised international hotels in Taiwan, it should be noted that the results may be affected by cultural factors. Thus, the nature of the data sample may

(as mentioned earlier) be difficult to generalize across different sectors and cultures. Although real cases in Western countries (e.g. the Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts) appear to reflect the analytic framework and research results, it is recommended that research is conducted in different cultures. Other individual differences could also be explored. Results show that married employees are higher than unmarried employees in person–brand fit, BC and BCB. This may imply that married employees are less inclined to associate themselves with the brand or be affected by brand-centered HRM practices, than their unmarried counterparts.

The data in this study are mainly cross-sectional, which may limit the assertions one can make about causality. Thus, it is suggested that future research adopts a longitudinal design to collect data across time. Furthermore, only brand-centered HRM is included as the antecedent of the outcome variables. According to Burmann and Zeplin (2005), other antecedents such as brand communication, brand leadership and brand cultures may be important to consider. It is suggested that researchers investigate the effects of these antecedents on employee attitudes, behaviors and customer-based brand equity in a holistic way. Finally, this study uses a two-level HRM. It is suggested that future research develops this further, to examine relationships using a three-level HRM model.

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Appendix

No.	Brand-centered HRM (Supervisors)	Mean	S.D.
1	Our company compensates employees for providing brand-related creativity and information	3.47	1.17
2	When employees display behaviors fostering brand value, our company gives employees formal rewards	3.45	1.13
3	When the market share of the brand enhances, our company rewards employees who participate in brand-related activities	3.33	1.96
4	Our company makes newcomers understand brand-related value and spirit through training	3.45	1.11
5	Our company often transmits brand-related value through formal communication platform	3.57	1.07
6	Our company makes personal value and behaviors of employees consistent with brand value through training courses	3.87	1.0
7	Our company considers personal traits of applicants to recruit employees with person-brand fit	3.8	1.0
8	Our company considers personal values of applicants to recruit employees with person-brand fit	3.71	0.97
9	Our company considers employees' brand-oriented behaviors in the process of evaluation	3.87	0.98
10	The brand image may help our company recruit appropriate employees while recruiting newcomers	3.43	1.09
11	Our company makes employees compare their behaviors with a brand-related standard via self-evaluation or colleague-evaluation	3.87	0.92
12	Our company focuses on cultivating brand-related talents	4.11	0.82
13	Our company often communicates brand-related spirit, content, and value while developing new products or services	4.06	0.87
Person-brand Fit (Employees)			
1	I feel that brand values are consistent with my personal values	3.73	0.84
2	I feel that the brand personality is consistent with my personality	3.58	0.86
3	Before I enter this organization, I consider the consistency between the brand value and my personal value	3.61	0.92
4	Before I enter this organization, I hope my image is consist with the brand image	3.61	0.95
5	In the process of recruitment, the organization utilizes some tools to understand the consistency between the brand value and my personal value	3.69	0.93
6	I think my ability, knowledge and skills reach the requirement of the brand	3.89	0.82
Brand Commitment (Employees)			
1	I would be very happy to spend my rest of my career with the brand	3.56	1.07
2	I really feel as if the brand's problems are my own	3.63	1.0
3	I feel the brand is meaningful for me	3.72	0.87
4	I have strong feeling of belongingness toward the brand	3.75	0.89
5	Overall, I am satisfied with the brand	3.8	0.9
6	Overall, I am pleased to work for the brand	3.87	0.85
7	When other people criticize the brand, I feel like they criticize me	3.91	0.89
8	I very care about what other people think about the brand	3.93	0.86
9	When other people praise the brand, I feel like they praise me	3.94	0.89
10	The success of the brand is like my success	4.03	0.84
11	When we talk about the brand, we say "our brand"	4.03	0.83

Table AI.
Measurement items

No.	Brand-centered HRM (Supervisors)	Mean	S.D.
	Brand citizenship behavior (Employees)		
1	I regard customers as my family and solve their problems as I do mine	4.22	0.75
2	I solve problems of customers voluntarily to foster brand value	4.25	0.7
3	I voluntarily follow brand guidelines while servicing customers	4.27	0.68
4	I voluntarily follow brand standard processes without organizational monitoring	4.17	0.74
5	I voluntarily follow brand guidelines while solving customers' complaints	4.16	0.74
6	I express aggressive behaviors to satisfy customers and enhance brand value	4.18	0.72
7	I am willing to endorse the brand and voluntarily transmit brand value to newcomers or friends	4.25	0.78
8	I have trust and loyalty toward the brand	3.9	0.87
9	I tolerate inconveniencies caused by brand-related activities to satisfy customers and enhance brand value	4.09	0.76
10	I never complain about inconveniences caused by brand-related activities	3.93	0.84
11	I voluntarily provide new information and ideas for the brand to enhance brand value	3.9	0.87
12	I strengthen my professional knowledge to foster brand value	3.87	0.87
13	I voluntarily understand needs of customers without organizational requirement	3.91	0.85
14	Regardless of positive or negative information, I voluntarily respond to customers' thoughts on my company	4.12	0.73
15	I am willing to endlessly enhance brand-related skills	4.13	0.77
	Customer Satisfaction (Customers)		
1	I am satisfied with the service quality provided by this hotel	4.08	0.86
2	The services and products provided by this hotel are better than my expectations	4.48	0.78
3	The service provided by this hotel is better than service in my idea	3.91	0.73
	Customer Citizenship Behavior (Customers)		
1	Refer fellow students or coworkers to the business	3.45	0.88
2	Recommend the business to your family	3.77	0.87
3	Recommend the business to your peers	3.89	0.79
4	Recommend the business to people interested in the business' products/services	4.02	0.78
5	Assist other customers in finding products	4.02	0.84
6	Help others with their shopping	3.74	0.79
7	Teach someone how to use the service correctly	3.56	0.73
8	Explain to other customers how to use the service correctly	3.58	0.73
9	Fill out a customer satisfaction survey	3.78	0.83
10	Provide helpful feedback to customer service	3.69	0.88
11	Provide information when surveyed by the business	3.81	0.79
12	Inform business about the great service received by an individual employee	3.48	0.89

Table AI.

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