

# Relationships of Brand Orientation with Internal Branding Factors: An Employee Perspective in a B2B Manufacturing Context

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This study examines employee perceptions of the firm's brand orientation and internal branding efforts, as well as the benefits (outcome factors) of internal branding, to determine the extent to which employees understand and internalize these concepts, ultimately resulting in brand performance.

**Methodology:** The study was conducted in a manufacturing B2B firm setting, utilizing a survey administered online via a link included in an email invitation sent to 600 employees. A total of 220 complete surveys were collected and analyzed.

**Findings:** The results indicate that all internal branding factors are positively and significantly correlated. Internal branding determinants significantly predict brand performance, brand orientation, and internal branding. Additionally, some demographic variables influence employee perceptions of internal branding factors.

**Results:** The benefits/outcome factors of internal branding, drawn from the literature, include brand commitment, brand citizenship behavior, brand allegiance, and employee recognition/reward. These factors were found to have a significant impact on brand performance.

**Authenticity:** This study is one of the pioneering investigations conducted in the manufacturing sector to explore brand orientation and internal branding from employees' perspectives, offering valuable insights for both academic research and managerial practices.

**Keywords:** Internal Branding, Brand Orientation, Internal Branding Factors

**JEL Codes:** M3, M1

# Marka Oryantasyonunun İçsel Markalaşma Faktörleri ile İlişkisi: B2B Üretim Bağlamında Çalışan Perspektifi

## ÖZ

**Amaç:** Bu çalışma, çalışanların firmanın marka yönelimi ve içsel markalaşma çabalarına ilişkin algılarını ve içsel markalaşmanın faydalarını (sonuç faktörlerini) inceleyerek, çalışanların bu kavramları ne ölçüde anladıklarını ve içselleştirdiklerini, bunun sonucunda da marka performansına olan etkilerini belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

**Yöntem:** Araştırma, bir B2B üretim firmasında gerçekleştirilmiş ve anket, çalışanlara e-posta yoluyla gönderilen bir bağlantı aracılığıyla çevrimiçi olarak uygulanmıştır. Toplamda 600 çalışana ulaşılan anketlerden 220'si eksiksiz bir şekilde doldurulmuş ve analize dahil edilmiştir.

**Bulgular:** Sonuçlar, içsel markalaşma faktörlerinin tamamının pozitif ve anlamlı bir şekilde ilişkili olduğunu göstermektedir. İçsel markalaşma belirleyicileri, marka performansını, marka yönelimini ve içsel

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markalaşmayı anlamlı bir şekilde tahmin etmektedir. Ayrıca, bazı demografik değişkenlerin çalışanların içsel markalaşma faktörlerine yönelik algılarını etkilediği görülmüştür.

**Sonuçlar:** Literatürde tanımlanan içsel markalaşma faydaları/sonuç faktörleri; marka bağlılığı, marka vatandaşlık davranışı, marka sadakati ve çalışan tanınması/ödüllendirilmesi olarak belirlenmiştir. Bu faktörlerin, marka performansı üzerinde önemli bir etkisi olduğu tespit edilmiştir.

**Özgünlük:** Bu çalışma, üretim sektöründe, çalışanların perspektifinden marka yönelimi ve içsel markalaşmayı inceleyen öncü araştırmalardan biri olup, akademik ve yönetsel uygulamalara değerli katkılar sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İçsel Markalaşma, Marka Yönelimi, İçsel Markalaşma Faktörleri

**JEL Sınıflandırması:** M3, M1

## 1. Introduction

Businesses use their brands to identify and differentiate themselves from competing brands. A strong brand can provide a significant competitive advantage in the global economy (Iyer et al., 2018). Barros-Arrieta and Garcia-Cali (2021) point out that the brand has become a strategic asset for organizations, serving as a source of competitive advantage. According to the American Marketing Association, a brand is a name, term, symbol, or combination of these that identifies the manufacturer or seller of a product (AMA, 2021). Beyond this definition, a brand is the global promise or value proposition that a firm project concerning the experience that the brand delivers (Aydon, 2009; Pinar et al., 2016). As an intangible strategic resource, a brand can represent a distinctive sign of consistency and quality (Erkmen & Hancer, 2015) and expresses much more by including abstract concepts such as excitement, entertainment, empathy, and stimulation (Kapferer, 2012).

In addition, as a management philosophy, brand orientation has received significant attention in branding literature which in places the brand at the center of organizational decision-making processes,

Brand orientation is an inside-out, identity-driven approach that sees the brand as the hub for an organization and its strategy (Urde et al., 2013). Brand orientation asserts that the primary objective of an organization is to protect and advocate its brand values and identity while performing organizational activities, including satisfying customers' requirements (Urde, 1994, 1999). In this regard, brand orientation represents the core values and brand promises that guide the organization's efforts, and in turn, those core values and brand promises are converted into extended customer values (Urde et al., 2013; 15). Iyer et al., (2018) state that managers of brand-oriented organizations would be willing to contribute efforts and resources to promote the brand internally to employees because these managers recognize the positive implications for the successful implemen-

tation of brand orientation in the long term. This suggests that the stronger a firm's brand orientation the easier it may be to implement internal branding.

Traditionally, branding strategies have focused on external stakeholders, as evidenced by a greater interest of researchers and managers (Devasagayam et al., 2010; Hytti et al., 2015; Kang, 2016; Wagner & Peters, 2009). Recently, however, the importance of employees as internal customers has been recognized, which led to the realization of the need to promote the brand internally (Devasagayam et al., 2010; Kang, 2016; Sheikh & Lim, 2015) for creating a strong brand and brand equity. Therefore, in addition to focusing on external stakeholders (i.e., customers) to communicate the brand promise with external branding, Anisimova and Mavondo (2010) suggest that brand management must also have an internal focus/orientation to promote the brand internally to employees using internal branding to help them understand the brand values and become brand promoters. In this regard, internal branding is defined as the management tool for ensuring that employees have a shared understanding of the desired brand image and values, such that they are able and willing to reflect this image to other stakeholders through their behavior (Ragheb et al., 2018). This indicates that internal branding provides employees with a clear direction to effectively deliver the meaning and values of the brand to external customers (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018; Sandbacka et al., 2013).

Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) state that internal branding directly influences the extent to which employees perform their role in fulfilling the brand promise and their attitudes toward the brand, which in turn, affects employee performance. Internal branding offers certain benefits to the organizations such as brand commitment, brand citizenship, (i.e., Burmann & König, 2011; King & Grace, 2010, King et al., 2012), brand allegiance (King et al., 2012), recognizing/rewarding employees (Iglesias & Saleem, 2015; Piehler, 2018), and brand performance (Casidy, 2014a, 2014b). In this study, we named them as the outcome factors of internal branding. Because employees can reinforce and even create a brand image for the products and organization (Miles & Mangold, 2004), it is essential to understand brand orientation and internal branding from the employee perspective.

Given the important role employees play in the success of a company's brand orientation, the overall objective of this study is to examine the employees' per-

ceptions of brand orientation, internal branding, and the benefits (outcome factors) of internal branding which include brand commitment, brand citizenship behavior, brand allegiance, employee recognition/rewarding. The study aims to determine to what extent these concepts are understood, accepted, and internalized by employees to live the brand that contributes to brand and business performance. Employees in manufacturing must understand and internalize the brand values and brand promise as they produce the products to deliver the brand promise advocated by the management. That is why understanding the perceptions of the employees of a manufacturing firm in the B2B environment producing quality products to deliver the brand promise is as critical as those of the employees in the B2C environment who deliver service to customers. Therefore, this study measures and assesses employees' perception of brand orientation and internal branding in a commercial wood and furniture manufacturing company.

The importance of the internal brand orientation of the company is traditionally confirmed by the services branding literature (e.g., King & Grace, 2005; King & Grace, 2010; Tosti & Stotz, 2001; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006), as the brand promise is delivered by personnel in their interactions at each touch points. Only a few studies examined brand orientation and internal branding in the B2B context, (non-service settings). For example, emphasizing the importance of internal branding in the industrial market, Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010) offer evidence regarding the impact of brand orientation on internal branding. A study by Baumgarth (2010) designed and tested a model for the internal anchorage of a business-to-business brand via corporate brand orientation. Reijonen et al., (2015) examined the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and brand orientation in industrial small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and found a positive effect of entrepreneurial orientation on business growth. Zhang et al. (2016) explored how brand orientation affects brand equity via internal branding for industrial service companies and found that a company with a high level of brand orientation will actively communicate its brand to customers and implement internal branding among employees. Moreover, Zhang et al. (2016) assert that the impact of brand orientation on brand equity is still not clear, and the active roles of multiple stakeholders in co-creating brand equity are largely neglected in business-to-business (B2B) branding literature. Understanding the perceptions of manufacturing employees is as important as those of the frontline employees because the manufacturing employees' perceptions of management's

brand orientation may significantly impact their motivation, quality of products, and performance, in turn, company's success. Therefore, this study is conducted in the manufacturing setting to fill this void by examining brand orientation, internal branding and its benefits/effects from the employees' perspectives. This study is one of the pioneer studies to examine brand orientation and internal branding from the employees' perspective in the B2B manufacturing setting.

## **2. Background**

Brand management is the process of developing and promoting the brand through strategic marketing efforts to achieve exchanges and realize expected benefits (Aydon, 2009) with the expectation of creating a strong brand. Barros-Arrieta & Garcia-Cali (2021) state that brand management involves not only external actions but also an internal orientation that seeks to promote the brand among employees. They suggest that managers must consider internal branding as a key process of their brand management strategy that successfully complements and supports all external brand efforts. Moreover, Barros-Arrieta & Garcia-Cali (2021) invite organizations to adopt an internal market orientation, because employees are key players in brand management. They suggest that managers must simultaneously adopt brand orientation and internal branding since the employees play a critical role in successfully implementing the brand orientation with internal branding programs resulting in a desired brand and organizational performance.

Based on a review of the literature, Barros-Arrieta & Garcia-Cali (2021) identified the positive effects (outcomes) of internal branding on employees as brand understanding, brand identification, brand commitment, brand loyalty, and brand citizenship behaviors. This suggests that brand orientation must be successfully implemented via internal branding to achieve these positive effects internally and their consequences in meeting customer expectations externally. The next section presents brand orientation, internal branding, and the benefits or outcomes of internal branding.

### **2.1. Brand Orientation**

Brand orientation, as reflected in a brand's identity (Urde, 1999), involves a deliberate and systematic brand management approach, which requires long-term planning (Baumgarth, 2010; Gromark & Melin, 2011; Urde, 1994; Wong

& Merrilees, 2007). Urde (1999,107) defines brand orientation as “an approach in which the process of the organization revolves around creation, development, and protection of brand identity in an ongoing interaction with target customers to achieve lasting competitive advantages in the form of brands”. This definition suggests that brand orientation is the degree to which a firm considers the brand and brand management as a critical factor to their success. Consistent with this view, Zhang et al. (2016) point out that brand-oriented organizations are expected not only to fulfill customer needs but also to build a strategic meaning to their brands.

Research indicates that perceived brand orientation by employees is positively linked to their behavior and response toward the brand and organization. For example, a study by Mulyanegara (2011a) found that perceived brand orientation was positively related to the perceived benefits of church attendees and increased church participation. Baumgarth (2010) argues that if managers and their staff at all levels do not “live” the brand, developing successful brand management will be difficult, if not impossible. This emphasizes the critical role of personnel in the internal implementation of brand orientation and branding concepts. Wallace et al. (2013) point out the importance of internal brand adoption and the relevant critical role of brand values in brand-supporting behaviors from front-line employees and supporting staff. Natarajan et al. (2017) also found that internal branding influence employees’ knowledge, commitment, and image of the brand, which also significantly influences employees’ brand endorsement in both countries. These studies suggest that effective and efficient internal branding practices are essential for the successful implementation of brand orientation to create a competitive advantage for the organization.

## **2.2. Internal Branding**

Internal branding emerges in the marketing literature as a concept to promote the brand internally to ensure that employees properly deliver the brand promise to external stakeholders (Foster et al., 2010). In this regard, King and Grace (2012) state that employees are particularly important in brand management, especially in service industries. This is because employees deliver the functional and emotional values of the brand as they interact with customers; in this process, they strongly influence what customers perceive about the brand and the organization (Aydon, 2009; Cheung et al., 2014; Du Preez and Bendixen,

2019; Zhang et al., 2016). To deliver the brand promise as advocated by brand orientation, however, employees must have a clear understanding of the brand values and brand promise (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018; Murillo & King, 2019). This is accomplished with internal brand management or internal branding, where employees can acquire the needed skills and knowledge required to represent the brand (King & Grace 2010).

The implication is that if employees do not understand the brand values and brand promise, they will not be able to deliver the brand promise communicated to customers through external branding strategies (Erkmen and Hancer, 2015). Therefore, through effective implementation of internal branding, employees must understand the brand and develop favorable attitudes toward the brand (Anisimova and Mavondo, 2010). Messages transmitted to employees about the brand are as important as those communicated to external customers (Anisimova and Mavondo, 2010; Pinar et al., 2016). When employees internalize the meanings and values of the brand, they will be able to deliver the brand promise to external customers (Punjaisri et al., 2009b). For this reason, internal branding focuses on aligning employees with brand values to create a workforce committed to delivering what the brand promises, and ultimately to generate a positive impact on the brand externally that creates a strong brand and brand equity.

Although academic research on brand orientation and internal branding is generally carried out in the service field, several studies also examine these concepts in the B2B context. A study by Baumgarth and Schmidt (2010) indicates that internal branding has recently emerged as an important issue in industrial markets. The findings of their study offer evidence for the powerful impact of a brand-oriented corporate culture on internal brand equity and demonstrated its relationship to external brand equity in B2B settings. In a study, Baumgarth (2010) demonstrates the positive influence of brand orientation on the market and economic performance, but smaller business-to-business companies exhibit lower levels of brand orientation than their larger counterparts, to their strategic disadvantage. Other research by Reijonen et al., (2015) found that entrepreneurial orientation has a positive effect on business growth in emerging markets, whereas brand orientation has an adverse effect. They point out that there are differences between B2B firms and B2C firms operating in emerging markets and between B2B firms operating in emerging markets and developed markets. Zhang et al. (2016) show that in industrial B2B services context, a com-

pany with a high level of brand orientation will both actively communicate its brand to customers and implement internal branding among employees, such that internal branding enhances the willingness and skills of service employees so that they can provide customers with excellent service experience. These prior studies, albeit limited, demonstrate that brand orientation and internal branding are relevant in the B2B settings, as in the services context, to be examined their impact on brand performance and business performance, and ultimately on brand equity, as such brand equity is more important for tangible goods than for services.” (Krishnan & Hartline 2001). This is because employees’ understanding, accepting, and internalizing brand values and brand promise is just as important for product quality as it is for service quality in delivering brand promise for brand performance and brand equity. Therefore, the findings of this study would contribute to our understanding of the role and influence of brand orientation and internal branding for business performance in the manufacturing (B2B) context.

### **2.3. Benefits of Internal Branding**

Prior studies point out the benefits of internal branding (Cheung et al., 2014; Coleman et al., 2015; Erkmen & Hancer, 2015; Poulis & Wisker, 2016; Sang & Swinney, 2012). For example, a study by Punjaisri et al. (2009a) found that internal branding has a positive effect on brand identity, brand commitment, and brand loyalty/allegiance, which is reflected by financial performance. In this regard, Sabir et al. (2021) state that internal branding creates positive changes in employee performance, which indirectly affects brand performance and market performance (Tuominen et al., 2016). According to Punjaisri and Wilson (2007), internal branding influences the brand attitudes of the employees regarding brand identity, brand commitment, brand loyalty/allegiance, and ultimately the brand behavior of employees and determines the way they deliver the brand experience. Moreover, the study by Du Preez et al. (2017) showed that internal branding influences brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviors, as well as job satisfaction and intention to stay in the organization. In a different study, Piehler et al. (2016) confirmed the influence of internal branding on brand citizenship behavior, which also identified brand understanding, brand identification, and brand commitment as benefits of internal branding.

The review of the extant literature identifies the aforementioned internal branding benefits of brand commitment, brand citizenship behavior, brand alle-



giance, and employee recognition/reward, each of which is discussed next. Concerning these benefits/effects, brand commitment is defined as an employee's psychological attachment to the brand and the degree to which it moderates the employees' willingness to behave in a brand-consistent way (King & Grace, 2010). Brand citizenship behavior is one of the main objectives of internal branding (King & Grace, 2012; Piehler et al., 2016; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011), which is defined as "all employee behaviors that are consistent with the brand identity and brand promise such that together they strengthen the brand" (Piehler et al., 2016, 15).

Prior research also indicates that brand reward systems for employees are considered an important component of internal branding management, where rewarding employees is essential for their brand-consistent behavior that positively affects delivering the brand promise (Iglesias & Saleem, 2015; Piehler, 2018) and enhancing their brand allegiance. Employee brand allegiance is defined by King et al. (2012) as the future intention of employees to remain with the organization/brand. Finally, brand performance is related to the success of a brand within the market that includes brand equity elements of brand awareness, strong reputation, and desired image among its target market (Cui et al., 2014; Wong & Merrilees, 2008). Research by Iyer et al. (2018) shows that internal branding is viewed as a facilitator for brand orientation that ultimately impacts brand performance. Following the studies by Tuominen et al. (2016), Wong & Merrilees (2008) and Iyer et al. (2018), this study uses brand performance as an outcome of brand orientation and internal branding and the above-identified measures to examine existence of the extent of perceived brand orientation and internal branding in a manufacturing company.

## 2.4. Research Objectives and Hypothesis

In the branding literature, it appears that most prior studies about internal branding are conducted in the context of service businesses (Dhiman & Arora, 2020; Miles & Mangold, 2005; Rouzi & Wang, 2021; Sabir et al., 2021). Although internal branding is also important for manufacturing businesses, there are only a few studies that examined internal branding in the B2B context (i.e., Baumgarth, 2010; Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010; Reijonen et al., 2015). Also, brand orientation, internal branding, and the benefits of internal branding could be understood and accepted differently by employees due to differences in their demographic characteristics. Any differences resulting from employee

demographics could adversely affect the successful implementation of the brand orientation, internal branding and their expected benefits and outcomes. Moreover, these concepts must be understood, accepted, and internalized by employees at all levels, regardless of white colored and blue colored, for their successful implementation. Given that it is important to have a consistent understanding and acceptance of these branding factors, the study examines if the perceptions of these factors are impacted by employee characteristics.

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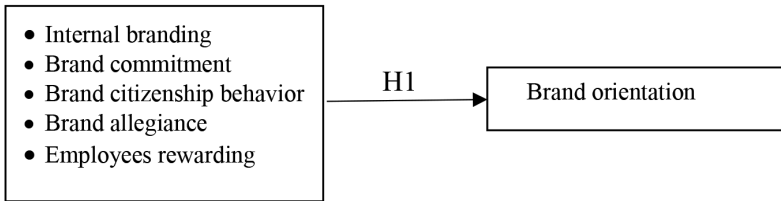
Based on the extant literature presented above, the potential benefits of brand orientation and internal branding include brand commitment, brand citizenship, brand allegiance, rewarding and recognizing employees, and brand performance. Using the above-identified measures and as presented in Figures 1A – 1C, this study intends to examine the employees' perceptions of their internalized brand orientation and internal branding, and the relationships of internal branding benefits as the independent variables with brand orientation, internal branding, and brand performance as the dependent variables, and determine if the internal branding factors are impacted by respondent demographics in the B2B context. The specific objectives of the research are as the following:

- RQ1:** To examine the employee perceptions of internal branding factors as a measure of branding success.
- RQ2:** To investigate the relationships of internal branding benefit with brand performance, brand orientation, and internal branding as perceived by employees, where employees are also critical in B2B as employees produce the product to deliver the brand promise.
- RQ3:** To examine if the internal branding factors are influenced or differed by respondent (employee) demographics of 3a) gender, 3b) completing an orientation and/or training when they started, 3c) age, 3d) education, 3e) job position, and 3f) receiving continuing education.

In addressing the RQs, various analyses will be conducted to examine the relationships between brand orientation, internal branding, its benefits, and brand performance from the employees' perspectives, and test hypotheses for each of

the proposed relationships. Moreover, brand orientation is a critical factor for the success of an organization (Urde, 1999), where brand-oriented organizations are expected to fulfill customer needs and build a strategic meaning to their brands (Zhang et al., 2016). Therefore, an analysis will be conducted to identify the factors that contribute to employees' brand orientation acceptance **or** internalization. This will allow us to determine if managers and employees at all levels understand the brand values to "live" the brand, as a requirement for successful brand management (Baumgarth, 2010). The following hypothesis is tested using the variables presented in Figure 1A:

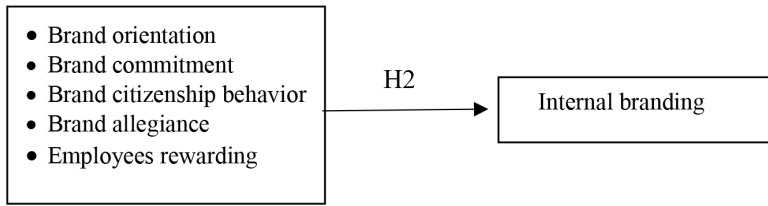
H1: Internal branding, brand commitment, brand citizenship behavior, brand allegiance, and employee reward positively influence the success of brand orientation.



**Figure 1A: Factors Influencing Brand Orientation**

In addition, internal branding efforts influence employees' commitment, and image of the brand, which also significantly influences employees' brand endorsement (Natarajan et al., 2017), which offers a clear direction to employees to effectively deliver brand values (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018; Sandbacka et al., 2013). This suggests that internal branding provides positive benefits of brand commitment, brand citizenship, (i.e., Barros-Arrieta & Garcia-Cali, 2021; Burmann & König, 2011; King & Grace, 2010, King et al., 2012), brand allegiance (King et al., 2012), recognizing/ rewarding employees (Iglesias & Saleem, 2015; Piehler, 2018). Because these benefits are indicators of internal branding, the study aims to identify the factors that predict the success of internal branding. The following hypothesis is tested using the variables presented in Figure 1B:

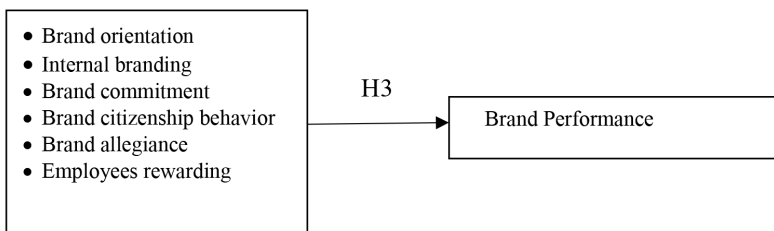
H2: Brand commitment, brand citizenship behavior, brand allegiance, and employee reward positively influence internal branding.



**Figure 1B: Factors Influencing Internal Branding**

In addition, because brand orientation is positively linked to customer behavior and their behavior toward the brand (Mulyanegara, 2011a, 2011b), and internal branding influences brand performance (Casidy, 2014a, 2014b, Iyer et al., 2018), an analysis was conducted to identify the factors that are associated with brand performance. The following hypothesis is tested using the variables presented in Figure 1C.

H3: Brand orientation, internal branding, brand commitment, brand citizenship behavior, brand allegiance, and employee reward positively influence brand performance.



**Figure 1C: Factors Influencing Brand Performance**

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Measurements

To accomplish the research objectives, a survey instrument was prepared from relevant literature to measure employee perceptions of the factors included in the study. Specifically, the measures for brand orientation are adopted from Baumgarth & Schmidt (2010), Ekebas-Turedi et al. (2018), & Santos-Vijande et

al. (2013), internal branding, brand commitment, brand citizenship from Burmann & König (2011), Burman & Zeplin (2005), King & Grace (2010), King et al. (2012), Ekebas-Turedi et al. (2018), and Thomson et al. (1999), brand allegiance from King et al. (2012), internal branding from Zhang et al. (2016), brand performance from Casidy (2014a), Casidy (2014b), Iyer et al. (2018), and Ekebas-Turedi et al. (2018). Since the scale measures were used in service businesses, the survey questions were modified for the manufacturing setting. Employee recognition was developed by the authors, which showed high internal consistency and reliability, as evidenced by Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .948. Each factor is measured with multiple items using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. In addition, because the scale measures were originally developed in English, the survey instrument was translated into Turkish, which is the language of the employees working at the manufacturing company located in Turkey. After the accuracy of the translation was verified by all of the authors, the Turkish version was back translated into English as recommended by Ball et al. (2002) to ensure the meaning was not lost.

Several pretests were conducted to improve the clarity, meaning, and understanding of the survey. The initial pretesting to improve the meaning and clarity of the items was conducted with several academicians who were knowledgeable on scale development and branding. After improving the statements based on the feedback received, the revised survey was pretested with 30 employees of the company in Türkiye, where the final survey was conducted. The pretest helped to clarify the wording of the survey questions and modify and/or eliminate some of the scale items due to low factor loadings. The revisions improved the face validity and internal reliability of the factors used in the main study (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005). After this scale purification process, the survey included brand orientation (4 items), internal branding (10 items), brand commitment (6 items), brand citizenship behavior (5 items), brand allegiance (4 items), employee recognition (4 items), and brand performance (3 items). Appendix A presents final scale measures used for the study. The survey also included several demographic questions including gender, age, education, job position, and years at the company, as well as completing an orientation and/or training when started and receiving continuing education.

### **3.2. Data Collection**

The final survey was administered online through a link included in an email invitation distributed to 600 employees of a B2B company in Turkey operating in the wood processing industry that provides materials to companies in the furniture business. The employees who were used for pilot testing were excluded from the mailing list. All surveys were anonymous and no personal information was collected. Upon completion of the surveys, employees were directed to another online site where they entered their contact information, without being linked to the main survey. Surveys were conducted over three weeks, with two follow-up reminders. A total of 220 employee surveys were completed, with a 36.7% response rate.

### **3.3. Results**

Respondents profile in Table 1 shows that 87.7% of personnel are male and 12.3% are female., About 44% of personnel (76.3%) are between 26-45 years old. Most of the employees (55.5%) have a high school education, followed by college education (16.8%) and junior college (15.5%). As for personnel, over half of respondents (51.4%) are in production, followed by management (24.1%), and staff (16.8%). Results show that 28.2% of the respondents have been working for 4-9 years, followed by 19.5% for 10-15 years, 14.1% for 21-26 years, and 13.2% for 16-20 years. Results show that 81.7 of the respondents received an orientation when started their job, and 18.3% did not. About 62% stated they would like to have continued education, 9.5 stated no, and 28.2% stated sometimes.

**Table 1. Respondents' Profile**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Male	193	87.7	Production	113	51.4
Female	27	12.3	Management	53	24.1
<b>Total</b>	220	100	Marketing and Sales	12	5.5
<b>Age</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percent</b>
15-25	19	8.6	Upper management	5	2.3
26-35	98	44.5	<b>Total</b>	220	100
36-45	70	31.8	<b>Years at this company</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percent</b>
46 and older	33	15	< 1 year	11	5
<b>Total</b>	220	100	1-3 years	24	10.9
<b>Education</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>	4-9 years	62	28.2
Middle school or less	20	9.1	10-15 years	43	19.5
High school	122	55.5	16-20 years	29	13.2
junior college	34	15.5	21-26 years	31	14.1
College	37	16.8	26 and more years	20	9.8
Graduate school	7	3.2	<b>Total</b>	220	100
<b>Total</b>	220	100	<b>Continuing Education</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Orientation Received</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>	Yes	137	62.3
Yes	179	81.7	No	21	9.5
No	40	18.3	Sometimes	62	28.2
Total	219	100	<b>Total</b>	220	100.0

### Internal Branding Factors

RO1 aimed to determine the perceptions of internal branding factors as a measure of branding success. To address the RO1, first, a reliability analysis was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the factors. The results in Table 2 show all Cronbach's alpha values are 0.91 or higher, which is above the 0.70 recommended level (Hair et al., 2010). The items used to measure each of these factors showed a high level of consistency. In addition, the results of factor analysis for each factor show that AVE (Average Variance Extracted) ranged from a low of 83.80% to a high of 92.70%. These findings indicate that there is a high reliability of the items used to measure each of the factors (Hair et al., 2010).

To determine the respondents' perceptions of these factors, the summated mean value for each factor is calculated and presented in Table 2. The mean values range from a low of 3.40 for employee recognition to a high of 4.29 for brand orientation on the 5-point Likert scale. The mean values for brand citizenship behavior, brand performance, and brand commitment are 4.00 or above. The results of the one-sample t-test show that all the mean values are significantly higher than the middle value of 3 (neutral) ( $p < .01$ ). These findings suggest that the company is effective in its brand orientation efforts, which shows that the respondents have a high understanding and acceptance of brand orientation. The results show that respondents have the lowest perception of employee recognition with a mean of 3.40, indicating that employees seem to perceive they are not highly recognized in this company. This finding offers an important implication in implementing the brand orientation and internal branding that will be discussed later in the paper.

**Table 2. Mean Values, Average Variance Explained, and Reliability Coefficient of Branding Factors**

Internal Branding Factors	Mean	St. Dev.	AVE (%)	Cronbach's Alpha
Brand Orientation	4.29	1.02	92.70	0.974
Brand Citizenship Behavior	4.23	1.00	89.10	0.969
Brand Performance	4.22	1.06	90.90	0.950
Brand Commitment	4.17	1.06	84.90	0.964
Internal Branding	4.00	1.01	83.80	0.978
Brand Allegiance	3.99	1.11	86.60	0.914
Employee Recognition	3.40	1.37	90.80	0.948

**Scale:** 1=Strongly disagree & 5=Strongly agree;  $p < .001$  for all Means > 3.0

### Internal Branding Factors and Brand Performance

RO2 aimed to examine the relationships between internal branding factors and brand performance. In addressing RO2, first, a correlation analysis was conducted, and the results are presented in Table 3. The results show that all correlations between brand orientation, internal branding, and the benefits/effects of internal branding that include brand commitment, brand citizenship behavior,



brand allegiance, employee recognition/rewarding, and brand performance are statistically significant at  $p < .01$  level. The significant correlations indicate the existence of strong relationships among these factors, suggesting that they all are interrelated and have synergistic relationships in creating a strong brand-oriented organization due to successful internal branding. Table 3 shows that brand performance is highly and significantly correlated ( $p < .01$ ) with brand orientation ( $r = .842$ ), and internal branding ( $r = .871$ ). Brand performance is also highly correlated ( $p < .01$ ) with the internal branding benefits factors including brand citizenship behavior ( $r = .875$ ), brand commitment ( $r = .685$ ), and brand allegiance ( $r = .605$ ), and employee recognition ( $r = .580$ ). Interestingly, employee recognition is not as highly correlated with brand allegiance ( $r = .442$ ), brand commitment ( $r = .432$ ), and brand orientation ( $r = .526$ ) but is more highly correlated with internal branding, brand citizenship behavior, and brand performance. This finding could have interesting managerial implications.

**Table 3. Correlations Coefficients Among Internal Branding Factors**

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Brand performance						
2. Brand allegiance	.605**					
3. Brand commitment	.685**	.851**				
4. Brandcitizen behavior	.875**	.634**	.736**			
5. Brand orientation	.842**	.659**	.731**	.910**		
6. Internal branding	.871**	.626**	.697**	.892**	.850**	
7. Employee recognition	.580**	.442**	.432**	.574**	.526**	.680**

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A regression analysis was conducted to determine which of the internal branding benefit factors including brand commitment, brand citizenship behavior, brand allegiance, and employee recognition/reward are relevant in predicting brand performance, brand orientation, and internal branding. As shown in Table 3, because all branding factors are highly or relatively highly correlated, a stepwise regression analysis was used to identify useful sub-sets of the predictors. The results of stepwise regression analysis for brand orientation in Part A of Table 4 show that the regression model is significant ( $F(3, 216) = 388.0, p < .001$ ) and adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.841 indicates that the independent variables explain 84.1 % of

the variance in the dependent variable of brand orientation. The standardized beta coefficients are significant ( $p < .01$ ) and are positive, where brand citizenship behavior is relevant in predicting an extent of brand orientation ( $\beta = .70$ ), followed by internal branding ( $\beta = .15$ ) and brand allegiance ( $\beta = .12$ ). The findings support H1 such that, of the factors in Figure 1A, brand citizenship behavior, internal branding and brand allegiance were significant in predicting brand orientation.

The results of the stepwise regression analysis for internal branding in Part B of Table 4 show that the model is significant ( $F(3, 216) = 396.7, p < .001$ ) with adjusted  $R^2$  of .844, indicating that 84.4% of the variance is explained by these independent variables. The standardized beta coefficients are all significant ( $p < .01$ ) and are positive, where brand citizenship behavior is the most relevant ( $\beta = 0.55$ ) in predicting internal branding, followed by employee recognition ( $\beta = 0.25$ ) and brand orientation ( $\beta = .21$ ). The implications of these findings for successful branding will be discussed later. Hypothesis H2 is supported that, of the factors in Figure 1B, brand citizenship behavior, employee recognition, and brand orientation were significant in predicting internal branding.

Finally, the results of the stepwise regression analysis for brand performance in Part C of Table 4 shows that the regression model is significant ( $F(3, 216) = 308.2, p < .001$ ) with adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.808, indicating that the independent variables explain 80.8% of the variance in the dependent variable of brand performance. The standardized beta ( $\beta$ ) coefficients are significant ( $p < .01$ ) and are positive, where internal branding ( $\beta = .41$ ) is the most important factor in explaining the brand performance, followed by brand citizenship behavior ( $\beta = .35$ ) and brand orientation ( $\beta = .18$ ). The findings support H3 such that, of the factors in Figure 1C, internal branding, brand citizenship behavior, and brand orientation were significant in predicting brand performance.

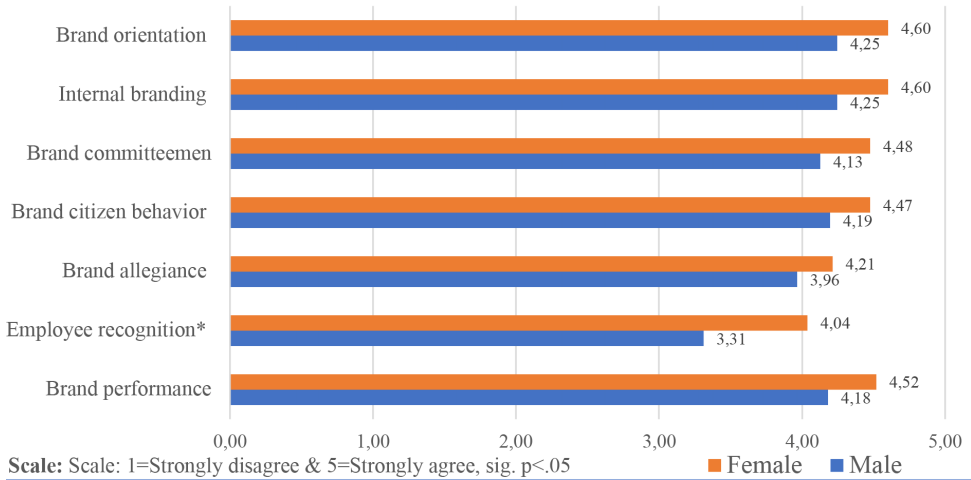
**Table 4. Results of Regression Analysis**

<b>Part a: Brand Orientation</b>	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	Sig.
(Constant)	0.21	0.12		1.67	0.096
Brand citizenship behavior	0.72	0.06	<b>0.70</b>	11.44	<b>0.000</b>
Brand allegiance	0.11	0.03	<b>0.12</b>	3.48	<b>0.001</b>
Internal branding	0.15	0.06	<b>0.15</b>	2.46	<b>0.015</b>
R = .918, R-square = .843, Adj. R-square= .841, F (3, 216) =388.0, p<.001					
<b>Part b: Internal Branding</b>	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	Sig.
(Constant)	0.09	0.12		0.72	0.473
Brand citizenship behavior	0.56	0.07	<b>0.55</b>	8.31	<b>0.000</b>
Employee resonation	0.18	0.02	<b>0.25</b>	7.65	<b>0.000</b>
Brand orientation	0.21	0.06	<b>0.21</b>	3.33	<b>0.001</b>
R = .920, R-square = .846, Adj. R-square= .84, F (3, 216) =396.7, p<.001					
<b>Part c: Brand Performance</b>	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	Sig.
(Constant)	0.15	0.14		1.05	0.297
Internal branding	0.43	0.07	<b>0.41</b>	6.11	<b>0.000</b>
Brand citizenship behavior	0.37	0.09	<b>0.35</b>	4.11	<b>0.000</b>
Brand orientation	0.18	0.08	<b>0.18</b>	2.41	<b>0.017</b>
R = .900, R-square = .811, Adj. R-square= .808, F (3, 216) =308.2, p<.001					

### Effect of Demographic Factors

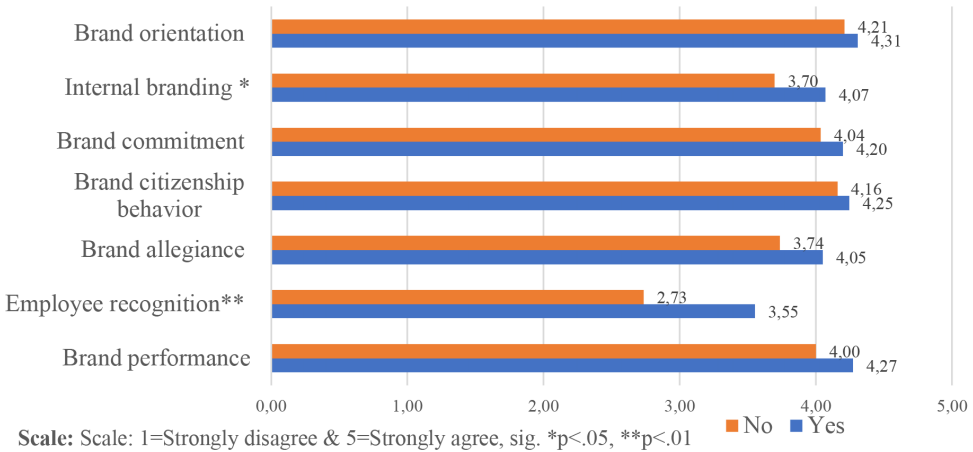
To address the RO3, several analyses were conducted to determine if the branding factors included in the study are impacted by respondent demographics of 3a) gender, 3b) having completed orientation and training when started working at the company, 3c) age, 3d) education, 3e) job position, and 3f) receiving continuing education. To determine if these factors are impacted by gender (RO3a), a two-sample independent t-test was conducted. The results in Figure 2 show a significant difference between the perceptions of male and female respondents for only employee recognition ( $p < .05$ ). Comparisons show that fe-

male respondents have significantly higher perceptions than male respondents for employee recognition (Mean for female=4.04 vs. male=3.31). The non-significant findings for other comparisons ( $p > .05$ ) indicate that both male and female respondents have similar perceptions regarding these branding factors.



**Figure 2. Comparisons of Internal Branding Factors by Gender**

The comparisons were conducted to determine whether respondents had orientation and training at the start of working at this company (RO3b). The results of two-sample independent t-tests presented in Figure 3 for having or not having an initial orientation indicated significant differences only for internal branding ( $p < .05$ ) and employee recognition ( $p < .01$ ). The comparisons show that respondents who had an orientation and training when they started working have significantly higher perceptions of internal branding (Mean for Yes=4.07 vs. No=3.70) and employee recognition (Mean for Yes=3.55 vs. No=2.73). The non-significant comparisons ( $p > .05$ ) for other factors suggest that whether the respondents had orientation and initial training had any significant effect on respondents' perceptions of these factors such that both groups had similar perceptions.



**Figure 3. Comparisons of Internal Branding Factors by Beginning Orientation & Training (Yes/No)**

In addition, as part of RO3, comparisons were conducted for age (RO3c), education (RO3d), job position (RO3e), and receiving continued training were conducted (RO3f). Since these factors were measured with more than two categories, a one-way ANOVA analysis was used. The comparisons for age (RO3c) and education (RO3d) were not statistically significant ( $p > .05$ ) for all branding factors, indicating that regardless of respondents' age or education levels, they all have similar perceptions of these branding factors. The study presents only significant findings. The analysis of the one-way ANOVA for the job position (RO3e) and receiving continued training (RO3f) were conducted and the significant results are presented in Table 5. The comparisons of the branding factors by job position (RO3e) showed that only brand allegiance was significant ( $p < .05$ ), where managers have significantly higher brand allegiance perceptions than the white color personnel. The non-significant comparisons for manager vs. blue color personnel and white color vs. blue color personnel indicate that they have similar brand allegiance. Because the other branding factors were not significant ( $p > .05$ ), regardless of position, all personnel have similar perceptions of these branding factors.

The results of the one-way ANOVA of branding factors by offering a continued education (RO3f) were significant for brand performance ( $p < .05$ ) and em-

employee recognition ( $p < .01$ ). Post-hoc comparisons for these significant factors show that the employee who says “Yes” to receiving continued education have a significantly higher perception of brand performance ( $p < .05$ ) than those of say “No” to continued education. The non-significant other comparisons ( $p > .05$ ) indicate that they have similar perceptions of brand performance. Also, the significant comparisons for employee recognition show that the employees who say “Yes” to continued training have significantly higher perceived recognition than those employees who stated “No” or “Sometimes” ( $p < .01$ ). The non-significant comparison for “No” vs. “Sometimes” indicates that they have similar perceptions regarding employee recognition. Finally, because the one-way ANOVA results were not significant for other branding factors by these demographics, respondents have similar perceptions of these factors regardless of their position, offering continued training.

**Table 5. One-way ANOVA Comparisons for Branding Factors by Job Position and Continued Education**

<b>Part A: Job position</b>	<b>White color</b>	<b>Blue color</b>	<b>Management</b>	<b>F-sig.</b>	<b>Comparison</b>
Brand allegiance	3.81	3.98	4.55	<b>0.050</b>	3>1*
<b>Part B: Receiving continued education</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>p-sig.</b>	<b>Comparison</b>
Brand performance*	4.36	3.76	4.06	0.020	1>2*
Employee recognition**	3.75	2.52	2.94	0.000	1>2**; 1>3**

**Scale:** Scale: 1=Strongly disagree & 5=Strongly agree, sig. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

### Discussion and Limitations

This study aimed to examine the personnel’s perceptions of brand orientation, internal branding, and the benefits/effects of internal branding including brand commitment, brand citizenship behavior, brand allegiance, and employee recognition/rewarding to determine to what extent these concepts are understood and internalized by employees and their effects on brand performance. It also examines which of the internal branding benefit factors significantly predict brand performance, brand orientation, and internal branding as well as whether internal branding factors are impacted by respondent demographics in a manu-

facturing (B2B) company. The results indicate that the items used for brand orientation, internal branding, and the internal branding benefits factors of brand commitment, brand citizenship behavior, brand allegiance, employee recognition, and brand performance are reliable measures of these factors (constructs) as evidenced by high internal reliability coefficients.

The mean values of the factors suggest that the company has a high level of acceptance of brand orientation and internal branding indicating that employees seem to have a good understanding and internalization of the company's brand values. The results are also supported by high mean values for the internal branding benefit factors of brand commitment, brand citizenship behavior, and brand allegiance, as suggested by prior research (i.e., Cheung et al. 2014; Coleman et al. 2015; Erkmen & Hancer, 2015; Poulis & Wisker, 2016; Sang & Swinney 2012), resulting in a high level of perceived brand performance, which is consistent with prior the literature (Mulyanegara, 2010; 2011a, 2011b).

One area that may need attention is employee recognition, where employees perceive that their work is not highly recognized and valued. Given that employees play an important role in implementing brand orientation and internal branding for brand performance (i.e., Barros-Arrieta & Garcia-Cali, 2021; Iyer et al., 2018; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007), it is advised that management should pay attention to improve on the employee recognition. The items included in measuring these factors could provide valuable insights into the specific areas that may need attention.

The results of correlation analysis revealed that the factors included in the study are significantly and highly correlated. The high significant correlations indicate that the factors are interrelated, indicating that they must work together collectively to have a successful brand orientation; thus, a successful brand. The findings confirm that these factors contribute to the success of the brand individually as well as collectively with their synergistic interactions and relationships. This notion is supported by the high correlations between brand performance and all other factors, showing their potential impact in a holistic manner on brand performance. In addition, the results of the regression analysis for brand performance, brand orientation, and internal branding, each as the dependent variable show that a) internal branding, brand citizenship behavior, and brand orientation are significant predictors of brand performance, b) brand citizenship

behavior, internal branding and brand allegiance are significant predictors of brand orientation, and c) brand citizenship behavior, employee recognition, and brand orientation are significant predictors of internal branding. It is interesting to note that because brand citizenship behavior is common in all three regression models, this shows the important role of brand citizenship behavior on the success of brand orientation, internal branding, and brand performance. The finding is consistent with the findings of the prior studies regarding internal branding and its benefits/effects (i.e., King & Grace, 2012; Piehler et al., 2016; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011) and brand performance (i.e., Sabir et al., 2021; Tuominen, et al., 2016). The strong correlations among these factors also confirm the synergistic relationships among these factors and their collective importance for the success of the brands, which suggests a holistic approach in analyzing their relationships and impact on business performance.

Analysis to determine the impact of demographic factors on branding factors also offered interesting findings. The results show that perceptions of the factors included in the study do not seem to differ by all demographic characteristics of the respondents with a few exceptions. The findings show that personnel at this company have similar perceptions of brand orientation, internal branding, its benefits, and brand performance. Moreover, given the high mean values, it would be safe to state that the personnel, regardless of their demographics, seem to understand and accept the company's brand values, which are essential for brand success. However, because there are some differences, the management must take necessary actions to improve on the factors that show significant differences. For example, male employees have a significantly lower perception of employee recognition than female personnel, which may impact their motivation for performing their job.

The study also shows that the respondents who received the orientation and training at the start of working perceived brand performance and employee recognition significantly higher than those who did not. This shows the importance of orientation program to achieve higher perceptions of employee recognition. Therefore, the company should make the orientation and initial training a standard practice. Also, the employees who received continued education and employee recognition had a significantly higher perception of brand performance than those who did not, which accentuates the importance of offering continuing training and recognition of high-performing employees. Finally, because



managers have significantly higher brand allegiance than both white color and blue color personnel, the company may develop strategies to increase the brand allegiance of both white and blue color personnel for the long-term success of its brand and company.

These findings could have several managerial implications. First, while the relevance of the internal brand orientation of the company has been confirmed mostly in the services branding literature (e.g., King & Grace 2005; 2010; Tosti & Stotz, 2001; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006), the findings of this study show the importance of brand orientation and internal branding in the manufacturing context, as found in a few prior B2B studies (i.e., Baumgarth, 2010; Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010; Reijonen et al, 2015; Wong & Merrilees, 2008). Therefore, we recommend that the B2B companies should have a strong brand orientation and internal branding to achieve better performance.

Second, the significant correlations between brand orientation, internal branding, its benefits/effects, and brand orientation suggest that these factors are interrelated. According to Urde (2013), brand orientation represents core values and promise to guide the organization's efforts in converting them into extended customer values, which emphasizes the importance of internal branding in delivering the brand promise, and it is also easier to implement the internal branding in brand-oriented organizations (Iyer et al., 2012). Consistent with the above notion, the findings suggest that brand orientation and internal branding and its benefits should be considered together collectively for synergistic relationships to achieve the desired brand performance. Therefore, as Barros-Arrieta and Garcia-Cali (2021) suggested, these factors must be simultaneously adopted in a holistic manner for the successful implementation of brand orientation. This point is also supported by the results of regression analysis to identify the relevant factors for brand performance, brand orientation, and internal branding. Finally, the results regarding the effects of demographic factors indicate that, with a few exceptions, employees seem to have similar perceptions of brand orientation and internal branding and its benefits. This confirms the importance of company-wide acceptance of brand orientation and internal branding for brand success. However, the findings of a few significant differences identified for some demographic factors should improve the success of the company.

The findings provided insights into brand orientation and internal branding, their relationships, and the effect of demographic factors on brand orientation

and internal branding in the manufacturing context. However, the study has some limitations. Therefore, the results should be interpreted within these limitations. The first limitation is that the study was conducted in one manufacturing company. Conducting the same study in similar manufacturing companies could increase the generalizability of the findings for the factors used in the study. The second limitation is the limited number of responses. More responses could make the results more reliable. The third limitation is that the study was conducted in one county (Türkiye). The same study could be undertaken in a different country to examine brand orientation and internal branding in a cross-cultural setting.

Despite these limitations, the findings of the study showed the importance and relevance of brand orientation, internal branding, and its benefits/outcomes in B2B context, and the key role of the employees in successfully implementing the strategies. We hope and recommend that similar study would be conducted with more B2B companies and different industries. The findings of such studies would further emphasize the importance of brand orientation and internal branding for the performance of B2B companies and industries.

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**Appendix A: The factors and their items included in the survey.**

<b>Brand endorsement (King, Grace, &amp; Funk 2012)</b>
I say positive things about the organization (brand) I work for to others
I would recommend the organization (brand) I work for to someone who seeks my advice
I enjoy talking about the organization (brand) I work for with others
I talk positively about the organization (brand) I work for to others
<b>Brand allegiance (King, Grace, &amp; Funk 2012)</b>
I plan to be with the organization (brand) I work for, for a while a long time
I plan to be with the organization (brand) I work for at least 5 years from now
I would turn down an offer from another organization (brand) if it came tomorrow
I plan to stay with the organization (brand) I work for
<b>Brand Consistent Brand behavior (King, Grace, &amp; Funk 2012)</b>
I demonstrate behaviors that are consistent with the brand promise of the organization I work for
I consider the impact on my organization's brand before communicating or taking an action in any situation
I am always interested to learn about my organization's brand and what it means to me in my role
<b>Brand role clarity (King, Grace, &amp; Funk 2012)</b>
Information about my organization's brand improved my basic understanding of my job
I understand what is expected of me because I have information about my organization's brand
I know how to make specific decisions for my job because I have information about my organization's brand
<b>Brand Commitment (King, Grace, &amp; Funk 2012)</b>
I care about the success of this company the organization I work for
My values are similar to those of this company the organization I work for.
I am willing to put extra effort beyond what is expected of me to make this company successful
I feel like my personality fits this company
I am committed to delivering the experience this company promises to our customers
I am proud of working for this company
<b>Affective Brand Commitment (Pinar Family Express, 20 )</b>
I feel like this company's problems are my own
I feel emotionally attached to this company
I feel like a part of the company's family



I feel affection for this company
<b>Brand Citizenship Behavior (Pinar Family Express, 20)</b>
I demonstrate behaviors that are consistent with the image of this company
I show extra initiative to ensure that my behavior remains consistent with this company's image
I pass on my knowledge about this company to new employees
I feel that I "live and breathe" this company brand
<b>Brand performance (Pinar Family Express, 20)</b>
In comparison to competitors, this company is more well-known
In comparison to competitors, this company has a better image
In comparison to competitors, this company is more trustworthy
<b>Customer performance (Pinar Family Express, 2020)</b>
In comparison to competitors, our customers are more satisfied
In comparison to competitors, our customers are more loyal
In comparison to competitors, this company offers better value to customers for their money
In comparison to competitors, this company provides its customers with a greater level of communication
In comparison to competitors, this company has fewer complaints.
<b>Brand Orientation (Pinar Family Express, 20)</b>
Building a strong brand is one of the objectives of this company's management
Effective management of this company's brand is important for achieving its competitive advantage
Brand decisions are an important element in this company's business strategy
This company's brand is one of its most valuable assets
<b>Internal Branding (ZHANG et al., 2016)</b>
Employees are proud of our brand's success and take bad news about the brand as a personal setback
Employees feel personally obligated to their superiors to work even harder for our brand
Most employees are aware of the goals we try to achieve through the brand
Most employees are well-informed about the values represented by the brand
Most employees understand how our customers can benefit from our brand
Most employees are aware that our brand significantly contributes to the overall success of our company
Employees' attachment to this brand is based first and foremost on the similarity of their value to those represented by the brand

The values represented by our brand are more than just words; they influence employees' day-to-day behavior
Employees believe that our brand accounts considerably for the loyalty of our customers
<b>Employee recognition (Developed by authors)</b>
Successes in my work are noticed and appreciated promptly.
Regardless of the results, my effort is noticed and appreciated.
Rewarding and appreciation practices at this company are fair.