

THE IMPACT OF TALENT MANAGEMENT ON BRAND ADVOCACY: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF INTERNAL BRANDING

UTJECAJ UPRAVLJANJA TALENTIMA NA ZAGOVARANJE MARKE: MEDIJACIJSKA ULOGA INTERNE IZGRADNJE MARKE



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Abstract

Purpose – This study examines the impact of internal branding and talent management practices on employees' brand advocacy, as well as the mediating role of internal branding.

Design/Methodology/Approach – A judgmental sampling method was employed, with data collected from 414 employees across various sectors in Turkey. The survey was conducted online using Google Forms. Data analysis was performed using SPSS 24 and Smart PLS 4.0.

Findings and Implications – The results indicate that talent management practices influence brand advocacy both directly and indirectly through internal branding. Additionally, internal branding has a significant impact on brand advocacy. All hypotheses proposed in the study were supported.

Limitations – This study has several limitations. First, it was conducted solely in Turkey. Additionally, no specific brand names were included. Lastly, the data collection process was subject to time constraints.

Sažetak

Svrha Studija istražuje utjecaj interne izgradnje marke i praksi upravljanja talentima na zagovaranje marke među zaposlenicima, kao i medijacijsku ulogu interne izgradnje marke.

Metodološki pristup U istraživanju je korišten prosudbeni uzorak, a podaci su prikupljeni od 414 zaposlenika iz različitih sektora u Turskoj. Istraživanje je provedeno putem interneta korištenjem Google obrazaca. Analiza podataka provedena je pomoću programa SPSS 24 i Smart PLS 4.0.

Rezultati i implikacije Rezultati pokazuju da prakse upravljanja talentima utječu na zagovaranje marke izravno i neizravno putem interne izgradnje marke. Nadalje, interna izgradnja marke ima značajan utjecaj na zagovaranje marke. Sve hipoteze predložene u istraživanju su potvrđene.

Ograničenja Istraživanje ima nekoliko ograničenja. Prvo, provedeno je isključivo u Turskoj. Osim toga, nisu uključeni konkretni nazivi maraka. Konačno, proces pri-

Originality – To the best of the authors' knowledge, no prior research has examined these three concepts together. This study offers valuable insights into employee behavior from both marketing and human resources perspectives and provides a foundation for future strategic developments.

Keywords: internal branding, talent management, brand advocacy

kupljanja podataka bio je podložan vremenskim ograničenjima.

Doprinos Prema saznanjima autora, nijedno prethodno istraživanje nije ispitivalo ova tri koncepta zajedno. Istraživanje pruža vrijedne uvide u ponašanje zaposlenika iz perspektive marketinga i upravljanja ljudskim resursima te postavlja temelj za budući strateški razvoj.

Ključne riječi: interna izgradnja marke, upravljanje talentima, zagovaranje marke

1. INTRODUCTION

Employees play a crucial role in the branding process of businesses. Those who embrace the institution's culture, mission, vision, image, and goals through internal branding and actively promote these qualities outside the organization can become brand advocates.

According to an article published in *Forbes*, a study conducted with more than 30,000 participants in 2012 revealed that employees were perceived to be more trustworthy than managers, and this was expressed as an opportunity for brands to make their employees strong brand advocates (Walter, 2013). Employee brand advocacy is particularly valuable for attracting top talent to the organization. When employees genuinely believe in and adopt the mission, vision, and goals of the enterprise, internal branding is reinforced, enhancing both brand advocacy and the organization's ability to attract external talent. Given the competitive landscape of talent acquisition, positioning employees as brand advocates can provide a significant advantage in the ongoing "talent wars" (Ilyas et al., 2018, p. 363). Internal branding, as a product of these talent wars, ensures that employees internalize and defend the company's vision, mission, and values (Zinkstein, 2018).

Recognizing the importance of human capital for innovation and sustainable success, brands are engaged in a talent war to attract the best employees (Patwa et al., 2018, p. 143). In today's highly competitive business environment, organizations are increasingly leveraging internal branding as a strategy to retain and manage talent while also attracting new talent (Näppä et al., 2014, p. 133). Through internal branding, employees serve as behavioral role models, reinforcing brand advocacy (Foster et al., 2010, p. 404). Research suggests that employees who act as brand advocates contribute significantly to both attracting and retaining top talent (Thelen, 2020, pp. 4-8).

This research study is aimed at examining the mediating role of internal branding in the relationship between talent management practices and brand advocacy. Given the interconnected nature of these concepts, it is positioned as a pioneering study in the field. By exploring these relationships, it seeks to fill a gap in the current literature. The study begins with a review of the existing literature on internal branding, talent management practices, and brand advocacy. Based on this review, hypotheses are developed within the conceptual framework, followed by an explanation of the research methodology, and findings. It concludes with discussions, implications, directions for future research and conclusions.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Ability motivation opportunity and reciprocity theories were used in the study.

2.1. Ability Motivation Opportunity Theory

The Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) Theory was first introduced by Bailey in 1993 (Appelbaum et al., 2000). According to this theory, employees are more likely to work willingly when they possess the necessary abilities and skills, receive appropriate motivation, satisfaction, and incentives, and are provided with the right opportunities by their employers (Appelbaum et al., 2000). Hughes (2007) further emphasized that motivation influences behavior, with this relationship being shaped by employees' abilities and the opportunities available to them.

Certain HR practices are linked to AMO, and talent management practices are one of these HR practices (Bos-Nehles et al., 2023). According to the AMO theory, when businesses provide employees with opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge, employees make significant contributions to individual and organizational goals and also show greater participation

(Tunio et al., 2023). It is also possible for employees who perceive that the company invests in them and offers various opportunities through talent management practices to exhibit behaviors such as brand advocacy for the company. Internal branding, which can be strengthened with talent management practices, can provide motivation and talent to employees and enable them to exhibit brand-related and extra-role behaviors (Prashar & Maity, 2024). In addition, it has been stated that internal branding motivates employees to promote and strengthen the brand (Kulkarni, 2022). Thus, it is possible for employees to assume the role of brand advocate through internal branding. Employees becoming brand advocates is also an opportunity for the company. In this study, a research model is theorized as follows: talent management practices as ability, internal branding as motivation, and brand advocacy as both opportunity and behavior. In the research model, in which internal branding is taken as a mediating variable, it is suggested that employee talent management practices and internal branding efforts may result in brand advocacy behaviors and opportunities.

2.2. Reciprocity Theory

A theory of reciprocity proposed by Falk and Fischbacher (2000) is a theory based on a social psychology concept that tries to explain the ways in which individuals respond positively to positive behaviors and negatively to negative behaviors. Based on the principle of reciprocity, this theory covers the general principles of exchange and fair behavior in social interactions between individuals. It is important for the reciprocity relationship in the work environment to be balanced on both sides, as the behaviors that emerge will be decisive in supporting harmony and cooperation in a group or society. From the point of view of the study, it can be considered a counter-behavior that the employee has a fair reaction or a sense of gratitude exhibited towards the business, even if it is not aimed against the individual, in return for the talent

management practices and internal branding efforts of the businesses for the employees.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Talent management and practices

Talent management is defined as a dynamic, multifaceted, and systematic process for identifying, discovering, attracting, developing, and retaining talent (Yıldız & Esmer, 2023, p. 94). Talent management is seen as an integrated and holistic approach, as well as strategies and systems created to ensure the effectiveness and productivity of the organization (Maurya, et al., 2021, pp. 43-44).

Effective talent management focuses on activating the existing talent within an organization and implementing a future-oriented, strategic plan for key personnel (Davies & Davies, 2010, p. 424). To enhance this capability, various collaborative applications can be implemented at all levels of the organization. A study by Jyoti and Roni (2014) identified four key components of talent management practices: talent identification, talent development, succession planning, and talent retention. Similarly, McCauley and Wakefield (2006, p. 4) emphasized the importance of workforce planning, recruitment, training, employee development, talent assessment, and performance appraisal in ensuring organizational continuity. Additionally, several other factors are critical for retaining top talent, including job security, workplace relationships, recognition, contribution, competitive salary, flexibility, learning opportunities, responsibility, and innovation (Alves et al., 2020, p. 5). Organizations that successfully engage employees in their processes through effective talent management practices will gain a significant competitive advantage in the future (Yapp, 2009, p. 5).

3.2. Internal branding

Internal branding is “the process of training employees and aligning them with all jobs and

processes so that they can consistently deliver the brand promise" (Semmans, 2004, as cited in Kahraman & Ay, 2015, p. 343). The concept of internal branding is related to the brand image in the eyes of employees and potential candidates, which creates an image in the minds of potential talent that an organization is a great place to work (Maurya & Agarwal, 2018, p. 313).

Internal branding has recently emerged as a strategic tool for building and maintaining strong brands; it is considered a possible way to achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Baca & Reshidi, 2025). Internal branding efforts are important for internalizing the organization's values and vision in employees and managing human resources. Therefore, today, organizations focus not only on customer-focused branding but also on branding based on employees, emphasizing internal branding that seeks to effectively communicate the organization's strategic vision, values, culture, and identity to its employees (Park & Kim, 2024).

Implementing internal branding involves three key stages: effectively communicating the brand and its essence to employees, convincing them of its meaning and value, and integrating it into daily business activities (Gonewa & Ikechukwu, 2014, p. 33). From a human resources management perspective, internal branding is linked to recruitment, training, and remuneration practices. By fostering internal branding, organizations encourage employees to invest more in the brand (Näppä et al., 2014, p. 136), with one such investment being their role as brand advocates.

A crucial aspect of internal branding is ensuring that employees develop behaviors aligned with brand values through training programs, ultimately fostering a brand-oriented mindset. Employees who are committed to organizational goals receive brand training, which further strengthens their role as brand advocates (Chong & Kong, 2007; Mahnert & Torres, 2007). Additionally, internal branding can enhance employee identification with the corporate brand

by reinforcing their sense of belonging to a specific group (Foster et al., 2010, p. 402).

3.3. Brand advocacy

Brand advocacy is widely recognized as a marketing strategy that provides significant benefits to brands today (Choi et al., 2021, p. 328). It refers to individuals who are highly committed to a brand, who actively support it and strongly recommend it to others. Considered a form of relational value behavior (Melancon et al., 2011, p. 347), brand advocacy is characterized by a strong, active interest in promoting and defending the brand (Wilk et al., 2020, pp. 415–416).

Brand advocacy behaviors include positive word-of-mouth communication, brand loyalty, brand trust, participation in brand communities, brand identification, and defending the brand against negative information (Bozkurt, 2021, pp. 39–44). Advocacy arises when consumers and employees embrace and share an organization's core values, making it a key aspect of relational behavior (Wilk et al., 2020, p. 417). Employee advocacy, which is defined as a behavioral structure in which the product or brand is voluntarily promoted or defended by an employee (Thelen, 2020, p. 2), can also be explained as a kind of brand advocacy.

A study by the Forbes Agency Council (2017) proposed 17 strategies for transforming customers and employees into brand advocates. In the context of this study, strategies such as educating employees about the brand, fostering a sense of belonging, and aligning talent management practices with employees' individual values are particularly relevant to internal branding efforts.

In this study, brand advocacy is considered as advocacy for potential employees. For employees, brand advocacy means that they voluntarily support the values and reputation of the organization and share this with internal and external stakeholders (Mosley, 2014). In this context, it would be useful to touch on employer branding. When looking at the employer brand,

it refers to the perceptions of the brand and the place where the brand is desired to work for current and potential employees, ensuring that the brand is different from other brands (Vardarlier, 2017, p. 630). Employer branding is considered important in terms of attracting high-quality potential candidates to the brand, especially within the framework of talent management. Employees have been said to be capable of making significant contributions to the brand promise in terms of employer branding and internal branding, so they can convey the brand better to other stakeholders (Kucherov et al., 2022). It is explained that the employer brand helps employees act as brand advocates, especially by providing corporate loyalty, and that employees who act as brand advocates contribute to the acquisition of talent (Jaffari et al., 2024). In this way, employees will actually act as brand advocates and will be able to help attract high-quality potential candidates to the organization through employer branding and internal branding.

4. HYPHOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

According to the resource-based approach, a key theory in strategic human resource management, an organization's human resources are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable, providing a sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Organizations that adopt this perspective can better recognize, evaluate, and appreciate their employees, viewing them as essential talent. In this context, research suggests that employee advocacy tends to be more prevalent in organizations that perceive and treat their employees as valuable assets (Akgündüz & Şanlı, 2017).

Effective talent management practices increase employee commitment and satisfaction, contributing positively to their becoming brand advocates (King et al., 2012). It is expected that the companies providing support and investing in the development of their talent will be adopted

by the employees, identified with the brand, and thus the talent will become the advocates of the brand both inside and outside the organization. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₁: Talent management practices have a positive effect on brand advocacy.

Internal branding enables all employees in the organization to see their own values, make sense of their work and take a broader view (Latvala, 2017). Together with internal marketing practices, it is aimed at creating individual motivation in the organization as well as strategies based on the development of personal abilities (Varey & Levis, 1999). Especially in terms of human resources management, various organizational tools and intermediaries such as internal communication, training support, award-recognition, leadership practices, sustainability factors, and recruitment practices are recommended (MacLavery et al., 2007). An organization with effective talent management practices selects and trains its employees in line with the brand's core promise and culture. This process supports internal branding, allowing employees to develop a strong emotional bond with the brand (Sirianni et al., 2013). Gapp and Merrilees (2006) noted that internal branding enables employees to understand and embrace the brand, which, when supported by talent management processes, increases long-term employee loyalty. When evaluated in this context, it can be suggested that talent management practices will positively contribute to the internal branding of employees. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₂: Talent management practices have a positive effect on internal branding.

Brand advocacy, which helps to shape a brand's reputation, reveals the employee-brand relationship. Internal branding focuses on how the organization can develop employee behaviors that are compatible with brand values (Schepers & Nijssen, 2018). The focus of internal branding

can be seen as the employee advocacy of the brand as a behavior pattern.

When an individual accepts brand values as her/his own, he/she can be expected to be intrinsically motivated to act in a way that will benefit the brand's interests (Morhart et al., 2009). It is stated that internal branding can enable employees to display brand-focused behaviors and with these behaviors, employees can act as employer brand ambassadors (Kuchеров et al., 2022). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₃: Internal branding has a positive effect on brand advocacy.

Internal branding is also important for improving employee development by creating brand advocacy for employees (Patwa et al., 2018). Talent management practices are a tool for improving employee development. According to Bali and Dixit (2016), building a strong brand image can support the talent management function in the organization (Bali & Dixit, 2016) and develop brand advocates within the organization. A study shows that one of the important contributions of advocacy is to improve the image of the employer; therefore, it is associated with attracting more talented people to a position in the organization (Latvala, 2017, p. 54). While talent management practices help employees embrace the organization's brand identity, internal branding strategies can turn employees into advocates and ambassadors of the brand (King & Grace, 2009). The talent management efforts implemented in the business will support the internal branding of the employees, and in exchange for these efforts, the employees will be able to advocate for the brand.

Effective internal branding efforts contribute to the development of a strong brand structure, which in turn increases employee loyalty. When talent management strategies are aligned with the brand's values and purpose, internal branding will be ensured, resulting in the employees who are passionate about and always defend the brand. These employees are expected to

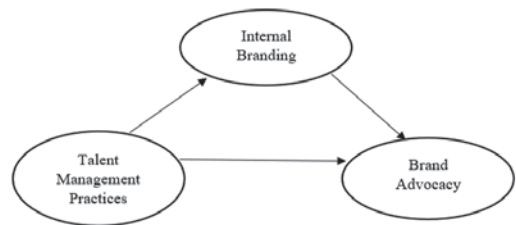
actively support, promote, and defend the brand. In summary, internal branding and talent management practices can be said to be factors that guide brand advocacy and positively affect the success of the brand. Considering the relationships between these concepts, the next hypothesis is as follows:

H₄: Internal branding has a mediating role in the effect of talent management practices on brand advocacy.

5. METHODOLOGY

Based on the reviewed literature, we propose the following research concept of this study, as shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1: Conceptual model of the study



Source: Authors' own research.

5.1. Sample and data collection

The judgmental sampling method was used in this study to select participants from among employees working in different sectors and companies. The reason for choosing that method was that it allows the researcher to determine potential participants in the research. Because the participants included in the study were selected from among the employees working in companies that implement talent management and internal branding practices in the company they work for, data was collected from employees working in different sectors.

There are several reasons why the study was conducted in the Turkish universe. Turkey has a young and dynamic population. Employees

prefer to work in companies that are compatible with career development and personal values and that invest in them. For this reason, organizations turn to talent management practices and try to become employer brands to attract such workforce. In addition, especially in big cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir, competition for talented employees is high and talent management practices play a critical role in retaining these employees. In addition, according to Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, Turkey is a collectivist society (Hofstede, 1980). Internal branding can be considered a common phenomenon that occurs in collectivist cultures because employees feel that they are part of the company brand, like family members. Finally, due to high employee turnover rates in Turkey, practices such as talent management and internal branding play a critical role in reducing turnover rates and are increasingly gaining importance.

An online questionnaire was used as a data collection tool in the study. The survey form, designed using Google Forms, was composed of two parts. While the demographic characteristics of the respondents featured in the first section, the expressions of the scales used in the model were included in the second section. A total of 414 out of the 435 people who were sent a survey link to whose corporate email addresses responded, resulting in a response rate of about 95%. Outlier and missing value analyses revealed that all 414 of the 435 responses were acceptable for further analysis.

The G*power analysis designed by Faul et al. (2009) was used to calculate the sample size taking an alpha level of 0.05, a medium effect size of 0.15, and a high power of 0.95 to produce a minimum of 108. Since the number of participants in the study was 414, this number is satisfactory for the sample size.

The means of early and late collected responses were evaluated using an independent sample t-test. There appeared to be no significant variation ($p>0.05$) between the mean of early response and the mean of late response,

indicating that nonresponse bias was not an issue (Bryman & Cramer, 2011).

5.2. Participants

The demographic characteristics of the participants in the study are shown in Table 1. Out of a total of 414 respondents, 56.3% are men and 40% are women. As to their age, 34.5% of the participants are 25-34 years old, 32.6% belong to the 35-44 range, with the majority of them being in the 25-44 age range. Their education level shows 39.6% of respondents to have a master's degree, with 27.1% holding a bachelor's degree, and 33.3% a doctorate. Almost two-thirds (63.8%) of the study participants are married and 36.2% of them are single. Some 37% have worked for the current institution for 1-5 years, and 27.3% for 6-10 years. In terms of their total work experience, 25.4% of the participants have 21 or more years of experience, 18.1% have 1-5 years, and 18.1% have 6-10 years of work experience. Further details are provided in Table 1.

5.3. Measures

The items used in the dimensions were developed from the literature review. A 21-item scale adapted by Demir (2015) was used for talent management practices. The Internal branding scale was adapted from a study by Aurand et al. (2005) and Punjaisri et al. (2009) and includes 13 items. The measurement items related to brand advocacy were adapted from Bozkurt (2021) to be included in the scale consisting of 8 items. All items were collected on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5).

Before its launch, the survey was piloted by four professors who are academics in marketing, brand, and human resource management to ensure the consistency, clarity, and simplicity of the scales. No corrections were made to the survey.

5.4. Data analysis and results

SPSS 24 and Smart PLS 4.0 programs were used to analyze data. While the SPSS software was

TABLE 1: Demographic Characteristics

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Work experience in current company	Frequency	Percent
Male	233	56.3	Less than 1 year	71	17.1
Female	181	43.7	1-5 years	153	37.0
Total	414	100.0	6-10 years	113	27.3
Age	Frequency	Percent	11-15 years	24	5.8
18-24	46	11.1	16-20 years	41	9.9
25-34	143	34.5	21+ years	12	2.9
35-44	135	32.6	Total	414	100.0
45-54	90	21.7	Total work experience	Frequency	Percent
Total	414	100.0	Less than 1 year	23	5.6
Education	Frequency	Percent	1-5 years	75	18.1
PhD	138	33.3	6-10 years	75	18.1
Bachelor	112	27.1	11-15 years	65	15.7
Master	164	39.6	16-20 years	71	17.1
Total	414	100.0	21+ years	105	25.4
Marital status	Frequency	Percent	Total	414	100.0
Single	150	36.2			
Married	264	63.8			
Total	414	100.0			

Source: Authors' own research.

used for frequency analysis and outlier analysis of the data set, the Smart PLS program was used to evaluate the measurement model and the structural model based on PLS-SEM (partial least square- structural equation modeling).

The reason for using the Smart PLS program in the study is that Smart PLS-SEM requires less information about data distributions, sample sizes, and measurement scales (Hair et al., 2019). Smart PLS-SEM is deemed suitable for analyzing the research models that are proposed as incorporating related theories and empirical data (Sobaih & Elshaer, 2022). As Leguina (2015) suggested, in the two-stage approach in the Smart PLS program, the measurement model is first used to examine the scale construct reliability

and validity, after which the structural model is analyzed to test the hypotheses.

Measurement model assessment

The measurement model is an analysis that starts with the evaluation of factor loadings by performing CFA to determine the relationships between factors and goes on to evaluate the reliability and validity of the factors (Hair et al., 2019).

Although the variables in the research study were sub-dimensional, second-order confirmatory factor analysis was applied because they were used as one-dimensional for research purposes. To verify the factor structures, the factor loadings of each statement should be above

TABLE 2: Reliability and validity test results

	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Talent Management Practices (PTM)	21	0.921	0.956	0.689
Internal Branding (IB)	13	0.932	0.938	0.642
Brand Advocacy (BA)	8	0.941	0.912	0.756

Source: Authors' own research.

TABLE 3: Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis results

	Mean	Std. deviation	IB	BA	PTM
IB	3.6200	0.87156	0.801		
BA	3.8179	1.10187	.759**	0.869	
PTM	3.1747	0.97145	.784**	.630**	0.793

Source: Authors' own research.

the critical value of 0.70, which can be considered significant (Hair et al., 2017). In our study, factor loadings of all statements were above this value. Therefore, no statement needed to be removed from the analysis.

The authors also examined using Harman's single-factor approach to assess common method variance (CMV). As a result of the analysis, the total variation explained by a single component for each factor structure was calculated at 38.9% (less than 50%) at most, so they concluded that CMV was not in question in the study (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In addition, the fit for the normal distribution was also calculated. If the skewness and kurtosis coefficient values are between -1.5 and +1.5, the data set should be considered to have a normal distribution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). It was determined that these values were in the appropriate range for the scales used in the study, so it was accepted that the data conformed to the normal distribution.

Different statistics are used to calculate the reliability and validity of the measurement model. These statistics include "internal consistency reliability" (Cronbach's alpha), "composite

reliability" (CR), "convergent validity", and "discriminant validity" (Hair et al., 2017).

As can be seen in Table 2, the results for Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values show both reliability indicators as being above the required threshold of 0.70. The reliability coefficients of the statements in the talent management practices scale ranged from 0.731 to 0.901, those in the internal branding scale ranged from 0.803 to 0.922, and those in the brand advocacy scale ranged from 0.831 to 0.929. The fact that the AVE values are greater than or equal to the recommended threshold value of 0.50 indicates that convergent validity is provided (Hair et al., 2017). All AVE values obtained from the study were 0.50 and above.

According to Bagozzi et al. (1991), discriminant validity is the square root of the AVE value and is obtained when structural measures are not highly correlated with each other. As can be seen in Table, italicized and bold diagonal AVE values are greater than the correlation coefficient between variables, indicating high discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2017). In addition, when the correlation coefficients between the variables are examined, according to the criteria

TABLE 4: Direct and indirect effect coefficients for hypothesis tests

Hypothesis	Standardized β	Standard deviation	t-value	p-value	R ²
PTM→BA	0.103	0.058	1.759	0.004	0.579
PTM→IB	0.704	0.027	25.649	0.000	0.614
IB→BA	0.869	0.065	13.628	0.000	0.736
PTM→IB→BA	0.612	0.043	16.472	0.000	

Source: Authors’ own research.

put forward by Cohen (1992), the relationship between internal branding and brand advocacy is of high level and positive ($r=0.759$; $p<0.01$), the relationship between internal branding and talent management practices is of high level and positive ($r=0.784$; $p<0.01$) and finally relationship between talent management practices and brand advocacy is of medium level and positive ($r=0.630$; $p<0.01$).

Structural model assessment

In the second step of the two-stage approach in the Smart PLS 4 program, the structural model evaluation was made. Hypotheses were tested at this stage. In the study, a bootstrap method was implemented in Smart PLS 4 to determine the path coefficient and its associated t-value for both the direct and mediating relationships.

Several criteria were used to assess the structural/path model in PLS-SEM analysis. One of these criteria is the R² value, which expresses the power of exogenous variables to predict the change in endogenous variables. Chin (1998) suggested an R² value of at least 0.10 to ensure a satisfactory model fit. R² values calculated for all endogenous variables in the model are greater than 0.10, as can be seen in Table 4. The path analysis results of the proposed model are presented in this table.

Smart PLS results showed that all direct effects were statistically positive and significant. Talent management practices have an effect on both brand advocacy ($\beta= 0.103$, $p<0.01$) and on internal branding ($\beta= 0.704$, $p<0.001$). Also,

internal branding has an effect on brand advocacy ($\beta=0.869$, $p<0.001$). Therefore, hypotheses H₁, H₂, and H₃ were supported. As talent management practices increase, so do brand advocacy and internal branding. Talent management practices have a greater effect on internal branding. Increasing internal branding increases employee brand advocacy. Compared to talent management, internal branding has a much greater effect on brand advocacy.

In addition, as illustrated in Table 4, the findings confirmed that internal branding mediates (indirect effect) the effect of talent management practices on brand advocacy ($\beta=0.612$, $p<0.001$). Since the direct effects of predictors were significant, we can conclude that the mediators partially mediated the relationship between predictors and the observed variables. Consequently, the H₄ hypothesis was also accepted. Total effect of talent management practices on brand advocacy along with the mediating effect of internal branding is $\beta=0.715$ ($p<0.001$). These findings show that the effect of talent management practices on brand advocacy increases more with internal branding, and internal branding contributes positively to this relationship.

6. DISCUSSION

Businesses leverage both marketing and human resource approaches when competing to attract talent to the organization. In this respect, supporting marketing activities is always of great importance, especially in retaining and attracting talented employees. In this research

study, which investigates the effects of talent management practices and internal branding on employee brand advocacy, it was concluded that talent management and internal branding positively affect brand advocacy, that internal branding has a mediating role in the effect of talent management practices on brand advocacy, and that brand advocacy will increase if internal branding also exists. At this point, supporting employees as brand advocates with both internal branding and talent management practices, the application of which is considered important for the organization, can be seen as a key factor in terms of both literature and practical applications. The study findings are parallel to those of some studies found in the literature. There are no specific academic studies in the literature stating that talent management practices and internal branding have no effect on brand advocacy or that internal branding does not play a mediating role in this relationship. On the contrary, extant literature generally emphasizes the positive effects of these practices on brand advocacy. As a result of internal branding, "it is aimed to gain behaviors compatible with the external brand among the employees, to encourage brand loyalty and to make the employees the advocates of the brand" (Mahnert & Torres, 2007, as cited in Gökdemir & Sever, 2018, p. 132). In addition, considering the importance of internal branding in terms of employees being brand advocates, it can be said that employees can represent the brand not only in the workplace but also in their non-work relationships (Gökdemir & Sever, 2018, p. 145). Employee advocacy has been found to be related to human capital through practices such as talent acquisition and employee retention (Thelen, 2020, p. 4). King et al. (2012) said that effective talent management practices positively contribute to employees becoming brand advocates by increasing their loyalty and satisfaction. Also, talent management practices have been said to positively support internal branding by ensuring that employees establish a strong

emotional bond with the brand (Sirianni et al., 2013). Gapp and Merrilees (2006) also emphasized that internal branding increases employee loyalty together with talent management practices. Ambler and Barrow (1996) pointed to the fact that employees who internalize the brand with their values and whose behaviors are compatible with the brand will be advocates of the brand. Jacobs (2003) also stated that employees who are committed to the brand through internal branding practices and whose behaviors are compatible with the brand will be advocates of the brand (Jacobs, 2003). Kucherov et al. (2022) also noted that employees can act as brand ambassadors with internal branding. It can be said that the results of the present research study are similar to these findings. In addition to being similar to the study findings in the literature, the fact that internal branding was confirmed to have a mediating role in the effect of talent management practices on employee brand advocacy represents the originality of the study. As per the results of the authors' research, no other study has been found to examine these three concepts together. Therefore, this study provides new insights.

When evaluated in terms of AMO and Reciprocity theory, as supported by the study findings, it can be said that employees are motivated to internally brand themselves in response to the talent management practices they perceive; the fact that they defend the brand in exchange for the investment made in them based on reciprocity theory presents an opportunity for the brand. According to the results of this study, an integrated approach to human resource management together with the marketing approach will lead to an increase in brand advocacy. Given the growing trend of employees to be brand advocates, organizations need to transform their marketing functions by expanding their brand management framework and paying attention to internal branding (Patwa et al., 2018, pp. 147-148).

7. IMPLICATIONS

The study provides the following contributions to managers and practitioners. From the perspective of human resources, the concepts of talent management practices, brand advocacy, and internal branding should be addressed in a supportive manner at the managerial level. Considering the resources of the enterprise, in addition to the financial resources of the enterprise, it is considered important to have sufficient competence and talented personnel in terms of human resources, especially in ensuring long-term competition and efficiency, and to carry out internal branding activities. According to the results of the research, it can be said that the best strategy for a brand seeking to differentiate itself and gain competitive advantage in the sector is to invest in the “employee”, which is the common point of the three basic concepts. The fact that the people-oriented approach of organizations is a very important strategy, especially in terms of retaining talent, goes without saying. It is recommended that institutions take advantage of the practices such as internal branding and talent management to reveal the potential of their human resources. Strengthening the employee’s identification with the organization can be achieved through internal branding. At the same time, a positive image about in-house branding and brand advocacy can be created with talent management practices (Foster et al., 2010). Recruitment practices and brand image announcements within the scope of internal branding will contribute to both internal and external customers. Institutions should help their employees develop their skills through the training provided within the scope of talent management and internal branding practices. Organizations should provide training on when, how, and under what conditions employees will defend the brand by trying to create a brand identity. Brand advocacy can be incorporated into talent pool programs that prepare employees for key positions. In the

performance evaluation process, compliance with brand values based on internal branding can be taken into account.

8. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

In future studies, it is recommended to test new research models with other concepts within the framework of different variables such as employer brand. The aim would be to examine how talent management practices, internal branding efforts, and brand advocacy vary among employees according to their demographic characteristics, work-related sector, experience, etc. The level of brand advocacy can be researched according to the level of application of talent management practices in enterprises. Comparisons can be made between different sectors or between countries.

9. CONCLUSION

This study was aimed at investigating the effects of talent management practices and internal branding on brand advocacy. Another aim of the study is to evaluate the mediating role of internal branding in the effect of talent management practices on brand advocacy. In that sense, all hypotheses put forward in the research were supported by the research results. To summarise the results of the study, internal branding and talent management practices affect brand advocacy. Internal branding partially mediates the effect of talent management practices on brand advocacy. The results of this research study point to the conclusion that having talent management practices contributes to the defence of the brand against external customers. Similarly, according to the results of this study, it can be said that the formation of internal branding perceptions in employees strengthens this relationship.

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