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GOING THE EXTRA MILE SKY HIGH

HOW DO INTERNAL BRANDING, BRAND ATTRACTIVENESS,
AND TEAM WORK ATTRIBUTES RELATE TO CABIN ATTENDANTS'
BRAND PROMISE DELIVERY?

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Abstract

Purpose – Most organisations acknowledge the importance of creating an attractive brand. Internal branding is a widely used instrument for increasing employees' brand commitment with this brand and for aligning the service delivery. However, attributes of the team in which the employees operate may alter the extent to which they are receptive for internal branding efforts, and their perceived attractiveness of the brand. This study explores the relation that team member exchange (TMX) and team atmosphere, in combination with perceived internal branding effectiveness and brand attractiveness, have on employees' brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour.

Design/methodology/approach – Data was collected from 286 cabin attendants of an European airline company by means of an online survey. Hierarchical regressions analysis was utilized to investigate the hypothesised relationships.

Findings – This study empirically validates that airline employees' perceptions of internal branding and brand attractiveness have a positive relation with brand commitment and citizenship behaviour. In addition, team member exchange demonstrated a positive relation with employee's brand citizenship behaviour, and team atmosphere demonstrated a weak positive relation with employee's brand commitment.

Practical implications – This study once more stresses the importance of introducing and maintaining an adequate internal branding programme, to turn airline employees into brand ambassadors. Adding a focus on TMX and team atmosphere within the branding programme is advised for taking the brand promise delivery to a higher level.

Originality/value – This study is the first to empirically investigate the relation that team work attributes, in combination with branding attributes, have with airline employees' brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour.

Keywords - Internal Branding, Brand Attractiveness, Team Member Exchange, Brand Commitment, Brand citizenship Behaviour

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1 Introduction

In this age where social media enables customers to share their service experiences swiftly with organisations and other customers, an isolated incident can damage the image and reputation of an organisation with just one Facebook video or screenshot on Twitter. When a screaming passenger was dragged off an United Airlines plane after refusing to give up his seat, for late incoming crew members on their way to an assignment, footage of the passenger and his bloodied face sparked a massive firestorm against United (Ismail & Abdullah, 2018). When a row of subsequent incidents with employees violating the service standards of the airline caused a major PR disaster, United Airlines learned the hard way that aligning the internal and external brand has become more important than ever.

This process of aligning employee's behaviour with the organization's brand values is known as internal branding (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). The importance of internal branding is widely recognized: it has a positive effect on employee's brand attitudes (Baker, Rapp, Meyer, & Mullins, 2014; Foster, Punjaisri & Cheng, 2010; Papasolomou & Vrontis, 2006; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007), which in turn promotes brand citizenship behaviour (Burmman, Zeplin, & Riley, 2009; Erkmén & Hancer 2014; King & Grace, 2012) resulting in satisfied customers (Chang, Chiang, & Han, 2012). Internal branding may be especially important in the aviation industry, where the customer journey consists of multiple distinct interactions with airline employees. Passengers interact with airline employees when arriving at the airport terminal, during boarding, while being onboard the aircraft, until reaching their destination. The former CEO of Scandinavian airlines Carlzon (1987) called these service interactions between employees and customers 'moments of truth', in which customers form their unique positive or negative impressions of the brand (Papadopoulou, Andreou, Kanellis, & Martakos, 2001). Any brand incongruent employee behaviour throughout this customer journey, influences the brand experience perceived by customers, and undermines the organisation's efforts to create a relationship with the customer (Clemes, Mollenkopf, & Burn, 2000). Hence, to live up to the customer's brand expectations at every service encounter, it is crucial that service employees are well informed about the fundamental brand image and are inspired to deliver it to the customers (King & Grace, 2009). Several authors (e.g. Schultz & De Chernatony, 2002; Xiong, King, & Piehler, 2013) refer to employees who deliver the brand promise as expected by the customers as brand

ambassadors. Employees' brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour are commonly accepted as the attitudinal and behavioural requirements to turn employees into brand ambassadors (e.g. Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2009).

Although the effects of internal branding may seem promising, service organisations only have limited control over the employee-customer interaction, since service employees may not always choose to act in coherence with the desired brand standards (Moser, 2003). There are several explanations for the lack of effect that internal branding has in such cases. Employee skills and organisational support for example, are requirements for brand understanding, brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour (Piehler, Hanisch, & Burmann, 2015). When employees are lacking knowledge or self-efficacy to effectively act according to the brand promise, the internal branding efforts will miss their goal. In a similar vein, when organisations have processes that hinder employees in delivering service as promised by the brand, there will be a mismatch between the promised and the delivered brand values.

But then, besides these organisational and personal factors, researchers are just recently starting to acknowledge the effect that co-workers may have on the brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour of employees in service environments. Punjaisri, Wilson and Evanschitzky (2008) conducted a qualitative case study in the hotel industry in Thailand, to explore the relevant mechanisms involved in the internal branding process, from the viewpoint of the employees. The authors proposed that employees' positive evaluations of their team members could enhance the effect that internal branding has on their brand attitudes and brand promise delivery. When employees feel supported by their team members, and the atmosphere at the workplace is pleasant, they may be more intrinsically motivated to act in coherence with the brand. However, empirical research on this matter is lacking until this date.

Hence, building on previous research from Punjaisri et al. (2008), this study adds to the literature with an empirical investigation of the influence that team members have on employees' brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour. More specific, the effects of team members brand performance, team member exchange and team atmosphere on employees' brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour are being explored. In addition, employees' perceptions of internal branding and brand attractiveness are

considered. This could be in the advantage of managers in ensuring that employees feel emotionally and instrumentally supported by their team members, are committed to the brand and engage in brand citizenship behaviours, to have satisfied customers in return. This leads to the following research question:

What is the relation of internal branding, brand attractiveness, team member brand performance, team member exchange, and team atmosphere with employees' brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour?

The following study consists of six chapters: Chapter two gives background information on the studied concepts and sets the boundaries in the used literature for the research question. Thereafter, the core of this study is presented in a research model. Chapter three describes which methodology is used and how data was obtained. In chapter four, the gathered empirical data and results are presented. In chapter five the findings are critically discussed and recommendations for future research are given, followed by the conclusion in chapter six.

2 Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this chapter is to review the most relevant literature and theories which best suit the research question. First, the necessity of having brand ambassadors in service organisations is explained. Following, the dependent variables, brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour, are defined. Then, the independent variables internal branding, employee brand attractiveness, team member brand performance, team member exchange, and team atmosphere are defined, to explore the influence of these variables. At the end of this chapter a research model is presented which summarizes this studies' research question.

2.1 Employees as brand ambassadors

Since employees are the personification of the brand (De Chernatony, 2002), their attitude and behaviour have a crucial impact on the brand promise delivery (Bernoff & Schadler, 2010; De Chernatony, 1999; Keller, 2003; Vella, Gountas, & Walker, 2009). Hur and Adler (2011) claim that achieving customer satisfaction is only possible when employees' brand delivery performance is consistent with the desired brand image. Successful airlines can create competitive advantage by positioning their brand in the minds of customers through their employees' behaviours (Miles & Mangold, 2005). Having friendly and courteous employees is no longer enough to be distinctive in the competitive aviation market. Nowadays, to stand out as an airline organisation, employees must act as ambassadors for the brand, and personify the brand promise during the actual employee-customer interaction (Schultz & De Chernatony, 2002). Internal branding is widely known as an effective instrument for turning employees into brand ambassadors (Xiong, King, & Piehler, 2013). To measure this concept of being a brand ambassador, this study uses one affective and one behavioural characteristic: employees' brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour, which will be discussed in section 2.2 and section 2.3 subsequently.

However, little attention has been paid in the literature to the role of the team in which airline employees operate, and its relationship with brand commitment and behaviour. Specifically, in the airline industry, where team members work together in a tight space, employee's team members brand performance, team member exchange and the atmosphere within the team could influence their brand commitment and their ability and

motivation to engage in brand citizenship behaviour. Subchapters 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8 handle these team variables and how they relate to brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour.

2.2 Brand commitment

Burmann and Zeplin (2005) used the concept of brand commitment to capture the affective commitment of employees to the brand, which is considered to elicit an enduring desire in employees to maintain a valuable relationship with the brand. The construct of brand commitment as the authors propose it, is similar with organisational commitment.

Organisational commitment is generally defined as a psychological bond between the employee and the internal organisation, and has shown to induce functional extra-role behaviour towards colleagues. Brand commitment however, includes the psychological bond with the external corporate brand and the actual service delivery, and sparks the extra-role behaviour that is directed towards customers and the group of people determining the brand experience (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005). Committed employees are more motivated to exhibit brand citizenship behaviour (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007), have higher levels of customer-orientation (Wallace, De Chernatony & Buil, 2013), positively influence customers' evaluation of the brand interaction, and contribute to higher brand performance and a better overall organisational performance (Gazzoli, Hancer, & Kim, 2013).

Several antecedents of brand commitment have been identified in the literature: compliance, identification, internalisation (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; O'reilly & Chatman, 1986), and brand trust (Erkmen & Hancer, 2015). Compliance with the brand identity captures behaviour that is consistent with the brand identity, and is driven by the desire to gain rewards or to avoid sanctions. It is based on equity theory (Adams & Freedman, 1976), which argues that employees continually try to seek a balance in their efforts and gains, through the organisational incentive system and social control. Commitment based on compliance does not induce extra-role behaviour, however it ensures compliance to rules, which is the foundation for brand citizenship behaviour.

Identification with the brand identity describes the social influence of the brand on the employee, induced by a sense of belonging to the group who determines the brand experience, and a feeling of being intertwined with this group's achievements (Burman &

Zeplin, 2005). This identification is derived from social identity theory (Ashford & Mael, 1989), which posits that a person's identity is comprised from an individual identity, but also a from a social identity from the group classifications he or she belong to. Employees who strongly identify themselves with the brand are more likely to engage in brand citizenship behaviour through a feeling of obligation to the brand. That is, success or failures of the brand group are perceived as one's one. These employees are proud of being a member of the brand and are likely to have a positive word of mouth (Oakes & Turner, 1980). This type of identification can be increased by emphasising the distinctiveness of the brand, through charismatic leadership and a strong group culture with shared rituals and symbols (Burman & Zeplin, 2005).

Brand internalisation refers to the incorporation of brand values into one's self-concept. This self-concept includes an employees' traits, competences, values, and his thoughts and feelings about himself. As people strive for self-continuation, these incorporated brand values form a guideline for employee's brand behaviour, and underpin brand citizenship behaviour. Brand internalization can be enhanced by organisational socialization of new employees, which is driven by informal value communication of colleagues, and formal communication of the organisation.

Erkmen and Hancer (2015) claim that, just as within the context of relational commitment, trust is an important factor to enhance employee's commitment and improve relationships in the context of branding. Their study reveals how employee's brand trust significantly influences brand citizenship behaviours, and functions as a mediator between brand commitment and these behaviours.

However, there is more to discover when trying to understand how employees become committed to the company brand. Punjaisri et al. (2008) conducted a qualitative case study in the hotel industry in Thailand, to explore the relevant mechanisms involved in the internal branding process. Their study demonstrated how internal branding influences employee's delivery of the brand promise. They discovered that internal branding influences employee's sense of belonging to the brand and brand commitment. In addition, they found that employee's positive evaluations of their team members could enhance the effect that internal branding has on their brand commitment. Building on this research, this study proposes that team members' brand behaviour, team member exchange and team

atmosphere positively influences brand commitment, which will be further elaborated in the following sections. First, closely linked to internal branding and brand commitment, the concept of brand citizenship behaviour will be defined.

2.3 Brand citizenship behaviour

The desired outcome of applying internal branding, is brand consistent employee behaviour, which several authors refer to as brand citizenship behaviour (e.g., Erkmen & Hancer 2015; Zeinabadi, 2010). Brand citizenship behaviour consists of all employee behaviours that are in coherence with the brand identity and brand promise and which strengthen the brand (Piehler et al. 2015). Burmann et al. (2009) suggest that 'brand citizenship behaviour could be operationalised in seven dimensions: willingness to help, brand awareness, brand enthusiasm, willingness to accept sacrifices, 'missionary' approach to marketing the brand as well as striving for developing and improving oneself as well as the brand' (p.266).

According to King (2010), it is the employees' brand citizenship behaviours that form the evidence for consumers to evaluate the service. Subsequently, when service employees deliver a consistent brand performance that is in coherence with how the brand is externally advertised, they turn the brand promise into reality (Henkel, Tomczak, & Wentzel, 2007). As such, brand citizenship behaviour strengthens the relationship that customers have with the brand (Burmann et al. 2008). There is a growing body of evidence on the positive relation between employees' reported brand citizenship behaviour and customers' evaluation of the brand performance and customer satisfaction (e.g. Chang, Chiang, & Han, 2012). Kim, Han and Lee (2001) found that consumer's satisfaction with employee's brand performance in the hospitality industry increases customer-brand trust, which in turn improves the consumer-brand relationship quality. Furthermore, Erkmen and Hancer's (2014) study among airline employees and passengers proved how brand supporting behaviours have a positive effect on passengers' relation with the company brand. Thus, service employees first need to perform in line with customer's brand expectations, so that customers trust the brand. Customers who have trust in a brand, are more likely to develop a long-term relationship with the brand (Fournier, 1998).

Previous studies have focused on internal branding (Erkmen & Hancer, 2015), employee skills and organisational support (Piehler et al., 2015) to explain employees'

delivery of the brand promise. The next subchapter defines and elaborates on how internal branding is related to the above-mentioned dependent variables brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour. Maxwell and Knox (2009) reason that for internal branding to be successful, management needs to emphasise the unique and attractive brand features, to motivate employees to live the brand. Subchapter 2.5 gives a theoretical foundation for the concept of brand attractiveness, and how it is related to brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour.

2.4 Internal branding

Because of the intensive level of interaction between customers and employees in the airline industry, employees are crucial for the brand success (Foster et al., 2010). When service employees internalize the brand values, they are more likely to perform in accordance with the brand promise (Berry & Lampo, 2004). Therefore, airlines have started to employ internal branding practices to improve successful delivery of the brand (Appelbaum & Fewster, 2002; Chong, 2007; Miles & Mangold, 2005). Many authors acknowledge how internal branding efforts positively influence employee's brand attitudes and behaviour (e.g. Baker et al., 2014; Foster et al, 2010; Pappasolomou & Vrontis, 2006; Punjaisri, Evanschitzky, & Wilson 2009; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007).

Baker et al. (2014) defined internal branding as brand information and communication given to employees to guide and improve their interactions with customers to meet their brand expectations. Internal branding can be used to align the internal processes and corporate culture with the brand values, to create a powerful corporate brand (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007). Internal branding practices concentrate on employees' knowledge of the brand objectives, positioning of the brand and requirements in delivering the brand promise (Wise & Zednickova, 2009). To deliver the desired brand experience to the customers it is important for employees to internalize the desired brand image and its emotional values (Burmamann & Zeplin, 2005). Burmann et al. (2008) proposed a model which identifies human resource practices, internal communication and brand centred leadership as three important components of brand management, to disseminate brand knowledge and facilitate internalisation of the brand

Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) proposed a model which classifies internal branding practises into four major groups, being training, orientation, briefings, and group meetings. Punjaisri, Wilson and Evanschitzky (2008) conducted a qualitative case study in the hospitality industry, to explore the relevant mechanisms involved in the internal branding process, from the viewpoint of the employees. Their study reflected the belief of other authors that internal branding influences employees' delivery of the brand promise. In line with other researchers who agree that commitment and emotional aspects are important relationship elements (Herington, Scott, & Johnson, 2005), their research postulated that internal branding can strengthen the brand-employee relationships.

Such internal branding activities need to be the coordination of efforts of management, marketers, and HR managers, to ensure that the consistent brand message is embedded in all internal branding practices (Hankinson, 2004). Consistent brand messages received by employees create a shared brand understanding among employees, which results in a committed workforce to fulfil the brand promise (Punjaisri et al., 2009). Several other researchers (e.g. Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007, Erkmen & Hancer 2015) agree that internal branding practices (i.e. training and internal brand communications) can induce employee's brand trust and brand commitment. Therefore:

H1: Employee's perception of internal branding activities has a positive relation with employee's brand commitment.

There is a growing body of evidence on the effect of internal branding on employees' brand citizenship behaviour. Burmann and Zeplin (2005) demonstrate how leaders with a brand-oriented leadership style influence the personal values of employees and encourage them to engage in brand citizenship behaviour. In line with these findings, Sun, Aryee and Law (2007) found that brand-centred HRM strategies involving supportive practices can inspire employees to demonstrate positive brand behaviours. Piehler et al. (2015) claim that brand understanding has both a direct and an indirect effect, through brand commitment, on brand citizen behaviour. Thus, implementing an effective internal branding strategy, with according brand-centred HRM practices, can stimulate employees to engage in brand citizenship behaviour. Based on this knowledge, the following hypothesis is put forth:

H2: Employee's perception of internal branding activities has a positive relation with employee's brand citizenship behaviour.

2.5 Brand attractiveness

Internal branding provides a strategic framework that incorporates both marketing and HR, so that an organisation can attract, retain, and motivate those employees who can add value to the company and are able to deliver the company's brand promise (Uncles & Moroko, 2005). Scholars agree that to obtain this advantages, an employer brand should meet three criteria: it should be aligned with the reality of the organisation, it should be distinctive from the competition, and attractive to the target audience (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004).

As the first two criteria speak for themselves, researchers have recently focused their attention on the determinants of brand attractiveness (e.g. Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Wilden, Gudergan, & Lings, 2010; Sivertzen & Nilsen, 2013). Dutton and Dukerich (1991) have introduced three perspectives to view an organisations brand: internal (the perception of the employee), external (the perception of outsiders) and construed external (employees' view on how outsiders perceive the brand). Research has shown that there are significant differences between these three perspectives (Knox & Freeman, 2006; Lievens et. al, 2007). Current employees appreciate different attributes of the organisation, and perceive the employer brand in a different way, when compared to potential employees (Maxwell & Knox, 2009). Lievens et al. (2007) found that employee's organisational identification is higher when the external brand image is regarded attractive.

When using a social identity approach (SIA) to study the phenomenon of brand attractiveness, the brand organisation becomes a social group to which the employee wants to belong. SIA posits that employees will seek to frame their organisation as being different from and better than the competition. They can do this by selecting certain attributes to compare their organisation and adjusting the importance and value of each attribute (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Employees who perceive the employer brand as attractive and distinctive, are more likely to incorporate the brand into their own self-concept (Ashford & Mael, 1989). This identification to the organisation has several benefits for the corporate brand. It encourages employees to engage in organisational citizenship behaviour and to 'live the

brand' (Maxwell & Knox, 2009). In addition, since perceived brand attractiveness increases organisational identification, and organisational identification constitutes one of the subdimensions of attitudinal commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), it can be logically extended that brand attractiveness induces brand commitment and willingness to support the brand. Consequently, it is hypothesized:

H3: Employee's perception of the brand's attractiveness has a positive relation with employee's brand commitment

H4: Employee's perception of the brand's attractiveness has a positive relation with employee's brand citizenship behaviour.

2.6 Team Member Brand Performance

The aim of the internal branding efforts in service companies is that employees' brand performance consistently supports the delivery of the brand promise, so that customers can experience the brand as it is advertised externally (Drake, Gulman, & Roberts, 2005).

Employee's brand performance can be described as the quality of the brand supporting behaviours of employees, in attempting to deliver the brand promise to customers. Due to the intangibility of evaluating a service product in the hospitality industry, many researchers have acknowledged the importance of employees' brand supporting behaviours in delivering the brand promise (Kim et al., 2008; King, 2010; Punjaisri et al., 2009).

Although previous research explored employees' brand performance (e.g. Erkmen & Hancer, 2015; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007), they mostly studied employees' brand performance as an outcome of internal branding. However, no consideration has been given to understanding the effect that the brand performance of team members may have on employees' own brand commitment and behaviour. King and Grace (2008) found that, apart from internal brand related information, the role of co-workers in the socialisation process was thought to be crucial for employees in helping them to successfully perform their job. More specific, the transformation of a new employee to a productive employee was highly dependent on the attitudes and behaviour of their co-workers. In line with this finding, it is expected that team members' favourable brand behaviour will positively influence employees' own brand attitudes and behaviour.

Additionally, using the lens of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004), identification of cabin attendants to their occupational group may induce them to engage in activities congruent with their group identity. Individuals define themselves partly in terms of the groups they belong to, and experience the successes and failures of the group as their own (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Hence, by viewing themselves as an exemplar of the group, the brand behaviour of team members may be a driving force for cabin attendants' own behaviours, and consequently moderate the effect of internal branding on brand citizenship behaviour.

Plus, Simon and Hamilton (1994) have found that membership in a small group induces a relatively large connection between the collective self and the individual self. As crew team members usually work together in relatively small teams, the connection between the individual employees' self and their collective team self may be profound. The strength of this connection with the group determines the extent to which one's behaviour is influenced by their group members (Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999). Hence, seeing team members 'live the brand' may increase employees' commitment and motivation to engage in citizenship behaviour. Therefore, it is postulated:

H5: Employee's perception of team members' brand performance has a positive relation with employee's brand commitment.

H6: Employee's perception of team members' brand performance has a positive relation with employee's brand citizenship behaviour.

2.7 Team member exchange

Derived from the concept of Leader Member Exchange (LMX), Team Member Exchange (TMX) defines the relationship between an employee and his or her team members (Seers, 1989). More specifically, TMX indicates employees' willingness to support team members, to share ideas, information and feedback, and to receive recognition from other team members (Seers, Petty, & Cashman, 1995). TMX is an exchange relationship which is rooted in social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). Social exchange theory identifies a dichotomy of social exchanges, 'social' exchanges which include obligation, gratitude and trust, and 'economic' exchanges which are in-role exchanges coming forth of the employment

contract. TMX instead, does not have this dichotomy and views the social exchange relationship quality as a continuum. Just as with social exchange theory, TMX does posit that as employees perform behaviours that benefit both parties, the quality of the relationship improves, which will lead to a desire to reciprocate the favours (Murphy, Wayne, Liden, & Erdogan, 2003).

Many studies acknowledge the beneficial effects of TMX on employees' attitudes and behaviour in service environments. Service employees who experience conflict between their true feelings and their expressed feelings often form a community with their co-workers to which they can express their true feelings and reduce stress (Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004). As such, TMX gives employees job resources to deal with difficult and stressful customer interactions (Demerouti, Verbeke, & Bakker, 2005). In addition, TMX initiates a motivational process that leads to higher work engagement and excellent performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) point out that team member support improves work commitment, which in turn leads to positive organisational outcomes like excellent performance and extra-role performance. Likewise, the study of Xanthopoulou et al. (2008) among flight-attendants revealed that team member support had a significant positive effect on reported self-efficacy and work commitment. It furthermore predicted both in-role and extra-role performance through work commitment (Xanthopoulou, Baker, Heuven, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2008).

Gountas and Mavondo (2014) maintain that employee's need for team member support is affected by the industry context and the organisational hierarchy. In aviation, the duties of flight attendants have some special contextual particularities that are characteristic for this occupation. One of the most distinctive aspects of the occupation is the limited duration that flight crews work together as a team. Flight crew members have usually never met each other before they are assigned to a specific outbound and homebound flight, after which they are assigned to another flight crew on their next flight. Therefore, flight attendants need to develop relationships rather quickly. Furthermore, since flight attendants are often being far away from home, amongst relative strangers, they are highly dependent on the level of emotional support they receive from their team members.

Especially with the ongoing densification of aircrafts and cost-cutting of airlines, airline crews need to perform highly efficient as a team to serve the growing number of

passengers per crew member. Since crew member compositions change with every trip cycle, crew members frequently report how the presence of affective bonding with team members to develops rather rapid. The social exchanges that follow, provide instrumental and emotional support for team members, and create social ties which enable team members to experience TMX (Herman, Dasborough, & Ashkanasy (2008). In addition, as flight attendants often experience considerable workload and time pressure during service tasks, support from co-workers could nourish their brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour by relieving their workload.

Another distinctive factor of the flight attendants' duties is their high exposure to emotional charged interactions with passengers (Heuven, Bakker, Schaufeli, & Huisman, 2006). When dealing with high social pressure in flight, flight attendants may receive emotional support, consideration, or useful customer information from their team members. Team members who trust and value each other, share information and recognition, may use this emotional and instrumental support as valuable means to lift their brand performance to a higher level. Another mechanism through which flight attendants may be motivated and facilitated to engage brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour is the social exchange of reciprocating social favours (Blau, 1964). This will be briefly explained in the next paragraph.

Studying the TMX through the lens Social exchange theory (SET), gives a better insight into the nature of those exchanges. SET posits that when one person does another person a favour, it is expected to be returned in the future, to establish a certain balance in exchanges (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). These favours can be material goods, but also symbolic gestures such as approval or prestige (Blau, 1964). Ma, Emily, Qu and Hailin (2011) describe social exchanges as voluntary actions of individuals that create an expectation of a future unspecified return. This expectation assumes that the receiver will eventually fairly fulfil his or her moral obligation (Holmes, 1981). The perceived quality of the relationship with another person can be influenced by the balance of efforts and rewards from that relation, the relationship we believe we deserve and the chance of having a better relationship with another person.

Organisations are taking benefits of a social exchange approach in creating a long-term relationship with their employees by investing in employees' wellbeing and career and

expecting the favour returned in terms of productivity and commitment. Researchers found that if employees are treated well by the organisation (Cho & Johanson, 2008), the supervisor (Organ, 1988) or colleagues (Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007), they are more motivated to engage in citizenship behaviour because of the social exchange relationship. According to Homans (1958), the reciprocation of favours usually happens in the form of various forms of extra role behaviours, because if the behaviour was in-role it would not have been a returned favour. In addition, Ma et al. (2011) claim that there may be a spill over effect of exchanges to different targets. That is, employees who experience positive social exchanges with one source are likely to exhibit OCB towards supervisors, colleagues and customers alike.

Thus, social exchange is an important motivator for employees' OCB. In the same line of thought, it could be a motivator for BCB as well. In addition, Bishop and his colleagues (2000) found evidence that employees returned received support with commitment, which then lead to more OCB. In conclusion, while TMX occurs through a social network in which all sorts of favours are exchanged in several directions, it is expected that TMX improves employees' brand commitment and BCB.

H7: Employee's perception of TMX has a positive relation with employee's brand commitment.

H8: Employee's perception of TMX has a positive relation with employee's brand citizenship behaviour.

2.8 Team atmosphere

During the past decades, a considerable amount of research is conducted to study the effects of atmosphere (also referred to as climate) in organizations (Schneider, Salvaggio, & Subirats, 2002). Team atmosphere can be defined as employees' shared perceptions and interpretations of their work environment, in terms of psychological meaning (Jones & James, 1979). Research from Herman, Dasborough and Ashkanasy (2008) revealed that team climate accounts for substantial variance in work attitudes and behaviours. Choi, Price and Vinokur (2003) used the term affective climate and defined it as an overall interaction

pattern or a shared positive perception among members, and the atmosphere that characterize interactions within a team.

This affective climate reflects the nature of the team and shapes the actions of individuals within the team. Even though climate perceptions are personal appreciations, they are commonly shared by team members within a team. This can be explained because affective climate is linked to the social network that exists within a team (De Rivera, 1992). Thus, affective climates between teams can differ because of social interaction differences, even though they work within the same organisation (Ashkanasy & Nicholson, 2003).

DeCotiis & Summers (1987) found that organisational atmosphere influences organisational commitment. At the team level, the atmosphere within teams can have several outcomes on the individual, such as job satisfaction (Schnake, 1983), and performance (Lawler, Hall, & Oldham, 1974). The right collaborative atmosphere causes an interpersonal cooperation which is essential for the generation of true group knowledge. A collaborative atmosphere can only emerge when team members are able to absorb and retain knowledge (Zaltman, 1979), and there is mutual trust (Von Krogh, 1998), empathy, tactfulness, courage, and access to help (Zárraga & Bonache, 2005). According to Herman, Dasborough and Ashkanasy (2008), climate perceptions determine how team members behave collectively by influencing perceptions and feelings about their surrounding environment. Employees use cues from their environment to reason which attitudes and behaviours are appropriate (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Characteristics of team member atmosphere, such as closeness, warmth, harmony (Posthuma, 1970), serve as social control mechanisms that shape employees' attitudes and behaviours in the team (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996). Therefore, when employees experience a positive team atmosphere, their motivation to engage in brand citizenship behaviour may increase because of their positive experience with their team members.

Kopelman, Brief, and Guzzo (1990) claim that atmosphere influences individual and team-level outcomes through its impact on cognitive and affective states. This claim is derived from expectation from Ajzens' (1991) theory of planned behaviour. This theory suggests that perceptions of the work environment influence employees' cognitive and affective states, which in combination with the opportunities and beliefs are the antecedents of subsequent behaviour (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Therefore, it can be

extended that if team members have a positive appreciation of the team atmosphere, and the possibility is here, they may feel more motivated to show citizenship behaviours because of their positive affective and cognitive state. Similarly, positive evaluations of employees' workplace environment may induce positive evaluations of the brand and result in greater brand commitment. This leads to the following hypotheses:

H9: Employee's perception of the team's atmosphere has a positive relation with employees' brand commitment.

H10: Employee's perception of the team's atmosphere has a positive relation with employees' brand citizenship behaviour.

The conceptual model for this research is demonstrated in Figure 1 below.

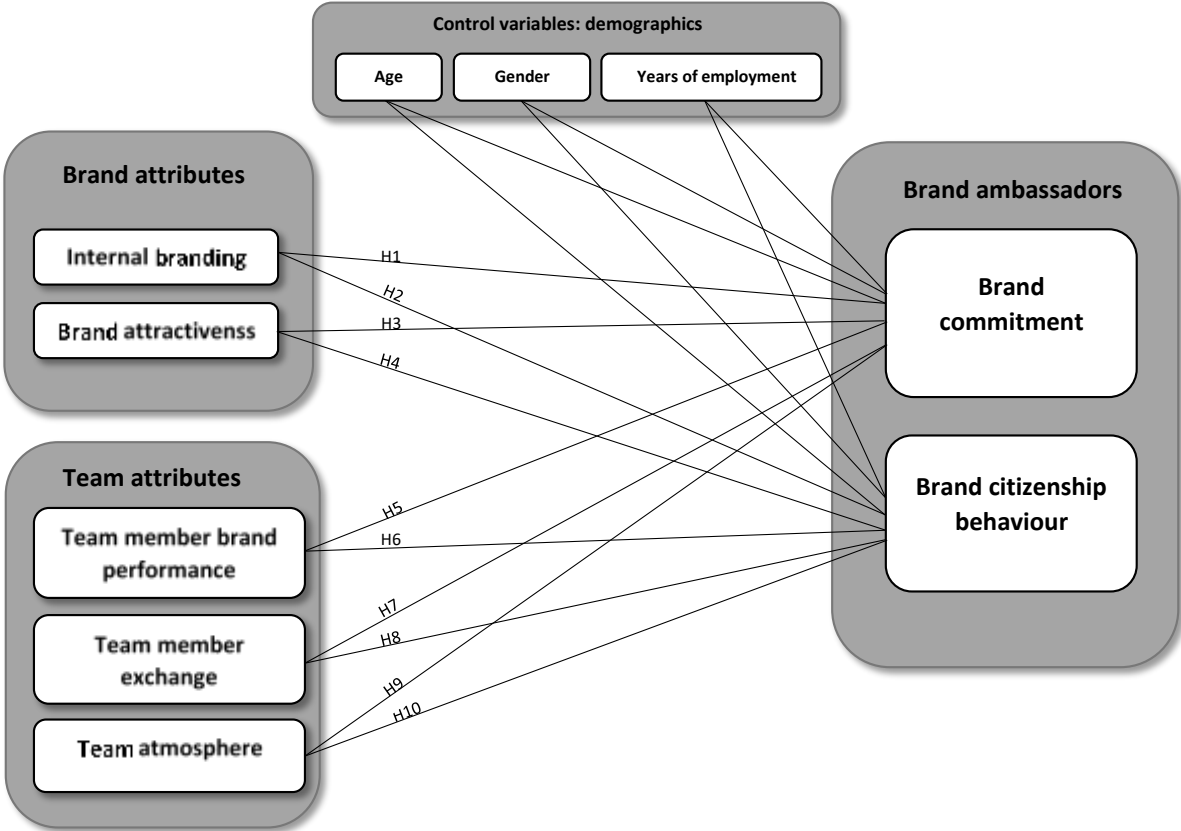


Figure 1. Conceptual mode

3 Methods

This section explains and justifies the methodological approach and its appropriateness. First, the quantitative research design is defined. Then, the sample and the research instrument are described and the reasoning for data collection and analysis methods is given.

3.1 Research Design

To examine if the hypothesized relations hold, a quantitative cross-sectional research was performed. This type of research was the most appropriate to explore existing relations, since it is cost-efficient, and it gives a good and quick picture of the existence and magnitude of relations between the independent and dependent variables at a given point in time (Olsen, 2004).

Data was collected from a convenient sample of cabin attendants from a major European airline, by means of an online self-administered structured survey. This type of quantitative research instrument is widely used to collect information on attitudes and behaviour, and to give a representative picture of the research problem (Mathers, Fox, & Hunn, 2007). Therefore, it was a suitable instrument for this research as it aims to examine employees' attitudes and behaviours concerning branding and team membership in the aviation industry.

3.2 Sample

A convenience sample of cabin attendants from one European airline was requested to participate in this study via two social media platforms. The population involved is provided with a tablet and internet by their employer, therefore, each participant has access to social media websites. The survey was uploaded to the web-based survey tool Qualtrics, and distributed by placing the link to the questionnaire on the social media platforms, with an accompanying post.

A cabin crew community of the concerned airline on Facebook with 6707 members was approached, and the airline's official cabin crew platform on Yammer, with 8549 subscribed employees. This gave ample possibilities to reach enough sample size out of the population of nearly 10.000 employed cabin attendants. To encourage participation in the

research, a donation to a charity organisation led by cabin attendants was given as reward when an amount of 150 respondents would be reached.

All participants were informed that participation was voluntary and strictly confidential. To keep the post with the survey active and on top of the timeline all participants who commented that they filled out the survey received a like and a personal thank you comment. This generated attention on the topic which resulted in over 250 completed questionnaires within the first five days. Data collection lasted for 8 days and yielded 286 fully completed surveys (N = 286).

Most of the respondents (90%, N = 257) were female, and the remaining 10% were male (N = 29). The sample had an average age of 45.49 (SD = 9.51). Regarding the length of employment in the organizations, it was varying from 0 years to 42 years, with an average employment of 19 years. 30% of the study participants were employed for 26 years or longer, the second largest group (21%) was employed for 21-25 years. The third group has worked for the airline organisation for 16-20 years and represented 14%. The smallest groups were those working for 11-15 years (9%) and 6-10 years (12%). The participants who had been employed for 0-5 years represented 14%.

According to the respective airline's latest 'social dashboard', retrieved from 'Vereniging Nederlands Cabinepersoneel' (VNC, 2018), currently 83% of the population of cabin attendants is female. In addition, most cabin attendants are between 45 and 49 years of age. Plus, within the employment categories, the group of employees with 15-19 years of experience is the largest. Hence, within the sample profile, females and respondents which are employed for 20 years or more are somewhat overrepresented.

3.3 Research instrument

This study used an online self-administered structured questionnaire for data collection (Appendix A). The questionnaire was designed to evaluate how employees' demographics, and attitudes towards branding and team attributes, related to self-reported commitment and brand citizenship behaviours. To avoid the subjectivity from being a cabin attendant myself, a focus group with experts (N=3) was asked to review the preliminary instrument to maximize the face validity. Additionally, a pre-test was performed by cabin attendants (N = 3). Some items were refined for clarity and conciseness within this study's context. For

example, the original question to measure brand performance (Punjaisri, Evanschitzky & Wilson, 2009): 'The quality level of my services meets the brand standards of Hotel X', was adjusted to 'The quality level of my colleagues' services meet the airline's brand standards'.

3.3.1 Demographics

The survey consisted of three items that measure demographic variables: age, gender and employment in years. To prepare the respondents for the branding subject, one item about the perceived effectiveness of the company's brand communication efforts in general was added.

3.3.2 Internal branding

The scale to measure cabin attendant's perceptions of internal branding consisted of 9 items ($\alpha = .85$): two items were adopted from Punjaisri & Wilson (2007), two items from King & Grace (2008), one item from De Chernatony & Cottam (2006), one from Punjaisri et al. (2009), and three from King (2010). The items measured the effectiveness of brand-oriented training and internal communication (e.g., 'I am aware of the skills I need to deliver my airlines' brand values', or, 'Brand values are included during our training at this airline'). Respondents were asked to express their level of agreement with the statements on an ordinal seven-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

3.3.3 Brand attractiveness

The 3-item scale from Elbedweihy, Jayawardhena, Elsharnouby and Elsharnouby (2016) was used to measure employees' perceptions of brand attractiveness ($\alpha = .82$). It was originally used to capture consumers' evaluations of the brands' central, distinctive and enduring characteristics. Within the current study it was used to address employees' attitudes towards the brand. Items were for example: 'I think that my airline brand is an attractive brand' or 'I like what my airline brand represents'. Respondents were asked to express their level of agreement with a statements on an ordinal seven-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

3.3.4 Team member brand performance

To measure cabin attendant's perception of team member brand performance, the five-item brand performance scale from Punjaisri, Evanschitzky & Wilson (2009) was used, which was originally designed to measure hotel employees' brand performance. Respondents were asked to express their level of agreement with the statements on an ordinal seven-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

In addition, one negative worded item of the brand performance scale was deleted to improve reliability. Even though there are some benefits when using reverse-coded items, researchers have noted that such items can cause several problems, such as loading on different factors (Netemeyer, Bearden, & Sharma, 2003) and respondents miscomprehending the items (Swain, Weathers, & Niedrich, 2008). After deletion of the negative worded item the scale was reliable ($\alpha = .79$).

3.3.5 TMX

The TMX scale (Ford & Seers, 2006) consisted of 13 items ($\alpha = .88$). It was designed to measure the quality of exchange relationships among team members as described by TMX theory (Seers, 1989). Examples of questions from this construct are 'My colleagues frequently provide support and encouragement to me' and 'I frequently provide support and encouragement to my colleagues'. Respondents were asked to express their level of agreement with the statements on an ordinal seven-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

3.3.6 Team atmosphere

The team atmosphere scale was found to be highly reliable (10 items; $\alpha = .95$). The scale is developed by Posthuma (1970) and asks respondents to describe the average atmosphere within their teams by rating 10 related characteristics (e.g., friendly-unfriendly, distant-close, depressed-cheerful) on a bipolar seven-point matrix table. Respondents were asked to rate the statements on a seven-point bipolar matrix table.

3.3.7 Brand commitment

The brand commitment scale (King & Grace, 2010) was used to measure the degree of emotional attachment of employees to the brand (5 items; $\alpha = .84$). An example of an item from this construct is: 'I am proud to be part of the airline I work for', or 'I really care about the fate of the airline I work for'. Respondents were asked to express their level of agreement with a statement on an ordinal seven-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

3.3.8 Brand citizenship behaviour

The scale for measuring employees' brand citizenship behaviours (6 items; $\alpha = .73$) was designed by King & Grace (2010) as well. These items measure employees' participation on the job, extra-role behaviour and positive word of mouth (Arnett et al. 2003). Respondents were asked to express their level of agreement with the statements on an ordinal seven-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). An example of an item from this constructs is 'I take responsibility for tasks outside of my own area if necessary (for example following up on customer requests)' and 'I demonstrate behaviours that are consistent with the brand promise of the airline I work for'. Since most the airline's cabin attendants are employed for 15 years or longer (VNC, 2018), their level of brand knowledge is assumed to be substantial. Hence, one item of the original scale was left out: 'I am interested to learn more about brand', as an expected low score on this item may not accurately reflect employees' level of brand citizenship behaviour.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data collected during the survey was analysed using SPSS software (IBM SPSS Statistics 23). The data analysis was performed in the following sequence: First the descriptive analysis was performed to summarize the basic data of the research. Then, the reliability analysis was performed which proved sufficient reliability. After that, Pearson correlation tests was performed to test the relations between the constructs. Following, a multiple regression analyse was performed to check whether the independent variables significantly predicted the dependent variables. In the next section the results of the empirical research are handled.

4 Results

This section describes the analysis of the quantitative empirical research results. First, means, and the strength of the correlations between the variables are given. Then, a Multiple regression analysis was used to test if the predictors from the conceptual model significantly predicted brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour.

4.1 Descriptive results

The means and standard deviations for the variables of this study's conceptual model are displayed in Table 1. All means appeared to be considerably high, with means for perceived brand attractiveness, brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour scoring even above six on a seven-point scale. A two-tailed Pearson's correlation test was selected to measure the strength of the relationship among dependent and independent variables. An overview of this correlation test is presented in Table 2.

Table 1
Means and standard deviations

Measure	Mean	SD
Demographics		
Age	45.49	9.51
Employment in years	19	10.5
Branding attributes*		
Internal branding	5.77	0.53
Brand attractiveness	6.04	0.61
Team attributes*		
Team member brand performance	5.37	0.71
Team member exchange	5.72	0.51
Team Atmosphere	5.67	1.05
Brand Ambassadors*		
Brand commitment	6.14	0.55
Brand citizenship behaviour	6.07	0.53

Note: * Variables were measured on a seven-point scale

Table 2
Pearson's correlations of measured constructs

Measure	Correlations								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Demographics									
1. Age									
2. Employment in years	.81**								
Branding attributes									
3. Internal branding	.02	-.01							
4. Brand attractiveness	-.10	-.10	.48**						
Team attributes									
5. Team member brand performance	.12*	.13*	.35**	.35**					
6. Team member exchange	.10	.17**	.49**	.46**	.52**				
7. Team Atmosphere	.13*	.17**	.23**	.24**	.32**	.34**			
Brand Ambassadors									
8. Brand commitment	.02	.00	.54**	.65**	.31**	.44**	.31**		
9. Brand citizenship behaviour	-.02	-.08	.55**	.52**	.30**	.54**	.17**	.62**	

Note: * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

4.2 Regression analysis

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed to test if internal branding, brand attractiveness, team members' brand performance, TMX and team atmosphere significantly predicted participants' ratings of brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour, after controlling for demographic variables. First, the sample size of 286 was deemed adequate given five independent variables to be included in the analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). Then, the assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity and absence of multicollinearity were checked. The predicted probability plot (P-P) plot showed that the residuals were normally distributed, thus the assumption of normality and linearity was confirmed. Furthermore, the scatterplot of residuals displayed homoscedasticity of the data. Following, the variance inflation factor (VIF) was checked, which is an indicator of multicollinearity. The VIF for all independent variables was < 2 , which is below the maximum level of 5 (Lewis-Beck, & Lewis-Beck, 2015).

Two three stage hierarchical multiple regression were conducted, one with brand commitment and one with brand citizenship behaviour as the dependent variable. Age, gender and years of employment were entered at stage one. Branding variables (internal branding and brand attractiveness) were entered at stage two and team variables (team member brand performance, TMX and team atmosphere) were entered at stage three. The variables were entered in this order as it seemed plausible to check what the team variables

added to the dependent variables when controlled for demographic variables and branding variables.

The hierarchical multiple regression (Table 3) revealed that at model one, the demographic variables did not significantly contribute to the regression model of brand commitment ($F(3,280) = .65, p > .05$), and brand citizenship behaviour ($F(3,280) = 1.19, p > .05$). Introducing brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour into the model significantly explained an additional 48,7% of variation in brand commitment ($F(5,278) = 54.07, p > .001$), and 26% of variation in brand citizenship behaviour commitment ($F(5,278) = 35.50, p > .001$). Both branding variables made a significant unique contribution to the model. Adding the team variables to the regression model explained an additional 1,6% ($F(8,275) = 35.64, p > .001$) of the variation in brand commitment and an additional 6,9% of the change in brand citizenship behaviour ($F(8,275) = 29.11, p > .001$). Together the five independent variables accounted for 50,9% of the variance in brand commitment, and 45,9% of the variance in brand citizenship behaviour.

In the final model, three out of five predictor variables showed a significant relation with brand commitment and/or brand citizenship behaviour. Employees' appreciation of internal branding ($\beta = .26, p < .000$), brand attractiveness ($\beta = .48, p < .000$) and team atmosphere ($\beta = .12, p < .05$) significantly predicted their brand commitment. In addition, employees' evaluation of internal branding ($\beta = .29, p < .000$), brand attractiveness ($\beta = .23, p < .000$) and TMX ($\beta = .35, p < .000$) significantly predicted their brand citizenship behaviour. Hence, **H1, H2, H3, H4, H8** and **H9** are supported. Besides these hypothesized predictors it turned out that age ($\beta = .16, p < .05$) and years of employment ($\beta = -.23, p < .05$) significantly predicted brand citizenship behaviour.

Employees' evaluation of their team member brand performance did not significantly predict their brand commitment nor their brand citizenship behaviour. Furthermore, employees' appraisal of TMX did not predict their brand commitment, nor did the evaluation of the team atmosphere predict employees' brand citizenship behaviour. Therefore, **H5, H6, H7** and **H10** are rejected. Table 4 below summarizes the results of hypotheses testing.

Table 3
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Model	Predictor Variables	Brand Commitment				Brand citizenship behaviour			
		β	<i>t</i>	R2	Adjusted R2	β	<i>t</i>	R2	Adjusted R2
1				.01	-.01			.01	.00
	Age	.08	.79			.13	1.33		
	Gender	.06	.93			.16	.16		
	Years of employment	-.07	-.68			-.19	-1.86		
2				.49	.48			.39	.38
	Age	.09	1.20			.13	1.60		
	Gender	.03	.65			-.02	-.34		
	Years of employment	-.03	-.34			-.15	-1.86		
	Internal branding	.29	5.98*			.40	7.36*		
	Brand attractiveness	.51	10.49*			.32	6.00*		
3				.51	.50			.46	.44
	Age	.10	1.35			.16	2.01**		
	Gender	.04	.93			.01	.32		
	Years of employment	-.06	-.88			-.23	-2.98**		
	Internal branding	.26	5.02*			.29	5.27*		
	Brand attractiveness	.48	9.21*			.23	4.22*		
	Team member brand performance	-.03	-.62			-.04	-.80		
	TMX	.07	1.13			.35	5.78*		
	Team atmosphere	.12	2.58**			-.03	-.68		

Note: * $p < .001$ ** $p < .05$

Table 4
Summary of hypotheses testing results

Hypothesis	Variables	Hypothesis testing results
H1	Internal branding and brand commitment	Supported
H2	Internal branding and brand citizenship behaviour	Supported
H3	Brand attractiveness and brand commitment	Supported
H4	Brand attractiveness and brand citizenship behaviour	Supported
H5	Team members' brand performance and brand commitment	Rejected
H6	Team members' brand performance and brand citizenship behaviour	Rejected
H7	Team member exchange and brand commitment	Rejected
H8	Team member exchange and brand citizenship behaviour	Supported
H9	Team atmosphere and brand commitment	Supported
H10	Team atmosphere and brand citizenship behaviour	Rejected

5 Discussion of findings

Because of the unique characteristics of service delivery in aviation, cabin attendants play a crucial role in delivering the brand promise. Hence, airlines often adopt internal branding practices to align employees' behaviour and attitudes with the externally communicated brand. Especially within service organisations, employees' brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour have proven to be important drivers for turning employees into brand ambassadors, and meeting customers' expectations.

The objective of this study was to gain insight into how these team work characteristics add to the relation that internal branding has with cabin attendants' role in being a brand ambassador (i.e. perceived levels of brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour). With consideration to team work, three attributes were tested to measure their relationship with cabin attendants' roles in being a brand ambassador: team member brand performance, team member exchange and team atmosphere. Through quantitative research, this study found that positive relations between team member exchange, team atmosphere and cabin attendants' role in being a brand ambassador exist. Given the internal branding process, two attributes were examined: cabin attendants' perceived effectiveness of the internal brand communication, and cabin attendants' perceived brand attractiveness. As expected, these attributes appeared to have a significant positive relation with cabin attendants' brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour. Team and brand attributes were found to have different relations with employees' brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour.

First, the results of this study reveal that out of both the brand and team variables, team member exchange has the strongest relation with cabin attendants' brand citizenship behaviour ($\beta = .35$). This finding highlights the necessity for management of encouraging team member exchange within crews, when striving to create brand ambassadors. Plus, while several other studies which found that TMX predicts *work* commitment (Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004; Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008; Xanthopoulou et al., 2008), this study did not find a significant relation with cabin attendants' *brand commitment*. An explanation may be that although the variables work commitment and brand commitment seem similar, being committed to one's labour in general is distinct from being committed to the umbrella brand one works for. Obviously, an employee can be fond of the brand he

works for, but reluctant to the tasks he must perform on a daily base, and vice versa. Apparently, team member exchange does make it easier for employees to go the extra mile for the brand, but this exchange does not necessarily influence employees' cognitive connection with the brand.

Second, team atmosphere showed to have a significant positive relation with brand commitment ($\beta = .12$). As this relationship in this study appeared to be weak, it may suggest that cabin attendants' commitment to the brand can only be slightly influenced by their appreciation of the atmosphere at the workplace. Team atmosphere has not been studied in relation to brand commitment before, and research results of its effects on organisational commitment are scarce. However, DeCotiis & Summers (1987) did find that organisational atmosphere influences organisational commitment. The authors reason that atmosphere perceptions determine how team members behave collectively by influencing perceptions and feelings about their surrounding environment. But perhaps, it is not so rational to expect that team atmosphere impacts on brand commitment directly. Brand commitment involves a broader concept, is more stable overtime and evokes a less rapid reaction in comparison to other variables such as atmosphere (Falkenburg & Schyns, 2007). The atmosphere on the workplace which may change from day to day can evoke an immediate direct reaction on an emotional level, whereas employee's brand commitment may remain steady. That is, an employee may momentarily be dissatisfied with the current team atmosphere, while he has a high level of commitment to the brand rationally.

In consideration of brand citizenship behaviour, several scholars posit that team atmosphere is related to team performance (González-Romá, Fortes-Ferreira, & Peiro, 2009). Moreover, Snow (2002) found a positive service climate to be related to positive evaluations of employee performance by customers. In line with these findings, this study proposed a positive relation between team atmosphere and brand citizenship behaviour. However, no empirical evidence supporting this proposed relation was found in this study. An explanation for this may be that atmosphere strength may be an important boundary condition for the effect of atmosphere on citizenship behaviours. Schneider, Salvaggio and Subirats (2002) obtained analogous results when investigating this relation between climate and subsequent customer perceptions of service quality. They found that this relation was only valid when the climate strength was high. Since the crew composition changes on every

flight, with subsequent varying levels of team atmosphere, the perceived generic atmosphere strength may be insufficient to predict brand citizenship behaviour. It is too early to draw sound conclusions on this matter, but future research should pay attention to this.

Third, based on the premise of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004), it was expected that identification of cabin attendants to their team would induce them to show behaviour in congruence with their team members (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). However, this study did not reveal a significant relation between team members' brand performance and cabin attendant's brand commitment and citizenship behaviour. An explanation for the weak relation could be the effect of social loafing and social compensation (Williams & Karau, 1991). Social loafing is the tendency for individuals to expend less effort when working collectively than when working individually (Karau & Williams, 1993). Under some conditions, employees will work harder collectively than individually when they expect their team members to perform poorly. This behaviour is known as social compensation (Williams & Karau, 1991). In this case, employees feel compelled to compensate for the inadequate contributions of their team members, to reach the collective goals. This perception of inadequate team member contributions may be derived from knowledge of team members insufficient efforts or abilities, or from a lack of trust in others to perform well when their contributions are shared with those of others.

Furthermore, as expected, both brand attributes appeared to have a significant relation with cabin attendants' brand performance. Considering employees' perceived effectiveness of internal branding, this variable appeared to have a significant positive relation with both cabin attendants' brand commitment ($\beta = .26$), and their engagement in brand citizenship behaviour ($\beta = .29$). This finding is widely supported by previous studies. Burmann and Zeplin (2005) for example, identify three practices for creating brand commitment: brand-centred human resources management, brand communication and brand leadership. Likewise, Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) revealed positive relationships between internal branding instruments and employees' brand promise delivery. With respect to brand attractiveness, this variable appeared to have the strongest significant positive relation out of all variables with brand commitment ($\beta = .48$). In addition, it appeared to have a significant positive relation with brand citizenship behaviour as well ($\beta = .23$). These

findings are in line with results from previous studies. Since brand attractiveness increases organisational identification, and organisational identification is one of the subdimensions of attitudinal commitment (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), brand attractiveness was expected to increase brand commitment. Plus, previous research (Gözükara & Hatipoğlu, 2016; Maxwell & Knox, 2009), proved that employer brand attractiveness has a positive impact on employees' organisational citizenship behaviours. Organizations can benefit from these findings by increasing employees' brand appreciation with a specific employer branding programme. Employer branding, which induces brand attractiveness for future and current employees, is an effective strategy for motivating employees to live the brand.

5.1 Limitations and implications for future research

The findings should be seen in the light of several limitations. One limitation in this study is the outcome of the confirmatory factor analysis. This analysis revealed that several questionnaire items loaded on more than one factor, or on factors differing from the intended construct. This poses a threat to discriminant validity, as the instrument failed to distinguish between several constructs. Several items of brand citizenship behaviour for example, loaded on the same factor as TMX. This is not surprising, as there is theoretical similarity of the constructs to some degree. Supporting one's colleagues for instance, is an example of citizenship behaviour. For future research, it is recommended to achieve better discriminant evidence between the variables, to check whether the results still hold.

Second, one should be vigilant of the predictive limitations of a cross-sectional research design. Within this research, cabin attendants' reported attitudes and behaviour are measured at one single point in time. It proves several assumptions about the existence of a link between the measured variables, but it is not possible to establish a true cause and effect relationship. For future research, a diary study would be suitable to measure how cabin attendants' brand performance fluctuates with every flight, as a result of perceived team work attributes.

Third, all participants are from the same geographical region, and represent cabin attendants working for the same airline. Thus, the results may differ for participants working in other regions, for other airlines and in other industries. In addition, the participants are all

employed within a large company. Therefore, research results are less applicable to medium-sized and small airlines.

Another issue is the over presentation of females (90%), and respondents employed for more than 20 years (51%) within this study's sample (n=257). The latest reported percentage of females in the population of cabin attendants of the approached airline is 83%. Plus, within the employment categories, the group of employees with 15-19 years of experience is the largest (VNC, 2018). For future research, it is recommended to get a more representative distribution in gender and years of employment, to prevent a biased sample.

Another limitation with respect to the sample is that respondents in this study are self-selected. Cabin attendant's decision to participate in this study may already correlate with higher levels of citizenship behaviour or team member exchange, making the participants a non-representative sample. This limitation however, can hardly be prevented in quantitative research, as the decision whether to participate or not, always remains with the participants.

Plus, within the sample, no distinction has been made between regular crew members, and senior crewmembers with supervisor tasks (pursers). Senior crew members may have other levels of commitment with their employer brand, and the nature of their exchange relationships with other crew members may be different. In a study from Lam (2003) for instance, it was found that leader member exchange did not moderate the relationship between unmet expectations of newcomers and organisational commitment, but team member exchange did. In future research, a distinction between regular crew members and senior crew members is suggested, to avoid bias in the retrospective account of exchange relationships.

5.2 Practical implications

The importance of commitment and citizenship behaviours in promoting positive outcomes for organizations is widely recognized in the literature (Bateman & Organ, 1983; Xerri & Brunetto, 2013). In the current study, perceived effectiveness of internal branding and brand attractiveness showed once again to be moderately related to cabin attendants' brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour. Therefore, it remains critical for airline

organizations to identify which internal branding practices are most appropriate to turn their employees into brand ambassadors.

Two-way communication is crucial in this internal branding process, as it allows cabin attendants to give suggestions for making the brand more attractive, while at the same time they can be informed about relevant brand matters (Robinson, Perryman, & Hayday, 2004). Thus, internal branding should be an integrative process, which is established in a climate of co-operation with employees. In this way, cabin attendants become internal customers, who are treated with the same dedication and respect (Varey & Lewis, 1999). The latter is crucial in airline organizations, as it is important to satisfy the employees' needs first, before the customers' needs can be satisfied (Salem, 2013).

Moreover, while the effects and importance of branding practices might vary in different airline organizations, internal market research is a critical factor in designing a specific branding programme which is appealing to cabin attendants. When organizations are not acknowledging different employee segments and their needs, their internal branding practises are of little value. Employees appreciate an individual approach; therefore, organizations should focus on understanding the internal market of cabin attendants and their motivation. Data from internal market research should be used for implementing customized internal branding practises (Roberts-Lombard, 2010).

Maxwell and Knox (2009) found that the specific attributes that were considered most attractive by employees were different for each organisation. However, the categories of attributes were almost the same for all organisations; these were employment, organisational successes, construed external image, and product or service characteristics. Ideally, managers need to identify the attributes of their own airline brand that cabin attendants find most attractive. Organizations could then concentrate on communicating the desirable values in a way that enables cabin attendants to identify with the brand, and find the brand attractive to work for.

The current study revealed that such an internal branding programme alone is not enough for maximizing cabin attendants' brand commitment and brand citizenship behaviour. Organizations should be aware of the importance of encouraging team member exchange. To achieve better exchange relations within teams, opportunities for communication and sharing information should be provided strategically. Organizations

could provide training and ongoing development programmes, to employees or teams who wish to establish more fruitful exchange relationships. Monitoring employees' appreciation of TMX periodically, and actively seeking suggestions for improvement, can help management to optimize levels of TMX.

In addition, a pleasant and collaborative atmosphere at the workplace results in higher levels of commitment to the brand. This positive atmosphere can only emerge when team members are able to absorb and retain knowledge (Zaltman, 1979), there is mutual trust (Von Krogh, 1998), empathy, tactfulness, courage, and access to help (Zárraga & Bonache, 2005). Nurturing and improving these facilitators can be useful for organisations who wish to maximize the benefits of a good team atmosphere. Plus, management should be an example of the climate that they wish to have, by being honest with employees, treating them fairly and consistently, keeping their word, and showing openness to comments and suggestions made by employees.

6 Conclusion

The objective of this study was to gain insight into how brand- and team work attributes relate to cabin attendants' role in being a brand ambassador, as reflected in their brand commitment and citizenship behaviour. This study found that, with respect to team work attributes, positive relations exist between team member exchange, team atmosphere and cabin attendant's role in being a brand ambassador. More specific, cabin attendants' perceived levels of team member exchange had a significant relation with their reported brand citizenship behaviour. Plus, higher appreciation of the atmosphere within the team was significantly related to higher levels of brand commitment.

Considering brand attributes, cabin attendants' perceived effectiveness of internal branding, and their perceived brand attractiveness, were both significantly positive related to being a brand ambassador. These results indicate that incorporating an internal branding programme remains of great importance for airlines who wish to turn employees into brand ambassadors. To maximize the benefits of these branding practices however, this paper stresses the relevance of encouraging team member exchange within crews, and providing a pleasant team atmosphere to work in. However, as this study posits several limitations, further research is needed. This could point out how team members attribute in going the extra mile, and making customer satisfaction go sky high.

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Appendix A Research Instrument

Demographics

What is your age?

What is your gender?

How many years have you been working for the airline you are currently employed at?

Priming question

Airlines use training and formal communication channels (for example newsletters, video's, email) to inform their employees about how they should perform according to the brand values. On a scale from 1 to 7, how would you rate the brand communication efforts of the airline you work for?

Brand commitment

I am proud to be a part of the airline I work for

I really care about the fate of the airline I work for

I am willing to put in extra effort beyond what is expected to make the airline I work for successful

My values are similar to those of the airline I work for

I feel like I really fit in with this airline brand

Brand citizenship behaviour

I take responsibility for tasks outside of my own area if necessary (for example following up on customer requests)

My behaviour is consistent with the brand promise of the airline I work for

I consider the impact on my airline's brand before communicating or taking action in any situation

I show extra initiative to ensure that my behaviour remains consistent with the brand promise of my airline

I regularly recommend the airline brand I work for to family and friends

If given the opportunity, I pass on my knowledge about my airline's brand to new employees

Internal branding

I am aware of the skills I need to deliver my airline's brand values

Brand values are included in our training at this airline

The airline I work for informs me what our airline brand stands for

The airline I work for is communicating formal brand related material to me and my colleagues (for example brochures, newsletters, e-mail)

The (pre-flight) briefings contain all essential information to provide service according to the brand expectations

The airline I work for teaches us why we should do things and not just how

The airline I work for communicates the importance of my role in the brand promise

Brand attractiveness

I like what my airline brand represents

I think my airline brand is an attractive brand

I like what my airline brand embodies

Team member brand performance

The quality level of my colleagues' service meets the airline's brand standards

Sometimes, my colleagues neglect aspects of the job they are obligated to perform

My colleagues effectively fulfil the promise that the brand has with customers

My colleagues always handle customers' requests according to the brand standards

My colleagues successfully fulfil responsibilities specified in their job descriptions

Team member exchange

- My colleagues frequently provide support and encouragement to me
- I frequently provide support and encouragement to my colleagues
- My colleagues communicate openly with me about what they expect from me
- I communicate openly with my colleagues about what I expect from them
- My colleagues frequently recognize my efforts
- I frequently recognize the efforts of my colleagues
- My colleagues frequently take actions that make things easier for me
- I frequently take actions that make things easier for my colleagues
- When I am busy, my colleagues often volunteer to help me out
- When my colleagues are busy, I often volunteer to help them out
- My colleagues frequently suggest ideas that I can use
- I frequently suggest ideas that my colleagues can use
- How would you rate your working relationship with others in general?

Team Atmosphere

Pleasant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Unpleasant
Friendly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Unfriendly
Bad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Good
Worthless	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Valuable
Distant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Close
Cold	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Warm
Quarrelsome	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Harmonious
Self-assured	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Hesitant
Efficient	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Inefficient
Depressed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Cheerful
