

# Exploring the relationship between brand-leadership and internal branding. How social media influence this process?

**T02 – The role of e-HRM and digital innovation in Human Resources Management**

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**Abstract.** The internal branding and brand-leadership constructs have already been explored in literature, but what is lacking is an in-depth analysis on which variables can influence this relationship. This paper aims to fill this literature gap. To fill the gap in literature on which factors influence the relationship between brand-leadership and internal branding, we argue that social capital, adequate HR practice strategies and use of social media can positively mediate this relationship. In today's society it is unthinkable not to talk about digital transformation, in particular social media has fundamentally changed people's private and professional lives. The questions that guide this work are: How brand centered HRM, social capital and social media influence the relationship between brand-leadership and internal branding? To answer these questions, an online questionnaire was administered to 9 different companies with the aim of understanding how collaborators perceive and live their brand.

**Keywords:** Internal branding, Social Media, Brand-leadership, Social Capital, Brand-centered HRM

## 1 Introduction

In literature, the relationship between brand leadership and internal branding has already been explored by various studies [1;2;3], but what is lacking are studies on elements that can mediate this relationship [4]. The goal of this study is to fill this gap.

While branding initiatives most frequently focus on external stakeholders, internal branding efforts establish system/processes and consequent employee behaviors that are consistent with the external branding efforts.

Although many different definitions of internal branding can be found, there is certain agreement that "it is a process through which brands aim to facilitate the internalization

of brand values by employees” [3], so that employee behavior aligns with these brand values when delivering the brand promise [4].

Internal branding recognizes the important roles of employees as brand sustainable competitive advantage. In addition, the role of leaders (such as encourages and manages innovation, respects employees as individuals, demonstrates passion to succeed, open to new ideas) can play a favorable role in guiding the efforts of their collaborators and making them feel active members of their organization. [3] define brand-specific leadership “as a leader’s approach to motivating his or her followers to act on behalf of the corporate brand by appealing to a contingency rationale in follower’s minds”. This relationship between internal branding and brand-leadership can be influenced by HR practices, these practices must safeguard the consistency between the external perception of the corporate brand and the image perceived inside, through a wise use of tools, internal communication, training and development. There is no internal branding without share capital, based on reciprocity and mutual recognition.

Finally, especially in the last decade, companies can leverage corporate social media, which according to our study play a moderation role in the relationship between internal branding and brand leadership. Social media play an important role in the relationship with external stakeholders. Through social media, the company will be able to increase the visibility of its brand by focusing on the right target and will be able to take advantage of the “word of mouth” effect. This is just one of the many advantages that the company can benefit from using social media. But, the benefits that social media have in the relationship between the company and its collaborators should also not be underestimated. Social media can be used as a “sounding board”, the HR office can use social media to increase and improve internal communication practices, in fact, thanks to the strategic use of these platforms, information can reach faster and to a greater number of collaborators, thus increasing knowledge flows sharing; not only that, training sessions can also be done through the use of social media. Furthermore, given that knowledge and values will be more widespread, leaders will be able to help people become brand ambassadors. Finally, today and more in the future, companies will be composed of the so-called Millennials, the digital natives who prefer virtual interactions rather than physical ones.

Drawing on social identity theory [5], Leader-Member Exchange Theory [6], and Signaling theory [7] address the following research questions: How brand centered HRM, social capital and social media influence the relationship between brand-leadership and internal branding?

Based on the data collected through a sample of 3500 individuals, belonging to 9 different organizations, this study aims to examine the relationship between internal branding and brand leadership, and how this relationship is mediated by other variables such as: brand-centered HRM, social capital and social media.

In the following sections, the constructs and theories on which our research is based will be analyzed.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Internal Branding process

The concept of the brand is often described in the marketing literature as “a set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that adds to or subtracts from the value provided by its product or service to a firm and/or to that firm’s customers” [8;9]. In order to be effective, the transfer of brand value is fundamental. Brand value is the financial worth of the brand. To determine brand value, businesses need to estimate how much the brand is worth in the market [8]. Brand value communicated to the market, outside companies should also be applied within the organization. And employees should know the value of the brand and also profess them. Internal branding is thought to be a moderately new approach which help organizations to concentrate on the organizational vision and values by on the whole passing on and focusing on one reasonable brand message in order to improve the corporate brand identity to all partners. For [10], a brand speaks to the relationship an organization has with its employee the same amount of as it speaks to the relationship that it has with its clients. One of the key roles of internal branding process is to ensure that employees transform brand messages into brand reality for external stakeholders.

Leadership is a key driver in internal branding processes. Indeed, the role of the leaders in focusing the behavior of employees on the interests of customers and on the brand is fundamental. A peculiar type of leadership, called brand-specific leadership, is the tendency to motivate employees to act in the name of the brand by leveraging [3] values and their personal beliefs. Leadership has become “the creation of a complete culture, a value system and a social structure, in which members find meaning for their work and so mobilize their commitment to the organization” [11 p. 50]. Due to the proximity between line managers and employees, line managers have a critical role in filtering, interpreting, and enacting visions and values for employees. Leadership, as a driver of employee brand-supporting behavior, is particularly important. A key mechanism through which leadership is translated into brand-building behavior is employee trust. Research differentiates between employees’ trust in the leader and trust in the organization. Trust has been defined as confident, positive expectations about the words, actions, and decisions of a trustee. Leader member exchange (LMX) reflects the degree to which a supervisor-employee relationship is characterized by mutual respect and obligation. Like trust, LMX and Perceived Organizational Support (POS) could be referenced to other targets (e.g. perceived supervisor support or organization-member exchange)[12].

[13] analyze the effective advancement of the internal branding convention might be as reliant on HR activities as on those created in the marketing division. HR practices not only include internal communication on corporate values, but also training support, leadership practices, reward & recognition programs, recruitment practices, etc. Therefore, if an organization would make employees’ behaviors to have a pro-brand manners. Brand-centered HRM is defined as HR practices that make employees produce positive attitude and behaviors toward the brands of the firm. [14] contend that the primary focus

of talent selecting is to hire those employees who have adequate ability to meet organizational goals. Thus, an organization may adopt brand-centered HR practices to induce employees to act according to the proper brand behaviors, which may contribute to the organization's better image. Previous research documents that organizations with good images have good organization identification and better perceptions of customers toward the organization [15]. [16] also contend that brand-centered HRM may contribute to the generation of brand identity internalization which is important to internal brand management. According to [13], employees who perceive a strong involvement of HR function may produce positive attitudes and behaviors, which are consistent with [17] who utilize social exchange theory to explain the relation between employees and the organization.

## **2.2. The role of social media in the internal branding process**

In this era of social media, the Internet has evolved from a broadcasting medium to a participatory platform which allows people to become the "media" themselves for collaborating and sharing information. [18] suggest that a company's reputation is determined in social media by a "*complex narrative web of meaning*" that is continuously produced in the interactions and dialogue between social-media users and organizations". It's really hard to define what is it social media because the speed at which the technology is expanding and evolving, challenges to the ability to define clear-cut boundaries around the concept. Social media technologies include a wide range of PC and mobile-based platforms that continue to be developed, launched, abandoned, etc. But, the goal of social media is certainly clearer: bring people together, facilitate collaboration and communication. Within organizations, social media can be used as an "other space" to interact with their collaborators and even among peers; to improve knowledge sharing processes and allow companies to circulate their ideas more easily by positively impacting innovation processes.

An organization's capability to innovate is closely tied to its intellectual capital, or its ability to utilize its knowledge resources. Organizations also assimilate and integrate knowledge by facilitating its communication, sharing, and transfer among individuals and by encouraging interactions in groups and networks [19]. [20] defines social capital "*as the knowledge embedded within, available through, and utilized by interactions among individuals and their networks of interrelationship*". Social capital is one of the identification mechanisms with the brand and therefore, the value and influence of the social exchange that take place inside and outside the organizational contest. Social capital concerns the wealth of relationships that a person has within the organizational context and how much he feels to be part of a group capable of collaborating, exchanging information and learning from each other in the name and on behalf of the brand. The dystopian perspective that the Internet reduces social capital has been widely criticized on a number of grounds [21]. Not only since the proclamation of virtual communities, researchers upholding the utopian view have considered the Internet as a means of social interaction. Online, one can meet and build networks of like-minded individuals. [22], for example, suggest that use of the Internet has positive effects on social capital. Social network sites thus have the potential not only to reshape social networks,

but also to build new networks online [23;24]. In this way, social network sites facilitate social interactions online. Similar to classical social network sites, Twitter can increase social capital [25] by helping users create new ties and maintain existing ones. In addition, on Twitter one can connect with other users more easily than on sites such as Facebook [25], as there is no need for approval of a follower's request. Furthermore, Twitter users can write short messages to report on their daily activities and express their opinions and ideas. They can also read about and take part in other people's lives and therefore feel part of the lives of their online contacts. Accordingly, Twitter may increase both a person's bridging and bonding online social capital.

The use of social media, today more than ever, plays an important role also because it is the conception that people have of work that changes. The work is perceived as a way of expressing oneself, in which to bring one's creativity, one's spirit of initiative, into an environment that is open and collaborative. This can represent a great opportunity for companies to welcome the use of social media in a positive and innovative way, on the one hand placing digital skills at the center of organizational development, which are transversal by their nature, on the other hand involving in this transition the younger generations. This entails a change in the entire organization, one no longer controls one's working sphere through the title in the organizational structure, but through one's influence, which derives from competence, the ability to attract followers but above all to create new leaders. The use of social media, through online social connectivity, certainly allows greater interaction (even if at the expense of face-to-face interactions), but also greater knowledge sharing.

In summary, corporate social media constitute a channel and environment for participation, information and involvement capable of making a decisive contribution to internal branding initiatives.

### **2.3. The theoretical model**

The social identity theory approach provide a link between internal branding and brand leadership. According to [5], social identity is "*the individual's knowledge that the belongs to certain social groups, together with some emotional and value significance to him of that membership*" (p.31). When employees define themselves as members of an organization, their attitudes and behaviors are directed towards achieving that organization's goals [26]. The branding literature highlights the role of employees in protecting brand identity and argues that leaders are important, as their behaviors affect employees' understanding of brand values encapsulated by brand identity [27]. The articulation of brand values by leaders could facilitate employees in defining themselves by corporate brand-specific attributes (i.e. brand values), motivating them to engage in activities congruent with brand identity. Still, research into leadership-employee identification is limited. Only the study of [28] provides empirical evidence to suggest that leadership behavior influences collective identification, such as corporate brand identification.

Despite arguments that "internal branding cannot be looked at in isolation" from employees' work environment [29, p. 1531] or their relationship with their employers, the

psychological employee-organization relationship has not been considered in prior research on how to turn employees into brand champions. Social Exchange Theory (SET) [30; 31] explains employees' positive behavior toward their employers as a result of reciprocity for benefits they (expect to) receive in return. Some researchers [32] argues that brand leadership is based on a social exchange theory relationship that represents a psychological contract between trustors and trustees, thus providing a basis for building trust. Such theory emphasizes "interdependent and contingent" exchanges by individuals as the bedrock for all societal transactions and relationships [33]. In other words, a key assumption of SET is that different forms of social interactions are built upon reciprocal exchanges and which also facilitates reciprocity, psychological contracts and mutual obligations [12]. The potency of social transactions to generate high-quality relationships or vice-versa has been especially delineated by [33]. Furthermore, the authors argue that "*SET is among the most influential conceptual paradigms for understanding workplace behavior*" (p. 874). As such, different forms of social transactions or social exchanges could be purposefully mediated and/or orchestrated through firm-specific architectures [34] and leadership [35]. Hence, social exchange theory provides an excellent backdrop for exploring how intra-organizational social networking architecture may influence capabilities and knowledge management through employees' attitudinal inclinations about collaboration and shared culture toward organizational citizenship [12].

Two streams of research applying social exchange theory in organizations have developed separately: leader-member exchange (LMX) [6;36] and perceived organizational support (POS) [37]. Leader-member exchange focuses on the quality of exchange between the employee and the manager and is based on the degree of emotional support and exchange of valued resources. In contrast, POS focuses on the exchange relationship between the employee and the organization.

Leader-member exchange also can be understood in terms of social exchange theory. The approach employs a transactional framework for leadership where supervisors treat individual subordinates differently. Consequently, relatively stable dyads develop and range from lower- to higher- quality exchanges [38].

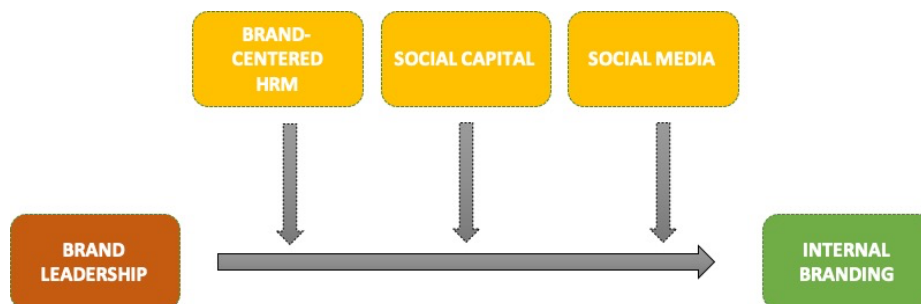
Moreover, according to [39], HRM can, through the organizational architecture and processes, enable ties and networks to form. There is no best way to build internal social networks; however, intra-organizational socializing plays a crucial role in ensuring ties and social capital accumulation. [39] proposes a model through which the HRM function can create sufficient ties in networks. The model stipulates that guided by the organizational goals, HRM should decide upon if the best way is through bonding or bridging ties; HRM should provide sufficient time and motivation, but also have a regard to the cultural aspect; and HRM should review the practices and processes in place, so they are not contradicting the goals of the network (pp. 152-154). In one strategic-based approach, researchers have examined the particular "fit" between various HRM practices and the organization's competitive strategy [40]. Embedded in this view is the notion that organizations must also horizontally align their various HRM practices toward their strategic goal and that practices must complement one another to achieve the firm's business strategy [40]. The guiding logic is that a firm's HRM practices must develop employees' skills, knowledge, and motivation such that employees behave in ways that are instrumental to the implementation of a particular strategy. Similarly,

researchers have taken a contingency perspective, with the assumption that the effectiveness of the HR system depends on contextual features such as industry, firm size, or manufacturing policies [41]. The HRM system itself is discussed not so much in terms of content (e.g., the specific set of HRM practices necessary for achieving an organizational goal) but rather process (the features of an HRM system that send signals to employees that allow them to understand the desired and appropriate responses and form a collective sense of what is expected) [42]. HRM practices can be viewed as a symbolic or signaling function by sending messages that employees use to make sense of and to define the psychological meaning of their work situation. The more HRM practices send strong signals about what strategic goals are most important and what employee behaviors are expected, supported, and rewarded relative to those goals, the more likely it is those goals will be achieved.

Signaling theory is frequently used in the entrepreneurship literature, where scholars have examined the signaling value of board characteristics [43], top management team characteristics, venture capitalist and angel investor presence and founder involvement. Signaling theory is also important to human resource management, where a number of studies have examined signaling that occurs during the recruitment process. As suggested by [44], once employees have experienced messages consistent with internal messages, such experience leads to higher level of internalization. Moreover, based on the signaling theory [7], company communications provide cues as information signals about the value of an intangible service offering. Lastly, given the commonly accepted view that internalization is the key to brand commitment [16], the positive influence of employee brand experience on commitment is not surprising. As employees experience brand values that are consistent with brand information provided, they would be more likely to believe in the brand and develop an attachment to that brand.

#### 2.4. Research Model and hypotheses

This study, starting from the assumption that there is a relationship between brand leadership and internal branding, aims to examine which variables have a moderation effect and to what extent in this relationship. Brand-centered HRM, social capital and social media are considered as organizational variables, which have a moderation effect on the relationship between brand-leadership and internal branding.



In our era, in which corporate organizational boundaries are more porous and much less defined than in the past, and customers are more aware of their choices, also due to the viral diffusion of purchasing experiences enabled by new technologies, brand management becomes more strategic and more complex. Brand management can no longer be just a specialized matter entrusted to the function of strategic and operational Marketing, as it once was. The brand management, on the other hand, requires comprehensive and integrated management that calls into question several company functions and above all the complex of company collaborators, that is, the ways in which human resources live the brand. In other words, the value of a corporate brand today does not only come from its distinctive features, from its recognizability and from the strength it has achieved in the reference market, but also depends on how much the company's employees and collaborators know, appreciate, support and live the brand. Certainly HR practices oriented in this direction will help individuals to experience the brand in a different way. A key role is also played by leaders, who must inspire collaborators through a compelling brand vision and individual involvement. The last aspect relating to the organizational characteristics that can influence the identification mechanisms with the brand concerns the share capital and therefore the value and influence of the social exchanges that take place inside and outside the organizational context. Today more than ever, it is not possible to talk about organization without referring to technology. The use of social media reinforces the sense of belonging to the company and allows the exchange of information, thus making a concrete contribution to the development of good relationships. Employees find corporate social media engaging because they are interactive, democratic and immediate, ideal channels for making their voices heard. By feeling involved in corporate communication processes, workers can develop a more complete sense of corporate belonging.

*H1: the positive relationship between brand leadership and internal branding will be stronger when brand HRM is higher compared to lower.*

*H2: the positive relationship between brand leadership and internal branding will be stronger when social capital is higher compared to lower.*

*H3: the positive relationship between brand leadership and internal branding will be stronger when social media is higher compared to lower.*

### **3 Methods**

#### **3.1. Sample**

An online questionnaire was constructed and distributed via e-mail to employees of 9 different companies. In total 3500 fully completed surveys were returned. Those who



claim to use social media in the company are 76% of the respondents, so the final sample is 2289. An introductory page containing the general purpose of the study, instructions on how to rate the items, and a clause on the confidentiality of the data collected was included with the questionnaire. Respondents' perceptions were measured using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). The sample comprised 62,1 per cent female and 37,9 per cent male. Most of the respondents are in the age group between 41-50 years with 39.9%, followed by > 50 years with 34.6%, 31-40 years: 19.7% and finally, <30 years with 5.8%. As for education, the majority of the sample (52,2%) has a diploma. As well as for the role held in the company, 64,6% is an employee.

### 3.2. Variables measurement

All scales used for the questionnaire are 5 point Likert.

*Independent variable:* we used 20 items taken from Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) Form 5x [45] to measure brand leadership (ability to guide followers, and to make them become brand ambassadors of the brand), including intellectual stimulation (a leader provides followers with challenging new ideas to stimulate rethinking of old ways of doing things e.g. They help me to see my works as a brand activity), inspirational motivation (refers to a leader's ability to create a sense of collective mission among followers by articulating an exciting vision e.g. They speak optimistically about the future of our brand), idealized influence (Attributes), idealized influence (Behaviors) are the degree to which the leader behaves in admirable ways that cause followers to identify with him/her (e.g. they consider the ethical and moral consequences of our brand promise) and individual consideration (refers to coaching and mentoring while trying to assist each individual in achieving his or her fullest potential e.g. They invest time in supporting me in brand issues).

*Dependent variable:* to measure "internal branding", we use brand knowledge (knowledge of the brand style rules to be used in communications, how to behave to better present the brand to customers /users, etc.), brand identification (feelings and personal opinions related to the brand) and brand commitment (it motivates the members of the organization to work in the interest of the brand, thus influencing also the behaviors acted and the subsequent performance).

Then we use Employee Brand Equity (EBE) scale of [46] including brand endorsement (what employees say about their brand), brand allegiance (what employees will do in the future e.g. I'm going to stay in the organization), and brand consistent behavior (the behavior of employees). Finally, we measured brand citizenship behavior (employees engaging in discretionary behaviors beyond formal job requirements) based on the approaches suggested by [47;48].

*Moderation variables:* we used 13 items taken from the questionnaire of [49] to measure brand-centered HRM (HR practices that make employees produce positive attitude and behaviors toward the brands of the firm), divided in "training and development"

(e.g. Our organization helps new employees to understand the value and principles related to the brand through training) and “evaluation and selection” (in recruiting new staff, the brand image can help our organization find the most suitable candidates). Finally, we used 5 items from [20] for social capital (as the knowledge embedded within, available through, and utilized by interactions among individuals and their networks of interrelationship). Furthermore, it was asked if the organization in which they work has adopted social media (social networks, blogs, video, etc.), and if they answer yes, we asked how often they use corporate social media.

*Control variables:* several control variables were included in the analysis, including gender, age of respondent, education level, organizational role and seniority.

### 3.3. Results

*Analytical approach.* Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to test uni-variate relationships and hierarchical linear multiple regression analysis was employed to examine the multivariate effects on internal branding. This approach consists of building several regression models by adding variables to a previous model at each step and checking whether newly added variables show a significant improvement in the proportion of explained variance. In total, three models were calculated. Control variables were entered first (Model 1). In a second step, we added brand leadership, social capital, and social media usage (Model 2). Finally, in order to test for moderation, in the last step, we included the interaction terms (Model 3). In order to avoid multicollinearity problems related to the multiplicative terms, all independent and moderating variables were mean-centred.

*Regression analysis.* Means, standard deviations, Cronbach Alpha and correlations are presented in Table I. The results of multiple regression analysis are reported in Table II.

	Mean	SD	Cronbach Alpha	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. gender	0,38	0,485	-	1								
2. age	3,03	0,88	-	,153**	1							
3. education	2,26	0,775	-	,147**	-,128**	1						
4. Direct contact with customers	3,16	0,863	-	0,032	0,012	,070**	1					
5. Social media usage	2,28	0,93	-	,125**	,053*	,173**	,122**	1				
6. Brand-specific Leadership (single factor)	70,03	18,72	0,920	0,009	-0,016	-0,028	,058*	,146**	1			
7. Brand-centered HRM (single factor)	39,46	12,37	0,898	,041*	-0,011	0,017	,072**	,152**	,699**	1		
8. Social Capital	15,99	4,72	0,902	,074**	-0,007	,049*	,097**	,151**	,572**	,659**	1	
9. Internal Branding	18,32	2,76	0,875	-0,009	0,029	-,107**	,109**	,174**	,597**	,468**	,429**	1

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

Table I: Means, standard deviations, Cronbach Alpha and correlations

	Internal branding					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.
Gender	-.006	.030	-.020	.024	-.017	.024
Age	.017	.017	.018	.013	.018	.013
Education	-.078***	.019	-.078***	.015	-.077***	.015
Direct contact with customers	.075***	.017	.040**	.013	.040**	.013
Brand-specific Leadership			.317***	.018	.310***	.018
Brand-centered HRM			.016	.019	.022	.020
Social Capital			.079***	.017	.080***	.017
Social media usage			.044***	.013	.046***	.013
Brand-specific Leadership X Brand-centered HRM					-.007	.016
Social Capital X Brand-specific Leadership					-.018	.016
Brand-specific Leadership X Social media usage					-.025*	.013
Adjusted R	.021***		.406**		.410***	

\*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001;

Table II: Multiple regression analysis

With regard to the main effects, gender, age, education and having direct contact with customers were entered into the regression model as control variables. We found that education was negatively and significantly related to internal branding and having direct contact with customers was positively and significantly related to internal branding. Model 2 shows that brand leadership, social capital, and social media usage were significantly and positively related to internal branding. In terms of moderating effects, Model 3 shows a significant moderating effect of social media that decreases the positive relationship between brand leadership and internal branding.

## 4 Discussion

Branding is facing important challenges due to the rise of digital and social-media environments.

As emerged from the results, those who have contacts with customers develop greater behaviors related to the brand. For this, employees are important because they reflect their own experience of the organization to outsider when working in different roles in the interface of the internal and external realities of the organization, and they build reputation by delivering the brand promise to customers. Nevertheless, employee involvement in reputation building tends to be a double-edged sword. A company's success is often linked with how well their employees have internalized the brand and company values and how well their actions and activities are aligned with the brand promise. This is why management of employees has been acknowledged as a crucial element of corporate-image formation processes. The ways in which employees are encouraged to commit themselves to the organization and its goals, through meaningful work practices, healthy work communities, and encouraging incentives and rewards, becomes central to how employees "live the brand" and thus create (or destroy) reputation in their everyday exchanges and social influence with various stakeholders.

In fact, as claimed by the Social Exchange Theory, employee behavior is nothing other than the result of reciprocity for the benefits they have received.

Employees who are in consensus with an organization's brand are more likely to act consistently in ways supporting how the organization hopes that external constituencies perceive it and its products/services. In fact, one of the results obtained from data analysis, which makes us understand the importance of a strategic use of social media, is that as the use of corporate social media increases, brand-related behaviors increase. Employees that have a more positive attitude toward the brand are more likely to incorporate this image into their work activities when there is some degree of HR involvement in the internal branding process. The leader-member exchange, the theory used for our theoretical framework, states that the quality of relationship is based on the degree of emotional support and exchange of valued resources. A result obtained, in contrast with what emerged from the literature, is that a high use of social media reduces the effect of brand-specific leadership on internal branding. It could be assumed that managers do not yet have the skills and the adequate awareness to make the most of these tools, in order to convey messages and values related to the brand. Social media is often seen only as a prerogative for the HR function. In the management literature, many works suggest that a number of practitioners are either reluctant or unable to manage appropriate strategies and allocate resources accordingly to successfully engage with social media. Hence some organizations ignore or mismanage the opportunities and threats offered by these strategic tools. Many senior decision makers in some organizations see social media as the wasteful pastime of teenagers [50]. According to [51] there are three main approaches towards using social media. The first is a method that is traditional, treating social media channels just like long-established media channels (e.g., television, radio, print), and using tried and true metrics on established critical ends in marketing (e.g. awareness, recall, purchase) and assessing return on investment. The second approach involves learning to discover important issues associated with social media (e.g., conversation, engagement); in a traditional way, since efforts are made to associate social media decisions and actions to ROI. A third approach includes experimentation, in order to discover ways of communication with a more "human" voice than a "corporate" voice, along with processes, where the end effects may be transformational and could impact significantly a firm's culture (e.g. more open/flat structures with respect to a power, control, and spanning of influence and interaction). In the companies in which corporate social media are adopted and used there will be a greater perception of the existence of HRM practices designed specifically to encourage, support and recognize employee behaviors conducive to brand development in line with the organizational objectives and the development of productivity and efficiency. To summarize, the contribution that this article wants to give at a theoretical level is to fill the gap in literature on which variables come into play in the relationship between internal branding and brand-leadership. Social media, social capital and HRM practices play a fundamental role in helping the company to develop a successful internal branding strategy. In fact, if the company can act towards external customers through the levers of communication and marketing to influence the perception of the brand, towards its internal customers it can use a series of HR practices that encourage employees to identify themselves with organizational objectives and orienting one's behavior towards the desired corporate identity and image. The alignment perceived by employees between the processes and organizational systems (e.g. training, communication,

rewarding, etc.) and the values expressed by the brand characterizes, in fact, those practices of internal branding that make employees produce attitudes and positive behaviors towards the brand. Brand values should be considered cornerstones around which HR practices should be built.

Another contribution that this article raises is to increase the literature on social media, emphasizing how the latter can be fundamental tools in support of HR practices and social capital. Focusing on social media, having a strategy behind it, can help companies increase their internal branding.

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