

# THE ROLE OF EMPLOYEES IN SHAPING BRAND PERFORMANCE

AGNIESZKA BIEŃKOWSKA, ANNA SAŁAMACHA,  
KATARZYNA TWOREK

## ABSTRACT

The impact of employee activities on creating the brand management process is becoming increasingly important in the modern economy. Therefore, the role of employees in shaping brand performance should be defined. The study investigates the mediating role of employee brand commitment in the relationship between employee openness and brand performance. In order to verify the potential relationship, empirical studies were conducted in 2019. The first stage was a pilot survey covering a group of 25 managers acting as competent judges, followed by the main study, during which results from 268 organisations located in Poland were collected. To develop and verify the assumed hypothesis, the following research methodology was used: a systematic literature review, correlation analysis, and multiple linear regression analysis with a mediator. The results of the research have shown that the shaping of brand performance is influenced by employee openness, and indirectly by employee brand commitment. It was established that brand performance is indirectly and significantly influenced by employee openness and also that employee brand commitment is a mediator in this relationship.

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**AGNIESZKA BIEŃKOWSKA,**

e-mail: agnieszka.bienkowska@pwr.edu.pl

**ANNA SAŁAMACHA,**

e-mail: anna.salamacha@pwr.edu.pl

**KATARZYNA TWOREK**

e-mail: katarzyna.tworek@pwr.edu.pl

## KEY WORDS

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Wrocław University  
of Science and Technology,  
Wrocław, Poland

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## Introduction

It is not without reason that employees are known to be the most important resource in the contemporary organisation (e.g. Armstrong, 1980, 1988). By performing the duties entrusted to them, they contribute to the achievement of the goals of the organisation as a whole, affecting the effectiveness of individual areas of the organisation (Kaplan and Norton, 1996). One of the most important areas of an organisation, which is both directly and indirectly influenced by employees, is the area of marketing, and therefore the organisation's clients. First of all, employees' job

performance (in the area of R&D, as well as technology, supply and production, and finally sales) translates – in accordance with the assumptions of the quality spiral (Juran, 1989) – into the quality of products (products and services) offered to the clients of the organisation, and thus also to the brand performance of these products and the organisation as a whole. At the same time, the role of employees does not end with the performance of the tasks entrusted to them. By going outside their own box, they can become ambassadors for the organisation and the brand among

customers, being engaged in the process of shaping it.

Many authors emphasise that employees have a major influence on the way the brand is perceived by external stakeholders (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011). Employees have the opportunity to demonstrate brand value through attitudes and behaviour, and also to communicate brand messages by providing brand experience (Xiong et al., 2013). Furthermore, they change the brand promise in terms of brand reality, which translates directly into benefits for consumers and other stakeholders (Xiong et al., 2013; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011). The importance of employees' impact on customer perception seems to be particularly important in the area of services, where it is not possible to convince customers to the brand through tangible features, so employee contact with the consumer is crucial (Xiong et al., 2013; Kimpakorn and Tocquer, 2010; Burmann and Zeplin, 2005). It should be emphasised that these issues are important not only in the area of business-to-consumer (B2C) communication, but also play a key role in business-to-business (B2B) marketing, where the relationships between entities are based on networks, and the withdrawal of an employee might jeopardise cooperation. However, Gelb and Rangarajan (2014) argue that employees interacting with consumers cannot be perceived as the only ones who influence the perception of the brand, because this approach might be too narrow. Consumers have a holistic approach to the brand; thus, in reality, the perception of all aspects thereof (e.g. visual identity system, marketing programmes, guarantees) requires the inclusion of all employees in the brand image (Gelb and Rangarajan, 2014).

Of course, the negative impact of employees on the brand should also be mentioned. Any negligence by employees, either during the production process or

the provision of service and experience, or information about the mistreatment of employees in an organisation, can have an extremely strong negative impact on the brand (Gelb and Rangarajan, 2014). Considering the above, it should be assumed that the influence of employees on the brand, including the very important issue of brand performance, is undoubtedly significant.

Due to the reasons discussed above, employee impact on brand performance has become a popular research topic (Cui et al., 2014; Cheung et al., 2014). Brand performance is a construct closely related to consumer behaviour (De Vries and Carlson, 2014). Therefore, when considering the impact of employees on shaping brand performance, their openness should be considered a condition which potentially determines their influence on consumers. This issue has already been debated in the literature to some extent. Altaf et al. (2019) examined the impact of openness on employees' brand equity in their research, while Kowalczyk and Kucharska (2019) showed that employee brand commitment has an impact on brand performance. However, a comprehensive analysis of the role of employee openness in shaping brand performance through employee brand commitment has not yet been undertaken, which constitutes a research gap.

In this context, the aim of the article is to explain how employees influence brand performance. In particular, the impact of the level of openness of employees on brand performance will be examined, aiming to build a mediation model confirming that employee openness affects brand performance through employee brand commitment. The proposed and empirically verified model will allow the researchers to fill in the identified research gap.

## 1. Literature review

### 1.1. Employee openness

Employee openness may be defined as employees' ability to exceed own limitations and be open to other employees in the organisation (Biełkowska and Tworek, 2020). In this sense it refers to employees' abilities to: 1) build relationships within and outside the organisation and communicate effectively; 2) be creative and innovative and think outside the box; and 3) perceive the wider context of tasks, their influence and dependence on other parts of the organisation (Biełkowska et al., 2020).

The organisation can be understood as a system of dependencies among the elements that created it (Biełkowska et al., 2020). In this context, it is necessary to have communication skills and the ability to collaborate with others (Barron, 2000), which of course translate into building relationships within and outside the organisation. Moreover, the functioning of an organisation in a changing environment requires modern employees to have the skills to perceive the broader organisational context and thus have a „broadened perspective of looking at reality” (Adam-ska-Chudzińska, 2012: 109). According to the theory of personality, openness to experience is considered a predictor of job performance. Of course, openness to experience in this context is defined differently than employee openness in the workplace (see McCrae and Costa, 1986): „Openness to experience reflects characteristics such as imaginativeness, artistic sensitivity, curiosity, broad-mindedness, intelligence, and creativity” (Barrick and Mount, 1991; Tews et al., 2011: 486). In turn, communication openness in the workplace is positively related to employees' job satisfaction (Wulandari and Burgess, 2011). Finally, open communication in an organisation, as noted by Schiller and Cui (2010),

is critical not only to effectiveness, but also efficiency and overall success.

### 1.2. Employee brand commitment

Employees' commitment has become an important issue in management sciences, because it has a strong influence (Kucharska, 2020; Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001). A great deal of research has been done on the subject of commitment to organisations, occupations, and unions, as well as commitment to working toward the attainment of goals and the implementation of policies (Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001). However, relatively little attention has so far been paid to employees' commitment to brands (Kimpakorn and Tocquer, 2010).

According to Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2010), employee brand commitment is defined as “the degree to which employees identify [...] with the brand, are willing to exert additional effort to achieve the goals of the brand and are interested in remaining with the [...] organisation” (Kimpakorn and Tocquer, 2010: 381). It is believed that EBC is a three-dimensional construct consisting of obedience (the degree of employee readiness to adapt their beliefs to those represented by the brand), identification (the degree to which employees consider themselves to be a component of the brand) and internalisation (the degree to which employees take the brand into account in their opinions and behaviours) (Burmam et al., 2008).

A high level of employee brand commitment brings about a number of positive aspects such as loyalty, dedication to work, positive word-of-mouth and consistent delivery of brand promise (Altaf et al., 2019; Burmann and Zeplin, 2005). As a consequence, there is a positive relationship between employee brand commitment and brand equity (Altaf et al., 2019; Gelb and Rangarajan, 2014). On the one hand, a lack of employee commitment has nu-

merous negative consequences, such as diminished loyalty, negative word-of-mouth communication directed to other employees and even customers, reduced productivity, and higher levels of employee turnover (Miles and Mangold, 2004). Kucharska argues that employee brand commitment should be an area of interest to organisations, as despite the fact that employees nowadays do not associate their entire career with one brand, this commitment should be stimulated (Kucharska, 2020). In this regard, the significant role played by predictors of commitment, such as job satisfaction, extrinsic rewards, intrinsic rewards, job characteristics, upward and downward communication, leadership, promotion satisfaction, trust in supervisors and employees' perception of organisational values, is emphasised (Kimpakorn and Tocquer, 2009).

### 1.3. Brand performance

In the literature, a great deal of attention has been devoted to organisational performance research (Alqahtani and Uslay, 2020; Tworek et al., 2018; Han et al., 1998). However, it seems that a comprehensive approach to performance on the macro level may not be sufficient for a full description of the organisational situation, mainly because it can contribute to the adverse phenomenon of hiding problem areas (O'Cass and Ngo, 2007). Focusing on the micro level, i.e. the brand, allows one to gain a competitive advantage, which is not directly related to the products offered by the organization but rather to the overall success on the markets obtained through achieving set goals and targets (Devendranath Reddy and Fabiyola Kavitha, 2019). Additionally, focusing on brands, the characteristics of the organisation, its environment and the relationships between them can be better presented (O'Cass and Ngo, 2007).

According to O'Cass and Ngo (2007), brand performance is perceived as a relative measurement of brand success in the marketplace. The authors believe that the notion is related to brand market strength, which might be measured according to market share, sales growth, profitability and the like (O'Cass and Ngo, 2007). A more extended approach, represented by Iyer et al. (2018b), perceives the construct as financial and non-financial performance measures, which illustrate at least the medium-term maintenance of brands (Iyer et al., 2018b). The above approaches, however, do not consider the significant role of the buyer, who is currently at the centre of marketing interest (Armstrong and Kotler, 2012). This issue was solved by Lai et al. (2010), who understand brand performance as financial performance achieved by the brand's owner and perceived by buyers (Lai et al., 2010).

## 2. Development of hypotheses

Employee brand commitment seems to be one of the most important factors influencing brand performance. Erkmen and Hancer (2015) believe that employee brand commitment is an important factor connected to managing employees and that it requires further detailed analysis. It is equally common knowledge that having a strong and distinctive brand requires employee involvement at all levels of the organisational structure (Balmer, 2001). Committed employees are a source of competitive advantage (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2011; Morgan and Hunt, 1994) because they are more likely to put more effort into achieving the goals of the organisation (Kimpakorn and Tocquer, 2010; Burmann et al., 2008; Castro et al., 2005). Additionally, it was found that committed employees work very hard to provide a brand promise to the

client and, as a consequence, bring many benefits to the brand (Cheung et al., 2014; Vandenberg and Lance, 1992). In addition, it is believed that employee brand commitment is one of the antecedents of brand citizenship behaviour, which is perceived to be the best way to create superior value (Kucharska, 2020; Kowalczyk and Kucharska, 2019; Asha and Jyothi, 2013).

Many studies have proven that there is a positive relationship between employee brand commitment and job performance (King and Grace, 2012; Kimpakorn and Tocquer, 2009; Castro et al., 2005). However, Kucharska et al. (2019) claim that it is not job performance, but instead brand performance, which is the most desirable value for an organisation in the long term (Kucharska et al., 2019) - employee brand commitment is categorically an important part of building said value. It is well established in the literature that internal branding has a positive impact on brand performance (Iyer et al., 2018a; Tuominen et al., 2016). Moreover, many authors argue that internal branding has an impact on employees' brand-supporting behaviour, i.e. employee brand commitment (Garas et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2015; Burmann and Zeplin, 2005), which further translates into brand performance. Therefore, it can be assumed that:

*H1: There is a relationship between employee brand commitment and brand performance*

Employee brand commitment is directly related to all employee activities which enable them to engage in "pro-brand" behaviour. Hardaker and Fill (2005) examined the intellectual and emotional engagement of employees in the context of messages directed at employees to maximise their effective "pro-brand" behaviour. They revealed that there are differences among employees concerning their brand commitment, which were related to their vari-

ous characteristics. As employees need to be recognised as a brand's "ambassadors" (Hemsley, 1998), it seems that their level of openness may be one of the most important factors in building their brand commitment. Many authors have discussed specific brand ambassador programmes, which are aimed at enabling brand commitment among employees who are ready and willing to communicate the brand outside the organisation (Schmidt and Baumgarth, 2018). Harris and de Charnatony (2001: 441) stated that "employees constitute the interface between a brand's internal and external environments" and they underline the need for specific skills among them. The skills should be connected to the ability to swiftly communicate outside an organisation and to think outside the box to do so, as employees represent a main source of customer information (Harris and de Charnatony, 2001). Henkel et al. (2007) discussed structural conditions of brand-consistent employee behaviour, similarly concluding that features connected to employee openness are a prerequisite for brand-consistent behaviour, including brand commitment. Therefore, the following hypothesis seems to be valid:

*H2: There is a relationship between employee openness and employee brand commitment*

However, employee openness seems not only to influence employee brand commitment, but also brand performance. As many authors have underlined in their models of brand performance, various employee characteristics are considered to be important factors which have an influence on it (Ngo et al., 2019; Poulis and Wisker, 2016). As stated by Harris and de Charnatony (2001: 453), "employees play a crucial role in building the brand". Their role is mainly connected to their ability to openly communicate and implement

actions to support brand performance. King and Grace (2012) listed relationship orientation and socialisation – all aspects connected to building relationships within and outside the organisation and communicating effectively – as crucial elements of employee openness. Such a view is supported by other authors, who claim that corporate communication (undertaken by employees who need to have the required skills needed for efficient communication outside the organisation) is crucial to improving brand performance (Foreman and Argenti, 2005). It furthermore confirms that openness, by enabling employees to undertake such communication efficiently, will influence brand performance. Mijan and Abdullah (2019) underlined the fact that internal orientation makes organisations facilitate communication to gain brand-related information from employees – in case of both strengths and weaknesses. It allows organization to retrieve customer-sourced information from the market to relate it to organisational capabilities, which means that without excellent communication skills mixed with innovative thinking (obtaining external information and communicating internal information), proper brand performance is impossible. Therefore, it seems that the following hypothesis can be formulated:

*H3: There is a relationship between employee openness and brand performance*

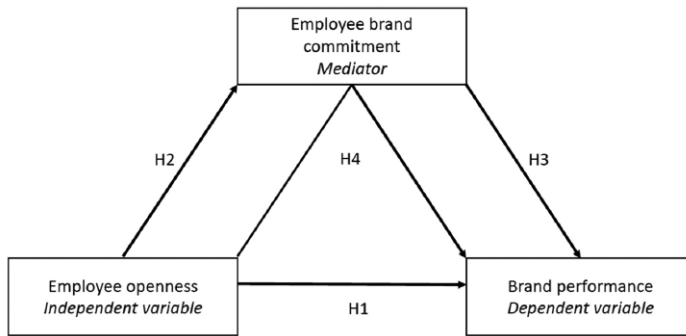
Moreover, it seems that the relationship between employee openness and brand performance may not only be direct. Harris and de Chernatony (2001) emphasised that the more likely managers and employees are to act according to the corporate brand values (translating into a more coherent brand identity), the stronger brand performance will be. However, it should be underlined that those activities of employees and managers must be visible in order for that influence to take place. Hence,

it seems that openness will play the role of enabler for the relationship between employee brand commitment and brand performance. It seems that employee brand commitment may act as a mediator between employee openness and brand performance – as it will be impossible to show those actions without the commitment to the brand itself. Such a view is confirmed e.g. by Piehler (2018), who stated that not only employee brand commitment, but also brand understanding and brand citizenship behaviours (which influence brand performance), need the active encouragement of employees in terms of brand development. Such encouragement is determined by openness, which enables them to communicate effectively and implement innovative thinking to act in the best interest of the brand, thus influencing its performance. Furthermore, other studies confirm (albeit indirectly) that effective brand connection, as determined by employees' various abilities, translates into performance, e.g. Ngo et al. (2019) in the context of job performance and Poulis and Wisker (2016) in the context of organisational performance, which are both shown to be closely connected to brand performance by Kashive and Khanna (2017). Therefore, considering such a view, which can be found in the literature (all showing some sort of mediation model stating that employee characteristics indirectly influence brand performance), together with the existence of the relations assumed above in the case of H1, H2, and H3, an additional assumption may be formulated stating that employee brand commitment is a mediator of the relationship between employee openness and brand performance. Hence, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

*H4: Employee openness influences brand performance through employee brand commitment.*

The overview of the proposed hypotheses is given in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Developed hypotheses**



Source: Own elaboration.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Sample

In order to verify the proposed hypothesis, a survey was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2019 among a group of 25 managers (acting as competent judges). The main survey was preceded by a pilot survey. Based on the obtained results, some ambiguous questions were rewritten and it was established that the proposed questions were understood by respondents as intended by the researchers (which is a prerequisite for establishing a questionnaire as a valid measurement method (Czakoń, 2019)). The main research was conducted using the CAWI method in December 2019 among 268 organisations

located in Poland, which was the only condition limiting the sample (organisations were surveyed regardless of size, industry or type of business etc.). The overview of the sample is shown in Table 1 and confirms that the sample is sufficiently diversified to form scientific conclusions based on the obtained results. Table 1 contains information about 253 organisations, because not all of them provided information on the object and scale of activity; however, this does not affect the results of the research, as they did not relate to those given in table cross-sections of the examined organisations.

**Table 1. Research sample characteristics**

| Type of organisation             | Manufacturing organisations | Trade organisations | Service organisations | Total |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-------|
| Local organisations              | 67                          | 39                  | 45                    | 151   |
| Branch of a global organisations | 55                          | 20                  | 27                    | 102   |
| Total                            | 122                         | 59                  | 72                    | 253   |

Source: Own elaboration.

### 3.2. Overview of variables

The verification of hypotheses was based on three variables: EO, EBC, and BP (Appendix A).

*Employee openness* (EO) was measured based on the research of Bieńkowska et al. (2020). The scale contains three items, which are assessed based on a five-point Likert scale (from “I strongly disagree” to “I strongly agree” with a mid-point of “I have no opinion”).

*Employee brand commitment* (EBC) was measured based on the results of research by Kowalczyk and Kucharska (2019). The scale, adapted from Beatty et al. (1988) and He and Li (2011), contains four items,

which are assessed based on a five-point Likert scale (from “I strongly disagree” to “I strongly agree” with a mid-point of “I have no opinion”).

*Brand performance* (BP) measurement was borrowed from Kucharska (2020) – the scale, adopted from Lai et al. (2010), contains four items, which are assessed based on a five-point Likert scale (from “I strongly disagree” to “I strongly agree” with a mid-point of “I have no opinion”).

The reliability of the scales was tested using Cronbach’s alpha and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (results are given in Table 2), which confirmed that they are well-fitted, reliable and coherent.

**Table 2. Verification of variables**

| No. | Variable | No. of items | Cronbach's $\alpha$ | Factor analysis | Kolmogorow-Smirnow | Shapiro-Wilk       |
|-----|----------|--------------|---------------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1   | EO       | 3            | 0.690               | 61.858          | 0.128. $p < 0.001$ | 0.967. $p < 0.001$ |
| 2   | EBC      | 4            | 0.824               | 65.720          | 0.122. $p < 0.001$ | 0.967. $p < 0.001$ |
| 3   | BP       | 4            | 0.813               | 64.173          | 0.131. $p < 0.001$ | 0.971. $p < 0.001$ |

Source: Own elaboration.

## 4. Research results

According to Saks (2006), there are three conditions which must be met to establish a mediation model. First, the independent variables must be related to the mediator. Second, the dependent variables must be related to the mediator. Third, a significant relationship between the dependent and independent variables will be reduced (partial mediation) or no longer be significant (full mediation) when controlling for the mediator.

Hence, in order to satisfy those conditions, the *r*-Pearson correlation analysis was performed in order to verify the first two conditions and verify hypotheses H1, H2, and H3. The *r*-Pearson analysis was chosen, as it was established that the tested variables exhibit a normal distribution (both Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorow-Smirnow tests were performed to verify that assumption, and their results are given in Table 2).

**Table 3. Correlation analysis between analysed variables**

|    |      | EBC    | BP     |
|----|------|--------|--------|
| EO | r    | 0.707  | 0.704  |
|    | Sig. | <0.001 | <0.001 |
|    | N    | 257    | 257    |
| BP | r    | 0.740  | 1      |
|    | Sig. | <0.001 | -      |
|    | N    | 257    | 257    |

Source: Own elaboration.



The results of the correlation analysis are presented in Table 3. They show that there is a statistically significant and strong correlation between all analysed variables, but the correlation is certainly strongest in terms of the relationship between brand performance and employee brand commitment. It allows for the acceptance of hypotheses H1, H2, and H3.

Hence, the next step of the verification of the mediation model can be performed. In order to do so, a regression model with a mediator is built for *employee openness* as the independent variable, and *brand performance* as the dependent variable.

*Employee brand commitment* is tested as the mediator in the model. In order to verify the model, the obtained regression model should be statistically significant and the total effect should be higher than the direct effect calculated for given variables. The results of the mediation analysis are included in Tables 4 and 5. It should be underlined that the aim of the article is to verify the existence of the mediation effect occurring within the developed theoretical model; therefore, the analysis of the regression is focused on the direct / indirect effects.

**Table 4. Overview of the regression model**

| Variables | Variable coefficient | Standard error | t-student test | p      |
|-----------|----------------------|----------------|----------------|--------|
| EO        | 0.377                | 0.055          | 6.809          | 0.0001 |
| EBC       | 0.446                | 0.052          | 8.457          | 0.0001 |

**Table 5. Employee brand commitment as the mediator of the relationship between employee openness and brand performance**

| Mediator | Direct effect value | Indirect effect value | Boot LLCI | Boot ULCI |
|----------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|
| EBC      | 0.377,<br>p < 0.001 | 0.333,<br>p < 0.001   | 0.251     | 0.421     |

Source: Own elaboration.

The obtained regression model with a mediator is statistically significant ( $F(2,250)=202.210$ ,  $p < 0.001$  and corrected  $R^2=0.618$ ) and all variables (both independent variable and the mediator) are significant elements of the model (see Table 4). The variables within the model explain 61.8% of the variance in brand performance. Moreover, *employee brand commitment* is a statistically significant mediator of the model ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $\text{coeff.} = 0.446$ ,  $\text{se} = 0.052$ ). The results also confirm that the mediating effect is statistically significant, as can be observed in Table 4, based on which it can be concluded that the indirect effect is greater than the direct one, and furthermore that it is significant. The obtained model shows that *employee brand commitment* is indeed

a mediator of the relationship between *employee openness* and *brand performance*. Therefore, it allows for the acceptance of hypothesis H4.

## 5. Discussion

The role of employees in shaping brand performance seems to be a significant issue in the management of modern organisations. The aim of the article was to explain how employees affect brand performance. In particular, the impact of employee openness on brand performance was examined, aiming to build the mediation model confirming that openness affects brand performance through employee brand commitment. The obtained results confirmed the adopted assumptions. In particular, they confirm that,

in order to shape brand performance, it is necessary for employees to go “out of the box”, expressed in their levels of openness. This is confirmed through research by King and Grace (2012) and Mijan and Abdullah (2019). The research results also show that the impact of employee openness on brand performance is indirect (see Harris and de Chernatony (2001) or Piehler (2018)). Therefore, it was proved that a mediator, i.e. employee brand commitment, plays a role in the process of shaping brand performance, which explains how openness affects brand performance. Therefore, openness plays a fundamental and direct role in shaping employee brand commitment – which is consistent with the statements of Hardaker and Fill (2005) and Hemsley (1998). In turn, employee brand commitment directly influences brand performance, which corresponds to the results of research by Kowalczyk and Kucharska (2019), Cheung et al. (2014), or Garas et al. (2018) among others. In the above context, the model of the effect of openness on brand performance through employee brand commitment should be considered validated.

## Conclusions

The empirical research performed in order to verify the influence of employee openness on brand performance through employee brand commitment, based on the literature review, allowed the researchers to confirm that: 1) there is a statistically significant indirect impact of employee openness on brand performance; and 2) employee brand commitment is a mediator of that relationship. Therefore, employee brand commitment, which creates engagement in “pro-brand” behaviour, affects brand performance in the organisation through employee openness. In this context, it should be recognised that the research gap was fulfilled by the literature

analysis complemented by empirical research.

The developed model, in addition to contributing to knowledge in the fields of both human resources management and marketing, is also of practical significance. The conclusions reached are relevant to business practice as well. After all, brand performance depends on the behaviour of each employee. Therefore, the statements by Hemsley (1998) and Schmidt and Baumgarth (2018) about the necessity and legitimacy of organisations undertaking extensive and systemic actions to increase employee participation in positively shaping brand performance seem to be right. Increasing pro-brand behaviour (e.g. by introducing brand’s “ambassadors”) (Hemsley, 1998) seems to be beneficial not only to brand performance, but also to the organisation as a whole. Therefore, as part of managerial implications, it is worth emphasising the importance of creating tools that directly affect employee openness. In particular, training that can support the desired abilities should be provided, but the inclusion of these features in the employee assessment process is also important.

However, the empirical study is burdened with certain limitations. First of all, the research hypotheses were verified on a research sample only in one country, namely Poland. Secondly, the research sample was chosen based on a purposive manner, so the conclusions may not be generalisable. Finally, not all the aspects of employee impact on brand performance have been included - many others that also have an impact have been identified in the literature, for example intrinsic work motivation, employees’ perceptions of authenticity or brand value congruence perceptions. In the present study, the relationships between the constructs were tested separately, so it is not known whether the impact would be equally large in the con-

text of other variables. Nevertheless, the results obtained can be regarded as the first solid step in the research area.

At the same time, the conducted research may form the basis for future research. First of all, the impact of openness as well as employee brand commitment should be examined together with other factors which potentially affect brand performance. It is important to know the importance of employees' impact in the process of shaping brand performance in relation to other factors in this respect. In addition, it should be remembered that the conducted research concerns only one country, which is undoubtedly a limitation of this study. Therefore, future research should consider extending the research sample to other countries, and thus other socio-economic contexts.

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- Agnieszka Bieńkowska** is a professor at Wrocław University of Science and Technology, Faculty of Computer Science and Management, where she is head of the Department of Management Systems and Organisational Development. Her scientific interests include models of controlling and HRM solutions in organisations.
- Katarzyna Tworek** is a professor at Wrocław University of Science and Technology, Faculty of Computer Science and Management, where she is deputy head of the Department of Management Systems and Organisational Development. Her scientific interests include the use of information technology in organisations, with special emphasis on IT reliability.
- Anna Sałamacha** is a doctor of economics, in the discipline of management science. She works as a research and didactic assistant at Wrocław University of Technology, Faculty of Computer Science and Manage-

ment, Department of Management Systems and Organisational Development. Her scientific interests include marketing and intellectual property management.

## Appendix A

### *Employee openness*

EO1: Employees skilfully build relationships both within and outside the company and communicate effectively.

EO2: Employees are creative and innovative. People in our company think outside the box.

EO3: Employees perceive the wider context of their own tasks, their influence and dependence on other parts of the company.

### *Employee brand commitment*

EBC1. I feel loyal towards my company's brand.

EBC2. Our company's brand success is my success.

EBC3. I am proud of our brand.

EBC4. Our company's brand is always the first choice for me.

### *Brand performance*

BP1. Customers who choose us increase our sales growth.

BP2. Customers who choose us enlarge our market share.

BP3. Customers who choose us improve our margin.

BP4. Customers who choose us improve our brand's overall performance.