Examining the interplay of employee brand love, affective commitment, positive word of mouth, and turnover intention

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Abstract

Purpose - The purpose of this paper was to examine the interplay of Employee Brand Love (EBL), Affective Commitment (AC), Positive Word of Mouth (PWM), and Turnover Intention (TI) among employees of different organizations in the service sector.

Design/methodology/approach - This research study employed a cross-sectional survey research design and utilized a purposive sampling technique to collect data from a sample of 251 respondents. To assess the hypotheses, we utilized the Process Macro 3.5 Free Version software.

Finding - The findings indicate that EBL exerts a significant impact on PWM and TI, but its influence on AC is found to be insignificant. Furthermore, the results demonstrate that AC serves as a partial mediator in the relationship between EBL and both PWM and TI.

Practical Implications - This study could help managers to better understand especially how brand love of employees affects employee intention to leave the organization. It might help to increase the likelihood that employees will love their organizational brands and, as a result, design branding strategies to strengthen the organizational brand in order to draw in new employees and promote organizations.

Keywords: Affective commitment, employee brand love, positive word of mouth, turnover intention

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How to cite this paper:
Shrestha, R., & Pokhrel, L. (2023). Examining the interplay of employee brand love, affective commitment, positive word of mouth, and turnover intention. *Journal of Emerging Management Studies, 1*(1), 52-62.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary landscape, branding holds paramount significance for organizations, serving as a pivotal tool to cultivate competitive advantage. Furthermore, branding aids employees in assimilating organizational values, while also playing a role in attracting and retaining personnel (Alnawas & Altarifi, 2016). Organizations have started to develop and apply branding principles to attract a committed workforce of employees who are prepared to provide the organization's clients with the best possible service (Mittal, Gupta, & Motiani, 2022). The branding efforts can help not only motivate employees the stay longer but also increase the spread of positive words about the organization (Mittal et al., 2022). As a result, employee brand love (EBL) has started gaining attention among researchers.

The EBL refers to the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied employee has for the brand he or she works for (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). It is a passionate emotional attachment of employees towards their service-oriented organizations. It has been associated with the affective commitment (AC) of employees (Kang & Kim, 2021). The AC refers to the psychological state of commitment encouraging employees to pursue courses of action that benefit the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Likewise, EBL is reported to be associated with PWOM (Jung & Kim, 2021). The PWOM refers to the process through which employees communicate information and opinions on an organization, both internally and externally (Keeling et al., 2013). Moreover, EBL has been reported to reduce turnover intention (TI) among employees (Mittal et al., 2022). TI refers to the prepared and intentional desire of a service sector employee to leave their respective organization (Ozolina-Ozola, 2014).

Although a few studies investigated the role of the organizational brand on organizational variables such as organizational brand and employee retention (Pokharel & Sharma, 2018); organizational brand and employee retention (Karki & Joshi, 2020); workplace bullying and turnover intention (Pokhrel, Bista & Giri, 2022), the role of EBL on PWOM and TI through AC has not been investigated in Nepali service sector. Drawing from the theoretical background of the social identity theory, this paper proposes to investigate the mediating role of AC in relation to EBL with PWOM and TI among employees of service sectors in Kathmandu Valley.

2. Review of Literature and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Employee Brand Love (EBL) and Affective Commitment (AC)
The social identity theory (SIT) of Tajfel and Turner (1980) supports the relationship. According to the SIT (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), people's self-concepts are derived from their psychological membership in diverse social groups. A brand's love can encourage identification with it and increase commitment by fostering a sense of belonging (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Employees who feel a deep emotional connection to their brands internalize the brand's identity as a result, and they continue to be loyal to their companies. According to empirical research, employee brand love significantly increases affective commitment (see, for example, Kang & Kim, 2021; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mittal et al., 2022). Based on the above arguments, this study hypothesized:
Hypothesis (H1): EBL positively influences AC.

2.2 Employee Brand Love (EBL) and Positive Word of Mouth (PWOM)
Employee motivation and external PWOM communication are both increased when they believe positively about their employer (Lohndorf & Diamantopoulos, 2014; Shinnar et al., 2004). EBL has also been shown to significantly improve PWOM, according to research (e.g., Jung & Kim, 2021; Kim et al., 2017; Mittal et al., 2022; Yoo et al., 2019). According to the SIT, people's self-concepts are derived from their psychological affiliation with various social groups and the favorable comments they make about coworkers (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Employees who are enthusiastic about the company hence identify with the company and spread the word about it to others. Therefore, this study hypothesized;
Hypothesis (H2): EBL positively influences PWOM.

2.3 Employee Brand Love and Turnover Intention
Due to the strong connection between personal identity and organizational membership, it is expected that a deep affection for the organization's brand will lead to a reduction in employees' intentions to leave their current jobs (Knippenberg et al., 2002). Numerous studies (e.g., Nguyen et al., 2021; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mittal et al., 2022; Wang & Chen, 2020) have consistently shown that Employee Brand Love (EBL) significantly and negatively influences turnover intentions. This is rooted in the concept of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986), where employees who strongly identify with their organizations tend to remain loyal because their personal identity aligns closely with that of the organization (Avanzi et al., 2014). Consequently, employees who are loyal to the company often integrate it into their self-concept, making the idea of leaving tantamount to relinquishing a part of their own identity. Based on the argument and evidence, the study hypothesized;
Hypothesis (H3): EBL negatively influences TI.

2.4 Employee Brand Love (EBL) and Positive Word of Mouth (PWOM): Mediating Role of Affective Commitment (AC)
A plethora of studies revealed that EBL has a significant positive effect on PWOM (e.g., Jung & Kim, 2021; Mittal et al., 2022; Yoo et al., 2019), whereas, AC has also found significant influence on PWOM (Mittal et al., 2022). When employees are passionate and committed to the organization, they spread positive messages about the organization. The mediational role has been investigated in Indian context (Mittal et al., 2022), however, it has not been investigated in the Nepali context. Therefore, this study hypothesized;
*Hypothesis (H4): AC mediates the relationship between EBL and PWOM.*

2.5 Employee Brand Love (EBL) and Turnover Intention (TI): Mediating Role of Affective Commitment (AC)
Nguyen et al., 2021; Mittal & Gupta, 2022; Wang & Chen, 2020, for example, found that EBL has a substantial negative influence on turnover intention; meanwhile, Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mittal & Gupta, 2022; Kang and Kim, 2021) reported that EBL has a large beneficial effect on AC. But in the situation of Nepal, AC plays a mediating role in connection to EBL and TI. Employees often generate a strong social identity and show commitment to their employer when they

emotionally identify with it. Employees are therefore more likely to remain with the company than to be keen on leaving it. Based on the argument, this paper hypothesized:
Hypothesis (H5): AC mediates the relationship between EBL and TI.
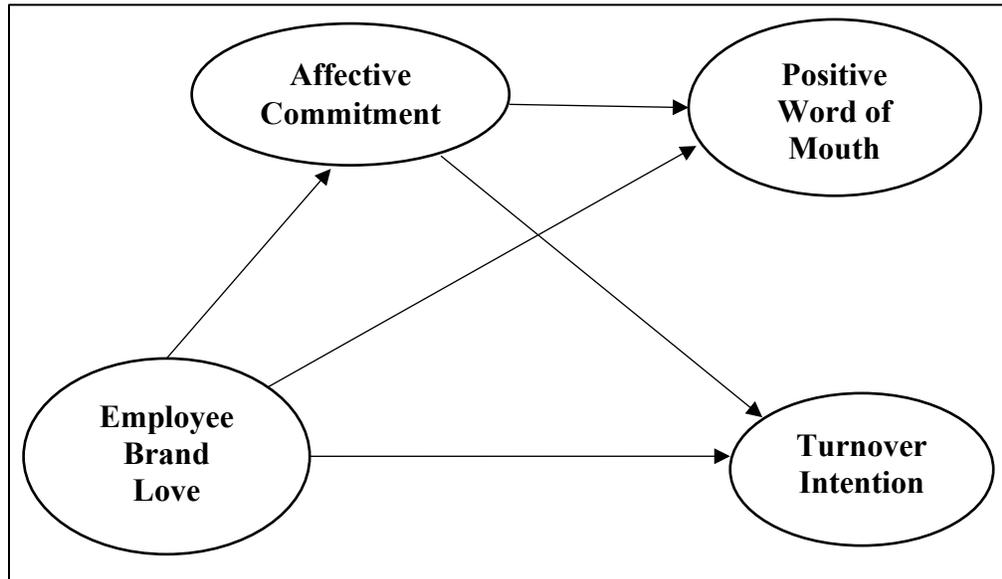
Figure 1. Conceptual framework (Source: Mittal et al., 2022)

3. Research Methods

3.1 Research Design
This study primarily aimed to investigate the relationships between independent factors such as EBL and AC and their impact on dependent variables like TI and PWOM. Therefore, the research design employed in this paper followed a cross-sectional research design, as tracking changes in these independent factors over time was not the primary focus (Pokhrel, 2021).

3.2 Population and Sample
First, since the majority of main branches of established brands are located in the Kathmandu Valley and private sector employees are reported to have the highest rate of turnover intention, the population of this study was employees working in the different organizations of the service sector in Kathmandu Valley. This paper attempted to increase the representativeness of the population by categorization of employees by gender, education, experience and stay in the same organization. Second, the purposive sampling technique was deemed appropriate for this study as it focused on specific characteristics of the population, namely workers in service-related organizations. Third, the sample size of the study was estimated by applying the recommendation of Hair et al. (2017). The authors suggested that the sample size of 10 times of number of 24 items (attached in the appendix section) is sufficient to perform the advanced

multivariate statistical tools. Because respondents are homogenous in the study variables such as EBL, TI, PWOM and AC, this paper estimated a sample size of 251.

3.3 Measures or instruments

Four items were employed to measure demographic variables, and the results were quantified using a Likert scale. This Likert scale consists of seven points, ranging from 1 to 7, where "Strongly disagree" corresponds to 1 and "Strongly agree" to 7, serving as the anchor for the scale.

3.3.1 Employee Brand Love (EBL) Scale

EBL was measured using the 10-item scale developed by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006). The sample item includes: "My company brand makes me feel good".

3.3.2 Affective Commitment (AC) Scale

AC was measured using 6 items developed by Meyer and Allen (1997). The sample items include: "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in my current organization".

3.3.3 Positive Word of Mouth (PWM) Scale

PWOM was measured using the four-item scale developed by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006). The sample items include: "I give my company's brand tons of positive word-of-mouth advertising."

3.3.4 Turnover Intention (TI) Scale

TI was measured using a 4 items scale adapted from Rosin and Korabik (1991). The sample items include: "I will be with my current company five years from now".

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

This paper administered the survey among employees of different organizations of the service sector in the Kathmandu Valley. Respondents were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and nature of participation. Printed questionnaires were dropped and collected after 7 days. The filled questionnaires were collected from November to January, 2022.

3.5 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The majority of respondents in the study were male (n=150, 59.8 %) and the most common category of the respondents was with Bachelor's Degree (n=153, 61%). The majority of the responders have work experience of 1-4 years (n=140, 55.8%) and stay with the current organization for 1-4 years (n=142, 56.6%).

4. Data Analysis and Result

As per the insights provided by Shi and Conrad (2009), data analysis involves the utilization of statistical tools to model the connection between a dependent variable and one or multiple independent variables. To assess the hypotheses formulated in this study, Ordinary Least

Square (OLS) regression was employed. The hypotheses were put to the test using both the Process Macro and the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Table 1. Result of Direct Hypotheses

Relationship	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Confidence Interval		t- statics		Results
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound			
1. EBL>AC>PWOM	0.850	0.840	0.010	-0.090	0.043	11.290		Partial
2. EBL>AC>TI	0.190	0.150	0.040	-0.210	0.117	2.010		Partial
Hypothesis	**RW**		**BC**	**R²**	**F**	**t-value**	**p-value**	**HS**
H1	EBL → AC		0.080	0.006	1.566	1.252	0.212	No
H2	EBL → PWOM		0.851	0.343	130.24	11.410	0.000	Yes
H3	EBL → TI		0.188	0.022	5.522	2.350	0.020	Yes

(Note. AC= Affective Commitment; EBL= Employee Brand Love; PWOM = Positive Word of Mouth; TI= Turnover Intention)

First, the result indicates that the EBL has an insignificant effect on AC (β= 0.08, t= 1.252, p>0.05). Second, the result is indicative that the EBL has a significant impact on PWOM (β= 0.851, t= 11.410, p<0.05). EBL explains 34.3% of variance on PWOM. Finally, it is found that the EBL has a significant impact on TI (β= 0.188, t= 2.350, p<0.05). The mediation effect can be examined among variables. It explains 2.2% of variance of EBL by TI.

4.1 Mediational Hypotheses

The mediated hypotheses were tested by applying the Process Macro 3.5 version developed by Andrew F. Hayes. The mediated role of AC in relation to EBL and PWM and TI. Table 2 shows mediated hypotheses.

Table 2. Result of Mediated Hypotheses

(Note. AC= Affective Commitment; EBL= Employee Brand Love; PWOM = Positive Word of Mouth; TI= Turnover Intention

H4 investigates if the association between EBL and PWOM is mediated by AC. The findings showed that the indirect impact of EBL on PWOM was significantly significant (β= 0.01, t = 11.288). Additionally, it was determined that EBL's direct impact on PWOM when the mediator was present was substantial (β = 0.840, p < 0.001). Therefore, the interaction between EBL and TI was partially mediated by AC. H5 investigates if the association between EBL and PWOM is mediated by AC. According to the findings, there was a substantial indirect impact of EBL on TI (β = 0.04, t = 11.288). Additionally, it was determined that the direct impact of EBL on TI when the mediator was present was substantial (β = 0.150, p 0.001). Therefore, the interaction

between EBL and TI was partially mediated by AC. Table 2 presents a summary of the mediation analysis.

5. Discussion

First, the findings indicated that EBL does not have a significant impact on AC. This outcome aligns with the findings by Maisam and Mahsa (2016). This outcome suggests that while employees might possess an affinity for their organization, it may not automatically translate into a sense of commitment. This divergence can be understood by drawing parallels to our sentiments for our homeland, where the pursuit of improved job prospects can override our deep emotional attachment, leading to migration.

Second, the empirical findings revealed a noteworthy and positively significant correlation between EBL and PWOM. This outcome closely echoes prior research endeavors (Jung & Kim, 2021; Mittal et al., 2022; Safeer & Khuhro, 2022). This finding suggests that an upsurge in EBL could potentially lead to an augmentation in PWOM within service sector organizations. Enhancing the perception of the company could be achieved by fostering a sense of employee brand love amongst Nepali organizational staff. This aligns harmoniously with the principles of Social Identity Theory (SIT) postulated by Tajfel and Turner (1986), where employees align themselves with organizations that share congruent values and principles, thus fostering a genuine affection for the organization. Consequently, these emotional connections, like brand love, tend to motivate individuals to openly share their organizational experiences, thereby fueling positive word-of-mouth endorsements.

Thirdly, the study brought to light a substantial impact of EBL on TI. These findings substantiate previous research outcomes (Khan et al., 2021; Kim & Legendre, 2021; Mittal et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2021). This underscores the notion that heightened EBL can potentially lead to diminished levels of TI among employees. Furthermore, bolstering the prevalence of EBL within Nepali service sector organizations holds the promise of ameliorating employee turnover intention. This coherence with the principles of Social Identity Theory (SIT) postulated by Tajfel and Turner (1980) remains evident. Employees who possess a robust identification with their organizations tend to exhibit reduced turnover intention due to the shared identity that forms a bond between themselves and the organization (Avanzi et al., 2014).

Fourth, the mediational role of AC was examined in relation to EBL and PWOM among employees of service sector organizations. This paper revealed that AC partially mediates the relationship between EBL and PWOM. It is aligned with the findings of Mittal et al. (2022). The result implies that employees' brand love and affective commitment both lead to an increase in positive word of mouth among employees. Therefore, service-oriented organizations could increase organizational PWOM by paying attention to the EBL and the AC of employees.

Finally, the study delved into the potential mediating role of AC in the context of EBL and TI among employees within the service sector landscape. The research revealed that AC partially serves as a mediator between EBL and TI. This study corresponds harmoniously with the conclusions drawn by Mittal et al. (2022). The implication here is that both employees' brand love and affective commitment contribute to a reduction in turnover intention. Consequently, service-oriented organizations stand to curtail their turnover intention by dedicating attention

to fostering both EBL and AC among their workforce. This resonates consistently with the tenets of Social Identity Theory (SIT) proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1986). When employees cultivate an emotional attachment to their organization, it frequently results in the formation of a positive social identity, bolstering self-esteem and disinclining them from severing ties with their established identity. This elevated affinity makes employees more inclined to remain loyal and engaged with the organization.

6. Implications for the study

6.1 Theoretical Implications

From a theoretical vantage point, this research has contributed significantly to the existing body of knowledge. Firstly, it has shed light on the often overlooked domain of employee brand love, a facet that remains underexplored within the broader realm of brand-centric studies that predominantly revolve around consumer-brand dynamics. This underscores the significance of the emotional bond employees form with their organizational brands, mirroring the importance of customer loyalty to product/service brands. Secondly, this study introduces the innovative concept of employee brand love through the lens of Social Identity Theory (SIT), offering a fresh perspective in the context of Nepal. This addition to the SIT literature serves as a noteworthy contribution. Lastly, the research establishes a compelling connection between employee brand love and three pivotal dimensions of employee attitudes and behaviors: affective commitment, turnover intention, and positive word-of-mouth (PWOM). This intricate interplay, previously unexplored in the Nepalese context, enriches both the realms of organizational behavior and human resource management literature.

6.2 Implications for the study

From a managerial standpoint, the study is poised to provide valuable insights that can benefit both managers and organizations. First, the current study's outcomes can assist firms and managers in comprehending how brand loyalty impacts employee attitudes and behaviors. Specifically, the results can aid brand managers in enhancing the experiences of employees who appreciate their organizational brands, leading to developing strategies to establish the organizational brand, attract potential employees, and enhance their performance. Second, this study has crucial implications for human resource managers. Human resource managers can utilize these findings to design policies that will foster a committed and productive workforce. Furthermore, they may keep an eye on their employees' brand-love behavior and incorporate those behaviors into specific performance criteria in internal branding efforts. Thirdly, a company's internal branding effort could strategically reposition its basic principles, exploit leadership styles, and implement internal policy-making. Moreover, managers will be able to circulate positive word of mouth of the products or services that they provide by increasing employee brand love which helps in promoting the business more effectively in the market thus reducing the overall promotional expense. Similarly, they can reduce the overall recruiting cost if employees are retained in the organization through employee brand love behavior leading to increased organizational productivity and effectiveness.

7. Limitations and directions for the study

Even though this research work provided some insightful observations, the findings should be taken with caution. First, the population of the study was small-sized organizations located in the Kathmandu Valley. Thus, future studies could be undertaken in the larger population and different cultural differences. Second, the data were collected by applying self-reported measures, therefore, the issue of self-reporting biases should be considered in future studies. Finally, the mediating mechanism could be investigated with other variables such as employee engagement, and psychological capital in future studies.

Conflict of Interest
Authors declared no conflict of interest while preparing this article.

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