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## Article

Internal Branding vs. Knowledge Sharing: An Evaluation of the Influence of Wikis as a Tool for Corporate Knowledge Management in contemporary Social Software on Internal Branding Strategy and Measures

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# Internal Branding vs. Knowledge Sharing

An Evaluation of the Influence of Wikis as a Tool for Corporate Knowledge Management in contemporary Social Software on Internal Branding Strategy and Measures.

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## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Aufsatz analysiert den Zusammenhang von Internal Branding und dem Einsatz von Social Software in Unternehmen. Das Ziel ist zu klären, ob Wikis dazu beitragen können, dass sich Mitarbeiter aktiv zur Marke bekennen oder ob sie diese gar gefährden. Zunächst werden zwei Modelle für Internal Branding sowie Social Software, insbesondere Wikis, vorgestellt. Für die Verknüpfung beider Themen werden Erfolgs- und auch Misserfolgs-Faktoren des Internal Branding herausgearbeitet und der Einfluss von Wikis auf diese Faktoren betrachtet. In einem nächsten Schritt werden Potentiale und Risiken von Wikis mit Blick auf die Etablierung eines Markenbekenntnisses unter den Mitarbeitern diskutiert. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass Wikis zwar die Markenloyalität der Mitarbeiter gefährden können, die positiven Effekte die potentiellen Risiken jedoch überwiegen. Es ist daher ratsam, Wikis im Rahmen des Internal Branding einzusetzen, um bei den Mitarbeitern in Unternehmen ein gewisses Markenbewusstsein zu schaffen und zu fördern.

*„Brands start their lives through the work of employees.“*

This quotation of Leslie de Chernatony (de Chernatony 2001, p. 71), one of the thought leaders on brand management, underlines the important role employees play within the branding process. According to a study conducted by *PricewaterhouseCoopers* (PwC) in 2012 (p. 9), about 90% of the companies in Germany see brands as one of the most important determining factors of a company's success which leads to a high relevance of brand management. Brand management can be divided into two categories, the external and

the internal brand management. In the past, the focus often was laid on external branding, specifically on how to communicate the brand to the customers (Tosti & Stotz 2001, p. 29). Even if the trend of internal branding, meaning establishing brand commitment and behaviour among the employees of a company, increased during the last few years (Bruhn, p. 1039), companies are still lacking in the implementation of this task. A study shows that in 2011 only 51% of the German companies stated that their employees have a unified picture of their own brand (Rat für Formgebung 2011, p. 25) although they ranked employee

behaviour in the fifth place of the most important tools in the field of branding. At the same time in contrast, traditional communication and advertising are merely situated in the 7th position (ibid., p. 28).

These results reflect that employees seem to play an important role in order to transmit brand values to customers. But how do companies establish their brand in the minds of the staff? Usually they use internal communication tools to inform employees about the brand (Burkhardt, Gündling, & Weyers 2008, p. 23). Yet, a new trend in communication that slowly replaces the traditional intranet is the social intranet. It focuses no longer on a classic one-direction communication but instead fosters a multi-dimensional communication among all communicators (Wolf 2011, p. 68), enabling every employee to freely express feelings, beliefs and expectations. As it is clear that the use of social software components - such as wikis and internal social networks - brings a lot of benefits for internal communication and the exchange of knowledge, it represents a potential danger in the field of internal branding due to the imponderability of the freedom of expression.

### Internal branding models

According to Tometschek (2008, p. 2) internal branding aims at translating abstract brand values into em-

ployee behaviour. The definition by Schmidt & Kilian (2012, p. 30) renders it more precisely and describes internal branding as the sum of all activities that have the objective of integrating employees into the process of brand establishment, inform them about the own brand, get them enthusiastic for the brand and subsequently influence their behaviour regarding the brand. The term behavioural branding is often used as a synonym for internal branding as its goal is to strengthen the brand by brand conformal behaviour of the employees (Schmidt 2007, p. 55; Esch et al. 2005, p. 987).

A well known approach for internal branding is the model created by Burmann & Zeplin in 2005 (p. 123). It presents a holistic approach focusing on several different influencing factors and steps in the internal branding process (figure 1). The first step that needs to be achieved among employees is brand commitment. The authors name three different levers that are crucial for this goal: brand-centered human resource activities, internal brand communication and brand-oriented leadership. Beyond that, the success of these levers depends on two contextual factors, namely the culture and the structure fit, which should be in line with the brand identity. Otherwise, the establishment of brand commitment cannot be guaranteed. In order to gain brand citizenship behaviour as a second step in the process, two further contextual factors are necessary: the know-how of employees and the resource availability (Burmann & Zeplin 2005, p. 124).

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In contrast to the first model, the model by Wentzel et al. (2005, p. 84) implies a more behavioural approach. It does not focus on

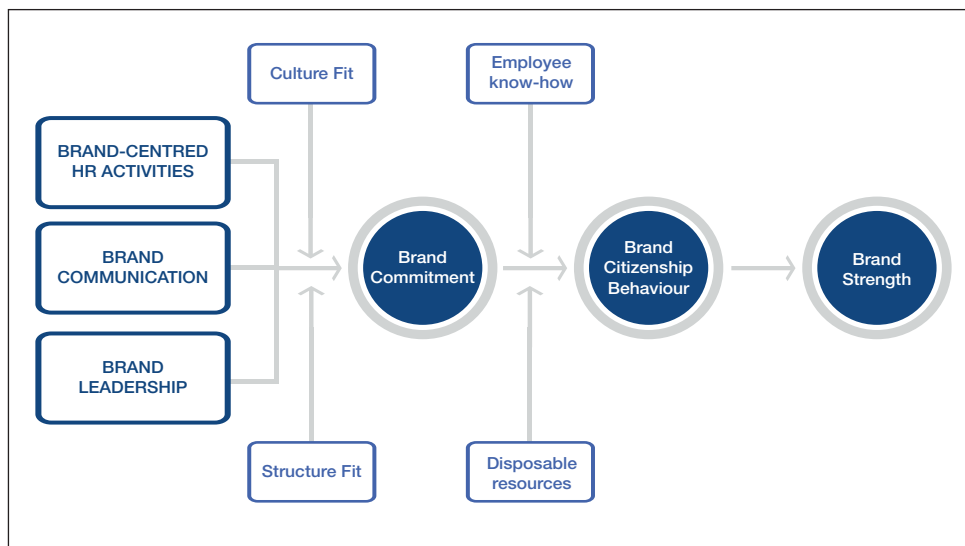


Figure 1: A holistic behaviour-oriented model for internal brand management  
Source: Burmann & Zeplin 2005, p. 123

different influencing factors, but rather represents various stages an employee has to pass in order to achieve the desired brand behaviour (figure 2).

The first component is knowledge which means that an employee needs to know and understand what the brand stands for and how his behaviour contributes to brand creation. The second element is commitment. It stands for employees who do not only have the necessary knowledge, but also want to communicate it to customers. The last component ability emphasizes that an employee needs to have physical and/or mental skills in order to convey the brand values to customers. If all three components are fulfilled, an employee will be able to behave according to the intended brand identity. This funnel tries to identify in which part of the process an employee is situated. Therefore, an improvement of a single employee's behaviour can be achieved (Wentzel et al. 2012, p. 83ff). However, the fulfillment of these steps depends on the selection of appropriate communication tools. They should have the ability to establish brand knowledge, strengthen commitment, develop skills and advance behaviour (Brexendorf et al. 2012, p. 344). Therefore, companies would do well to choose a range of tools covering at least all steps that are necessary for internal branding.

Both models show that a successful internal branding process depends on several components that should be taken into consideration. Different fields can be identified such as the staff, management and HR dimension. But also communication, information and personal willingness and abilities are included as well as the organization's structure and culture.

## Social software

With the change from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0, new possibilities for the Internet users emerged which ultimately lead to new behaviour. Instead of only consuming provided content, new technologies foster the active involvement of users (Bulander 2011, p. 89). The broad usage of Social Media in private usage also influences business software. Especially in the

field of internal web services (intranet), studies show that social software platforms are more and more integrating Web 2.0 features and usability concepts into the world of internal corporate communication and collaboration (Arendt, Gatz & Schulz 2012, p. 37).

Andrew McAfee, principal research scientist at the MIT's Center for Digital Business, is the inventor of the term enterprise 2.0 and defined it as "the use of emergent social software platforms within companies, or between companies and their partners or customers" (McAfee 2006a). However, social software can be defined in many different ways, but most of the considered definitions are very likely to include terms like communication, interaction and collaboration with the focus on human behaviour (Hippner 2006, p. 7; Coates 2005; Sixtus 2005). For this article, social software shall be defined as applications that support human communication, interaction and collaboration. In order to specify this definition, several principles that characterize social software have been identified. McAfee (2006b, p. 23ff) calls them *SLATES*, which stands for:

- **Search:** Users should be able to find the information they need.
- **Links:** A huge amount of users should have the possibility to include links in order to simplify search processes.
- **Authoring:** Users ought to have the chance to write content to a broad audience instead of only reading it.

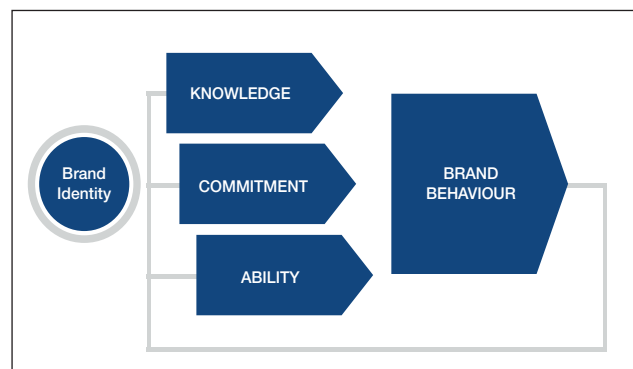


Figure 2: Brand behaviour funnel  
Source: Wentzel et al. 2005, p. 84

- **Tags:** Users should be able to set tags (one-word descriptions) that are also available for other users. Such a bottom-up categorization of content is called folksonomy.
- **Extensions:** Algorithms help to find out which content one specific user is interested in.
- **Signals:** Users should get a signal when new information of interest arises.
- **Editing:** Existing sites can be edited without the need for specialised knowledge in programming.
- **Links:** Every article can refer to another article via links and tags.
- **History:** Previous versions are saved in order to track changes.
- **Recent Changes:** An automatically generated site that gives an overview of recent changes within the wiki-sites.

Hippner (2006, p. 7f) also set up various principles that social software systems should include. However, they differ from those McAfee defined in the same year because the focus lies rather on the dimension of human behaviour than on technical circumstances. The principles are the following:

- The focus lies on individuals or groups
- The idea of self-organization
- Support of social feedback
- Crosslinking of information and persons
- From one-to-one to one-to-many and many-to-many communication
- Visibility of people, relationships, content and evaluations

## Wikis

Wikis in companies are one of the most frequently used tools when managing knowledge internally (McKinsey 2013). A wiki is a web-based platform where all users are allowed to change content via editing the website in the browser. Hence, a wiki is used for collaboration on texts (Ebersbach et al. 2008, p. 14). As all users are requested to participate, wikis are based on a bottom-up approach (Orth & Decker 2008, p. 14). Wikis can be categorized into three different forms: private, community and corporate wikis. Private wikis are only for personal use, community wikis are for the general public (like the well-known platform Wikipedia) and corporate wikis are specially created for the usage within a company and are typically not accessible for the general public (Manouchehri Far 2010, p. 36). Ebersbach et al. (2008, p. 22ff) outline different functions that every wiki contains:

- **Sandbox:** A test environment where users can learn how to use a wiki.
- **Search functions:** A search engine that helps to find specific articles when entering key words.

According to the Pumacy Technologies company, a well experienced supplier of knowledge management, various requirements of a wiki as knowledge management tool are of high importance. They can be divided into four different categories (Figura & Kross 2013, p. 8):

- Knowledge management for everyone – ease of use
- Structured knowledge base – rights and roles
- Simple knowledge access – research options
- Quality management – evaluation options for articles

The category knowledge management for everyone – ease of use focuses on the simplicity in creating (e.g. via WYSIWYG editors) and consuming content (e.g. providing an import/export function for the Microsoft Word format). The second category, structured knowledge base – rights and roles, emphasizes functions like the installation of wiki areas, the classification of categories, the definition of user roles allowing the explicit determination of rights for groups and individuals. Simple knowledge access – research options as third category includes search functionalities (full-text search as well as file searching), universal access possibilities (e.g. the usage of responsive web design for mobile phone users) and email notifications or RSS feeds in order to configure the tracking of information as seamless and effortless as possible. In the last category quality management – evaluation options for articles, the authors explain how the users



can self-control the quality of the provided information based on statistics that show all content changes as well as information about the number of visits per page, the activity of users and information about the authors who are responsible. (Figura & Kross 2013, p. 9ff).

### **The positive influence of wikis regarding crucial factors for internal branding**

Mahnert and Torres (2007) made an extensive literature research to find out the factors of failure and success in internal branding. They came to the conclusion that the crucial factors can be categorized into seven different dimensions, including organization, information, management, communication, strategy, staff and education (Mahnert & Torres 2007, p. 56ff). Table 1 gives an overview of these categories and factors and discusses whether wikis can have a positive influence on them (Table 1).

Within the category organization, wikis can have influence on the two factors culture and insular thinking and internal competition. The corporate culture of a company should be in accordance to the internal branding goals. As wikis can be classified into a bottom-up communication approach, hierarchical characteristics within a company can be reduced by fostering a multi-directional communication. The first part of the second factor, meaning insular thinking can be countered with the support of wikis as a company-wide library of knowledge without the boundaries of particular divisions.

The influence of wikis in the category information can be determined for two factors. As corporate wikis should include discussion and editorial possibilities within each site, employees are typically not only able to give feedback and to discuss the content but also to create content. These functions can reveal uncertainties about the internal brand from all organisational levels and help to assess the suitability of the internal branding program. In addition, a wiki can support the availability of specific knowledge of brand direction as it is a tool for knowledge manage-

ment within a company and at the same time enables access for all departments.

A wiki as a tool itself can rarely influence factors within the category management as it cannot determine responsibilities or a leader's communication behaviour for internal branding. Still, it is very desirable that management staff actively contributes to the Wiki articles, acting as role models for all other employees.

The influence of wikis on the dimension communication is obvious, as wikis are a communication tool. The bottom-up approach of wikis enables a multi-directional communication involving all employees within the company and offering the possibility to write comments or to provide content. As it is crucial that employees are confronted with the right amount of information at once, wiki technologies can contribute to give the users the opportunity to decide how detailed they want to be informed. Functions like the search engine and further references via linked pages enable a precise movement through the information without the users being faced with too much unwanted data.

Wikis can also have an influence on the formality of messages, because writing an article in a certain way is formal, whereas comment functions or discussions tend to be informal. The objective that the internal and external messages are aligned can be supported by wikis in terms of collaboration. As typically different departments - like the human resources department - and various management levels are responsible for internal branding and the responsibility for external branding rests usually on marketing departments, inconsistencies within internal communication as well as discrepancies regarding internal and external messages can occur. Therefore, wikis can be a useful option matching all ideas and views together and provide an easy way to identify discrepancies in order to ensure the offering of a unified internal and external brand of the company.

Dimension	Crucial factor for internal branding	Influence of wikis on the crucial factor
Organization	Structure	No
	Culture	Yes
	Insular thinking & internal competition	Yes
Information	Market research	No
	Measurement & feedback	Yes
	Specific knowledge of brand direction	Yes
Management	Jurisdiction	No
	Leadership support	No
	Deeds communication	No
	Brand teams	Yes
Communication	Multi-directional communication	Yes
	Formality of message	Yes
	Alignment of internal & external messages	Yes
	Internal Clutter	Yes
Strategy	Alignment of business & brand objectives	Yes
	Budget	No
	Timing	No
Staff	Employee participation and support	Yes
	Recruitment	No
	Remuneration	No
	Segmentation	Yes
Education	Legitimacy and acceptance	No
	Guidance	No
	Mental models	No

Table 1: Influence of wikis regarding factors of failure and success for internal branding  
Source: Own representation according to Mahnert & Torres 2007, p. 56

## Identification of risks and transfer to the buy-in matrix of Thomson et al.

According to the identified influencing areas of wikis regarding internal branding, different risks using wikis for establishing brand commitment can be disclosed and arranged into two categories:

- **Multi-directional communication:** Although multi-directional communication is a success factor in the internal branding process, it can endanger establishing brand commitment. As knowledge about the brand is the prerequisite for brand com-

mitment, it is important that every employee receives correct information about the brand. However, using wikis for knowledge sharing means that every user who has editing rights is able to falsify messages and information. This can occur with either motivated employees who want to create content but do not have enough knowledge to write articles of high quality, or with employees who want to damage the company. Both threats lead to an increased necessity of supervision and active regulation.

- **Employee participation:** Employee participation

within the internal branding process is crucial, so wikis are perfectly capable of enabling staff integration. However, the expectation of an automatic usage after the introduction of a wiki system is a common fallacy. Often, only a few people are active and create content, whereas the others participate only in a passive way while reading content (Ebersbach et al. 2008, p. 33) – if they participate at all.

For the internal branding process, it is not necessary that every employee writes articles about the internal brand, as only a few will have the knowledge to do so. However, those people who have the knowledge, have to be willing to distribute. A typical problem could be that some people tend to hide information in order to get a personal advantage and therefore refuse to use the wiki. As a consequence the participation of staff needs to be stimulated actively.

Thomson et al. (1999, p. 828) have developed an intellectual and emotional buy-in matrix classifying employees due to their understanding and commitment of the corporate brand (figure 3). This model can be adopted by identifying which employees in the company pose a risk when introducing a wiki. The authors identify four different main types within the buy-in matrix. The champion has both a high understanding of the brand and a high commitment to the brand (ibid.). Employees who match with this category are unoffending for the introduction of a wiki, as knowledge and commitment already exist. The second type is the bystander who understands the organizational goals, but is not committed enough to the brand to support them (ibid., p. 829). Staff within that category poses the risk that important knowledge is not spread, as they have a lack of commitment concerning their contribution to the company. This hidden information may result in a loss of quality among the wiki articles.

The third type is the loose cannon who has a high motivation regarding the support of the organisational goals, but does not know how to achieve them nor what they are (ibid.). This is the most dangerous type

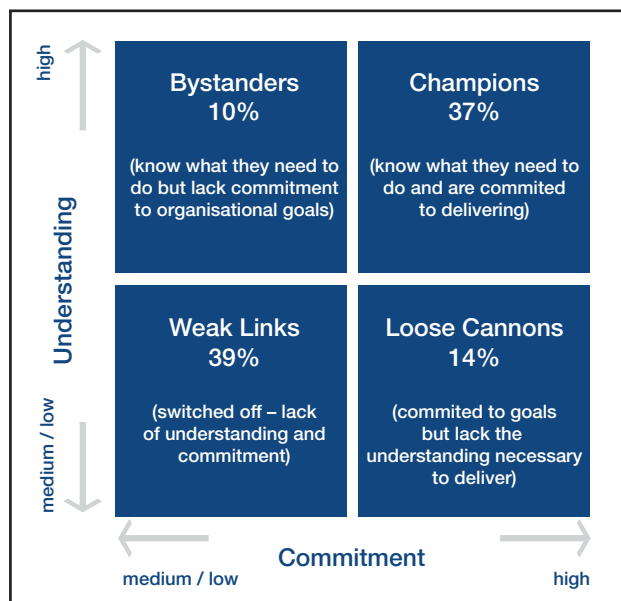


Figure 3: Intellectual and emotional buy-in matrix  
Source: Thomson et al. 1999, p. 828

when considering wikis in internal branding, because the high motivation can lead him to create or change articles with wrong information about the brand. This can influence other readers in an unwanted way. And the last type is the weak link, who is neither concerned nor aware about the organization's goals (ibid.). This type is not an active risk factor for communicating internal brand values via wiki because he or she has no motivation to participate within the internal branding process. However, this passive behaviour does not help to identify why information is not internalized, because feedback from that type cannot be expected. Also, if the type of the weak link is the numerically strongest group within an organization, the usage of wikis might totally fail.

## Conclusion

In a world where a growing number of companies introduce social software products into their intranet environments, the question if this form of communication and collaboration influences brand management - and especially internal branding - is of high relevance. Wikis, which have been in the central focus of this article, are clearly able to influence several factors of failure and success for internal branding, both positive and negative. It has to be claimed that the bottom-up approach of wikis can falsify mes-



sages, either intentionally or unintentionally which endangers the spreading of correct brand knowledge. Additionally, risks can occur when the participation rate is low, due to demotivation or knowledge hiding, and thereby the quality of information lacks and the integrated feedback channel is not used. If companies do not recognize these identified risks, wikis will clearly be able to endanger the establishment of brand commitment among staff.

However, these risks can be handled. On the positive side, wikis provide features like access privileges, where editing rights can be determined and the possibility to see which author edited an article makes wrong content traceable and offers the possibility to recognize employees and employee groups who might need additional training. In order to reduce the risk of a low employee participation rate, a wiki should not only be implemented with the hope that it is used by a lot of employees, but it should be supported and introduced by management (Ebersbach, Glaser & Heigl 2005, p. 28) and it is very desirable to develop specific actions to foster the employee activation.

The authors believe that the positive influence of wikis on many different factors of failure and success for internal branding is higher than the risks combined. Therefore companies should consider if wikis might be a useful tool to establish brand commitment. This raises the question if the wiki concept fits into the corporate's work and communication culture. Nevertheless, a wiki is only one of many different communication tools that could be useful within the internal branding process – but this article shows that it might be a quite valuable one.



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