

The Role of Knowledge Management in Building Employees' Brand Commitment: Employees' Brand Knowledge as Mediating Variable

Abdallah Q. Bataineh

Assistant Professor, Department of Marketing
Applied Science Private University, Amman, Jordan
P.O. Box 166 Amman, 11931 Jordan

Tasneem F. Alfalah

Assistant Professor, Department of Business Administration
Applied Science Private University, Amman, Jordan
P.O. Box 166 Amman, 11931 Jordan

Abstract

Since banking sector reflects a sophisticated structure of people, operations, procedures and information systems; knowledge management (KM) in banks can be utilized as strategic tool to expand the banks' capabilities in order to effectively resolve, adjust and develop a package of solutions to proactively deal with changing business environment. However, the focal point of this research is to explore how KM practices including knowledge creation, knowledge storage and knowledge sharing can affect employees brand commitment in banks operating in Jordan. A structured questionnaire has been built and distributed on a total sample of 760 from 25 banks located in the capital of Amman. The findings of the multiple regression tests revealed that; knowledge sharing is the most affective variable on employees' brand commitment, and consecutively; knowledge creation and knowledge storage. What's more, employees brand knowledge has been supported as mediating variable. Hence, the researchers provided critical implications and recommendations with the aim of convincing banks' marketers to spend more time and efforts in building and applying different types of KM practices to increase employees' commitment and loyalty.

Keywords: knowledge Management, knowledge creation, knowledge storage, knowledge sharing, brand knowledge, brand commitment, banks.

1. Introduction

At the present time, the term "knowledge" has become for greater extent a precious asset in all nations, and it can be considered as the cornerstone for the contemporary economies, since knowledge represents the key weapon to gain competitiveness for most businesses in the market. On the other hand, the fundamentals and conventional basis of production (capital, labor and land) have become less important compared with the power of knowledge as being the main resource for the modern economy (Drucker, 1993). For decades, the concept of knowledge management (KM) has been extensively practiced by many organizations as major and efficient tool to attain success. According to Slavkovic and Babic (2013) applying KM systems in organizations can establish long-term competitive advantage, achieve superior performance and a better rates of overall country's economy and social progress. Furthermore, business leaders in internal marketing (IM) and human resource management (HRM) have been asserted the vital role of leveraging knowledge between employees as key mean to make sure that employees are doing their daily tasks mentally and emotionally rather than only physically (Bedarkar and Pandita, 2014). Likewise, running KM within organizations can enhance their competencies of acquisition, sorting and transferring of timely and accurate information to support their overall business information system, improve the effectiveness of decision making process and at the end of the day enhance performance (Lo and Chin, 2009).

However, despite the fact that the banking sector in Jordan considers globally as simple financial system; it seems as one of the most spirited and essential economical sectors in Jordan, by contributing to approximately 4.26% of gross domestic product (GDP) based on recent figures provided by association of banks in Jordan (2014).

Nevertheless, the importance of this sector is not only noticeable by its considerable contribution to (GDP); but also by being one of leading employers within the private sector, and it has the highest capitalization on the Amman stock exchange, making it a main pillar and a key driver of the Jordanian economy. What is more, the total assets of licensed banks have been tripled from 14.15 billion in 2000 to 60.5 billion JOD in 2014, achieving growth rate of 329%, so this progress in some way can be attributed to the banks' conservative policies which helped Jordan to resist and overcome the global financial crisis in (2008). Nevertheless, the intangible nature of banking services can increase the overall customers' perceived risk, because they can't easily check the service before purchasing. Over and above, the employees of service sector mediate the brand-customer bond, and they highly symbolize the brand from customer point of view (Kimpakorn and Tocquer, 2010).

In view of the fact that Jordanian banking sector is considered somehow developed industry, and aims continuously to cope up with latest global trends in order to introduce innovative services that are consistent with customers changing needs and wants; unfortunately banks still focus only around how to utilize their tangible resources, with the intention of increase sales, market share and achieve branding goals. For this reason, banks in Jordan might invest more in their human resource, as being actually the first customers to be satisfied, as well as they represent the foundation stone for establishing and practicing different types of KM systems. However, the KM concepts is still in evolution and preliminary stages in Jordanian banks, and not strongly recognized by decision makers within these banks, because they have no clear paradigm of KM techniques, how it works and how they can extremely benefit from these techniques in building knowledgeable staff and win them as loyal and committed employees in the future. Based on the researchers best knowledge; there is no studies investigated the role of KM in building brand commitment from employees perspective, and most conducted to date have shown a positive impact of KM on various organizational outcomes, these studies have established a link between KM and innovativeness (Carneiro, 2000), KM and value creation for customers (Schiuma et al., 2007), organizational effectiveness (Zack et al., 2009), and business performance (Liao, 2011). Consequently, this research is essentially an attempt to investigate the role of KM practices in establishing employees brand commitment in banks operating in Jordan, in addition to examine the role of employees brand knowledge as mediating variable.

2. Research Background

2.1 Brand commitment

In order to create loyal and committed employees it is vital for organizations to apply various types of internal branding techniques, since the internal branding is an approach that measures the positive influence of organizations' brand on employees' thoughts, feelings and attitudes, which can lead them to respond in a particular way with the aim of reinforce brand building process. Since the 1970s, brand commitment concept has gain substantial attention in marketing and human resource management literatures. According to Wallace et al., (2011) the terms brand commitment and organizational commitment have been used interchangeably by many researchers in recent years. The concept of brand commitment reflect the psychological relationship between the employee and brand (Burmam and Zeplin, 2009). Moreover, brand commitment can be derived from employees' perceptions, given that it is more advantageous to keep committed for current brand, rather than switching for new one. According to Meyer et al., (2002) brand commitment assists in measuring internal brand equity, strongly energizes employees and affect their citizenship behaviors.

However, to facilitate employees commitment for a given brand; the information flow from higher managerial levels to employees have to go clearly and smoothly, and without sophisticated technical details (King, 2010). Employees' commitment toward brand will be increased if they have the feeling of weak contribution to the organization success, so they will show more responsibility and hard work in the future (Flynn and Shaumberg, 2012). Brand knowledge is extremely linked with employee's both brand commitment and role clarity. Timely information to the organization and brand can enable employees to earn well-built brand knowledge, and efficiently communicate the brand promises for the customers (King and Grace, 2010). Therefore, to be a part of the bank family; banks executives have to match banks strategic intentions and values related to the brand with employees expectations and capabilities, in order to strengthen the feel of loyalty and pride between their employees.

2.2 Knowledge management (KM)

The application of KM concepts have shown swift growth over the last three decades, which forced organizations to become conscious that information and knowledge are critical strategic tools required to take rational decisions.

Successful KM assists decision makers to remove the barriers between what they know, and what they don't know (Allame, 2011). According to Branin (2003) KM practices can be defined as the manner of translating ideas into actions to attain particular goals. Practicing successful KM strategies within the organization can lead to achieve the following advantages (Wamundila and Ngulube, 2011): (1) enhance customer services; (2) apply various quality methods to gain faster innovation processes; (3) improve communication and collaboration between all stakeholders; and finally (5) achieve financial goals. In this research, the conceptual definition of KM practices contains three dimensions; that is "knowledge creation, knowledge storage and knowledge sharing. In the banks context, this definition indicates banks' capability to create knowledge from different sources, and methodically store it, and share it scientifically, and soon or later it will become the main competitive advantage for these banks. Moreover, since banks in Jordan work in accountable and transparent business environment; prudent execution of KM systems can lead banks to easily communicate and deliver high quality services for target audience.

2.2.1 Knowledge creation

All members in the organization are responsible to employ different approaches in order to generate, store and transfer knowledge (Mazdeh and Hesamamiri, 2014). The process of new knowledge construction possibly will come from inside or outside the organization. Unfortunately, a numerous researches focused on knowledge transfer and ignored the crucial role of knowledge creation (Mitchell and Boyle, 2010). However, knowledge creation typically depends on spirited team-oriented communication, by the use of seminars, learning sessions, workshops, brainstorming and research and development (R&D). According to Liao et al., (2008) organizations gain the knowledge throughout internal or external networks connections. Accordingly, banks will make use of different sources to build distinguish database, which enable employees to enhance their capabilities in meeting customers' needs and wants, and provide them with tailored and high quality services from all touch points, i.e. branches, ATM or online banking. Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: knowledge creation positively affects employees' brand commitment.

2.2.2 Knowledge storage

Since knowledge consider as a critical resource for organizations; the value of knowledge storing cannot be ignored for current or future use. The process of storing and retrieving knowledge can be extremely used to improve organizational memory. Knowledge storage provides coding and indexing of knowledge for later recovery. According to (Probst et al., 2000) the process of knowledge storing consists of three stages, namely; (1) identify types of knowledge to be stored i.e. employee records, operations, competition etc., (2) sorting and encoding knowledge in simple and accessible forms, (3) update knowledge over time. Organization's readiness to store knowledge has significant consequences for its performance (Olivera, 2000). On the other hand, knowledge preservation by knowledgeable staff is a vital factor for banks to gain strong and long-term competitive advantage (Grant and Grant, 2008). According to Wamundila and Ngulube (2011) organization can store knowledge throughout a variety of techniques such as; set up professional networks, educate employees, training sessions and operations documentation via advanced technology. In this research, knowledge storage reflects banks' ability to use advanced systems and softwares that assist employees and decision makers to take proactive procedures for any given case, and to update data automatically. Hence, banks employees' will show professional and quick response for customers' inquiries 24/7, and in return, employee will be satisfied and feel comfort to have the appropriate knowledge level to handle any problem. Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: knowledge storing positively affects employees' brand commitment.

2.2.3 Knowledge sharing

Today's, managers are responsible to create a healthy environment that support and encourage knowledge sharing, and eliminate the cultural barriers between employees. Modern organizations recently use different manners to increase knowledge sharing by means of incentive schemes (Li and Poon, 2009). According to (Wang and Noe, 2010) the concept of knowledge sharing describes task-based information, via know-how technique to assist and cooperate with others to resolve problems, build up new ideas and put procedures and policies into practice.

Knowledge sharing might take place through face-to face or written communications, by means of systems and networks. Moreover, knowledge sharing considers essential activity, since personnel possibly will add something to knowledge innovation and application (Jackson et al., 2006).

Knowledge that can be shared within the banks in Jordan includes; the accumulative experience derived from IT platforms; banks organizational structure, risk management i.e. deception cases of using credit cards; most excellent practices, customer needs, lifestyles, habits and attitudes toward the bank and selling channels. Thus, banks employees will be able to deal with various conditions, and make rational decisions based on acquired knowledge from systems or other employees, which already derived from top management vision and believes. Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: knowledge storing positively affects employees’ brand commitment.

2.3 Brand knowledge

The concept of brand knowledge is the foundation stone to understand consumer based brand equity CBBE (Keller and Lehmann, 2006). Likewise, employees’ brand knowledge is highly considered as the basis to recognize the importance of internal branding efforts in building employees based brand knowledge EBBE. As well as, both concepts (CBBE and EBBE) are focusing on the inherent nature of the brand. However, EBBE describes the differential impact that brand knowledge has on an employee’s responses to the work environment (King and Grace, 2009). Through identifying of brand knowledge; employees can decrease the role vagueness which is vastly related to their performance. Consequently, the dissimilar and blur understanding of the organization’s brand mean will probably leads employees to convey unclear brand promises for the customers, which at the end might destroy organizations’ brand equity. According to King and Grace (2008) and depending on in-depth interviews with employees; they indicated that providing employees with comprehensive and accurate information about the brand can allow employees to earn strong brand knowledge, and retain brand promise for customers. As a result, employees cannot convert organizations’ brand vision into brand equity without thorough brand knowledge (Miles and Mangold, 2005). Hence, banks managers have to make sure that brand promises have the same meaning for all employees, in order to deliver consistent messages for customers.

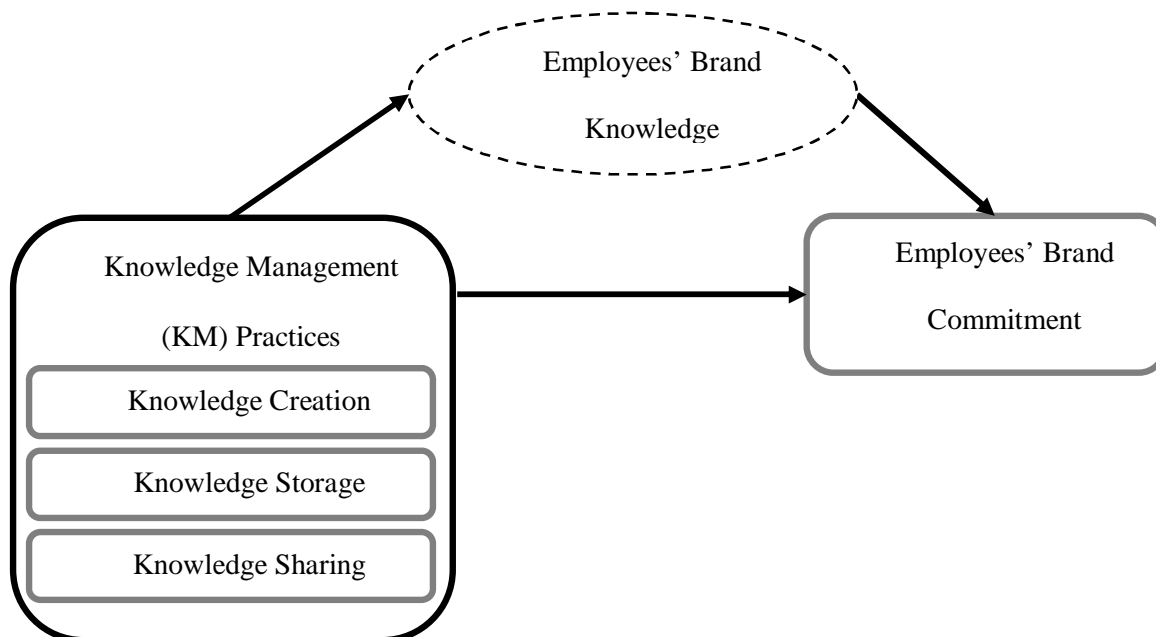
Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: the relationship between knowledge management practices and employees’ brand commitment will be mediated by employees’ brand knowledge.

3. Conceptual Model

The following conceptual model was built up depending on previous literatures, which basically related to the antecedents of KM practices in business organizations. Furthermore, employees’ brand knowledge and employees’ brand commitment were adapted from internal marketing and internal brand management literatures. As shown below, the model exhibits the relationships among the research variables.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model



4. Research Methodology

4.1 Population and Sample

According to the annual report provided by association of banks in Jordan (2015) the number of banks operating in Jordan is 25 banks, 16 out of them are Jordanian banks, and the rest are foreign banks. However, the research population consists of all banks employees working in Jordan. In view of that, figure 2 exhibits the number of banks employees, as shown in the figure; the number of banks employees was (17866) in 2012, while increased in 2013 to be (18423); achieving growth rate by (3.12%). Likewise, figure 3 exhibits employees distribution in banks operating in Jordan, as shown in the figure; the number of employees working at Jordanian commercial banks forms the highest share with 74%, and respectively; Islamic banks with 17% and foreign commercial banks with 9%.

Figure 2: Number of banks employees (2012-2013)

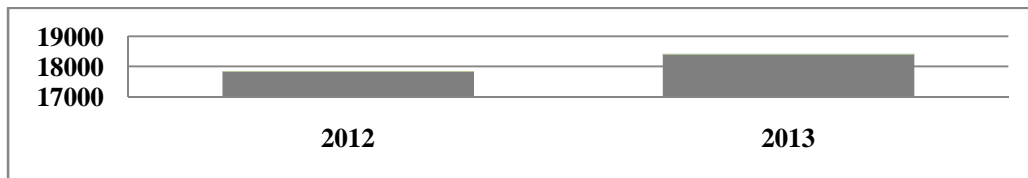
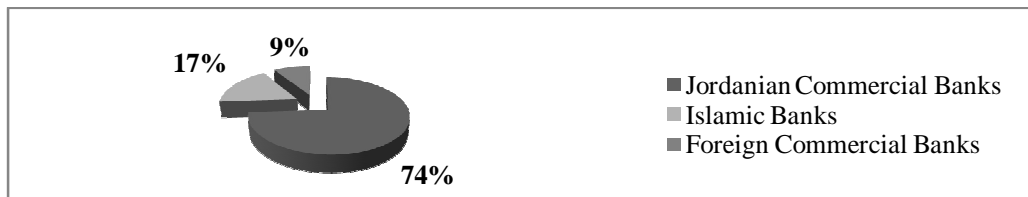


Figure 3: Employees distribution in banks operating in Jordan



Accordingly, the researchers have applied convenience sampling technique with the intention to gather data from the research respondents; which they are the banks employees from different managerial levels. Since the convenience sampling technique can be applied somehow with low cost and effortlessly (Diffley et al., 2011). Furthermore, with the purpose of achieving statistical stability analysis; the size of the sample was 760 employees; based on the number of questions included in the research' questionnaire, and this rule was proven by (Hair et al., 2010). Thus, to make possible to access this sample size and to achieve the highest possible response rate; the researchers have many contacts with all banks in Jordan in order to gain emails lists of employees, but unfortunately some of the banks rejected to provide emails list under the pretext of privacy and competitive reasons. Therefore, the researchers relied on both online and fieldwork channels to spread out the research questionnaires in the capital of Amman, since it embraces branches for all banks operating in Jordan. In the field work channel, the researchers have been considered to contact banks employees out of their official working hours to avoid confusing them. Nevertheless, after than three months of questionnaires distribution; only 698 questionnaires were returned, and the valid number for statistical analysis was 663.

4.2 Research Instrument and Data Gathering

With the purpose of collecting data from banks employees, the researchers have built up the research questionnaire depending on previous studies of knowledge management, brand commitment and brand knowledge. Furthermore, the researchers have used five-point Likert' scale as rating tool. However, research measurements and operational definitions were adapted from previous researches as demonstrated in the following table.

Table 1: Research measurements

Variable	Measurement
Knowledge creation	(Liao et al., 2008)
Knowledge storage	(Wamundila and Ngulube, 2011)
Knowledge sharing	(Wang and Noe, 2010)
Brand knowledge	(King and Grace, 2010)
Brand commitment	(King and Grace, 2010)

4.3 Research Validity and Reliability

In order to assess the validity of the research instrument; the researchers have applied both content validity and face validity. According to Churchill (2014) content validity indicates the methodological approach which has been used to build up the research instrument, which already mentioned previously, whereas face validity has been assessed throughout the pilot work with many professional bankers and academics in this research area. Likewise, cronbach's alpha has been used to assess the research reliability as identified by (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013). Table 3 indicates that all of the research variables were greater than 60% which is the cutoff point used in this research. Hence, the researchers have met the coefficients of internal reliability.

Table 3: Values of Cronbach's alpha

Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Knowledge creation	3	0.813
Knowledge storage	3	0.806
Knowledge sharing	4	0.882
Brand knowledge	4	0.866
Brand commitment	5	0.889

5. Data Analysis

5.1 Demographic Characteristics

The table below shows the demographic characteristics of the research sample. However, findings related to the respondents' gender, age category and educational level; they are all in line with the (2013) annual report provided by association of banks in Jordan. While in terms of positions, the juniors and team leaders have the highest ratio, and this finding seems normal since managers and executives vacant are predominately few. Finally, the highest experience years ranged between 3-6 years, and this finding clearly indicates that banks employees in Jordan are skilled and have a good experience in general.

Table 4: Demographics characteristics

Variable	Frequency	Percentage%
Gender		
Male	369	56.0
Female	294	44.0
Age category		
Less than 25	114	17.0
25 – 34	279	42.0
35 – 44	169	26.0
More than 44	101	15.0
Educational level		
College community degree	99	15.0
Bachelors'	492	74.0
Masters' degree	54	8.0
Doctoral' degree	18	3.0
Position		
Junior	209	32.0
Team leader	225	34.0
Manager	148	22.0
Executive	81	12.0
Experience years		
Less than 3	197	30.0
3 – 6	228	34.0
7 - 10	144	22.0
More than 10	94	14.0
Total	663	100.0

5.2 Hypothesis Testing

In order to testing the research hypothesis; the researchers have applied multiple regression models to determine the effect of KM practices on employees' brand commitment of banks operating in Jordan. In addition, to explore if employees brand knowledge has a mediation role.

H1: knowledge creation positively affects employees' brand commitment.

As appear in table 5, knowledge creation positively and significantly affects employees' brand commitment. As well as, (37.3%) of the variation in employees' brand commitment is explained by knowledge creation, and the beta value = 0.321 is significant at (0.000). Consequently, H1 can be supported.

Table 5: Multiple regression rest for H1

R	R²	F	Sig.	H1 Result		
.611a	.373	147.215	.000b	Supported		
Coefficients						
Unstandardized Coefficients			Standardized Coefficients		T	Sig.
B	Std. Error	Beta				
2.194	.113	.321		18.217	.000	
.324	.024			12.133	.000	

H2: knowledge storage positively affects employees' brand commitment.

As appear in table 6, knowledge storage positively and significantly affects employees' brand commitment. As well as, (33.2%) of the variation in employees' brand commitment is explained by knowledge storage, and the beta value = 0.302 is significant at (0.000). Consequently, H2 can be supported.

Table 6: Multiple regression rest for H2

R	R²	F	Sig.	H2 Result		
.577a	.332	395.731	.000b	Supported		
Coefficients						
Unstandardized Coefficients			Standardized Coefficients		T	Sig.
B	Std. Error	Beta				
3.665	.238	.302		24.111	.000	
.456	.041			19.893	.000	

H3: knowledge sharing positively affects employees' brand commitment.

As appear in table 7, knowledge sharing positively and significantly affects employees' brand commitment. As well as, (41.2%) of the variation in employees' brand commitment is explained by knowledge sharing, and the beta value = 0.372 is significant at (0.000). Consequently, H3 can be supported.

Table 7: Multiple regression rest for H3

R	R²	F	Sig.	H3 Result		
.642a	.412	307.406	.000b	Supported		
Coefficients						
Unstandardized Coefficients			Standardized Coefficients		T	Sig.
B	Std. Error	Beta				
2.054	.106	.372		21.395	.000	
.291	.028			17.533	.000	

H4: the relationship between knowledge management practices and employees' brand commitment will be mediated by employees' brand knowledge.

As illustrated in table 8, KM practices including (knowledge creation, knowledge storage and knowledge sharing) have been affects employees' brand commitment positively and significantly. As appear in the table, 47.1% of the variation in employees' brand commitment is explained throughout the independent variable KM practices. Likewise, the findings of weighted least square regression analysis (WLS) indicated that knowledge sharing beta= 0.385 is significant at (0.000), and knowledge creation beta= 0.366 is significant at (0.000) respectively formed the highest and strongest predictors.

As a result, and through comparing the value of R^2 with previous values; it's obvious that the effect of KM practices including (knowledge creation, knowledge storage and knowledge sharing) can be stronger through employees' brand knowledge. Hence, the findings are supporting H4.

Table 8: Weighted least square regression test (WLS) for H4

R	R²	F	Sig.	H4 Result	
.687a	.471	256.61	.000c	Supported	
Coefficients					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.721	.127		16.019	.000
Knowledge creation	.166	.034	.366	15.446	.000
Knowledge storage	.149	.029	.341	13.188	.000
Knowledge sharing	.201	.039	.385	17.053	.000

6. Conclusions and Marketing Implications

As shown in previous tables, the proposed hypotheses have been empirically supported. The findings of multiple regression tests have been confirmed that KM practices' including (knowledge creation, knowledge storage and knowledge sharing) affects employees brand commitment positively and significantly. On the other hand, employees brand knowledge has shown a crucial influence as mediating variable. In general, these findings without doubt were in line with KM literatures. However, the most influential and significant KM practice on employees' brand commitment was knowledge sharing, and that was based on beta values. Consequently, this finding is consistent with previous studies i.e. (Wang and Noe, 2010), and respectively; knowledge creation which was consistent with (Mazdeh and Hesamamiri, 2014) and knowledge storage also was consistent with (Grant and Grant, 2008). Moreover, the role of employees' brand knowledge as mediating variable was highly supported depending on the findings of (WLS) test. Thus, the influence of KM practices on employees' brand commitment can be stronger through employees' brand knowledge; this finding actually reflects the originality of this research. However, this research is vital for banks for the following reasons: (1) the interdependence relationship between banks and employees consider as a process based on knowledge exchange, rather than principles or values. For that reason, employees' involvement in making decision must be not merely one-time exercise, other than be in line with the overall banks' strategy; (2) employees' brand commitment hinges on employees' incessant learning process. Therefore, banks possibly will spend huge efforts in order to fulfill employee's ambitions and expectations, which can directly impacts the banks' performance; (3) studying the interrelationship between KM practices and internal brand management within banks operating in Jordan considers extremely appropriate, since banks employees continuously in touch with the customers, and they need to transfer banks vision to their customers professionally and precisely.

7. Recommendations and Future Research

Since 1990's, KM has been put imprint in the management literatures, and it has globally recognized as a weapon to gain competitive advantage for all organizations. Unfortunately, most banks in Jordan still unaware of its worth, and probably not understood clearly by most of them. However, although efficient KM practices became an essential in building organizations' strategy; banks in Jordan have a number of KM practices that require additional examination caused by the speedy shifting of information environment, which are influenced particularly by social networking sites (SNS's) and different types of media, that created high scale of information and led to improve and complicate at the same time the banks' knowledge systems. Nevertheless, possessing flexible and retrievable database by banks might enhance the knowledge availability not only for decision makers, but for all banks' stakeholders.

Moreover, employees are the cornerstone of any organization, and if they are not provided with the proper tools to utilize skills and knowledge at workplace, then the feeling of discomfort can be appeared. Future researches might be advised to look at how KM practices within banks can impact both banks financial and non-financial performance, or to apply the research model in different context. Eventually, other researchers may compare different types of KM practices between local and foreign banks, and examine their effect on banks performance.

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