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A Systematic Review of Reward and Employee Brand-Building Behaviour Proposing Reward as a Brand Signal

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Abstract

Employees increasingly carry brand promises to customers and prospective employees, yet evidence on reward, one of the most direct levers organisations control, remains difficult to isolate because most studies measure it within broader practice bundles. This systematic review aimed to synthesise empirical evidence on whether, how, and when reward relates to employee brand-building behaviour and to customer and brand outcomes. Following PRISMA 2020, searches of Scopus and Web of Science identified 23 eligible studies, which were appraised with the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool and synthesised without meta-analysis through direction-based vote counting and GRADE-informed certainty ratings. All 19 studies with an estimable direction reported positive associations, but statistical significance varied. Reward tied explicitly to brand behaviour, observed mostly within brand-centred practice bundles directed at the corporate brand, showed the most coherent association with brand citizenship behaviour and was associated with it through statistical pathways involving brand commitment, person–brand fit, and brand psychological ownership. Generic financial and developmental reward, studied mainly in relation to employer-brand advocacy, related to advocacy weakly, indirectly, or depending on context, and one sales study suggested a substitution pattern between brand identification and incentives. Customer-level evidence was confined to brand-centred bundles, and certainty was low to very low because all designs were cross-sectional. The synthesis proposes that brand contingency, attributed motive, and credibility may shape reward signalling, a proposition that requires experimental and longitudinal testing.

Keywords: Brand Citizenship Behaviour; Brand-Contingent Reward; Employee Advocacy; Employer Branding; Systematic Review

Introduction

Brands are increasingly built by the people who deliver them. Frontline staff, salespeople, and employees who speak about their organisation online translate brand promises into customer experiences, and their voices now reach audiences far beyond the service encounter (De Kerpel and Van Kerckhove, 2025; Schaarschmidt and Walsh, 2020). Because employee attitudes and behaviour are linked to customer satisfaction and firm performance along the service-profit chain Hogreve, Iseke, Derfuss and Eller (2017) and because identification cascades from leaders through employees to customers Wieseke, Ahearne, Lam and Van Dick (2009), the question of how organisations elicit brand-supporting behaviour from employees is of strategic rather than merely operational importance. Organisations therefore invest in internal branding programmes, brand-specific leadership, and human resource practices intended to align what employees do with what the brand promises (Buil, Martínez and Matute, 2016; Morhart, Herzog and Tomczak, 2009).

This review uses the term employee brand-building behaviour (EBBB) for the voluntary and role-based behaviours through which employees represent an organisation's brand to external audiences. EBBB comprises brand citizenship behaviour that goes beyond role requirements Burmann and Zeplin (2005) brand-consistent behaviour within the role, including the delivery of the brand promise to customers King and Grace (2010); Piehler, King, Burmann and Xiong (2016) and employee advocacy and word of mouth (De Kerpel and Van Kerckhove, 2025). These behaviours, however, do not share a single target. Customer-facing behaviour supports the product, service, or corporate brand and is addressed to customers, whereas employer-brand advocacy, such as recommending the organisation as a place to work, supports the employer brand, that is, the organisation's distinctive identity as an employer, and is addressed to current and prospective employees (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Theurer, Tumasjan, Welpe and Lievens, 2018). The psychological explanations also differ. Internal branding research explains brand citizenship through employees' brand understanding, identification, and commitment Piehler et al., (2016), whereas employer branding research explains employees' responses through their evaluation of the employment offering, the psychological contract, and organisational identification (Edwards, 2010). This review treats employer-brand advocacy as one domain of a broader EBBB construct because, in both domains, employees act outwardly on behalf of the organisation and reward is studied as an antecedent. Because the two domains differ in target brand, audience, and mechanism, every included study was coded by its target brand, and findings are compared within the customer- or corporate-brand domain and within the employer-brand domain rather than pooled as if they were interchangeable.

Internal branding research has matured into a substantial body of work on how such behaviour is elicited. Systematic reviews and a bibliometric analysis have mapped the field Barros-Arrieta and García-Cali (2021); Saini, Lievens and Srivastava (2022); Saleem and Iglesias (2016) and recent meta-analyses have consolidated the chain from internal brand management through brand understanding and brand commitment to brand citizenship behaviour (Afshardoost, Eshaghi and Bowden, 2023; Chhibber, Chahal and Kaurav, 2025; Prashar and Maity, 2024). The levers examined in this literature are predominantly communicative and relational, namely internal brand communication, brand-specific leadership Morhart et al., (2009) and the identification and exchange processes through which employees become brand champions (Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos, 2014). Reward, by contrast, has rarely been studied in its own right. As Table 1 shows, prior reviews either subsume reward under brand-centred human resource management or analyse it together with other internal branding practices, and the most recent meta-analysis identified an effective reward system as one of six internal branding operationalisations while noting that empirical research on rewards was too limited for a fuller analysis (Prashar and Maity, 2024).

Table 1. Treatment Of Reward In Prior Reviews And In This Review

Review	Design and Corpus	Treatment Of Reward	Focal Outcomes
Saleem and Iglesias (2016)	Systematic review	One part of brand-centred human resource management, alongside brand ideologies, brand leadership, internal brand communication, and internal brand communities	Components of internal branding

Saini et al., (2022)	Bibliometric analysis of 739 Scopus articles	Not examined as a separate lever	Employer branding and internal branding mapped as largely independent streams
Afshardoost et al., (2023)	Meta-analysis of 38 studies	Not separated from internal brand management	Brand understanding, brand commitment, and brand citizenship behaviour
Prashar and Maity (2024)	Meta-analysis of 65 studies and 226 effect sizes	One of six operationalisations of internal branding; evidence described as limited	Employee commitment
This review	Systematic review of 23 studies	Focal lever; isolated measures separated from bundles, brand-contingent from generic reward, and customer-facing from employer-brand targets	Brand citizenship, brand-consistent behaviour, advocacy, and customer and brand outcomes

Source: Authors' Compilation From The Cited Reviews

This neglect matters for three reasons. First, reward is among the most direct and costly levers that organisations control, and managers already use it to elicit brand behaviour, from rewards for brand-fostering conduct in hotels Chang, Chiang and Han (2012) and incentives for multi-brand salespeople Mullins, Swain and Friend (2023) to bonuses and extra leave for employees who act as online ambassadors (Soens and Claeys, 2025). Whether such investments build the brand remains an open empirical question. Second, theory offers competing predictions. Social exchange reasoning suggests that reward obliges employees to reciprocate with discretionary effort Cropanzano, Anthony, Daniels and Hall (2017) and signalling theory suggests that observable organisational actions communicate otherwise unobservable intentions Connelly, Certo, Ireland and Reutzel (2011), so that reward may tell employees which behaviours the organisation values. These accounts imply two routes. As an incentive, reward may change behaviour because employees want the reward, without changing how they understand the brand. As information, reward may tell employees, including colleagues who merely observe others being rewarded, what the organisation prioritises, because human resource practices act as messages that employees interpret (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004). Motivation research adds that extrinsic incentives relate differently to performance quantity and quality Cerasoli, Nicklin and Ford (2014) that their effects on intrinsic motivation remain contested Gerhart and Fang (2015) that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation relate differently to employee outcomes Kuvaas, Buch, Weibel, Dysvik and Nerstad (2017), and that controlling forms of reward may undermine the autonomous motivation on which voluntary behaviour depends (Gagné et al., 2022). Brand citizenship and advocacy are precisely such voluntary behaviours, so a reward that secures in-role compliance might fail to produce behaviour beyond the role. Third, employees respond not only to human resource practices but also to the motives they attribute to them (Hewett, Shantz, Mundy and Alfes, 2018; Hu, Oh and Agolli, 2025). A reward explicitly tied to the brand may therefore relate to behaviour differently from generic pay, yet this distinction has not been examined systematically.

The relevant evidence is also scattered across marketing, human resource management, hospitality, and sales research, which use different labels, theories, and

measures. Employer branding and internal branding have developed as largely separate streams Saini et al., (2022) and human resource systems are measured so inconsistently that the contribution of individual practices is difficult to isolate (Boon, Den Hartog and Lepak, 2019). Reward in particular is often measured as items or dimensions within broader bundles such as brand-centred human resource management, internal marketing, or employer branding, and it is related to outcomes that range from behaviour to intention. As a result, the literature does not yet show which rewards relate to which EBBB dimensions and target brands, which mechanisms have been tested rather than assumed, and what can be concluded about customers and brands. Without a synthesis that separates evidence on reward from evidence on the bundles in which it is embedded, scholars risk attributing bundle effects to reward, and managers lack evidence on whether brand-related reward is a worthwhile investment.

This study therefore aims to synthesise empirical evidence on whether, how, and when reward relates to EBBB and to customer and brand outcomes. It addresses four research questions: how research on reward and EBBB has developed across publications, contexts, theories, and designs (RQ1); which types of reward relate to each EBBB dimension and target brand (RQ2); which mechanisms and boundary conditions have been proposed or tested (RQ3); and how far the evidence connects reward-related EBBB to customer and brand outcomes (RQ4). The review follows PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021) and the evidence-informed management review tradition Tranfield, Denyer and Smart (2003), frames its questions with context-intervention-mechanism-outcome logic Denyer, Tranfield and Van Aken (2008), appraises study quality with the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool Hong et al., (2018) reports synthesis without meta-analysis following the SWiM guideline Campbell et al., (2020) rates certainty with GRADE logic Guyatt et al., (2008) and reports inter-reviewer agreement as percentage agreement together with kappa (Landis and Koch, 1977; McHugh, 2012).

The review makes three contributions. First, it treats reward as the focal internal branding lever and separates evidence on reward itself from evidence on the broader constructs in which it is usually embedded, distinguishing financial, non-financial, and developmental reward, isolated measures from practice bundles, brand-contingent from generic reward, and customer-facing from employer-brand targets. Second, it develops from the patterns and limits of this evidence a proposed integrative model of reward as a brand signal that keeps observed associations, formally tested indirect pathways, and theoretical propositions visibly distinct. Third, by appraising methodological quality and rating the certainty of each finding, it establishes how much confidence the current evidence warrants and sets out a research agenda for building causal knowledge.

Method

This study is a systematic literature review reported in line with PRISMA 2020, using an evidence synthesis approach without meta-analysis that combines direction-based vote counting for quantitative findings with thematic synthesis of qualitative findings. The data sources were peer-reviewed articles indexed in Scopus and the Web of Science Core Collection, searched on 26 October 2026 without date restrictions for English-language articles, using three concept blocks covering reward and practice bundles, brand-related employee outcomes, and employee populations. Studies were determined through explicit eligibility criteria, which required empirical studies of employees that measured reward explicitly and employee brand-building behaviour (brand citizenship behaviour, advocacy and word of mouth, or brand-consistent in-role behaviour) and analysed their relationship directly or through a mediator, with practice bundles accepted only when a reward component was identifiable; two reviewers

screened titles, abstracts, and full texts independently, a third reviewer resolved disagreements, and agreement was recorded as percentage agreement and Cohen's κ. The research instruments were a piloted extraction form, which recorded study characteristics, reward content and measurement form, brand contingency, EBBB dimension, target brand and outcome form (both coded after peer review), mechanisms, boundary conditions, and the direction, significance, and evidence type of each estimate, and the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool 2018, applied with written rules and reported per criterion without a summary score. Data were collected by one reviewer, who extracted data with page references, and were verified item by item against the full texts by a second reviewer, with the third reviewer resolving discrepancies, a procedure also applied to the target-brand and outcome-form codes, and no imputation of unreported data. Data were analysed descriptively for the development of the field. Because reward and outcomes were measured in incommensurable forms, the reward-EBBB relationships were synthesised without pooling; studies were grouped by reward content, measurement form, brand contingency, EBBB dimension, and target brand, one direction of effect per study was vote-counted and tested with a two-sided sign test, significance was tabulated descriptively, and sensitivity analyses repeated the vote count across subgroups. Qualitative evidence was synthesised thematically, and the certainty of each finding was rated with GRADE logic, starting at low because all designs were cross-sectional; vote counting and certainty ratings were added to the synthesis plan before the analysis began, and the account of reward as a brand signal was formulated after the synthesis as the authors' proposition, separate from relationships tested in primary studies.

Results and Discussion

1. Development Of Research On Reward And Employee Brand-Building Behaviour

The final search string (Table 2) yielded 435 records (227 from Scopus and 208 from Web of Science). Deduplication by normalised DOI and then by title and year removed 155 duplicates, leaving 280 records, of which 233 were excluded at title and abstract screening; at this stage the reviewers retained records whenever a criterion could not be refuted and agreed on 97.14% of decisions (κ = 0.90). Of 47 reports sought, two could not be retrieved and 45 were assessed. First-round full-text agreement was 77.78% (κ = 0.55), so the third reviewer's resolutions were codified as eight written decision rules, for example that pay-satisfaction items within job satisfaction did not count as reward and that EBBB items within composite employee-based brand equity scales did qualify, after which both reviewers independently reassessed all 45 reports and agreed on 97.78% of them (κ = 0.96). Twenty-two reports were excluded because reward was not measured (11), EBBB was not measured (4), no reward-EBBB analysis was reported (4), the population was ineligible (2), or the design was non-empirical (1). Twenty-three studies were included (Figure 1; Table 3).

Table 2. Final Search String (Scopus Syntax)

Block	Terms
A: Reward and practice bundles	reward* OR remunerat* OR compensation OR incentiv* OR bonus* OR salary OR salaries OR wage* OR "total reward*" OR "pay for performance" OR "performance related pay" OR "merit pay" OR "employee recognition" OR "recognition program*" OR "recognition scheme*" OR "recognition practice*" OR "employee appreciation" OR "career development" OR "career advancement" OR "career opportunit*" OR "brand centred HRM" OR "brand centered HRM" OR "brand centred human resource*" OR "brand centered human resource*" OR "brand oriented HRM" OR "brand

	oriented human resource*" OR "HRM practice*" OR "HR practice*" OR "human resource practice*" OR "human resource management practice*" OR "internal marketing"
B: Brand-related employee outcomes	"brand citizenship" OR "brand building behavio*" OR "brand supporting behavio*" OR "brand consistent behavio*" OR "brand aligned behavio*" OR "brand oriented behavio*" OR "brand enhancing behavio*" OR "brand related behavio*" OR "on brand behavio*" OR "brand ambassador*" OR "brand advoca*" OR "brand champion*" OR "living the brand" OR "live the brand" OR "lives the brand" OR "brand promise delivery" OR "brand commitment" OR "brand identification" OR "brand psychological ownership" OR "brand knowledge" OR "brand understanding" OR "internal branding" OR "internal brand management" OR "internal brand building" OR "employee branding" OR "employee based brand equity" OR "employer brand*" OR "employee advoca*" OR "employee word of mouth" OR "employee brand engagement"
C: Population	employee* OR staff OR worker* OR personnel OR frontline OR "front line" OR "service provider*" OR salesperson* OR "sales force" OR salesforce OR workforce
Limits	Scopus: DOCTYPE(ar) AND LANGUAGE(english). Web of Science: DT=(Article) AND LA=(English)

Source: Authors' Search Records, 2026

Note. Web of Science used the topic field (TS=) with hyphenated variants added (for example, brand-centred HRM). The final string followed two calibration iterations that returned 26 records per database and then 85 and 82 records, after which Block B was extended to employer branding and employee advocacy. The final string retrieved 324 Scopus and 249 Web of Science records, or 227 and 208 after the limits, and a known eligible study was retrieved in both databases.

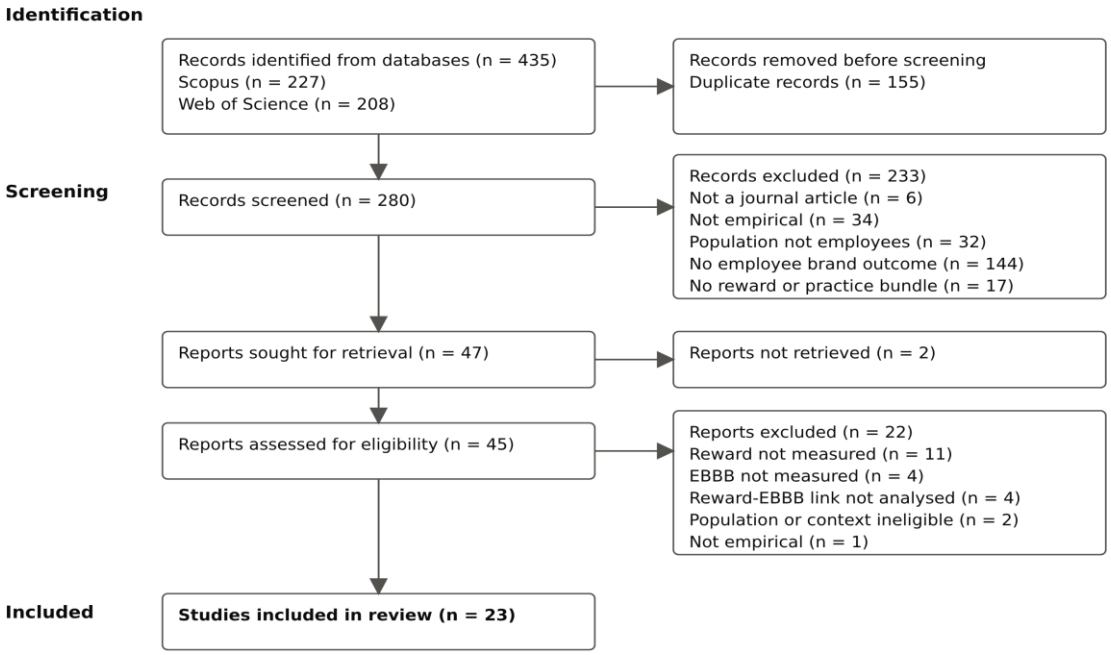


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram Of Study Selection
(Source: Authors' Analysis, 2026)

Table 3. Characteristics Of The Included Studies (n = 23)

Study	Country	Sector	Design and data	Reward measure	EBBB outcome (target brand)	MMAT criteria not met (N) or unclear (CT)
Allison and Flaherty (2020)	USA	Beverage distribution	Quantitative; multilevel, multi-source	Bundle; financial, non-financial; brand-contingent	Brand-consistent (product)	3.1 CT; 3.3 CT
Atanasovski, Veselinova, and Apasieva (2026)	North Macedonia	SMEs, multi-sector	Quantitative; self-report	Bundle; unspecified	Brand-consistent (not distinguished)	3.1 N; 3.4 N
Baca and Reshidi (2025)	Kosovo	Banking	Quantitative; self-report	Bundle; financial	Advocacy/ WOM (not distinguished)	3.4 CT
Balzano and Modugno (2025)	Italy	Multi-sector	Qualitative; interviews	Theme; financial, non-financial, developmental	BCB (mixed)	None
Chang et al., (2012)	Taiwan	Hospitality	Quantitative; multilevel, multi-source	Bundle; financial; brand-contingent	BCB (corporate)	3.1 CT
Chang, Chiang and Han (2015)	Taiwan	Franchise retail, food and beverage	Quantitative; multilevel, multi-source	Bundle; unspecified; brand-contingent	BCB (corporate)	3.1 CT
Chiang, Han and McConville (2018)	Taiwan	Hospitality	Quantitative; multilevel, multi-source	Bundle; financial; brand-contingent	BCB (corporate)	3.1 CT
Styvén, Näppä, Mariani and Nataraajan (2022)	Sweden	Tourism and hospitality	Mixed; web panel, interviews	Isolated; financial, developmental	Advocacy/ WOM (employer)	3.1 N
Hajj Hussein and Bou Zakhem (2024)	Lebanon	SMEs, multi-sector	Mixed; self-report, interviews	Bundle; financial	BCB (corporate)	1.4 CT; 3.1 N; 3.4 N; 5.4 N; 5.5 N
Jaffari, Foroudi, Palazzo, and Akbari (2024)	Pakistan	Services	Mixed; self-report, interviews, focus groups	Bundle; financial, non-financial, developmental	Advocacy/ WOM (employer)	1.3 to 1.5 CT; 3.1 N; 3.3 CT; 3.4 N; 5.3 CT; 5.4 N; 5.5 N

Le Tan and Trang (2020)	Vietnam	Hospitality	Quantitative ; self-report	Bundle; financial, non-financial	BCB (corporate)	3.1 CT; 3.4 N
Michael, Michael, and Fotiadis (2023)	United Arab Emirates	Hospitality	Qualitative; manager interviews	Theme; financial, non-financial, developmental	Advocacy/ WOM (mixed)	None
Mullins et al. (2023)	USA and Canada	B2B industrial sales	Quantitative ; multi-source	Isolated; financial; brand-contingent	Brand-consistent (product)	None
Mutter (2025)	Germany	Multi-sector	Quantitative descriptive; secondary survey	Bundle; financial, developmental	Advocacy/ WOM (mixed)	4.2 CT; 4.3 N; 4.4 CT; 4.5 N
Panagiotidou and Mihail (2024)	Greece	Multi-sector	Quantitative ; self-report	Bundle; financial, developmental	Advocacy/ WOM (employer)	3.1 N; 3.3 CT
Saini and Jawahar (2021)	Ten countries and a world list	Ranked employers	Quantitative ; firm-level secondary	Isolated; financial, developmental	Advocacy/ WOM (employer)	3.1 CT
Sarangal (2018)	India	Hospitality	Quantitative ; self-report	Bundle; financial	Composite EBBE (corporate)	3.1 N; 3.2 N; 3.3 CT; 3.4 N
Shaari, Salleh, and Hussin (2012)	Malaysia	Hospitality	Quantitative ; self-report	Isolated; financial, non-financial; brand-contingent	BCB (corporate)	3.1 CT; 3.2 CT; 3.4 N
Shafia and Seyyed Naghavi (2019)	Iran	Hospitality	Qualitative; expert interviews	Theme; financial, non-financial; brand-contingent	Brand-consistent (corporate)	None
Soens and Claeys (2025)	Belgium	Multi-sector	Mixed; self-report, social media posts	Isolated; financial, non-financial; brand-contingent	Advocacy/ WOM (mixed)	5.4 N
Sreejith, Khan, Sinimole, and Philip (2026)	North America, Asia, Europe	Information technology	Mixed; online reviews	Isolated; financial, developmental	Advocacy/ WOM (employer)	1.4 CT; 3.1 N; 3.3 CT; 3.4 N; 5.5 N
Taweewattana kunanon and Darawong (2022)	Thailand	Hospitality	Quantitative ; self-report	Isolated; financial, developmental	Advocacy/ WOM (employer)	3.1 CT; 3.4 N
Thomas and Rodrigues (2020)	India	Banking	Quantitative ; self-report	Bundle; unspecified	Brand-consistent (brand promise to customers)	3.1 N; 3.2 CT; 3.4 N

Source: Authors' Analysis Of The 23 Included Studies, 2026

Note. BCB = brand citizenship behaviour; WOM = word of mouth; EBBE = employee-based brand equity; brand-contingent = reward explicitly tied to brand behaviour or brand goals. Target brand: corporate, product, and brand promise to customers are customer-facing targets; employer = employer brand; mixed = employer and customer-facing targets combined; not distinguished = target not specified. MMAT 2018 criteria: 1.3 findings adequately derived from data; 1.4 interpretation sufficiently substantiated by data; 1.5 coherence between data, analysis, and interpretation; 3.1 representativeness of participants; 3.2 appropriate measurement; 3.3 complete outcome data; 3.4 confounders accounted for; 4.2 representative sample; 4.3 appropriate measurement; 4.4 low risk of nonresponse bias; 4.5 appropriate statistical analysis; 5.3 integration adequately interpreted; 5.4 divergences between components addressed; 5.5 components adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition. All studies met the two MMAT screening questions.

The studies were published between 2012 and 2026, and 17 of them (73.9%) appeared from 2020 onwards, with a peak of four in 2025 (Figure 2). The Journal of Business Research published four studies and the Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality and Tourism two, while the remaining 17 appeared in 17 different journals spanning marketing, tourism, human resource management, and information systems.

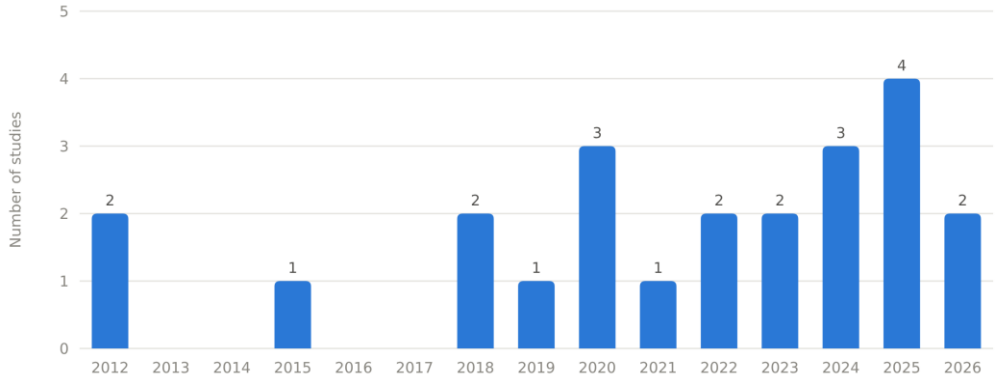


Figure 2. Included Studies By Publication Year
(Source: Authors' Analysis, 2026)

Asia contributed 12 studies (52.2%), Europe seven (30.4%), North America two (8.7%), and multi-country samples two (8.7%). The three Taiwanese studies came from one research group Chang et al., (2012); Chang et al., (2015); Chiang et al., (2018) and no study was conducted in Africa, Latin America, or Oceania. Hospitality and tourism was the dominant sector (n = 9, 39.1%), followed by multi-sector samples (n = 8, 34.8%), sales (n = 2), banking (n = 2), franchise retail (n = 1), and information technology (n = 1). Social exchange theory (n = 9, 39.1%) and social identity theory (n = 8, 34.8%) were the most frequent lenses, followed by signalling theory (n = 4), and five studies (21.7%) stated no explicit theory or relied only on a framework. Fifteen studies (65.2%) were quantitative, five (21.7%) used mixed methods, and three (13.0%) were qualitative. All designs were cross-sectional, and no study was longitudinal or experimental. Five studies combined employee data with ratings by supervisors, managers, or customers, four of them in multilevel designs, whereas 13 relied on single-source reports, two on managerial informants, and three on secondary data. Employee survey samples ranged from 173 to 687 respondents (median 300), and covariance-based structural equation modelling was the most common technique (n = 7), followed by multilevel modelling (n = 4), regression or correlation (n = 4), and partial least squares (n = 3).

Coded by target brand, 11 studies addressed customer-facing brands (eight the corporate brand, two product brands, and one the brand promise to customers), six addressed the employer brand, and six either combined employer and customer-facing targets or did not distinguish them. Target brand was not independent of reward design.

Seven of the eight studies of brand-contingent reward targeted the corporate or a product brand and the eighth a mixed target, whereas all six employer-brand studies examined generic reward. This pattern mirrors the separation of employer branding and internal branding into distinct research streams Saini et al., (2022) and reflects the different conceptual roots of the two domains, internal branding in brand understanding and commitment Piehler et al., (2016) and employer branding in the evaluation of the employment offering (Edwards, 2010; Theurer et al., 2018). It also means that any contrast between brand-contingent and generic reward in this corpus partly coincides with a contrast between corporate-brand citizenship and employer-brand advocacy, a confound that the subsequent findings must be read against. The concentration of the field in hospitality, in Asia and Europe, and in cross-sectional survey designs further indicates that the evidence base is young and narrow, even though interest has grown markedly since 2020.

2. Methodological Quality Of The Evidence

The second reviewer's verification agreed with the first reviewer's quality ratings in 91.00% of 211 ratings ($\kappa = 0.77$), and the third reviewer resolved the 19 discrepancies. Because a study that meets more appraisal criteria but leaves a serious confounding problem unaddressed is not necessarily more informative for a given question than a study that meets fewer criteria with more appropriate measurement, the studies were not ranked into quality tiers. Table 3 instead lists, for each study, the specific MMAT criteria that were not met or could not be judged, and Figure 3 summarises the ratings per criterion. All studies met the two MMAT screening questions. Sample representativeness (criterion 3.1) was the weakest criterion; it was met by three of the 19 quantitative components, not met by eight, and could not be judged in eight. Confounders (criterion 3.4) were accounted for in nine of the 19 quantitative components, whereas measurement (16 of 19) and outcome data completeness (14 of 19) were mostly adequate. Among the five mixed-methods studies, only two addressed divergence between components and only two met the quality standards of each tradition. The qualitative components were generally strong, although interpretation was sufficiently substantiated by data in five of eight. The quantitative descriptive study did not meet the criteria for appropriate measurement and statistical analysis, and its sample representativeness and nonresponse risk could not be judged.

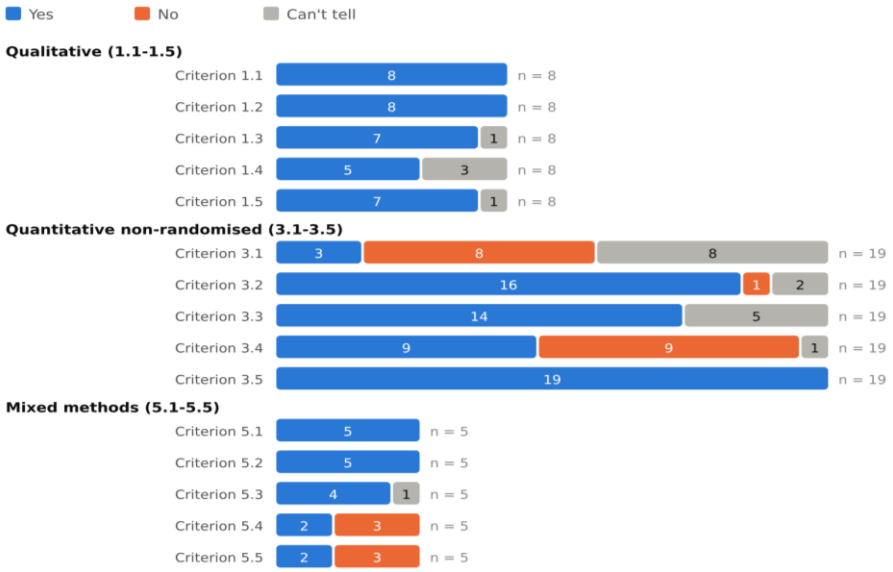


Figure 3. Methodological Quality Ratings Per MMAT 2018 Criterion
(Source: Authors' Analysis, 2026)

Reporting inconsistencies were identified in seven studies, and in these cases table values took precedence over the text. They included coefficients or counts that differed between tables and text Chang et al., (2015); Jaffari et al., (2024); Le Tan and Trang (2020); Taweewattanakunanon and Darawong (2022) unreported path coefficients Thomas and Rodrigues (2020), inconsistent data completeness Sarangal (2018), and a moderation effect labelled as mediation (Hajj Hussein and Bou Zakhem, 2024). The criterion-level profile matters for interpretation because the weaknesses are not evenly distributed. Eight of the nine quantitative components that did not account for confounders examined generic reward or generic bundles, mostly with single-source data, whereas the four multilevel studies of brand-contingent bundles met the confounding criterion and mainly could not demonstrate sample representativeness. The former weakness threatens causal interpretation of the reward-EBBB association directly, whereas the latter limits generalisation, so the two kinds of study warrant different caveats rather than a single superior or inferior label.

3. Reward Types And Employee Brand-Building Behaviour

a. Evidence Map

Reward was measured as an isolated construct in seven studies (30.4%), embedded in a practice bundle in 13 (56.5%), and identified as a qualitative theme in three (13.0%). The bundles were brand-centred human resource management, internal marketing, employer branding, corporate branding, green human resource management, strategic human resource management, and service-oriented human resource practices. Eight studies used brand-contingent reward. Because reward categories are not mutually exclusive, a single study can contribute to several cells of the evidence map; across studies, financial reward was examined in 20 studies, developmental reward in nine, non-financial reward in eight, and an unspecified reward system in three. Figure 4 separates direct reward evidence, in which reward was measured as an isolated construct or emerged as a qualitative theme, from reward-inclusive bundle evidence, in which the reward component was not isolated. Direct quantitative evidence concentrated on financial and developmental reward in relation to advocacy (five and four studies, respectively), whereas four of the six studies linking financial reward to brand citizenship behaviour (BCB) measured reward within a bundle. No quantitative study measured recognition as a stand-alone construct, and no study linked developmental reward to brand-consistent in-role behaviour.

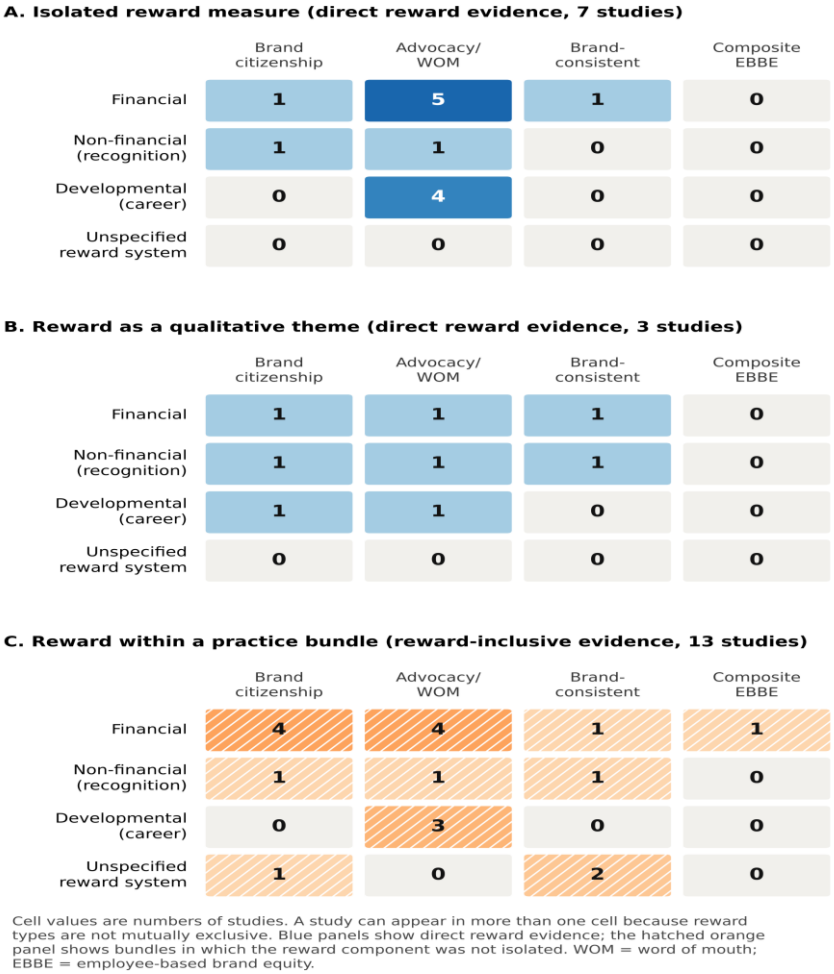


Figure 4. Evidence Map Of Reward Types And EBBB Dimensions, Separating Direct Reward Evidence From Reward-Inclusive Bundle Evidence
(Source: Authors' Analysis, 2026)

The map shows what has been studied rather than which reward is more effective. Its most important feature is that much of the evidence on BCB, the dimension most often theorised as voluntary brand support, comes from bundles that combine reward with training, communication, or leadership. The cells that look densest are therefore not necessarily the cells in which the contribution of reward is best understood, a problem that reflects the broader difficulty of isolating individual practices within human resource systems (Boon et al., 2019).

b. Direction And Significance Of Associations

All 19 quantitative and mixed-methods studies with an estimable direction reported a positive reward-EBBB relationship (sign test, $p = 0.000004$). The direction did not change in any subgroup, including the nine studies that accounted for confounders, the 12 studies without reporting inconsistencies, and each target-brand group, although the three studies that met the representativeness criterion were too few for the sign test to reach significance (Table 4). The four remaining studies were a typology without an association statistic Mutter (2025) and the three qualitative studies.

Table 4. Vote Counting Based On Direction Of Effect

Subgroup	Studies (n)	Positive (n)	Positive (%)	Sign Test P (two-sided)
All studies with an estimable direction	19	19	100	0.000004

Subgroup	Studies (n)	Positive (n)	Positive (%)	Sign Test P (two-sided)
Formally tested direct or indirect effect	11	11	100	0.000977
Isolated reward measure	7	7	100	0.0156
Reward embedded in a bundle	12	12	100	0.000488
Confounders accounted for (MMAT 3.4 met)	9	9	100	0.0039
Representative sample (MMAT 3.1 met)	3	3	100	0.25
No reporting inconsistencies	12	12	100	0.000488
Customer-facing target brand	10	10	100	0.0020
Employer-brand target	6	6	100	0.0313
Mixed or not distinguished target	3	3	100	0.25

Source: Authors' Analysis, 2026

Consistency of direction did not imply consistency of significance. Across 31 quantitative effect estimates, 16 were positive and significant, seven were positive component paths without a test of the indirect effect, five were not significant, and three could not be estimated. No estimate was negative and significant. The only negative estimate, a direct effect of reward on the culture dimension of online behaviour, was not significant $b = -0.03$, $p = .527$ (Soens and Claeys, 2025). Table 5 shows these patterns study by study, together with the target brand of each study. Vote counting based on direction indicates consistency, not magnitude or precision McKenzie and Brennan (2019) so the uniformly positive direction should be read as evidence that reward and EBBB tend to co-occur rather than as evidence of a strong or causal effect.

Table 5. Direction and Significance Of Reward-EBBB Associations By Study, Measurement Form, EBBB Dimension, And Target Brand

Study	Brand citizenship behaviour	Advocacy and word of mouth	Brand-consistent in-role behaviour	Composite EBBE	Target brand
Reward measured as an isolated construct					
Shaari et al., (2012)	S+	–	–	–	Corporate
Saini and Jawahar (2021)	–	S+	–	–	Employer
Styvén et al., (2022)	–	S+; NS	–	–	Employer
Taweewattanakunanon and Darawong (2022)	–	CP+; NS	–	–	Employer
Mullins et al., (2023)	–	–	S+	–	Product
Soens and Claeys (2025)	–	S+; NS	NS	–	Mixed
Sreejith et al., (2026)	–	PI+	–	–	Employer
Reward embedded in a practice bundle					
Chang et al., (2012)	S+	–	–	–	Corporate
Chang et al., (2015)	S+	–	–	–	Corporate
Chiang et al., (2018)	S+	–	–	–	Corporate
Sarangal (2018)	–	–	–	S+	Corporate
Allison and Flaherty (2020)	–	–	CP+	–	Product
Le Tan and Trang (2020)	S+; NS	–	–	–	Corporate

Study	Brand citizenship behaviour	Advocacy and word of mouth	Brand-consistent in-role behaviour	Composite EBBE	Target brand
Thomas and Rodrigues (2020)	–	–	CP+	–	Brand promise
Hajj Hussein and Bou Zakhem (2024)	CP+	–	–	–	Corporate
Jaffari et al., (2024)	–	CP+	–	–	Employer
Panagiotidou and Mihail (2024)	–	S+	–	–	Employer
Baca and Reshidi (2025)	–	CP+	–	–	Not distinguished
Mutter (2025)	–	NE	–	–	Mixed
Atanasovski et al., (2026)	–	–	CP+	–	Not distinguished
Reward as a qualitative theme					
Shafia and Seyyed Naghavi (2019)	–	–	Q+	–	Corporate
Michael et al., (2023)	–	Q+	–	–	Mixed
Balzano and Modugno (2025)	Q+	–	–	–	Mixed

Source: Authors' Analysis, 2026

Note. S+ = positive, formally tested and significant; NS = not significant; CP+ = positive component paths, indirect effect not tested; PI+ = positive predictive importance without an effect estimate; Q+ = positive association in qualitative evidence; NE = direction not estimable (typology); – = dimension not examined. Two codes in one cell denote two estimates in the same study. EBBE = employee-based brand equity. Target brand: corporate, product, and brand promise are customer-facing targets; employer = employer brand; mixed = employer and customer-facing targets combined; not distinguished = target not specified.

c. Brand-Contingent Reward And Brand Citizenship Behaviour

Brand-contingent reward and BCB formed the most coherent body of evidence, and all of it concerned the corporate brand. Brand rewards were associated with BCB ($\beta = 0.458$, $p < .01$) and with each of its four dimensions (Shaari et al., 2012). Supervisor-rated brand-centred human resource management, which included rewards for brand-fostering behaviour and brand-related creativity, was associated with employee BCB across levels in two hotel samples, with $\gamma = 0.429$ $p < .01$ Chang et al., (2012) and $\gamma = 0.241$ $p < .05$; (Chiang et al., 2018). Corporate branding that rewarded participation in brand activities showed a similar association $b = 0.317$, $p < .01$ (Chang et al., 2015). At the factor level, brand-centred reward and training was associated with brand sportsmanship ($\gamma = 0.292$, $p < .01$), whereas its associations with helping and self-development were not reported as significant (Chang et al., 2012).

This pattern is coherent but not yet attributable to reward alone. Three of the four quantitative studies measured the reward within bundles (brand-centred human resource management or corporate branding), the three multilevel studies came from one research group, and all of them targeted the corporate brand, so brand contingency, bundle content, research group, and target brand coincide. The dimension-level result also cautions against relying exclusively on aggregate citizenship measures, because antecedents of BCB can differ across its dimensions (Piehler, 2018). A non-significant association with helping or self-development indicates that an association was not detected in that sample, not that reward has no bearing on these dimensions.

d. Generic Financial And Developmental Reward And Advocacy

Isolated financial reward and advocacy, mostly directed at the employer brand, showed a more mixed pattern. Economic value was associated with intention to recommend the employer β = 0.19 Styvén et al., (2022), and firm-level compensation ratings were associated with the percentage of employees recommending the firm b = 4.49, p < .01 (Saini and Jawahar, 2021). However, rewards for online ambassadorship had no significant direct association with endorsement (b = 0.04, p = .321) and an indirect association through the employee–organisation relationship (b = 0.04, 95% CI 0.01, 0.07 (Soens and Claeys, 2025). Remuneration was not correlated with intention to recommend (r = 0.03) and was linked to it only through job satisfaction (Taweewattanakunanon and Darawong, 2022). In more than 300,000 employee reviews, compensation was not among the dominant predictors of advocacy (Sreejith et al., 2026). Evidence on developmental reward was inconsistent. Career opportunities were associated with recommendation at the firm level b = 5.99, p < .01 Saini and Jawahar (2021) and appeared among the dominant predictors of advocacy in all three technology subsectors Sreejith et al., (2026), whereas career value was not significant among Swedish tourism and hospitality employees β = 0.07 Styvén et al., (2022), and career development was not related to job satisfaction in Thai luxury hotels (Taweewattanakunanon and Darawong, 2022).

The weak or indirect advocacy associations of financial reward are compatible with meta-analytic evidence that incentives predict performance quantity more closely than quality, whereas intrinsic motivation predicts quality more closely (Cerasoli et al., 2014). Advocacy places employees' personal credibility at stake, and its associations with remuneration through satisfaction and with ambassadorship rewards through the employee–organisation relationship are consistent with social exchange explanations that emphasise the employment relationship (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Career prospects are instrumental employer attributes Theurer et al., (2018), and their relevance may depend on how visible internal labour markets are in a sector, although this remains hypothetical because no study compared sectors using a common measure. Outcome form also differed between the two domains. Of the six employer-brand studies, two measured intention to recommend Styvén et al., (2022); Taweewattanakunanon and Darawong (2022), two used recommendation endorsements on employer-review platforms Saini & Jawahar (2021); Sreejith et al., (2026), one combined intention and behaviour items Panagiotidou and Mihail (2024), and one did not report item wording that allowed the form to be determined Jaffari et al., (2024), whereas the six quantitative studies of corporate-brand citizenship measured self-reported behaviour. Intention to recommend an employer is therefore not equivalent to enacted advocacy. Because these studies targeted mainly the employer brand and measured mainly intentions or platform endorsements, the weaker pattern may reflect the different psychology of recommending a workplace Edwards, (2010) and the different outcome form rather than a weaker role of financial or developmental reward as such.

e. Brand-Contingent Sales Incentives And Reward-Inclusive Bundles

In sales settings, solution-selling incentive expectancy was associated with more balanced effort across a brand portfolio β = 0.14, p < .05 (Mullins et al., 2023). Brand relationship investments that included brand-specific incentives, commissions, and bonuses were associated with salesperson brand identification (0.215, p < .05), which was in turn associated with brand engagement 0.422, p < .05 (Allison and Flaherty, 2020). Generic bundles containing a reward component were positively associated with BCB, word of mouth, brand promise delivery, or brand-consistent behaviour. Five of these studies reported only component paths without testing the indirect effect (Atanasovski et al., 2026; Baca and Reshidi, 2025; Hajj Hussein and Bou Zakhem, 2024; Jaffari et al.,

2024; Thomas and Rodrigues, 2020). Formal tests were reported for a direct association of employer brand awareness with word of mouth β = 0.429, $p < .001$ Panagiotidou and Mihail (2024) and for an indirect association of service-oriented human resource practices with BCB 0.32, $p < .01$ (Le Tan and Trang, 2020). Internal marketing correlated strongly with composite employee-based brand equity $r = 0.830$, $p < .01$ Sarangal (2018), but the outcome scale combined practice items with behavioural items.

No generic-bundle study isolated the contribution of the reward component. These findings therefore describe the bundles, not reward, and they are consistent with meta-analytic evidence that internal brand management as a whole is related to brand commitment and citizenship Afshardoost et al., (2023); Chhibber et al., (2025); Prashar and Maity (2024) and with evidence that internal brand management relates to the organisational citizenship behaviour of frontline hotel employees (Buil et al., 2016). The composite outcome in Sarangal (2018) is a further caution, because employee-based brand equity was conceived to distinguish management practices from employee responses King and Grace (2010), and combining the two can inflate associations.

4. Mechanisms And Boundary Conditions

Twelve mediators and ten boundary conditions were identified (Table 6). Formally tested mediation was supported for brand commitment Shaari et al., (2012) person-brand fit and brand commitment Chiang et al., (2018) brand psychological ownership Chang et al., (2012) service climate Le Tan and Trang (2020), and the employee-organisation relationship (Soens and Claeys, 2025). Psychological reactance was tested and did not mediate the associations of reward (Soens and Claeys, 2025). The remaining mediators, including brand identification, were inferred only from significant component paths, and three of the formal tests used the causal-steps procedure rather than interval estimates of the indirect effect (Chang et al., 2012; Chiang et al., 2018; Shaari et al., 2012).

Table 6. Mediators And Boundary Conditions Of Reward-EBBB Relationships

Mechanism Or Condition	Studies	Evidence
Brand, organisational, or affective commitment	Chiang et al., (2018); Jaffari et al., (2024); Panagiotidou and Mihail (2024); Shaari et al., (2012); Thomas and Rodrigues (2020)	Formally tested in two studies (partial and full mediation); inferred from component paths in three
Brand identification and person-brand fit	Allison and Flaherty (2020); Chiang et al., (2018)	Person-brand fit formally tested in one study (full mediation); brand identification inferred in one
Brand psychological ownership	Chang et al., (2012)	Formally tested (partial mediation)
Employee-organisation relationship	Soens and Claeys (2025)	Formally tested (significant indirect effect)
Service climate	Le Tan and Trang (2020)	Formally tested (full mediation)
Psychological reactance	Soens and Claeys (2025)	Formally tested (no mediation)
Organisational pride; job satisfaction; employee engagement; brand knowledge	Atanasovski et al., (2026); Baca and Reshidi (2025); Hajj Hussein and Bou Zakhem (2024); Taweewattanakunanon and Darawong (2022)	Inferred from component paths, one study each

Psychological contract fulfilment; motivation and pride	Balzano and Modugno (2025); Michael et al., (2023)	Qualitative
Brand portfolio identification	Mullins et al., (2023)	Weakened the incentive association ($b = -0.08$, $p < .01$)
Reactance potential; susceptibility to normative influence	Allison and Flaherty (2020)	Strengthened (0.093, $p < .05$) and weakened (−0.141, $p < .05$) the bundle association with brand identification
Competitive intensity	Le Tan and Trang (2020)	Weakened the bundle association with service climate ($\beta = -0.11$, $p < .05$)
Individual green values	Hajj Hussein and Bou Zakhem (2024)	Strengthened the bundle-to-pride and pride-to-BCB paths
Employer ranking group; demographic groups; technology subsector	Panagiotidou and Mihail (2024); Saini and Jawahar (2021); Sreejith et al., (2026)	Associations held across ranking groups; differed by age and by subsector
Inadequate or withheld pay; superficial sustainability commitments	Balzano and Modugno (2025); Shafia and Seyyed Naghavi (2019)	Qualitative hindering conditions

Source: Authors' Analysis Of The 23 Included Studies, 2026

The mediators followed four pathways. A relational pathway comprised commitment, the employee-organisation relationship, pride, satisfaction, and service climate; an identity pathway comprised brand identification, person-brand fit, and psychological ownership; a cognitive pathway comprised brand knowledge; and a motivational pathway comprised engagement. The relational pathway was examined most often, whereas the cognitive and motivational pathways each rested on one study without a formal test. Identity mechanisms appeared particularly in the multilevel brand-contingent studies (Chang et al., 2012; Chiang et al., 2018). These pathways align with exchange and identification explanations of brand championship Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos (2014) with the joint contribution of brand understanding, identification, and commitment to citizenship Piehler et al., (2016) and with meta-analytic evidence that human resource management relates to outcomes through motivation and attachment (Jiang, Lepak, Hu and Baer, 2012). They are nevertheless candidate mechanisms rather than established causal channels. Three of the five formally tested mediations used causal-steps procedures, and all studies were cross-sectional and many single-source, so reverse causality and omitted variables cannot be excluded Antonakis, Bendahan, Jacquart and Lalive (2010), common method variance may inflate attitude-behaviour associations Podsakoff, MacKenzie and Podsakoff (2012), and commitment and identification could also follow citizenship behaviour.

Each boundary condition appeared in one study. Brand portfolio identification weakened the association of incentive expectancy with balanced brand effort, which was positive when identification was low (simple slope 0.12, $p < .01$) and not significant when it was high (Mullins et al., 2023). This moderation in one sales context suggests a possible substitution pattern, in which incentives matter less where brand identification already sustains effort, which is consistent with the energising role of brand identification among salespeople (Hughes and Ahearne, 2010). A single moderation in one sample does not establish a general substitution of identification for incentives, and it does not demonstrate motivational crowding out. Debate over the undermining effects of pay Gerhart and Fang (2015) differing intrinsic and extrinsic motivational relationships Kuvaas et al., (2017)

and concerns about controlling rewards Gagné et al., (2022) remain relevant, but psychological reactance did not mediate reward associations in the one study that tested it, where only 33 of 502 employees reported receiving rewards (Soens and Claeys, 2025). Reactance potential strengthened the association of brand relationship investments with brand identification, whereas susceptibility to normative influence weakened it (Allison and Flaherty, 2020). Competitive intensity weakened the association of service-oriented human resource practices with service climate Le Tan and Trang (2020), and individual green values strengthened the paths from green human resource management to pride (0.409) and from pride to BCB 0.412 (Hajj Hussein and Bou Zakhem, 2024).

5. Customer And Brand Outcomes

Eleven studies reported outcomes beyond EBBB, but only five drew them from an independent source. Hotel-level BCB was associated with customer-rated satisfaction, with $\gamma = 0.688$ $p < .01$; Chang et al., (2012) and $\gamma = 0.301$ $p < .05$; Chiang et al., (2018) and franchise-level BCB was associated with customer-based brand equity 0.268, $p < .01$ (Chang et al., 2015). In sales, brand engagement was associated with manager-rated brand performance 0.674, $p < .05$ (Allison and Flaherty, 2020). Balanced brand effort was negatively associated with solution performance ($b = -0.26$, $p < .05$), and the association turned positive only when opportunity identification ability was high interaction $b = 0.34$, $p < .01$ (Mullins et al., 2023). The other six studies relied on same-source or participant-perceived outcomes, namely employer attractiveness, employer of choice, internal brand identity, and hotel and destination brand image. No study tested isolated reward through EBBB to customer outcomes, and the three studies with customer data all examined brand-centred bundles in Taiwan.

The associations of aggregated citizenship with customer-rated satisfaction and brand equity are consistent with the service–profit chain Hogreve et al., (2017) and with the cascading of identification from leaders and employees to customers (Wieseke et al., 2009). However, all three customer-level studies came from one research group, assessed bundles, and concerned the corporate brand, so the customer link has not been shown for reward itself or for employer-brand advocacy. Greater brand effort was also not uniformly beneficial, because balanced portfolio effort related negatively to solution performance unless opportunity identification ability was high (Mullins et al., 2023).

6. Qualitative Evidence And Reward Credibility

The three qualitative studies and the qualitative components of the five mixed-methods studies yielded three themes. First, reward served as evidence that employer promises were kept. Employee welfare, participation bonuses, and recognition were read as fulfilment of the psychological contract, which reinforced commitment before employees acted as brand citizens and advocates (Balzano and Modugno, 2025). Second, brand-contingent reward appeared most effective when embedded in an evaluation system oriented to guests and brand identity, such as guest-vote-based encouragement, best-employee awards, and quarterly evaluations (Shafia and Naghavi, 2019). Third, inadequate salaries and promised quarterly rewards that were not paid weakened morale and brand orientation (Shafia and Naghavi, 2019). Human resource executives described compensation and recognition as means of motivating employees to act as brand ambassadors, although the available quotations related more to retention than to advocacy (Michael et al., 2023).

These themes suggest that credibility may connect the qualitative and moderation findings. Rewards interpreted as fulfilled promises reinforced commitment, while withheld or inadequate pay weakened brand orientation, and superficial sustainability

commitments hindered commitment, whereas individual green values strengthened the green human resource management, pride, and citizenship paths (Balzano and Modugno, 2025; Hajj Hussein and Bou Zakhem, 2024; Shafia and Naghavi, 2019). Evidence outside the corpus that greenwashing is related to lower brand citizenship through reduced brand pride, especially among employees with stronger green concern Xiao (2025) supports examining the consistency between reward and the brand promise. Credibility, however, was not measured as a construct in any included study, so whether employees who are more attached to brand values withdraw support first when reward contradicts the promise remains a proposition rather than an established finding.

7. Certainty Of Evidence

Three findings reached low certainty and five very low certainty, and none reached moderate or high certainty (Table 7). The positive association of brand-contingent reward with BCB, the indirect pathways through relational and identity mechanisms, and the association of aggregated EBBB with customer outcomes were rated low. The remaining findings were downgraded for inconsistency, indirectness, or few formal tests.

Table 7. Summary Of Findings And Certainty Of Evidence

Finding	Studies (Formal Tests)	Reasons For Downgrading	Certainty
Brand-contingent reward, isolated or within brand-centred human resource management, is positively associated with BCB (corporate brand)	4 (4)	None beyond cross-sectional design	Low
Generic bundles containing reward are positively associated with BCB and brand-consistent behaviour through employee attitudes	5 (2)	Indirectness (reward component not separable); few formal tests	Very low
Isolated financial reward is positively associated with employee advocacy (mainly employer brand)	5 (3)	Inconsistency (non-significant direct associations and low predictive importance)	Very low
Developmental reward is positively associated with employee advocacy (mainly employer brand)	4 (2)	Inconsistency (two positive, two non-significant); few formal tests	Very low
Brand-contingent sales incentives are associated with brand-building effort, subject to boundary conditions	2 (1)	Few formal tests; incentive within a formative index in one study	Very low
Relational and identity mechanisms are statistically associated as indirect pathways between reward and EBBB	5 (5)	None beyond cross-sectional design	Low
Aggregated EBBB in organisations with reward-inclusive brand-centred practices is positively associated with customer satisfaction and customer-based brand equity	3 (3)	None beyond cross-sectional design	Low
Brand identification, competitive intensity, individual values, and unpaid reward were observed as boundary conditions in single studies	5 (4)	Single study per condition	Very low

Source: Authors' Analysis, 2026

Note. Certainty Started At Low Because All Designs Were Cross-Sectional

8. Reward As A Brand Signal: A Proposed Integrative Model

The pattern of findings invites an interpretation that goes beyond the tested relationships. Signalling theory holds that observable and costly actions convey otherwise unobservable intentions Connelly et al., (2011), and a reward that is visibly contingent on brand conduct could tell employees which brand behaviours the organisation values. Human resource system strength Bowen and Ostroff (2004) and the motives employees attribute to human resource practices Hewett et al., (2018) may shape whether such a signal is received as intended, and meta-analytic links between commitment- or control-focused attributions and employee outcomes support this possibility (Hu et al., 2025). The corpus, however, does not test this account. Signalling theory was used explicitly by only four of the 23 studies, and no study measured signal perception, signal clarity, signal costliness, or employees' interpretation of reward as a signal. Reward as a brand signal is therefore positioned here as a theoretical synthesis and proposition of this review, not as a finding, and it could be strengthened by experiments that manipulate brand contingency and signal credibility while holding reward value constant.

Figure 5 presents this proposition as a proposed integrative model. Its line styles distinguish observed cross-sectional associations, formally tested indirect pathways, and theoretical propositions. Recognition is shown as a reward type only with a qualification, because no quantitative study measured it as a stand-alone construct, and reward credibility and attributed motive are shown as propositions because they rest on qualitative and external evidence rather than on tested moderation within the corpus. The model also separates customer- or corporate-brand behaviour from employer-brand advocacy, because the evidence for the two domains came from different reward designs.

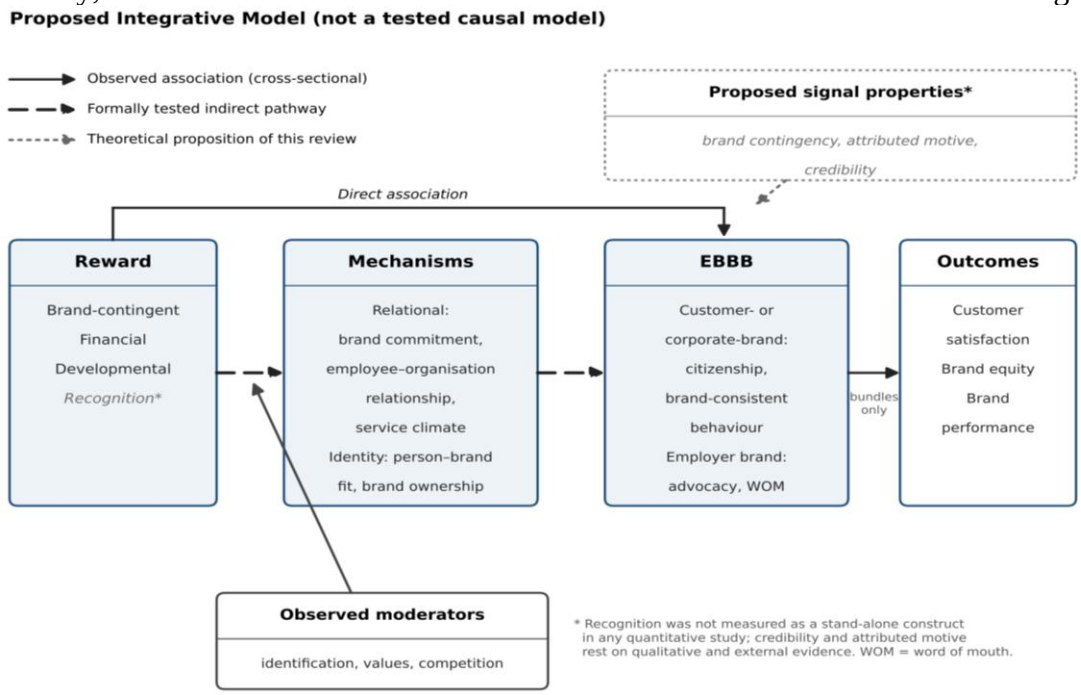


Figure 5. Proposed Integrative Model Of Reward And EBBB, Distinguishing Observed Associations, Formally Tested Indirect Pathways, And Theoretical Propositions (Source: Authors' Synthesis, 2026)

For theory, the model suggests specifying which reward signals what to whom. Treating brand contingency, attributed motive, and perceived credibility as properties of reward, rather than treating reward as a generic item within internal branding bundles, could connect fragmented internal branding research Barros-Arrieta and García-Cali (2021); Saleem and Iglesias (2016) through signalling, attribution, and identity

explanations, and it gives employer-brand and internal-brand research a common set of testable properties. For practice, managers may consider visible rewards for brand-fostering conduct, guest-based recognition, and brand-specific sales incentives while maintaining perceived fairness of base pay, and may pair incentives with brand-specific leadership Morhart et al., (2009) and internal brand management Buil et al., (2016) and deliver promised rewards reliably. These options are consistent with the observed associations but should be treated as programme designs to be evaluated, because their causal benefits have not been established and financial reward may support employment relationships without directly securing advocacy.

9. Limitations and Future Research

Coverage was limited to English-language Scopus and Web of Science articles, and database differences Gusenbauer and Haddaway (2020) and the absence of citation tracking may have excluded relevant studies. Direction-based vote counting indicates consistency, not magnitude or precision McKenzie and Brennan (2019), and effect direction plots only partly address this limitation (Boon and Thomson, 2021). Target-brand and outcome-form coding was added after peer review, in six studies the target was mixed or not distinguished, and employer-brand advocacy was measured mostly as intention or platform endorsement rather than enacted behaviour, so differences between the two domains cannot be separated from differences in outcome form. Cross-sectional, predominantly single-source evidence concentrated in hospitality, Asia, and Europe limits causality and generalisability. Research priorities are experiments that vary brand contingency and signal credibility while holding reward value constant; longitudinal tests of whether commitment and identification precede citizenship; designs that isolate reward from communication, training, and leadership; studies that compare customer-facing and employer-brand targets with common measures; stand-alone measurement of recognition; tests of the possible substitution between brand identification and incentives and of employees' attributions of reward motives; and multi-source studies that trace isolated reward through EBBB to customers beyond Taiwan, including Africa, Latin America, Oceania, and Southeast Asian economies such as Indonesia.

Conclusion

Reward was consistently, but not uniformly, associated with employee brand-building behaviour. The association was most coherent when reward was tied explicitly to brand behaviour, mainly within brand-centred human resource bundles directed at the corporate brand, and it was statistically associated with brand citizenship through pathways involving brand commitment, person-brand fit, and brand psychological ownership, whereas generic financial and developmental reward, studied mainly in relation to employer-brand advocacy, related to advocacy only weakly, indirectly, or depending on context. Building on these patterns, the review advances the theoretical proposition, not an established finding, that the meaning of reward may depend on its brand contingency, the motives employees attribute to it, and its credibility, so that reward can be studied as a potential brand signal rather than only as a generic item within internal branding bundles. For practice, organisations may consider making part of reward visibly contingent on brand conduct, keeping base pay fair, and pairing incentives with identity-building practices, while treating these options as programme designs to be evaluated because their causal benefits have not been established. Evidence certainty is low to very low because all studies were cross-sectional. Experimental, longitudinal, and multi-source research isolating reward and tracing customer outcomes must establish whether reward causes or accompanies employees' brand-building efforts.

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