

## **Bridging Internal Communication and Corporate Brand Identity: A Review of Brand Performance Dynamics in the Marine Sector**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study reviews existing literature on the relationship between Internal Communication Effectiveness (ICE), Corporate Brand Identity Management (CBIM), and Brand Performance (BP) within the marine industry. Drawing on research in communication, branding, and organizational behaviour, the paper applies maturity theory to explore internal branding and performance management. It emphasizes how communication effectiveness strengthens organizational identity and influences employee behaviour, thereby enhancing sustainable brand performance. Findings highlight the importance of employee engagement, ethical branding, and sustainability practices in fostering brand coherence and equity. The study further provides recommendations for digitalization and contextual adaptation of CBIM frameworks to align with the specific challenges and opportunities of the marine industry.

**Keywords:** internal communication effectiveness, corporate brand identity management, brand performance, employee engagement, marine industry

## INTRODUCTION

Brand identity management has shifted from a marketing-focused concept to a holistic organizational framework that includes communication, culture and leadership in order to maintain brand coherence and integrity. From Balmer (2021) and Keller (2022), BIM is no longer an external marketing exercise, instead BIM as managerial process that encapsulates the corporate mission, vision, and values. Today's organizations are embracing the concept of the corporate brand as a strategic asset and expression of identity and direction which can unite and engage an organization internally and build trust externally. In the age of digital transformation and globalization, when business ecosystems are redefined, what is increasingly setting companies apart from one another is their ability to ensure that brand identity remain transparent and authentic across diverse cultures and geographic markets. Related with this, brand identity management concerns the working of internal-brand (internal business processes) and external brands (partnership) through its consistent and credible link with employees and partners respectively (King & Grace, 2007).

Internal communication is considered the "lifeblood" of managing brand identity and serves as the primary tool linking employees with corporate vision, values, and objectives. Good communication characterized by openness, clarity, engagement and feedback enhance the psychological attachment of employees to the organization (Feiz & Ahmadi Alvar, 2021). If channels of communication are open, credible and aligned strategically; employees can work as brand ambassadors who incarnate and promote the brand through their daily interactions and behaviour (Edward et al., 2024; Verčič, 2021). Conversely, disjointed or poor internal communication weakens brand uniformity, creates misalignment between teams, and undermines employee engagement and performance results. This is because empirical studies provide evidence of the significance of ICE in developing employee commitment and strengthening CBIM, given that effective communication engenders shared values, trust, and mutual understanding (Thelen & Men, 2020; Men, 2022).

Even though significant developments on communication and brand management have been achieved, there are still important gaps in research relating to specific sectors and among them the yacht industry. The maritime industry faces distinctive organizational challenges given the international nature of the industry, the diversity associated with a multicultural workplace and high levels of regulation and sustainability demand. Amidst these complex operational settings, ensuring brand consistency and employee engagement in these internal and external brand touchpoints are highly challenging (Vural et al., 2021; Tong & Kang, 2025). Research in manufacturing and service industries has demonstrated that ICE positively tends to relate to with brand identity alignment, performance outcomes despite empirical evidence is limited within the shipping context (Galindo-Reyes, 2025; Nguyen & Ha, 2023). Low levels of research attention in this area suggest that an examination of the way communication processes affect a brand's performance in high-stakes, multicultural, and geographically dispersed markets is required.

As such, the aim of this study is to integrate underlying interdisciplinary perspectives between Branding, Communication and Organizational studies literature to provide a comprehensive understanding of the existence of Corporate Brand Identity Management (CBIM) mechanism from its predecessor Internal Communication Effectiveness (ICE) and eventually into firm's BP. By grounding the conversation in the context of an oceans destination, this study fills an important void and adds depth to our understanding of strategic

communication as it underlies identity congruence, operational harmony, and sustainable brand distinctiveness. This way it contributes both to theory and practise of communication oriented brand management, stressing the fact how useful internal communication is not just an operational tool but a strategic factor of organization development and sustainable success of the brand.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Using a PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses)-based scoping review methodology, this review extracted and critically synthesised modern literature on Internal Communications (IC) Effectiveness, Corporate Brand Identity Management (CBIM) and Brand Performance (BP) in general organizational contexts as well as specifically linked to marine-sector organisations. The PRISMA checklist provides a systematic, transparent and replicable framework for searching, screening and including suitable academic studies that is intended to improve methodological quality whilst minimising selection bias (Page et al., 2021; Tricco et al., 2018). This assimilation of the PRISMA approach with thematic synthesis mechanism helps in including both conceptual and empirical studies related to internal branding, communication, brand management in various industrial settings.

This study searched systematically for literature in five renowned academic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, Emerald Insight, SpringerLink and Sciencedirect from January 2015 to October 2025. This range was selected with an eye to capturing key literature concerning both internal communication, corporate branding, and employee engagement but also reacting to changes influenced by digital transformation and the post-pandemic workplace (Snyder, 2019; Peters et al., 2020). To establish academic credibility, comparability and consistency in methodology were minimized by focusing on peer-reviewed journal articles published in English and excluding grey literature, dissertations, editorials and non-refereed articles in the review process.

To retrieve relevant studies, Boolean operators and carefully structured keyword combinations were used, including:

*(“internal communication effectiveness” AND “corporate brand identity”) OR (“brand management” AND “brand performance”) AND (“marine sector” OR “organizational communication”)*

The PRISMA protocol was implemented through four sequential phases:

- a. Identification: Comprehensive database search and record retrieval.
- b. Screening: Removal of duplicates and evaluation of relevance based on title, abstract, and keywords.
- c. Eligibility: Full-text review of potentially relevant studies to ensure alignment with inclusion criteria.
- d. Inclusion: Final selection of studies for synthesis and thematic analysis (Page et al., 2021).

This structured process promotes methodological transparency as well as analytical depth, and may enable cross-comparative inferences between general organizational and marine-sector research. Following Tricco et al. (2018), “Reproducing the search in more than one database and backing-up to check for studies reduces publication bias strengthening the robustness of final synthesis.

Furthermore, the methodological rigor was strengthened through the use of a data extraction matrix, which systematically recorded each study’s author(s), year, context, methodology, conceptual framework, and major findings. This enabled consistent data handling and thematic coding across diverse sources. Thematic synthesis was subsequently used to cluster findings into three dominant themes:

- a. The influence of ICE on organizational engagement and culture.
- b. The mediating role of CBIM in linking internal communication to BP.
- c. The contextual application of communication strategies in the marine and service industries (Nowell et al., 2017; Arksey & O’Malley, 2005).

### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

To ensure methodological and transparency, this review applied explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria based on the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021). The criteria were developed to capture peer-reviewed and high-quality studies that directly contribute to understanding the relationship between Internal Communication Effectiveness (ICE), Corporate Brand Identity Management (CBIM), and Brand Performance (BP). Applying such structured criteria minimizes bias and strengthens the credibility of the review (Snyder, 2019; Peters et al., 2020).

The inclusion parameters were designed to encompass empirical and theoretical studies published between 2015 and 2025, focusing on internal communication, branding, and employee engagement across diverse sectors, including the marine industry. This period reflects the post-digital transformation phase in corporate communication research, where new communication technologies, hybrid workplaces, and sustainability communication have become increasingly relevant (Men, 2022; Verčič, 2021).

Only peer-reviewed journal articles published in English were included to maintain academic reliability and comparability. Articles were sourced from leading databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Emerald Insight, SpringerLink, and ScienceDirect, ensuring comprehensive coverage of high-impact and credible research sources.

The exclusion parameters filtered out non-peer-reviewed materials, conference proceedings, dissertations, and studies unrelated to brand communication, ensuring a focus on theoretical and empirical contributions that align with the review’s scope (Tricco et al., 2018; Arksey & O’Malley, 2005). In addition, studies purely addressing technical or environmental aspects without a branding or communication component were excluded to maintain thematic coherence.

Table 1 outlines the systematic parameters used to identify, screen, and select relevant literature. The inclusion criteria prioritize contemporary, peer-reviewed research that directly explores the interplay between internal communication, brand identity, and performance outcomes. Emphasizing 2015–2025 ensures the integration of studies reflecting modern corporate communication trends, such as digital transformation, hybrid work environments, and sustainability-driven branding (Edward et al., 2024; Men, 2022).

The decision to focus on the marine and service sectors broadens the applicability of findings while highlighting the unique communication challenges faced by globally networked, multicultural industries (Vural et al., 2021). Conversely, the exclusion criteria were established to eliminate conceptual and contextual noise for instance, studies focusing solely on environmental or technical marine operations were removed to retain a clear branding and communication focus (Galindo-Reyes, 2025).

Following best practices from systematic review methodologies (Page et al., 2021; Peters et al., 2020), this structured approach ensures reliability, replicability, and a clear thematic boundary, thereby enhancing the academic robustness of the study.

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

| Criteria Type    | Inclusion Parameters                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Exclusion Parameters                                                                                                                                                               |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Publication Type | Peer-reviewed journal articles, empirical or theoretical studies, and systematic or integrative reviews that contribute to theory building in internal communication, branding, or identity management.              | Conference proceedings, book chapters, dissertations, non-peer-reviewed publications, and opinion pieces were excluded to maintain scholarly rigor and methodological consistency. |
| Time Frame       | 2015–2025. This timeframe captures the evolution of digital communication, post-pandemic organizational transformations, and contemporary brand management theories.                                                 | Studies published before 2015 were excluded due to differences in pre-digital communication structures and limited relevance to current theoretical frameworks.                    |
| Language         | English-language publications to ensure conceptual clarity, consistency in interpretation, and alignment with international scholarly communication standards.                                                       | Non-English studies were excluded to prevent translation bias and ensure analytical comparability.                                                                                 |
| Field of Study   | Corporate communication, internal branding, brand identity management, marine management, leadership communication, and employee engagement studies directly addressing communication-based organizational outcomes. | Studies unrelated to corporate branding, communication effectiveness, or organizational identity such as purely marketing, financial, or operational models were excluded.         |
| Sectoral Focus   | General business, service industries, and marine and maritime sectors, focusing on how communication and identity management intersect within complex, multicultural organizational environments.                    | Purely technical, environmental, or engineering studies without an explicit communication or branding dimension were excluded, even if situated in the marine sector.              |

### **PRISMA Flow Process**

This study rigorously adhered to the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) in framework to ensure methodological transparency, reproducibility, and analytic precision throughout the review process (Page et al., 2021). The PRISMA model establishes a structured and replicable procedure for identifying, screening, and including relevant academic studies, thereby minimizing researcher bias and enhancing the validity of synthesized evidence (Tricco et al., 2018; Peters et al., 2020). By employing this framework, the review was able to systematically capture both conceptual and empirical contributions related to Internal Communication Effectiveness (ICE), Corporate Brand Identity Management (CBIM), and Brand Performance (BP), ensuring the inclusion of only high-quality, theoretically grounded, and methodologically robust studies.

A total of 612 records were initially retrieved from five leading academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, Emerald Insight, SpringerLink, and ScienceDirect. These databases were selected for their disciplinary breadth, encompassing business communication, management, marketing, and organizational studies. Following the identification stage, 126 duplicate records were removed, leaving 486 unique records for initial screening. During the screening phase, records were assessed based on their title, abstract, and keyword relevance to ensure alignment with the review's focus on internal communication, brand identity, and performance dynamics. Studies that lacked conceptual alignment or methodological clarity were excluded at this stage.

From the screened records, 142 full-text articles were retrieved for detailed evaluation. During this eligibility phase, each article was assessed according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in Table 1, focusing on publication quality, research methodology, conceptual focus, and sectoral relevance. Following this rigorous evaluation, 130 studies met the eligibility threshold and were subjected to in-depth methodological appraisal. Ultimately, 72 studies were included in the final synthesis representing the most relevant and empirically credible evidence base addressing ICE, CBIM, and BP relationships.

The reasons for exclusion at this stage included:

- a. Lack of direct focus on ICE or CBIM constructs (n = 22).
- b. Non-empirical or conceptually repetitive studies (n = 18).
- c. Studies lacking sectoral application or demonstrating incomplete methodological procedures (n = 18).

This multistage selection process is illustrated in Figure 1, which visually represents the systematic narrowing of studies through the PRISMA stages of Identification, Screening, Eligibility, and Inclusion. The flow diagram demonstrates how a broad initial search was refined to include only those studies meeting stringent quality and relevance benchmarks, thereby ensuring analytical precision and replicability of findings.

This structured process aligns with emerging best practices in systematic review methodology as advocated by Snyder (2019) and Peters et al. (2020), emphasizing the value of methodological rigor and transparency in interdisciplinary research. By systematically filtering and synthesizing peer-reviewed studies published between 2015 and 2025, the review captured both foundational and contemporary perspectives that reflect digital transformation, post-pandemic communication paradigms, and evolving practices in corporate and marine organizational contexts.

The integration of the PRISMA process not only enhances the credibility and traceability of the review but also strengthens its contribution to academic discourse by ensuring comprehensive coverage and consistency across multiple research traditions. This systematic approach allows for a deeper, evidence-based understanding of how internal communication functions as both a driver and mediator of brand identity management and performance. Ultimately, the PRISMA methodology underpins the scholarly integrity of this review, ensuring that its insights are both empirically grounded and theoretically significant within the fields of communication management, branding, and organizational behaviour.

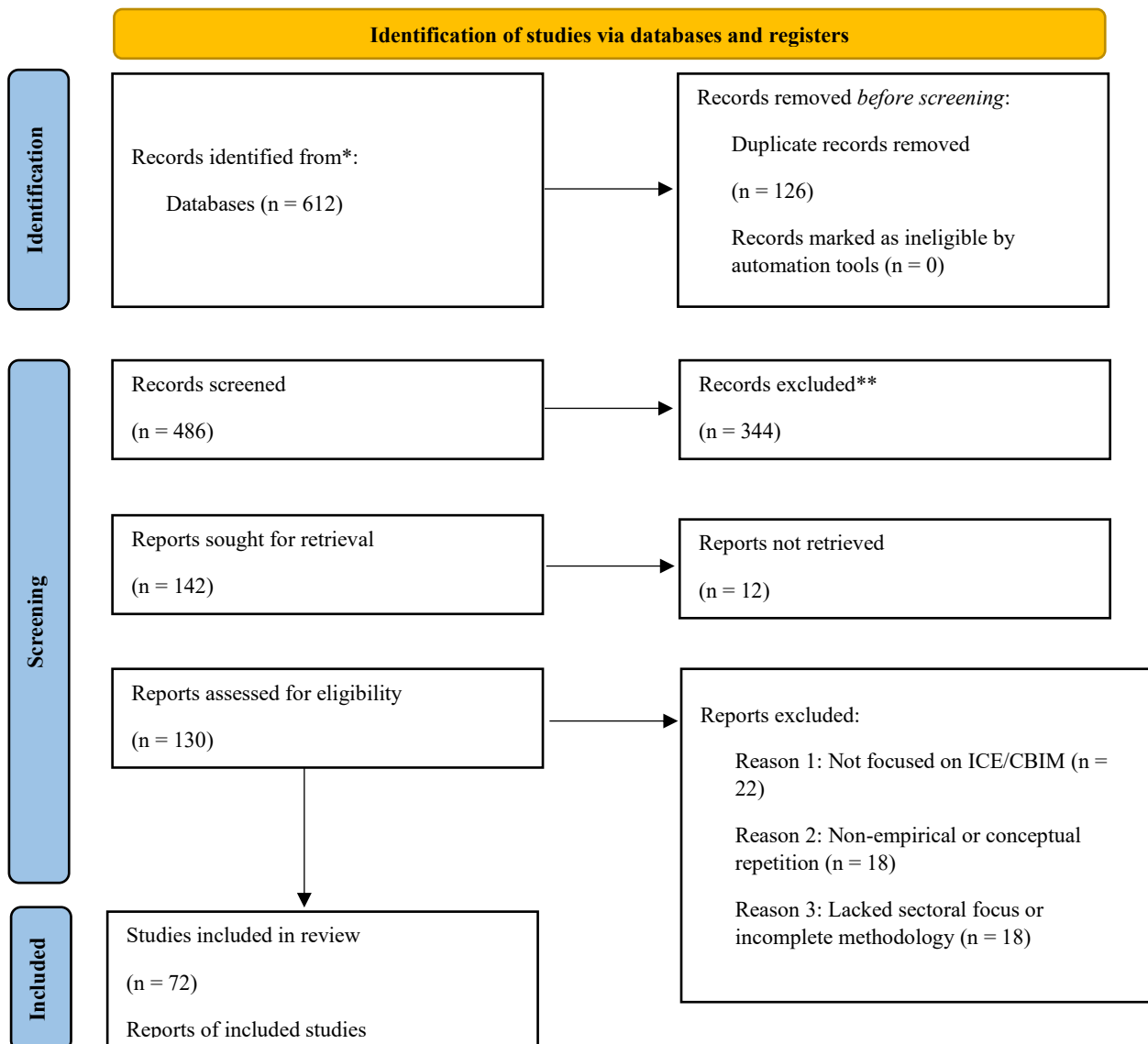


Figure 1: PRISMA 2020 flow diagram illustrating the literature selection process for studies on internal communication effectiveness, corporate brand identity management, and brand performance (2015–2025)

**Data Extraction and Thematic Analysis**

Each selected article was systematically reviewed using a comprehensive data extraction matrix designed to capture key bibliographic and methodological metadata, including author(s), publication year, journal source, methodological design, conceptual focus, and primary findings. This structured extraction process ensured methodological rigor and transparency by providing a clear audit trail of how data were identified, appraised, and synthesized. The approach enabled the consolidation of diverse empirical and conceptual insights into a unified analytical framework, facilitating a deeper understanding of the intersections between communication management, corporate branding, and organisational performance.

Following data extraction, a thematic synthesis approach was employed to identify, interpret, and integrate recurring patterns across the reviewed studies. This process combined both deductive and inductive reasoning: deductive in aligning findings with established theoretical constructs, and inductive in allowing emergent themes to surface organically from the literature corpus. Through iterative coding, comparison, and synthesis, three dominant and interrelated themes were identified:

- a. The influence of Internal Communication Effectiveness (ICE) on organisational culture, employee engagement, and the internalisation of brand values.
- b. The mediating role of Corporate Brand Identity Management (CBIM) in shaping performance outcomes through alignment of internal and external brand identities.
- c. The sector-specific application of communication strategies within marine and service industries, highlighting contextual dynamics such as multicultural workforce management and operational communication challenges (Nowell et al., 2017; Arksey & O'Malley, 2005).

The use of thematic synthesis offered a robust and flexible method for managing the conceptual heterogeneity inherent in interdisciplinary studies. As Nowell et al. (2017) emphasize, thematic analysis not only provides structure to qualitative interpretation but also ensures credibility, dependability, and confirmability in the synthesis process. Similarly, Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework for scoping reviews guided the analytical stages ranging from data mapping to thematic categorisation thereby supporting a comprehensive and transparent synthesis of both qualitative and quantitative evidence. This dual analytical strategy was essential for drawing meaningful insights across diverse research traditions and for identifying gaps that warrant future empirical exploration.

Ultimately, this methodological approach ensured that the synthesis was both systematic and interpretive, allowing nuanced theoretical and practical insights to emerge within the interdisciplinary nexus of internal communication, brand identity management, and organisational performance. By maintaining analytical rigor and reflexivity throughout, this process contributed to a richer and more integrative understanding of how internal communication dynamics influence brand coherence and performance across complex organisational contexts.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical foundation of this review is built upon three interrelated perspectives namely, Internal Branding Theory, Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the Corporate Brand Identity Management (CBIM) Framework. Together, these theoretical lenses explain the relational dynamics linking Internal Communication Effectiveness (ICE), corporate brand identity management (CBIM), and Brand Performance (BP) within organisations, particularly in the marine sector.

First, it is argued that companies need to bring together internal culture, leadership and behaviour of the employees with external brand identity to create a living brand promise through their personnel. It has been found that internalizing brands and becoming part of the identity it represents leads employees to become an advocate who supports brand performance outcomes (Soleimani et al., 2021; Aslam et al., 2022).

Secondly, Social Exchange Theory offers a valuable explanation for the psychological and relational mechanisms at play when employees perceive that the organisation invests in transparent communication, trust, support and value, they reciprocate with increased engagement, brand-supportive behaviours and commitment (Verčič & Men, 2022). In this way, ICE becomes the mechanism through which the organisation initiates favourable exchanges, fostering a psychological contract that underlies employee brand alignment.

Thirdly, the Corporate Brand Identity Management (CBIM) framework addresses how brand identity is shaped and managed both internally and externally. It conceptualises organisational brand identity as a multidimensional construct comprising vision, culture, image and stakeholder perceptions that must be consistently communicated and enacted to deliver brand performance (Foroudi et al., 2024). Within this framework, ICE supports the revelation and alignment of brand identity internally, while internal branding ensures that employees live the brand and SET explains why they choose to do so.

In combining these three perspectives, we posit a structural logic: ICE (via clarity, credibility, consistency, timeliness, feedback) enables internal branding initiatives to seed brand knowledge, commitment and advocacy among employees; SET explains the reciprocal motivation for employees to engage in brand-aligned behaviours; and CBIM mediates how those behaviours translate into coherent external brand identity and ultimately into tangible brand performance, such as employee advocacy, customer loyalty and organisational reputation. The marine sector context offers a compelling terrain for this model operations are global, teams diverse and safety and sustainability imperatives strong, meaning that effective communication, brand identity alignment and employee advocacy are not simply “nice to have” but essential to operational reliability and brand credibility.

Hence, this integrative theoretical framework underscores that the achievement of robust brand performance arises not just from external marketing or customer-facing messages, but from a system of internal communication, relational exchange and identity alignment. Through this lens, ICE serves as the foundation, internal branding as the cultural mechanism, SET as the relational psychology, and CBIM as the strategic identity management process that collectively drive BP.

**Internal Branding Theory**

Internal Branding Theory underscores the critical role of aligning an organisation's internal culture, leadership, and employee behaviour with its external brand identity. According to King and So (2019), effective internal branding goes beyond the dissemination of brand messages it requires embedding brand values into the organisational DNA so that employees live the brand promise in their daily interactions. This alignment transforms employees into committed brand ambassadors who consistently reinforce the brand's image both internally and externally. As Lee et al. (2025) affirm, when employees internalise the brand's ethos, they become proactive advocates who not only deliver the brand promise but also contribute to shaping a coherent and authentic brand experience for customers.

A robust internal communication system is pivotal in facilitating this alignment. It reinforces shared meanings across organisational levels, fosters psychological engagement, and promotes brand-consistent behaviours among employees (Feiz & Ahmadi Alvar (2021; Edward et al., 2024). Internal communication serves as the conduit through which strategic brand messages are translated into daily employee practices. When communication is transparent, participative, and reciprocal, it cultivates trust and emotional connection between employees and the organisation, which in turn enhances identification with the corporate brand. Empirical research consistently demonstrates that organisations with strong internal branding initiatives experience significantly higher levels of employee satisfaction, loyalty, and customer-aligned service quality (King & Grace, 2007). These findings collectively highlight that internal branding is not merely a communications initiative it is a strategic cultural process that integrates employees' cognitive, emotional, and behavioural engagement with the brand identity.

In the marine sector, where organisations frequently operate within multicultural, geographically dispersed teams and complex operational hierarchies, the strategic significance of internal branding becomes even more pronounced. Effective internal branding in this context functions as a unifying mechanism, fostering coherence across departments, fleets, and national cultures. It ensures that employees whether onshore or offshore share a consistent understanding of the organisation's mission, vision, and brand purpose. As Vural et al. (2021) emphasize, such alignment is vital for achieving operational excellence and sustaining competitive differentiation in an industry where brand reliability and service consistency are key determinants of performance. Ultimately, internal branding provides the cognitive and emotional infrastructure necessary for employees in the marine sector to embody the corporate brand, fostering trust among stakeholders and translating organisational values into tangible performance outcomes.

**Social Exchange Theory (SET)**

Social Exchange Theory (SET) provides a robust psychological and relational foundation for understanding why effective internal communication cultivates employee brand commitment. Rooted in Blau (1986) seminal work, SET asserts that social relationships within organisations are governed by reciprocal exchanges of resources tangible or intangible such as respect, trust, recognition, and communication. When employees perceive that their organisation invests in them through transparent communication, equitable treatment, and genuine recognition, they reciprocate through increased loyalty, engagement, and brand-supportive behaviours (Cropanzano et al., 2017). This reciprocal process transforms internal communication from a

mere managerial function into a strategic mechanism for fostering brand citizenship, emotional attachment, and long-term commitment to the organisation's brand values.

In branding research, SET has become central to explaining the employee–organisation relationship. Open and credible communication enhances employees' emotional attachment to the brand and strengthens their willingness to engage in discretionary, brand-supportive actions that go beyond formal role expectations (Men, 2022). Such communication not only conveys information but also signals respect and psychological safety two critical precursors to organisational trust. When employees perceive fairness, transparency, and inclusion in internal communication processes, they experience a heightened sense of value and belonging. This reinforces their psychological contract with the organisation and encourages them to act as brand ambassadors who personify brand ideals in every customer interaction (Thelen & Men, 2020; Verčič, 2021).

The reciprocal nature of SET is especially salient within the marine industry context, where complex operational structures, multicultural crews, and dispersed communication networks present significant relational challenges. In such environments, effective internal communication acts as a relational glue that bridges hierarchical and cultural divides, thereby strengthening collective identification with the corporate brand. As Galindo-Reyes, (2025) observe, communication quality directly influences team cohesion, safety compliance, and service reliability in high-risk, multinational marine operations. When employees perceive that their organisation is committed to open and respectful communication, they reciprocate by upholding safety standards, demonstrating brand-aligned conduct, and maintaining operational excellence even in challenging conditions.

Therefore, SET provides a compelling framework for conceptualising how internal communication effectiveness (ICE) drives the psychological and emotional bond between employees and the corporate brand. Through cycles of reciprocal exchange, ICE reinforces trust, commitment, and brand identification, which collectively elevate both internal cohesion and external brand performance. In essence, the application of SET to internal branding and communication underscores the principle that employee brand commitment is not commanded it is earned through consistent, transparent, and equitable relational exchange.

### **Corporate Brand Identity Management (CBIM) Framework**

The Corporate Brand Identity Management (CBIM) framework provides a comprehensive and integrative lens through which organisations can understand the strategic and cultural alignment of their brand identity. It merges both the internal and external dimensions of branding, underscoring the need for coherence between what an organisation is and what it communicates (Balmer, 2021; Keller, 2022). CBIM conceptualises corporate brand identity as a multidimensional construct encompassing an organisation's vision, culture, and image three interdependent elements that together represent the organisation's core identity. The effectiveness of CBIM depends on how well these dimensions are synchronised through robust internal communication systems that ensure consistency between internal brand values and external brand messages (King & Grace, 2007). When managed effectively, CBIM not only clarifies the brand's strategic direction but also ensures that all stakeholders employees, customers, and partners perceive a unified and authentic brand identity.

In practical application, CBIM functions as a mediating mechanism linking internal communication and brand performance outcomes. Effective communication serves as the connective tissue that aligns internal perceptions with external brand promises, ensuring that employees, as internal stakeholders, understand and embody the brand's strategic intentions. This communicative alignment enhances identity cohesion and strengthens stakeholder trust by reinforcing a sense of authenticity and transparency (Prashar & Maity, 2024; Men, 2022). Furthermore, CBIM contributes to organisational resilience by creating a shared understanding of brand meaning, which in turn supports consistent brand delivery and sustained differentiation in competitive markets. The more effectively an organisation manages its brand identity internally, the more capable it becomes of projecting a credible and consistent image externally thereby improving customer loyalty, corporate reputation, and long-term performance.

Within the marine sector, the CBIM framework assumes heightened significance due to the industry's global scope, multicultural workforce, and increasing pressure for sustainability and regulatory compliance. Marine organisations operate within complex ecosystems where operational reliability, environmental stewardship, and stakeholder transparency are essential to brand credibility. CBIM enables such organisations to maintain brand authenticity and trust by embedding their corporate identity into daily communication practices and decision-making processes (Vural et al., 2021; Nguyen & Ha, 2023). Through effective CBIM, organisations in the marine industry can integrate sustainability values and safety commitments into their core identity narratives, ensuring that both employees and external stakeholders perceive coherence between what the company declares and what it delivers. In this way, CBIM becomes not just a managerial tool but a strategic foundation that sustains brand performance, enhances reputational capital, and reinforces corporate legitimacy amid global regulatory and environmental pressures.

### **Internal Communication Effectiveness (ICE)**

Internal Communication Effectiveness (ICE) is a cornerstone of organisational success, encapsulating the degree to which communication systems promote clarity, credibility, consistency, timeliness, and feedback culture across hierarchical levels. It represents not merely the transmission of information but the strategic management of meaning within an organisation. According to Feiz and Ahmadi Alvar (2021), effective internal communication builds the connective tissue that binds employees to the organisation's vision and values. It fosters a shared sense of purpose, trust, and alignment between management and employees, thereby transforming communication from a transactional process into a relational and cultural mechanism. As Tong and Chan (2022) further asserts, ICE is a critical component of internal branding, ensuring that employees are not only informed but also emotionally invested in organisational goals. When communication is perceived as authentic, consistent, and two-way, it reinforces organisational identification and empowers employees to act as brand advocates.

The dimensions of ICE clarity, consistency, credibility, timeliness, and feedback orientation serve as diagnostic indicators of an organisation's internal communication health. Clarity ensures that organisational messages are comprehensible, accessible, and aligned with the strategic vision, thereby reducing ambiguity and enhancing role understanding. Consistency, as Edward et al. (2024) highlight, sustains coherence in brand narratives and operational directives across departments and geographies, ensuring that employees share a

unified understanding of organisational priorities. Credibility, on the other hand, is built through transparent leadership communication that fosters trust and accountability (Men, 2022). Timeliness ensures that communication is responsive and relevant, particularly in dynamic environments requiring quick decision-making, while a feedback-oriented culture promotes bidirectional dialogue and inclusion (Feiz & Ahmadi Alvar, 2021). Collectively, these dimensions reinforce an environment of psychological safety, enabling employees to voice opinions, share insights, and engage constructively in brand-supportive behaviour.

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that ICE predicts a range of positive outcomes, including employee engagement, brand advocacy, organisational trust, and overall performance (Men, 2022; Park & Kim, 2024; Thelen & Men, 2020). Effective communication practices cultivate a sense of mutual respect and belonging that strengthens organisational commitment and reduces employee turnover. Furthermore, in hybrid and digital work settings, ICE is increasingly facilitated by technological platforms such as Slack, Microsoft Teams, and enterprise intranets, which enable continuous, interactive, and transparent engagement (Verčič, 2021). These technologies not only sustain communication flow but also democratise access to information, allowing employees to actively participate in the co-construction of brand meaning.

Within the marine sector, the importance of ICE becomes even more pronounced. Marine operations are inherently complex, geographically dispersed, and culturally diverse, requiring precise coordination and strong interdepartmental communication. ICE plays a decisive role in enhancing operational safety, efficiency, and brand commitment across multinational teams (Vural et al., 2021). Clear and credible communication ensures that all employees from onshore management to offshore crews share a unified understanding of safety protocols, brand values, and organisational objectives. Moreover, a feedback-oriented culture helps identify emerging risks, promote adaptive learning, and strengthen cross-cultural collaboration. Thus, ICE functions as both a communicative and cultural mechanism that integrates strategic intent with employee experience, fortifying internal brand alignment and, ultimately, improving brand performance outcomes.

In essence, Internal Communication Effectiveness transcends traditional information exchange; it is a strategic enabler that transforms communication into a source of trust, engagement, and collective identity. By ensuring that every message reinforces organisational purpose and values, ICE becomes the vital link that connects internal branding, corporate brand identity management, and sustainable brand performance in dynamic and globally dispersed sectors such as maritime industries.

### **Brand Performance (BP)**

Brand Performance (BP) represents the culmination of strategic brand management efforts, encompassing both tangible and intangible outcomes that reflect how effectively an organisation builds, communicates, and sustains its brand value. It integrates diverse metrics such as customer loyalty, employee advocacy, corporate reputation, innovation capacity, and stakeholder trust (Baca & Reshidib, 2025). As Keller (2022) explains, BP embodies the collective perception of both internal and external stakeholders regarding the brand's authenticity, consistency, and value proposition. In this sense, brand performance serves not only as a barometer of short-term profitability but also as a long-term indicator of

organisational sustainability, differentiation, and competitive resilience. Effective brand performance is therefore achieved when employees' behaviours and stakeholder perceptions align coherently with the organisation's intended brand identity.

In contemporary research, internal branding is increasingly recognised as a critical antecedent of Employee-Based Brand Equity (EBBE) a concept that captures the extent to which employees' brand-related attitudes, identification, and discretionary behaviours contribute to the overall value of the corporate brand (Afshardoost et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2025). Employees who internalise the brand's purpose and values become instrumental in translating abstract brand ideals into tangible stakeholder experiences. Internal Communication Effectiveness (ICE) amplifies this relationship by fostering emotional attachment, role clarity, and brand-consistent behaviours, which collectively enhance organisational reputation and performance outcomes (Men, 2022; Verčič, 2021). Through clear, credible, and participatory communication, organisations can ensure that employees understand not just what the brand stands for but why it matters transforming them from passive recipients of information into active brand champions.

In marine organisations, the notion of brand performance extends far beyond conventional financial indicators. It encompasses dimensions such as operational reliability, safety adherence, sustainability performance, and social responsibility (Vural et al., 2021). Given the industry's complex, multinational, and high-stakes nature, brand performance is intrinsically linked to trust both internally among employees and externally among regulators, clients, and communities. When employees in marine organisations internalise the corporate brand identity through well-managed communication and Corporate Brand Identity Management (CBIM) strategies, they demonstrate higher advocacy, accountability, and adherence to brand-aligned behaviours (Galindo-Reyes, 2025). This alignment not only improves service quality and compliance but also reinforces the company's global reputation as a responsible and trustworthy brand.

Hence, BP should be conceptualised as a holistic construct that encapsulates the synergistic interaction of communication, identity, and engagement. It reflects how well an organisation translates its internal values into external brand credibility and how consistently it delivers on its promises across diverse stakeholder interfaces. In this integrative framework, ICE and CBIM act as the primary enablers, while internal branding serves as the cultural foundation that channels employee energy toward sustaining long-term brand excellence. Within the marine sector, this holistic view of BP underscores the importance of harmonising internal coherence with external legitimacy ensuring that operational performance, corporate ethics, and brand communication converge to produce measurable organisational success.

### **Proposed Conceptual Model**

Drawing from the integrated theoretical foundations discussed in preceding sections, this study proposes a conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 2 that delineates the interrelationships among Internal Communication Effectiveness (ICE), Corporate Brand Identity Management (CBIM), and Brand Performance (BP). The model positions ICE as the foundational driver and primary antecedent within the brand-building process. Specifically, it posits that effective internal communication fosters clarity, credibility, and consistency in organisational messaging, which in turn strengthens corporate brand identity alignment through CBIM mechanisms. This mediating process ultimately enhances brand performance by cultivating

employee engagement, brand advocacy, and stakeholder trust. Conceptually, the framework visualises the causal logic connecting communication, identity, and performance, illustrating that organisational alignment and sustainability are achieved through the dynamic interaction of communication quality, cultural coherence, and employee commitment.

A synthesis of recent empirical findings supports a robust and positive causal chain linking ICE → CBIM → BP, confirming that internal communication functions as a strategic catalyst for brand identity coherence (Men, 2022; Edward et al., 2024). ICE contributes not only to message clarity but also to emotional and cognitive alignment among employees, fostering an internal environment conducive to brand consistency and trust. When employees perceive that internal communication is transparent and credible, they are more likely to internalise the brand's identity and values, reinforcing organisational legitimacy and stakeholder confidence. This conceptual linkage aligns with the mediated model advanced in contemporary branding research, which demonstrates that CBIM mediates the impact of communication on brand outcomes suggesting that communication quality directly strengthens identity coherence and indirectly amplifies brand performance (Edward et al., 2024; Men, 2022).

Cross-industry comparisons further reinforce the external validity and generalisability of this conceptual model. In hospitality, transparent communication practices have been shown to enhance both brand loyalty and service excellence by creating a culture of trust and empowerment (Afshardoost et al., 2021). Similarly, in the banking sector, internal communication strategies that prioritise employee inclusion and feedback contribute significantly to customer trust and sustained engagement. Within the marine industry, these same principles manifest as enhanced operational branding, strengthened safety culture, and reinforced sustainability identity (Vural et al., 2021; Nguyen & Ha, 2023). The marine sector, in particular, exemplifies how the effective management of communication and identity coherence is essential for maintaining brand credibility in an increasingly complex and regulated global environment.

By integrating these theoretical and empirical insights, this review positions ICE as the communicative foundation of corporate identity management, CBIM as the strategic mediating mechanism, and BP as the ultimate organisational outcome. Together, these constructs form a coherent system of brand governance that underscores the centrality of communication in achieving sustainable brand success. The proposed model thus advances the theoretical understanding of how internal communication serves as the linchpin connecting employee engagement, identity alignment, and performance excellence. Beyond its theoretical contribution, this conceptual framework provides practical implications for scholars and practitioners alike, offering a diagnostic lens to assess and enhance brand alignment in complex organisational ecosystems. In doing so, it underscores the critical role of ICE and CBIM as dynamic enablers of brand differentiation, operational resilience, and long-term competitive advantage.

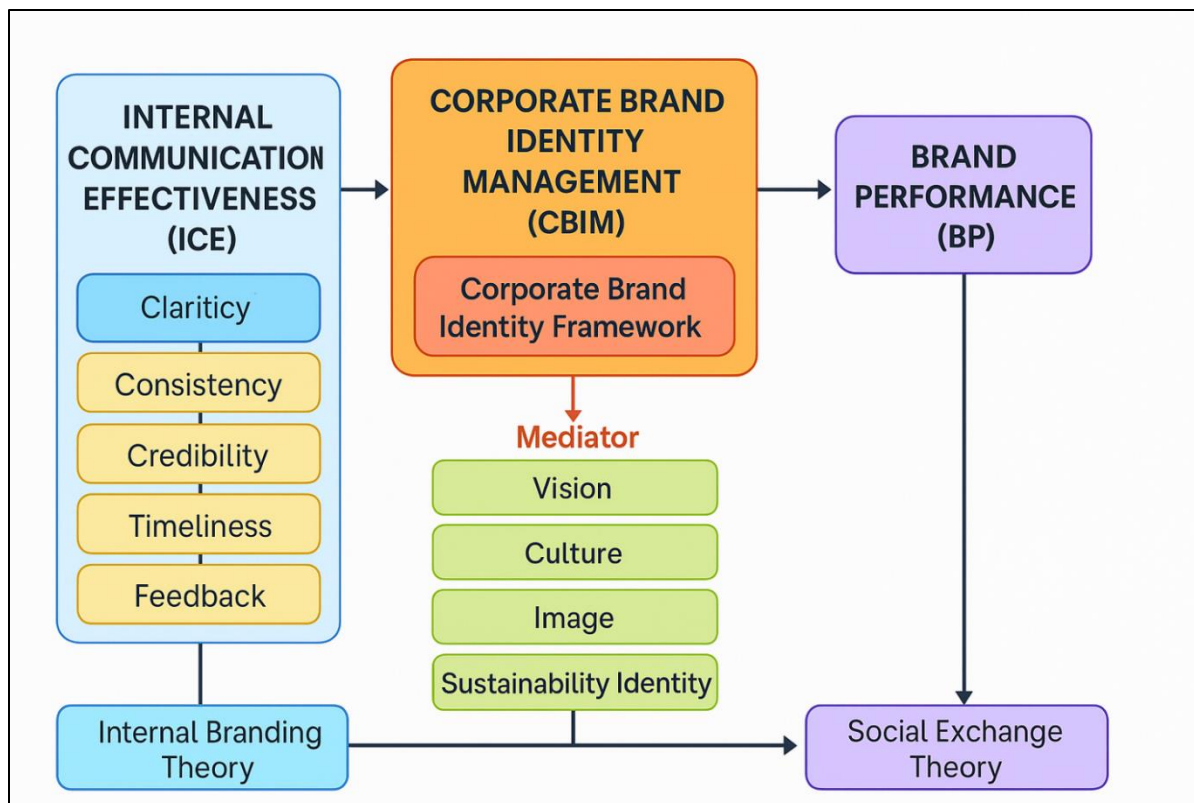


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of Internal Communication Effectiveness (ICE), Corporate Brand Identity Management (CBIM), and Brand Performance (BP) Based on Integrated Theoretical Foundations

## CONCLUSION

The implications of this review are presented that can lead to theoretical, practical and sectoral advancements in CBIM and ICE knowledge within contemporary organizations. Drawing on Internal Branding Theory, Social Exchange Theory (SET), and the CBIM framework, this review emphasizes communication as an important relational and strategic tool for developing brand consistency, and employee engagement and performance across non-maritime maritime sector contexts.

This review extends Internal Branding Theory by positioning communication effectiveness as a pivotal antecedent of brand coherence and performance outcomes. While traditional models of internal branding emphasize leadership and organizational culture as the foundation of brand advocacy Afshardoost et al. (2021), this study reveals that Internal Communication Effectiveness (ICE) serves as a structural bridge linking these cultural and leadership dimensions with employee identification and brand advocacy (Men, 2022; Edward et al., 2024). Effective internal communication fosters a shared understanding of brand values, clarity of purpose, and credibility of leadership communication key conditions that reinforce brand authenticity and employee alignment. Future research should continue refining theoretical models that integrate communication constructs such as clarity, feedback, and credibility with corporate brand identity alignment and brand performance (Verčič, 2021).

From a practical standpoint, the findings highlight the growing importance of digital communication strategies and leadership engagement models in reinforcing organizational culture and employee-brand alignment. Modern organizations are encouraged to leverage digital collaboration tools, feedback analytics, and hybrid communication systems to sustain engagement and trust in distributed and multicultural workforces (Lee et al., 2025). Leadership development initiatives should likewise emphasize authenticity, empathy, and transparency to enhance brand citizenship behaviour and strengthen employee commitment to corporate values (Thelen & Men, 2020).

In the marine and maritime industries, communication plays a strategic and multidimensional role in maintaining brand coherence across diverse, multicultural, and geographically dispersed teams. These findings are especially relevant for marine research and sustainability-oriented institutions such as the Food Research Institute (FRI) and WorldFish, where internal communication fosters brand identity coherence, environmental stewardship, and stakeholder trust (Vural et al., 2021; Nguyen & Ha, 2023). Strengthening internal communication channels in such organizations enhances their ability to project consistent sustainability narratives while deepening employee engagement in global initiatives.

Future research should leverage AI-driven communication analytics to assess real-time employee sentiment, communication tone, and engagement trends. Advanced computational methods, such as natural language processing and sentiment analysis, can provide actionable insights into how communication clarity and emotional tone influence brand alignment and trust (Edward et al., 2024). Such data-driven approaches will enable organizations to adopt proactive communication interventions that reinforce identity coherence and brand advocacy.

Moreover, future studies should pursue cross-cultural comparative analyses to examine how communication and brand identity management differ between Eastern collectivist and Western individualist contexts, particularly in multinational and maritime organizations (Galindo-Reyes, 2025; King & Grace, 2007). Understanding these cross-cultural variations is vital for designing communication strategies that respect cultural diversity while preserving a unified brand identity.

Another promising research avenue involves exploring Employee Brand Citizenship Behaviour (EBCB) within hybrid and remote work models. As workplace boundaries blur, voluntary brand-supportive behaviours such as advocacy, knowledge sharing, and digital brand representation play a growing role in sustaining internal brand coherence and engagement (Verčič, 2021). Investigating these behaviours through the lens of ICE and CBIM can illuminate new pathways for sustaining brand identity in increasingly virtual organizational environments.

Overall, effective internal communication remains the cornerstone of corporate brand identity management, serving as both a driver and mediator of brand performance. The evidence consolidated in this review demonstrates that communication clarity, consistency, and credibility are essential for translating strategic brand identity into coherent employee behaviours (Men, 2022; Edward et al., 2024). These insights reinforce the notion that organizational success in the 21st century depends not merely on external branding, but on the internal mechanisms through which brand meaning is created, communicated, and lived by employees.

In the context of the marine sector, where operations are shaped by complex regulatory frameworks, multicultural teams, and sustainability imperatives, the need for interdisciplinary research linking communication, identity, and performance is both timely and critical (Vural et al., 2021). By institutionalizing strong internal communication mechanisms, marine organizations can build cohesive cultures that foster innovation, advocacy, and safety key drivers of brand resilience and competitive advantage.

Finally, future scholarship should continue exploring cross-sectoral and technological intersections between communication effectiveness and brand identity alignment. Such inquiry is crucial to developing sustainable, human-centred branding models that integrate digital transformation with organizational authenticity, ensuring that brands remain adaptable, credible, and trusted in the evolving digital era.

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