

Article

How Teachers Contribute to the Sustainability of the University Brand: Evidence from China

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Abstract: A brand strategy is a powerful guarantee for a university to enhance its reputation and sustainable development. An internal brand is the foundation of a university brand. Based on three variables—internal market orientation, teachers’ organizational identity, and teachers’ brand support behavior, a research model is constructed on a university’s internal brand formation mechanisms. To summarize how teachers support the university’s internal brand building, we analyzed the relationship between the three variables. This study used a three-stage sampling survey method to distribute 500 questionnaires and recovered 419 valid samples. The data from the valid questionnaires were statistically analyzed using two software programs—SPSS 24.0 and Mplus 7.2. This survey and analysis found that the three internal market orientation dimensions (internal information collection, internal communication, and feedback) are significantly positively correlated with teachers’ organizational identity and brand support behavior. Teachers’ organizational identity is not only significantly positively correlated with brand support behavior, but also mediates the relationship between the three dimensions of internal market orientation and brand support behavior. Universities should pay attention to the key roles of teachers in brand building and regard internal market orientation as an important tool for internal brand building.

Keywords: sustainability of university brand; teachers; organizational identity; internal market orientation; brand support behavior



Citation: Jiang, S.; Xiao, F. How

Teachers Contribute to the Sustainability of the University Brand: Evidence from China. *Sustainability* **2024**, *16*, 3793. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16093793>

Academic Editors: Rosabel Roig-Vila and Guojun Ji

Received: 17 March 2024

Revised: 26 April 2024

Accepted: 28 April 2024

Published: 30 April 2024



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1. Introduction

The influence of market mechanisms is becoming increasingly apparent in China’s higher education. For example, the resource allocation mode is gradually becoming more diversified, and the government is guiding the characteristics and classification of university development, emphasizing competition, performance, and adjustment between universities through the “Double First-class” construction policy [1]. China is in the process of marketing higher education and formatting its institutional market. And the competition among higher education institutions around reputation, status, and resources has become more intense [2]. As an active organizational entity, the university should actively respond to competitive pressure by implementing a branding strategy [3]. With a brand strategy, a university can improve its reputation, show its quality and characteristics, form differentiated development with others, gain a dominant position in the institutional market, and form the basis for promoting sustainable development [4]. Internal branding is a process that values the involvement of key stakeholders within the organization in brand building to ensure that they identify and internalize the values of the organization’s brand and transmit brand-supporting behaviors to the organization [5]. Consequently, the internal brand is a key link to building a brand and promoting the sustainable development of a university. Internal brand management is a potential way for a university to gain a sustainable competitive advantage. Teachers are key to building an organization’s competitive advantage through internal brand building. Meanwhile, building employee brand

citizenship behavior is a key component of successful internal brand management [6]. From the perspective of internal interactions, this study focuses on the mechanisms of internal branding in universities, i.e., how teachers contribute to the sustainable development of the university brand. In higher education institutions, internal market orientation is more closely related to organizational citizenship behavior than other variables such as job satisfaction and performance [7]. Internal branding is a process in which universities develop and implement appropriate mechanisms, pay attention to/actively respond to the needs and suggestions of teachers, and make them deeply involved in brand building. Then, teachers can translate their organizational dedication into brand support behaviors. Thus, we hope to discover the primary factors and their relationship to internal branding. Based on existing studies and organizational identity theory [8], this study aims to create a mediating model and provide answers to the aforementioned concerns by surveying university teachers.

Organizational identity refers to the aspects of consistency in behaviors and concepts between members and the organizations they belong to. Members recognize that they have a sense of a contract, responsibility, belonging, and dependence on the organization and they try their best for the organization's activities [9]. Individual behavior in an organization can be divided into organizational role behavior and organizational citizenship behavior. Organizational role behavior refers to the qualitative behavior in the formal role assigned to individuals by the organization. Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) refers to the sum of behaviors that are beneficial to the organization's operation, efficiency improvement, and social status [10]. OCB involves the voluntary behavior of individuals and is not directly related to the organization's formal compensation system. OCB is a concept strongly related to organizational identity. Individual organizational identity is triggered by organizational identity in terms of affective cognition. OCB is promoted by organizational identity in terms of behavior. Organizational identity is a prerequisite for OCB, whereas OCB is the outcome and external manifestation of organizational identity [11].

Internal branding is based on organizational identity theory, as well as research on internal market orientation and brand support behavior. Internal market orientation refers to an organization's management gathering, disseminating information on employees' needs under its brand development goals, as well as designing and implementing appropriate responses to meet those needs. Internal market orientation demonstrates its efficacy through a combination of three dimensions: internal information collecting, internal communication, and feedback. The degree of internal market orientation effectiveness has varying effects on the attitudes and behaviors of individuals [12]. Brand support behaviors are non-coercive, functional extra-role behaviors shown by individuals, apart from the formal roles, which benefit the enhancement of brand identity and performance. Some researchers contend that brand support behaviors exceed OCB in that they also encompass external target behaviors that are often considered intraorganizational [13].

Because of strong path-dependent characteristics and the difficulty of imitation, organizational identity can be a significant competitive advantage for organizations [4]. In addition, the service-oriented nature of universities necessitates a focus on teachers in brand building. Unlike employees of other organizations, teachers belong to a knowledge-based group with highly subjective initiatives and typically have a deeper awareness of their duties and the university's goals and values. The effectiveness of teachers' work is largely dependent on the degree to which each teacher identifies with the university and their profession [9]. This identification also serves as the foundation for maintaining positive interactions between teachers and the university as well as encouraging their organizational citizenship and brand support behaviors. Therefore, the organizational identity theory has a high explanatory capacity for brand identity within universities [13]. Organizational identity theory has been applied to analyze higher education in the following aspects: (1) the factors affecting teachers' organizational identity, for example, organizational fitness and affiliation [14]; (2) teachers' organizational identity and professional identity, for example, job autonomy and organizational environment have significant positive impacts on

professional identity and organizational identity. Professional identity has a positive impact on organizational identity, partially mediating the relationship between job autonomy, organizational environment, and organizational identity [15]; (3) the relationship between organizational identity and teachers' innovative behaviors; for example, the organizational identity of teachers has a positive effect on their innovative behaviors and partially mediates the relationship between their professional identity and innovative behaviors [16]; (4) organizational identity and reputation strategies in universities, for example, a university's organizational identity encompasses strategic, structural, and cultural levels, as well as four dimensions: organizational identity, symbolic identity, image, and reputation. Based on this approach, university leaders can establish identity and reputation strategies that can substantially impact reputation and brand building [17].

Taken together, this study aims to construct a theoretical model with intermediaries to explore the impact of internal market orientation on the internal brand of universities and explore the mediating role of the teacher's organizational identity at the same time. Hence, this study extends the related research literature in several ways. Specifically, first of all, this study contributes to the literature on internal market orientation by focusing on the direct effects it has on teachers' organizational identity and brand support behavior. Moreover, by introducing the organizational identity of teachers as a mediator, this study opens the 'black box' on how internal market orientation affects brand support behavior and expands the research on organizational identity. In addition, this study broadens the research on the influencing factors of university brands by discussing the role of internal market orientation and organizational identity.

2. Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

2.1. Teachers' Organizational Identity and Internal Market Orientation

Internal market orientation refers to the organization's perspective of individuals as significant customers and service providers [8]. Individuals within the organization are involved in the formulation and implementation of organizational development plans. When a culture of trust and respect is established within the organization, organizational loyalty will be enhanced. Internal information collection refers to a university gathering insights into teachers' perceptions and attitudes regarding their work, organizational environment, mission, vision, and values, as well as the needs of teachers. It can help the university to establish an emotional connection with teachers [15]. Internal communication aims to reduce information asymmetry inside an organization. Timely internal communication enables employees to feel appreciated by the organization and increases their sense of ownership [18]. Open and trustworthy information can improve teachers' participation and behaviors. To use the internal communication strategy effectively, the information must be disseminated and communicated between departments and individuals throughout the organization. Effective feedback refers to the capacity of a university to respond to the collected information, thereby meeting the needs of teachers, boosting the quality of internal services, and fostering a healthy organizational culture.

Internal and external market orientations in an organization are closely related. Internal factors of an organization's performance have a direct bearing on its market competitiveness. Internal market orientation tactics can be utilized to promote employee motivation and organizational loyalty, hence increasing employee satisfaction and organizational commitment [19]. In addition, there is a connection between internal market orientation and other organizational variables. The extent of an organization's dedication to creating value for teachers is substantially associated with enhanced teacher satisfaction and organizational loyalty [20]. Based on the perspective of establishing a good interaction between the organization and teachers, higher levels of internal market orientation have a positive impact on the brand commitment of teachers in higher education [21]. According to the above discussion, the following ideas and hypotheses are proposed:

H1a. *Internal information collection is significantly and positively related to the organizational identity of teachers.*

H1b. *Teachers' organizational identity is significantly and beneficially linked to internal communication.*

H1c. *There is a strong and preferable relationship between feedback and teachers' organizational identity.*

2.2. Internal Market Orientation and the Brand Support Behavior of Teachers

The purpose of internal market orientation is to encourage members to support the organization and its brand. The management of the organization ensures the efficacy of internal market orientation by promoting the broadcast of organizational values, encouraging brand-supportive behaviors, and making clear and consistent commitments to individuals [3]. As a group founded on knowledge, teachers frequently offer more valuable ideas and suggestions for university development based on their work. Moreover, the unique characteristics of a university make communication between departments and teachers crucial for internal communication. Generally speaking, the attitudes and behaviors of individuals are mutually impacted and intimately intertwined [22]. Effective internal marketing orientation has a great influence on employee job satisfaction, extrinsically and intrinsically. For example, employee motivation and retention, have a positive effect on the effectiveness of the organization. Internal market-oriented actions can alter an individual's organizational commitment, which in turn influences their relationship with the organization's brand [23].

The individual's sense of belonging influences their willingness to fulfill their responsibilities and achieve organizational goals. The implementation of internal market-oriented strategies is a shared responsibility between the organization and the employee [24]. By enhancing the employees' ability to adapt to their work environment, internal market orientation can encourage brand support behaviors. Employees' compatibility with administrators and the organization as a whole has a greater effect on their brand-supportive actions [25]. This study claims that, based on the preceding discussion, effective internal market orientation may also be viewed as a useful human resource management tool within universities, and it is an essential component that affects teachers' brand support behaviors. The following hypotheses are, therefore, proposed:

H2a. *The acquisition of internal information is a powerful and favorable predictor of teachers' support for the brand.*

H2b. *Internal communication is significantly and strongly related to the brand support behavior of teachers.*

H2c. *Teachers' brand support behavior is considerably and fondly related to feedback.*

2.3. Teachers' Organizational Identity and Their Brand Support Behaviors

To fulfill their material, spiritual, and self-development demands, individuals share their high organizational identities and active organizational citizenship behaviors with the organization by utilizing their resources, such as knowledge, skills, or technology [9]. They do not clearly distinguish between individual and organizational goals and related reciprocal interests. This effect is amplified in a collectivist social culture setting [26]. From the functionalist perspective—in addition to reducing turnover rates, generating greater satisfaction and well-being, enhancing individual performance, and stimulating organizational citizenship behaviors—organizational identity can positively influence the creativity of individuals. In other words, individuals with stronger organizational identities will more likely put more creative efforts into their work, resulting in greater inventive performance and, subsequently, more rewards and organizational alignment [27]. Similarly, teachers with stronger organizational identities experience better job satisfaction and affective commitment, which in turn

increases their motivation and creativity [14]. There are three aspects to the organizational citizenship behaviors of teachers: love for the institution, support for colleagues, and self-development. There is a significant positive relationship between organizational identity and all three factors among teachers [28]. Furthermore, organizational identity can effectively promote teachers' understanding of organizational behavior, support for the organization, and innovative behavior, and it can also increase teachers' commitment to the organization [29]. This study contends that, based on the preceding discussion, the brand support behavior of teachers is the key to the success of internal branding in universities. Teachers' organizational identity is the foundation of their brand support behaviors. The following hypothesis is, therefore, proposed:

H3. *Teachers' organizational identity has a big and positive influence on the degree of brand support.*

2.4. The Mediating Role of Organizational Identity

Internal market orientation emphasizes the interactions between individuals and the organization [19]. The effectiveness of internal market orientation affects the behavior of organization members. This process is dependent on how much an individual feels the organization's attention and whether a sense of ownership can be developed through the bilateral interaction [30]. This also determines whether the individual's organizational identity can be strengthened. That is, internal market orientation influences the individual's organizational citizenship behavior via organizational identity. Internal market orientation, organizational identity, and organizational citizenship behaviors are influence mechanisms. Leadership, procedural justice inside the organization, and other elements serve as organizational identity precursors [31]. Organizational identity is responsible for the creativity, job satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behavior of individuals. In other words, organizational identity mediates the relationship between the antecedent and outcome variables. Effective internal market orientation may communicate organizational values, mission, and development strategies to teachers, as well as provide timely feedback on teachers' requirements. This will result in a stronger organizational identity for the university [32]. Therefore, teachers will consider their actions from the perspective of being beneficial to the university, adopt supportive behaviors that are advantageous to the university's development, and closely link their personal development to the university's development. The following hypotheses are, therefore, proposed:

H4a. *Teachers' sense of organization mediates the relationship between internal information collection and brand support behavior.*

H4b. *The relationship between internal communication and brand support behavior is mediated by the teachers' sense of organizational identity.*

H4c. *The organizational identity of teachers influences the relationship between feedback and brand support behavior.*

Based on the above discussion, the research model in this study is shown in Figure 1.

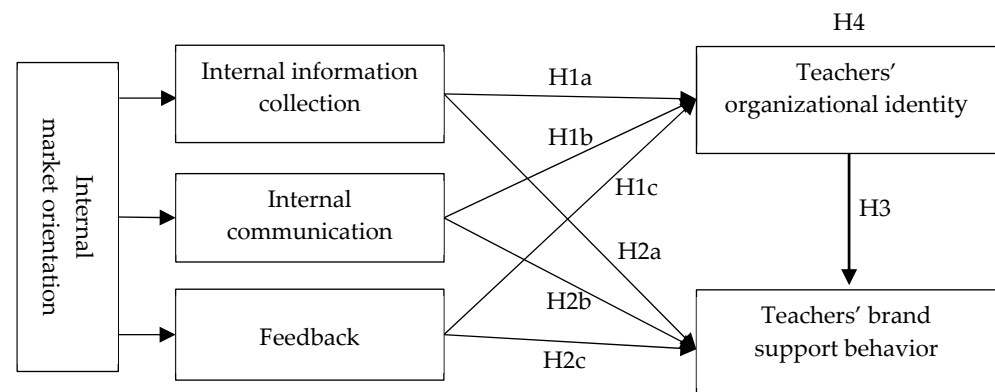


Figure 1. Research model.

3. Methods

3.1. Participants and Sampling Procedure

To test the research hypotheses and whole theoretical model, this study conducted an empirical survey among teachers at 10 universities (6 “Double First-class” construction universities and 4 ordinary universities) in China’s 5 core cities, which are Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan, Guangzhou, and Xi’an. These cities have more universities in number and type. And the comprehensive level of teachers is relatively higher than in other cities. So, the data samples collected in this study are representative. Specifically, with the help of the personnel management departments of these universities, this study obtained a list of teachers in the major disciplines of 10 universities, and then randomly selected 500 teachers to participate in the empirical survey. We also promised all teachers who participated in the survey that the survey would only be used for academic research and that the survey data obtained would be kept strictly confidential to ensure that each teacher could fill in the questionnaire in a more objective and truthful manner and obtain relatively objective survey data.

Meanwhile, to enhance the reliability and decrease the common method bias, this study collected sample data at three different times. Consistent with previous studies [33,34], the sample data were collected every two weeks. At time 1, teachers were asked to report their demographic information and true feelings about the university’s internal market orientation. At time 2, teachers were asked to fill out questionnaires that included individual organizational identification. At time 3, teachers were asked to fill out questionnaires about the university’s brand support behaviors. The 500 questionnaires and their Wenjuanxing links were sent to teachers through WeCom, which is widely used in online education investigation and research in China. And 419 valid questionnaires were collected, with a valid recovery rate of 83.8%. The detailed demographic information of the participants is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants.

Demographic Variable		Sample	
		Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	191	45.6%
	Female	228	54.4%
Age	31–50	301	71.8%
	>50	118	28.2%
Education	Bachelor	30	7.2%
	Master	172	41.1%
	Doctor	217	51.8%

Table 1. Cont.

Demographic Variable		Sample	
		Number	Percentage
Tenure	<5	138	32.9%
	6–10	91	21.7%
	11–15	85	20.3%
	16–20	44	10.5%
	>20	61	14.6%
Title	Junior	65	15.5%
	Intermediate	180	43.0%
	Deputy senior	125	29.8%
	Senior	49	11.7%
University Type	“Double First-class” construction	167	39.9%
	Ordinary	252	60.1%

3.2. Measures

The main variables involved in this study, internal market orientation, teachers’ organizational identity, and teachers’ brand support behaviors, were measured by mature scales. According to the actual needs of this study, some words of the scales were modified appropriately [35]. The response format was a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”. The questionnaire was initially validated on a small scale, and the specific content of the questions was modified based on the validation results to make them more consistent with the characteristics of teachers and this study.

3.2.1. Internal Market Orientation

In this study, the scale developed by Yu was used to measure the teachers’ perceptions of the university’s internal market orientation at time 1 [36]. This scale consists of 3 dimensions and 9 items, with an example item being “Our university conducts teachers’ assessments regularly to discuss the needs of teachers”. The Cronbach’s alpha value for this measure was 0.860.

3.2.2. Organizational Identity

Combined with the scale developed by van Dick and Wagner, the organizational identity of teachers was measured at time 2 [37]. The scale contains 11 items, with example items being “I feel good working at this university” and “My university’s success is my success”. The Cronbach’s alpha value for this measure was 0.903.

3.2.3. Brand Support Behavior

The organizational citizenship behavior scale of university teachers developed by Donglong and colleagues was adopted, and the sentences of some items were adjusted to form a scale to measure teachers’ brand support behaviors at time 3 [38]. The scale contains 2 dimensions and 15 items, with example items being “take the initiative to introduce or publicize the advantages of the university”, “take the initiative to coordinate and communicate with the university or colleagues”, and “actively participate in various job skills training organized by the university”. The Cronbach’s alpha value for this measure was 0.914.

3.2.4. Control Variables

Based on previous studies [16,20,27,39], the control variables of this study mainly include demographic information such as gender, age, education, and university type. Gender is a binary variable coded as 0 = male and 1 = female. The age of the participants is divided into 2 levels (1 = 31–50 years; 2 = 50 years and older). The education is divided into 3 levels (1 = bachelor; 2 = master; 3 = doctor). University type is divided into 2 levels (1 = “Double First-class” construction university; 2 = ordinary university).

3.3. Data Analysis

In this study, the data from the valid questionnaires were statistically analyzed by two software programs, SPSS 24.0 and Mplus 7.2. Data are usually measured by the ratio of the chi-square/degree of freedom (χ^2/df), the comparative fit index (CFI), the goodness of fit index (GFI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) [40,41]. Firstly, to ensure the quality of the gathered data, the reliability and validity of the measurement questions were examined. Secondly, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis were used to test the relationship between internal market orientation, teacher organizational identity, and teacher brand support behavior by SPSS24.0. Finally, this study used the Bootstrap method and Model4 via the Process plug-in in SPSS24.0 to further verify the mediating effect and overall hypothesis model of teacher organization identification.

4. Results

4.1. Common Method Bias Testing

Since the data for this study were collected from the same group of participants, a certain degree of common method bias was unavoidable, which could potentially mislead the results of the study. Therefore, Harman’s one-way ANOVA was used to validate the valid sample data and ensure the accuracy and scientific validity of the study results [42]. This was accomplished by combining 35 items from the survey for exploratory factor analysis. Factors with eigenvalues larger than 1 were retrieved using principal component analysis. Totalling three, the number of factors with eigenvalues larger than 1 was extracted without rotation. The first component explained the greatest amount of variance with a value of 36.022%, which did not meet the 50% threshold [43]. Therefore, this analysis contains no significant common method bias.

4.2. Reliability Testing

This study used SPSS 24.0 to test the reliability of each variable and used the Cronbach alpha coefficient value as a measure. According to the analysis, the alpha value for internal market orientation was 0.866, while the alpha values for the other three dimensions were 0.840, 0.828, and 0.845, respectively. The alpha values for teachers’ organizational identity and teachers’ brand support behaviors were, respectively, 0.903 and 0.914. All three variables had alpha values larger than 0.8, and two variables—organizational identity and brand support behavior—had alpha values larger than 0.9, indicating that this study scale has good reliability and high internal consistency among the measurement topics [44]. Initially, the structural validity of the sample data was examined using the exploratory factor analysis, and the results indicated that the KMO values of three variables (internal market orientation, organizational identity of teachers, and brand support behavior) were, respectively, 0.909, 0.893, and 0.918 [45]. The p -value of Bartlett’s sphericity test was $0.000 < 0.05$, indicating that the structural validity of the scale in the study was high. Using Mplus 7.2, validation factor analyses were performed on the sample data. The results showed that $\chi^2/df = 2.413$, RMSEA = 0.064, CFI = 0.928, TLI = 0.913, and SRMR = 0.069, all of which passed the statistical requirements [33,40], indicating that the model validity of this study was satisfactory.

4.3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analyses

Commonly, the correlation coefficient between variables is calculated using Pearson's correlation coefficient (r), whose value ranges from -1 to 1 . Different levels of r imply distinct correlations, and the magnitude of r shows the strength of the correlation. The means, SD, and correlation coefficients of the variables in the correlation analysis of this study are shown in Table 2, which demonstrates that internal information collection, internal communication, feedback, teachers' organizational identity, and brand support behavior are significantly and positively correlated. This will lay the groundwork for the next study.

Table 2. Means, SD, and correlation.

Constructs	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Internal information collection	2.820	1.050	1			
2. Internal communication	3.011	0.891	0.698 **	1		
3. Feedback	2.853	0.427	0.537 **	0.606 **	1	
4. Organizational identity	3.249	0.553	0.524 **	0.599 **	0.488 **	1
5. Brand support behavior	3.925	0.314	0.340 **	0.415 **	0.289 **	0.597 **

Note: $N = 419$; ** $p < 0.01$.

4.4. Hypotheses Testing

Based on the correlation analysis, we used a hierarchical regression analysis to test the hypotheses proposed in the previous studies. Firstly, we placed teachers' organizational identity as the dependent variable, demographic characteristics as the control variable in the first tier, and internal information collection, internal communication, and feedback as independent variables in the second tier, and ran a regression analysis to obtain the analysis results. As can be seen in Table 3, after controlling for demographic variables such as gender, age, education, and university type, internal information collection ($\beta = 0.507$, $p < 0.001$), internal communication ($\beta = 0.578$, $p < 0.001$), and feedback ($\beta = 0.463$, $p < 0.001$) all had a significant positive effect on teachers' organizational identity. The three dimensions significantly increased the explanatory power of the independent variables on the dependent variables by 24.6%, 32.4%, and 21.0%, respectively. Therefore, hypotheses H1a, H1b, and H1c were all verified by the data.

Table 3. Regression analysis of the internal market orientation on teachers' organizational identity.

Variables	Organizational Identity			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Gender	0.041	0.017	0.029	0.027
Age	0.097	0.128	0.106 **	0.094 *
Education	−0.164 **	−0.087 *	−0.083 *	−0.127 **
University type	−0.187 ***	−0.127 **	−0.124 **	−0.128 **
Internal information collection		0.507 ***		
Internal communication			0.578 ***	
Feedback				0.463 ***
R ²	0.065	0.312	0.390	0.276
ΔR^2		0.246	0.324	0.210
F value	7.242 ***	37.418 ***	52.717 ***	31.419 ***

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Secondly, we employed the same method to incorporate the brand support behavior of teachers as the dependent variable, demographic factors as control variables, and the dimensions of internal market orientation and organizational identity as independent variables. The results of the analysis were obtained by running a regression analysis. After controlling for demographic variables, Table 4 demonstrates that internal information

collection ($\beta = 0.345$, $p < 0.001$), internal communication ($\beta = 0.412$, $p < 0.001$), feedback ($\beta = 0.274$, $p < 0.001$), and organizational identity ($\beta = 0.587$, $p < 0.001$) all had a significant positive effect on teachers' brand support behaviors and enhanced the explanatory power of the independent variables by 11.4%, 16.5%, 7.4%, and 32.2%, respectively, on the dependent variable. Consequently, all four hypotheses, H2a, H2b, H2c, and H3, were supported by the data.

Table 4. Regression analysis of internal market orientation, teachers' organizational identity on brand support behavior.

Variables	Brand Support Behavior				
	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
Gender	0.033	0.017	0.024	0.025	0.009
Age	0.194 ***	0.215 ***	0.200 ***	0.192 ***	0.136 **
Education	−0.050	0.002	0.008	−0.029	0.046
University type	−0.129 **	−0.088	−0.084	−0.094 *	−0.019
Internal information collection		0.345 ***			
Internal communication			0.412 ***		
Feedback				0.274 ***	
Organizational identity					0.587 ***
R ²	0.057	0.171	0.221	0.130	0.379
ΔR^2		0.114	0.165	0.074	0.322
F	5.376 ***	16.982 ***	23.455 ***	2.364 ***	50.347 ***

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

To verify the mediating effect of teachers' organizational identity in the relationship between the three dimensions of internal market orientation and teachers' brand support behavior, this study used the Sobel test and Bootstrap bias correction test [46,47]. The results are shown in Table 5, where the Sobel Z values are all much greater than 1.96. Bootstrap-repeated sampling, conducted 5000 times, showed that none of the mediating effects within the 95% confidence interval contained 0, indicating that the mediating effect of teachers' organizational identity in the relationship between the dimensions of internal market orientation and brand support behavior is significant. Therefore, hypotheses H4a, H4b, and H4c were verified by the data.

Table 5. Result of Hayes-Model 4.

Independent Variables	Z	Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI	p
Internal information collection	8.4748	0.1535	0.0222	0.1141	0.2001	0.000
Internal communication	8.5733	0.1785	0.0252	0.1340	0.2322	0.000
Feedback	8.3145	0.2328	0.0311	0.1783	0.3019	0.000

5. Discussion

University brand building can be regarded as a kind of culture change [48]. The internal brand is the most valuable intangible asset to promote the sustainable development of the university [49]. Teachers, as a knowledge-based group, are the most valuable tangible asset in the innovation and development of the university [50]. This study discusses the key factors in the process of university brand building, which include teachers and their relationship with their university from an internal organization perspective. The empirical results indicate that the three dimensions of internal market orientation (internal information collection, internal communication, and feedback) are significantly positively correlated with teachers' organizational identity and brand support behavior. Teachers' organizational identity is not only significantly positively correlated with brand support behavior, but also mediates the relationship between the three dimensions of internal market orientation and brand support behavior.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

This study first verified that internal information collection, internal communication, and feedback are all significantly and positively related to the organizational identity and brand support behaviors of teachers. Internal communication has the largest impact on the explanatory power of the independent variables in enhancing the dependent variable, followed by internal information collection and feedback. The three elements of internal market orientation can be understood as the three stages of interaction between universities and teachers [51]. In addition, internal communication is crucial to the continuation of the process [23,52]. Specifically, it can be explained as follows: during the process of good communication, teachers perceive their significant roles and ownership in the development of the organization, which increases their identification with the university and promotes positive organizational behaviors. Internal information collection and feedback, as necessary stages of this interaction mechanism, have a greater impact on the psychology and behavior of teachers and are prerequisites for demonstrating the success of internal market orientation [53]. This also shows that the internal market orientation of organizations has a positive impact on teachers' brand support behavior. It expands the research perspective on university brand building from the perspective of teachers' psychology and behavior [54].

Moreover, based on the organizational identity theory, this study found that the organizational identity of teachers is strongly and positively associated with brand support behavior, and it mediates the effects of the three dimensions of the internal market orientation on teachers' brand support behavior. The organizational identity of teachers is an internal psychological state that is influenced by the organizational environment and behavior [55]. On the other side, brand support behavior is the external manifestation of an internal psychological state [56]. The two are consistent. For the analysis of this study, internal market orientation is a behavior at the organizational level. Internal market orientation has an impact on teachers' inner psychology via three distinct aspects, which in turn promote their brand support behavior. In other words, teachers' organizational identity mediates the relationship between internal market orientation and brand support behaviors in universities. This finding also explores the influence of the effectiveness of internal market orientation on the attitude and behavior of teachers, and also further analyzes the influence on internal brand building [57]. It expands the application scope of the organizational identity theory in the field of institutional research [14,58].

In addition, this study explains the process of the internal market orientation to the university's internal brand building. Specifically, starting from two-way communication within universities, teachers are encouraged to better understand the brand value of the organization, internalize the vision of the organization, and make more efforts to achieve the organization's goals. These behaviors will improve the efficiency of universities [59]. At the same time, the organizational identity of teachers plays a complete intermediary role in this process. It indicates that the organizational identity of teachers is an important medium to link the internal market orientation and brand support behavior [60].

5.2. Managerial Implications

Firstly, universities should pay close attention to the important role of teachers in the process of brand building [5,61]. The development of a university brand should not only emphasize external brand-building strategies but also acknowledge the importance of the internal brand. As a service-oriented organization, branding from the inside out is an efficient technique. Hence, we first believe that increasing the organizational identity of teachers is the key to the establishment of the university's internal brand. Universities should take into account the characteristics of the organization and teachers, acknowledge that teachers are the university's most valuable tangible assets, and create an organizational environment that is beneficial for teachers to accept the brand value and convert it into behaviors [62]. In this way, the organization's goals, mission, and values are fully shared. Thereby it can incentivize teachers to strive to accomplish their organizational commitment and lay the foundation for the university's competitive advantage. Internal market

orientation is a significant element for university brand building. Modern organization development must address the interaction between organizations and individuals. According to this study, the key to building a university brand from the inside out is good interactions between organizations and teachers [63].

Secondly, universities should regularly conduct internal surveys and research via questionnaires, historical data analysis, or interviews to fully comprehend the attitudes of teachers regarding their work, organizational environment, vision, and goals [64]. In this process, universities collect information on the needs of teachers in each department to ensure that the organization takes their perspectives and values seriously. University leaders should take teachers' demands into account in the design of systems, salary management, and career development planning through effective internal information collection and job analysis [65]. Teachers' organizational identity should be bolstered by an autonomous working environment through decentralization and the sharing of teaching and research achievements [66]. Meanwhile, university leaders can form a benign internal brand management mechanism by beginning with three dimensions of internal market orientation and ensuring the effectiveness of each component [67].

Thirdly, we should enhance communication and exchange within universities and develop an effective framework for bidirectional interactions. The research findings indicate that internal communication has a substantial impact on the organizational identity and brand support behavior of teachers than internal information collection and feedback. The effectiveness of internal communication is crucial to the success of internal market orientation. Effective communication must consist of the following elements: university leaders, departments, divisions, and teachers [68]. Based on communication channels such as teachers' meetings, training, internal manuals, and new media platforms, a university should communicate either formally or informally. To ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of communication, consideration should be given to a calm and equal communication environment as well as the proper communication frequency [69]. The transparency of internal communication should be maintained, and the results of communication should be promptly publicized throughout the campus to encourage teachers to engage in communication and fully exercise their right to speak.

Finally, timely feedback on teachers' comments and requirements is needed. Universities should strengthen the organizational identity of teachers by optimizing their positions, enhancing their knowledge and skills, optimizing their welfare benefits and evaluation process, and incorporating feasible policy recommendations into the university's branding [70]. Through the optimization of the organization's internal feedback, a good organizational environment can be created, and the brand support behavior of teachers can be stimulated. Thereby, teachers can understand and help promptly solve problems in university branding, leading to success in using the university branding strategy [71].

5.3. Limitations and Recommendations

Future studies should increase the effective sample size of the existing research population; enhance the sample's representativeness, generalizability, and balance; and employ more scientific data collection procedures to reduce measurement errors. Future research should also thoroughly investigate the influence of moderating variables to provide more reliable and scientific conclusions. Student groups should also be included in the research on university brand building because they are primary internal stakeholders of universities and have intuitive feelings about the quality of university operations and internal service quality [72]. Student participation in co-creating value can improve the satisfaction of the university experience, create and maintain a positive image of the university, and build the credibility of the university. The student group is a key factor in achieving sustainable development of the university brand. Through an empirical investigation, researchers may investigate the mechanisms of organizational identity and brand support behaviors of students regarding university branding [73]. To strengthen the objectivity and scientific nature of the research findings, the brand support behaviors of teachers and students should be

examined, such as by surveying the university administrators with questionnaires and interviews [74]; this approach also provides a reference for the high-quality sustainable development of universities [75].

6. Conclusions

To summarize, in the context of Chinese universities, this study constructs and validates a theoretical model with intermediaries to explore the impact of internal market orientation on the internal brand of universities, while exploring the mediating role of teachers' organizational identity. The empirical research results show that the three dimensions of internal market orientation (internal information collection, internal communication, and feedback) have positive effects on teachers' organizational identity and brand support behavior. Teachers' organizational identity not only has a positive effect on brand support behavior but also plays a completely mediating role in the influence of internal market orientation on teachers' brand support behavior. This research proves that effective internal market orientation can stimulate teachers' brand support behavior. This study further confirms that teachers' organizational identity is an important medium that links internal market orientation and brand support behavior. That is, each stage in the formation of a university's internal brand is important to the psychology and behavior of teachers in the next stage. Taken together, this study believes that the key to the formation of a university's internal brand is to enhance the organizational identity of teachers. The university must be fully aware of the particular needs of teachers, make full use of the internal market orientation, and actively construct interactive communication and feedback mechanisms with teachers. This ensures that teachers can truly participate in the reform and development process of the university, feel valued and respected, and recognize their membership at the university. The university, therefore, can stimulate teachers' brand support behavior, in other words, "internalizing the university's values in their hearts and externalizing them in their actions".

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, S.J. and F.X.; methodology and software, S.J.; validation, S.J. and F.X.; formal analysis, S.J.; investigation, resources, and data curation S.J.; writing—original draft preparation, S.J.; writing—review and editing, F.X.; visualization, S.J.; supervision, F.X.; project administration, S.J.; funding acquisition, S.J. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research is supported by "the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (ZY2443)".

Institutional Review Board Statement: This study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Central University of Finance and Economics, China (date of approval: 26 December 2023).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data supporting the reported results are available from the authors upon request.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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