

The Effect of Internal Marketing Practices on Marketing Performance of Private Medical Clinics: An Empirical Study

أثر ممارسات التسويق الداخلي على الأداء التسويقي للعيادات الطبية الخاصة: دراسة ميدانية

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Received: 2022-12-23

Accepted: 2023-01-03

Published: 2023-02-06

Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to determine the effect of internal marketing practices on marketing performance in the private medical clinics in Algeria. A self-administered questionnaire was developed to collect data from 73 respondents working in private medical clinics. A linear regression analysis was used to test the model hypotheses. The results revealed that the marketing performance is significantly and positively affected by training and development, and empowerment. Reward was found to have a negative insignificant effect on marketing performance. Therefore, to achieve higher marketing performance, the private medical clinics should focus on implementing properly training, empowerment, and reward.

Keywords: Customer; healthcare industry; internal marketing; performance measures; Algeria.

Jel Classification Codes: M12; M31.

ملخص:

الغرض من هذه الورقة هو تحديد تأثير ممارسات التسويق الداخلي على الأداء التسويقي للعيادات الطبية الخاصة في الجزائر. تم تطوير استبيان مدار ذاتيا لجمع البيانات الأولية من 73 مستجوبا يعملون في العيادات الطبية الخاصة. وقد تم استخدام تحليل الانحدار الخطي لاختبار فرضيات النموذج. كشفت النتائج أن الأداء التسويقي يتأثر ايجابيا وبشكل دال معنويا بالتدريب والتطوير؛ والتمكين. كما وجد أن المكافأة لها تأثير سلبي غير دال معنويا على الأداء التسويقي. لذلك، لتحقيق أداء تسويقي عال، يجب على العيادات الطبية الخاصة التركيز على تنفيذ التدريب والتمكين والمكافأة بشكل صحيح.

كلمات مفتاحية: زبون؛ صناعة الرعاية الصحية؛ تسويق داخلي؛ مقاييس الأداء؛ الجزائر.

تصنيف JEL : M12; M31

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1. Introduction

In the healthcare industry, front-line personnel play an important role to get competitive advantage to their organizations by delivering high-quality services (efficient and quick) to their customers (Ishaque, 2017). Internal marketing is the strongest and the most efficient and valuable approach in creating good relationships with employees in the workplace. Through it, health institutions (such as clinics and hospitals) increase their ability to retain employees. Therefore, effective internal marketing practices play a vital role in increasing profits and improving marketing performance. According to González Santa Cruz et al. (2020), internal marketing involves "the development of organizational strategies that promote the welfare of the employees who, in turn, play a transcendental role in achieving institutional goals."

Many studies have shown that internal marketing has a positive effect on organisational commitment (Caruana and Calleya, 1998; Chiu et al., 2020; Farzad et al., 2008); employees' job satisfaction (Abd-Elmageed et al., 2021; Almaslukh et al., 2022; Hussin, 2022; Iliopoulos and Priporas, 2011; Joung et al., 2015); employee performance (Chiu et al., 2020), creative performance (Ishaque, 2017); customers' satisfaction (Rafiq and Ahmed, 2000); and customer loyalty (Awan et al., 2015). Thus, internal marketing is an important part of human resource management and can help private health clinics improve their service quality, employee satisfaction and retention rates, and productivity. At the same time, internal marketing through employee satisfaction can improve customer (patient) satisfaction and increase customer retention. For example, an oncologist who has received special training in treating cancer patients can improve the quality of healthcare service making the patient feel satisfied.

Few researches have focused on investigating internal marketing in health care (Iliopoulos and Priporas, 2011). Therefore, this study will attempt to answer the following main question: What are the effects of training, empowerment, and reward on marketing performance of private medical clinics? The findings of the present paper will be valuable for the managers of private medical clinics to enhance their understanding of the feasibility of implementing internal marketing. In addition, this paper is expected to contribute to bridging the research gap in the

field of internal marketing in the health care sector in Algeria. Accordingly, the objectives of this paper are to determine: (1) the effect of training and development on marketing performance; (2) the effect of empowerment on marketing performance; and (3) the effect of reward on marketing performance. This study is structured as follows. Section 1, presents the literature review and research hypotheses. Section 2, describes the research methodology. Section 3, is devoted to the analysis and discussion of the results. Finally, conclusion, study limitations, and recommendations for future research are presented in Section 4.

2. Literature Review and Research Hypothesis

2.1. Internal Marketing Practices

Internal marketing described by Berry (1981, p.25) as "viewing employees as internal customers, [and] viewing jobs as internal products that satisfy the needs and wants of these internal customers while addressing the objectives of the organization". Rafiq and Ahmed (2000) defines internal marketing as "a planned effort using a marketing-like approach to overcome organizational resistance to change and to align, motivate and interfunctionally co-ordinate and integrate employees towards the effective implementation of corporate and functional strategies in order to deliver customer satisfaction through a process of creating motivated and customer-orientated employees." However, the definition of internal marketing varies according to the context or field and the views of researchers. In the field of health care, internal marketing refers to "all the actions that an organization (i.e., health care organizations, hospitals) has to perform in order to develop, train and motivate its employees, so to enhance the quality of the services provided to its customers" (Iliopoulos and Priporas, 2011, p.1). Quester and Kelly (1999, p.224) stated that "the implementation of internal marketing is carried by a combination of people such as the marketing manager, the managing director and particularly the human resources manager who are highly involved in planning internal marketing".

2.2. Marketing performance

Marketing performance refers to marketing's results compared against the set objectives. Khalayleh and Al-Hawary (2022, p. 1025) defined marketing performance as "the extent to which the organization is able to achieve marketing objectives effectively and efficiently and invest the available resources in creating and developing products and services that meet the aspirations of current and

future customers in order to achieve high levels of satisfaction and loyalty." In the field of marketing health services, marketing performance is one of the important indicators to measure the success of health organizations. Rust et al. (2004, p.76) claimed that "the effective dissemination of new methods of assessing marketing productivity to the business community will be a major step toward raising marketing's vitality in the firm and, more important, toward raising the performance of the firm itself". Recently, Khalayleh and Al-Hawary (2022) measured marketing performance through three dimensions: (1) customer loyalty, (2) customer satisfaction, and (3) attracting new customers. In our study the marketing performance was measured through three dimensions includes customer confidence, customer satisfaction, and demand for services. In fact, marketing performance is affected by many factors, these factors include corporate social responsibility (Moyo et al., 2021), customer relationship management capabilities (Mulyana et al., 2020), digital marketing database, social media platforms, digital pricing, and digital advertising (Khalayleh and Al-Hawary, 2022). However, Mulyana et al. (2020) found that marketing innovativeness has no significant effect on marketing performance in SMEs Muslim fashion in Indonesia.

2.3. Research hypothesis

2.3.1. Training and development

Training is related to the development of employees' skills and knowledge, as it represents a basic function of human resource management, and it is one of the important dimensions of internal marketing. According to Armstrong (2001), "Training is the formal and systematic modification of behavior through learning which occurs as a result of education, instruction, development and planned experience. Development is improving individual performance in their present Roles and preparing them for greater responsibilities in the future". Many of the studies have found the significant relationship between effective training programs and organizational performance (Khan et al., 2011); product innovation and process innovation (Dostie, 2018); labor productivity (Colombo and Stanca, 2014); employee performance (Kum et al., 2014); employees 'job satisfaction (Hussin, 2022). Therefore, based on the above, we propose the first hypothesis: H1: Effective training programs have a positive effect on marketing performance of private medical clinics.

2.3.2. Empowerment

The empowerment described by Peterson and Zimmerman (2004, p. 129) as “an active, participatory process through which individuals, organizations, and communities gain greater control, efficacy, and social justice.” Numerous studies have revealed that organizational empowerment can affect performance (Ke and Zhang, 2011); job satisfaction (Choi et al., 2014); knowledge sharing (Wu and Lee, 2017; Xue et al., 2011). Dahleez et al. (2022) found that safety climate mediates the relationship between empowering leadership and organizational citizenship behavior in times of crisis. Moreover, Al-Omari et al. (2020) found that empowerment has a positive influence on internal processes; learning and growth; customer satisfaction; and organizational performance. Another study by Oh and Chung (2011) states that there is a significant relationship between psychological empowerment and nursing performance; job satisfaction; and organizational commitment. Hence, we propose the second hypothesis:

H2: Empowerment has a positive effect on marketing performance of private medical clinics.

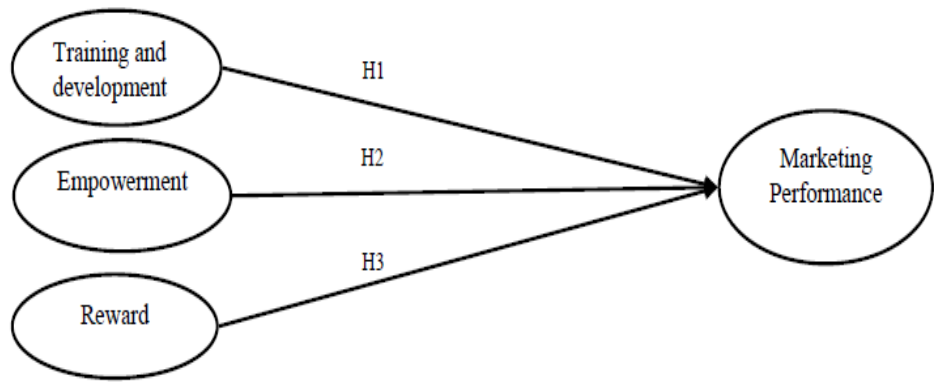
2.3.3. Reward

From a management and marketing perspective, we can define reward as giving the employee something of value. Previous research identifies two basic types of rewards in firms, i.e., financial rewards (monetary) and non-financial rewards (non-monetary) (Ibrar and Khan, 2015). According to Armstrong and Murlis (2009, p.3), "the strategic aim of reward management is to develop and implement the reward policies, processes and practices required to support the achievement of the organization's business goals." Many scholars found evidence supporting that reward is a major element in the successful performance. For example, Ibrar and Khan (2015) confirmed that rewards (extrinsic and intrinsic) have a positive relationship with employee's job performance. The findings of Joung et al. (2015) and Hussin (2022) show that rewards had positive effects on employee job satisfaction. Similarly, Kumari et al. (2021) reported that reward and motivation positively influence employees' job performance. In a study conducted by Terera and Ngirande (2014), it was found that reward has a positive impact on employee retention, but, does not have impact on employee satisfaction among nurses. As a result, the third hypothesis has been constructed:

H3: Reward has a positive effect on marketing performance of private medical clinics.

Figure (1) shows hypothetical relationships between the variables.

Figure 1. Proposed research model



Source: Author's own elaboration

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Population and Sample

The population for the current study consisted of employees working in some private medical clinics in different states of Algeria. The respondents were selected using a convenience sampling method. Respondents in this research were voluntary and anonymous. Data was collected during the month of November 2022. The questionnaire was distributed to 100 employees, with 73 useable questionnaires being returned with a 73% response rate. The respondents’ demographical profile is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 73)

Characteristic	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	27	37.00
	Female	46	63.00
Age	Under 30 years	24	32.90
	45 years- 30	36	49.30
	Above 45 years	13	17.80
Education	Secondary and less	26	35.60
	College-graduates	38	52.10
	Postgraduate	09	12.30
Years of Experience	Under 5 years	28	38.40
	10 years- 5	32	43.80
	Above 10 years	13	17.80

Source: Survey results

As shown in Table 1, 63% were female while 37% were male. Overall, 49.30% of respondents were aged from 30-45 years, 32.90% under 30 years and 17.80% above 45 years. With respect to respondents' education level, 52.10% respondents reported that they were college-graduates, followed by secondary and less degrees (35.60%), and then postgraduate degrees (12.30%). In term of work experience, 43.80% of respondents reported that they have work experience ranging between 5-10 years, 38.40% under 5 years working experience and 17.80% above 10 years experience.

3.2. Measurement Instrument

In this study, a questionnaire was used to collect data from respondents. The questionnaire included the questions on personal information (such as gender, age, level of education, and years of experience), and the questions related to the study constructs. The training and development construct was measured using three items adapted from Ishaque (2017). Empowerment construct was measured with scales adapted from Spreitzer (1995), whereas to measure the reward, a three-item scale was adapted from Caruana and Calleya (1998). In addition, a three-item scale was adapted from Sin et al. (2005) to measure the marketing performance construct; where the respondents were asked to evaluate the marketing performance of their clinics (customer confidence, customer satisfaction, and demand for services) compared to their major competitors. The questionnaire was initially developed in English and then translated into the Arabic language. The questionnaire was self-administered. Before the questionnaire was distributed, two marketing specialists were invited to review the survey instrument, to assure content validity. Reponses were made on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) “strongly disagree” to (5) “strongly agree”. The items are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Questionnaire content

Constructs	Items	References
Training and development	Our clinic prepares its employees to perform well.	Ishaque (2017)
	Our clinic views the development of knowledge and skills in employees as an investment rather than a cost.	
	Skill and knowledge development of employees happens as an ongoing process in our clinic.	
Empowerment	‘The work I do is very important to me’	Spreitzer

	'I have mastered the skills necessary for my job'	(1995)
	'I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work'	
Reward	Our performance measurement and reward systems encourage employees to work together.	Caruana & Calleya (1998)
	We measure and reward employee performance that contributes most to our clinic's vision.	
	In our clinic, those employees who provide excellent service are rewarded for their efforts.	
Marketing Performance	Compared to our major competitors, our customer' confidence in our clinic has improved.	Sin et al. (2005)
	Compared to our major competitors, our customers' satisfaction has improved.	
	Compared to our major competitors, the demand for our services has increased.	

Source: Author's own elaboration

4. Results and Discussion

This section analysis the data collected from respondents. Afterwards, we'll test the hypotheses and interpret the research findings, which will help in achieving the research objectives.

4.1. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis

Cronbach Alpha, means, and standard deviation values are presented in Table 3. According to Malhotra (2010), a value greater than 0.6 indicates satisfactory internal consistency reliability. The reliability for the training and development construct was satisfactory with a value of 0.835. The Cronbach Alpha value for empowerment was 0.850. For reward is 0.963, and for marketing performance is 0.697. These values indicate that the scales were reliable and all items should be included in the scale.

The mean scores were 3.12 of training and development (moderate level), 4.23 of empowerment, 3.03 of reward, and 3.97 of marketing performance (where 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest).

Table 3. Cronbach Alpha, means, and standard deviation

Constructs	Nu. of items	Alpha	Mean	S.D.
Training and development	3	0.835	3.127	0.985
Empowerment	3	0.850	4.232	0.775
Reward	3	0.963	3.036	1.460
Marketing Performance	3	0.697	3.972	0.535

Source: Survey results

4.2. Hypotheses testing and discussion

The present paper aimed to investigate the effect of internal marketing on marketing performance in the private medical clinics. We perform regression analyses to examine the effect internal marketing practices on marketing performance. The results are provided in Table 4, 5, and 6.

Table 4. Regression analysis results for H1

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Stan. Coef.	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(constant)	3.514	0.203		17.281	0.000
Training and development	0.147	0.062	0.270	2.364	0.021

Dependent Variable: Marketing performance. Independent variables: Training and development.

Notes: Model summary: R = 27.0%; R Square = 7,30%; Adjusted R Square = 6%; F = 5.590; P = 0.021 (p<0.05).

We found that training and development has a positive effect on marketing performance ($\beta = 0,147$; $t = 2.364$). Hence, H1 is supported. This means that effective training and development programs leads to positive improvements in marketing performance. Hence, training programs can help employees to carry out their tasks properly, especially with the trend towards digitization of the health sector in Algeria. Working in the era of digitization requires special skills that require intensive training courses. The literature suggested that training and development positively influenced organizational performance (Khan et al., 2011) and employee performance (Kum et al., 2014). So, our results supported these results. The variable "training and development" explained 6% of the variance in marketing performance (Adj. $R^2 = 0.060$, $F = 5.590$, $P < 0.05$).

Table 5. Regression analysis results for H2

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Stan. Coef.	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		

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(constant)	2.905	0.328		8.855	0.000
Empowerment	0.252	0.076	0.365	3.307	0.001

Dependent Variable: Marketing performance. Independent variables: Empowerment.

Notes: Model summary: R = 36.50%; R Square = 13.30%; Adjusted R Square = 12.10%; F = 10.937; P = 0.001 (p<0.05).

The result indicates that the respondents have a high level of empowerment (Overall mean = 4.23). In addition, employees' empowerment was shown to have a positive and significant effect on marketing performance ($\beta = 0,252$; $t= 3.307$). Hence, H2 is supported. This means that employees' empowerment in medical clinics leads to work flexibility, engagement, satisfaction, productivity improvement, improving service quality and patient satisfaction, which, in turn leads to high marketing performance. Therefore, we conclude that empowerment is one of the main sources for enhancing marketing performance. Several studies observed a positive effect of empowerment on customer satisfaction and organizational performance (Al-Omari et al., 2020). Oh and Chung (2011) found that empowerment has negative relationship with turnover intention among nurses. The variable "psychological empowerment" explained 12.10% of the variance in marketing performance (Adj. R² = 0.121, F = 10.937, P < 0.05).

Table 6. Regression analysis results for H3

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Stan. Coef.	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(constant)	4.125	0.145		28.468	0.000
Reward	-0.050	0.043	-0.137	-1.164	0.248

Dependent Variable: Marketing performance. Independent variables: Reward.

Notes: Model summary: R = 13.7%; R Square = 1.90%; Adjusted R Square = 0.50%; F =1.356; P = 0.248.

On the other hand, as is evident in Table 6, the effect of reward on marketing performance was determined to be statistically not significant ($t = -1.164$, $\beta = -0.050$, $p=0.248$), in this instance, H3 was not supported. This means that employees in private medical clinics do not receive incentive cash bonuses or other financial rewards. One of the logical reasons for the clinics' indifference to providing bonuses is the employees' acceptance of this situation due to the lack of job opportunities in the market. Practically, the reward programs (monetary, non-monetary, and psychological payments) motivate employees to complete high-quality work. Reward system can have an important positive effects on job

satisfaction (Hussin, 2022) and job performance (Ibrar and Khan, 2015; Kumari et al., 2021), when it implemented successfully.

5. Conclusion

There has been a significant increase in studies around internal marketing in the healthcare context and it has been found that internal marketing practices contribute to improving organizational commitment and job satisfaction, which in turn improves the overall performance of the organization. Despite this increase, there is a gap in identifying the impact that internal marketing practices have on marketing performance within a medical clinics context. Therefore, the primary objective of this paper was to determine the effect of internal marketing on marketing performance in the private medical clinics in Algeria.

The results of this study indicate that training and development, and psychological empowerment influence the marketing performance of private clinics. Furthermore, we found that rewards have a negative effect on marketing performance, but this effect is not significant.

5.1. Managerial Implications

The present findings highlight the importance of internal marketing practices to improve the marketing performance. Moreover, our findings support the crucial roles of training and development, and empowerment in the marketing performance of private medical clinics. The research findings provide marketing managers of medical clinics with the following practical implications: (1) managers can most effectively drive marketing performance by implementing effective internal marketing programs; (2) develop specialized training programs that meet the needs of both employees and the private medical clinics, and continuously improve the clinics performance; (3) managers must make employees feel independent and give them the authority to act independently; and (4) our study suggests that managers of private medical clinics should reinforce the morale of their employees through fair and equitable reward and recognition programs.

5.2. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Similar to other studies, our study also has some limitations. First, the current study was conducted only in some private medical clinics ($n = 73$), and as such the results are not claimed to be totally representative. Therefore, increase the sample size would be of value for future research. Second, this research

examined three dimensions of internal marketing and did not consider the other dimensions such as internal communication, internal market segmentation, sharing information, and employment security. Thus, we highly recommend future research to focus on these dimensions. Finally, future studies could investigate the relationship between internal marketing programs and customer satisfaction; service quality; organizational commitment; financial performance; or turnover intention.

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