

**INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND INTERNAL MARKETING AS
ELEMENTS OF INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION (IMC)
IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between the internal communication and nine dimensions of Internal Marketing and their interconnection to shape the conditions for the job satisfaction. The paper utilizes the mixed method. Data were collected from six Public Universities in Greece and in Cyprus. Findings are presented and results are discussed.

Keywords: internal communication, integrated marketing communication, internal marketing, value system, universities

INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The world seems to be changing in a very fast pace than organizations are becoming resilient (Marwa & Milner 2013, p. 835). Universities are trying to become more flexible in their strategic plans to cope with dramatic changes related to knowledge and digital society (Siegel & Leih, 2018).

Scholars and practitioners propose measures to overall customer experience. The interactions of customers with organizations through lots of touchpoints, leads researchers to identify customer's journey (Kuehnl, Jozic & Homburg, 2019; De Haan, Wiesel & Pauwels, 2016; Baxendale et al., 2015) or finding ways to manage customer's journey (Kuehnl, Jozic & Homburg, 2019; Anderl et al., 2016) in driving positive brand attitudes and customer loyalty (Grohmann et al., 2007; Dick & Basu, 1994). As customer experience is a multidimensional construct (Verhoef et al., 2009; Schmitt, 2003), researchers and practitioners differentiate their marketing practices to goods and services. They also provide evidence for an effective process of service delivery (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Rust & Chung, 2006; Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler, 2006).

For implementing effective service delivery, research has been focused on Integrated Marketing Communication (Porcu et al., 2017; Tafesse & Kitchen, 2017; Schultz & Schultz, 1998), where Internal Marketing is a promising approach for putting employees in the core of an organization and treating them as the most valuable asset (Ferdous, 2008; Gummesson, 2000; Berry, 1981). In this vein, a) the development of a benevolent environment of trust to flourish among all parties involved (Melewar et al., 2017), b) the creation of a value system with control channels of service provided (Parasuraman et al., 1985), c) motivating employees (Stankovska, 2017) and d) personnel's job satisfaction (Bailey et al., 2016), are considered to be highly

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important for the consolidation, development and long-term growth of an organization. Internal Marketing is a determining factor in shaping and implementing objectives within the strategic planning of an organization (Ahmed, Rafiq & Saad, 2003; Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000; Greene, Walls & Schrest, 1994). Several dimensions of Internal Marketing have been explored by researchers as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 to be placed about here.

Although previous research studies examined certain dimensions of Internal marketing, as to our knowledge, there is not any research dealing with the nine above presented (Table 1) dimensions in a human-centric perspective, as this study attempts to accomplish. Moreover, there are only a few theoretical frameworks and empirical research insights about organizational challenges in the higher education sector (Sahibzada et al., 2019; Siegel & Leih, 2018; Yildiz & Kara, 2017). Under this framework, this paper examines a) the relationship between the internal communication and the nine dimensions of Internal Marketing (Santos & Goncalves, 2018; Ng, Fang & Lien, 2016; Gounaris 2006; Foreman & Money, 1995; Tourish & Hargie, 1996) and b) how the same dimensions are interconnected to shape the conditions for the job satisfaction of the administrative staff in their workplace. For the purpose of this research, six major Public Universities in Greece and Cyprus are selected.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The evolution of technology, social and economic needs, have developed marketing into a more integrated form. Integrated marketing is approached by three elements: a) Internal marketing with reference to the employees of the organization; b) External marketing with reference to the recipient customers of the organization and c) Interactive marketing with reference to the relationship between employees and clients – recipients (Kotler & Keller, 2006; Bitner, 1995; Grönroos, 1990). Organizations focus on “value”, in the way the customer perceives it. Mechanisms and tools are developed to help the communication between the organization and its recipient customers.

According to Belch and Belch (2004), the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), recognizes the values of an integrated plan that evaluates the strategic plan of multiple communicational activities, such as advertising, public relations, personal sales and sales promotion, combining them to provide clarity, consistency and maximum impact on communication. In this way, the message delivered to recipient is coherent and consistent through the various means used.

According to Ferdous (2008), the organizations in their approach toward the integrated marketing communication, upgrade their processes of external marketing, ignoring the benefits of internal market (Ferdous, 2008). Researchers suggested that focus on customers is the primary step of an organization to achieve its goal and upgrading the value of services offered (Mortimer & Laurie, 2015; Ferdous, 2008). This is connected to employees who are customer – oriented and emotionally committed to organizational values and orientation in such a way to contribute in high quality services (Ferdous, 2008; Gummesson, 2000).

Furthermore, service organizations aiming at their sustainability and profitability need to turn to their internal market (employees). Employees can influence customer

relations and can increase their satisfaction, only when themselves are satisfied (Ferdous, 2008; Gummesson, 2000; Berry, 1981). In the same context, teamwork, to have positive results, needs an integrated internal culture with a high sense of value and identity of the organization by all staff (Aleong, 2018; Mueller, 2017). The purpose of an organization is to create a close and long-term relationship between the recipient and the services provided. Integrated Marketing Communication with its dimension being the internal marketing, shape and evolve the content of modern marketing (Tafesse & Kitchen, 2017; Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010; Mosley, 2007).

BACKGROUND THEORY

The behavior of personnel is mediated by marketing to support the internal value system (Soares, et al., 2007). A communication process in an organization should incorporate the elements of trust (Vieira-dos Santos & Goncalves, 2018; Melewar, 2017; Ng, Fang & Lien, 2016; Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2014) and transparency (Kaptein, 2008). The role of the communication in an organizational value system, guides the daily relations of personnel, shapes their behavior and attitudes, supports the hierarchy (Vieira-dos Santos & Goncalves, 2018).

Internal framework of an organizational value system is generated with activities and functions that utilize the tool of internal marketing and the efficient internal communication to develop the competitive advantage (Ferdous, 2008; Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003).

Zeithaml and others (1988), suggest that the frequency, the quality and the accuracy of communication, hierarchically from top to bottom, mitigate the ambiguity of employees' role and this contributes to increase job satisfaction (Rafiq & Ahmed 2000, p. 457). The dissemination of information is related to the communication between Managers from different departments and hierarchical levels (Gounaris 2006, p. 436).

Internal communication (vertical and horizontal), employees' commitment, loyalty, trust, organization's strategy and identity, should be correlated with each other positively (Melewar et al., 2017). Commitment and trust play a modest role in five of the core tasks: training, motivation, organizational goals and vision, dedication of staff and effective internal marketing (Ng, Fang & Lien, 2016). According to Vieira-dos Santos and Goncalves (2018), transparency and trust affect the way communication is formed in the organization.

In the working environment, the personnel need to feel safe to be productive and efficient. An important factor in reducing uncertainty and ambiguity of the organizational system, is the growing operational communication (vertical and horizontal) in the organization (Tourish & Hargie, 1996).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the study objectives, the related literature review and the background theory, the following research questions are formulated:

- a) Are the dimensions of the internal marketing related to the internal communication of administrative staff in Public Universities?
- b) Which dimensions of internal marketing affect the job satisfaction of administrative staff in University's workplace?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research combines the qualitative and the quantitative research approach. To achieve the objectives of the study, administrative staff from six major Public Universities in Greece and in Cyprus were asked to participate. In Cyprus, two Universities out of three were selected and in Greece, four Universities out of eight. Interviews of administrative staff in a Public University in Cyprus were chosen, as a way to measure the concepts identified through literature review (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). A pilot study attempted as a trial of the interview protocol developed for the research. For the purpose of the study, semi-structured interviews were employed to twenty-four participants (administrative staff in University), addressing open-ended questions of the research area (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). The researchers chose the qualitative interviews as a method of acquiring rich and in-depth information about participants' experiences and particular views on the related examined subject (Dikko, 2016; Turner, 2010). Data obtained were analyzed to develop an adequate representation of items that operationalize the content validity. In this way, an instrumentation was developed (questionnaire). A trial run (pilot test) of the questionnaire was conducted for two weeks. A full-scale research instrument was established after a Cronbach's α analysis was performed. The final questionnaire with 46 questions, included only the items that supported the variables examined. Each scale had a score of more than 0.65, which is considered satisfactory (Table 2).

Table 2 to be placed about here

Sample

For the final data collection, a questionnaire was posted online for two months. Participants in completing the questionnaire, for each question could choose from 1 ("not at all" or "totally disagree" or "totally insignificant") to 7 ("to the maximum extent" or "totally agree" or "absolutely important") (Likert 7 scale).

Two hundred sixty-four (264) administrative staff members out of two thousand eight hundred (2800) which is the total population of six major selected Public Universities responded and completed the questionnaire.

FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis was performed using Statistical Package application. The regular distribution of variable data was preceded. Spearman's Rank Order Correlations were performed to examine the correlation between the internal marketing dimensions and the internal communication. After the results, a further Multiple Linear Regression analysis was attempted.

Analysis of Variable Correlations (Spearman's Rank Order)

Focusing on the internal value system (Aleong 2018; Soares et al., 2017; Mueller, 2017; Naude et al., 2003; Varey, 2000) and the upgrade quality of services provided (Lings & Greenley, 2009; Panigyrakis & Theodoridis, 2009; Gounaris,

2008;Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985), the correlation of the nine dimensions shown in Table 1 to internal communication is investigated.

The variables examined are a matrix of associated elements without a hierarchical or causal structure. The following correlations are prevalent (Table 3):

Table 3 to be placed about here

Internal Communication is positively correlated to a high extent ($r < .60$) to personnel's job satisfaction, their rational goals and their role clarity and the correlation is statistically significant ($p < .001$). Internal communication is positively correlated to a moderate extent ($r < .40$) to the respect of rules, the safety in the workplace and the transparency. The correlation is statistically significant ($p < .001$). Internal communication is positively correlated to a low extent ($r < .20$) to trust, the job commitment and the reward and the correlate on is statistically significant ($p < .001$).

Analysis of Multiple Linear Regression

From the previous analysis of variables' correlations, internal communication was considered to be of a great importance for effective rational goals, role clarity and a job satisfaction. Therefore, a further examination of the data was attempted by utilizing the multiple linear regression analysis. Investigating the factors that provide job satisfaction to administrative staff at University workplace, multiple regression has resulted as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 to be placed about here

Based on the results of the data analysis, the following conceptual framework is presented:

Conceptual framework to be placed about here

Internal Communication (vertical and horizontal) in Public Universities is found to be highly positively correlated to: a) personnel's job satisfaction, b) the development of rational goals set by the management and c) the clarity of their working role ($r < .60$, $p < .001$). The same time, it seems that the internal communication is positively correlated to a medium extent to: a) the existence of transparency, b) to the respect of rules the administrative staff should demonstrate and c) the safety at working environment ($r < .40$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, it is noted that the internal communication is positively correlated to a low degree to: a) the reward of employees in recognizing their level of contribution to the implementation of an assigned task or extra moral reward in some important work, b) employees' trust in the supportive framework set by the management and c) the commitment of staff to the adoption of management's decisions and actions ($r < .20$, $p < .001$).

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings suggest that the management of a University may comply with internal marketing dimensions. In the same vein, the role of the developing functional internal communication, vertically and horizontally, seems to build the appropriate actions and behaviors of personnel and integrate the processes that serve the organizational strategic goals. The management of a University, in the process of developing an effective internal communication, may take into account the clarity of tasks assigned

to administrative staff and set the supportive framework which will be trusted by the personnel, offering them satisfaction at their workplace. Also, the decision-making process, the rotation of administrative staff from one department to another and the opportunities for personnel's development and training should be transparent. Moreover, rational goals in terms of clarity, feasibility and measurability provide personnel's commitment to the adoption of management's decisions and actions. Respect of rules, reward to personnel and safety conditions are additional internal elements that management of a University cannot afford to underestimate them. The organizational internal dimensions seem to be significant positively correlated to internal communication.

Interestingly, internal communication along with rational goals set by the management of a University and the clarity of roles set to administrative personnel, have emerged as factors for predicting job satisfaction of the administrative staff at University's workplace. The three factors (internal communication, rational goals and clarity of roles), were responsible for the 65% of the fluctuation of job satisfaction. The findings of this study have important implications for the management of a University. Internal communication in a form of internal marketing creates a fertile ground in shaping the conditions for personnel's job satisfaction. For the implementation of organization's tasks, the messages of various Internal activities should be clear through internal communication. The findings demonstrate that internal communication has an impact on the dimensions of internal marketing and its importance to the organization cannot be overlooked. Internal communication, among other dimensions is a prerequisite to facilitate employee's job satisfaction. The rational goals of the organization must be clear, feasible and measurable, both in the short and long term. If the rational goals of an organization are understood in detail by the personnel, the context of their day-to-day performance will be connected to the achievement of the strategic University's goals. A great value is given to an organization if the focus is turned into the expectations of the recipients - customers. To adopt this philosophy, the management of the organization may integrate employees into the process. Internal communication is an integral part of the value chain of internal activities. The clarity of the work role of staff, combined with rational goals and communication, contribute to employee satisfaction. Satisfied employees, with appropriate actions and behaviors, may serve the University's goals appropriately.

LIMITATIONS

Although the study collected data from six major Public Universities in Greece and Cyprus, yet the research did not incorporated data from the total number of the Public Universities in these two countries. Therefore, data should be treated in a conscious manner and it is appropriate the results not to reach in generalizations.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In Marketing literature, there is a lack of agreement on the conceptualization of Internal Marketing. Also, there is a difficulty on the development of Internal Marketing consistent framework. Therefore, more empirical studies are proposed to support an internal marketing framework which will serve an internal value system.

Moreover, a further research is strongly encouraged to examine the effect of nine dimensions of Internal Marketing in relation to employee's loyalty.

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TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1

Dimensions	Definitions	Related Literature
1. Trust	Trust as a fundamental element for open communication, sharing ideas and resources improving relationships	Vieira-dos Santos & Goncalves, 2018; Melewar, 2017; Ng, Fang & Lien, 2016; Schnackenber & Tomlinson, 2014; Morgan & Hunt, 1994
2. Transparency	Ensuring visibility and awareness within the organization to allow employees to modify or correct actions and behaviors.	Vieira-dos Santos & Goncalves, 2018; Kaptein, 2008; Soares et al., 2007
3. Organizational Commitment	The level of employee's commitment towards their organization.	Melewar, 2017; Ng, Fang & Lien, 2016; Ainswarth et al., 2016; Kim, Song & Lee, 2016; Ahmed and Rafiq, 2003; Morgan & Hunt, 1994
4. Safety	Workplace safety conditions.	Vieira-dos Santos & Goncalves, 2018; Cameron & Quinn, 2006; Bansal, Mendelson & Sharma, 2001
5. Rational Goals	Goals linked to strategic plans are planned and built appropriately and are transferred precisely to employees.	Cameron & Quinn, 2006; Lings & Greenley, 2005
6. Respect of Rules	Employees to obey rules and regulations providing job effectively.	Vieira-dos Santos & Goncalves, 2018; Bansal, Mendelson & Sharma, 2001
7. Reward	Recognition of the level of employee's contribution to the implementation of an assigned task.	Gounaris, 2008; Gounaris, 2006; Rafiq & Alfred, 2000; Foreman & Money, 1995
8. Role Clarity	Employee's clear content of tasks, work methods and priorities within the organization	Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000; Tourish & Hargie, 1996
9. Job Satisfaction	The feeling of fulfilment that derives from employee's job.	Ainswarth et al., 2016; Gounaris, 2008; Snipes et al., 2005; Lings & Greenley, 2005; Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003; Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000; Berry & Parasuraman, 1991

Table 2

Variables	Cronbach's α Values
Trust	0,70
Transparency	0,85
Job Commitment	0,85
Safety	0,67
Rational Goals	0,96
Respect of Rules	0,69
Reward	0,68
Role Clarity	0,70
Job Satisfaction	0,86
Communication	0,88

Table 3

Non-Parametric Variable Correlation Control (Spearman's Rank Order)

Correlations	Trust	Commitment	Safety	Transparency	Rational Goals	Rules Respect	Reward	Role Clarity	Job Satisfaction
Internal Communication	,396 ^{***}	,391 ^{***}	,444 ^{**}	,404 ^{***}	,622 ^{***}	,583 ^{***}	,352 ^{***}	,635 ^{***}	,625 ^{***}

Notes. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Correlation coefficient value between .60 and .80 (high)

Correlation coefficient value between .40 and .60 (moderate)

Correlation coefficient value between .20 and .40 (low)

Table 4

Uniform (and standardized) linear regression factors for the dependent variable "Job Satisfaction"

	Y: Job satisfaction
Constant	.056
X ₁ : Internal communication	.229 (.294)**
X ₂ : Rational goals	.227 (.268)*
X ₃ : Clarity of roles	.307 (.362)**
Coefficient of determination (R ₂)	.648

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Conceptual Framework

