

**MEASURING PERCEIVED INTERNAL MARKETING AND EMPLOYEE
ENGAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

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ABSTRACT

Despite the longevity and popularity of the Internal marketing (IM) in the service literature, its structure is yet unclear (Ballantyne, 2003; Huang & Rundle-Thiele, 2015; Qaisar & Muhamad, 2021; Tsai & Tang, 2008). The literature on Employee Engagement (EE) explains the employees' emotional commitment and their psychological presence in their job and organization, but it lacks of a concurrence regarding its definition and its measurement (Kossyva et al., 2022). Despite the importance and dynamism of the Higher Education (HE) sector, there is only scant research data of IM and EE in HEIs (Tsarakhova & Kabanov, 2020; Vel et al., 2019; Vieira-dos Santos & Gonçalves, 2018; Yildiz & Kara, 2017).

The aim of this paper is to explore the structure and components of IM and EE in HEIs. A two-stage mixed methods design was adopted, comprising 15 semi-structured interviews with a convenience sample of employees of a public HEI and a census of all employees in public and private HEIs in Cyprus. Important data collected from the interviews that could not be identified in literature, new items were created to support the themes coded. From scales of IM identified in literature kept those that supported what the participants expressed during the interviews (Carr & Lopez, 2007; Conduit et al., 2014; Conduit & Mavondo, 2001; Foreman & Money, 1995; Joung et al., 2015; Kohli et al., 1993; Mainardes et al., 2019; Voon, 2007; Yildiz & Kara, 2017). Items in literature about Employee Job Satisfaction, Commitment, Loyalty and Engagement were confirmed as reflecting the lived experience of HEI employees. Furthermore, the important values conveyed by the participants during the interviews, have been found in Schwartz (2012) and were adjusted in a way to support the data collected.

The questionnaire was distributed electronically to nine HEIs in Cyprus. It was carried out over two months with two reminders and resulted in a response rate of 22,4%. All items were measured of a 5-point Likert scale.

Out of the 415 useable questionnaires, 216 (52%) were from academic staff, 241 females (58.1%) and 244 participants (58.8%) working in a Public University. We run an EFA using PCA with VARIMAX rotation (IM *KMO* .925, $p < .001$; EE *KMO* .960, $p < .001$; Basic Values_Myself *KMO* .830, $p < .001$; Basic Values_Uni *KMO* .905, $p < .001$). The analysis provided that IM is a function of a 12-item scale with α of .93, EE is a function of a 21-

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item scale with α of .96., Basic Values_Myself is a function of an 8-item scale with α of .79 and that Basic Values_Uni is a function of a 9-item scale with α of .90.

A CFA analysis was conducted using the R programming language. The results revealed that the four-factor model offered the best fit to the data ($X^2=2,297.2$; $p<.001$; CFI=.93; RMSE=.046; SRMR=.057). Items with standardized factor loadings lower than .5 were excluded from further analysis (Hair et al., 2010, 2018). Moreover, the appropriate paths were added in the error of items since their modification index was greater than 4. The final model included twelve items of IM, twenty-one of EE, nine items of Basic Values_Uni and eight items of Basic Values_M.

The findings of our research provide the constructs of IM and EE in HEIs. Our study offers valuable insights into what has meaning and gives value to HEI employees. The way these elements are communicated to and espoused by the internal stakeholders can assist organizations in simultaneously offering value to employees and achieving organisational objectives by ensuring they are emotionally connected to their job and the organization so that they convey the brand values to external stakeholders.

Keywords: Internal marketing, Employee engagement, Higher education institutions

References upon request