

The Role of Internal Marketing in Employee Loyalty - Job Satisfaction as Mediator: A Study of Hospitality Industry of Pakistan

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Abstract. The study highlights internal marketing as a key/central concept in pursuit of achieving organizational loyalty among employees. This paper identifies the relationship between internal marketing and employee loyalty with mediating role of job satisfaction. Data was collected through survey-based questionnaires from 386 employees working in the hospitality industry of Pakistan. Amos 22 was used for CFA and SPSS 22 for correlational and regression analysis. Results revealed that internal marketing boosts employee loyalty, and additionally job satisfaction provides effective underlying mechanism for the relationship between internal marketing and employee loyalty. Thus, effective implementation of internal marketing helps to inspire and motivate employees creating a long run sustainable competitive advantage.

Key words: Internal Marketing, Job Satisfaction, Employee Loyalty, Hospitality Industry, Pakistan.

1 Introduction

The hospitality industry is growing dynamically in Pakistan within an extremely competitive environment. In this context, literature evident that employee-loyalty is the main concern for hotels or restaurant management. As maintaining employee-loyalty is not easy, a need has risen to identify factors contributing to employee loyalty (Sihombing and Berlianto, 2018). According Hart and Thompson (2007), employee-loyalty is the degree to which employees want to be a part of an organization in long run. Additionally, the personnel who possess higher loyalty provide desirable outcomes (Dhir et al., 2020).

In the existing literature, a number of academics have looked at the precursors and outcomes of employee loyalty (Han and Hyun, 2019; Tseng and Wu, 2017). There is still a need to uncover the factor(s) that assure employee loyalty, so that management can use these elements to design effective and efficient employee management techniques. Internal marketing could be one of these techniques that ensures a long-term competitive advantage. Internal marketing, according to Park and Tran (2018), produces beneficial consequences. Berry (1981), first established the notion of internal marketing, explaining that it focuses on the employees and internal environment of the firm, involving employees at all levels of management. Internal marketing

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philosophy, according to [Azêdo and Alves \(2014\)](#), is used to align, integrate, and encourage employees toward the company's goals. As a result, in order to advance research and knowledge, the current study looks at internal marketing as a predictor of employee loyalty.

Internal marketing has been linked to job satisfaction in the literature ([Kanyurhi and Akonkwa, 2016](#)). Management support, according to [Grobelna et al. \(2016\)](#), leads to job satisfaction. Few others offered evidence that job satisfaction is influenced by work engagement and role clarity, leadership style, reward system, and corporate culture ([Borzaga and Tortia, 2006](#); [Dhir et al., 2020](#); [Hien et al., 2020](#)). As a result, job satisfaction leads to a variety of positive outcomes, including improved performance, reduced staff turnover, and enhanced productivity. According to [Aziri \(2011\)](#) job satisfaction is related to a person's positive behavior at workplace. Therefore, there is need to explore how internal marketing leads to employee loyalty through the underlying mechanism of job satisfaction.

The concept is supported by social exchange theory, which portrays those exchanges are vital and that each input generates consequences in a predictable manner. Thus, if management treats employees as internal consumers and provides them with complete guidance and assistance, it ensures their satisfaction and, as a result, anticipates their loyalty to the company. Furthermore, in the hospitality industry, where tourists, visitors, and consumers closely study the attitude and behavior of employees before deciding whether or not to use their services, these conversations become more viable.

The current study adds to the existing literature in several ways. It begins by explaining how internal marketing leads to employee loyalty. Second, it looks into job satisfaction as a mediator in the relationship between internal marketing and employee loyalty. Third, the study focuses on the hospitality industry, which is thriving but facing ongoing challenges in third-world countries such as Pakistan. Fourth, it adds to social exchange theory, which emphasizes that positive exchanges between stakeholders result in positive outcomes while negative exchanges result in negative outcomes.

As a result, the current study addresses the explicit objectives listed below. Investigate the effect of internal marketing on hospitality employee loyalty. Recognize the impact of internal marketing on hospitality employee job satisfaction. Show the link between job satisfaction and employee loyalty in the hospitality industry. Estimate the role of job satisfaction as a mediator in the relationship between internal marketing and hospitality employee loyalty.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Internal Marketing and Employee Loyalty

As highlighted earlier, management needs to focus on the implementation of internal marketing techniques because internal marketing practices greatly affect the subordinates' attitudes ([To et al., 2015](#)). Present study highlights the comprehensive model in which we suggest that internal marketing significantly impacts employee loyalty at workplace in the presence of job satisfaction. This study drawn upon social exchange theory ([Kieserling, 2019](#)).

The social exchange theory is based on the mechanism of exchange or reciprocity. It explains that management and subordinates exchange positive behavior with each other under the phenomenon of indebtedness or obligation. Thus, the degree to which management practices (internal marketing) will spread positivity, and it will result in reciprocation and eventually employees will become loyal the organization in return.

Internal marketing is based on the idea of treating employees as internal customers (Hult et al., 2000). According to a study conducted by Schulz et al. (2017), the only difference between internal and external marketing is the targeted audience, i.e. for internal marketing, the targeted audience is employees, whereas for external marketing, the targeted audience is customers. Previous research has revealed that internal marketing can be understood from a variety of perspectives, including management philosophy, marketing techniques, and core competency base (Huang et al., 2020; Rafiq and Ahmed, 2000). This study's concept is based on management philosophy (internal marketing). According to Roşca et al. (2017), internal marketing human resource practices (employment security, training, reward development, inter-functional communication, empowerment, and reduced status distinction) have a positive relationship with external service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty. This means that if the organization's internal customers are satisfied, they will work hard to satisfy their external customers.

Employees should be viewed as an organization's primary asset in order to achieve organizational goals when developing an internal marketing strategy (Kim et al., 2015). According to Wu and Li (2018), when customers perceive value, they show loyalty. Similarly, when employees feel valued at work as a result of internal marketing strategies, they are more likely to be loyal to the organization. Communication of the company's vision and mission, development, and motivation tactics, as suggested by Alawni et al. (2015), have a significant impact on employee loyalty. Employees nowadays believe that their future is dependent on the success of the company. Ibrahim and YESILTAS (2021) investigate the impact of internal marketing on employee loyalty. As a result, the most important factor in achieving employee loyalty is internal marketing. Based on the preceding discussion, the following hypothesis has been developed: Hypothesis 1: Internal marketing and employee loyalty have a positive and significant relationship.

2.2 Internal Marketing and Job Satisfaction

Internal marketing has resolved conflicts by focusing on the organization as a whole, rather than just the functional unit. It also focuses on interactive performance in collaboration with the other departments to come up with something better and satisfactory (Asiedu et al., 2014). Thus, we can consider internal marketing as a holistic approach. Internal marketing is the management philosophy that helps managers to understand their job, roles and responsibilities through appreciation and encouragement (Bohnenberger et al., 2019). Job satisfaction is defined as the blend of environmental, physiological, and psychological factors that cause positive attitudes towards the job (Judge et al., 2008). Regardless of it, job satisfaction also depends upon the roles of employees (Iliopoulos and Priporas, 2011).

Several factors affect the satisfaction of employees and for service sector industries like hospitality industry, it is hard to satisfy and retain them (Lillo-Bañuls et al., 2018). Hussinki et al. (2019) discussed one of the factors i.e., treating the workforce as internal customers. It provides them value and respect which ultimately results in greater job satisfaction. According to Ross and Ali (2011), internal marketing strategy is beneficial for their internal customers satisfaction level i.e., employees. Sihombing and Berlianto (2018) also investigated the relationship between internal marketing and employee satisfaction. This implies that if management ensures the implementation of internal marketing strategies, then it could lead towards employee satisfaction (Nemteanu and Dabija, 2021). Therefore, we can hypothesize that internal marketing results in employee satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: Internal marketing and job satisfaction have a positive and significant relationship.

2.3 Job Satisfaction and Employee Loyalty

According to [Collins and Powers \(2000\)](#), loyalty is the level of commitment to an organization. Employee loyalty is measured in this study by factors such as motivation, career development, belongingness, and commitment. Employee loyalty is a dyadic attitude that involves both the employer and the employee. As a result, participants in a hierarchical and professional relationship should understand the significance of employee loyalty ([Tseng and Wu, 2017](#)). Employee turnover, poor working conditions, job satisfaction, inadequate benefits, and low compensation are the attributed factors from which employee loyalty can be measured ([Book et al., 2019](#); [Jun et al., 2006](#); [Ross and Ali, 2011](#)). According to [Dhir et al. \(2020\)](#), job satisfaction is regarded as the most important factor influencing employee loyalty.

The antecedents of employee loyalty discussed by [Bloemer and Odekerken-Schröder \(2006\)](#) are leadership, positive management orientation, employee evaluation and remuneration system, and provision of resources. These antecedents of employee loyalty have shown a strong effect on employee performance by increasing competition and employee satisfaction. Researchers identified the key determinants that affect employee loyalty. These determinants include quality orientation, effective communication of vision, job satisfaction, and job motivation. Employee loyalty of front-line workers in the hospitality sector is also influenced by job satisfaction ([Hien et al., 2020](#); [Phuong and Vinh, 2020](#)). As a result, this study has made a concerted effort to identify the positive relationship between job satisfaction and employee loyalty.

Hypothesis 3: Job satisfaction and employee loyalty have a positive and significant relationship.

2.4 Job satisfaction as a Mediator

Numerous studies provide evidence that employee job satisfaction is linked to external customers ([Homburg and Stock, 2004](#); [Matthews et al., 2016](#); [Pantouvakis and Bouranta, 2013](#); [Son et al., 2021](#)). [Turkyilmaz et al. \(2011\)](#) found that numerous factors i.e., reward and recognition, empowerment and participation, teamwork and training, working conditions, and personal development increases employee satisfaction leading towards employee loyalty. [Dhir et al. \(2020\)](#) also claimed that employee loyalty could be achieved through enhanced employee job satisfaction. This job satisfaction could be the result of internal marketing strategies implemented by management ([Chen and Lin, 2013](#)). Therefore, it could be hypothesized that when internal marketing strategies are implemented within the organization, they contribute towards increasing employee job satisfaction which strengthens the loyalty between the employee and the organization.

Hypothesis 4: The relationship between internal marketing and employee loyalty is significantly mediated by job satisfaction.

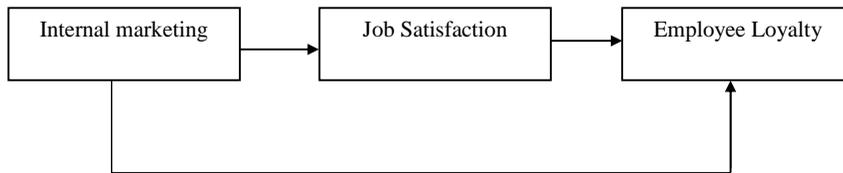


Figure 1: Internal marketing on employee loyalty with job satisfaction as a mediator

2.5 Theoretical Framework

3 Method

3.1 Participants and Procedure

This study was conducted on frontline workers of hospitality industry, 386 employees working in hotels and restaurants of twin cities Rawalpindi and Islamabad were approached personally and through friends' network. Firstly, the invitation letter illuminating the purpose of this study and emphasizing the importance of participation of hospitality employees were distributed to the HR managers. Few managers showed willingness and formally allowed to collect data from their employees. It was a cross sectional study, as data were collected in one point of time. Individuals were given information about the nature and purpose of research and ensured that the data will remain confidential and will be used for study purpose only. Among respondents 52% were male and 48% were female. The age of the participants varied with 58% of participants lying between 20-30 years of age, 32% between 31-40 years of age, and the remaining 10% being above 40 years of age. Furthermore, 18% had less than 1 year of experience, 30% had 1-3 years, 22% had 4-6 years, 21% had 7-10 years, and 9% had more than 10 years of experience. Approximately, 27% were managers, 38% were frontline workers, and 35% were supporting staff and others.

4 Measurements

4.1 Internal Marketing

A scale developed by [Foreman and Money \(1995\)](#) containing 15-items was used for data collection. It's a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". A sample item included "We communicate our organization's vision well to employees". The reliability of this scale was .92.

4.2 Employee Loyalty

To measure employee loyalty, [Ineson et al. \(2013\)](#) used a 21-item 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree." A sample item includes, "I enjoy good communications with my managers". The reliability of the scale was .87.

4.3 Job Satisfaction

It was measured by using a six-item scale of (Crow et al., 2012). It was a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”. Sample item included “I feel rewarded on my job”. The reliability of this scale was .88.

5 Results

5.1 Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 shows the results of means, correlations, and reliabilities, among other things. The mean values show that the majority of respondents agreed with the statements. For correlation analysis, the results depict that internal marketing and job satisfaction are positively related ($r = .34, p < .01$). Job satisfaction is significantly and positively related to employee loyalty ($r = .43, p < .01$). Additionally, internal marketing is positively related to employee loyalty ($r = .42, p < .01$).

Table 5.1: Means, Standard Deviations, Correlation, and Reliability

	Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1.	Internal Marketing	3.59	0.84	(.92)		
2.	Job Satisfaction	3.90	0.91	.34**	(.88)	
3.	Employee Loyalty	3.91	0.57	.42**	.43**	(.87)

Notes: Diagonal includes Cronbach's Alpha. *At the 0.05 level; 0.01 level, correlation is significant (2-tailed).

5.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

CFA (confirmatory factor analysis) was used to determine whether or not the model meets the fit statistics requirements. The results depicted that the three-factor model fits the data well, as all values meet threshold requirement (see table II) with CFI .922, TLI .917, RMSEA .040, SRMR .051 and χ^2/df 1.62. Comparatively, null and two factor model indicated poor fit statistics (see table II), thus the proposed three factor model appeared fit for further analysis.

5.3 Hypotheses Testing

5.3.1 Internal Marketing and Employee Loyalty have a Positive and Significant Relationship (H_1)

Process macro was used for regression analysis to test the hypotheses. The results revealed (see Table III) that a positive and significant relationship exists between internal marketing and employee loyalty ($\beta = 0.22, P < 0.001$) which indicates that hypothesis 1 accepted.

Table 5.2: Models of Measurement Comparison

Model	χ^2/df	$\Delta\chi^2$	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	TLI
Null Model (all independent indicators)	8.59	-	-	-	-	-
Baseline model (three factors; Internal marketing, job satisfaction, employee loyalty)	1.62	-	.922	.040	.051	.917
Model 1 (two factors; internal marketing and job satisfaction were combined)	2.78	949**	.777	.068	.082	.765

Note: TLI = Tucker Lewis Index; CFI = Comparative fit index; RMSEA = Root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = Standardized root mean square residual. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

5.3.2 Internal Marketing and Job Satisfaction have a positive and Significant Relationship (H₂)

The second hypothesis proposed that a positive and significant relationship exists between internal marketing and job satisfaction. The results indicate that internal marketing is positively and significantly related to job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.37, P < 0.001$), which indicates acceptance of hypothesis 2.

5.3.3 Job Satisfaction and Employee Loyalty have a positive and Significant Relationship (H₃)

The results show that job satisfaction is positively and significantly ($\beta = 0.20, P < 0.001$) related to employee loyalty, indicating acceptance of hypothesis 3, that there exists a positive and significant relationship exists between job satisfaction and employee loyalty.

Table 5.3: Direct & Indirect Effect

Direct effect	Estimate	SE	t
Internal Marketing → Employee Loyalty	0.22**	0.03	6.88
Internal Marketing → Job Satisfaction	0.37**	0.05	7.09
Job Satisfaction → Employee Loyalty	0.20**	0.03	7.02
Indirect effect	Effect	S.E	LL, UL
Internal Marketing → Job Satisfaction → Employee Loyalty	0.07**	0.03	0.03, 0.13

$N = 386, *P < 0.05; **P < 0.01; UL = upper limit; LL = lower limit; SE = standard error.$

5.3.4 The Relationship between Internal Marketing and Employee Loyalty is significantly mediated by Job Satisfaction (H₄)

The fourth hypothesis H₄ assumed that job satisfaction significantly mediates the relationship between internal marketing and employee loyalty. The results revealed that all the assumptions of mediation were satisfied as internal marketing is significantly related to job satisfaction

($\beta = 0.37$, $P < 0.001$), while job satisfaction depicts a significant positive relationship with employee loyalty ($\beta = 0.20$, $P < 0.001$). The results of the indirect effect, namely, internal marketing on employee loyalty via job satisfaction show a significant relationship (indirect effect = 0.07, $P < 0.001$). Additionally, zero does not exist between upper and lower limit at 95% confidence interval (LLCI = 0.03, ULCI = 0.13), thus the proposed underlying mechanism was accepted.

6 Discussion

The study opens new avenues for further research. Firstly, employees are the asset of an organization. They are identified as internal customers by modern organizations, and hence, must be treated exceptionally well by the management unlike other stakeholders for desirable outcomes (Huang et al., 2020). The result of hypothesis one emphasizes that if employees are taken into confidence, briefed about future moves, they can contribute effectively, which is consistent with previously done study (Chen and Lin, 2013; Narteh and Odoom, 2015; To et al., 2015). Additionally, hypothesis two results highlight that right treatment leads to their job satisfaction as supported by earlier done studies (Kanyurhi and Akonkwa, 2016; Mainardes et al., 2019; Ting, 2011). Moreover, the result of hypothesis three indicates that the satisfaction of employee ensures their selfless and unshaken loyalty with the organization, which is aligned with previous studies (Dhir et al., 2020; Phuong and Vinh, 2020; Rajput et al., 2016). Furthermore, job satisfaction, which is not a one moment reaction, strengthens exchange mechanism between employees and management. As employees develop confidence, receive appreciation for effort, role clarity and fair distribution of responsibilities from management, the employees show positive attitude and consequently stay loyal with respective organization, as observed in earlier researches (Martensen et al., 2006; Narteh and Odoom, 2015; Tansel and Gazioglu, 2014).

Thus, it is concluded that internal marketing is a novel and unique area for study in the service sector specifically hospitality industry. This smart strategy must be used to enhance employee loyalty specifically in the Asian context. Just expecting positive attitude and response of employees without generous input is worthless. Consequently, unreliable and dissatisfied workers cannot achieve desirable objectives. Conclusively for survival in a highly competitive hospitality industry, management must focus on internal marketing practices like communication of vision, training & development, and fair compensation etc. This increases in job satisfaction ultimately, leading to a rise in employee loyalty toward the organization.

6.1 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Extending research on internal marketing and outcomes on a universal level, the present research emphasizes the significance of internal marketing and offers several theoretical and practical implications. Firstly, this study makes some theoretical contribution by examining the proposed relationships in non-western Pakistani context, thus it adds in extant literature with cultural perspective on how employees perceive and behave in Asian culture. Secondly the study has some practical implications as it gives an idea about how hospitality professionals work, what they expect, how they should be trained and developed. It could be helpful for HR managers in hospitality sector such as through giving information about organizational goals and mission to employees their loyalty with the organization could be enhanced. Furthermore, it recommends that job satisfaction is a worthy underlying mechanism between internal marketing and employee loyalty. HR managers could enhance the job satisfaction and loyalty of

hospitality employees by ensuring that employees are well known and familiar with their organizations' objectives, mission, vision, and play a vital role in generation of organizational strategies.

6.2 Limitations and Future Research

The scope of this study is broad but still, it contains a few limitations. First, the study was cross-sectional, future researchers can try other research designs as well like longitudinal research or time lag study. Secondly, this research worked on single relationships, future research can test multiple relationships i.e., new mediators and moderators and outcome variables. Thirdly, the research just focused on the Pakistani culture, future researchers can include samples from different cultures. Lastly, same combination of the variables can be tested in other industries to confirm the major findings associated with internal marketing and organizational loyalty.

7 Conclusion

Internal marketing is a novel and exciting area of study in the service sector industry, particularly in the hospitality industry. The research objectives of this study have been met using the social exchange theory. The first goal was to investigate the effect of internal marketing on the loyalty of hospitality employees. Internal marketing is a significant strategy for increasing hospitality employee loyalty in the Asian context, according to research. The second goal was to determine the effect of internal marketing on job satisfaction among hospitality employees. According to the findings, when employees gain confidence, role clarity, and a fair distribution of responsibilities from management, they are ultimately satisfied with their jobs. The third goal of this study was to demonstrate the relationship between job satisfaction and loyalty of hospitality employees. The fourth goal was to estimate the role of job satisfaction as a moderator in the relationship between internal marketing and hospitality employee loyalty. As a result, the researchers in this study developed a conceptual model for identifying the effect of internal marketing practices on employee loyalty as mediated by job satisfaction. The current study has provided evidence and highlighted the importance of job satisfaction in explaining why employees show loyalty to an organization when internal marketing strategies are implemented.

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