Measuring a Multifaceted Concept: A high Order Confirmatory Factor Analysis Towards Internal Marketing

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Abstract. *Multi-dimensionality of internal marketing (IM) concept continuously poses a challenge for researchers because a number of measurement approaches have been used for more than a quarter of a century since its maiden empirical inception. These multiple operationalizations have augmented confusion and decision-makers are not sure which one to rely on for optimal results. Additionally, due to its evolutionary nature, research has not kept up with the pace to substantiate this evolution empirically, leaving a void for researchers to proceed for a quantitative investigation to extend its boundaries. The present research takes up this challenge and provides an empirical evidence to prove its progression. As IM is multi-faceted in nature, this research chips in two brand new dimensions, informational justice and developmental opportunities, to the IM mix, while a third dimension that has only once been studied in connection with an IM work, is also enfolded. To this end, a top-down high order confirmatory factor analysis was done to identify the underlying structure of IM dimensions. Findings of the study revealed that the hypothesized five dimensions of IM are confirmed dimensions of IM concept. This empirical stamp will embolden researchers to devise measurement scales preferably sensitive to its growing character, and capitalize on its prowess to adapt to the novelties and peculiarities of a specific industry. Moreover, this study will help in making it a more reliable tool for managers to negotiate new constraints imposed by Covid in a post-Covid world.*

Keywords: Internal marketing; opportunity development; feedback; informational justice; internal market research; training

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Introduction

Internal Marketing started in the mid-70s and gave an alternate approach to the then dominating school of thought that always showed concern about external customers. This alternative thought viewed the employee as customer, too. Berry, Hensel, and Burke (1976), Sasser and Arbeit (1976), George (1977) and Berry (1981) are greatly credited for the introduction of this concept. According to people projecting IM, it is the employee who should be the first customer of an organization. The external customer can seek satisfaction

and value once the internal customer is also satisfied. This approach is quite old, but even writers with recent work call it evolutionary (e.g., Al-Weshah, 2019; Huang, Rundle-Thiele, & Chen, 2019; Park & Tran, 2020; Santa Cruz, Mero, Alcívar, & Fernández, 2020; Svensson, 2020).

Its evolution probably owes to the fact that IM is an extraordinarily dicey concept, simple in appearance, but largely colossal to operationalize (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003; Qaisar & Muhamad, 2021; Svensson, 2020). In addition to the evolutionary process IM is going through, little agreement is there on whether IM mix can be effective in influencing employees to be motivated and to work in a customer-oriented spirit (Ahmed, Rafiq, & Saad, 2003). Svensson (2020) also points out that from theory to empirical findings, defining the internal marketing concept and what activities exactly constitute it is quite hard. IM is certainly an effective change management strategy for a great variety of context if its definitional level ambiguity is removed (Raeisi, Lingjie, & Suhaili Binti Ramli, 2019). Yet, over the past four decades numerous attempts have been made to operationalize IM, but no consensus on the number of IM dimensions (Yildiz & Kara, 2017) exists yet. The reason for these efforts might be that IM has the greatest effect on employee performance or customer-oriented behavior, suggesting the key role it can play in performance improvement (Imani, Foroudi, Seyyedamiri, & Dehghani, 2020). However, its evolutionary power, which is a hallmark of IM, remains under-explored and the authors believe that practitioners can only keep it close to their minds when more and more empirical efforts are steered to expand its scope and clarify its underlying structure. To tap this abstract and nebulous concept to observable behavioral dimensions and measurable elements, we expect that universities implementing IM strategy to have five broad characteristics, i.e., internal market research, training, informational justice, developmental opportunities, and performance feedback (for details, see literature section).

Furthermore, there is practical relevance related to the dimensionality of IM in higher education institutions. According to Sahibzada et al. (2019), scale development or combining and confirming existing relevant dimensions in higher education is rare and need to be considered. Likewise, higher education is facing paramount challenges, and the only way out is to invest in academics (Altarifi, 2014) from the internal marketing perspective. Also, individuals and nations depend on the performance of their higher education institutions (Rehman & Farooq, 2020). The globalized and liberalized world has internationalized higher education, bringing a new set of challenges to it (Akhtar & Kalsoom, 2012). The higher education sector is facing severe competition (Alam, Ahmad, & Hossain, 2020; Farrukh, Lee, & Shahzad, 2019; Voon, 2006). IM is as important to higher education institutions as to any other organization in the service industry (Sahibzada, Jianfeng, Latif, & Shafait, 2019). Universities face high competition, and IM can prove to be a differentiation tool to ensure competitive advantage (Chasanah, Hidayat, & Mustafa, 2020). However, thrust of IM research in the last decade has been on hotels, restaurants, casinos, and financial companies (Tang, Chang, Wang, & Lai, 2020), creating a void in the higher education sector. Thus, the evolutionary character of IM coupled with little research in higher education prompts this study. Therefore, the aim of this study is to test the proposed underlying observable behavioral dimensions and measurable elements that made IM scale in the context of higher education institutions.

Literature review

Tansuhaj, Wong, and McCullough (1987) pioneered the IM scale with training programs, communication, rewards, motivation, and employee-customer interaction. Other than the simple statement that the literature was extensively reviewed, there was no explanation on the inclusion of dimensions or items representing these dimensions. In addition to this lacuna, the methodological rigor is also deeply missing to ascertain their status as IM companions. This is probably the prime reason for many IM scale-developers (Ahmed et al., 2003; Keller, Lynch, Ellinger, Ozment, & Calantone, 2006; Panigyrakis & Theodoridis, 2009; Sahibzada et al., 2019; Yildiz & Kara, 2017) consider the scale of Foeman and Money (1995) as the first one to measure IM. Thus, Foeman and Money (1995) were the pioneer authors to present a general-purpose scale to measure IM. They introduced vision, reward and training and development, and recommended managers to consider these issues while pursuing IM objectives. IM mix scale developed by Ahmed et al. (2003) in a cross-sectoral (manufacturing and service) study included 11 elements: senior leadership, strategic rewards, incentive systems, organizational structure, selection and succession, physical environment, operational/process changes, empowerment and inter-functional co-ordination.

The internal marketing mix scale of Keller et al. (2006) operationalized on distribution service employees also consisted of 6 dimensions: internal basic job product, internal advanced job product, internal proactive effort price, internal reactive effort price, internal place, and internal promotion. Jou, Chou, and Fu (2008) presented a six-factor measurement scale for IM in the service industry, including banking, medical, airline, and insurance. These factors are: empathy and consideration, upward communication, benchmarking, promotional activities, job quality and rewarding, and value and information sharing. The scale introduced for the construct of IM in retail industry by (Panigyrakis & Theodoridis, 2009) has five dimensions: rewards, formal interaction, internal customer orientation and feedback. Bellaouaied and Gam (2011) developed the IM scale with only two dimensions: Gratitude-Empathy and Integration-support in the French banking sector.

Kameswari and Rajyalakshmi's (2012) scale of IM for the banking sector (state bank of India) contained training, work environment, work content, superior support and colleague support. Staff recruitment, staff training, staff motivation, staff retention, job security and internal communication were the dimensions of the IM scale floated by Akroush, Abu-ElSamen, Samawi, & Odetallah (2013) in the hospitality industry of Jordan. Altarifi (2014) validated an IM scale in the higher education sector of Jordan; having development, internal communication, internal market research, management support, vision on excellent service and performance incentives as its dimensions. Dahl and Peltier (2014) chose the health care industry of two countries, Germany and the US. The target population for their IM scale was that of nurses. Structural, physician social, nurse social, and financial bonds were the representative dimensions of their scale. For the Ghanaian banking industry, Narteh and Odoom (2015) developed an IM scale having 6 dimensions: organizational culture, rewards systems, internal communication, organizational commitment and training. The IM scale of Kaur and Sharma (2015) emanates from their study of the Indian financial sector. The dimensions included: inter-functional coordination, senior leadership and vision, organizational structure and changes, internal

communications, training and development, staffing, strategic rewards, physical environment, incentives and empowerment. Huang and Rundle-Thiele (2015) validated their scale containing training, internal market research and internal communication, simultaneously in an Asian and Western context (Taiwan and Australia) and in two sectors: tourism and higher education. Yildiz and Kara (2017) are an exception in the whole lot of IM scale developers with a unidimensional construct, calling it IM-11. The study of Sahibzada et al. (2019) introduced six elements of IM in the Chinese higher education sector: internal communication, interrelations, work support, training and development, motivation and rewards. Santa Cruz et al. (2020) studied Ecuadorian cooperatives and developed an IM-scale for this sector with the following elements: identify value exchange, work-family balance, internal communication, internal market segmentation, training, and management concern.

The field of IM can see a big progress by developing measures that will themselves provide its operationalization (Jou et al., 2008). This specific operationalization of IM with five elements thus helps in progressing the concept further in higher education institutions. Kaur and Sharma (2015) terms IM a theoretically groomed construct that lacks a valid and vibrant measurement scale. Huang and Rundle-Thiele (2015) who also developed an IM scale recommend exploring more for additional elements of IM. Bulk of management research recommends for a context specific scale; in reality however, fewer attempts are made in this regard (Sahibzada et al., 2019). Thus, their observation is also an added impetus to undertake this study. Literature also suggests that a change in organizational settings also brings a change in the elements of IM, therefore a contextual scale development becomes more inevitable (Sahibzada et al., 2019). No consensus on the number of IM dimensions (Yildiz & Kara, 2017) exist yet. Similarly, scale development or combining and confirming existing relevant dimensions in higher education is rare and need to be considered (Sahibzada et al., 2019), since higher education is facing paramount challenges and the only way out is to invest in their academics (Altarifi, 2014) from an internal marketing perspective.

One can very effectively start survey-based IM measures to explore previous studies (Huang & Rundle-Thiele, 2015). The current study also extensively navigated the literature on past studies and found that training and internal market research has been extensively referred as part of IM scales in recent empirical investigations (e.g., Altarifi 2014; Cruz et al., 2020; Hsieh, 2018; Huang, 2020; Huang & Jiang, 2020; Huang & Rundle-Thiele, 2015; Huang et al., 2019; Kadic-Magljalic, Boso, & Micevski, 2018; Nart, Sututemiz, Nart, & Karatepe, 2019; Nurul Aqilah, 2018; Sahibzada et al., 2019). There is only one study (Panigyrakis & Theodoridis, 2009) empirically attaching feedback to IM, and developmental opportunities and informational justice not at all. So, the study moves on to build a scale with a flavor of old dimensions like training and internal market research as well as new dimensions like informational justice and developmental opportunities, while performance feedback though only referred once in a research article and that too in a retail context, can also be labelled new.

Certain scholars view IM as including everything that can motivate employees and can establish cordial relations with employees (Yildiz & Kara, 2017). The new dimensions of IM fulfill both these criteria. Developmental opportunities are a great way to motivate employees to work hard, since it carries incentives of greater competence and career growth. Having these opportunities also sends a recognition message to a person on

his/her abilities. The informational justice means important information is shared with employees. This sharing of information also motivates them to do their job and enhances the relationship quality between employee and the elders in organization. Even in social exchange relationships, an incentive the employer offers to the employee is a continuity of career with employee (Yildiz & Kara, 2017) and this continuity is possible only when developmental opportunities have enabled the employee to keep on growing and no key information is withheld. Ahmed et al. (2003) terms controllable elements of organization the IM mix. Whatever influential levers an organization has, they make up these IM mix elements. Based upon this definition, two new factors are chipped into the IM mix, namely Developmental opportunities and informational justice. They further call THE IM mix a set of organizationally controlled elements that can work to increase influence and motivation of employees. Since organizations can facilitate informational justice requirements of employees and their learning needs, the criterion put forward by Ahmed et al. (2003) is also fulfilled.

Since IM improves the capabilities and competencies of employees (Mishra, 2020), learning opportunities have an inherent place in the IM adobe. IM avails every reasonable opportunity to flourish well-being at work and beyond. Also, Ahmed et al. (2003) suggest IM is a competency builder. One more reason for considering them a part of IM package is due to the fact that context determines the real value of a resource in reference to a demand context. Particular context of higher education calls for a broadening of competency to meet the future demands of industry. While sticking only to monotonous and primitive tasks, the skills and knowledge gained during an academic's job in the university may very well have lost its meaning to the new needs of the market. By fulfilling employee needs, IM dimensions convey a belief of care and significance (Qaisar & Muhamad, 2021). Since informational justice ensures the right to timely information, and explanation is not infringed while provision of developmental opportunities certifies that employee's knowledge and growth concerns are a key priority. The accession of these dimensions is again justified.

Tansuhaj, Randall, & McCullough (1991) recommend managers to give feedback consideration in implementing IM. Keller et al (2006) also cite the work of Ballantyne (2000) to include feedback as part of IM tools. Finn, Baker, Marshall, and Anderson (1996) also point towards the inclusion of feedback in organizational mechanisms to steer employees to work on quality standards and then evaluate them on those standards. For a well-defined IM program, feedback should be one of the IM components to help employees in doing their jobs comfortably (Keller et al., 2006). Varey (1995) also terms it to be a key dimension of IM. However, the empirical-level demonstration comes from (Panigyrakis & Theodoridis, 2009). Researchers consistently demonstrate that stronger employee-organization ties bring positive organizational and individual outcome (Valle, 2020). This feedback can work effectively for this cause and that is why it is included here. So, the prime forces for the combination of these dimensions in the Higher Education Sector are described above. The following section goes into the literature on these IM mix elements.

Developmental opportunities

Continuous development evolves the skills of employees as changes in a certain field emerge. Abruptly meeting the changing requirements may be too difficult a task. Adaptability is thus never an overnight fix; it happens over time. Developmental

opportunities in contrast to training are not a special activity planning a whole lot of learning activity where the services of a trainer required. It is in fact an organization-led, but employee-owned, activity. The level of learning that employees attribute to continuous learning and performing tasks that make contribution in increasing their potential is called developmental opportunities (Rego, 2009). These opportunities provide intrinsic motivation in work performance (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007). Developmental opportunities increase work engagement (Albrecht, Breidahl and Marty, 2018; Babic, Stinglhamber, Barbier, & Hansez, 2019). Conradie (2011) highlights the need for developing employees to motivate them for organizational goals. It is the responsibility of organization to ensure availability of these opportunities (Rego, 2009). Van Wingerden, Derks and Bakker (2018) also call for top management's facilitating character in developmental opportunities. So, the discussion shows the commonality between training and developmental opportunities, and the role of the organization is crucial. However, Molino (2013) calls it understudied construct. The nature of higher education increases its importance many times and that is why this under-researched construct is studied here. The first hypothesis is:

H1: Developmental opportunities are a confirmed dimension of IM mix.

Feedback

Feedback ensures management and employee share similar work expectations. It clarifies employees are doing a meaningful job for organizational goals. Feedback also strengthens the communication channel between managers and employees. The specialty of this channel is that it also enhances mutual trust. Service strategy gets implemented once employees have feedback from management, according to Gronroos (1990). He further says that management can use feedback to motivate employees to be customer-focused and service-oriented. Moreover, it keeps the interest of employee alive in a job. Employees can seek direct information on their job accomplishment (Sever & Malbašić, 2019). Where there is a learning and performance deficiency, feedback spots those deficient areas (Guarana, 2010). Those facing problems in job can resort to it for advice to be better performers (Kloutsiniotis & Mihail, 2018). Organizations with more challenging tasks can largely simplify those tasks with feedback, as it makes these daunting tasks easier (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2011). Since faculty involves itself in research and teaching activities that are quite demanding, the feedback can lessen its complexity. Organizations interested in coming out of closed climates should provide feedback to their subordinates. It enables employees to be more service-minded. Key aspect of a good feedback is its provision in a reasonable amount of time (George, 1990). Feedback is so important it spans over the whole organizational life (Bear, Cushenbery, London, & Sherman, 2017). Regular feedback, at least once a month, is essential for performance (Jaiyeoba, Marandu, & Kealesitse, 2015). So, it is hypothesized that:

H2: Feedback is a confirm dimension of IM mix.

Informational justice

Informational justice relates to the belief of an individual about receiving timely and sufficient information, and if he/she believes to have received in-time and adequate information, it will be an experience of informational justice (Campana & Hammoud, 2015). Making a comparison between behaviors of change leaders and task and relational leaders,

Karam et al. (2019) say change leaders show more association with this type of justice perceptions. Individuals perceiving their workplace as providing information on decision-making, on average experience lesser burnout than those who do not have the same perceptions (Campana & Hammoud, 2015). All types of organizational justice uniquely contribute to endorsing fairness perceptions (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). Ustaman, Taha, and Zakaria (2020) even go on to say it is more important than other dimensions of organizational justice. Informational justice is more objective than interpersonal justice (Zapata, Olsen, & Martins 2013). Cheung (2013) even recommends informational justice to be a parameter for promotion of employees to leadership positions. Companies can quite successfully put informational justice into practice through the quality of explanation. Organization bent to giving quality to customers should not be blind to quality in explaining decisions (Loi, Yang, & Diefendorff, 2009).

Although it is apparently simple, is not simple in real life, Zapata (2013) says, since informational justice involves sharing sensitive information. So, it increasingly gets complex and challenging as the sensitivity of information heightens. In spite of these issues, a critical aspect of IM is the communication style of the management towards employees (Svensson, 2020). Conduit, Matanda, and Mavondo (2014) contend that the care, support, and attention that internal customers receive from organization create a real difference. Therefore:

H3: Informational justice is a confirmed dimension of IM mix.

Internal market research

Internal market research is similar in character to the external research, except that it has a focus on the internal market of an organization, i.e., the employees. Information on external customer falls under external market research, while for internal customer it is internal market research (Huang and Rundle-Thiele, 2015). When IM declares employees as customers, it certainly means to know more and more about their perceptions and responses against the job products they are offered. An optimum way to gather this information is to choose internal market research. This research enables the organization to find out employee segments, their characteristics and needs to design and implement strategies for these identified segments (Kadic-Magljalic et al., 2018). Altarifi (2014) says internal market research offers more opportunities to generate information. A variety of complex service encounters can also be soothed with internal market research (Nart et al., 2018). It means higher education can be a key target of this intervention. Mostly organizations are overwhelmed with the thoughts of external customers and are thus unable to consider them in marketing strategies (Szostek, 2017). Generally, this type of research is occasionally found in organizations, and even those practicing it keep it in secret cabins of HR and marketing departments (Sanchez-Hernandez & Grayson, 2012). This practice must change for fruitful results (Sanchez-Hernandez & Grayson, 2012). The next hypothesis is:

H4: Internal market research is a confirmed dimension of IM mix.

Training

Training is needed to prepare employees for performing functional roles and to assign them higher responsibilities (Narteh & Odoom, 2015). After the hiring is completed, employees take part in training programs, which give them an overview of the entire

organization so that they can find where they stand and what their importance is in overall business operations (Tanshuj, Randall, & McCullough, 1988). Training involves spending of resources on employees. Since employees make up an organization, it has to invest in the skills of employees to improve their performance (Elnaga & Imran, 2013).

This investment is justified because it provides a very high return, resulting in competitive advantage (Elnaga & Imran, 2013). Shin, Kim, Kim, and Kang (2020) mention that studies show training produces more satisfied, quality-oriented, high-moral, motivated, and committed employees. They further note that trained individuals commit few mistakes and are thus more productive. As training increases satisfaction level, it compels employees to avoid organizational switching (Ocen, Francis, & Angundaru, 2017)). It is an effort to protect an organization from a management crisis due to shortage of skills (Narteh & Odoom, 2015). Training offers intangible benefits like improved attitude and enhanced skills, which may indicate greater service quality, satisfaction and loyalty of customers (Bansal, Mendelson, & Sharma, 2001). They further wonder why, in spite of all these benefits, companies do not sufficiently meet the training need and invest only in case they are profitable. Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H5: Training is a confirmed dimension of IM mix.

Methodology

Four hundred questionnaires were distributed to the faculty members serving in different public sector universities of Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK). A total of 341 respondents returned the questionnaires with 21 being incomplete. Thus, for the data analysis we used 320 valid responses. Having access to the population register and the generalizability consideration, simple random sampling technique was applied to collect data.

Measurement

The measurement instruments used in current study have been adapted from the works of previous researchers. Training is adapted from the scale used by Foreman & Money (2005), Internal Market Research from Lings & Greenley (2005), feedback from Conduit & Movando (2001), Developmental opportunities from Bakker et al. (2010) and informational justice from Colquitt (2001).

Analysis and Discussion

Descriptive

Out of the total participants, 73% were male and remaining were female. A share of 76% was married and the remaining was single. A share of 29% had a PhD, 63% held an MS degree, and 8% had a Master's degree, while no respondent had a BS (4 years) degree. Designation-wise, 9% were Professor, 16% were Associate Professor, 26% were Assistant Professor and 49% were Lecturers. Of the total respondents, 34% lie in the age group of 30-40, 46% were in the age bracket of 41-50, and 20% were in the age bracket of 51 and above.

Reliability

The reliability and validity of the measurement model containing all constructs is evaluated following the method suggested by Hadi, Abdullah, & Sentosa (2016b), and Hadi &

Muhammad (2019). Composite reliability used to evaluate internal consistency of the constructs provided satisfactory values going above the minimum requirement of 0.7. As evident from the tables, the value for training is 0.934, informational justice 0.920, developmental opportunities 0.923, internal market research 0.910, and feedback 0.788. These values endorse the internal consistency of all the constructs.

Table 1. Factor Loadings, Reliability and Validity of Constructs

Items	Loadings	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
TR1	0.954	0.934	0.782
TR2	0.941		
TR3	0.934		
TR4	0.678		
IJ1	0.727	0.920	0.698
IJ2	0.877		
IJ3	0.855		
IJ4	0.828		
IJ5	0.881		
DO1	0.877	0.923	0.750
DO2	0.860		
DO3	0.824		
DO4	0.902		
IMR1	0.795	0.910	0.594
IMR2	0.683		
IMR3	0.626		
IMR4	0.836		
IMR5	0.874		
IMR6	0.835		
IMR7	0.713		
FB1	0.689	0.788	0.554
FB2	0.802		
FB3	0.737		

Source: Authors' own research.

Construct validity

Convergent validity ensures the instrument is valid for the given construct. For reliability, Cronbach alpha along with composite reliability is used. Their values should be at or above 0.70. Fornell and Larcker (1981) recommend to look for the value of average variance extracted (AVE) to measure convergent validity. The threshold set for AVE value is greater than 0.50. All the constructs (training 0.782, informational justice 0.698, developmental opportunities 0.75, internal market research 0.594, feedback 0.554) in this study are above 0.5.

It is clear from Table 2 that all the dimensions of Internal marketing are confirmed dimensions of IM. According to Cunningham (2008), when dimensions key variables (high order factor) are moderately to highly correlated (the correlation that exists amongst the lower-order factors), these factors are best explaining their high order factor (IM in this study). The correlation between IM and other factors like developmental opportunities, feedback, informational justice, internal market research, and training are 0.511, 0.864, 0.879, 0.847, and 0.843 respectively, signifying high correlation. Similarly, all these factors are confirmed dimensions of high order factor, as can be seen in the table below (p value for all paths originating from IM to each dimension is below the recommended threshold

value of 0.05). Hence, all hypotheses (H1 to H5) are accepted. This result confirms the multifaceted concept of IM concept in Higher Education Institutions (see Figure 1 for detail).

Table 2. Path-Coefficients

Path	B	Standard Deviation	T -Statistics	P-Values
IM→DO	0.511	0.054	9.476	0.001
IM→FB	0.864	0.019	46.427	0.001
IM→IJ	0.879	0.014	61.679	0.001
IM→IMR	0.847	0.022	38.190	0.001
IM→TR	0.843	0.021	40.616	0.001

Source: Authors' own research.

IM theory has been revolving around the concept of internal customers, i.e., employees. Hence, satisfaction of external customers hinges upon satisfaction of internal customers. The message is: employees are critical in the success and failure of an organization and, therefore, they deserve as much worthy treatment as external customers. This treatment will ensure employees and organization have similar priorities on the importance of customers. Thus, a forward-looking organization is one that has a proper internal marketing system at work to create a favorable environment where such relationships could establish. In a similar suit, present research introduces a model with training, developmental opportunities, feedback, internal marker research, and informational justice as its dimensions. These IM dimensions will endure positive thoughts in employees that university does not take them for granted, but actively delivers on strategies beneficial to their cause. All this leads to a skillful human resource, which is key for university survival (Butt et al., 2020), and investing in employees bring enormous benefits to organization (Yildiz & Kara, 2017).

Figure 1: Tested Model

Source: Authors'

IM is also a determinant of employee concerns and their needs. In universities, certainly developmental opportunities, feedback, and informational justice represent the areas of need and concern; and the current study addresses them (Moreira Mero, Hidalgo Fernández, Llor Alcívar, & González Santa Cruz, 2020). Since IM plans, assesses, and implements strategies on internal customers (Moreira Mero et al., 2020), this study actually reassesses IM and includes developmental opportunities and informational justice. Though IM provides competitive advantage at a global scale, it must ensure its dimensions cover expectations of employees (Moreira Mero et al., 2020). This perspective is also kept alive in the work by ensuring employee expectations regarding their competency and growth, information sharing, and a proper response towards their task attempts get covered in these dimensions. As the elements of IM can be harnessed to gain competitive advantage in a specific environment (Wedzerai et al., 2020), the present study also harnesses IM mix for higher education.

IM actually brings employee to a ready-state to deliver great services (Svensson, 2020). Voon (2006) believes that, in order to give high service quality, universities should be employee-oriented. Imani et al. (2020) ask whether organizations interested in employee performance should focus on IM. Gronroos (1985) says that internal products also consist of a work environment that keep employees motivated to meet management's demand of customer orientation. This internal product consisting of market research and informational justice truly contributes to a great environment that is transparent and committed to offer learning opportunities to its employees, and has the capacity to fulfill customer-orientation requirements of a university to effectively battle the competition. In

developmental opportunities, the organization is a mere facilitator, and no large investment required. These opportunities equip academics to achieve technical soundness to face career challenges.

Conclusion

Probably the greatest contribution of this study, *inter alia*, is the induction of two new members in the family of IM (Huang 2020; Park & Tran, 2020; Santa Cruz et al., 2020), or even three, considering the fact that feedback has been used in only one study by Panigyrakis and Theodoridis (2009), and that too more than a decade back. These two novel members are developmental opportunities and informational justice. What differentiates this inclusion from previous efforts is they have not even been theoretically suggested to be representing IM. Although researchers have been advocating the evolutionary character of IM, this research goes a step further and joins those few people who have actually demonstrated the same (e.g., Jou et al., 2008; Keller et al. 2006). The present study has an empirically attested version of the evolution of IM. It is a tall tale to pursue the confused lot, doubtful of its precise operationalization and apt utilization. Undoubtedly, to a great extent, its findings will at least easily fall off confusion from the minds of higher educationists. Higher education is of paramount importance for developing countries. They can throw away the status-quo by adopting change, since IM scholars, as described in the introductory part, take it as a change agent and a reliable tool for competitive advantage; they can build a system solidly based on great education system. For such a system to exist and flourish, no nation can afford to be complacent with traditional strategies to carry out transformation (Afzal et al., 2019; Rehman & Farooq, 2020). To maintain the dominance of a specific industry, organizational measures like IM are indispensable (Gwinji et al. 2020; Santa Cruz et al., 2020).

IM is evolutionary, but it has not received the due attention of researchers and is hence creating a knowledge gap. A meager advancement is made with this effort to fill it. Researchers also consider IM multidimensional, and this multidimensionality also seeks empirical endorsement. It also adds to the body of knowledge. Its uniqueness certainly owes to the inclusion of two new variables that have been suggested by Khalid and Hadi (2021), but were never tested empirically. The essence of modern-day decision making for managers and policy makers is to base their decisions on hard-core evidence. A disagreement on one operational definition of IM has been dissuading practitioners from accepting it. Results, however, are indicative that the disagreement is a strength, giving them the freedom to choose what suits them, as in the ongoing case they can opt for this model of IM to send faculty a message of being internal customers.

Implications

With the confirmation of training, performance feedback, internal market research as elements of IM and specifically the addition of two new elements of informational justice and developmental opportunities, the present research shows that anything that is valuable for employee can thrive under the umbrella of IM. The new measures do not look for any financial commitments from the university; hi-ups simply need to change their management style to integrate these practices into their working.

Limitations and future directions

Although it has great implications for various organizations, however, there are limitations. First, the population of this study is only composed of public sector universities. This limits its generalizability to other sectors. Certainly, the ground for future researchers is open to replicate this newly developed IM model, specifically in both public and private sector settings of higher education. Any organization overwhelmed with knowledge workers, like the healthcare industry and the IT industry, can also test this model in their settings, as it will surely mold employees in the desired direction. The recommendation for knowledge-worker-oriented firms is due to the fact that the present study has been conducted in a similar setting, and this synonymity of the setting increases the chances of its replicability. Secondly, developmental opportunities expand the competency horizon of people and it is an existential must for knowledge workers. Informational justice not only breaks away the chain of confusion; the targeted message also saves precious time of knowledge workers, which can be utilized for more productive activities. Thus, knowledge-worker intensive industries can primarily benefit from this research and should lead to its empirical validation. Researchers can also work on expansion of IM and may introduce some new elements in different contexts in the future. Finally, the current study measures the underlying structure of dimensions and elements that make the IM scale, and future research needs to test the impact of this IM scale on customer-oriented behavior or employee performance with mediating effects such as the organization identity.

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