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INTERNAL MARKETING AND SALES FORCE PERFORMANCE OF BEVERAGE MANUFACTURING FIRMS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
The main objective of this study was to examine the effect of internal marketing on sales force performance in the selected beverage manufacturing firms operating in Nigeria. The study adopted a survey design method to help analyze the inherent problem. The population of this study is made up of management and staff of 15 food/beverage firms quoted on the Nigerian Stock Exchange. 153 respondents were studied. Convenience sampling was used because of the nature of the respondents. The test of hypotheses was done using simple regression model. All analyses were done through the use of SPSS (version 20.0). The results of regression analysis revealed that internal communication exerts positive and significant effect on sales force performance of the designated beverage firms in Nigeria. The study's second regression result showed that internal training significantly and favourably affects the sales force performance of the chosen Nigerian manufacturing companies. The researchers recommended that fostering mutual relationships amongst the persons concerned is a two-way process that is achieved through communication. The studied beverage firms should keep lines of communication open so that the sales staff and upper management may communicate. Also, the management of the studied beverage firms in Nigeria have to give training its sales force top priority if they are to succeed. To give the sales force the knowledge and direction they need to represent the firm in an ethical manner, a variety of training methods must be employed.

Key Words: *Beverage Manufacturing Firms, Internal Communication, Internal Marketing, Internal Training, Sales Force Performance.*

Introduction
Internal marketing is the practice of promoting an organisation's goals, procedures, culture, brands, products, plus services to its own employees. According to this theory, businesses need happy staff in order to have happy customers (Baran & Arabelen, 2017; Braimah, 2016). Internal marketing principles have been around for longer than thirty years. In the early writings of Berry, Hensel, and Burke (1976), internal marketing was presented as a strategy that designed an organisation's campaign and the marketing of such a campaign to its employees as though they were the organisation's customers.

Internal marketing deals with marketing activities that focus on employee satisfaction (Udonde et al., 2022). Internal marketing forms part of the broader organisation's objectives. Studies have indicated that the application of internal marketing can foster cross-functional connections, augment the inventiveness of sales personnel, promote comprehension, and reduce internal friction inside departments (Braimah, 2016). Implementing a number of tactics aimed at inspiring, training, and maintaining the sales staff and, consequently, meeting client expectations is necessary for internal marketing. The brewing industries are currently adopting an internal marketing strategy to raise their product awareness, grow their external customer base, plus increase market share with their customers in order to satisfy and maintain customers' loyalty due to intense competition and rising customer awareness and complexity (Etuk et al., 2021).

Internal marketing remains one of the strategies adopted by best-practice organisations to satisfy and win the loyalty of customers. Studies have found a positive association between internal marketing and its dimensions on employee performance (Shrestha, 2020; Munir et al., 2015). Nonetheless, measuring internal marketing dimensions remains challenging. Nevertheless, a few academics propose a few dimensions. For instance, Berry and Parasuraman (2004) highlight training and development, while Udonde et al. (2022) indicate motivation and promotion. Yeun, Wee, and Bang (2020) considered communication, training, plus information as internal marketing indices, whereas Varey (2002) identified motivation plus training. In order to forecast sales force performance in the beverage manufacturing companies operating in Nigeria, the researchers in this study use the aspects of internal marketing, which are summed up as internal communication and internal training.

Statement of the Problem

The practice of making internal products—jobs—available to fulfill the demands of a crucial client, the sales force, and the organization's overarching goals is known as internal marketing. According to Parasuraman et al. (2013), the caliber of the services rendered determines both attitudinal loyalty and customer happiness. Whether or not the service providers have a tendency to offer clients services of this caliber is up to them. This illustrates the need to prioritize the human element (sales force). Increasing employee performance is an organization's main objective, and in order to do this, it needs to use the right internal marketing strategies that can affect sales force performance (Udonde et al., 2022). There doesn't seem to be much research on internal marketing and its components—internal communication and training—in relation to sales force performance, despite the growing interest in internal marketing literature. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, previous studies disregarded the impact that internal marketing characteristics have on sales force performance in Nigerian beverage manufacturing organizations.

The main objective of this study was to examine the effect of internal marketing on sales force performance in the selected beverage manufacturing firms operating in Nigeria. The specific objectives include to;

i. examine the effect of internal communication on sales force performance of the selected beverage firms in Nigeria.

ii. ascertain the effect of internal training on sales force performance of the selected manufacturing firms in Nigeria.

In line with the research objectives, the following research hypotheses were formulated

H_{01}: There is no significant effect of internal communication on sales force performance of the selected beverage firms in Nigeria.

H_{02}: Internal training does not have any significant effect on sales force performance of the selected firms in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Internal-marketing

The phrase "the employees are the first market of a company" is one that Sasser and Arbeit (1976) used to introduce the idea of internal marketing (Kimura, 2017). That is, the emphasis on treating employees as internal customers is referred to as "internal-marketing" in the marketing literature (Kanyurhi & Akonkwa, 2016). Internal marketing, according to Pantouvakis (2012), is the use of "a marketing perspective for managing an organization's human resources". Because internal marketing shows a win-win cooperation between employees and the company (Matanda & Ndubisi, 2013), it is crucial in a company and should come before external marketing in order to have high-quality services provided by motivated employees (Piha & Avlonitis, 2018; To et al., 2015). Prior to being applied to clients outside the organization, internal marketing is the application of marketing theory and practice to employees within a corporation (Alma, 2014). People who serve consumers must be hired by managers, and they must work hard. Internal marketing, according to Alma (2014), requires managers to treat their staff as customers, consider the quality of their work as a product, and try to design services and products as much as possible to meet the needs of their customers outside the company. As a result, to develop a business in the field of high contact services, the concept of internal marketing is used in order to provide better and more satisfying services with increasing customer satisfaction.

Internal marketing, according to Kotler (2008), is the process of hiring and educating knowledgeable staff members who are eager to provide excellent customer service. A skilled marketer understands that internal marketing initiatives can be just as vital as external marketing initiatives, if not more so. The best service is frequently promised before the firm workforce is prepared to deliver it. The definition given above demonstrates how critical it is to address employee needs in order to advance and hire qualified personnel to serve customers. Additionally, studies by Akar and Ertürk (2010) and Popa et al. (2017) offered empirical proof of the beneficial effects of employee empowerment and decision-making centralization on businesses' capacity for innovation. Similar to this, McLean's (2005) emphasis on the supervisor's role in fostering an environment that supports risk-taking should assist staff in developing creative ideas for businesses. Regarding the level of employee training, Wilkins (2002) and Farouk (2016) both emphasize the need of providing employees with suitable training that aims to improve their skills and knowledge.

Dimensions of Internal Marketing

Internal Communication

The primary objective of internal marketing is to cultivate salespeople who understand customer pleasure and service excellence. Sales agents must be aware with the organization's guiding principles, vision, marketing strategies, long- and short-term goals, market segmentation, customer wants and expectations, among other things, in order for this to be accomplished (Bansal, Verma, Bansal, & Mann, 2020). According to Etuk (2018), good communication is a two-way process in which managers and staff members listen to one another and foster relationships. The process of information exchange between a sender and a recipient, where a message travels through communication channels, is referred to as communication (Kozaric, 2015; Ebitu, 2015).

Internal Training

Anyadighibe et al. (2019) define training as a learning process that aims to improve employee performance by acquiring knowledge and honing skills, concepts, rules, attitudes, and behaviours. Internal training is a collection of activities and procedures designed to help staff members advance their knowledge and abilities so they may work better and benefit the company and themselves (Amahalu, Okudo, Okafor, & Onyeka, 2023). In addition to guaranteeing that workers do their duties to a high standard, training also fosters a feeling of community among workers. Employers can use training to impart knowledge to new hires from seasoned staff members. This fosters an atmosphere where people skills can thrive, empowering employees to deliver polite, compassionate, and understanding service (Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler, 2008; Narteh, 2012).

Sales force Performance

The sales staff Individuals can also be referred to as sales agents, personal sellers, salespeople, and salesmanship." They function as a liaison between the company and its clientele. Their task is to find purchase answers from clients in an effort to influence them to make a purchase (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010). Every person in a company whose responsibility it is to convince consumers to purchase their goods is considered the sales force (Anyadighibe et al., 2019). Esu (2012) defines sales force as an interpersonal exchange in which a seller discloses and meets a buyer's needs for the benefit of both parties over the long run. According to Anyadighibe et al. (2019), the definition of Esu emphasizes that selling involves more than just closing deals and receiving orders; it also include carrying out tasks that improve connections between parties. Therefore, the effectiveness of the sales force has the potential to convert the organization's inputs into outputs (goods and services) at the lowest possible cost (Elgaed, 2019).

Theoretical framework

The Resource-Based View (RBV)

The resource-based view highlights the role of a firm’s internal characteristics and its environment in determining performance (Bruderl *et al.,* 1992). According to this perspective, a company is made up of diverse resources that have the capacity to combine to produce useful capabilities that will work in the company's favor (Wernerfelt, 1995; Caldeira & Ward, 2003). Thus, the RBV improves knowledge of how resource heterogeneity helps businesses achieve and maintain success (Thornhill and Amit, 2003).

One of the first contributions to the RBV was Penrose's (1959) definition of a firm as a collection of management and entrepreneurial resources. According to Barney (1991), these resources provide services that are used as inputs in the production process. Heterogeneity, which sets one company apart from another, is the consequence of the variety of services provided by these resources (Peteraf, 1993). According to Lerner and Almor (2002), a corporation can leverage its competitive advantage to improve performance. As to Edelman et al. (2008), the RBV merely states that changes in a firm's efficiency in combining its resources lead to performance discrepancies among them.

Barney (1991) elaborated that resources possess unique qualities that make them valuable, uncommon, non-replaceable, and capable of sustaining a competitive advantage. Wernerfelt (1995) defined these resources as strengths and weaknesses in the form of tangible and intangible assets that are connected to a company in a semi-permanent manner. Miller and Shamsie (1996) assert that intangible assets are knowledge-based, whereas tangible assets are property-based. Because they are difficult to copy and cannot be easily identified, intangible assets have a higher likelihood of producing a sustained competitive advantage as compared to tangible assets (Miller and Shamsie, 1996). The study's internal marketing aspects were well-suited by RBV, which served as the study's foundation.

Human Capital Theory- Schultz (1961)

When classical economics first appeared in 1776, a scientific theory that would later become known as human capital theory was born (Fitzsimons, 1999). Human capital was named one of the key drivers of national economic growth in the modern economy by Schultz (1961). According to the human capital idea, spending money on education and training is expensive but should be regarded as an investment because it's done to advance one's own personal growth. According to Becker's (1964) introduction, the theory of human capital can be described as the acquisition of skills, and skills acquisition can be accomplished through education and training. The best way to acquire human capital is through education, and investing in training is another crucial strategy. According to Woodhall (2001), human capital has an impact on different societal facets. When compared to the quantitative input of labor force, land, and financial capital, several economists discovered that the primary factor in raising individual incomes during the 1950s was the investment of human capital (Salamon, 1991).

An individual's knowledge and abilities can easily be applied to specific commodities and services through the investment of human capital (Romer, 1990).There is a popular opinion that learning is the key element to expand the human capital, which is essential for employee performance in courier firms, given that the accumulation of knowledge plus skills plays a significant role in that of human capital. Put differently, learning is a crucial part of acquiring knowledge plus skills through a variety of methods, including relationships with others (Sleezer et al., 2003). Currently, it is permissible for the conceptual basis of a person's human capital to be based on the information and skills that person has learned. Human capital is a basic source of economic production and an investment that persons make in themselves to boost their output, according to Rodriquez and Loomis (2007; Mulgan, 2005). Sheffin (2003) saw human capital as the pool of

knowledge and skills that are manifested in the capacity to execute work in a way that generates economic value from a production-oriented perspective. As a result, human capital combines instrumental meaning, which is employed to create certain values, with endogenous meaning, which comes from within. There is no doubt that education and training may play a significant role in defining the notion of human capital in terms of the ability to either dependently or independently develop these values.

Empirical review

Khansa et al. (2012) looked into how internal marketing affected market orientation, organizational commitment, and business performance of commercial banks. The study's data came from 12 Pakistani commercial banks. Data were gathered using quantitative research methods, and the study's sample size was 500 bank employees. On SPSS 18.00, inferential analysis methods were used to further evaluate the data. According to the study's findings, internal marketing initiatives significantly influenced employees' dedication, market orientation, and the firm's total profitability. Additionally, there was no evidence to support the mediation link between internal marketing and market orientation and organizational commitment.

Waddah and Nooraini (2016) looked at how internal marketing affected job satisfaction among Yemeni bank employees. Internal marketing elements, which included development, internal communications, vision, rewards, plus empowerment, served as the study's independent variable. The dependent variable was the elements that contributed to job satisfaction, which included pay, supervision, work, promotions, plus coworkers. 407 Yemeni bank workers completed a survey questionnaire for the study, which then used descriptive statistics along with exploratory factor analysis to examine the data. Additionally, the study employed structural equation modeling, and the results indicated that there is a substantial correlation between internal marketing plus job happiness. The findings of this study demonstrated that internal marketing enhances job satisfaction.

Amangala and Wali (2013) assessed how internal marketing strategy affected worker productivity. Precisely, the study used the domains of internal marketing identified by Greene et al. (1994) as the predictor and criterion variables, respectively. Affective organizational commitment served as the study's moderating variable. Employee performance served as the study's moderating variable. In order to collect data from the target population, the study also used a questionnaire instrument. 150 employees were then purposefully chosen from ten service companies serving the aviation industry at Nigeria's Port Harcourt International Airport. With the aid of SPSS version 18, the obtained data were also examined utilizing the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient plus Simple Regression. Findings demonstrated a strong and favorable influence of internal marketing promotion on worker performance. Additionally, internal marketing reward programs had a favorable and significant impact on workers' output, and affective organizational commitment plus output were found to be positively correlated. It was advised that stakeholders and managers of businesses in the Nigerian aviation sector use internal marketing strategies to encourage their staff to work as productively as possible.

Al-Khasawneh (2016) investigated the effect of internal marketing on employee job satisfaction in Islamic banks using the city of Jordan as a case study. The study's objective was to assess how internal marketing tactics affect worker satisfaction. The research findings indicate that all four internal marketing elements - employee empowerment, training initiatives, incentives and rewards, and internal communication - have a noteworthy influence on job satisfaction among employees in Jordan's Islamic banks.

Alamro (2015) conducted a study titled "The Impact of Internal Marketing on NPD". The article's objective was to help Jordan's manufacturing sector integrate new product development (NPD) with internal marketing elements including communication, incentive, and rewards. The study's conclusions show how internal marketing factors positively influence the creation of new products.

Efe and Akyol (2019) conducted empirical research on Turkish participation banks to examine the impact of internal marketing on internal branding. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the impact of internal marketing tactics on internal branding initiatives in the Turkish banking sector. Their findings demonstrated that highly motivated staff members who had received training from their companies were crucial to the connected organization's branding process' success.

Anyadighibe et al. (2019) studied the effect of sales representative motivation and training on the sales performance of service marketing organizations (First Bank Plc, Guaranty Trust Bank, and Premium Pension Limited) in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. The study assessed how financial and non-financial motivation and training affected the sales performance of Calabar-based service marketing companies. The results of their study showed that sales representatives' motivation and training had a substantial impact on how effectively service marketing organizations performed in terms of sales.

Braimah (2016) carried out a study on employee dedication and internal marketing in the hotel sector. The study examined how information and communication technology (ICT) affects employee commitment as well as internal communication, employee growth, and motivation. The study's findings showed that every facet of internal marketing significantly impacted workers' dedication.

Baran and Arabelen (2017) carried out a quantitative study to investigate the impact of internal marketing on cruise agents' work satisfaction. The authors set out to investigate the relationship between employee happiness and internal marketing and its foundations. According to the findings of their study, internal marketing—which includes development, vision and communication, and a reward system—improves the job satisfaction of Zmir's container line ship agents.

Ibrahim and Yesiltas (2021) studied the impacts of internal marketing on customer relationships, loyalty, and promotion at the Multination Beverage Company in Iraq while taking into consideration the mediating roles of reward, incentive, and training. The

results of the study indicated that while training demonstrated a substantial, discernible trend in terms of customer connections and promotion, incentives and rewards had the biggest impact on the relationship between internal marketing and employee loyalty. This demonstrates how a well-trained staff member may provide excellent customer service and establish a stronger rapport with customers to help the realization of the organization's mission.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey design method to help analyze the inherent problem. The survey study method was adopted because its approach provides a holistic and in-depth investigation of the phenomena and is compatible with a critical interpretive research paradigm. The design is descriptive and analytical in nature employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Survey approach allowed the researchers to solicit information that can be aggregated and quantified.

The population of this study is made up of management and staff of 15 food/beverage firms quoted on the Nigerian Stock Exchange. For the present study, convenience sampling was used because of the nature of the respondents. Convenience sampling was employed because it offered the researcher the opportunity to select and interview those who were willing to provide the relevant information needed for the study. The researcher approached these respondents in their offices where copies of the questionnaire were administered and retrieved immediately after completion. Based on the sample size of 153, copies of the questionnaire were administered.

Before the questionnaire which was the major research instrument used for actual study, its content was validated through pilot survey. The importance of this test was to ensure that the questionnaire covered all the intended dimensions of the research. It l also assisted the researcher in eliminating questions that were ambiguous. Space allocated for the answers was also be determined to be adequate or not. In response to this, necessary modification and adjustment were made. A minimum of five (5) academics which included the research supervisor were involved in this testing. Thus, content validity was used. Firstly, test re-test was conducted to establish the initial reliability of the instrument. A further reliability test was conducted in the study using the Cronbach's Alpha. The reliability of the instrument was upheld when the reliability coefficient (r) exceeded 0.7 according to Nunnally (1978). Cronbach's alpha seeks to measure how closely test items are related to one another and thus measuring the same construct.

The test of hypotheses was done using simple regression model. All analyses were done through the use of SPSS (version 20.0).

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Result and Discussion

Effect of internal communication on sales force performance of the designated beverage firms in Nigeria

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Table 1. Simple regression analysis showing the effect of internal communication on sales force performance of the selected beverage firms in Nigeria

Model	B	Std. Error	t-value	P-Value	R	R^2	F-Ratio
(Constant)	2.771	0.212	13.070	0.000	0.913	0.882	67.129
Internal communication	0.312	0.046	6.782	0.000			

Source: SPSS Output, 2023

The results in Table 1 reveal that internal communication exerts positive and significant effect on sales force performance of the designated beverage firms in Nigeria. The R-squared value reveals that internal communication explained almost 88 percent of the variances in online customer patronage in Nigeria, while 12% of the variations are explained by other factors not included in the model. The F-ratio is 67.129, and its p-value was 0.000 which is less than the critical value implying that internal communication significantly affects sales force performance of the designated beverage firms in Nigeria. Therefore, the null hypothesis ($H0_1$) which states that there is no significant effect of internal communication on sales force performance of the designated beverage firms in Nigeria is rejected and the alternative hypothesis accepted. It can be concluded from the result that there is significant effect of internal communication on sales force performance of the designated beverage firms in Nigeria.

This is consistent with research conducted at various locations by Al-khasawneh (2016), Efe and Akyol (2019), and Braimah (2016), which indicated that internal communication has a favorable relationship with workers' performance and dedication inside an organization.

Effect of internal training on sales force performance of the selected manufacturing firms in Nigeria

Table 2. Simple regression analysis showing the effect of internal training on sales force performance of the designated manufacturing firms in Nigeria

Model	B	Std. Error	t-value	P-Value	R	R^2	F-Ratio
(Constant)	3.412	0.303	11.260	0.000	0.934	0.903	62.667
Internal training	0.311	0.074	4.202	0.000			

Source: SPSS Output, 2023

The results in Table 2 reveal that internal training has positive and significant effect on sales force performance of the designated manufacturing firms in Nigeria. The R-squared value reveals that internal training explained almost 90 percent of the variances in sales force performance of the selected manufacturing firms in Nigeria, while 10% of the variations are explained by other factors not included in the model. The F-ratio is 62.667, and its p-value was 0.000 which is less than the critical value and shows that internal training significantly affects sales force performance of the designated manufacturing firms in Nigeria. Therefore, the null hypothesis ($H0_2$) which states that internal training

does not have any significant effect on sales force performance of the designated firms in Nigeria is rejected and the alternative hypothesis accepted. It can thus be resolved that internal training has significant effect on sales force performance of the designated firms in Nigeria.

This aligns with the findings of Anyadighibe et al. (2019), Ibrahim and Yesiltas (2021), and Al-Khasawneh (2016), who also discovered a noteworthy correlation between employee performance and training. Training gives talents confidence, energy, and encouragement. With this, the sales team can work effectively and promote the company's goods and services.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Manufacturing firms' sales performance is largely dependent on the training and communication provided to its sales staff. It is impossible to overestimate the significance of sales representative training since it is essential to their professional development, self-assurance, and drive to achieve peak performance. The study's findings led to the following conclusions being drawn: The study found, empirically, that internal marketing significantly improves the effectiveness of sales forces in Nigerian beverage manufacturing enterprises. Additionally, a substantial positive association was shown when the two aspects of internal marketing—internal communication and internal training—were examined and applied independently to the sales force's effectiveness. The researchers' recommendations were based on the study's findings and conclusion:

i. Fostering mutual relationships amongst the persons concerned is a two-way process that is achieved through communication. The business should keep lines of communication open so that the sales staff and upper management may communicate. By doing this, the business will strengthen relationships, boost productivity, and improve its reputation.

ii. The management of beverage firms in Nigeria have to give training its sales force top priority if they are to succeed. To give the sales force the knowledge and direction they need to represent the firm in an ethical manner, a variety of training methods must be employed. It should be the goal of annual conferences and seminars to raise the level of knowledge among sales personnel. Since those who are less experienced or newer to the sector might benefit from their knowledge, it is crucial to acknowledge the worth of a more experienced employee directly supervising and teaching sales representatives. In addition, management ought to create a policy that guides the retraining and training of the sales staff, improve a successful communication plan, and foster partnership.

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