

Original Research

Internal Marketing and Sales Force Performance of Beverage Manufacturing Firms in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study was designed to investigate the influence of internal marketing on the sales force performance of beverage manufacturing firms in Nigeria. The underpinnings of internal marketing were internal communication and internal training. The population of the study included the salespersons that were involved in the sales of beverage-manufactured drinks, both alcoholic and non-alcoholic, in Nigeria. A sample size of 152 was investigated. A structured questionnaire served as the primary instrument for data collection. The structured questionnaire was administered to every member of the population, and 144 copies of the instrument were filled out and returned in useable form. Data collected were analysed using percentage analysis, and hypotheses formulated were tested using simple linear regression analysis. Findings from the study revealed that there is a significant relationship between the internal marketing variables (i.e., internal communication and internal training) and sales force performance. Based on the empirical findings, the author concluded that internal marketing strategies influence the sales force performance of beverage manufacturing firms in Nigeria. The researchers recommended that management show more interest in communication and training to improve and enhance sales through the performance of the sales team.

Keywords: Internal communication, Internal marketing, Internal training, Methods of sales force training, Sales force performance.

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Introduction

Internal marketing is the practice of promoting an organisation's goals, procedures, culture, brands, products, and services to its own employees. This concept advocates that to have a satisfied customer, organisations must also have satisfied employees (Baran and Arabelen, 2017; Braimah, 2016). Historically, internal marketing concepts have existed for more than three decades. 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, Akpan, and Awah, 2022).

Internal marketing forms part of the broader organisation's objectives. Studies have shown that internal marketing is used to develop inter-functional relationships, enhance sales force creativity, improve understanding, and minimise departmental conflict (Braimah, 2016). Internal marketing calls for the implementation of a series of strategies directed at motivating, developing, and retaining the sales force and, as a result, fulfilling the expectations of customers. Intense competition and increasing customer awareness and complexity are now causing the brewing industries to adopt an internal marketing strategy to increase their external customer base, creating product awareness and enhancing market share with their customers in order to satisfy and secure customers' loyalty (Etuk, Usani, and Udoh 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 relationship between internal marketing and its dimensions on employee performance (Shrestha, 2020; and Munir, Othman, Shukur, Ithnin, and Rusdi, 2015). Nonetheless, measuring internal marketing dimensions remains challenging. Despite this, some researchers suggest some dimensions. For example, Udonde *et al.* (2022) suggest motivation and promotion; Berry and Parasuraman (2004) identify training and development. Yeun, Wee, and Bang (2020) considered communication, training, and information as internal marketing dimensions, while Varey (2002) identified motivation and training. In this study, the researchers adopt the dimensions of internal marketing, summarised as internal communication and internal training, to predict sales force performance in the beverage manufacturing firms operating in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Internal marketing is the process of making internal products (jobs) available to meet the needs of a key customer (the sales force) while also satisfying the organisation's overall objectives. Parasuraman *et al.* (2013) believe that customer satisfaction and attitudinal loyalty are determined by the quality of the service provided. It depends on the people providing the services if they have a propensity to provide customers with services of this calibre. This demonstrates why the human (sales force) aspect must always be prioritised. An organisation's primary goal is to increase employee performance, and in order to do so, it must adopt the appropriate internal marketing underpinnings that can have an impact on sales force performance (Udonde *et al.*, 2022). Despite the increased interest in internal marketing literature, it appears that there is little study on internal

marketing and its dimensions (internal communication and training) as they relate to sales force performance. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no research has yet looked into the relationship between internal marketing's dimensions and sales force performance in the beverage manufacturing firms in Nigeria, which was overlooked in prior studies. This research looks into that missing relationship. The main objective of this research was to investigate the relationship between internal marketing and sales force performance in the selected beverage manufacturing firms operating in Nigeria. The specific objectives include:

1. To investigate the relationship between internal communication and sales force performance of the selected beverage firms in Nigeria.
2. To ascertain the link between internal training and the sales force performance of the selected manufacturing firms in Nigeria.

Hypotheses for Research

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

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between internal communication and the sales force performance of the selected beverage firms in Nigeria.

H₀₂: Internal training does not have any link with the sales force performance of the selected firms in Nigeria.

Review of Related Literature

Overview of Internal Marketing

The internal marketing philosophy was first introduced by Berry in 1981. This philosophy was based on the principle that organisations should treat their employees (sales force) as their clients (Anaza and Rutherford, 2012; Peltier, Nill, and Schibrowsky, 2013). Various scholars have come up with different definitions of internal marketing. According to Chandrika (2014), internal marketing is a traditional marketing approach that focuses on basic marketing mix principles, which include the sales force as the product, and uses price, place, and promotion to build the product's popularity. Internal marketing, according to Chang and Chang (2008), aims to hire, educate, and inspire internal staff members to understand and value customer satisfaction, as well as support and collaborate with the marketing department to deliver superior customer service. Kotler (2010) sees internal marketing as the job of hiring, training, and motivating a competent sales force that wants to serve customers.

Dimensions of Internal Marketing

Internal Communication

Internal marketing's main goal is to develop salespeople who are aware of client satisfaction and service quality. This can only be accomplished if the sales representatives

are aware of the organisation's core values, guiding principles, vision, marketing strategies, long- and short-term objectives, market segmentation, consumer needs and expectations, etc. (Bansal, Verma, Bansal, and Mann, 2020). Effective communication, in the opinion of Etuk (2018), is a two-way process in which employees and managers both listen to one another and promote mutual relationships. Communication refers to the process of exchanging information between a sender and a receiver, where the message flows from one person to another through communication channels (Kozaric, 2015; Ebitu, 2015).

Internal Trainings

According to Anyadighibe *et al.* (2019), training is a learning process that involves the acquisition of knowledge and the sharpening of skills, concepts, rules, attitudes, and behaviours to enhance the performance of employees. Internal training can be defined as a set of events and processes aimed at developing the employees' skills and knowledge to improve their performance and achieve positive results for both the organisation and the employees. Training is important not only for ensuring that employees perform their jobs satisfactorily, but it also helps to promote a sense of belonging among employees. Organisations may use training to teach new hires what seasoned employees know. This creates an environment where interactional skills can flourish, enabling staff members to provide courteous, kind, and empathic service (Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler, 2008; Narteh, 2012).

Methods of Sales Force Training

There are diverse methods of sales force training in an organisation, but for the purpose of this study, the different methods of training will be grouped into two categories: on-the-job training and off-the-job training.

On-the-job training method

On-the-job training is just learning through practise and experience. This strategy gives employees the chance to develop their skills or talents through practical work experience. The point about on-the-job training is that learning is taking place as the job is going on; the learner does not leave his job for training; rather, he learns through practise and experience on the job with the help of experienced or senior colleagues on the job. There is a learner and a supervisor, both located at a defined place of work. Though the learner is as much an employee as a supervisor, the former has to 'learn the ropes' from the latter, who is expected to be more knowledgeable and experienced. The supervisor need not be academically more qualified than the learner. What is crucial is that the supervisor has more experience born out of a longer exposure to the job than the new person or learner (Ubong, 2007).

Off-the-job training

Off-the-job training is learning that takes place off-the-job, away from the work place, or the centre may be near the work place. It takes the form of lectures, discussions, demonstrations, and role-playing. The lecture method is the most efficient way to present

company policies, procedures, and selling concepts and principles. Lectures provide the new salesperson with an introduction to the company and the subject of selling. The discussion method provides salespeople with the opportunity to state their ideas and opinions on a variety of subjects related to personal selling and company policies. Demonstration involves showing rather than explaining the best way to sell a product. Sales force personnel can see how their jobs may be performed instead of merely hearing explanations. Through role-playing, sales trainers are brought closer to the real-world sales environment by having them pitch a product in an imagined setting (Ebitu, 2012).

Concept of sales force Performance

The sales force People are also known as personal sellers, salesmanship, salespersons, "and sales representatives." They serve as a point of contact between the customers and the organisation. Their work is to search for purchase responses from customers, persuading them to make a buying decision (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010). The sales force consists of all the employees of an organisation whose job it is to persuade customers to buy their organisation's product (Anyadighibe *et al.*, 2019). According to Esu (2012), sales force is an interpersonal communication during which a seller uncovers and fulfils a buyer's wants for the mutual long-term advantage of both parties. Anyadighibe *et al.* (2019) explain that the definition of Esu points to the fact that selling is more than making a sale and getting orders; the functions are performed to enhance mutual relationships. Hence, sales force performance has the capacity to translate the organisation's inputs into outputs (products and services) at the lowest achievable cost (Elgaed, 2019).

Functions of the Sales Force

The sales force performs functions like: gathering useful information that enables the company to know what the consumers want and how to serve them excellently well; portraying a good image of the organisation to the customers; ensuring customer satisfaction by informing the marketing department about the needs and wants of the customers; and also insisting that the wishes of the consumers must be treasured by providing what they wish for. They also conduct marketing research about the behaviour of customers, such as why they accept or reject a particular product in relation to other products, which enables top management to formulate decisions and marketing strategies.

Theoretical Framework

The anchor theory for this study is the resource-based view of competitive advantage propounded by Wernerfelt (1984). The theory argues that competitiveness can be achieved by innovatively delivering superior value to customers in a way that customers consider appropriate. This theory underscores the firm as a unique collection of resources, although the theory highlights that not all of these resources possess the potential to provide the firm with a sustained competitive advantage (Nyongesa, 2014). A resource-based view is one of the substantial theories of strategic management. This theory suggests that an organisation's internal resources make up the majority of the factors that influence how it performs. The theory holds that organisational internal resources are more important than external factors in developing and retaining competitive advantage (David, 2011). This theory is significant to this study because it explains how beverage

firms in Nigeria can use internal training and internal communication as resources to improve sales force performance and gain a competitive advantage.

Empirical Review and conceptual framework

Al-Khasawneh (2016) used the city of Jordan as a case study for his investigation into the impact of internal marketing on employee job satisfaction in Islamic banks. The aim of the study was to evaluate the influence of internal marketing strategies on employee satisfaction. The study discovered that each of the internal marketing dimensions—empowering employees, training programmes, incentives and rewards, and internal communication—had a significant effect on employees' job satisfaction in the Islamic banks in Jordan.

A study entitled "The Impact of Internal Marketing on NPD" was undertaken by Alamro (2015). The goal of the article was to integrate new product development (NPD) with internal marketing dimensions (training, communication, motivation, and reward) in the Jordanian manufacturing industry. The research findings demonstrate how internal marketing dimensions help favourably boost new product development.

A research work conducted by Efe and Akyol (2019) on the effect of internal marketing on internal branding: empirical research on participation banks in Turkey. The study's goal was to assess how internal marketing strategies affected internal branding strategies in Turkey's banking industry. Their results showed that motivated employees who have received training by their organisations played a significant role in the success of their associated organisation's branding process.

In Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria, Anyadighibe *et al.* (2019) conducted a study on the impact of sales representative training and motivation on the sales performance of service marketing firms (First Bank Plc, Guaranty Trust Bank, and Premium Pension Limited). The study evaluated the impact of training and motivation, both financial and non-financial, on the sales performance of service marketing organisations in Calabar. Their study findings demonstrated that training and motivation for sales representatives significantly affected how well service marketing organisations performed in terms of sales.

A study on internal marketing and employee commitment in the hospitality industry was conducted by Braimah (2016). The study looked at internal communication, employee development, motivation, and the impact of information and communication technology (ICT) on employee commitment. The study's conclusion demonstrated that every aspect of internal marketing had a substantial effect on employees' commitment.

A quantitative study was conducted by Baran and Arabelen (2017) to examine how internal marketing affected the job satisfaction of ship agents. The authors' aim was to examine how internal marketing and its underpinnings affect employees' satisfaction. Their research conclusion showed that internal marketing (development, vision and communication, and reward system) enhances the job satisfaction of container line ship agents' office staff in Zmir.

At the Multination Beverage Company in Iraq, Ibrahim and Yesiltas (2021) conducted a study on the effects of internal marketing on customer relationships, loyalty, and promotion while accounting for the mediating roles of training, motivation, and reward. According to the study findings, incentives and rewards had the greatest influence on the relationship between internal marketing and employee loyalty, whereas training showed a significant, distinct trend in terms of customer relationships and promotion. This shows that a well-trained employee can deliver great service to the client and connect with them more effectively to support the advancement of the organisation's vision.

Existing studies reviewed showed that the application of internal marketing strategies can significantly enhance the performance of business organisations in Nigeria and around the world. The conceptual framework reveals how the independent variables are related to the dependent variable. In this study, sales force performance was held as a one-dimensional construct. Hence, the relationships are portrayed by the conceptual framework developed and presented in Figure 1. to support this investigation.

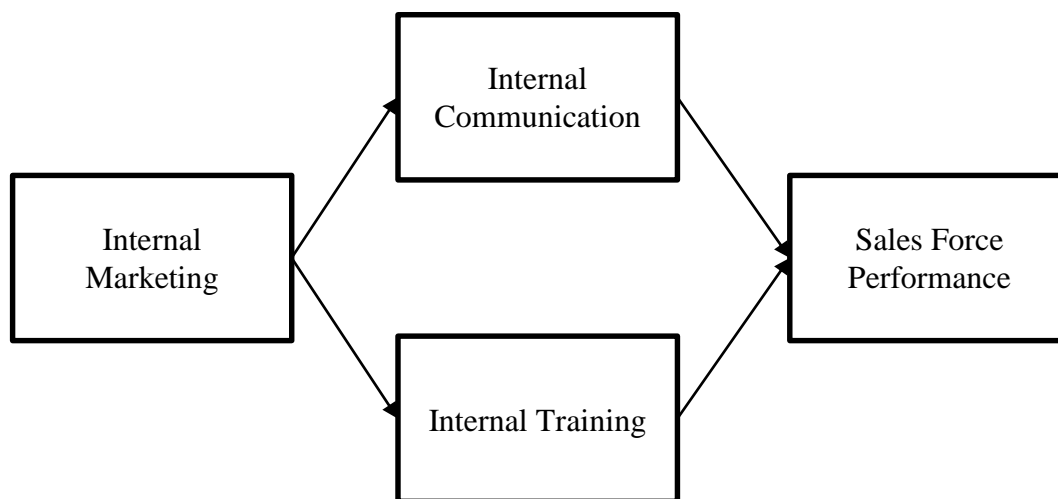


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of internal marketing and sales force performance.

Methodology

The survey research design was utilised for this investigation, and the population of the study consisted of all persons involved in the sales of beverages (alcoholic and non-alcoholic) in Nigeria. These people are sales representatives (SR), depot managers (DM), regional trade marketing managers (RTMM), district sales managers (DSM), regional business managers (RBM), and van salesmen. All together, they made a total of 152 people who were posted to work in the three (3) senatorial districts of Akwa Ibom State. The research instruments were distributed to every member of the population using the census method of statistical enumeration. The instrument was divided into two sections. The first section sought demographic information on the respondents, and the second portion gathered data on internal marketing underpinnings and sales force performance. The dependability of the instrument was examined using the Cronbach (Alpha) model. A reliability coefficient for Cronbach's alpha of 0.714 and 0.662 was obtained for internal communication and internal training, while 0.813 was obtained for sales force

performance. The use of the instrument was thought to be justified at this level of Cronbach's coefficient. The data for the study were analysed using descriptive statistics, and the formulated hypotheses were tested using simple linear regression analysis. Each hypothesis was tested at a significance level of 5%.

Model Specification

Sales force performance is estimated to be a function of some internal marketing dimensions such as internal communication and internal training. This can be expressed mathematically as;

$$Y = F (X_1, X_2)$$

Recoded to represent the variables as;

$$Sfp = F (IC \text{ and } IT)$$

The simple regression model that will represent the effect that exists between the independent variables (X_1, X_2) and the dependent variable (Y) will be expressed in this form;

$$H_{01}: Y = a_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + e$$

$$H_{02}: Y = a_0 + \beta_2 X_2 + e$$

To represent the variables in use, the simple linear regression equations are presented as:

$$H_{01}: Sfp = a_0 + \beta_1 Ic + e$$

$$H_{02}: Sfp = a_0 + \beta_2 It + e$$

Where: Sfp (Y) = Sales force performance

IC (X_1) = Internal Communication

IT (X_2) = Internal Training

e = error term

The above estimated equation is a linear function which was used in testing the model separately.

Findings

Data Presentation and Analysis

Out of the total of 152 copies of the questionnaire distributed to respondents, 144 copies were accurately filled out and returned. This constitutes 95% of the total copies of the questionnaire that were found relevant for the study; 8 copies of the questionnaire

were returned incompletely filled. Hence, they were discarded. The breakdown of respondents' feedback is shown in Table 1.:

Table 1. Demographic Data of the Respondents

Variables	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	110	69.9
Female	34	30.1
Total	144	100
Educational Background		
NCE/ND	78	57.2
HND/B.SC	51	35.7
MSC/NBA	15	7.1
Total	144	100
Length of Time Spent on Current Job		
1-5 years	71	52.8
6-10 years	52	24.2
Above 10 years	21	23
Total	144	100

Table 1. indicates that 110 (69.9%) of the respondents were male, while 34 (30.1%) of the respondents were female. This implies that more males are employed as sales representatives than females. For educational qualifications, 78 (57.2%) of the respondents were holders of ND or NCE, 51 (35.7%) of the respondents were holders of HND or BSC, and 15 (7.1%) of the respondents were holders of Msc or MBA. This indicated that the respondents under study were all educated and knowledgeable of the structured questions for the study. In terms of length of time spent, 71 (52.8%) of the respondents affirmed that they had spent 1–5 years, 52 (24.2%) of the respondents said they had spent between 6–10 years, and 21 (23.0%) of the respondents also said they had spent 10 years and above with their respective companies. This indicates that more respondents have stayed with the breweries in Nigeria, indicating that the respondents involved in the study are knowledgeable enough to participate in the study.

Data Presentation and Interpretations

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between internal communication and sales force performance in the selected beverages firms.

Table 2. reveals the correlation coefficient of determination of $R = 0.801$, which indicates that there is 80.1% relationship between the dependent and the independent variables. The R-squared value of 0.647 implies that about 64.7% of the variation in the sales force's performance was explained by internal communication. The F-calculated value of 411.869 and P-value of 0.000 implies that the model was adequate, that is, the independent variable was able to explain the dependent variable very well. The constant value of 7.913 indicates that by keeping internal communication constant, the sales force's performance will remain at 7.913. The coefficient of internal communication was 0.223,

which means that a unit change in internal communication will lead to a 22.3-unit change in sales force performance. Since the P-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that there is a significant positive relationship between internal communication and sales force performance.

Table 2. Results of Simple Linear Regression Analysis between internal communication and sales force performance

	B ₁	SE	B ₂	t-value	Significant (2 tailed)
Constant	7.913	0.333	-	45.239	0.000
Internal Communication	0.223	0.018	0.815	20.393	0.000
Dependent variable: Sales force performance R= 0.801 ^a R ² = 0.647 Adjusted R-square= 0.646 Std. Error estimate= 0.479 F= 411.869					
*significantly related at 5% (p<0.05). B ₁ = unstandardized beta, B ₂ = standardized beta, SE = standard error.					

H₀₂: Internal training does not have any link with sales force performance of the selected firms.

Table 3. Results of Simple Linear Regression Analysis between internal training and sales force performance.

	B ₁	SE	B ₂	t-value	Significant (2 tailed)
Constant	7.520	0.757		9.928	0.000
Internal training	0.600	0.49	0.603	12.353*	0.000
Dependent variable: Sales force performance R = 0.603 ^a R ² = 0.364 Adjusted R-square = 0.361 Std. Error of estimate = 2.14263 F = 152.584 Significance = 0.000					
*significantly related at 5% (p<0.05). B ₁ = unstandardized beta, B ₂ = standardized beta, SE= standard error.					

$$Y = a_0 + \beta_2 X_2 + e$$

$$Sfp = a_0 + \beta_2 It + e$$

Hence, to justify the simple linear regression equation the resulting equation is;

$$Sfp = 7.520 + 0.600It$$

Table 3. shows the correlation coefficient of determination of 0.603, which indicates that 60.3% of the variations in sales force performance were explained by internal training. The F-calculated (152.584) is greater than the critical F-value, which means that there is a significant regression link between the dependent variable and the independent variable. The beta coefficient of 0.600 was obtained for internal training ($= 0.600$, S.E. = 0.049, $t = 12.353$, $p = 0.000$ p 0.05). Since the P-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between internal training and sales force performance.

Discussion

The study was structured on an operational framework that showed the predictor variables (internal communication and internal training) on the criterion variable (sales force performance) with two hypotheses stated and tested. The results from the first hypothesis indicated that there exists a significant and positive relationship between internal communication and sales force performance in the beverage manufacturing firms operating in Nigeria. This result is in agreement with the findings of Al-khasawneh (2016), Efe and Akyol (2019), and Braimah (2016), who in their findings at different geographical locations found that internal communication positively relates to employees' performance and commitment in an organisation.

Also, the second hypothesis examined the link between internal training and sales force performance. Thus, it was tested, and the results showed a significant positive relationship. The null hypothesis was also rejected. Based on that, it was concluded that internal training boosts sales force performance. This finding is in tandem with the works of Anyadighibe *et al.* (2019), Ibrahim and Yesiltas (2021), and Al-Khasawneh (2016), who, similarly, found that training has a significant relationship with employee performance. Training energises, encourages, and inculcates skills with confidence. With this, the sales force can perform and speak positively about the organization's products and services.

Conclusion

The communication and training of sales representatives are key to the sales performance of service marketing companies. The importance of sales representative training cannot be overstated since it plays a crucial role in enhancing their knowledge, boosting their confidence, and motivating them to perform at the top of their game. Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were reached: Empirically, the study established that internal marketing has a significant positive effect on the sales force performance of beverage manufacturing companies in Nigeria. Also, the two dimensions of internal marketing (internal communication and internal training) were tested and applied separately to the effectiveness of the sales force, which showed a significant positive relationship.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of the research, the researchers made the following suggestions:

1. Communication is a two-way process that fosters mutual relationships between the parties involved. The company should maintain an open communication channel through which the sales force can interact with the company's top management. In doing this, the company will improve its image, enhance relationships, and increase productivity.

2. For the breweries in Nigeria to be successful, management must prioritise educating its sales team. Various training techniques must be used to provide the sales force with the necessary information and guidance on how to conduct themselves ethically when representing the company. Annual conferences and seminars should be held to improve the expertise of the sales staff. It's important to recognise the value of a more experienced employee's direct supervision and mentoring of sales reps since those who are less experienced or newer to the industry can benefit from their knowledge.

3. Last but not least, management should establish a policy that directs the retraining and training of the sales force, enhance an effective communication strategy, and provide mutual relationships.

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