

Effect of Internal Marketing on Internal Supply Chain Management through Mediation of Employees' Affective Commitment

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Abstract--- This study examined the relationship of internal marketing and employees' affective commitment with internal supply chain integration. Furthermore, this study also uncovered the mediation mechanism by proposing employees' affective commitment as mediator between internal marketing and internal supply chain integration for services firms. Data of 245 usable responses was collected from five major banks of Thailand through self-administered questionnaire by utilizing convenience sampling. Structural equations modeling was carried out in Smart-PLS 3 in order to test the proposed hypotheses. Results depicted that internal marketing is a significant predictor of internal supply chain integration and this relationship becomes stronger with the intervention of employees' affective commitment. This study sheds a light on the importance of employees for service organizations and provide a way forward to managers for policy making about their employees in order to develop profitable and competitive assets for the organization.

Key Words--- *Internal marketing, employees' affective commitment, internal supply chain integration, Thailand*

1. Introduction

Services sector (e.g. banking sector, health sector, and telecommunication) has been a competitive sector in the world (Ralston, et al., 2015). Moreover, in this competitive environment integration of supply chain plays and undeniable role in the enhancement of business performance [81] and that success can be

drawn from the knowledge of customers and competitors [57]. Contrarily, instability [1-5] in the integration of supply chain can produce unfavorable outcomes for organizations [78]. Therefore, this area has been a considerable focus for researchers and practitioners [76, 81, 55]. Consistently, services sector relies more on internal supply chain (i.e. chain of value-creating activities or processes within the company which turns a product or service into a consumable form for customers). A good integrated supply chain can produce highly satisfied customers for the organization preceded to a good service quality [10]. More conventionally, integration of internal supply chain depends on employees of any service firm in today's industrial age. Therefore, this phenomenon forced organizations to change their views about employees and take them as assets of the organization instead of treating them like slaves –as organizations were used to treat them in the past [5, 1].

Furthermore, in today's turbulent world it has been more difficult to manage services operations and get customers satisfied especially in banking sector [43, 56, 67, 19] and this issue becomes more critical when it comes to developing countries like Thailand [49]. Thailand has 15 commercial banks and 11 foreign banks and it also includes 4 subsidiaries [8]. Moreover, it has several "specialized" government banks. [9].

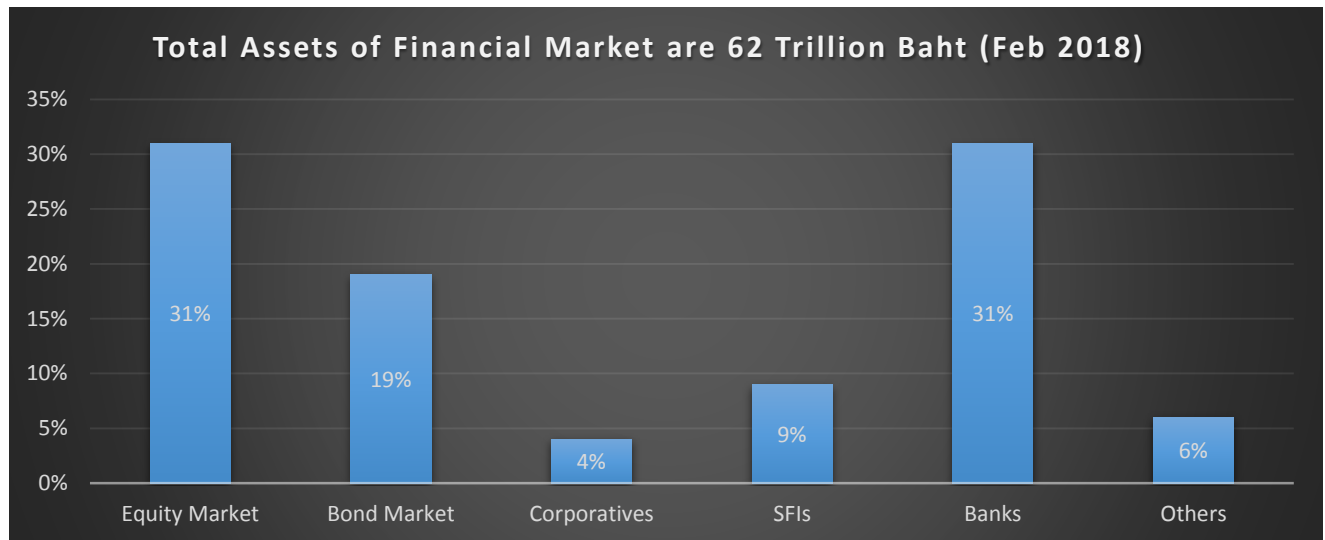


Figure 1. Assets Distribution of Financial Market in Thailand (2018)

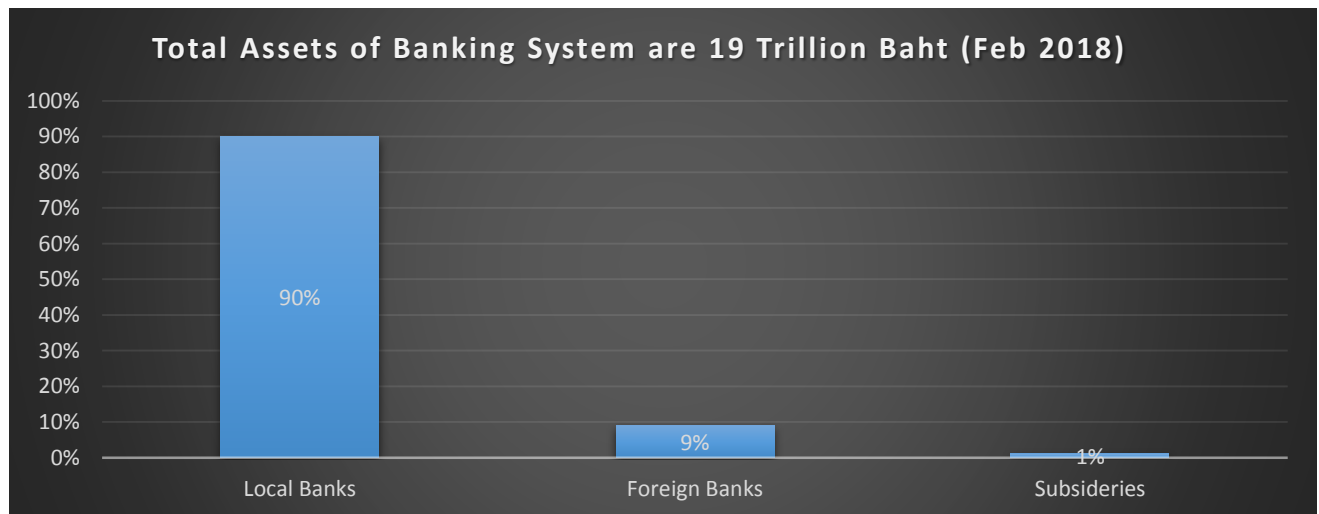


Figure 2. Assets Distribution of Banking system in Thailand (2018)

Consequently, this growing sector in the country demands to focus on factors which can boost the performance of this sector. Furthermore, it is also an undeniable reality that all key players in the services sector have similar kind of services – what makes the services differentiable from competitors are employees and their processes [31, 11]. Therefore, researchers are distinctively investigating the concept of internal marketing which is defined as “*concerned with making available internal products (jobs) that satisfy the needs of a vital internal market (employees) while satisfying the objectives of the organizations*” [12].” Additionally, researchers argued that if service firms start to make their

employees satisfied by fulfilling their requirements then employees will work with high devotion and commitment. In result, organizations performance will boost up in many perspectives [42, 85, 17, 65, 8, 60, 93].

Consistently, relationship of employees and organization’s positive outcomes have been validated in earlier studies [85, 13]. Given that, this strategic and operational importance of supply chain activities integration, many studies have observed various factors as antecedents of supply chain integration and its consequences as well [76, 85, 74, 72, 17, 65, 8, 15]. However, organizational commitment has been an ignored phenomenon from interpersonal

relationship's perspective and its outcome as interpersonal, interdepartmental and other integrated activities. Particularly, a less attention has been paid on internal integration of supply chain antecedents – as internal marketing (IM) through employees' organizational commitment. We relied on Social Capital Theory [14] to develop these relationships. In practice, these relationships should be uncovered to achieve highly integrated internal supply chain in order to provide high quality services to valuable customers of services firms. Hence, we will contribute to the literature of services marketing and supply chain management by unfolding the relationship of internal marketing with internal supply chain integration through employees' organizational commitment [31]. Moreover, this study will provide a way forward to organizations for implementation of internal marketing practices in a new perspective (i.e. internal supply chain management).

This paper is arranged as follows. First, literature about internal integration of supply chain, internal marketing and employees' organizational commitment is reviewed which proceeded to hypotheses development. Second, part contains the methodology used in the study which continued the results of this empirical research and last part presents the discussion, implications, limitations and future research directions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Internal Marketing

Internal marketing is a distinctive view of seeing organizations' internal practices in which employees are viewed as customers and employees' jobs are considered products [89, 3, 4, 63, 23, 26, 17]. Similar, to traditional marketing, it struggles to satisfy internal customers by fulfilling their needs and demands with the help of internal products [3, 63] in order to attract, motivate, develop and retain their employees [31, 18]. Unfortunately, an enormous amount of research has been done on internal marketing in past four decades, but researchers have not yet achieved a consensus on the definition of internal marketing. However, this study utilized the definition of internal marketing – a set of internal practices which direct and motivate employees to get satisfied in their job settings [16].

2.2 Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is usually referred as employees' interest in job and satisfaction from job and organization as well [57]. Furthermore, organizational commitment can be stated as "*the robust belief in accepting organization's objectives and values, devoted endeavor for organization and strong proclivity to maintain membership in organization*" [92]. Organizational commitment is further classified into three categories: normative commitment, affective commitment and continuance commitment. First, normative commitment views about the socialization of employees within the organization and employees are directed by norms, values and pressure of ethics. In this situation people are culturally bound to remain loyal with the organization [6, 93-95]. Second, affective commitment is claimed as belongingness with organization and devoted involvement of employees in organizations' activities. In this type of commitment employees make their identification with organization and remain loyal with the organization which leads to production of great service quality to satisfy organizations' customers [67]. Third, continuance commitment is discussed as employees' devotion of their lives for the organization and they make organization their identities for lifetime [91]. Here, in this study we utilized one dimension of commitment (i.e. affective commitment) because our objective is to develop relationship between internal marketing and internal supply chain integration which is best facilitated by the affective commitment.

2.3 Internal Supply Chain Management and its Integration

Supply chain management is defined as the tendency of collaboration with supply chain members and managing the collaboration of organizations' processes within and outside the organization [22]. Additionally, some researches categorize supply chain integration into internal and external integration [48, 27, 96, 22, 68, 20]. [21] defined internal supply chain as functions, activities or processes inside the company to provide a product or service to the customers. Given that, Lambert et al [52] argued that successful supply chain management is followed by the integration of all business

processes (e.g. material flows, information flows). Moreover, these activities can provide an exceptional outcome to any organization if are well-integrated [48]. Consistently, Sheriff & Ismail [76] reported that excellence in providing customer services can be achieved by integrating all internal supply chain activities. Furthermore, a common consensus has been built that organizations should not ignore the integration of firms' activities both internally and externally to survive in today's global business competition [19, 74, 72, 25]. Additionally, Sezen [73] argued that an organization can access the required information, sense the customers changing tastes, response in proactive way to compete their rivals, with the help of well integrated supply chain. Similarly, Lee [54] proposed that organizations with a well-integrated supply chain structure, can decrease costs of processes and increase market shares to deliver a good value to their shareholders. Furthermore, supply chain integration helps organizations to boost up their performance and it can be modified by the complexity of supply chain [27]. Despite of the given importance of supply chain integration, there is no consensus on the definition of integration among researchers [10].

2.4 Internal Marketing and Internal Supply Chain Integration

Internal supply chain integration has been a compulsion for organizations to meet the required quality demands of products/services in highly competitive marketplace [54] which needs to be integrated at cross-functional level of organization [96, 48, 80]. Furthermore, integrated functional departments play an imperative role in a concerted and synchronized organizations' processes aligned with the production of required demands of quality in order to satisfy their customers [56, 67, 96, 22, 79]. Thus, internal integration includes sharing of information, skills, employees in different collaborated functional departments in order to align all supply chain activities within the organization [96, 22, 16, 25]. So, internal marketing incorporates all social actors to collaborate across functional departments in order to satisfy their uncertain customers [67, 45]. Moreover, it is suggested by Social Capital Theory that effective implementation of internal marketing practices build social assets

(e.g. information sharing,] trust, relational norms, collaborations and integrations etc.) which yield high quality production further leads to highly satisfied customers [56, 66, 67, 87, 23]. Hence, we proposed our first hypothesis as:

H1: Internal marketing has a significant and positive effect on internal supply chain integration.

2.5 Relationship between Internal Marketing and Employees' Commitment

Internal marketing is majorly focused on to transfer a perception among employees that organization values them and takes care of their needs. In result, it motivates and leads to employees' commitment [29, 26]. Similarly, internal marketing also plays an imperative role in higher job performance [41, 58, 28]. Furthermore, Ting [82] argued that organizational commitment is directly influenced by internal marketing, it is also consistent with the findings of [30] in the context of Thailand. Moreover, several researchers found that employees committed with their organization are prone to produce services according to the demanded quality [56, 66, 67]. Conclusively, above discussion mentioned that numerous studies have provided a clear evidence that internal marketing affects organizational commitment. Moreover, Social Capital Theory postulates that internal marketing practices transfer a sense of being cared among employees and in result employees become affectively committed with the organization. Thus, we proposed our second hypothesis as:

H2: Internal marketing has a significant and positive effect on employee's affective commitment.

2.6 Affective Commitment and Internal Integration of Supply Chain

Integration of employees while processing any function of the organization is a compulsion for the effectiveness and efficient production of quality services [56, 66, 67]. Additionally, employees who have affective feelings about the organization and affectively committed with their job and organization will have high work engagement [32, 33, 34]. Particularly, committed employees will be more committed to provide high quality services [72, 86] and will have an attitude of collaboration with others [35, 36]. As a result, these findings suggest that

commitment plays an imperative role in collaboration of employees with each other. Furthermore, Social Capital Theory explains that people integrate/collaborate if they have feelings about each other or a specific goal which can be best achieved by collaboration. Thus, on the basis of above mentioned evidence and theory explanation, we draw our third hypothesis as:

H3: Employees' affective commitment has a significant and positive effect on internal supply chain integration.

2.7 Affective Commitment as mediator

It was purported on the basis of Social Capital Theory that employees' affective commitment plays a mediator role in the relationship of internal marketing and internal supply chain integration.

According to this theory when employees feel that their management cares about them then in result they become committed with the organization and urge to return back in shape of high job performance which results in collaboration with employees and different functional departments. The literature also provide supports to this explained phenomenon that internal marketing affects employees' affective commitment [41, 58, 29, 37, 39] and employees' affective commitment affects internal supply chain integration [56, 66, 67, 72, 86]. Hence, we developed our fourth hypothesis as:

H4: Employees' affective commitment mediates between the relationship of internal marketing and internal supply chain integration.

3. Theoretical Framework



Table 1. Sample Information

		%
Gender	Male	47.8
	Female	52.2
	Total	100
Education	Graduation	49
	Post-graduation	51
	Total	100
Experience	1-5	44.90
	6-10	28.16
	11-15	15.91
	16-20	11.02
	Total	100
Age	20-25	8.98
	26-30	10.61
	31-35	43.26
	36-40	6.93
	41-45	18.36
	46-50	7.75
	51-55	4.08
Total	100	

4. Methods

4.1 Sample and Procedures

This study was aimed to investigate the relationship of internal marketing and internal supply chain integration through the mediation of employees' affective commitment. To accomplish this objective, convenience sampling was utilized and data were collected from five major banks of Thailand. Prior to the data collection, discretion of respondents was taken and after the permission self-administered questionnaires were distributed. Respondents were also taken in confidence by making sure about the confidentiality of their data. Total 900 questionnaires were distributed among respondents, from which 381 respondents delivered back their responses and we left with 245 usable questionnaires.

4.2 Measurements

All variables included in this study were measured on a seven point Likert scale ranging from "1 = Strongly

5.1 Measurement Model

Table 2 represents the basic central tendency measures (i.e. mean and median) and dispersion (i.e. standard deviation). To address the validation of measure's, we calculated the convergent validity and discriminant validity (see Table 2). Firstly, we measured item reliability based on their factor loadings on respective constructs. We considered 0.6 [40] as threshold value in order to include or remove items from the scale, and all items were found highly loaded. Secondly, Cronbach alpha coefficients and composite reliability (CR) was measured to confirm the construct reliability. Table 2 depicts that all values of Cronbach alpha and CR were greater than the concerned threshold value 0.7 [45, 46]. Thirdly, for convergent analysis, authors calculated AVE and found all values greater than threshold point 0.5 [47, 68-70], which confirm the convergent validity of measures. Furthermore, authors compared the squared root of AVE of each construct with its correlations with other constructs. Table 3 summarizes the correlation between constructs and square root of AVE in diagonals with in brackets. Fornell and Larcker [24] argued that square root of AVE should be greater than paired correlation which consequently confirms the discriminant validity.

Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree". The first part of the questionnaire contained total 38 questions in which 16 questions were related to internal marketing [89], six questions were about employees' affective commitment [60] and 16 questions were included to measure internal supply chain integration [10, 71-80]. Second part of the questionnaire was devoted to collect demographic information of respondents.

5. Results

Authors utilized structural equations modeling by partial least squares in Smart-PLS (3). It is a variance based approach to test the hypothetical models. First, section of results contains the descriptive information of the sample. Second, in this study we analyzed the measurement model and then we moved towards the testing of structural model. Results of measurement model and structural model are represented in the next section.

Moreover, we analyzed measurement model against various indices for its fitness like $\chi^2 = 657.3$; $df = 243$; $\chi^2 / df = 2.704$; RMSEA 0.051; GFI = 0.92; CFI = 0.89; IFI = 0.90, NFI = .91 and all were found according to good fit of the model [38, 44, 81-90]. Harman single factor test was employed to fix the issue of common method variance. Single factor explained a variance of 33.76 % which was lower than our default model explained variance (71.4%). According to Podsakoff et al., [61], no single factor should not demonstrate more than 50 percent variance otherwise it will confirm the common method biasness existence. Hence, this proves that proposed theoretical model is statistically fit and therefore SEM can be applied for hypotheses testing.

5.2 Structural equation modeling

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was utilized to determine the effect of internal marketing on internal supply chain integration and mediation mechanism through employees' affective commitment. The proposed theoretical model was tested by using Smart PLS 3.0 which is based on partial least square algorithm. First hypothesis was developed to check the direct effect of internal marketing on internal supply chain integration and hypothesis was stated as

“Internal marketing has a significant and positive effect on internal supply chain integration” which was supported by results ($\beta = 0.113$, $t = 2.212$, $p < .05$). Similarly hypothesis two was stated as “Internal marketing has a significant and positive effect on employee’s affective commitment” and results confirmed the hypothesis ($\beta = .360$, $t = 5.512$, $p < .05$). Third hypothesis was developed to check the effect of employees’ affective commitment on internal supply chain integration and it was stated as “Employees’ affective commitment has a significant and positive effect on internal supply chain integration” and results revealed that employees’ affective commitment has significant effect on internal supply chain integration ($\beta = 0.423$, $t =$

6.023 , $p < .05$). Fourth hypothesis was developed to check the mediation effect of employees’ affective commitment between the internal marketing and internal supply chain integration and it was stated as “Employees’ affective commitment mediates between the relationship of internal marketing and internal supply chain integration” and results confirmed the indirect effect of internal marketing on internal supply chain integration ($\beta = .152$, $t = 4.001$, $p < .05$). Conclusively, the direct and indirect effects both were significant, this shows that partial mediation exist between internal marketing and internal supply chain integration. Table 4 shows the results of direct and indirect effects of SEM.

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis and Convergent Validity

Construct	Items	Mean	Median	SD	Loadings	α	CR	AVE
IM	IM1	5.67	6.00	1.43	.89	.89	.91	.79
	IM2	6.28	7.00	1.51	.94			
	IM3	5.91	6.00	1.46	.83			
	IM4	5.27	6.00	1.52	.86			
	IM5	5.74	6.00	1.47	.82			
	IM6	6.67	7.00	1.44	.91			
	IM7	5.84	6.00	1.42	.94			
	IM8	5.66	6.00	1.46	.88			
	IM9	5.75	6.00	1.45	.87			
	IM10	6.18	7.00	1.48	.91			
	IM11	6.32	7.00	1.49	.93			
	IM12	5.87	6.00	1.47	.89			
	IM13	6.25	7.00	1.43	.86			
	IM14	6.41	7.00	1.48	.87			
	IM15	5.93	6.00	1.51	.91			
	ISCI	IM16	6.13	7.00	1.44			
ISCI1		6.87	7.00	1.62	.91			
ISCI2		6.76	7.00	1.67	.94			
ISCI3		6.93	7.00	1.64	.92			
ISCI4		6.18	6.00	1.63	.89			
ISCI5		6.44	7.00	1.65	.87			
ISCI6		6.39	7.00	1.63	.81			
ISCI7		5.97	6.00	1.64	.84			
ISCI8		6.31	7.00	1.67	.88			
ISCI9		6.43	7.00	1.65	.79			
ISCI10		6.24	6.00	1.62	.81			
EAC	ISCI11	6.35	7.00	1.69	.80	.91	.94	.80
	ISCI12	6.57	7.00	1.66	.92			
	ISCI13	6.36	6.00	1.68	.87			
	ISCI14	6.77	7.00	1.67	.86			
	ISCI15	6.41	7.00	1.71	.84			
	ISCI16	6.83	7.00	1.59	.82			
	EAC1	6.15	6.00	1.53	.94			
EAC2	5.92	6.00	1.56	.92				
EAC3	5.62	6.00	1.58	.91				
EAC4	5.81	6.00	1.52	.89				
EAC5	6.52	7.00	1.54	.84				
EAC6	6.84	7.00	1.59	.86				

Table 3. Discriminant Validity

	IM	ISCI	EAC
IM	(.88)		
ISCI	.65	(.86)	
EAC	.71	.76	(.89)

Table 4. Direct and Indirect effects of SEM

Hypothesis		β	t- values	p values	Remarks
IM \rightarrow ISCI	(Direct)	.113	2.212	0.039	Supported
IM \rightarrow EAC	(Path A)	.360	5.512	.000	Supported
EAC \rightarrow ISCI	(Path B)	.423	6.023	.000	Supported
IM \rightarrow EAC \rightarrow ISCI	(Indirect- Partial Mediation)	.152	4.001	.000	Supported

6. Discussion and Conclusions

This study was aimed to contribute in the field of internal marketing broadly in services marketing literature and in supply chain management literature as well. Building on social capital theory [14, 62-66], we hypothesized that internal marketing and employees' affective commitment are positively related to internal supply chain integration. The result suggested that internal marketing and employees' affective commitment are positive predictors of internal supply chain integration. Furthermore, we hypothesized that employees' affective commitment mediates the relationship of internal marketing and internal supply chain integration which was also proved by the result. Thus, all our hypotheses were accepted. This result suggest that organizations focusing more on internal marketing practices have committed employees and good integration of their internal supply chain processes. The findings of this study are consistent with the previous studies [56, 66, 67, 50,51, 53, 55,57,58-60]. Aforementioned discussion of findings suggests that internal marketing has an imperative role in making employees committed and make them to collaborate in work settings.

6.1 Theoretical and practical implications

This study propose that effective implementation of internal marketing practices transfer a sense of being valued which results in employees' affective commitment and leads to integration in supply chain processes within the organization. This integration can trigger many positive outcomes for organizations.

Concisely, internal marketing as antecedent of internal supply chain integration and their relationship mechanism has been a less focused area in the literature. Therefore, this study contribute to the literature by investigating the mechanism by proposing employees affective commitment as mediator between internal marketing and internal supply chain integration. Finally, we suggest that managers should emphasize on the implementation of internal marketing practices that their employees – are claimed valuable assets, are being treated fairly and given value.

6.2 Limitations and future directions

Likewise other studies, this study also has some limitations. First, only employees were responded on the questionnaire which can lead to common method bias, although we tried to fix this problem by using Harman single-factor test. Second, this study relied only on the cross-sectional data while other data collection techniques may be suitable in developing strong causal attribution. In future, these limitations can be overcome by collecting data with longitudinal method and from different sources. Furthermore, this study focused on only internal integration of supply chain to examine the relationship with internal marketing and utilized only one very variable as mediator to uncover the relationship mechanism of aforementioned variables. In future, internal marketing can also be studied with external supply chain and the link of internal marketing and internal supply chain integration can be verified by using other employee related intervening variables. Finally, this research has started discussion about two

imperative dimensions especially for services organizations and these relationships need more exhaustive investigation.

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