

Does Professional Training of Managers in Marketing Skills Enhance Commercial Performance of Small and Medium Size Enterprises?

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Abstract

This study assessed the impact of training on internal marketing strategy on the commercial performance of small and medium-size enterprises in North West Region of Cameroon. Specifically, it purport to investigate the effect of value chain analysis, internal people and internal communication on the commercial performance of small and medium-size enterprises. The study made use of both descriptive and inferential research design and data was source from respondents who responded to our questionnaires. The results showed that chain analysis has a positive impact on commercial performance, with a coefficient of 0.026. Findings also revealed that value chain management does not significantly affect the commercial performance of business in Bamenda while internal people were observed to have a positive impact on commercial performance, with a coefficient of 0.572, and the result is statistically significant at 0.01 % level, indicating that internal people significantly affect the commercial performance of businesses in Bamenda. Furthermore, the findings revealed that internal communication has a positive impact on commercial performance with a coefficient of 0.114 and a statistical significance of 0.05 % level. Based on these findings, the study recommends that managers be train on the importance of internal employers and internal communication as a tool to enhance organizational performance.

Keywords: *Internal marketing strategy, Value chain, internal people, internal communication, commercial performance.*

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I. Introduction

The internal marketing strategy concept can be performed with a holistic marketing approach covering integrated marketing, performance marketing, relationship marketing and internal marketing strategies. (Kotler & Keller 2009). The strategy is based on the development, design, and implementation of marketing programs, processes, value chains and activities that represent the breadth and interdependencies (Doyle 2018). Internal marketing strategies have become more important because it has a role in ensuring that everyone in the organisation embraces appropriate marketing principles with the concept of customer first, but more precisely is the employee first (Ateke, 2022). Internal marketing strategies see employees as internal customers whom the company has to build their loyalty. Small and medium size enterprise may retaliate to competitive market entry with several options such as increased promotional spending (to consumers or trade members), new product launch and price reductions, simultaneously or otherwise.

According to Halil and Cem (2010) internal marketing strategies is emerging as a central theme of increasing importance in both academic and practitioner discourse as a platform upon which organisations can get their human resources to understand and commit to the value proposition of the organisation and improve their performance. It is probable that a committed workforce achieves better results in their tasks and therefore delivers better services (Halil & Cem, 2010) which in turn affects client confidence positively and contributes to realising client loyalty.

Moreover, in the same line the elements of the marketing mix (advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations, and direct marketing) are designed by businesses in coordination with paid advertising agencies and marketing firms (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The tools and internal marketing strategies for interacting with customers have changed with the advent of consumer-generated media. Managers' control

over the content, timing and frequency of information is diminishing in the era of social media (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Zampetakis and Moustakis (2007), assert that the satisfaction of employee needs, as the internal customers of the business, implies that a business should be in a better position to deliver the quality desired to satisfy external customers. Implicated in this is the assumption that fulfilling employee needs enhances employee motivation and retention, and as a consequence the higher the degree of employee satisfaction, the higher the possibility of generating external satisfaction and loyalty. However, these practitioners frequently do not equate this with relationship marketing. On the other hand, the academic relationship marketing literature does highlight internal relationships as having an important impact on external customer relationships (Herington, Johnson & Scott, 2006).

Small and medium size enterprises performance and profitability depend on employees (Pop et al., 2014; Mone et al., 2013). So, by developing an impactful internal marketing strategy, small and medium size enterprises could better treat and satisfy their competent employees benefiting from their creativity as well as their contribution to increasing profitability (Lal and Park, 2022). Taking the pilot study and the previous studies into consideration, the problem statement can be represented in the low level of small and medium-size enterprises employees' performance, as well as the absence of a specific strategy of internal marketing to retain competent individuals and increase their level of performance such as values chain marketing analysis, pricing marketing strategies and internal marketing strategies, etc.

Limited research has been conducted in the field of internal marketing strategies in Cameroon as well as North West Region in particular and no study has focused exclusively on internal marketing strategies and the performance of small and medium-size enterprises in the country. Prior research within Cameroon, as well as internationally, includes studies conducted for the purpose of investigating internal marketing strategies in small and medium-size enterprises, or to establish the linkage between internal marketing strategies, the elements of the extended marketing mix, and the performance of small and medium size enterprises. The primary focus of previous studies was to provide a holistic view of internal marketing strategy from a small and medium size enterprises environment perspective or to provide a comparative analysis between academic and practitioner views on internal marketing strategy. It is from this background that we ought to bring out the impact of internal marketing strategies on the commercial performance of SME enterprises in the North West Region of Cameroon. The main question that arise from the above background is: What is the impact of internal marketing strategy on the commercial performance of small and medium size enterprises in North West Region of Cameroon? From the main research question, we formulated the following specific research questions:

- * What is the effect of value chain strategy on the commercial performance of small and medium-size enterprises in North West Region of Cameroon?
- * What is the effect of internal people on the commercial performance of small and medium-size enterprises in North West Region of Cameroon?
- * What is the effect of internal communication on the commercial performance of small and medium size enterprises in North West Region of Cameroon?

II. Theoretical framework

Michael Porter was the first person who introduced the term "Value Chain" in his book *Competitive advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance* (Porter 1985). Michael Porter defines "Value Chain" as a representation of a firm's value-adding activities, based on its pricing strategy and cost structure. The ability of any firm to understand its own capabilities and the needs of the customer is crucial for competitive strategy to be successful. The first steps in conducting the value chain analysis are to break down the key activities which involve in the framework. The next steps are to assess the potential for adding value through the means of cost advantage or differentiation. Finally, it is very important for the analyst to determine the strategies that focus on those activities that would enable the company to attain sustainable competitive advantages. The profitability of a firm depends on how impassively it manages the various activities in the value chain; price that the customer is willing to pay for the company products and services exceeds the relative cost of the value chain activities.

Resource Advantage (R-A) theory is a dynamic, process theory of competition developed by Shelby and Morgan. It has been developed through more than a dozen articles over time (for instance, Hunt and Morgan 1995; Hunt and Morgan 1996) and is detailed in two books (Hunt 2000; Hunt 2002). It draws from evolutionary economics, Austrian economics, heterogeneous demand theory, differential advantage theory, historical tradition, industrial-organization economics, resource-based tradition, competence-based tradition, institutional economics, transaction cost economics, and economic sociology (Hunt 2000). Hunt and Arnett (2001) argue that R-A is the remedy for the current antitrust stagnation. For example, they argue that a market-based advantage that stems from a contractual agreement that exclusively ties a distributor is anticompetitive if the distributor is

coerced into the agreement through the bundling of a complementary product. In this case, the market advantage does not necessarily come from a relational resource but through market power.

III. Empirical review and hypothesis Development

From empirical literature, Tasmia (2014) examined holistic service marketing strategies concepts. The conceptualized holistic service marketing strategy variables are interactive/integrated, internal and external/relationship strategies while technology is the moderating variable. Firms' corporate objectives variables are customers' satisfaction, measured by service quality, market share, return on owners' investment, customers' loyalty and profitability. Sample size was determined using Taro Yeman's formula. Demographic and primary data were obtained through interview and from questionnaire administered to four hundred (400) respondents made up of customers and staff of five service firms namely: banks, electric power companies, Insurance firms, Petrol stations and Gas companies located in Lagos, Abuja and Port Harcourt; through cluster sampling method. Finding revealed consequently the following major findings among others were obtained: (1) there was positive and significant relationship between holistic service marketing strategy and customers' satisfaction. (2) There was positive and significant relationship between customers' satisfaction and profitability with technology moderating them. We conclude that only holistic service marketing strategies could guarantee sustainable customers' satisfaction and in turn realize corporate objectives. We recommend among others that firms should adopt holistic service marketing strategy concepts in order to satisfy customers and sustain firms' profitability locally and globally.

Daša (2014), aims at broadening the understanding of Small and Medium Businesses (SMBs) as a significant driver of economic development, as particularly related to their market performance, as well as the impact of the internal and external environment on it. The study was conducted on Croatian fast-growing SMBs, i.e. Gazelles. However, the scientific and practical contribution of the research transcends national borders, as there are not many similar studies carried out in transitional or small countries or those in the field of fast-growing businesses. The paper provides a more realistic picture of the variability of environmental factors, as well as of the variability of SMBs performance, as well as includes the period of economic crisis, jeopardising not only the performance, but also the very survival of businesses in general. This study confirmed that eight internal factors (business entity size, life cycle stages, technology and product innovation, organizational autonomy, centralization and formalization, market roles, and type/importance of goals) and three out of the five analyzed external factors (general state of the economy, sector, and type of customers), depending on the period (life cycle stage and general state of the economy), exercise a more or less significant impact on the performance (sales growth and achievement of goals) of SMBs.

Krishnan (2014), carried a study on the internal marketing practices of travel agency in the southern region of India oriented towards their employees as internal customers of the business. This article also establishes the current level of Internal marketing practices that the management of the travel agency follows in the southern region applies. A survey was conducted 57 employees working in different travel agency were surveyed in the structured questionnaire. The questionnaire is designed by the researcher a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree-5 to strongly disagree-1) to identify the internal marketing practices. The findings revealed a long-term relationship between travel management and employees as internal customers. The study we, therefore, used Cronbach's alpha scale as a measure of reliability. Sophisticated statistical tool for 'Exploratory Factor Analysis has been used. The results show that internal marketing practices of six constructs group are extracted from the analysis that together accounted higher percentage of the total variance are identified. This paper majorly contributes to the understanding of what internal marketing practices are considered as important by the internal customers.

João, Katarzyna and Ricardo (2018), identify conditions for the implementation of internal marketing concepts among employees and its impact on the organisational performance. Only one study was found simultaneously integrating the two constructs. It concerned the cork processing industry alone, yet considered expanding the efforts namely, using qualitative exploratory research in the form of 10 in-depth interviews based on a script of generally open questions to the entire industry in the Portuguese region between rivers Douro and Vouga. The unit of analysis was constructed considering distinct features as well as activity criteria and the geographic location, thus ensuring the necessary heterogeneity. The results inform about the awareness of the internal marketing conceptualisation. The research found that all analysed enterprises had more or less structured model frames and worked with the conceptualisation of the guidance for the internal market, a strategic concern, and in some instances, this concept was an organisational desideratum in the sector. In addition to the lapse of the research according to a qualitative paradigm of exploratory nature, the main limitation is the need for objective sustainability of the results obtained through future quantitative studies to promote an integrated triangulation of their outcomes. The research allowed identifying the companies that use organisational models conducive to the individual well-being of employees and facilitating the desired orientation to the market.

Exploring the studies on internal marketing strategies, it was found that it is a multi-dimensional concept, with an employee as internal customer at the center of it. After discussing different approaches to internal marketing strategies, it was decided to view it as a set of initiatives and activities for implementation, namely internal marketing strategies. The analysis of the previous studies confirmed that many different internal marketing strategies are found in academic literature and there is no single measure to evaluate its existence in organisations (Huang & Rundle-Thiele, 2015), Therefore the current study seek to assess the impact of internal marketing strategies on the commercial performance of small and medium size enterprises in Bamenda.

IV. Research Methodology

A quantitative and descriptive research design was adopted in the study. According to Van der Merwe (1996), quantitative data can be used to test hypotheses, establish facts, show correlations between variables, and forecast outcomes. Using questionnaires and a descriptive research approach, quantitative data was gathered. The descriptive research design was chosen for its benefit of generating a sizable number of replies from a diverse group of respondents. Additionally, this design gives a relevant and accurate account of what happened while attempting to explain people's perceptions and actions in light of the facts gathered. This design has the benefit of making it easier to locate views in their native habitat.

The study had a constrained scope in terms of duration, region, and subject matter. Additionally, the study's geographic scope is restricted to the Mezam division's Bamenda I, II, and III subdistricts in Cameroon's North-West. Other locations were difficult to access due to financial limitations and the socio-political situation in the North West, thus it is essential to concentrate primarily on the aforementioned regions.

Economically, the main industries are the processing of agricultural products such as coffee, elementary food processing, handicraft, cottage industry, education, tourism and hospitality, construction works, mining, hunting, fish farming and transport. Economic activities in this area are dominated by small and medium-size enterprises.

A questionnaire containing closed-ended inquiries were used to collect primary data. The questions were clearly explained to respondents. The questionnaire was chosen as the best data collection tool for this study since it guaranteed competent and precise data standardization. Additionally, material from the chosen study group was swiftly and properly gathered without inciting unwarranted conflict among the subjects.

Small and medium-sized businesses individually served as the sampling unit. Respondents filled out 180 questionnaires in total. The questionnaire was enclosed with a cover letter outlining the study's objectives. The covering letter further guaranteed the secrecy and anonymity of the replies.

A multivariate regression model was used to determine the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables. This model is made up of one dependent variable (commercial performance of SMSs) and three independent variables (value chain, internal people, and internal communication). This linear model is illustrated adopted the functional model of Grivani *et al.* (2014) as follows;

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{1i} + \beta_2 X_{2i} + \beta_3 X_{3i} + \beta_4 X_{4i} + \epsilon \dots\dots\dots (Equation 3.1)$$

3.6 Econometric Model

$$CP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 VaCh + \beta_2 InPe + \beta_3 InCo + \epsilon \dots\dots\dots (Equation 3.2)$$

Where:

CP= Dependent Variable (Commercial performance of small and medium-sized enterprises)

β_0 = Constant

β_1, \dots, β_3 = Coefficient of the independent variable

VaCh= Value chain

InPe=Internal people

InCo= Internal communication

ϵ = error term

The data was coded into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and analyzed using descriptive and regression analyses. The regression analyses coefficients from the regression showed the impact (whether positive or negative) of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

Empirical studies have applied ordinary least squares (OLS) to analyze the impact of internal marketing strategies on the commercial performance of small and medium-size enterprises in Bamenda. In order to capture the influences of independent variables on the dependent variable, the qualitative data was quantified by computing the index of each of the variables using transformation by taking the sum of the questions under each specific variable. Therefore, this study makes use of the ordinary least square technique (OLS).

V. Results and Findings

5.1. Presentation of Regression Results

Table 1: Summary of Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
CP	180	8.833333	2.714538	6	20
VaCh	180	7.461111	2.220685	4	13
InPe	180	9.133333	2.928191	6	17
InCo	180	9.272222	2.351347	6	15

Source: Author's computation (2023)

The summary of descriptive statistics above shows that all the variables are having 180 observations each, also from the table above the mean of commercial is 8.833333 and maximum and minimum values are 6 and 20 respectively. Its standard deviation is 2.714538 indicating a high deviation from the mean. Table 1 is also used to test for normality which is to test if the variables used in the model are normally distributed, the table above shows that the standard deviation of the major variable used is smaller than their mean value this indicates that all the major variable used in the model are normally distributed implying variables are perfect variables to be used in the model.

5.2. Presentation of Inferential Statistics

Table 2: Pairwise Correlation Matrix

	CP	VaCh	InPe	InCo
CP	1.0000			
VaCh	0.4021	1.0000		
InPe	0.7598	0.4209	1.0000	
InCo	0.5962	0.5910	0.6016	1.0000

Source: Author's computation (2023)

The correlation of results presented in Table 2, shows that there exist both weak positive and negative impacts between the variables involved in the model this result shows that the correlation between one variable and itself is 1(perfectly collinear). The correlation result could also be used as a prelude to investigating the present of multicollinearity. From the table above there exists a weak and average correlation between variables indicators by their values which are less than 0.48 in all the cases. A weak and average correlation shows the absence of multicollinearity as observed above however to further verify and support the result of the pairwise correlation the variance inflation factor (VIF) test for multicollinearity was performed as shown below;

Table 3: Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

Variable	VIF	1/VIF
CP	2.08	0.480163
VaCh	1.71	0.585770
InPe	1.63	0.612189
InCo	1.63	

Source: Authors Computation (2021)

The table 3 shows the VIF result, which is used to measure, the degree of Multicollinearity. If the VIF of a coefficient of a variable exceeds 10, then that variable is highly collinear, and Multicollinearity becomes a problem (Gujarati, 2004). The VIF result shows that individually, none of the VIF exceeds 10, thus it can be concluded that there is no problem of Multicollinearity among the independent variables.

Table 4: Heteroskedasticity Test

Breusch-Pagan / Cook-Weisberg test for heteroskedasticity
Ho: Constant variance
Variables: fitted values of CCIAL_P
chi2(1) = 102.54
Prob > chi2 = 0.0000

Source: Author's computation (2023)

To test for heteroscedascity we use the breusch pagan cook Weisberg test. The decision rule is that when $BP_{cal} > BP_{cri}$ we talk of heteroscedascity therefore from Table 4, $prob > Chi = 0.0000$ we reject the H_0

and conclude that there is no constant variance hence the problem of heteroscedasticity exit. So, this problem was handled by presenting robust standard error results.

Table 5: Regression Results Robust

Number of obs =180						
F (17, 162) =12.71						
Prob > F =0.0000						
R-squared =0.6213						
Root MSE =1.7559						
CP	Coef.	Robust Std. Err.	t	P>t	[95% Conf.Interval]	
VaCh	.0256964	.0655792	0.39	0.696	-.1038038	.1551966
InPe	.5726526	.0870404	6.58	0.000	.4007725	.7445326
InCo	.2484909	.1142652	2.17	0.031	.0228497	.4741322
Constant	.0699591	1.521929	0.05	0.963	-2.935418	3.075336

Source: Author's computation (2023)

The value for R square coefficient of 0.6213 indicates the degree of variation in commercial performance of small and medium enterprises in Bamenda captured by variation in the variables used in the model. from the result above the value of Adj R square is 0.5816 indicating that 58.16% variation in commercial performance small and medium enterprises in Bamenda is attributed to change (variation) in the variable included in the model. In order to further validate the model estimated the result was subjected to a test for heteroscedasticity to verify whether the residual had a constant variance or not.

The result shows that **VaCh** has a positive impact on commercial performance, VaCh analysis has a coefficient of 0.0256964 this implies that when the is an increase in value chain analysis by one unit, commercial performance increases by 0.0256964 thus result is statistically insignificant at 10 % level of significance since the P Value was greater than the critical value. The finding was in line with the work João *et al.*, (2018) establish the prerequisites for internal marketing strategy adoption by staff members and examines how it affects organizational performance. The study discovered that all examined businesses had more or less formal model frames and focused on conceptualizing internal market direction as a strategic concern; in some cases, this concept was an organizational goal in the industry. The research allowed identifying the companies that use value chain models conducive to the individual well-being of employees and facilitating the desired orientation to the market.

The result furthermore shows that **InPe** has a positive impact on commercial performance, internal people have a coefficient of 0.5726526 this implies that when the is an increase in internal people by one unit, commercial performance increases by 0.5726526 thus result is statistically significant at 0.01 % level of significance since the P-Value was less than the critical value. Our result was similar to the work of Tasmia (2014) explored principles for holistic service marketing tactics. Interactivity and integration, internal and external relationship strategy, and technology serve as the envisioned holistic service marketing plan variables. Findings led to the following important conclusions, among others: there was a favorable and significant association between an all-encompassing service marketing strategy and customer satisfaction. With technology acting as a moderator, there was a positive and significant association between customer satisfaction and profitability.

Moreover, the findings revealed to show that **InCo** has a positive impact on commercial performance, internal communication has a coefficient of 0.1142652 this implies that when the is an increase in internal communication by one unit, commercial performance increases by 0.1142652 thus result is statistically significant at 0.05 % level of significance since the P-Value was less than the critical value. When making policy recommendations within the enterprises' internal people should be given serious treatment. Our result was similar to the work of Mornay (2009) who examine whether building enduring relationships with employees who serve as the company's internal clients, is mutually advantageous. According to the study's conclusions, there needs to be a stronger effort made to increase internal communication between the management of Avis car rental offices and their staff. This would foster a culture of respect, trust, and care between management and staff within the Avis Rent-A-Car organisation.

VI. Conclusion and Recommendation

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the impact of internal marketing strategy on the commercial performance of small and medium-sized enterprises in Bamenda. According to the findings of the objectives, the dominant forms of internal marketing on the commercial performance of businesses in Bamenda, value chain analysis, internal people and internal communication since findings revealed that some of these internal marketing strategies were statistically significant and affect the commercial performance of businesses

in Bamenda positively. However, the result further revealed that the value chain analysis has a positive impact on commercial performance, value chain analysis has a coefficient of 0.0256964 this implies that when there is an increase in value chain analysis by one unit, commercial performance of small and medium-sized enterprises increases, value chain management does not significantly affect the commercial performance of business in Bamenda. Also, internal people have a positive impact on commercial performance, internal people have a coefficient of 0.5726526 this implies that when there is an increase in internal people by one unit, commercial performance increases by 0.5726526 thus result is statistically significant at a 0.01 % level of, internal people significantly affect the commercial performance of businesses in Bamenda. Moreover, the findings revealed that internal communication has a positive impact on commercial performance, internal communication has a coefficient of 0.1142652 which implies that when there is an increase in internal communication by one unit, commercial performance increases by 0.1142652 thus result is statistically significant at 0.05 % level of significance. The study concurs that internal and internal communication as an internal marketing strategy significantly affects the commercial performance of business in Bamenda, based on the findings the study recommends that internal and internal communication as an internal marketing strategy should be given serious consideration when making policy within the enterprises on internal marketing strategies.

Based on the research findings the following recommendations have been drawn: These recommendations were suggested after analysis of the research findings that the researcher emphasized on the impact of internal marketing strategy on the commercial performance of small and medium-size enterprises in Bamenda. Having gone through the study the researcher recommends the following as a way of incurring that internal marketing strategy plays a vital role in the commercial performance of small and medium-size enterprises in Bamenda: management department should protect financial institutions by creating laws, which must be followed accordingly to enable them to improve in performance and small and medium size enterprises activities and management departments in these various enterprises should properly adopt a strategy that will encourage internal people which will improve impactiveness and efficiency, in a way of promoting the medium enterprises.

Business owners need to carefully assess the type of internal communication marketing activities that are applied to their specific business by identifying the key players that play a role to develop, execute, and monitor the use of communication marketing strategy in enterprises. A business needs to develop a communication marketing policy, and set guidelines that should be followed, individual shops and enterprises need to be aware of the possible risk and threats that internal communication marketing strategy might present to business. A clear well defined internal communication marketing strategy is important in any business.

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