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EVALUATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTERNAL MARKETING AND EMPLOYEE RETENTION OF INFORMAL ELDERLY LABORERS

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ABSTRACT

The research aimed to determine the effect of internal marketing on employee retention considering the case of Thailand's hospital sector. The study used a quantitative design where a close-ended survey questionnaire was used to collect data from 420 employees working in the hospital sector of Thailand. The analysis has been conducted using SEM modelling on SmartPLS. The impact of internal marketing was found to be positive and significant. Besides, in the context of the factors affecting internal marketing, the factors internal communication, employee motivation, future growth, training and development are found to be statistically significant. The research has certain limitations considering the scope of this study. Firstly, it is limited to the geographical bounds of Thailand. Secondly, the targeted industry in the healthcare industry with specifically the hospital sector and no other industry has been taken into account. Therefore, in future, the research can be improved by considering any other sector or country. Qualitative analysis can also be done to improve the study.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of internal marketing has become highly significant on the retention of employees in an organisation. The relationship of internal marketing and employee practices has been discussed in various studies in terms of the practices of internal marketing aimed towards the motivation of employees and making them satisfied. Based on the study conducted by Frye, Kang, Huh, and Lee (2019) with the emergence of the industrial era, corporations have changed their perceptions regarding their employees that has led towards a shift in the practices adopted by organisations to manage its employees. According to the study conducted by Ahmad, Iqbal, and Sheeraz (2012) the importance of human capital within the organisation is considered to be critical by organisations operating in the contemporary time as these organisations are operating and growing on the basis of the competitive advantage. The concept behind the success of an organisation is based on the human capital that helps an organisation achieve its goals. The traditional concept of treating employees was based on treating them as their servants as at that time those organisations were only focused on selling its products and services. However, the time has changed that has also changed the mindset of the corporate world in terms of treating their employees as their assets.

The hospital sector has been identified as one of the fastest-growing sectors in Thailand, and in the country's economy, it is expected to be a key driver. It has been estimated by Deloitte that in Thailand, the spending of the healthcare sector has reached \$18.7 billion in 2018. There has been 8 percent increase between 2014 and 2018. The government's share of sector is considered the second-highest in the region, at 77%. As Thailand is considered the most famous tourism destination, thus, the private hospitals of Thailand greatly drive Thailand's medical tourism industry (HealthcareITNews, 2019). The growth and expansion of the healthcare sector are continuously contributing to the economy of the country.

Therefore, this is indubitable that the hospital sector has a great contribution to the economy of Thailand, and it is considered one of the most important indicators of economic growth in the country. However, it has been observed that despite providing universal health coverage to its citizens, there are various challenges are being faced by hospital sector and the rate of employee turnover is the most serious in this regard (Ahmad et al., 2012). Due to an increase in the rate of employee turnover the economy of Thailand is being affected. In the year of 2017, there had been 3.7 percent of hospital sector share in the economy of Thailand. In the year 2007, this share was 3.4, which means the share of hospital sector has increased over the years (Statista, 2020). However, due to the issue of employee turnover, the share of Thailand's hospital industry is decreasing, which is indirectly affecting the economy of the country. Thus, employee turnover is considered a serious problem for the hospital industry that has been caused by inadequate internal marketing. The problem of employee turnover is costly for both organisation and economy.

In the light of the study conducted by Kale (2007) the service sector is mainly dependent on its employees in order to produce high-quality services and also the manufacturing sector that is dependent on its employees specifically in the product development function. Internal marketing has become equal handling for both employees and customers through the help of effective policies in regards to it that could help the organisation achieve its goals and objectives. The study conducted by Barnes, Fox, and Morris (2004) states that the internal marketing leads towards the increasing effectiveness in products and services and also leads towards the increasing efficiency of the employees working in the organisation. For a long period of time, marketing practices have been limited towards the external customers only in order to build the strong image of the company and also to increase sales of its products or services. However, the central piece of all those activities was to increase customer retention that could enhance the profitability of the company and lead towards the growth of that firm. The justification

behind that was based on increasing the customer loyalty and loyal customer are not highly sensitive towards pricing. This had been the traditional marketing approach of these organisations in which only the external environment was focused instead of focusing the internal environment of the organisation.

According to the study conducted by Awwad and Agti (2011) as the practices are changing within the organisational context, there are various organisations that are still not focused on its employees and have high turnover. The concept of the external marketing tactics in order to attract customers have become highly important for these organisations that the organisations are not concerned with the satisfaction of their employees. This is eventually leading towards reduction in the employee retention and increasing the turnover ratio that is also portraying a negative image of these organisations in the corporate world and also it impacts the service and product quality that dissatisfy customers. It has been seen that internal marketing is highly significant in these organisations and could bring various positive impacts on the organisation (Matanda & Ndubisi, 2013; Odi, 2019). Moreover, the contemporary organisational setting have started focusing on this aspect but the previous studies have not covered the relationship of internal marketing activities within the contemporary organisational setting including its impact on employee retention that shows a gap within these studies. This study aims to cover the research gaps and answer the problem statement in terms of discussing the impact of the internal marketing activities on retaining the employees and increasing their motivation level of their employees so that they could work effectively and contribute in the accomplishment of the organisational goals and objectives. This study also aims to understand the concept of internal marketing from the theoretical point of view and also to assess the impact the effect of internal marketing on employee retention in the hospital sector of Thailand. Moreover, it also aims to propose recommendations to the hospital sector of Thailand in regards to retaining its employees via internal marketing practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There have been numerous studies covered on employee retention and the organisational practices in terms of increasing employee motivation and satisfaction through which these employees could be retained for a long period of time. According to the study conducted by Gilani and Cunningham (2017) internal marketing practices are based on the consideration of the internal employees as the internal customers and also focusing on the satisfaction of those internal customers (employees) through different strategies. The core purpose of employee satisfaction is to retain those employees in the organisation for a long period of time. Based on the study conducted by Dechawatanapaisal (2018) internal marketing has always been consistent within the efforts made by an organisation whether what sector the organisation is operating in. It includes the training of the employees and also motivating employees in order to perform better and offer better services. The value and significance of internal marketing is relatively higher than in the manufacturing sector as the services sector is primarily based on the performance of its employees that ultimately satisfies the customer. In the light of the study conducted by Zaman, Javaid, Arshad, and Bibi (2012) internal marketing practices within the service industry helps the organisation make its employees understand the mission and objectives of the company. Moreover this study states that it also refers to the training and development of employees, employee motivation level and the proper evaluation of the performance of employees in terms of the accomplishment of the organisational goals. The study conducted by Abzari and Ghujali (2011) states that the initial concept of internal marketing was based on the training and development of employees so that they could perform in an effective manner and also to make them understand the customer satisfaction through their effectiveness in services. However, various studies have rejected and argued on this particular concept of internal marketing in organisations on the basis of their concepts that include the motivation and satisfaction for employees as

well as they are the internal customers of organisations and also on the external customers that these employees are serving to. According to the study conducted by Ferdous and Polonsky (2014) internal marketing is like the orientation thought of the planning practice that could help the organisation achieve various goals and objectives through its policies. These days, the human resource function has become highly focused on the retention of employees as it takes a long time span to hire new employees that could replace them and also the incurred costs within the hiring process. Furthermore, internal marketing is completely different from external marketing and has some objectives associated to it. These objectives include conquer the conflicts associated with the organisation for alliance in order to increase the satisfaction level of internal customers, increasing motivation and customer orientation leading towards the integration of employees (Dahl & Peltier, 2014; Kamasak & Cansever, 2019).

Moreover, these aims include the effective implementation of the strategies of the organisation by the employees working in the organisation. These objectives are associated with the internal marketing practices executed by organisations that could help retain its employees and making them able to achieve the goals associated with the organisation in an effective manner. According to the study conducted by To, Martin, and Billy (2015) the emergence of internal marketing practices have made various organisations focus on their internal environment in terms of their workforce and the organisational culture through which these organisations could achieve their goals and objectives. It has been observed that an organisation is impacted due to its internal and external environment (Khan & Ahmad, 2011; Vargas-Hernández & Jiménez, 2019). However, building external marketing strategies could lead towards the increasing revenues and profitability of the organisation, it could not bring stability within the internal environment of the organisation. Based on the study conducted by Yao, Chen, and Cai (2013) internal marketing practices are classified into four perspectives that include consistent collection and analysis information related to the internal market and also the competitive environment, determination of the internal market segment, segmentation of the internal marketing mix and lastly the effective management of the internal marketing within the organisation. This shows that the internal marketing is as significant as the external market in order to maintain the stability of the organisation.

When it comes to the relationship of internal marketing practices and employee retention, there are various studies that describe its relationship based on the success of the organisation. According to the study conducted by Kim, Song, and Lee (2016) the relationship between internal marketing and retention of employees is highly significant as they are both interlinked to each other. The study conducted by Lee, Kim, and Kim (2014) describes the relationship of both of these aspects as employee retention derives from the motivation and the value given to employees that make employees work dedicatedly and with high efficiency. Moreover, internal marketing is the core responsibility of the HR function and the management of the organisation that could indulge with its employees in order to make them feel comfortable. These practices ultimately lead to the increasing employee retention and the success of the organisation through its human resource that also help the organisation achieve its objectives and goals. Based on the study conducted by Tanwar and Prasad (2016) employee retention is the vital issue being faced by various organisations in the cotemporary business setting that is leading towards the increase in the employee turnover, lack of skilled workers and the reducing organisational growth. The primary reason behind the increasing employee turnover within the organisation is based on the weak practices or neglecting attitude of the management of that organisation regarding the adopting of effective internal marketing practices.

The study conducted by Shah (2014) states that employee turnover is not only based on ineffective internal marketing practices as employee turnover is voluntary as well as involuntary. It shows that weak internal marketing practices lead employees towards

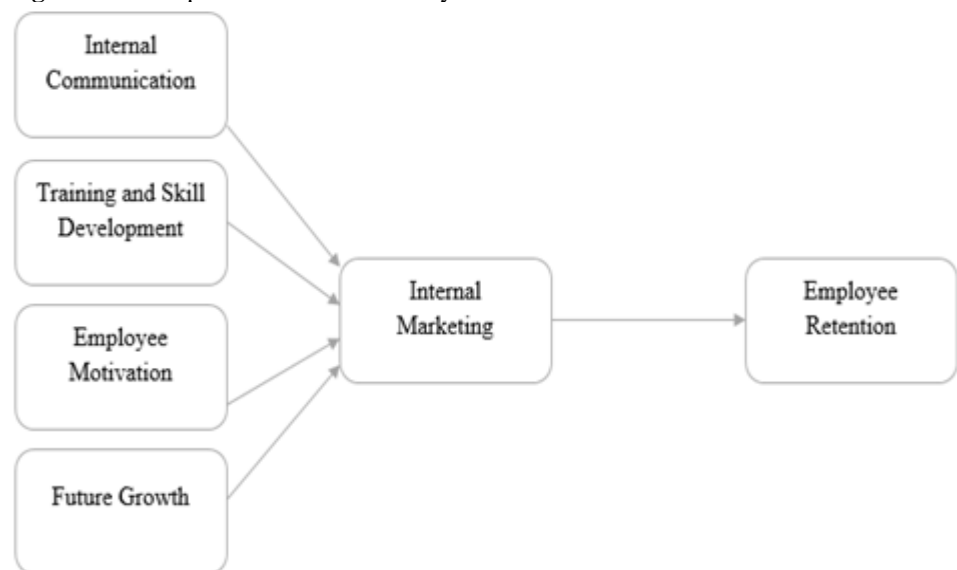
stepping out of their job roles within an organisation and also due to the ineffective performance of employees lead the company towards firing employees as they are not much productive as the company expects them to be. The voluntary turnover could be a result of the lack of effective internal marketing practices executed by the organisation that ultimately demotivate employees and decrease their level of satisfaction (Farrelly, Greysier, & Rogan, 2012; Kerdpitak, 2019; Okafor Samuel, 2019; Onuoha, Umoh, & Ufomba, 2017). On the basis of that it could be said that the impact of internal marketing practices is significant on the employee retention. When it comes to retaining employees on the basis of internal marketing practices, there are various practices that should be taken into consideration. According to the study conducted by Alhakimi and Alhariryb (2014) practices like consistent training and development, innovation in the leadership style, effective performance appraisal, effective reward and incentive management systems and also building the effective communication through clarifying the objectives and mission of the organisation could bring a positive impact on the organisation.

These practices could help the organisation retain its employees and satisfy them on the basis of working for the organisation for a long period of time. However, there are some factors that impact the relationship between internal marketing and employee retention. Based on the study conducted by Iliopoulos and Priporas (2011) factors like internal communication, training and skill development, motivation and future growth enhance the influence of internal marketing practices on employee retention. Therefore, it becomes evident that most of the previous studies have assessed the positive impact of internal marketing on the retention of employees working in an organisation. As a result, organisations have started realizing the importance of internal marketing and retaining its employees in order to accomplish their goals effectively.

Conceptual model

Considering the factors identified in the literature review which is supported by the study of Iliopoulos and Priporas (2011) the conceptual model and hypotheses have been constructed as follows:

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Study



HA: Internal marketing significantly affects employee retention

H₁: Internal communication is a significant factor of internal marketing in the private and public hospital sector of Thailand

H₂: Training and skills development is a significant factor of internal marketing in the private and public hospital sector of Thailand

H₃: Employee motivation is a significant factor of internal marketing in the private and public hospital sector of Thailand

H₄: Future growth is a significant factor of internal marketing in the private and public hospital sector of Thailand

METHOD

Data collection method

Since the research follows a quantitative design, therefore, the data collected in this study is numeric. The method used for the data collected in this study is primary where the target population is based on the employees serving public and private hospitals of Thailand. Considering this, the researcher approached 420 peoples from 100 hospitals in Thailand to collect the data. The platforms that have been utilized for the collection of the data include Google Forms, emails, and some survey questionnaires were distributed physically to the acquaintances.

Sampling technique and sample size

To determine the sample from a population is referred to as sampling technique Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016) and in this research, the researcher has used purposive sampling. According to Roller and Lavrakas (2015) purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling which is selective in nature. The researcher chose this to collect data of only those employees who had been serving Thailand's hospital sector for two years at least. For the determination of the sample, the exact population of the sample was unknown, therefore, the formula for an infinite or unknown sample has been used prescribed by Herkenhoff and Fogli (2013) and presented as follows:

$$n = \frac{z^2 \times p \times (1 - p)}{e^2}$$

In accordance with the calculation, 'z' is the standard score having 1.95 value at 95% confidence level and 'p' is the population's proportion intended to be captured in the study. This is assumed to be 0.5 while is the error which is 5% (because confidence level is 95%). Inserting the values, the following value has been obtained:

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.5 \times (1 - 0.5)}{(0.05)^2} = 384$$

Hence, the minimum sample to be approached in this study was 384, therefore, the at least 450 employees were approached in order to have a high response rate, however, the eligible questionnaires returned were 353. Consequently, the response rate is calculated to be 78.4%.

Research instrument

The research is quantitative, therefore, the research instrument designed for this study was based on a close-ended survey questionnaire. The questions were based on a Likert scale that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree and was further devised on the basis of 5-points. In addition to the mentioned aspects, the questionnaire was self-administered and used local language for better comprehension and was also provided in the English language.

Data analysis technique

The data gathered as per the methods mentioned earlier, the researcher has used Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) for the analysis. Specifically, the technique is based on partial least squares (PLS) which does not require the data to be normally distributed (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2016). Moreover, the tests have been conducted on SmartPLS and the results comprised on the measurement model for testing factor loadings, reliability and validity, path assessment and blindfolding technique to determine the predictive relevance of the model.

RESULTS

Measurement model- partial least squares (PLS)

The results concerning the measurement model have been presented in Table 1. The results show that all the outer loadings are above 0.6 and are significant as well. According to Wong (2011) the threshold for outer loadings is considered to be 0.6. Besides, the reliability has been determined using Cronbach Alpha and composite reliability and Avkiran and Ringle (2018) asserted that the minimum acceptable value is 0.6 whereas, values above 0.7 are deemed more appropriate to define the internal consistency in the data. Considering the threshold, all the latent constructs are found to reliable as all the values of Cronbach Alpha and composite reliability are above 0.7. In furtherance, to determine the convergent validity of the latent constructs, AVE has been used which depicts the relatedness of the latent variables with each other. The study of Latan and Noonan (2017) stated that the cut off value for AVE is 0.5, hence, all the latent constructs of this study are valid as the minimum value in Table 1 is computed to be 0.727 which is above 0.5. Some aspects of the model can also be seen in Figure 2.

Table 1: Reliability and Convergent Validity of the Model

Latent Constructs	Indicators	Outer Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Employee Motivation	EM1	0.890***	0.882	0.927	0.809
	EM2	0.919***			
	EM3	0.888***			
Employee Retention	ER1	0.878***	0.923	0.942	0.765
	ER2	0.877***			
	ER3	0.845***			
	ER4	0.893***			
	ER5	0.879***			
Future Growth	FG1	0.909***	0.899	0.937	0.832
	FG2	0.932***			
	FG3	0.896***			
Internal Communication	IC1	0.903***	0.864	0.916	0.784
	IC2	0.894***			
	IC3	0.858***			
Internal Marketing	IM1	0.887***	0.906	0.934	0.780
	IM2	0.908***			
	IM3	0.903***			
	IM4	0.834***			
Training and Development Skills	TSD1	0.844***	0.816	0.889	0.727
	TSD2	0.899***			
	TSD3	0.814***			

Note: ***: indicating significance at 1%.

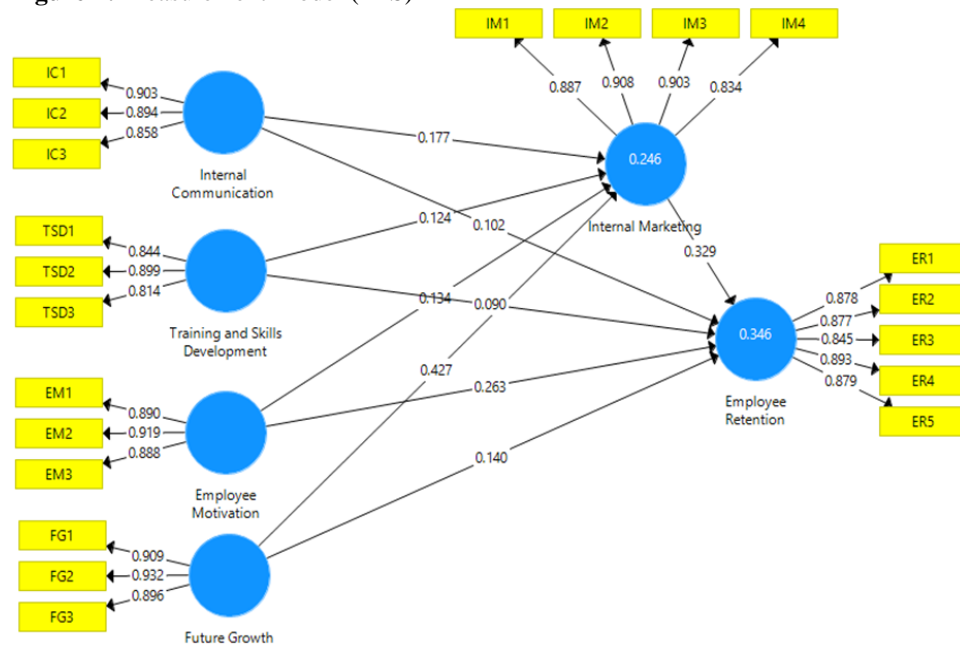
The CFA analysis further incorporates the analysis of distinctiveness of the latent variables and according to Tobbin and Kuwornu (2011) HTMT is one of the most used

metrics to serve the purpose when conducting SEM analysis. Additionally, the research stated that a conservative criterion assumes that the maximum value of HTMT ratio should be lower than 0.85 between two latent constructs. Considering this, the results in Table 2: *Discriminant Validity using HTMT Ratio* can be deemed as valid because all values are below 0.85.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity using HTMT Ratio

	Employee Motivation	Employee Retention	Future Growth	Internal Communication	Internal Marketing
Employee Retention	0.500				
Future Growth	0.745	0.487			
Internal Communication	0.715	0.272	0.603		
Internal Marketing	0.406	0.537	0.519	0.216	
Training and Skills Development	0.569	0.338	0.459	0.636	0.290

Figure 2: Measurement Model (PLS)



Path analysis

For the evaluation of the hypothesized relationships, the researcher has conducted path assessment. To serve the purpose, bootstrapping has been used that is a resampling technique which is used for obtaining the significance values. The results of this study have been presented in Table 3. The effect of internal marketing is computed to be positive and significant [B= 0.329; p-value= 0.000 < 0.05] and this implies that with the improvement in the internal marketing concerning the hospitals in Thailand, the employees’ retention rate would be improved. In addition to this, the path assessment has also included the effect of factors of the internal marketing. It has been inferred from the analysis that employee motivation affects the internal marketing significantly and positively as well [B= 0.134; p-value= 0.082 < 0.1] and similar is the case with the future

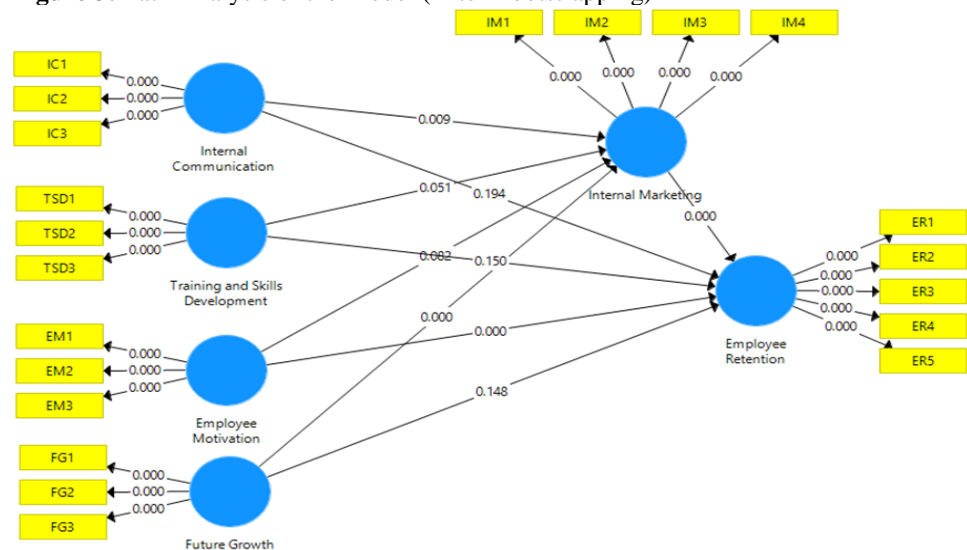
growth opportunities [B= 0.427; p-value= 0.000< 0.01]. Besides, internal communication [B= 0.178; p-value= 0.009< 0.01] and training and skills development [B= 0.125; p-value= 0.051< 0.1] are also found to have significant and positive effect. These inferences have been drawn because of the fact that the p-values are lower than their tested thresholds. The results following the bootstrapping can be viewed in Figure 3.

Table 3: Evaluation of the Path

	Path Coefficient	T Statistics	P Values
Employee Motivation -> Employee Retention	0.263***	3.970	0.000
Employee Motivation -> Internal Marketing	0.134*	1.738	0.082
Future Growth -> Employee Retention	0.140	1.447	0.148
Future Growth -> Internal Marketing	0.427***	5.782	0.000
Internal Communication -> Employee Retention	0.104	1.300	0.194
Internal Communication -> Internal Marketing	0.178***	2.597	0.009
Internal Marketing -> Employee Retention	0.329***	4.519	0.000
Training and Skills Development -> Employee Retention	0.090	1.439	0.150
Training and Skills Development -> Internal Marketing	0.125*	1.952	0.051

Note: ***: indicating significance at 1%; **: indicating significance at 5%; *: indicating significance at 10%.

Figure 3: Path Analysis of the Model (After Bootstrapping)



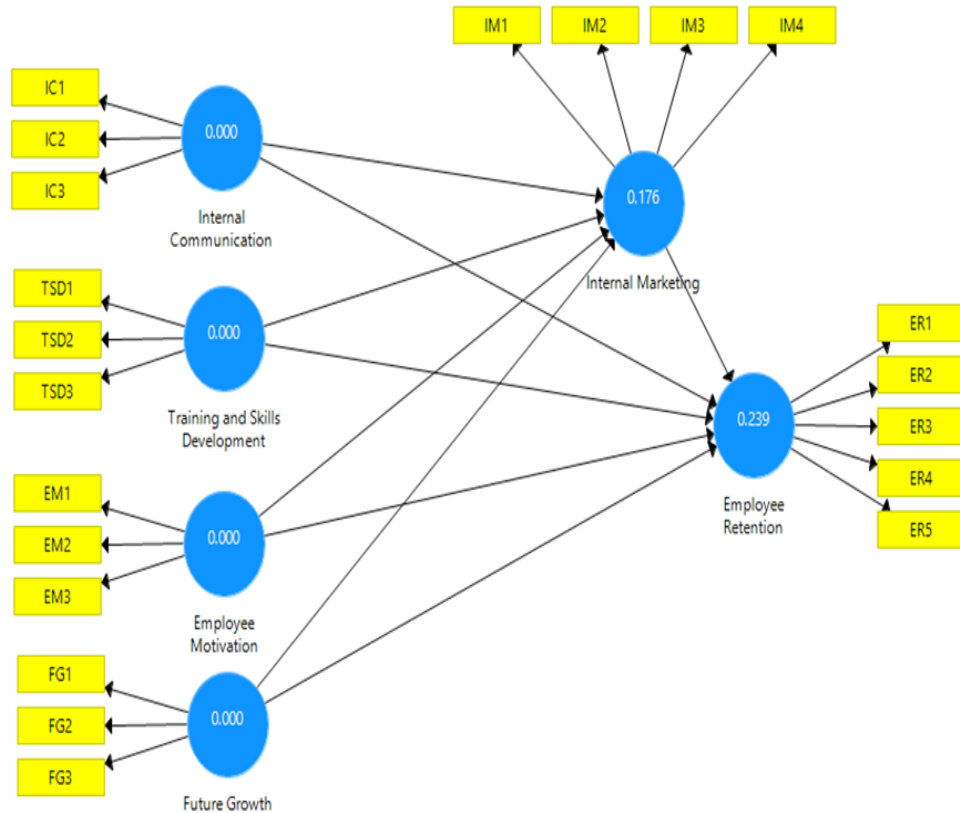
Quality criterion and predictive relevance

The researcher has evaluated the quality of the model using R-square and adjusted R-squared and results have been presented in Table 4. It has been concluded that the variance in the internal communication, employee motivation, future growth, training and development and internal marketing explain 34.59% variation in the employee retention considering the case of Thailand’s hospital sector. However, with the adjustments in the error, the value is reduced to 33.65%. In furtherance, the predictive relevance is determined using Q-square and the value above zero indicates the relevance of the model for predictions (Hair et al., 2016; Olowolaju, 2018). Considering this, the results in Table 4 show that the value is 0.239 which is above the threshold and hence, the model is found to possess predictive relevance. The Q-square of the model can also be viewed in Figure 4.

Table 4: Evaluation of Quality Criterion and Predictive Relevance.

	R Square	R Square Adjusted	Q-square
Employee Retention	34.59%	33.65%	0.239
Internal Marketing	24.58%	23.71%	0.176

Figure 4: Blindfolding Test of the Model



Hypotheses assessment summary

In accordance with the results obtained in the study, the hypotheses have been summarised and presented in

Table 5. It is evident from the table that all the propositions have been accepted based on the statistical analysis.

Table 5: Hypotheses Summary and Decision

Hypotheses Statement	Decision
HA: Internal marketing significantly affects employee retention	Accepted
H ₁ : Internal communication is a significant factor of internal marketing in the private and public hospital sector of Thailand	Accepted
H ₂ : Training and skills development is a significant factor of internal marketing in the private and public hospital sector of Thailand	Accepted
H ₃ : Employee motivation is a significant factor of internal marketing in the private and public hospital sector of Thailand	Accepted
H ₄ : Future growth is a significant factor of internal marketing in the private and public hospital sector of Thailand	Accepted

DISCUSSION

The research aimed to determine the effect of internal marketing on employee retention considering the case of Thailand's hospital sector. The aim has been successfully attained using statistical techniques. The impact of internal marketing was found to be positive and significant which coincided with the findings of Zaman et al. (2012) who states that internal marketing practices build better comprehension in the employees regarding the goals and vision that the company owns. Another research carried out by Lee et al. (2014) provided an implication by stating that retained employees are highly motivated and this leads to the increment in their productivity level. Therefore, implementing the implication on the hospital sector of Thailand, it can be asserted that the employees would be able to serve the patients and the people requiring consultancy in a more comprehensive manner if they are aware of the motifs of the organisation along with the incentives and future growth prospects provided by the hospitals in Thailand. Besides, in the context of the factors affecting internal marketing, the factors internal communication, employee motivation, future growth, training and development are found to be statistically significant and these are supported by the study of Iliopoulos and Priporas (2011). Hence, the congruency in the findings in the context of previous studies validates the findings of this study more.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusively, it can be asserted that internal marketing is found to have a significant effect on employee retention concerning the case of the hospital sector in Thailand. Also, internal communication, employee motivation, future growth, training and development were affecting the internal marketing practices in a significant manner. This implies that the employers of the hospital sector in Thailand should devise the strategies that motivate the employees and the internal communication is needed to be enhanced with frequent meetings within the organisation. In furtherance, the future growth prospects are also required to be made clear to the employees to have a high retention rate in future. The employees also stressed on the training and development aspect. Therefore, incorporating an intensive training programme in their schedule can be opportunistic for the future and long-term profitability of the hospitals operating in Thailand.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The research has certain limitations considering the scope of this study. Firstly, it is limited to the geographical bounds of Thailand. Secondly, the targeted industry in the healthcare industry with specifically the hospital sector and no other industry has been taken into account. Besides, a limited sample was approached for data collection and this research took quantitative assessment into consideration only. Hence, this study has a considerable room for improvement where another country can be taken for analysis or any other sector than the hospital sector. In furtherance, a comparative assessment between Thailand or any other developing or developed country can be undertaken for future researchers. In addition to the mentioned aspects, interviews can be conducted to enhance the explanation and causation. Lastly, more factors concerning internal marketing practices can be taken into account in the future.

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