

Internal marketing and employee commitment in the hospitality industry

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Abstract

Internal marketing has been posited as a tool that can positively influence employees' to consistently deliver quality service. Internal marketing has also been said to impact employee behaviour in diverse ways, including employee commitment to the organisation. However, not much is known about the impact of internal marketing on employee commitment in small hotels, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Again, the dimensions of internal marketing are not commonly agreed. This study is therefore an attempt to determine internal marketing dimensions in the small hotel sector, and evaluate its impact on employee commitment. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data. Respondents were selected using simple random sampling technique and data analysed using exploratory factor analysis, scale reliability test and multiple regression analysis. The study established seven dimensions of internal marketing comprising, internal communication, staff development, information communication technology (ICT), fairness, empowerment, teamwork and motivation. Together, these internal marketing dimensions had 26 items which predicting over 62% of the variance in employee commitment. ICT was the most significant dimension impacting employee commitment, while motivation did not have a statistically significant impact on employee commitment.

Key Words: Internal marketing, small hotels, hospitality, employee commitment, Ghana

Background to the study

Various scholars have argued internal marketing to be a tool that could be employed to motivate employees to deliver quality service (Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000; Chang & Chang, 2009; Narteh, 2012). Internal marketing was first proposed as a solution to the persistent challenge of consistently delivering high quality service (Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000). Internal marketing has also been said to be the key to satisfying the internal employee as a means of realising organisational intent (Berry, 1981). Berry and Parasuraman (1991) have even argued that the commitment of the internal customer is critical for the survival and growth of the enterprise. Internal marketing has further been posited as an effective tool in the management of change and implementation of strategy (Rafiq & Ahmed, 1993; Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000). Gronroos (2009) maintains that, promises made by organisations to their external customers, would not be realised unless employees are motivated and willing to keep such promises. As a result of the perceived benefits that organisations practising internal marketing is conceived to derive, scholars have sought to understand its impact on employee commitment (Mishra, 2010; Ting, 2011; Narteh, 2012).

Despite the obvious significance of internal marketing in the delivery of quality service and positively impacting employee behaviour, scholars are not consistent with the conceptualisation of the dimensions of internal marketing. There is little agreement on the mix of elements that should be employed by an organisation in an attempt to achieve the objectives of an internal marketing effort (Ahmed, Rafiq & Saad, 2003). For instance, Ahmed

et al. (2003) investigated communication and empowerment as dimensions of internal marketing. For Chang and Chang (2009) the dimensions of internal marketing included employee-oriented measures, internal communication and external activities. Again, Narteh (2012) conceptualised the dimensions of internal marketing as empowerment, reward systems, communications and employee training and development. Similarly, De Bruin-Reynolds, Roberts-Lombard and de Meyer (2015) considered internal product, internal price, internal promotion and internal distribution as internal marketing mix. Clearly, there is no meeting of minds when it comes to the elements of internal marketing. This gap is a major challenge with current internal marketing literature. This study therefore explores the internal marketing literature and attempts to develop a broader framework of internal marketing dimensions that better reflect internal marketing, especially in the small hotel sector.

Internal marketing and the hospitality industry

Researchers have argued that the hotel industry is unique compared to other service industries, as it provides a home environment for commercial purposes. Studies on internal marketing have over the years sought to demonstrate the relevance of internal marketing in the management of employees of the hotel industry. Various studies on internal marketing have demonstrated that effective internal marketing practices in the hotel industry results in employee satisfaction, customer focus and high service quality delivery to the guest (Kandampully, 2002; Tag-Eldeen & El-Said, 2011; Sokhatskaya, 2013). For instance, Kandampully (2002) argues that, satisfied employees will ultimately relay their level of satisfaction onto the guest who patronise their services. Sokhatskaya (2013) posits that, internal marketing enables the provision of high standards of quality at all stages of the operation of a hotel. Effective internal marketing practices lead to the establishment of a service culture, development of a marketing approach to human resource management, information dissemination among hotel employees, and implementation of a reward and recognition system (Tag-Eldeen & El-Said, 2011).

The complex nature of the hospitality industry makes the management of people challenging and different from other industries (Tag-Eldeen & El-Said, 2011). Internal marketing has been seen as a means of effectively managing employees for enhanced productivity (Yankevich, 2004). An excellent internal marketing environment in the hotel would enable employees provide high service quality. Indeed, several studies have confirmed the importance of internal marketing in managing employees in the hotel industry (Turkoz & Akyol, 2008; Lo, Stalcup & Lee, 2010; Sokhatskaya, 2013). Lo et al. (2010) for example, suggested that hotel operators must first address the needs of employees as a measure to building good relations with customers. Internal marketing is considered the means by which employee needs can be addressed, and is therefore the basis of the formation of the relationship between the customer and the employee in the hotel setting (Sokhatskaya, 2013).

Turkoz and Akyol (2008) found a positive relationship between the level of internal marketing in the hotel and the level of hotel performance. The effective application of internal marketing practices in the hotel industry has been shown to contribute to employee job satisfaction resulting in an increase in positive employee behaviour including cooperation with colleagues and commitment to the organisation (Arnett, Laverie & Mclane, 2002). In a study of five-star hotels in Egypt, Tag-Eldeen and El-Said (2011) concluded that internal marketing is an effective tool in promoting and enhancing employee commitment to the hotel. In a case study of two hotels, Hedin and Lidstrom (2006) demonstrated that low employee turnover rate was a consequence of internal marketing practices in these hotels.

Sokhatskaya (2013) also argued that internal marketing enhanced the effectiveness and focus of the hotel employee. However, several of these studies as cited above sparingly focused on sub-Saharan Africa, and especially on the lower-end of the market (small hotel), as conceptualised in this study. A search of the extant literature suggests that studies linking internal marketing practices and employee commitment, especially in the small hotel sector, and more so in a developing country context are rather limited. This introduces a contextual gap in the literature. Management values and practices differ considerably between small and luxury hotels (Lee-Ross & Ingold, 1994; Hankinson, 1989) implying that findings from one segment of the industry may not necessarily be applicable to other segments. It is therefore relevant to determine the impact of internal marketing on employee commitment on small hotels in a sub-Saharan environment, using Ghana as a case in point.

Critical research issues arise from the discussions above. The study attempts to seek answers to the question: what are the dimensions of internal marketing and what is its impact on employee commitment in small hotels? Consequently, the study is designed to achieve the following objectives applicable to small hotels:

- Identify internal marketing dimensions
- Determine the impact of internal marketing on employee commitment
- Determine the relative significance of the dimensions of internal marketing on employee commitment

It is hoped that the study would make a contribution towards conceptualising the dimensions of internal marketing and throw more light on the relationship between internal marketing practices and employee commitment, especially in the small hotel sector. It is also expected that the output of the study would provide small hotels and their managers with relevant insights that they could employ to gain the commitment of their employees.

Internal marketing dimensions

A major challenge with current internal marketing literature is the lack of agreement on its dimensions (Ahmed et al. 2003). Despite this challenge, a number of studies suggest some dimensions. For instance, Berry and Parasuraman (2004) identified attracting, developing, motivating, and retaining qualified employees as relevant internal marketing dimensions. Gummesson (1991) considered communication, training, education and information as internal marketing dimensions while, Varey (1995) identified motivating, developing and training employees. Ahmed et al. (2003) also suggested strategic rewards, internal communications, training and development, inter-functional co-ordination, incentive systems and empowerment while Chang and Chang (2007) proposed training, administrative support, internal communication and human resource management as internal marketing dimensions. Service training programmes and performance initiatives were also identified as internal marketing dimensions (Tsai & Tang, 2008).

Reading from the extant literature, this study operationalised the constructs of internal marketing as; internal communication, staff development, ICT, fairness, empowerment, teamwork and employee motivation. These constructs are discussed below.

Internal communication

Communication within the organisation has become an essential prerequisite for the well – functioning of internal activities in the organisation and job satisfaction (Goris, Vaught & Pettit, 2000; Ducharme & Martin, 2008; McCormick, 2008; Tourani & Rsat, 2012). Communication has been defined by Dwyer (2005) as the process whereby people within an organization give and receive message. Ahmed and Rafiq (2003) posit that, communication should be featured at all levels of the organizational hierarchy so that the behaviour of all employees can be influenced. According to Roberts–Lombard (2010) organisations, as part of their priorities should improve communication with employees through different means such as internal newsletter and team work discussion sessions. The power of an effective internal communication should not be undermined because it serves as a vital tool as far as internal marketing practices are concern (Lovelock, 1999; Dwairi, Bhuian & Jurkus, 2007). Beyerlein, McGee, Klein, Nemiro and Broedling (2003) suggested that management should align support systems that employees can communicate their needs and frustrations as this will lead to employee satisfaction and effective functioning of the organization. Studies have noted a positive association between internal communication and employee outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Jo & Shim, 2005; Kim & Rhee, 2011). It is hypothesised therefore that;
H1: Internally communication significantly impacts employee commitment.

Staff development

Employees are the greatest resources of the organisation (Beyerlein et al. 2003). Managers in the service sector need to train and develop their human capital to be abreast with changes in the environment and equip them with new skills to deliver service quality in this era of intense competition. According to Abiodun (1999), training is a systematic development of the knowledge, skills and attitudes required by employees to perform adequately on a given task or job. A study conducted by Martensen and Grønholdt (2006) revealed that, employees who have undergone training and develop new skills and acquire knowledge are competent, secured and confident in service delivery far better than their counterparts with inadequate training. Papasolomou (2002) contends that employee development serves as motivation for their dedication to work and delivering of high service quality. Watkins and Marsick (2003) found that, employee development leads to increase in employee job satisfaction. In the small hotel settings, managers should periodically organise training sessions for employees about new developments or impending changes (Byju, 2013). Byju (2013) argues that this will help the employee to reposition and absorb the developments and adjust to the necessary requirements. Waris (2005) argues that, when employees believe employers have invested in them through training and development, they become satisfied and subsequently cultivate a sense of belonging to the organisation. It is hypothesised therefore that;

H2: Staff development significantly impacts employee commitment

Information and communication technology (ICT)

Time in service delivery is an important tool due to the perishable nature of services, specifically hotel business operations. Several scholars agree that the immersion of ICT in the development of marketing activities can be a true source of competitive advantage for any company, improving innovation processes and their outcomes (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000; Bond & Houston, 2003; Tatikonda & Stock, 2003; Neu & Brown, 2005; Antioco, 2006; Penttinen & Palmer, 2007). In this study, ICT is seen as the use of state of the art technological logistics (computers, reliable internet, intercom services) and other technological infrastructure that aid employees to deliver services on time. According to Zeithaml and Bitner (2000), building a service system and enhancing service quality excellence requires the use of IT infrastructure. Neu and Brown (2005) reiterated that, for

organisations to compete in an increasingly complex market, staff ability to use ICT for services is a vital resource. In similar developments, Antioco (2006) argues that, ICT enables better service delivery and leads to improve cross-functional communication and service oriented business strategy internally within the organisation. Sorensen and Lundh-Snis (2001) point out that, ICT serves as catalyst and encourage the process of transmission and diffusion of knowledge throughout the organisation. In the light of the earlier discussions, it can be argued that employees equipped with the requisite ICT equipment and skills will be more committed to work and deliver high service quality than their counterparts with obsolete or no technological devices. This informed the third hypothesis;
H3: ICT significantly impacts employee commitment

Fairness

Management must arrange regular meetings with their employees to listen to their needs, enquiries, complains and recommendations, in order to address the needs of employees on an individual basis (Roberts-Lombard, 2010). The author argues that such a practice will enable management to institute equity and fair play towards employees in the organisation. Unfair treatment of employees by management hinders service quality delivery. For instance, most employees in the same rank usually compare their salaries with each other to ascertain whether they receive equal pay (Noe et al. 2006). Meanwhile, Suleiman Awwad and Mohammad Agti (2011) emphasised that a fair reward system coupled with a positive interaction and vision sharing with employees creates more emotionally attached employees and employee satisfaction leading to employee retention. Consequently, fairness as internal marketing tool will help reduce suspicions among co-workers which will enhance conducive working environment and corporation among employees. It is thus conceptualised that;
H4: Fairness significantly impacts employee commitment

Empowerment

Employee empowerment is significant in service organisations. Zeithaml and Bitner (1996) opine that a lot of organisations accept that in order to be responsive to customer needs, employees need to be empowered to accommodate customer requests, and respond appropriately to remedy situations when things go wrong. According to Proctor and Doukakis (2003), the effective part of employee development dwells on empowerment. Empowerment as an internal marketing dimension means authorizing and enabling employees to act, behave, think and make decisions to get the job done (Kaner, 2014). This enables employees to exercise their discretion in service delivery (Czaplewski, Ferguson & Milliman, 2001). It is when employers create favourable environments and equip employees with resources to boost their level of confidence that they are able to effectively take on new responsibilities (Lovelock, 1999). Scholars have suggested that, when empowerment is incorporated in the job design of an organisation, it could enhance employee satisfaction (Evan & Lindsay, 1996; Eskildsen & Dahlgard, 2000). Empowered employees have the opportunity to go beyond scope to satisfy the firm's customers (Babakus, Yavas, Karatepe & Avci, 2003). It is thus hypothesised as follows;
H5: Empowerment significantly impacts employee commitment

Teamwork

It is important for internal employees to work as a team to satisfy the external customer. Moingeon and Edmondson (1996 p.166) defined internal team work as "the extent to which team members engage in behaviours to monitor performance against goals, obtain new information, test assumptions and create new possibilities". A study conducted by Drake,

Gulman and Roberts (2005) revealed that an effective implementation of internal marketing can lead to better team work. In the hotel business it is equally important for employees to work as a team and share ideas to harness delivery of service quality. Employees effectively working as one team with a common purpose can improve the quality of service delivery and profitability. Consequently, it is hypothesised that;

H6: Teamwork significantly impacts employee commitment

Employee motivation

Motivation is an essential element which enhances the performance of the employee (Papasolomou, 2006). Ahmed and Rafiq (2006) ranked employee motivation and satisfaction as the first phase in internal marketing. The study of Tansey, McHugh and McGrath (2004) as cited in Amjad and Muhammad (2012) found that management can use internal marketing to motivate employees to provide the best possible service to customers. In a similar development, Papasolomou (2006) argues that a lot of companies set a systematic reward system to motivate its employees to improve their service quality and delivery. The challenge in the reward system is management's inability to ascertain the differences that exist between good, average, and poor performers (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart & Wright, 2006). Empirical evidence from the hospitality management literatures indicates that intrinsically motivated employees exhibit desirable outcomes such as heightened job satisfaction (Karatepe & Uludag, 2007). A study by Locke and Latham (1990) found a relationship between employee motivation and job satisfaction. Zain, Ishak and Ghani (2009) established a direct relationship between motivation as a reward system and employee commitment. Flowing from the above, it is hypothesised as follows;

H7: Employee motivation significantly impacts employee commitment

Employee commitment

Different scholars have defined employee commitment in diverse ways (Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979; Maxwell & Steel, 2003; He, Murrman & Perdue, 2010; Nartey, 2012). For instance, Mowday et al. (1979) noted that commitment referred to the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organisation. Maxwell and Steele (2003) described employee commitment as the intensity of an employee's affinity to and participation in an organisation. He et al. (2010) on the other hand saw employee commitment as the psychological and emotional attachment of an employee to his or her organisation, accepting the goals and values of the organisation, and delivering high quality service in order to satisfy and retain customers.

Narteh (2012) described employee commitment as a felt state of employees' attachment to their organisations, including their willingness to internalise the values of the organisation and abiding by the rules and regulations therein. For the purposes of this study, employee commitment is described as the strength of an employee's attachment to an organisation, usually manifested in employee internalisation of organisational values, going the "extra mile" to achieve corporate objectives and staying long in the organisation. Scholars have frequently measured employee commitment from three perspectives thus: affective commitment; normative commitment; and continuance commitment. (see Allen & Meyer, 1997; Yousef, 2003; Dixit & Bhati, 2012; Narteh, 2012). An employee's commitment to an organisation could be based upon any one of these three types of commitments, or all of them as all the three sub-components are not mutually exclusive (Park & Rainey, 2007).

Affective or attitudinal commitment refers to an employee's belief and acceptance of the goals and values of an organisation (Swales, 2002). Park and Rainey (2007) posit that high levels of affective commitment in organisations has the most significant effect on job satisfaction, perceived performance and quality of work, in their study of public sector agencies in the United State of America. Normative commitment on the other hand, describes the feelings of obligations and loyalty an employee feels towards organisation (Swales, 2002). Normative commitment stresses both the formal and informal responsibility an employee feels towards the organisation. The employee feels obliged to work in order for the firm to effectively function and meet its goals and objectives (Park & Rainey, 2007; Narteh, 2012). The normative aspect develops as employees' perceive they have a moral obligation to remain with a specific organisation, irrespective of how much status improvement or fulfilment the organisation has given the individual over the years (Marsh & Mannari, 1977; Dixit & Bhati, 2012). The cost an individual perceives to be associated with leaving the employment of an organisation is described as continuance commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1997). For Allen and Meyer (1997) continuance commitment develops on the basis of two factors; the number of investments individuals make in their current organisation and the perceived lack of alternatives.

Kanter (1968) describes continuance commitment as a cognitive activity that occurs when there is a profit associated with continued participation, and a cost associated with leaving. Continuance commitment is cost induced and refers to an employee's awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organisation (Narteh, 2012; Dixit & Bhati, 2012). The items that were used to measure employee commitment were drawn from the extant literature. Particularly the items were drawn from the works of Yousef (2003); Chang and Chang (2009) and Narteh (2012). The plausible relationships between the internal marketing dimensions identified above and employee commitment is demonstrated by figure 1 and hypothesised as follows:

- H1: Internal communication significantly impacts employee commitment
- H2: Staff development significantly impacts employee commitment
- H3: ICT significantly impacts employee commitment
- H4: Fairness significantly impacts employee commitment
- H5: Empowerment significantly impacts employee commitment
- H6: Teamwork significantly impacts employee commitment
- H7: Employee motivation significantly impacts employee commitment

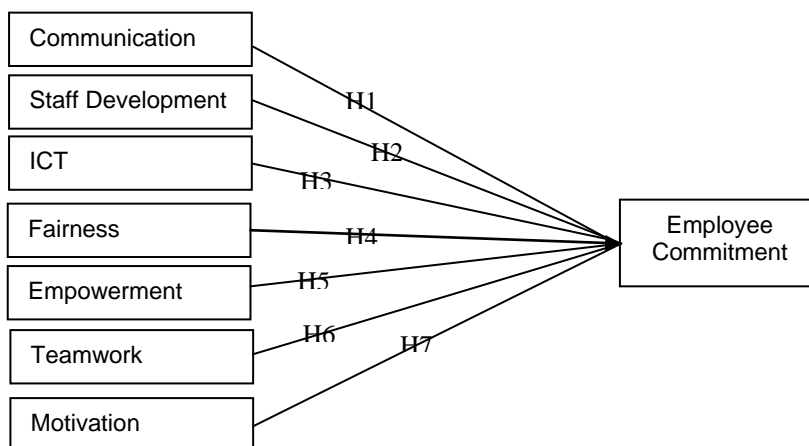


Figure 1: Internal marketing and employee commitment

Small hotels in Ghana

Small hotels are conceptualised in this study to include budget hotels and guest houses as classified by the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA) which regulates and supervises the tourism and hospitality sector. Hotels in Ghana are rated from 1 star to 5 stars. Hotels with no star rating are considered budget hotels and guest houses. A guest house is a hotel that could otherwise have achieved a star rating status, but that has fewer than 10 guest rooms. A study in this sector is particularly significant as according to the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA), small hotels constitute about 70% of the total number of hotels in Ghana.

Study methodology

The study was designed as a single cross-sectional study. The sampling units for the study were made up of small hotels in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. The sampling frame for this population consisted of a register of small hotels in the Greater Accra region as maintained by the GTA. The hotels were chosen through a random sampling technique. The hotels were serially numbered and each number was written on a separate piece of paper and crumbled into a dry container. The researcher then picked 50 pieces of these crumbled papers at random. The hotels whose corresponding numbers were picked constituted the sampling units for the study. A total of 50 hotels were sampled. The sampling elements were made up of employees of the selected hotels. The Greater Accra Region is the economic and political capital of the country and according to the GTA, has about 40% of small hotels in Ghana. It is the researcher's consideration that the study sample drawn from the Greater Accra region provides deep insight into the research subject.

The items used for measurement in the study were derived from the review of relevant extant literature on both internal marketing and employee commitment. These items were used to design a structured questionnaire for the study. The questionnaire was first given to three senior colleagues who reviewed the instrument and made suggestions. These suggestions resulted in the restructuring and rewording of parts of the instrument. The questionnaire was then piloted tested among 30 employees randomly selected from 15 small hotels in Accra, the capital city. These hotels and their employees were selected as per the same procedure described for the selection of the sampling units and elements for the main study. Adjustments were made to the questionnaire after the pilot test before the instrument was rolled out for the survey.

The items on the questionnaire were measured on a five-point Likert scale. The scale ranged from 1 which was described as "highly unimportant" to 5 which was described as "highly important". The questionnaire contained 41 questions. 29 questions measured seven internal marketing dimensions, seven questions measured employee commitment and five questions related to the personal data of respondents such as age, gender and nationality. For internal marketing, six items measured fairness, four items measured empowerment, five items each measured motivation and internal communication, and three items each measured staff development, teamwork and ICT. The internal marketing dimensions and employee commitment, and the various items that measure them are outline below.

Fairness

- I am treated fairly in salary issues
- I am treated fairly in training and development issues
- I am treated fairly in promotion issues
- I am treated fairly in workload issues

I am treated fairly in reward, incentives and benefits issues
I am treated fairly in disciplinary issues

Empowerment

My hotel encourages me to take initiatives
My hotel enhances my feeling of self-efficiency
My hotel trusts me to exercise good judgements
My hotel allows me to use my own judgement in solving problems

Motivation

Employees are paid competitive salaries
Employees are paid competitive fringe benefits and incentives
Employees are encouraged to give off their best
Employees are encouraged to remain with the company
Employees are given reasonably workload

Internal communication

This organisation has internal communication strategies
This organisation has interactive communication channels
This organisation encourages interpersonal communication
This organisation regularly communicates with us
This organisation communicates clearly and unambiguously with us

Staff development

The hotel constantly trains staff
The hotel fosters learning among staff
The hotel ensures training is linked to roles played by staff

Teamwork

My colleagues in the department effectively collaborate with me
My colleagues in other departments effectively collaborate with me
My superiors effectively collaborate with me

ICT

The ICT facility is always in working order
The ICT facility is the right one for me
The ICT facility enables me effectively perform my job

Employee commitment

I care about the future development of this hotel
I feel I have a promising future if I stay with this hotel
I will pass on my experience to new staff in this hotel
I am emotionally attached to this hotel
I will feel guilty if I leave this hotel
I am willing to serve this hotel
I am better off staying with this hotel

The items measuring the various internal marketing dimensions were derived from various literature sources as indicated in table1 below.

Table 1 Dimensions of internal marketing

Item	Internal marketing dimensions	Literature source
1	Internal Communication	Gummesson (1991); Ahmed et al. (2003); Chang and Chang (2007); Narteh (2012).
2	Staff Development	Berry and Parasuraman (1991); Gummesson (1991); Varey (1995); Ahmed et al. (2003); Tsai and Tang (2008); Narteh (2012).
3	ICT	Zeithaml and Bitner (2000); Neu and Brown (2005); Antioco (2006).
4	Fairness	Neo et al. (2006); Roberts-Lombard (2010); Suleiman Awwad and Mohammad Agti (2011)
5	Empowerment	Mishra (2009); Proctor and Doukakis (2003); Ahmed et al. (2003); Kaner (2014); Narteh (2012).
6	Teamwork	Ahmed et al. (2003); Kaner (2014).
7	Employee Motivation	Varey (1995); Berry and Parasuraman (1991); Ahmed et al. (2003); Narteh (2012).

Source: Constructed from literature

The questionnaires were administered to employees of 50 hotels selected by a random sampling technique. 250 respondents were targeted, that is, 5 respondents per hotel. At each selected hotel, the purpose and nature of the research was made known to management and permission sought from them to conduct the study. Each employee was represented (identified) by a letter of the alphabet which were all written on separate pieces of paper and crumbled into a dry container. The researcher randomly picked five pieces of paper each from the containers, and these represented the sample for the study.

Quantitative data analyses techniques in SPSS version 20 which included exploratory factor analysis, scale reliability test and multiple regression analysis were used to analyse the collected data for the study. Exploratory factor analysis and scale reliability test were used as data reduction and reliability test tools to determine relevant internal marketing dimensions and items. Multiple linear regression analysis was also used to determine the relationship between the internal marketing dimensions and employee commitment. 180 questionnaires were found to be useful for the study.

Findings from the study

The majority of the respondents were male, constituting almost 68%. Ages 18 to 40 years constituted about 90% of respondents, with the age group of 31 to 40 alone constituting 50% of the respondents. There was no intention to skew the gender composition and age group. However, the results suggest that more young males are employed in this sector of the hotel industry. Only 4 respondents had tertiary education. Majority of respondents fell within the primary/ JHS/ SHS category. This situation is not surprising because this segment of the industry is the “lower end”, and so is unable to attract the services of highly educated personnel. This is further illustrated by the fact that over 83% of respondents had worked for five years or less in these hotels, suggesting that people moved on as they obtained higher educational qualifications. In terms of nationality, only four respondents were not citizens of Ghana.

The descriptive statistics revealed a high mean score. From an answer range of 1 to 5, the lowest mean score registered was 3.3111, and the highest mean score recorded was 4.3111. This means that respondents were highly agreed on all the items that measured internal marketing.

Exploratory factor analyses

The Bartlett's test of sphericity must be significant ($p < .05$) for factor analysis to be considered appropriate for a given set of data. The Bartlett Test of Sphericity in this study recorded an approximate Chi-Square value of 4623.623 (df. 406) and was significant (Sig. 0.000). The KMO measure of sampling adequacy recorded a value of .742, and this is considered adequate for factor analysis, as KMO index of 0.6 is suggested as the minimum value for a good factor analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007; Hair, Bush, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2006). A correlation matrix was generated from the dataset and it indicated a large proportion of items with correlations of .3 and above, thus establishing the suitability of the data set for factor analyses (Pallant, 2010).

The study contained 29 items which were subjected to exploratory factor analysis using Principal Component Analysis in SPSS Version 20 for windows. Only items with eigenvalues exceeding 1 were extracted (Malhotra & Birks, 2007; Pallant 2010), and this resulted in 8 factors which explained 79% of the variance. To aid in the interpretation of these 8 components, Varimax rotation was performed. This resulted in 26 items loading unto 7 factors. The resulting factors were tested to determine their reliability and internal consistency, and they registered high alpha values as indicated in table 2.

Table 2 Factor loadings, reliability of scales- independent variables

Variables	No. of Items	Item Loadings	Item-Total Correlation (ITC)	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Internal Communication`	5			.889	
Internal communication strategies exist		.644	.717		.868
Interactive communication channels exist		.723	.710		.870
Interpersonal communication encouraged		.824	.698		.873
Regular communication with staff		.762	.776		.855
Unambiguous communication with staff		.746	.753		.860
Staff Development	5			.871	
Encouraged to give off their best		.778	.657		.853
Reasonable workload		.605	.606		.865
Constant training of staff		.644	.715		.839
Learning among staff is fostered		.779	.810		.816
Training linked to roles staff play		.720	.702		.843
ICT	3			.924	
ICT facility always in working order		.822	.864		.877
ICT facility is appropriate		.909	.880		.861
ICT facility enables effective job execution		.776	.628		.898
Fairness	4			.839	
Fair treatment in salary issues		.843	.726		.774
Fair treatment in staff development		.834	.650		.806
Fair treatment in promotion		.823	.753		.763
Fair treatment in reward/ benefits		.560	.577		.843
Empowerment	3			.843	
Fair treatment in reward/ benefits		.697	.715		.776
Encouraged to take initiatives		.828	.764		.727
Enhance feeling of self-efficiency		.736	.650		.837
Teamwork	3			.903	
Effective intra-departmental cooperation		.795	.737		.927
Effective inter-departmental cooperation		.812	.874		.813
Superiors effectively cooperate with staff		.750	.825		.846

Motivation	3		.782	
Use own judgement in solving problems	.655	.584		.743
Competitive salaries paid	.774	.616		.710
Competitive benefits paid	.873	.670		.651

Source: Constructed from field data

Scale reliability

A scale reliability test was undertaken to determine the internal consistency of the items that constituted each of the dimensions of internal marketing. For an item to be retained in the scale it should have a minimum factor loading threshold of 0.5 (Hair et al. 2006), register an item-total-correlation greater than 0.3 (Blankson & Stokes, 2002) while a factor must have a Cronbach Alpha score of at least 0.7 (Pallant, 2010). All the 26 items were retained after the reliability test. See table 2. All seven factors were also retained for further analyses as they all scored high Cronbach Alpha values, with .782 being the lowest score registered by staff motivation, and .924 being the highest Cronbach Alpha score, registered by ICT. A scale reliability test was also conducted to assess the internal consistency of the overall scale. The overall scale registered a high Cronbach's Alpha score of .924, meaning that the scale as a whole had a very high degree of internal consistency, and so was reliable.

Dependent factor

The dependent factor, "employee commitment", which was made up of seven items, was also subjected to scale reliability test to determine the internal consistency of the sub-scale. Table 3 revealed that all items in the dependent component had factor loadings greater than 0.5, ITC scores greater than 0.3, and a Cronbach Alpha score of .904. Consequently, all items were retained for further analysis.

Table 3 Factor Loadings, Reliability of Scales- Dependent Variables

Variables	No. of Items	Item Loadings	Item-total correlation (ITC)	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha if item is deleted
Employee Commitment	7			.904	
Emotionally attached to the hotel		.875	.814		.879.
Will pass on my experience to new staff		.841	.767		.885
Have promising future with the hotel		.822	.742.		.887
Will feel guilty if I leave the hotel		.807	.726		.889
I am willing to serve the hotel		.792	.714		.890
I care about the future of the hotel		.724	.626		.900
I am better off staying with the hotel		.720	.627		.900

Source: Constructed from field data

Multiple regression analysis

In order to determine the effect of internal marketing on employee commitment in small hotels and evaluate the relative significance of the dimensions of internal marketing with respect to employee commitment in small hotels, a multiple regression analysis was performed. Results from the multiple regressions were used to analyse the relationship between dimensions of internal marketing and employee commitment in small hotels. This was done to extract the independent variables that better explained the dependent variable.

Issues of multicollinearity were investigated and the data was found to be suitable for applying multiple regression analysis as the lowest tolerance value (.452) and highest VIF

value (2.214) registered were higher than the “.10” and lower than the suggested “10” cut off points, respectively (Hair, Bush & Ortinau, 2003; Pallant, 2010). A correlation matrix was constructed which recorded several correlation values of .3 and above between the independent and dependent variables, and correlation values below .7, and this is acceptable for multiple regression purposes (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

As shown in table 4, the results from the regression statistics indicated that there is a strong and significant relationship between the internal marketing and employee commitment constructs (F=40.556, Prob. F-stats). Costello and Osborn (2009) have noted that a model reaches statistical significance at Sig<.05. In this study the model is statistically significant (Sig. 000). The R-Square value in the model summary depicts the degree of variance in the dependent variable which is explained by the model. The R-square value of .623 indicates that the internal marketing construct explains 62.3% of the variance in employee commitment.

Table 4 indicates that all the dimensions of internal marketing had a statistically significant impact on employee commitment (results are significant at 0.05, that is P<0.05), except employee motivation which registered a P-value of .463. As indicated in table 4, ICT was found to be the highest contributor towards employee commitment (β =.489, t =7.986, Sig.=.000 < 0.05); the second was employee empowerment (β =.329, t =5.513, Sig.=.000), while the third was internal communication (β =-.287, t =-.3985, Sig.=.000). The fourth factor was teamwork (β =.159, t =2.473, Sig.=.014); the fifth factor was staff development (β =.158, t =2.409, Sig. .017); and the sixth dimension was fairness (β =0.157, t =2.399, Sig. 0.016).

Table 4 Multi regression analysis table

	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant		1.426	.156
Fairness	.134	2.444	.016
Empowerment	.329	5.513	.000
Motivation	-.039	-.735	.463
Staff Development	.158	2.409	.017
Internal Communication	-.278	-3.985	.000
Teamwork	.159	2.473	.014
ICT	.489	7.986	.000
R	.789		
R-Square	.623	F-Statistics	40.556
Adj. R-Square	.607	Prob. (F-stats)	.000
			N-180

Discussion of findings

The first objective of the study was to establish the dimensions of internal marketing. The results show that internal marketing is multi-dimensional and is consistent with findings from other studies (Narteh, 2012; Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003). In this study, internal marketing is made up seven dimensions which comprised 26 items. The dimensions and items are as follows, ICT (3 items), employee empowerment (3 items), communication (5 items), teamwork (3 items), staff development (5 items), fairness (4 items), and staff motivation (3 items). See table 2 for the internal marketing items. The extant literature has identified empowerment of employees and teamwork (cross-functional participation), as relevant elements of internal marketing (De Bruin-Reynolds, 2015; Kaner, 2014; Narteh, 2012; Ahmed et al. 2003). The effective dissemination of information among employees (internal communication), and the implementation of a reward and recognition system (motivation) are necessary in the

establishment of an effective internal marketing practice (Narteh, 2012; Tag-Eldeen & El-Said, 2011). The education of staff, good communication system using good reward systems were identified as key dimensions of internal marketing in the hotel industry by Hedin and Lidstrom (2006). Staff management and training, as well as communication, have also been identified as critical internal marketing activities that when instituted in the hotel, enhanced employee productivity (Narteh, 2012; Yankevich, 2004). The dimensions established in this study as internal marketing elements have largely been identified by various researchers in different studies. However, these dimensions have not all been identified in one single study as has happened in this study. This work has therefore offered a more comprehensive conceptualisation of internal marketing dimensions focused on small hotels in the hospitality sector.

The second objective of this study was to determine the impact of the internal marketing construct on employee commitment in the small hotel sector. From table 4, the internal marketing construct explained 62.3% of the variance in employee commitment, and this is statistically significant. This result is consistent with findings from other studies. For instance, in a study of nurses in Taiwan, a favourable perception of internal marketing was associated with increased organisational commitment (Chang & Chang, 2009) which appears to support the findings in this study. Sokhatskaya (2013) have emphasised that internal marketing enhances the effectiveness and focus of the hotel employee. Similarly, in a study to determine the impact of internal marketing on employee commitment in the banking sector in Ghana, Narteh (2012) also found internal marketing to have a positive impact on employee commitment.

In terms of the individual impact of the internal marketing dimensions on employee commitment, the study hypothesised that all the seven internal marketing dimensions under study had significant impact on employee commitment in the small hotel sector. From the regression results, six of the seven internal marketing dimensions all had statistically significant impact on employee commitment to the hotel, thus accepting hypotheses H1-H6. The impact of motivation on employee commitment to the hotel was however not statistically significant, thus failing to accept hypothesis H7.

Empowerment was found to be a major driver of employee commitment among the hotels studied. Employee empowerment positively and significantly impacted employee commitment. The implication of this finding is that management should allow staff to use their discretion and take initiatives. This has the potential to make the employee feel relevant and wanted by the hotel, thereby developing his or her sense of commitment to the hotel. In fact, it has been argued that when employees are permitted to use their discretion and take initiatives to handle customers for example, they (employees) develop a high sense of personal worth, and this makes them more committed to their organisations (Narteh, 2012; Yiing & Ahmad, 2009). This finding is consistent with results of other studies which found empowerment as a tool that influence employee behaviour (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003; Foley, 2008; Narteh, 2012).

Internal communication was also found to have a significant relationship with employee commitment in small hotels. The finding is contrary to the finding from Narteh (2012) study of banks in Ghana where communication was found not to have a statistically significant relationship with employee commitment. This result from the current study however agrees with other studies that found that the availability of internal communication channels influenced employee commitment (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003; Chang & Chang, 2009; Finney, 2011). The study suggests that small hotels should design strategies that would encourage effective internal communication that would be regular and unambiguous.

Teamwork and fairness in management practices were also found to be positively and significantly influencing employee commitment. Scholars have argued that employees of the same rank compare their salaries for example, and unfair practices detected results in poor service quality delivery, whereas a fair reward system for instance creates emotionally attached employees (Noe et al. 2006; Roberts-Lombard, 2010; Suleiman Awwad & Mohammad Agti, 2011). Again, when there is cooperation among employees, they engage in behaviours that create new possibilities (Edmondson, 1996). It is the contention of this paper that when management is fair in their dealings (such as promotion, training and benefits) with employees, as well as instituting a spirit of team work in the hotel, it would positively impact employees' commitment to the hotel.

Staff development was found to be positively related to employee commitment in this study. This finding collaborate other works that assert that well trained employees tend to develop further skills and knowledge which helps them understand current and future needs of customers and how to satisfy them, generally enhance their job performance and impacts positively on employee commitment to the organisation. This study thus suggest that, employees should be adequately developed, as a well trained staff enhances the overall organisational performance, and is also positively influenced in his or her behaviour (commitment) to the hotel. Motivation recorded negative beta and "t" values and was not statistically significant. This means that motivation did not have any real impact on employee commitment to small hotels. This is contrary to findings from other studies that suggest that offering competitive salaries and fringe benefit to employees tend to increase their levels of commitment towards the organization (Lou et al. 2007; Wei & Atuahene-Gima, 2009; Cichy et al, 2009). It is conceivable that because these hotels are at the lower-end of the industry, employees are not expectant of huge salaries and benefits. Consequently, the combined impact of the other internal marketing dimensions appears to adequately act as motivational factors. It is therefore suggested in this study that, though the need for "good salary and benefits" are relevant to meet the food, shelter and clothing needs of employees in developing countries (Narteh, 2012) other internal marketing dimensions are more relevant in influencing desired employee behaviour (commitment) in small hotels for example.

The third objective of this study was to identify the internal marketing dimension that significantly impacted employee commitment in the small hotel sector. ICT was established as the most significant internal marketing dimension that impacted employee commitment in this study. Interestingly, ICT has received little attention in the extant literature as a dimension of internal marketing. In the era of computers and the Internet, ICT has literally been ignored as a factor of internal marketing. The current study has however demonstrated that ICT is very critical as a dimension of internal marketing mix. For this researcher, the emergence of ICT as the most significant internal marketing dimension is no coincidence, since ICT is at the heart of business and management operations as well as communication. For the benefits of internal marketing to be fully leveraged, there is the need for an effective ICT system to be operational in the hotel.

Conclusions and future research direction

Employees are at the centre of the service delivery efforts of service organisations such as hotels. The commitment of staff to the course of the hotel is therefore critical to the growth and profitability of the hotel. The management of small hotels should carefully consider the internal marketing dimensions, especially the six factors (and the items they are comprised of) that had a positive and significant impact on employee commitment. The effective

deployment of practices that may lead to the manifestation of the internal marketing factors and items (as identified in this study) in the hotel work environment would help induce commitment from staff. Though “staff motivation” had no statistically significant impact on “employee commitment,” management should not ignore the three items the motivation factor contained. Since “staff motivation” loaded on the factor analyses and recorded a significant Cronbach Alpha score of .782, they are also relevant when discussing the dimensions of internal marketing.

A major purpose of this study was an attempt to conceptualise and empirically test a broad range of factors that can be considered internal marketing dimensions. The study was contextualised in the “lower-end” of the hotel industry in a developing country. This study could be replicated in other jurisdictions, and also in the “upper segment” of the hotel sector. This would help determine the reliability of the factors and items identified in this study. It would also be interesting to establish whether or not the factors identified in this study would be relevant in the public sector and in other industries beyond the hotel sector.

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