

Internal marketing in the last decade: a systematic review

El marketing interno en la última década: una revisión sistemática

Abubakar Musa

Umar Suleiman College of Education, Gashua, Nigeria

abumusadanchuwa@gmail.com

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4255-6897>

Mukaila Adebisi Ijaiya

Federal University of Technology Minna, Nigeria

majaiya@futminna.edu.ng

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3146-7490>

Umaru Mustapha Zubairu

Federal University of Technology Minna, Nigeria.

uzubairu@gmail.com

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9498-233X>

Abstract

This research examines internal marketing (IM) over the last decade (2012-2021) using systematic quantitative assessment techniques (SQAT). The review identified 82 IM articles from 39 countries. A significant number of the articles were published in 2015, with a large concentration in Asia. Taiwan had the highest number of published IM articles among the contributing countries. The majority of the articles reviewed were empirical research, while the minority were conceptual articles. Four methods of data collection (i.e. survey, Secondary data, interview, and observation) were identified, with a survey as the most utilized method. The review identified three different IM themes (i.e. IM magnitude, consequences of IM, and IM mechanism) with IM magnitude as the most investigated theme. This review recommends that more IM articles are encouraging in South America and other nations of other countries that currently have no representation. More conceptual research is encouraged in balancing the wide gap between empirical and conceptual articles. Researchers are encouraged to use more qualitative methods of data collection to gain more understanding of the concept. The researchers are also advised to adopt the mixed method of data collection on the consequences of IM and IM mechanisms themes.

Keywords

Internal; marketing; research; review.

1. Introduction

The world of business faces constant changes in terms of its economic, political, and social environment, creating permanent instability of customer's demands in the global markets (Moreira Mero et al., 2020). As such, companies embark on either internal marketing or external marketing to have competitive advantage over its rivals. Advertising has been a strategy for dealing with customers for almost three decades (Jiménez-Marín, et al., 2021). An approach, companies can consider improving their competitiveness is through the use of internal marketing practices to satisfy and enable employees to deliver superior service quality and perceived customer satisfaction (De Bruin et al., (2020). Several studies suggested that one way to improve employee's job satisfaction is through internal marketing (Frye et al., 2020). Internal marketing first appeared to ensure the delivery of steady high-quality service (Berry, 1981). The internal marketing concept comprises three interrelated developmental stages; employee focussed, customer focussed and company focussed (Chen et al., 2020). The idea of internal marketing is to view employees as internal customers, and to use jobs as internal products to satisfy their needs (Berry, 1981), which, in turn, educate, reward, and motivate them to meet the needs of external customers (Chen et al., 2020).

IM publication with nearly 40 years' history (Huang, 2020), focuses on employee satisfaction first for better service performance, and suggested that employees who are given more power and authority are more likely to obtain satisfaction (Chen et al., 2020). IM as a multidimensional approach assists organization in understanding employee demand, recognize the importance of training employees, and encourage good communication which assists teamwork and improve employee's relationships (Huang, 2020). Internal marketing is a method of cultivating high-level employee performance (Qaisar and Muhamad, 2021). In particular, several studies in various contexts have supported the idea that internal marketing positively affects the satisfaction of employees such as the Hospitality sector (Jeong and Lam, 2016), Tourism sector (Huang and Rundle-Thiele, 2014; Kim et al., (2015), Insurance sector (Ferdous and Polonsky, 2014), Sports sector (Chiu et al., 2014), Financial sector (Bailey et al., 2016; Kanyurhi and Akonkwa, 2016), and Healthcare sector (Chen et al., 2015). Nevertheless, there have been thousands of internal marketing articles in the last decade (Google Scholar found 1450 articles published between 2012 and 2021 that mentioned internal marketing in the title of the article). This is evident that there are thousands of scholars who are curious to determine whether this idea can exist in organizations. This research aims to conduct a systematic review of the last decade (2012–2021) of IM journal articles to understand the rate of publication in the last decade. The geographic distribution of these articles, the types of articles being published (conceptual versus empirical), the data collection methods utilized by these articles, and the various themes explored by these articles.

This study is structured as follows: Firstly, a methodology section is presented describing how studies for this paper were developed and analysed. Secondly, the findings of the review are presented, along with suggestions for future research avenues, and thirdly, a concluding section with limitations of the study is presented.

2. Methodology

This study reviews internal marketing (IM) articles in the last decade (2012 to 2021) using the systematic quantitative assessment technique (SQAT) developed by Pickering and Bryne in the year 2014. This technique is used to assess the criterion for inclusion or exclusion of peer-reviewed English journal publications and allows scholars to analyze the existing literature and produce an organized summary of a research area (Pickering and Bryne 2014). The method investigates the time distribution, geographical area, methods of data collection, and types of articles of the research area (Pickering and Bryne, 2014). The SQAT is well organized and comprehensive, as it shows the most critical subjects and variables for future research. SQAT recommends five steps in carrying out an effective systematic review. Table 1 presents each step and how it was applied in this study.

Table 01: Description and application

S/N	Dimensions	Application in the current study
1	Define topic	Internal Marketing (IM) journal articles published between 2012 and 2021.
2	Develop research questions	Five research questions: 1. In which countries were these journals written? 2. In which countries were these journals written? 3. What types of IM articles were published? (Conceptual vs. Empirical) 4. What are the methods used for data collection? 5. What are the specific themes these papers explored, and what were the major findings of those themes?
3	Keywords identified	"Internal Marketing"
4	The databases were identified and searched.	1. Six (6) databases utilized: Elsevier, Springer, Wiley, Taylor and Francis, Emerald, Sage 2. "All in title" search using the phrase "internal marketing" from Google scholar advanced search.
5	Read and assess publications	1. Abstracts of only original peer-reviewed English journal publications found to be dealing with "internal marketing" were read. 2. Literature reviews book chapters and conference proceedings were not included; only peer-reviewed conceptual and empirical papers were assessed.

Source: Author's Review.

The researcher studied 82 IM peer review English journals that met the selection criteria from six (6) high-quality databases. Table 2 depicts the breakdown of IM articles by publishers

Table 02: IM articles reviewed by publishers (2012-2021)

Publisher	Number of IM articles
Emerald	23
Sage	10
Elsevier	14
Springer	5
Wiley	3
Taylor and Francis	27
TOTAL	82

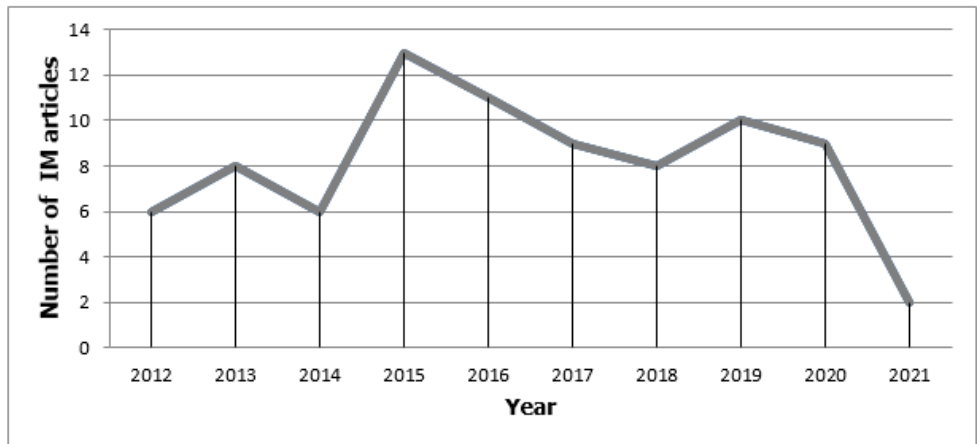
Source: Author's Review

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Time Distribution of Articles on Internal Marketing (IM)

Figure 1 shows a time distribution analysis of IM on the 82 peer-reviewed English journal articles downloaded between 2012 and 2021.

Figure 01: Time distribution of IM articles



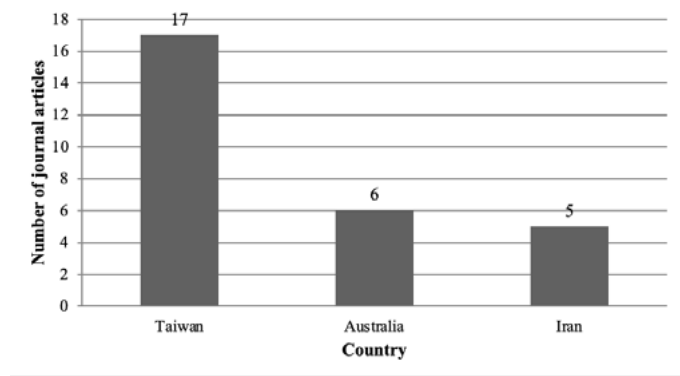
Source: Author’s Review

The systematic review found that IM articles were published in each of the ten years used for this review. A significant number (13 articles) of the articles were published in 2015 (which can be categorized as the most productive year on IM publications), while 2021 has the least (2 articles) number of the articles published. It is important to note that the researcher uses articles downloaded between 1st January 2012 and 7th March 2021.

3.2. Geographical distribution of IM articles

From the country perspective, the review identified 82 IM journal articles from 39 countries. Figure 2, depicts the top three countries in terms of IM articles publications between 2012 and 2021.

Figure 02: Countries with the maximum IM articles



Source: Author’s Review

Taiwan has a whopping sum of 17 articles which makes it the most ranked, followed by Australia with a total of 6 articles, while Iran has only 5 IM articles. The fact that most of IM research used here were produced in Asian countries, it leads to the conclusion that Asian countries are leading the research of internal marketing in the last decade. Based on this review, researchers across the globe are encouraged to conduct more research on IM, as only a few (39) countries out of 196 countries in the world researched it. The remaining 36 countries with their numbers of IM articles are presented in Table 3.

To provide more insight into the geographical distribution of IM articles in the last ten years, Figure 3 presents the geographical distribution of the IM articles on a continental basis. Based on this review, it can be observed that the IM articles are largely concentrated in Asia (50 articles), while South America (2 articles) has been largely ignored. Europe (10 articles) followed Asia in terms of continental ranking, while North America, Africa, and Australasia have 6 articles respectively.

Table 03: The remaining 36 countries with their numbers of IM articles

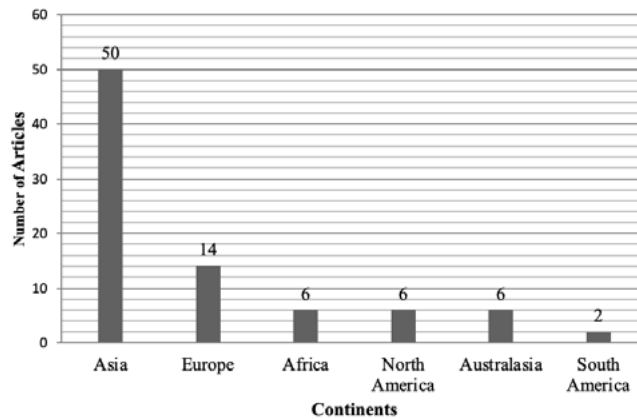
S/N	Country	No. of Articles
1.	United Kingdom	4
2.	USA	4
3.	South Korea	4
4.	India	4
5.	China	4
6.	Ghana	4
7.	Saudi Arabia	3
8.	Turkey	3
9.	Vietnam	3
10.	UAE	2
11.	Jordan	2
12.	Aberdeen	1
13.	Brazil	1
14.	Cyprus	1
15.	DRC Congo	1
16.	Ecuador	1
17.	Finland	1

S/N	Country	No. of Articles
18.	Germany	1
19.	Greece	1
20.	Hong Kong	1
21.	Indonesia	1
22.	Malaysia	1
23.	Michigan`	1
24.	Nigeria	1
25.	Oman	1
26.	Pakistan	1
27.	Portugal	1
28.	Puerto Rico	1
29.	Singapore	1
30.	Spain	1
31.	Croatia	1
32.	Slovenia	1
33.	Bosnia	1
34.	Herzegovina	1
35.	Moldova	1
36.	Romania	1

Source: Author's Review

IM serves as a new strategic tool for companies in today's intense global competitive markets. It is a method that has been explored by researchers and accepted by organizations to improve the quality of the products and services and to accomplish a better performance (ELSamen & Alshurideh, 2012) by considering as internal customers (employees) to enforce job satisfaction and motivate them to be more productive (Berry, 1981). However, on the geographical aspect of this study, it calls for Future research on the IM program to have a special focus on the countries in South America and other nations of other countries that currently have no representation.

Figure 03: IM Articles by continent



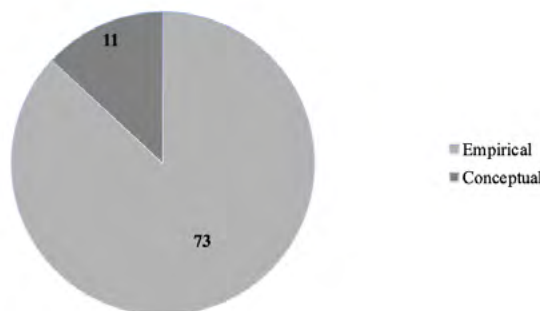
Source: Author’s Review

South America had the least number of studies in this area, and this shows a geographical gap in IM research. South America has been described as one of the continents with high poverty levels (Bikefe, et al., 2020). The region needs to grow more and better. Productivity must grow at a steady pace, to serve as the basis for sustained improvements in the well-being of the employees. Inequality must be decreased; this could be achieved by closing the productivity gap between upgraded companies and the many firms whose productivity is low (Tinoco and Bárcena (2012). Therefore, the implementation of IM programs in South American companies is likely to improve the continent’s economic and environmental conditions. Hence, future research is encouraged to address this geographical research gap.

3.3. Article Type

Figure 4 classified the 82 peer-reviewed English journals into empirical and conceptual research. A significant number (73) of the articles were empirical, while very few (11) were conceptual articles. In empirical research, data were collected to test an existing theory/model.

Figure 04: IM Articles Type



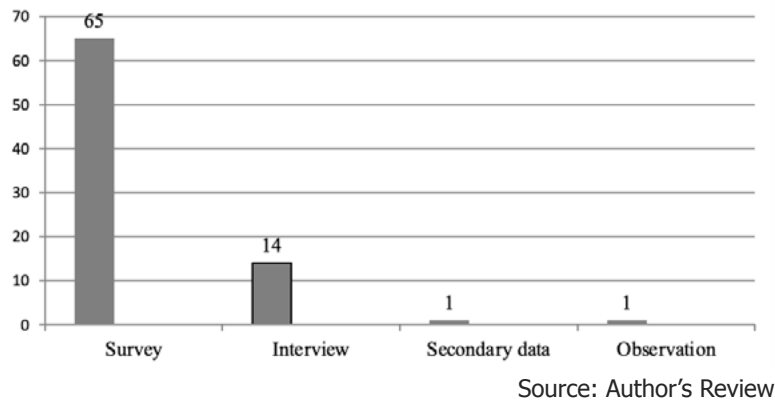
Source: Author’s Review

3.4. IM Data collection methods

The four data collection methods used by the 73 empirical IM articles reviewed for this study are presented in figure 5. It can be observed that a significant number of the articles used a survey to collect data (e.g., Fernando, 2012; Huang and Rundle-Thiele, 2014; Pool et al., 2017; Jalilvand et al., 2019; Frye et al., 2020; Pavlidou and Efstathiades, 2021). The interview happens to follow the trend (e.g., Kumar et al., 2012; Boukis et al., 2015), while secondary (e.g. Bermúdez-González et al., 2016) and observations (e.g. Sinha et al., 2020)

were used by one article respectively. Only one study (Bermúdez-González et al., 2016) adopted a trio methods approach, triangulating secondary data, interviews, and surveys. Few studies adopted a mixed-method (e.g Boukis et al., 2015; Sinha et al., 2020) of data collection. On this basis, more researchers are encouraged that adopt either trio or mixed methods of data collection for future internal marketing research.

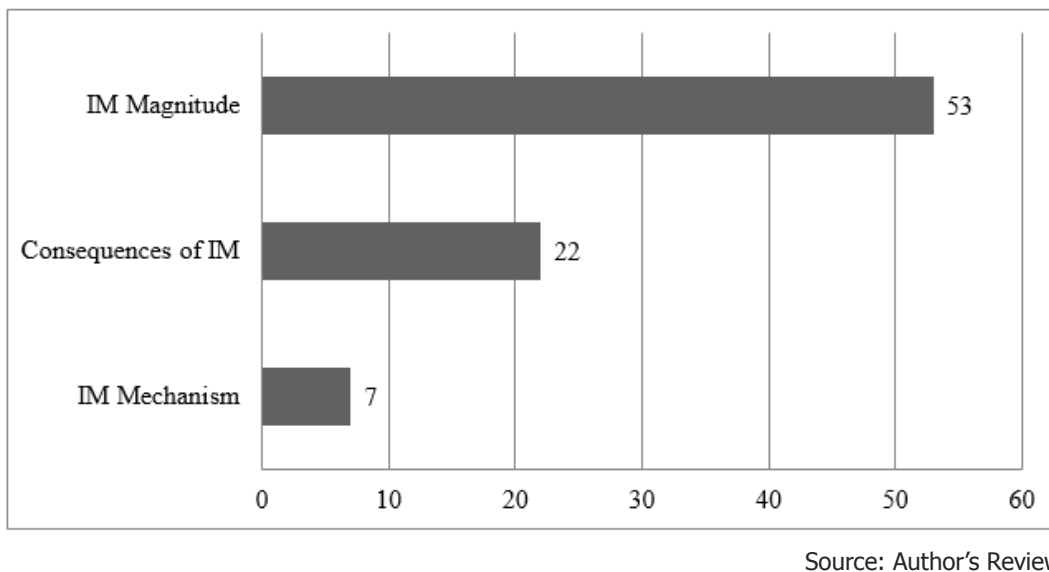
Figure 05: IM Data Collection Methods



3.5. IM Themes

Figure 6 presents the analysis of the 82 IM article's themes used for the systematic review. The result shows that they explored three different themes

Figure 06: IM Themes



It can be observed that a significant number of the IM articles (53 out of 82) used for this review examined the IM magnitude (relationship between IM and other variables as employee satisfaction, organizational commitment, customer orientation, market orientation). The review classified the 53 articles into two (i.e. Service and Manufacturing industry). The service industry is the most (52 articles) researched, while the manufacturing industry is the least (1 article) researched. In the services industry, finance (e.g. Narteh, 2012; Albassami et al., 2015; Bailey et al., 2016; Kanyurhi and Akonkwa, 2016; Park and Tran, 2018; Mainardes et al., 2019; Park and Tran, 2020), hospitality (e.g. Huang and Rundle-Thiele, 2014; Kim et al., 2015; To et al., 2015; Jeong and Lam, 2016; Chiang and Liu, 2017; Grooss and Rottler, 2019), and healthcare (e.g. Huang et

al., 2013; Azedo and Alves, 2014; Chen et al., 2015; Kim and Lee, 2016; Asiamah, et al., 2018; Al-Weshah, 2019) are the most investigated industry with 10 articles respectively. The travel industry has 6 articles (e.g. Fernando, 2012; Fu, 2013; Chow et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2019; Chen, et al., 2020); the education (e.g. Yildiz, 2016; Hernández-Díaz, et al., 2017; Muneeb et al., 2020; Pavlidou and Efstathiades, 2021) and sports (e.g. Huang, and Chen, 2013; Chiu et al., 2014; Chiu et al., 2019) industry has 4 articles respectively. Insurance (e.g. Ali, 2012; Ferdous, 2014) and food (e.g. Joung et al., 2015; Salehzadeh et al., 2017) services have 2 articles each, while ICT (e.g. Pham et al., 2019), Logistics (e.g. Koo et al., 2016), and oil and gas (e.g. Seyedjavadin, et al., 2012) have 1 article each. On the other hand, the manufacturing sector (e.g. Wu et al., 2013) has only the electronics production industry with an article. Another interesting article (Sohail and Jang, 2017) that was classified as general services, discussed the customer-service employees and their managers from various service contexts (i.e. restaurants, pharmacies, cosmetic shops, travel agencies, beauty care services, and shoe, optical services, and other retailing services) in Saudi Arabia. This findings conforms with Qaisar and Muhamad (2021)'s view that service organizations are more aware of IM, and it is more widely used to create a supportive environment, than manufacturing companies which uses higher proportions of unfriendly forms in their work arrangements.

The next most explored theme is the consequences of IM (i.e. the outcome of using IM in an organization), a significant number of the article's themes discussed the service industry (21), while manufacturing is the least (1) investigated outcome (e.g. Kumar et al., 2012). Furthermore, in the service industry, Professional services are the most discussed theme (e.g. Ferdous et al., 2013; Rainey, 2014; Qaisar and Muhamad, 2021), followed by healthcare (e.g. Pantouvakis, 2012; Tsai, 2014; Fertenberry and McGoldrick, 2016), finance (e.g. Ndubisi and Ndubisi, 2013; Boukis et al., 2015) and education (e.g. Vel et al., 2019), Non-profit-organisation (e.g. Álvarez-González et al., 2017), while food services (e.g. Ozuem et al., 2018) and hospitality(e.g. Fertenberry and McGoldrick, 2016) have least research IM themes. On the other hand, the manufacturing industry (e.g. Sinha et al., 2020) has only one Metal and tubes industry.

The last theme used for this review is the IM mechanism. All the articles discussed only the service industry. Education has the maximum research article (e.g. Huang and Rundle-Thiele, 2015; Yildiz and kara, 2017; Sahibzada et al., 2019), followed by finance (e.g. Kaur and Sharma, 2015; Kadic-magljalic et al., 2018), while food services (e.g. Akroush, et al., 2013) and travel (Pool et al., 2017) have minima research articles. The research affirmed Qaisar and Muhamad, (2021) findings that there is dearth of studies on the mechanisms for identifying employee needs to develop internal marketing practices. On this note, more researchers are encouraged to conduct future research on either the consequences of IM or IM mechanisms.

Table 04: Summary of findings of the reviewed 82 IM articles

S/N	Headings	Key Findings	Implications
1.	Time distribution (2012-2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - IM articles were published every year in the last decade (2012-2021). - A significant number of the articles were published in 2015 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - IM research is getting more attention from scholars over the years.
2.	Geographical distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This review identified 82 IM articles from 39 countries. - On the geographical distribution, IM articles are largely concentrated in Asia, while South America has been largely ignored. - Taiwan had the highest number of IM articles among the contributing countries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is a need for more IM research in South America and other nations of other countries that currently have no representation.
3.	Article type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most of the articles reviewed were empirical research, while the minority were conceptual articles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More conceptual IM research is encouraged in balancing the wide gap between empirical and conceptual articles.
4.	Data collection methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This review identified four methods of data collection (i.e. survey, Secondary data, interview, and observation). - The survey was the most utilized method over the last decade. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scholars are encouraged to use more qualitative methods of data collection to have more understanding of the concept. - The researchers are also advised to adopt the mixed method of data collection.
5.	IM Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Three different IM themes were identified (i.e. IM magnitude, consequences of IM, and IM mechanism). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - IM magnitude is the most investigated theme. - Scholars are encouraged to carry out more research on the consequences of IM and IM mechanisms.

Source: Author's Review

4. Conclusion

If IM programs are implemented correctly, it offers positive outcomes for an organization. Internal marketing requires the combinations of both human resource management (HRM) ideologies and marketing practices. Internal marketing practices such as internal communication, reward, empowerment, and internal market research create positive work environments, characterized by trust, enthusiasm, and happiness are reflected in employee behaviour and enhanced coordination, communication and quality of tasks performed (Qaisar and Muhamad, 2021). Moreover, an IM program satisfies and motivates employees, loyal customers, and improved organizational performance for the company's competitive advantage.

For those reasons, this paper conducted a systematic review of IM English peer-review journal articles over the last decade (2012–2021). Eighty-two (82) IM articles were reviewed using the five headings: time distribution, geographic distribution, article type, data collection methods, and IM themes, with key findings for knowledge and practices, which were discussed for each heading.

This review identified 82 IM articles from 33 countries; a significant number of the articles were published in 2015. Taiwan had the highest number of IM articles among the contributing countries. Asia is the most productive continent, while South America has been largely ignored. The majority of the articles reviewed were empirical research, while the minority were conceptual articles. This review identified four methods of data collection as; survey, interview, observation, and secondary data. Survey happens to be the most utilized method.

However, this review is without limitations, these limitations are gapped future IM researches which can be explored. First, it only relied on journal articles published by six of the six quality publishers: Emerald, Elsevier, Sage, Springer, Taylor, and Francis and Wiley. Although this was done to ensure the quality of articles reviewed, it means that other valuable IM articles not published by these publishers have been excluded. Future researchers can widen the article selection criteria to increase the robustness of the review. A second limitation is a fact that only articles with the phrase "Internal Marketing" in their titles were included for selection; some IM articles might not have included that phrase in their titles and thus are not captured by this review. The third limitation is that this study is time-bound, only articles published in 2012 and later years were used. Future research may include earlier years, as this may provide some useful insight. The fourth limitation is that only English journal articles were included in the review; book chapters and conference proceedings were excluded. This was done by the SQAT methodology to maintain the high quality of articles reviewed. However, there is possibly very useful insight in book chapters and conference proceedings, which future research can include.

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