ALCANCE

THE BEAUTY IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER: HOW DO EMPLOYEES AT A COMMUNITY UNIVERSITY RELATE INTERNAL MARKETING AND ORGANIZATIONAL IMAGE?

A BELEZA ESTÁ NOS OLHOS DE QUEM VÊ: COMO OS COLABORADORES DE UMA UNIVERSIDADE COMUNITÁRIA RELACIONAM MARKETING INTERNO E IMAGEM ORGANIZACIONAL?

LA BELLEZA ESTÁ EN LOS OJO DEL ESPECTADOR: ¿CÓMO RELACIONAN LOS EMPLEADOS DE UNA UNIVERSIDAD COMUNITARIA EL *MARKETING* INTERNO Y LA IMAGEN ORGANIZACIONAL?

ABSTRACT

Objective: Internal *Marketing* shares the institution's strategic vision with the employee, who acts as both a receptor and a disseminator of the Organizational Image, a crucial asset in today's context, especially in the service provision context, such as in a community university. This study aims to analyze the relationship between the perception of Internal *Marketing* and the Organizational Image perceived by employees of a community university.

Design / methodology / approach: Two already validatd scales were used to collect data through an online questionnaire answered by 115 technical-administrative and teaching staff from the main campus of a community university, due to the infrastructure and marketing context to the detriment of other campuses. They were analyzed using the mean and standard deviation of perceptions about the instituition's Internal *Marketing* and the Organizational Image, and, through structural equation modeling, the relationship between the two thematic constructs.

Results: Both constructs, Internal *Marketing* and Organizational Image, received good evaluations. Although there are areas of attention such as Affective Image, Reward, and Internal Communication, the General Image, Vision, and the Training and Development dimension received excellent ratings, even higher than the evaluation of the original construct itself. Finally, a statistically significant relationship between Internal *Marketing* and Organizational Image was confirmed, an important contribution to the theory of the two constructs studied, and which provides opportunities for new research exploring moderating or mediating variables of this relationship.

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Originality/value: This research innovates by adapting and relating two scales - one Likert-type from 0 to 5 points and the other semantic differential scale from 0 to 7 points - already validated, allowing different analyzes depending on the technique used. Furthermore, it relates two constructs – Internal *Marketing* and Organizational Image – widely explored, but without recent evidence of their relationship.

Keywords: Organizational image. Internal *marketing*. Employee. University.

RESUMO

Objetivo: O *Marketing* Interno compartilha a visão estratégica da instituição com o colaborador, que atua como receptor e difusor da Imagem Organizacional, um ativo crucial no contexto atual, especialmente no contexto da prestação de serviços, como em uma universidade comunitária. Este estudo tem como objetivo analisar a relação entre a percepção do *Marketing* Interno e a Imagem Organizacional percebida pelos colaboradores de uma universidade comunitária.

Design/metodologia/abordagem: Duas escalas já validadas foram utilizadas para levantar os dados por meio de um questionário online respondido por 115 colaboradores técnico-administrativos e docentes do campus sede de uma universidade comunitária, em função da infraestrutura e contexto mercadológico em detrimento dos demais campi. Foram analisados utilizando a média e o desvio padrão das percepções sobre o *Marketing* Interno e a Imagem Organizacional da instituição, e, por meio da modelagem de equações estruturais, a relação entre os dois construtos temáticos.

Resultados: Ambos os construtos, *Marketing* Interno e Imagem Organizacional, receberam boas avaliações. Embora existam áreas de atenção como Imagem Afetiva, Recompensa e Comunicação Interna, a Imagem Geral, Visão e a dimensão de Treinamento e Desenvolvimento receberam avaliações excelentes, até mesmo superiores à avaliação do próprio construto original. Por fim, uma relação estatisticamente significativa entre *Marketing* Interno e Imagem Organizacional foi confirmada, uma contribuição importante para a teoria dos dois construtos

estudados, e que oportuniza novas pesquisas explorando variáveis moderadoras ou mediadoras dessa relação.

Originalidade/valor: Esta pesquisa inova ao adaptar e relacionar duas escalas – uma tipo-Likert de 0 a 5 pontos e a outra escala de diferecial semântico de 0 a 7 pontos - já validadas, permitindo diversas análises dependendo da técnica utilizada. Além disso, relaciona dois construtos – *Marketing* Interno e Imagem Organizacional - amplamente explorados, mas sem evidências recentes de sua relação.

Palavras-chave: Imagem organizacional. *Marketing* interno. Colaborador. Universidade.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: El *Marketing* Interno comparte la visión estratégica de la institución con el colaborador, quien actúa como receptor y difusor de la Imagen Organizacional, un activo crucial en la actualidad, especialmente en el contexto de la prestación de servicios, como en una universidad comunitaria. Este estudio busca analizar la relación entre la percepción del *Marketing* Interno y la Imagen Organizacional percibida por los colaboradores de una universidad comunitaria.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque: Se utilizaron dos escalas ya validadas para recolectar datos a través de un cuestionario en línea respondido por 115 colaboradores técnico-administrativos y docentes del campus principal de una universidad comunitaria, debido al contexto de infraestructura y mercadeo en detrimento de otros campus. Se analizaron utilizando la media y la desviación estándar de las percepciones sobre el *Marketing* Interno y la Imagen Organizacional de la institución y, mediante modelado de ecuaciones estructurales, la relación entre los dos constructos temáticos.

Resultados: Ambos constructos, *Marketing* Interno e Imagen Organizacional, recibieron buenas evaluaciones. Si bien existen áreas de atención como Imagen Afectiva, Recompensa y Comunicación Interna, la dimensión la Imagen General, la Visión y la dimensión de Entrenamiento y Desarrollo obtuvieron calificaciones excelentes, incluso superiores a la evaluación del propio construc-

to original. Finalmente, se confirmó una relación estadísticamente significativa entre el *Marketing* Interno y la Imagen Organizacional, un aporte importante a la teoría de los dos constructos estudiados, y que brinda oportunidades para nuevas investigaciones que exploren variables moderadoras o mediadoras de esta relación.

Originalidad/valor: Esta investigación innova adaptando y relacionando dos escalas -una tipo Likert de 0 a 5 puntos y otra escala diferencial semántica de 0 a 7 puntos- ya validadas, permitiendo diferentes análisis en función de la técnica utilizada. Además, relaciona dos constructos – *marketing* interno e imagen organizacional– ampliamente explorados, pero sin evidencia reciente de su relación.

Palabras clave: Imagen organizacional. *Marketing interno*. Colaborador. Universidad.

INTRODUCTION

Internal Marketing aims to raise employee awareness about the institution's direction and maintain a positive organizational environment, to position employees as creators of the brand's image and value for the market (Brum, 2020). According to Schuler and de Toni (2015), employees play a dual role. They are both opinion makers and part of the institution's audience. As opinion transmitters, they mediate the relationship between the consumer and the institution they work in.

For Vieira et al. (2014), the organizational image can be perceived through elements that reflect its identity, which results from how the company members interpret the institution's mission, vision, and values. Together with organizational culture and identity, image forms an umbrella construct called reputation (Cian, 2014), which is one of the contributing indicators to brand value formation (Brand Finance, 2023).

The brand has become one of the most valuable assets for institutions today. According to the 2023 Annual Report of Brazil's most valuable brands, Brazilian brands have grown for the second successive year. Thus, the findings of Vieira et al. (2014) remain relevant, demonstrating the importance of Organizational Image management.

Internal Marketing also plays a role in service-providing institutions by striving for excellence in customer service (Da Silva et al., 2023). Črnjar (2020) emphasizes that Internal Marketing contributes to the success of the institution and improves service quality and work performance by having more focused and dedicated employees. Community universities possess distinct characteristics compared to other organizations, as they are non-profit institutions maintained by civil society and thus committed to returning the investment to the society through activities such as people training, projects involving the community, and research that bring innovation and benefits to the population (ACAFE, 2023). For this reason, a community university is the object of this research, given its social relevance and the diversity of audiences it serves.

The institution has a significant market share in its region, as it is a multiple-campus university, serves about 15,000 students, and has over 2,000 employees, according to the Institutional Development Plan 2022-2026. However, due to the structural differences among the campuses and varying market conditions based on geographic location, this study took place only at the main campus. It is also worth noting that the organizational structure of the institution does not include a specific department responsible for internal marketing.

Employees of this institution have raised concerns that may indicate a discrepancy between the Organizational Image and the perception of Internal Marketing. This includes the perception of the Organizational Image by relatives, friends, or students, which sometimes differs from the reality experienced by the internal public. There are also cases in which these audiences communicate information or internal procedures about the institution, instead of the institution itself.

Derived from these observations brought by the institution's internal public, this research aims to analyze the relationship between the perception of Internal Marketing and the Organizational Image perceived by employees of a community university. To this end, the research will: examine employees' perception of the Internal Marketing developed at the institution; identify employees' perception of the institution's Orga-

nizational Image; and evaluate the relationship between the perception of Internal Marketing and the perception of Organizational Image.

According to the literature, recent research that addresses Internal Marketing and Organizational Image is vast. Therefore, these are topics of great importance for academia and the market. Above all, studies relate Internal Marketing to constructs such as Employee Performance (Chiu, Won & Bae, 2020), Engagement (Al-Weshah, 2019), (Črnjar, Dlačić & Milfelner, 2020), Customer-Oriented Behavior (Nart et al., 2019), among other constructs for the institution. Likewise, the relationship between constructs that influence Organizational Image is researched, such as Corporate Social Responsibility (Al Mubarak, Ben Hamed & Al Mubarak, 2019) and Total Quality Management (Babu & Thomas, 2021). It is important to note that the works found do not relate the two constructs together, and the gap is repeated when analyzing research carried out in higher education institutions. Therefore, the theoretical contribution of this work will be to extrapolate knowledge on this topic through this new relationship that consists of extending known solutions to new problems (Grego|R & Henver, 2013).

Most studies approach Organizational Image from the perception of the consumer public. The theoretical review emphasized work based on the point of view of the collaborator, although few studies in this regard were found, including in educational institutions. Therefore, it was possible to understand the Organizational Image from the perspective of the employee.

Therefore, this research carried out a field survey, using an online form with employees from the main campus of a community university. The data collected supports the evaluation of the perception of the employee about Internal Marketing and Organizational Image, through the mean and standard deviation and, subsequently, the relationship of the constructs through Structural Equation Modeling – MEE (Partial Least Squares – Structural Equation Modeling – PLS-SEM). The research problem focuses on the relationship between the constructs of Internal Marketing and Organizational Image and does not focus on the specificities of the institution researched. For this reason, its name will not be mentioned.

The practical contribution of this work to educational institutions is in line with the statement by Sahibzada et al. (2020), who mention the need for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to be increasingly customer-oriented to be recognized and remain competitive in the market in which they operate. Mainardes et. al. (2020) also point out the practical relevance of research on Internal Marketing, citing that research on this topic is relevant to the development of strategies that involve marketing, people, and operations and can trigger competitive advantages.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Internal Marketing

Some authors treat Internal Marketing as an analogy to External Marketing, in which the employee is considered the consumer of this relationship. Accordingly, for part of the literature, engagement is more than job satisfaction. It is a more recognized asset by administrators. This concept brings about the need for coordination among various sectors to achieve the involvement of this internal consumer (Al-Weshah, 2019).

The work of Al-Weshah (2019) explores the relationship between Internal Marketing and engagement at work. According to the research, Internal Marketing practices have a significant positive effect on work engagement. In other words, providing training, promoting motivation, and sharing information are practices that improve the involvement of professionals at work.

Črnjar, Dlačić, and Milfelner (2020) contributed by detailing the dimensions that can build engagement and its relationship with Internal Marketing elements. The authors state that investment in training, internal communication, and initiatives that enhance employee motivation and loyalty can enhance cognitive, physical, and emotional engagement with the organization, ultimately leading to improved performance and dedication from its employees.

The emotional bonds created between employees and the institution, leading to a sense of pride in being part of that institution are po-

sitively influenced by Internal Marketing, as demonstrated by Canales-Requena et al. (2021). The research by Asif, Fatima, and Johns (2022) also suggests Internal Marketing tools can develop affective commitment, if the institution follows this strategic orientation.

Similarly, Chiu, Won, and Bae (2020) brought positive results by relating Internal Marketing to organizational commitment. The authors emphasize that, for employees to achieve good performance and be committed to the institution, Internal Marketing tools and actions are fundamental and deserve attention as an investment. The work also proves the relationship between Internal Marketing and employee performance is positive.

The Vietnamese telecommunications companies studied by Luu et al. (2022) demonstrated that Internal Marketing actions, such as a reward system, internal communication, empowerment, work environment, training and development, and the institution's vision, are related to employee satisfaction. The following topic explains the dimensions that build Internal Marketing in more detail.

Composition of Internal Marketing

Internal Marketing has various ways of measurement and dimensions of analysis, ranging from actions dependent on the institution to those related to employee behavior. Chiu, Won, and Bae (2020) identified internal communication as the second most relevant tool for employee performance, facilitating task efficiency. Al-Weshah (2019) suggests regular meetings can improve the work environment and employee satisfaction strategies. Asif, Fatima, and Johns (2022) found that for younger employees, communication is the third most important tool, while for senior employees, it is the most crucial. Črnjar, Dlačić, and Milfelner (2020) observed a strong correlation between internal communication and emotional engagement. Canales-Requena et al. (2021) emphasize that well-informed employees positively reflect on the Organizational Image. Luu et al. (2022) assert that internal communication strongly impacts employee satisfaction, recommending a more transparent and open communication approach.

Asif, Fatima, and Johns (2022) showed that financial compensation is relevant for all employees, with little difference between junior and senior staff. Chiu, Won, and Bae (2020) highlight rewards as essential for employee satisfaction, including feedback, recognition, and behavior management. Luu et al. (2022) consider the reward system the most relevant element for employee satisfaction.

Chiu, Won, and Bae (2020) found that training and development are crucial for employee performance. Asif, Fatima, and Johns (2022) note that training is the most relevant factor for junior employees, but the least important for senior employees. Črnjar, Dlačić, and Milfelner (2020) indicate that training leads to engagement in the hospitality sector. Canales-Requena et al. (2021) suggest that technical and personal/professional development training are complementary. Luu et al. (2022) identify training as the least influential factor in employee satisfaction, while Nart et al. (2019) state that training promotes customer-oriented behavior.

Asif, Fatima, and Johns (2022) claim that institutional vision is crucial for the emotional commitment of senior employees. Luu et al. (2022) highlight that sharing the institutional vision inspires employees and impacts satisfaction. Additionally, the authors emphasize that an open and friendly communication environment is relevant to employee satisfaction. Similarly, Al-Weshah (2019) considers the work environment less critical for Internal Marketing, though still significant for engagement.

The managerial and behavioral actions of Internal Marketing have proven significant in shaping employees' perceptions of institutional practices, positively influencing various related constructs. It is possible to assess employee perceptions within the context of this study through the dimensions debated.

Internal Marketing in Higher Education Institutions

It is worth mentioning that Internal Marketing can utilize the classic marketing mix by McCarthy (1960) – product, price, place, and promotion – which is refining over time. Regarding service marketing, three additional aspects can be added to this mix: people, processes, and physical evidence (Booms & Bitner, 1981). In higher education institutions, compared to other types of organizations, the primary focus is on the quadrant dealing with people, where employees play a crucial role in the relationship between the institution and its consumers. Sahibzada et al. (2020) conclude that educational institutions must focus on service and people to remain competitive and valued, demonstrating a positive relationship between Internal Marketing and organizational performance. Sahibzada et al. (2019) also show a positive relationship between Internal Marketing and knowledge management, which is essential for institutional and academic development.

Considering the dimensions of Internal Marketing strategy, some are related to the emotional commitment of employees to the institution. Asif, Fatima, and Johns (2022) analyze dimensions such as training, compensation, communication, and vision, observing that age and job level influence the perceptions of the employees. Communication was the only dimension positively related to emotional commitment across all age groups, while training and compensation showed no positive relationship for senior employees. The vision of the institution was not positively related to the emotional commitment of younger employees.

The study by Pardiyono et al. (2022) presents a positive relationship between the three specific quadrants of service marketing and the Internal Marketing of the institution studied. Additionally, the research shows a positive link between external marketing and the Internal Marketing of the institution. The study presents results from the perspective of the student, indicating that the quality of service provided to students and non-students reflects Internal marketing. The authors propose that the Internal and External Marketing strategy mix for higher education institutions is the most effective approach for complementing, developing, and optimizing marketing strategies.

Although Pardiyono et al. (2022) study the Internal Marketing construct, the perspective presented is that of the institution's consumer. This finding suggests Internal Marketing, which targets employees, can also be assessed from the perspective of other audiences, such as the consumer. Similarly, Organizational Image, discussed in the next chapter, is generally perceived from the view of the consumer, but can also be studied from the perspective of a non-consumer audience.

Organizational Image

Some studies in the literature review address the influence of Organizational Image on other constructs that benefit the institution. Externally, concerning the consumer, Sudaryanto et al. (2021) confirm that Organizational Image influences Purchase Decisions, along with price and cultural aspects.

Other findings highlight the importance of Organizational Image, particularly regarding employees as the Internal Marketing target audience. Dhir and Shukla (2019) indicate a positive association between Organizational Image and Employee Engagement. The analysis of the Organizational Image reveals benefits for the institution's management, such as increased Employee Engagement. Lee, Hameduddin, and Lee (2023) state that external appreciation of the institution enhances engagement. Employee performance, in turn, is positively influenced by Organizational Image, especially at high engagement levels (Dhir & Shukla, 2019). Although Almeida and Coelho (2019) do not find direct statistical evidence of the influence of Organizational Image on performance, they confirm the positive impact of commitment on performance and the relationship between Organizational Image and commitment, suggesting an indirect effect on performance. According to Almeida and Coelho (2019), the high perception of Corporate Social Responsibility actions also increases commitment and improves employee performance.

The composition of the Organizational Image, a complex construct that, as demonstrated earlier, is important in various aspects of the institution, will be explored further.

Composition of the Organizational Image

Organizational Image, like Internal Marketing, has several dimensions for analysis. However, Internal Marketing dimensions are more consolidated and replicable across different institutions. On the other hand, Organizational Image is subjective, approached from multiple perspectives, and composed of numerous attributes depending on the context and research focus (Biral dos Santos & Teixeira, 2018).

Organizational Image attributes can be classified into different dimensions depending on the theory. Schuler and de Toni (2015) classify these attributes into four categories: functional, cognitive, symbolic, and emotional. The theory of Palacio, Meneses, and Pérez (2002) divides Organizational Image into Affective, Cognitive, and Overall Image. Biral dos Santos and Teixeira (2018) suggest that functional and cognitive attributes fall into the cognitive dimension, while emotional and symbolic attributes are related to the Affective Image.

According to Schuler and de Toni (2015), functional elements include facilities, equipment, and material resources, whereas cognitive elements are related to evaluations and perceptions. Other aspects, such as Academic Offer, Cost, Teaching Resources, Research Resources, and Preparation for the Job Market, were used by Lafuente-Ruiz-De-Sabando, Forcada, and Zorrilla (2018) to measure Organizational Image. In this study, Teaching Resources and Preparation for the Job Market were the most relevant variables in forming the Overall Image of the institution, after the Affective Image. Cost, academic offer, and research resources were irrelevant.

Lafuente-Ruiz-De-Sabando, Forcada, and Zorrilla (2018) also found that the Affective Image had a more significant influence than the Cognitive Image in forming the institutional image. This result is relevant considering the limited research on the affective aspect of Organizational Image. Related to this aspect, it is crucial to understand

that emotional elements denote self-esteem, strength, and competitiveness, while symbolic components convey the significance of the object to the individual (Schuler & de Toni, 2015). Sudaryanto et al. (2021) highlight that symbolic image provides satisfaction, self-esteem, social status, and recognition.

Unlike Internal Marketing, predominantly used as an independent variable, Organizational Image has been explored through various parameters and themes, demonstrating the complexity of this construct.

Organizational Image in Higher Education Institutions

The literature review provides interesting results about educational institutions regarding Organizational Image. Biral dos Santos and Teixeira (2018) examine Organizational Image in secondary/technical and higher education institutions, finding that attributes related to the Affective Image impact the Organizational Image for both groups. However, tangible and measurable aspects show more significant differences. Higher education students prioritize career expectations, while secondary/technical students value course diversity and the quality of teaching staff. The study used the scale of Palacio, Meneses, and Pérez (2002), already employed in other studies, validating the dimensions analyzed for the educational context.

Wæraas and Dahle (2020) adopt a qualitative research approach and emphasize the need for managers to carefully design people management systems to ensure employees act according to the desired reputation of the institution, avoiding measures that could restrict employee freedom and lead them to become brand saboteurs. It is one of the few to explore Organizational Image from the perspective of the employee, suggesting a potential research gap for future studies on the context of Organizational Image in higher education institutions. Therefore, there is an opportunity for further exploration of this topic in new research.
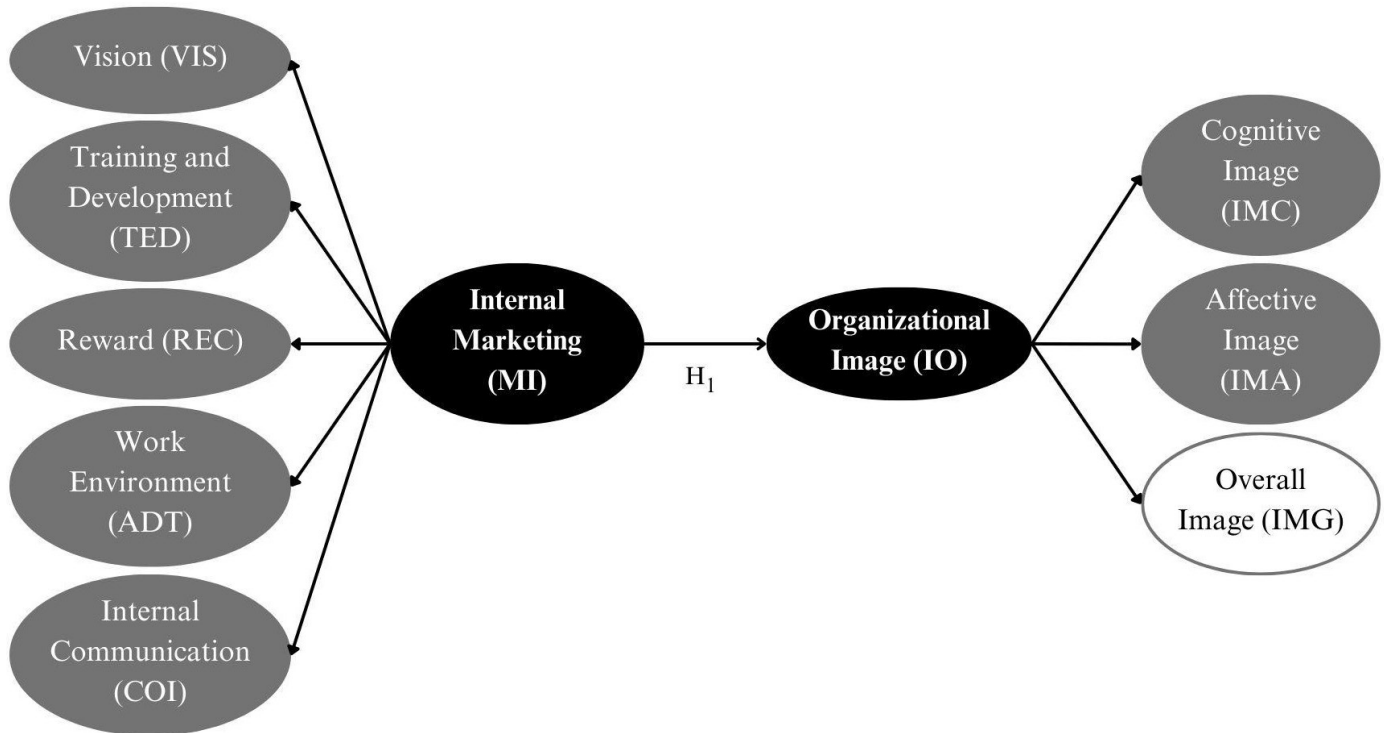
Theoretical Model

The literature review for this study did not find studies on the relationship between Internal Marketing and Organizational Image. However, the study yielded positive and significant results when related to other constructs.

Therefore, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Internal Marketing is positively and significantly related to Organizational Image.

Figure 1

Theoretical Model

Source: Own elaboration (2023).

The theoretical framework highlighted several dimensions to evaluate each construct - Internal Marketing and Organizational Image. The variables used in the study are detailed in the theoretical model to achieve the proposed objectives. Although the theoretical review presents various dimensions for each construct, those shown in Figure 1 reflect the research environment.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed in this study is a quantitative and descriptive approach, utilizing a cross-sectional field survey, which means collecting data at a single point in time (Hernández Sampieri, Collado, & Lucio, 2013). The study was carried out at a multi-campus community university in southern Brazil. This focus was necessary due to the structural and marketing differences among the various campuses, which are influenced by the geographical layout. The number of campuses posed a challenge in determining the exact size of the research population, as the workforce of approximately two thousand employees is distributed across multiple campuses.

In order to ascertain the minimum sample size required for conducting structural equation modeling analyses, the G*Power software was used, yielding a minimum requirement of 73 cases. The research obtained 115 valid respon-

ses. Initial contact was made via email, informing about the study and requesting participation, with a link to the Google Forms questionnaire. Participants who accepted the Informed Consent Form (ICF) received a link to the questionnaire.

The questionnaire began with a screening question to ensure respondents primarily worked at the main campus. The Internal Marketing block contained 25 items on a Likert scale from 0 to 5 points, based on the scale by Luu et al. (2022). The Organizational Image block included 25 items on a semantic differential scale from 0 to 7 points, according to Palacio, Meneses, and Pérez (2002), divided into three dimensions: Cognitive Image, Affective Image, and Overall Image. The final block had six questions about the respondent's profile.

The questionnaire's translation was validated by a specialist and subjected to a pre-test involving 30 participants to make necessary adjustments. After the ethics committee's approval, the data were collected and tabulated in Microsoft Excel and imported into SmartPLS for analysis. A reflective model with repeated indicators was used to form Second-Order Latent Variables (LVs), analyzed through the PLS-SEM technique (Bido & Silva, 2019). The analysis included checks for missing data, reliability, convergent and discriminant validity, and hypothesis testing.

The PLS-SEM technique was chosen for its robustness in handling data, estimating parameters through partial least squares (PLS) regression (Bido & Silva, 2019), and considering Latent Variables (Hair et al., 2019).

RESULTS

The results obtained and analyzed below are based on data collected between December 13, 2023, and February 4, 2024. Although the data collection occurred predominantly during the holiday period, 131 individuals chose to participate in the research. Of these, 16 do not work at the main campus, while 115 respondents continued with the survey, totaling the sample analyzed.

Respondent Profile

The majority of respondents are women (59.1%), compared to 40.9% men. There are 63% administrative employees and 37% faculty members. The predominant educational qualification is a doctorate in progress or completed (33.9%), followed by a master's degree in progress or completed (20.9%), specialization in progress or completed (26.1%), and finally, an undergraduate degree in progress or completed (19.1%). The majority of the age range of respondents is between 36 and 45 years (32.2%), followed by those aged between 46 and 55 years (27%) and above 56 years (17.4%), with 17.4% aged between 26 and 35 years. The age group with the lowest participation is 18 to 25 years (6.1%). Likewise, 47.8% of respondents have been working for the institution for more than 15 years. On the other hand, respondents who have been at the institution for between 0 and 5 years are the second largest proportion (20.9%), followed by 20% who have been at the institution for 6 to 10 years, and the smallest group consists of participants who are 11 to 15 years at the institution. A significant portion (80.9%) works between 31 and 40 hours per week at the institution, followed by those working up to 10 hours (7.8%), between 11 and 20 hours (6.1%), and finally, between 21 and 30 hours (5.2%). In agreement with ethical principles, responses to some questions were not mandatory to complete participation. Therefore, some questions may have a different number of responses compared to the number of participants.

Perception of Internal Marketing

In percentage terms, the evaluation of the institution's Internal Marketing would be 76% agreement with the items.

Table 1

Analysis of Internal Marketing Dimensions

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation	Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation
Vision	4,05	1,01			
Training and Development	4,09	1,02			
Reward	3,27	1,27	Internal Marketing	3,84	1,08
Work Environment	4,01	1,00			
Internal Communication	3,79	1,09			

Source: Own elaboration (2024).

Training and Development was the most highly rated dimension. The institution offers scholarships to employees, influencing this assessment positively. According to Asif, Fatima, and Johns (2022), the importance of this construct varies with the employee's age and experience, suggesting that the institution must consider the profile of its employees.

The Vision received the second-highest rating, and it stood out for two key reasons - one positive and one negative. On the positive side, the Vision is effectively communicated through channels beyond Internal Communication, which received a low rating. However, on the negative side, the low rating of Affective Image may have undermined the Vision, which is crucial for the Affective Commitment of senior employees (Asif, Fatima, & Johns, 2022).

The dimension Work Environment received a good rating, although Internal Communication was rated poorly. According to Luu et al. (2022), there is a relationship between these two aspects, as Internal Communication involves interpersonal relations between employees and managers. A good Vision can positively influence the Work Environment, as suggested by Al-Weshah (2019), who relates the Work Environment to Engagement.

Internal Communication was the second lowest-rated dimension. Chiu, Won, and Bae (2020) highlight its importance for employee performance, indicating a need for improvements. The low rating may be related to the methods and channels used for internal communication and the higher proportion of employees over 36 years old, who place more value on this dimension (Asif, Fatima, & Johns, 2022). Internal Communication also reflects investment in Internal Marketing (Nart et al., 2019), but here it was rated lower than other dimensions.

Rewards received the lowest rating. Luu et al. (2022) state that rewards are crucial for employee satisfaction, indicating that the institution should pay attention to this area.

Perception of Organizational Image

In percentage terms, the evaluation of the institution's Organizational Image would be 79% agreement with the items.

Table 2

Analysis of Organizational Image Dimensions

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation	Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation
Cognitive Image	5,70	1,11			
Affective Image	4,64	0,86	Organizational Image	5,52	0,94
Overall Image	6,21	0,86			

Source: Own elaboration (2024).

The average of the Overall Image dimension, presented in Table 2, is 8.9 on a scale of 0 to 10, which is higher than the average of the Organizational Image construct (5.52). This high rating may be influenced by the Vision dimension in Internal Marketing, as Canales-Requena et al. (2021) suggest that well-informed employees tend to spread a positive image. Vision was the highest-rated dimension, with an average higher than the overall construct.

Cognitive Image was the second highest-rated dimension, which surpassed the average of the construct. Lafuente-Ruiz-De-Sabando, Forcada, and Zorrilla (2018) suggest that cognitive aspects, such as teaching resources and student training, are less influential on Organizational Image than Affective Image, which contradicts our results. They also consider research resources, costs, and academic offerings less significant, while our research places them as the second highest-rated dimension. Both studies agree that student training for the job market is relevant.

Affective Image received the lowest rating. Črnjar, Dlačić, and Milfelner (2020) relate this to internal communication and emotional engagement. Our research also rated Internal Communication as one of the lowest dimensions. In contrast, Lafuente-Ruiz-De-Sabando, Forcada, and Zorrilla (2018) consider Affective Image the most relevant dimension for the overall Organizational Image of a university. According to Sudaryanto et al. (2021), Affective Image measures public satisfaction and self-esteem, and it is concerning that it received a rating of 6.5 on a 0 to 10 scale despite the high Overall Image.

Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) Analysis

In the analysis of the measurement model, the factor loading of each indicator was examined, followed by the evaluation of Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of the First and Second Order Latent Variables (LVs) associated with the hypotheses (Hair et al., 2019).

Some indicators had a factor loading <0.6, necessitating elimination: IMC1 (0.445); IMC2 (0.488); IMC4 (0.362); IMC5 (0.338); IMC6 (0.569); IMC9 (0.575); IMC15 (0.516); IMC19 (0.549) (Bido & Silva, 2019).

Afterward, estimated model reliability was examined, based on the AVE and CR of the LVs. The studies of Hair et al. (2019) suggest that AVE is adequate when above 0.50, and CR should be above 0.70. The results of the reliability validation of the LVs in the estimated model are more detailed in Table 3.

Table 3

Validation of the Reliability of the Latent Variables in the Estimated Model

	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
a) 1st Order LV		
VI	0,898	0,691
TD	0,904	0,696
RE	0,896	0,689
AT	0,877	0,650
CI	0,898	0,691
IC	0,915	0,547
IA	0,861	0,692
b) 2nd Order LV		
Org_Image	0,944	0,507
Int_Marketing	0,964	0,524

Source: Own elaboration (2024).

The analysis revealed that all latent variables (LVs) expected the minimum threshold for Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR). With this confirmation, the subsequent task was to assess the convergent validity of the estimated model. According to Hair et al. (2019), an estimated model demonstrates discriminant validity when each indicator has higher loadings on its LV than on any other.

Table 4
Convergent Validation of Indicators and Latent Variables in the Estimated Model

	VI	TD	RE	AT	CI	IC	IA	IG
VIS01	0,830	0,580	0,54	0,602	0,557	0,585	0,561	0,420
VIS02	0,854	0,562	0,577	0,658	0,713	0,561	0,556	0,429
VIS03	0,851	0,479	0,524	0,521	0,534	0,569	0,568	0,456
VIS04	0,743	0,446	0,573	0,410	0,378	0,496	0,443	0,481
VIS05	0,871	0,725	0,694	0,673	0,657	0,607	0,612	0,438
TED01	0,421	0,790	0,437	0,320	0,393	0,426	0,401	0,260
TED02	0,541	0,815	0,551	0,445	0,520	0,555	0,538	0,386
TED03	0,704	0,880	0,735	0,690	0,664	0,549	0,648	0,433
TED04	0,557	0,840	0,613	0,613	0,620	0,486	0,496	0,381
TED05	0,572	0,844	0,739	0,657	0,625	0,579	0,586	0,411
REC01	0,704	0,726	0,879	0,711	0,671	0,643	0,622	0,471
REC02	0,653	0,652	0,822	0,608	0,661	0,566	0,507	0,434
REC03	0,566	0,673	0,886	0,622	0,615	0,480	0,497	0,423
REC04	0,451	0,492	0,754	0,490	0,454	0,358	0,402	0,326
REC05	0,503	0,550	0,801	0,604	0,590	0,441	0,511	0,390
ADT01	0,480	0,449	0,506	0,821	0,600	0,482	0,551	0,393
ADT02	0,511	0,431	0,473	0,833	0,585	0,498	0,503	0,436
ADT03	0,447	0,442	0,404	0,711	0,559	0,495	0,609	0,498
ADT04	0,654	0,681	0,707	0,892	0,753	0,600	0,652	0,464
ADT05	0,673	0,648	0,720	0,761	0,654	0,550	0,579	0,415
COI01	0,612	0,645	0,671	0,676	0,831	0,504	0,590	0,464
COI02	0,661	0,561	0,664	0,747	0,853	0,632	0,639	0,419
COI03	0,470	0,474	0,440	0,439	0,711	0,345	0,381	0,270
COI04	0,605	0,639	0,650	0,712	0,912	0,527	0,594	0,405
COI05	0,524	0,535	0,567	0,671	0,839	0,532	0,521	0,382
IMC03	0,567	0,567	0,474	0,582	0,580	0,695	0,689	0,488
IMC07	0,494	0,368	0,367	0,372	0,366	0,652	0,413	0,355
IMC08	0,409	0,468	0,455	0,402	0,402	0,639	0,492	0,332
IMC10	0,561	0,608	0,557	0,604	0,617	0,788	0,594	0,523
IMC11	0,534	0,585	0,486	0,572	0,546	0,849	0,670	0,593
IMC12	0,413	0,485	0,449	0,425	0,532	0,677	0,551	0,355
IMC13	0,560	0,440	0,495	0,483	0,470	0,763	0,541	0,492
IMC14	0,395	0,349	0,361	0,420	0,269	0,692	0,553	0,423
IMC16	0,403	0,266	0,336	0,360	0,235	0,648	0,549	0,423
IMC17	0,385	0,226	0,273	0,310	0,282	0,613	0,513	0,433
IMC18	0,549	0,448	0,510	0,555	0,530	0,838	0,730	0,574
IMC20	0,480	0,453	0,372	0,424	0,344	0,600	0,551	0,551
IMA01	0,560	0,531	0,447	0,574	0,524	0,666	0,829	0,614
IMA02	0,593	0,634	0,586	0,649	0,592	0,766	0,894	0,688
IMA03	0,545	0,523	0,471	0,586	0,544	0,551	0,762	0,52
IMA04	0,514	0,472	0,543	0,590	0,553	0,704	0,837	0,586
IMG01	0,530	0,456	0,497	0,545	0,473	0,658	0,727	1

Source: Own elaboration (2024).

The results indicate that all indicators of the latent variables (LVs) have higher values against their corresponding cross-loadings, which are the sidelines. However, for some indicators evaluated vertically, there were higher values compared to the correlations of the indicators when they were outside their constructs (ADT03, CIO03, IMC20). Therefore, since the subsequent robust criterion (Fornell-Larcker) was validated, it has been decided not to remove indicators to avoid chance capitalization (Bido & Silva, 2019). Afterward, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was applied, comparing the square roots of the AVE values of each LV with the correlations between the LVs (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). According to this criterion, the square root of the AVE values should be greater than the correlation values (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 5
Discriminant Validation of the Latent Variables of the Estimated Model

a) 1st Order LV

	VI	TD	RE	AT	CI	IC	IA	IG
VI	**0,831**							
TD	0,682	**0,834**						
RE	0,702	0,753	**0,83**					
AT	0,700	0,674	0,737	**0,806**				
CI	0,696	0,691	0,728	0,791	**0,832**			
IC	0,680	0,626	0,610	0,657	0,619	**0,709**		
IA	0,664	0,650	0,618	0,721	0,664	0,623	**0,832**	
IG	0,530	0,456	0,497	0,545	0,473	0,658	0,727	**1**

a) 2nd Order LV

	Int_Marketing	Org_Image
Int_Marketing	**0,724**	
Org_Image	0,670	**0,712**

Note 1: Correlation matrix between LV with the square root of AVE on the diagonal, in bold.
Note 2: 2nd Order LVs Org_Image and Int_Marketing were evaluated by repeating the indicators of the respective 1st Order LVs.
Note 3: All correlations are significant at 1%.
Source: Own elaboration (2024).

The results indicate that the correlations between the latent variables (LVs) were higher than the square root of the AVE, which confirms the presence of discriminant validity among them. With the measurement model validation steps checked and fulfilled, the next step was to validate the structural model. The results from the Bootstrapping technique (5000 resamples) and Blindfolding are illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2
Structural Model Analysis (PLS-SEM)
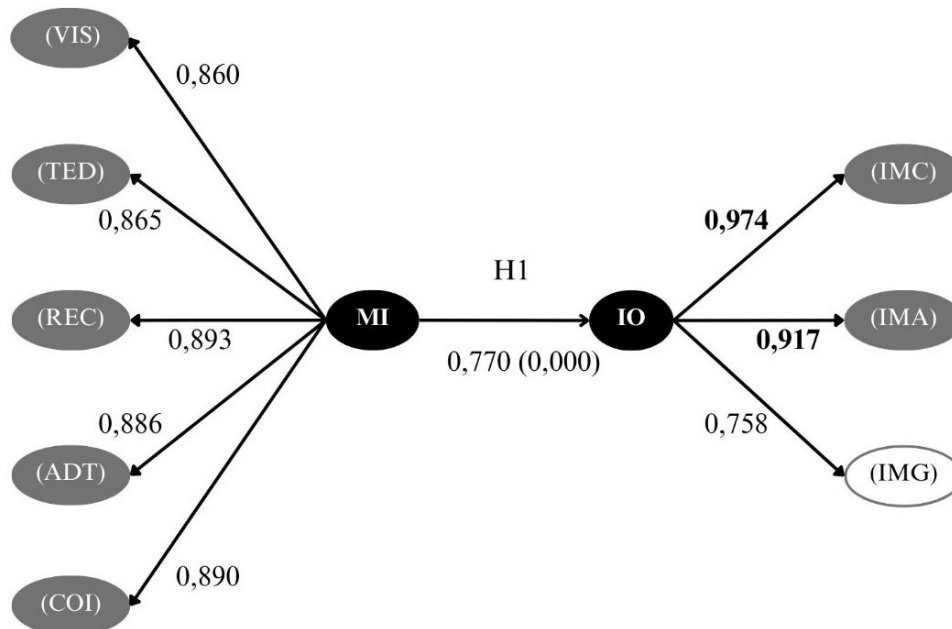
Note 1: R² values are shown inside the circles representing the LVs.
Source: Own elaboration (2024).

The R² values, which explain the variance of the exogenous latent variables (LVs) in the structural model, demonstrate strong effects, as indicated by the values contained within the circles in Figure 2. Finally, the results of the hypothesis tests are more detailed in Table 6.

Table 6

Evaluation of the Structural Relationships of the Latent Variables of the Estimated Model

Hypothesis	Structural Relationship	Structural Coefficient	Standard Error	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Int_Marketing → Org_Image	0,770	0,042	18,347	0,00	Confirmed

Source: Own elaboration (2024).

It is worth noting that Hypothesis 1, which states that Internal Marketing is positively and significantly related to Organizational Image, was confirmed (β=0.770; p<0.001).

Relationship among constructs

The literature review states that Internal Marketing positively influences Employee Engagement (Al-Weshah, 2019; Črnjar, Dlačić, & Milfelner, 2020) and employee performance (Chiu, Won, & Bae, 2020). Organizational Image also influences these constructs (Almeida & Coelho, 2019; Dhir & Shukla, 2019; Lee, Hameduddin, & Lee, 2023). In this case, Internal Marketing acts indirectly as a predictor of Organizational Image.

Studies did not cover the direct link between Internal Marketing and Employee Commitment. However, Employee Commitment is influenced positively by Organizational Image (Almeida & Coelho, 2019), implying that Internal Marketing also predicts it. The among between the concepts of Affective Commitment (Asif, Fatima, & Johns, 2022) and Organizational Commitment (Canales-Requena et al., 2021; Chiu, Won, & Bae, 2020) with Employee Commitment suggests that Organizational Image plays an influence on these constructs, and, consequently, so does Internal Marketing.

The lack of studies directly relating these constructs indicates an opportunity for new research to contribute to the theory of Internal Marketing and Organizational Image and marketing practices.

Internal Marketing and Organizational Image in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

The dimensions of each construct explain the measurement model consistently. Sahibzada et al. (2019, 2020) support Booms and Bitner (1981), highlighting that service marketing, as in educational institutions, needs to address aspects such as People – represented by Training and Development and Compensation, among other relevant items for employees.

Pardiyono et al. (2022) demonstrated the influence of Internal Marketing on the institution's External Marketing. Thus, the confirmation of this work's hypothesis is consistent with the results of Pardiyono et al. (2022), as one construct focuses on the internal audience and the other on the external audience, influencing Organizational Image.

The confirmation of this hypothesis supports the work of Wæraas and Dahle (2020), which emphasizes the importance of people management for employees to act in accordance with the institution's desired reputation. This reflects the strong relationship between Internal Marketing and Organizational Image.

CONCLUSION

The research addresses both general and specific objectives by examining employees' perceptions of the Internal Marketing developed at the institution. The dimensions evaluated follow this order from the highest to the lowest: Training and Development, Vision, Work Environment, Internal Communication, and Rewards. The overall evaluation of Internal Marketing is 7.6 on a scale of 0 to 10. When identifying employees' perceptions of the institution's image, the results show that the Overall Image of the institution was the highest-rated dimension of Organizational Image, with a 7.9 average. Cognitive Image and Affective Image were the second and third dimensions of the construct, respectively. The evaluation of the relationship between perceptions of Internal Marketing and Organizational Image confirmed the consistent statistical significance between the two constructs, with a structural coefficient of 0.770 (p<0.001). It confirms the interdependence between the constructs and the findings from other authors on the same topics, fulfilling the objective of analyzing the relationship between

employees' perceptions of Internal Marketing and Organizational Image at a community university.

The study concludes that Internal Marketing may be an effective tool for Organizational Image development. That is, well-implemented Internal Marketing strategies positively impact Organizational Image. As an application of the results, the research identified that Rewards and Internal Communication are areas that lack attention. Training and Development, Vision, and Work Environment are strengths of the institution.

Replicating the research at the same institution in different periods could generate useful comparisons and test changes in strategies, which allows a detailed analysis of the strength of Internal Marketing across different groups and campuses. The study innovated by adapting two validated scales for higher education institutions. It enables other institutions to use the data collection instrument with appropriate adaptations. The scales used included 5-point Likert items and 7-point semantic differential items.

With the confirmed relationship between constructs in the studied institution, the results can be scaled through research at other institutions, allowing measurement of Internal Marketing and Organizational Image perceptions. It facilitates the diagnosis of dimensions and the implementation of improvements in institutional strategies. Academically, the study established a new relationship between Internal Marketing and Organizational Image, which are widely studied constructs but rarely together. The literature review showed over 8,000 articles on the researched terms, indicating the academic and market relevance of the constructs. The study contributes to institutions using the research as a starting point to develop Internal Marketing and Organizational Image studies. It allows the creation of accurate strategies, supporting decision-making and improvements in strategic planning.

Among the study's limitations, the low number of participants was influenced by the timing of the research, coinciding with the end of the semester and school recess. This timing may have led to more positive responses due to the respondents' emotional state. Ethical issues, such as sending the invitation only to area supervisors, may have resulted in more positive responses due to fear of repercussions. Future studies could explore the perceived Organizational Image from other audiences, including employees from different campuses, identifying strengths and weaknesses of each construct, and relating perceptions of constructs to employee characteristics. Increasing the number of respondents and applying the research at different educational institutions, as well as exploring other variables as moderators or mediators, is also a possibility. New approaches to respondents, such as through professional social networks and department visits, could be explored to obtain a more comprehensive and representative sample.

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