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## Internal marketing, employee satisfaction and cultural congruence of Gulf airlines

### ABSTRACT

**Purpose-** Little empirical research has examined the role of culture on the internal marketing-employee satisfaction relationship, and even fewer studies focus on this subject in the airline sector. This paper aims to assess whether culture moderates the contribution of internal marketing to the satisfaction of employees from Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) airlines.

**Design/methodology/approach-** The investigation is conducted via a structured questionnaire with 310 cabin crew members who work at three GCC airlines. Multi-group analysis was used within SmartPLS 3.0 to measure whether the impact of internal marketing on employee satisfaction is moderated by cultural congruence.

**Findings-** The results reveal the practice of internal marketing contributes to employee satisfaction in GCC airlines, while cultural congruence moderates the direct relationship between internal marketing and the satisfaction of airlines' employees. The results indicate that airlines need to satisfy the cultural needs of employees to increase their satisfaction for successful internal marketing practice.

**Originality/value-** This study contributes towards assessing the moderation effects of cultural congruence on internal marketing practice in the airline sector. It contributes to the current literature on aviation research, as well as specific managerial implications for the airlines and managers to achieve higher competitiveness.

**Key words:** GCC airlines, internal marketing, cultural congruence

### 摘要

**研究目的:** 文化一致性是否会影响企业内部营销活动与员工满意度二者之间的关系? 目前在这方面的研究还很稀缺, 而聚焦于航空领域的这一主题的研究更是少之又少。本研究以海湾合作委员会的航空公司为例, 旨在分析文化一致性因素能否调节企业内部营销活动对员工满意度的影响力。

**研究方法** 本研究对三家海湾合作委员会的航空公司共计 310 名的空服人员展开了问卷调查。通过运用 SmartPLS 3.0 软件的多群组分析方法来具体评估航空公司的内部营销活动对其员工满意度的影响是否会被文化一致性因素所调节。

**研究结论** 研究结果显示, 在海湾合作委员会航空公司中, 内部营销活动的实施有助于员工满意度的提升; 同时文化一致性因素可以调节航空公司的内部营销活动对其员工满意度的影响。该结果表明, 为了获得成功的内部营销实践, 航空公司需要满足员工的不同文化需求, 以期提高员工的满意度

**研究价值:** 本研究聚焦于分析文化一致性对航空公司内部营销实践的调节效应。其不仅是对当前航空研究领域文献的补充, 同时也能够为航空公司及其管理者提供具体的管理方法, 从而获得更多的竞争优势。

**关键词:** 海湾合作委员会航空公司, 内部营销, 文化一致性。

## Resumen

**Propósito:** el papel de la cultura en la relación de satisfacción de los empleados y el marketing interno ha sido examinada en pocas investigaciones empíricas, e incluso menos estudios se centran en este tema en el sector de las aerolíneas. Este documento tiene como objetivo evaluar si la cultura modera la contribución del marketing interno a la satisfacción de los empleados de las aerolíneas del Consejo de Cooperación del Golfo (CCG).

**Diseño / metodología / enfoque:** la investigación se realiza a través de un cuestionario estructurado con 310 miembros de la tripulación de cabina que trabajan en tres aerolíneas del CCG. El análisis de grupo múltiple se realizó con SmartPLS 3.0 para medir si el impacto del marketing interno en la satisfacción de los empleados es moderado por la congruencia cultural.

**Resultados:** los resultados revelan que la práctica del marketing interno contribuye a la satisfacción de los empleados en las aerolíneas del CCG, mientras que la congruencia cultural modera la relación directa entre el marketing interno y la satisfacción de los empleados de las aerolíneas. Los resultados indican que las aerolíneas necesitan

satisfacer las necesidades culturales de los empleados para aumentar su satisfacción por los logros del marketing interno.

**Originalidad / valor:** este estudio contribuye a evaluar los efectos de moderación de la congruencia cultural en la práctica del marketing interno en el sector de las aerolíneas. Contribuye a la literatura actual sobre investigación de aviación, así como indicadores de las consecuencias específicas de gestión de personal para que las aerolíneas y los directivos logren una mayor competitividad.

**Palabras clave:** aerolíneas CCG, marketing interno, congruencia cultural.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Globalisation of the airline industry is now a reality and is expected to continue. Globalised air travel is leading to a multicultural mix of crew, and many airlines are global employers, recruiting in over 100 countries (Button, 2008). In particular, the GCC airlines have taken the idea of a multicultural cabin crew team to the extreme in that they balance the nationalities of the cabin crew based on the destinations they serve (Emirates Group Careers, 2017; Qatar Airways, 2017). Emirates, Etihad and Qatar Airways, three major GCC airlines, known as the “Middle East three” are the most important exponents of the rise of the Gulf (Dresner et al., 2015).

Culture is a system of values, norms, and beliefs shared among individuals (Everett, 2013). Employees from diverse cultures need to overcome their perceived cultural differences, and they may find it demanding to integrate their values, different backgrounds and norms and manage to work together (Shaban, 2016). Diverse teams are likely to experience conflicts, stress, communication difficulties, absenteeism, low trust, and low job satisfaction (Shaban, 2016).

Cultural congruence is the distance between the cultural competences offered by the organisations’ and employees’ cultural needs (Costantino et al., 2009). It promotes

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4 effective interaction between the organisation and its employees by creating a superior  
5 work environment in cross-cultural context (Schim and Doorenbos, 2010). However,  
6 most of the studies investigated the effects of culture on individual attitudes, behaviours,  
7 and communication in the aviation sector (Neo et al., 2014; Trkovsky, 2017), with no  
8 evidence found examining the impacts of culture on internal marketing practice. Rafiq  
9 and Ahmed (2000) stated that organisations need to ensure the internal market is  
10 satisfied in order to produce satisfied customers, as employees are the primary market  
11 in the service industry. Berry (1981) supported and noted that organisations can better  
12 understand their employees, satisfying their needs and wants when they are considered  
13 as internal customers.  
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25 Against the above background, this paper attempts to assess the role of culture in  
26 affecting the internal marketing-employee satisfaction relationship within GCC airlines.  
27 In particular, this study aims to assess (1) the relationship between internal marketing  
28 and employee satisfaction in the aviation industry, (2) the moderating role of culture  
29 between internal marketing and the satisfaction of employees. In order to achieve the  
30 research aim and objectives, previous research was reviewed.  
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39 In general, most internal marketing studies that have investigated the influence of  
40 culture were qualitative, while only few studies have empirically, quantitatively  
41 assessed the influence of culture on internal marketing (Huang and Rundle-Thiele,  
42 2014). As an exception and also the first attempt, Huang and Rundle-Thiele (2014)'s  
43 study confirmed the effects of culture on internal marketing through quantitative  
44 research when investigating employees from different tourism and hospitality sectors  
45 including hotel, restaurant, club, pub, and et al. They have confirmed three internal  
46 marketing variables including internal communication, training, and internal market  
47 research that can assist to improve employee satisfaction. Nevertheless, no research  
48 attention is focused on the airline setting, let alone in the Middle East area. Therefore,  
49 given the research context of aviation different Huang and Rundle-Thiele (2014)'s  
50 study, this study aims to make theoretical contributions by identifying new internal  
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4 marketing variables and extending the theoretical framework to fit the aviation sector.  
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6 In addition, it attempts to contribute to recent discussions regarding culture  
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8 heterogenisation vs. global homogenization (Cleveland and Laroche, 2007), and  
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10 produce practical implications for airline management.  
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## 15 **2 Theoretical foundation**

### 16 **2.1 Internal marketing**

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19 Internal marketing first appeared to ensure the delivery of consistent and high-quality  
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21 service (Berry, 1981). The internal marketing concept has gone through a development  
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23 process consisting of three interrelated stages including employee focused, customer  
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25 focused and company focused (Kimura, 2017). However, despite the rapid growing  
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27 discussion on the internal marketing concept (Berry, 1981; Ballantyne, 2003), there is  
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29 no consensus on its definition, its functions, how to implement it and who should be  
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31 responsible for it. Therefore, through a critical review of various definitions (Ballantyne,  
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33 2003; Huang and Rundle-Theile, 2015; Rafiq and Ahmed, 2000), internal marketing is  
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35 defined as a management philosophy of treating employees as internal customers and  
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37 to align, motivate, and coordinate them to work towards customer satisfaction through  
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39 internal relationship management in the current study.  
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43 Internal marketing is noted as a multi-dimensional concept including two dimensions  
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45 (Fu, 2013), three dimensions (Back et al., 2011; Huang and Rundle-Thiele, 2014), or  
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47 four dimensions (Gummesson, 1991). Although there is no consensus forming on the  
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49 number of components characterising the internal marketing construct, shared  
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51 components have been identified. Specifically, the elements of the internal marketing  
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53 mix include rewards (Back et al., 2011; Foreman and Money, 1995), internal  
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55 communication (Kim et al., 2016), training (Back et al., 2011; Kimura, 2017), internal  
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57 market research (Huang and Rundle-Thiele, 2015), organisational structure (Ahmed et  
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59 al., 2003), and management support (Kim et al., 2016). According to Leong and Lam  
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(2016), the various dimensions of internal marketing can be categorised into four major

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4 groups including vision, communication, reward system, and training.  
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8 However, differences were noted among studies in various contexts on the  
9 identification of the internal marketing mix. Therefore, given the contextual similarity,  
10 the current study adapted 'value of needs' and 'authority autonomy' as the internal  
11 marketing dimensions from the study by Fu (2013) in the aviation sector. According to  
12 Fu (2013), those two dimensions were identified and operationalised from real  
13 discussions with senior managers of airline companies. In addition, rewards and  
14 internal communication are included as additional dimensions given their importance  
15 as shown by the review. However, the dimension 'training' is excluded because the  
16 dimension 'value of needs' already includes the training part. Consequently, based on  
17 the above, value of needs, authorised autonomy, internal communication, and rewards  
18 were identified as the dimensions characterising the internal marketing construct in the  
19 current study.  
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## 33 **2.2 Relationship between internal marketing and employee satisfaction**

34 Employees are the objects of internal marketing. They are the best assets of a company,  
35 and it is crucial to retain them through adopting effective human resource policies  
36 (Gronroos, 1990). Employee satisfaction is known as employee job satisfaction in this  
37 study. In general, employees' job satisfaction is measured in terms of evaluative,  
38 emotional, and behavioural components towards their jobs (Kim and Back, 2012). It  
39 embodies the attitudes of employees regarding their jobs, and reveals the degree of fit  
40 between employees and their organisations (Back et al., 2011). Back et al. (2011)  
41 highlighted that satisfied employees are inclined to remain in the organisation and  
42 distribute favourable word of mouth.  
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54 The concept of internal marketing is to view employees as internal customers, and to  
55 use jobs as internal products to satisfy their needs (Berry, 1981), which in turn tends to  
56 educate, reward and motivate them to meet the needs of external customers (Varey and  
57 Lewis, 2000). Internal marketing is acknowledged as the key to external marketing  
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(Shiu and Yu, 2010), while employees should get satisfaction first for better service performance (Back et al., 2011), it is suggested that employees who are given more power and authority are more likely to obtain satisfaction. In particular, a number of studies in various contexts have supported the idea that internal marketing positively affects the satisfaction of employees, such as the hospitality sector (Leong and Lam, 2015), tourism sector (Huang and Rundle-Thiele, 2015), insurance sector (Shiu and Yu, 2010), and logistics sector (Keller et al., 2006). Hence, those findings informed the following hypothesis:

**H1.** *Internal marketing practice positively and significantly influences employee satisfaction.*

### **2.3 The role of cultural congruence**

According to Rashed (2013), culture as shared symbols and meanings shapes people's experience, interpretation, and action, these orient the way in which people feel, think, and act in the world. The airline sector is becoming globalised in that there are a large number of multicultural mixes among the crew of many airlines. Several studies have revealed that culture plays a significant role in the airline sector. Trkovsky (2017) noted the positive effects of culture on the behaviour and communication of multicultural flight crews, which might improve flight safety. Neo et al. (2014) discovered that airlines' lack of understanding of employee (learners') needs and cultural backgrounds can result in ineffective training and negligible performance improvement. However, when it comes to internal marketing practice in the aviation sector, whether culture exerts influence remains uncertain.

The negative implications of cultural diversity are often involved with adverse behavioural outcomes in the workplace such as misunderstandings, bias, stereotyping, and perceived inequality (Shaban, 2016). To enable employees to work efficiently in a cross-cultural context, cultural congruence serves as a set of congruent attitudes and behaviours that come together among employees to minimise misunderstandings and communication barriers (Costantino et al., 2009). It is suggested for organisations that

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4 have better met the cultural needs of multinational employees, the impact of internal  
5 marketing on the satisfaction level of employees is expected to be stronger (Huang and  
6 Rundle-Thiele, 2014). Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed:  
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11 **H2.** *The impact of internal marketing on employee satisfaction is positively moderated*  
12 *by cultural congruence.*  
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17 In summary, a conceptual framework is developed as shown in Figure 1 below,  
18 assessing whether cultural congruence is an important moderator between internal  
19 marketing and the satisfaction levels of employees in Middle Eastern airlines.  
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25 **Figure 1: The proposed conceptual framework**  
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### 30 31 **3 METHODOLOGY**

#### 32 33 **3.1 Questionnaire design**

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35 A questionnaire survey was employed to test the hypothesis. The questionnaire consists  
36 of four parts. In particular, Part 1 of the questionnaire measured the internal marketing  
37 practice of airlines using a 12-item approach. Three items on authorised autonomy were  
38 adapted from Fu (2013), three items on internal communication were drawn from  
39 Huang and Rundle-Thiele (2014), three items on rewards were from Foreman and  
40 Money (1995), and three items on value of needs were developed from Fu (2013) and  
41 Foreman and Money (1995). Part 2 captured and measured employee's perceptions of  
42 cultural congruence using a 3-item scale adapted from the study by Costantino et al.  
43 (2009) and Huang and Rundle-Thiele (2014). Next, the construct of employee  
44 satisfaction was measured in Part 3 using a three-item scale adapted from studies by  
45 Yeh (2014) and Huang and Rundle-Thiele (2014). All items are posed on a 7-point  
46 Likert scale from '1=strongly disagree' to '7=strongly agree'. Lastly, Part 4 examined  
47 the demographics of employees in terms of gender, age, nationality, current employer,  
48 and the duration they have been working for the airlines.  
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### 3.2 Research development

Prior to using the questionnaire, pilot testing was undertaken with 21 crew members from GCC airlines to check whether respondents would have issues with answering the questions. The results showed that the questionnaire items were appropriate but there is a need to enlarge the font size, and to add a back button of the web-based questionnaire. Questionnaire was thus updated as requested.

The selected population of the study are cabin crew who work at three GCC airlines, and the main survey was conducted between 25th July 2017 to 20th August 2017. The questionnaire was conducted using a web-based approach so that respondents can take part freely and remain anonymous. One of the authors had previously worked in the Gulf airlines, so the questionnaire was administered using the Internet via the authors' personal network of former co-workers on Facebook and WhatsApp messengers. Respondents were taken to the online questionnaire on Qualtrics immediately following activation of the hyperlink. In addition, in order to allow the questionnaire to be widely spread, snowball sampling was employed to recruit the population of cabin crew among the acquaintances of respondents' social networks (Saunders et al., 2009). In total, 310 usable questionnaire responses were collected.

### 3.3 Data analysis

This study applies the technique of partial least squares (PLS) to examine the hypotheses through SmartPLS (Hair et al., 2016). According to Lowry and Gaskin (2014), PLS can be used for both confirmatory and exploratory studies because it avoids factor indeterminacy. Accordingly, PLS does not require the theory to already have empirical support that is well established from other sources (Gefen et al., 2000). Consequently, due to no empirical evidence was sought in the airline setting on the effects of culture on internal marketing, PLS technique was more suitable for the current research, and could contribute to the existing literature by applying a different analysis approach. In particular, the PLS-SEM technique was utilised to examine: the

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3 effects of internal marketing practice (IMP) on employee satisfaction (ES), and the role  
4 of cultural congruence as a moderator between IMP and ES in the current study.  
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9 The following analytical procedures were adopted: (1) SPSS 23 was employed to assess  
10 the quality of data. The results revealed the satisfactory quality of the data to proceed  
11 with PLS after the assessment of missing data, outliers and normality. (2) SmartPLS  
12 was adopted to examine the reliability and validity of both reflective and structural  
13 models. To measure the significance of the path between internal marketing and the  
14 satisfaction levels of employees, PLS analysis was first executed without the moderator  
15 (cultural congruence). The result of hypothesis 1(H1) was thus obtained after the  
16 evaluation of the structural model; (3) Multi-group analysis was used within SmartPLS  
17 3.0 to evaluate the moderating effect of cultural congruence. Hair et al. (2016) noted  
18 that a common approach to assess the moderating variable is to dichotomise the variable  
19 based on the values through the use of either a median or a mean split. Therefore,  
20 participants in this study were categorised into 'high-cultural congruence' and 'low-  
21 cultural congruence' groups using a median split approach.  
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## 39 **4 RESULTS**

### 40 **4.1 Profile of respondents**

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42 310 valid questionnaires were returned and deemed sufficient for data analysis (Hair et  
43 al., 2010). The demographic data showed there were more females (80.0%) than males  
44 (20.0%). Tyler and Talyor (2002) explained that females tend to have the skills  
45 associated with the role of cabin crew characterized as 'women's work'. Most of the  
46 respondents were between 21 and 29 years old (61.0%) and 30 to 39 years old (30.6%).  
47 This can be explained by the fact that airlines prefer youthfulness and the average age  
48 of their cabin crew is 26 to 29 years old (Fassihi, 2008). In addition, the data revealed  
49 that 47 (15.2%) respondents were African, 132 (42.6%) respondents were Asian and 88  
50 (28.4%) respondents were European. Five (1.6%) respondents did not specify their  
51 nationalities or entered irrelevant information.  
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## 4.2 Results of the measurement model

A two-step approach was utilised to examine the presented theoretical model. Specifically, internal consistency reliability, indicator reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were assessed to examine the reliability and validity of the measurement model. As indicated in Table 1, firstly, internal consistency reliability of the constructs is established with Cronbach's Alpha ranging from .700 to .824 and the composite reliability ranging from .822 to .895. Secondly, indicator reliability was satisfactory as all values of the construct indicators were higher than the thresholds of 0.70. Thirdly, convergent validity was confirmed by the average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeding the cutoff value of .50 (Henseler et al., 2009). Lastly, due to the AVE values exceeding the squared coefficients between any pairs of constructs (as shown in Table 2) (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), the reflective measures have satisfactory discriminant validity. Consequently, the measurement results were considered sufficiently strong to proceed to the evaluation of the structural model.

**Insert Table 1**

**Insert Table 2**

## 4.3 Results of the structural model

A structural equation analysis was then conducted to examine the hypotheses. In particular, the explanatory power and predictable capabilities of the model were assessed (Hair et al., 2016). With the VIF values of the indicators ranging from 1.023 to 1.092 below 5 (Chin, 1998), multicollinearity was confirmed as non-existent in the structural model. Next, according to Chin (1998), the minimum limit for the  $R^2$  value is .10, therefore, the explained variance ( $R^2$  value) (Table 3) for the variable of employee satisfaction being .132 is acceptable. In addition, the Stone-Geisser  $Q^2$  test exhibits value of employee satisfaction higher than zero, implying sufficient predictive relevance of the model (Henseler et al., 2009). Consequently, sufficient predictive validity was also confirmed for the structural model.

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6 **Please Insert Table 3**  
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10 Finally, the path coefficient and t-statistics of the hypothesised relationship were  
11 assessed using a bootstrapping procedure (Chin, 1998). Table 4 below reveals the  
12 testing results of the hypothesis given the path coefficient and the associated  
13 significance. In particular, internal marketing practice was found to be in positive and  
14 significant correlation to employee satisfaction at  $\beta = .363, p < .01$ .  
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25 **4.4 Multi-group Analysis**  
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27 To capture the role of cultural congruence, the study proposes to check whether the  
28 relationship between internal marketing and employee satisfaction differs in terms of  
29 cultural congruence. Based on the value of the cultural congruence construct, the  
30 dataset was spilt into two groups: one group owned low (n=171) and the other group  
31 owned high (n=139). Then, by means of a multi-group analysis (PLS-MGA), the path  
32 coefficients across the high and low groups of data were compared through a modified  
33 two-independent-sample t test as proposed by an earlier study (Keil et al., 2000).  
34 Following the instructions suggested by Hair et al. (2016, p.274), two group-specific  
35 numbers of observations, path coefficients of both groups, and standard errors were  
36 used as inputs for calculation. As shown in Table 5, the path coefficient differs  
37 significantly across the two groups. In particular, the group with high perceived cultural  
38 congruence revealed greater impacts of internal marketing on the satisfaction levels of  
39 employees than the low group. Consequently, the heterogeneity results in the support  
40 of the second hypothesis (H2) that the influence of internal marketing on employee  
41 satisfaction is positively moderated by cultural congruence.  
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58 **Insert Table 5**  
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## 5 DISCUSSIONS

### 5.1 Internal marketing practice and employee satisfaction

Internal marketing is an organisational management element and multi-dimensional concept that can be controlled and utilized to influence and motivate employees (Ahmed et al., 2003; Huang and Rundle-Thiele, 2015). The empirical results of this study confirm and support the previous work of Huang and Rundle-Thiele (2015) pertaining that the internal marketing concept is multi-dimensional. Secondly, the results reveal that internal marketing practices (authorized autonomy, internal communication, value of needs and rewards) have significant positive influences on employee satisfaction. The findings corroborate with the work by Chang and Chang (2007), Huang and Rundle-Thiele (2014), and Shiu and Yu (2010) concerning the significant positive effect of internal marketing practices on employee satisfaction.

More specifically, the findings support the work by Yukl and Becker (2006) that autonomy is positively related to job satisfaction as it can be seen as a non-monetary reward and an antecedent of job satisfaction. Employees with job autonomy are more likely to share their knowledge and have innovative behaviour (Williams, 2003). The results also corroborate the findings by Ruck and Welch (2012) suggesting effective internal communication is closely related to organisational performance and employee satisfaction. According to Gronroos (1990), the airlines need to satisfy employees primary needs by providing them with sufficient information about job-related matters, customer needs, organisational decision-making, and the importance of their contributions to the airline. Getting cabin crew involved in marketing campaigns provides the opportunities for them to strengthen their organisational commitment, which has a positive influence on job satisfaction (Bansal et al., 2001).

In addition, high-quality relationships between airline management and cabin crew can be developed through the administration of contingent reward behaviour including feedback, approval and recognition (Wayne et al., 2002). Treating cabin crew as

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4 customers while recognizing and rewarding desired behaviours gives an impression  
5 that the airline values and care about them (Wayne et al., 2002). Therefore, an effective  
6 internal marketing programme should consist of a reward and measurement system for  
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8 employee satisfaction and excellent performance (Czaplewski et al., 2001).  
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## 15 **5.2 Assessing the moderating effect and outcomes of cultural congruence**

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17 The empirical results confirm the moderation effects of cultural congruence on airline's  
18 internal marketing practice towards the satisfaction of employees. In other words,  
19 understanding the cultural needs of employees can enable airlines to conduct more  
20 effective internal marketing practices, which will lead to higher satisfaction levels of  
21 employees. The results coincide with the study by Huang and Rundle-Thiele (2014)  
22 concerning the tourism sector.  
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31 Workplaces in the State of Qatar and United Arab Emirates are among the most  
32 culturally diverse in the world. The airlines employ expatriates from diverse cultures,  
33 the multi-national teams comprised of over 152 nationalities to attract a diverse range  
34 of passengers to purchase (The Emirates Group, 2017; Etihad Aviation Group, 2017;  
35 Qatar Airways Group, 2017). Against this background, to enhance the positive impacts  
36 of internal marketing practice on employee satisfaction, the findings of the study  
37 illuminated the importance for airlines to take employee's culture into account when  
38 conducting internal marketing practices. Understanding the diverse needs of  
39 multinational teams contributes to employees' feelings of self-satisfaction and pleasure,  
40 which is more likely to result in quality service.  
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## 54 **6 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

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56 The results of this study indicate the direct effects of internal marketing on employee  
57 satisfaction, suggesting effective internal marketing is of positive association with a  
58 high level of employee satisfaction in the GCC airlines. In particular, the study confirms  
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4 how different internal marketing variables could assist in achieving higher employee  
5 satisfaction in the GCC airlines. In addition, this study confirms the moderation effects  
6 of cultural congruence on the internal marketing-employee satisfaction relationship in  
7 the aviation sector. In other words, the degree that airlines understand and meet the  
8 cultural needs of employees can assist in monitoring the internal marketing practice to  
9 improve the satisfaction of employees. Airlines can retain the loyalty of employees with  
10 diverse cultural backgrounds through meeting their cultural needs and providing  
11 support, which in turn will improve the customer service provided by them (Gremler  
12 and Gwinner, 2000).  
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### 23 **6.1 Theoretical implications**

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25 This study makes theoretical contributions in the following aspects. Firstly, this study  
26 contributes to the existing research on internal marketing in the aviation sector. In  
27 contrast to the study by Huang and Rundle-Thiedle (2014) that noted three variables of  
28 internal marketing (i.e. internal communication, training, and internal market research)  
29 in the tourism and hospitality sector, this study contributed to the literature by providing  
30 refined internal marketing variables in the aviation sector. In particular, the dimensions  
31 of internal marketing in the aviation sector were identified including value of needs,  
32 authorised autonomy, internal communication, and rewards.  
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43 Next, this study, to some extent, makes methodological contribution to the research  
44 assessing the influence of culture on internal marketing practice. As mentioned before,  
45 most internal marketing studies that investigated the impacts of culture were qualitative,  
46 with only Huang and Rundle-Thiedle (2014)'s quantitative study as an exception.  
47 However, differing from Huang and Rundle-Thiedle (2014)'s study that processed the  
48 quantitative data with AMOS, a tool using covariance-based-structural equation  
49 modelling, this study adopted component-based estimation method-PLS path  
50 modelling. Consequently, this study further contributed to the quantitative research  
51 examining the influence of culture on internal marketing through the use of PLS-SEM  
52 technique.  
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## 6.2 Practical Implications

Based on the above, the airlines and managers need to devote more efforts to their internal marketing in order to achieve higher competitiveness. Specific managerial implications are outlined below.

Firstly, airline management needs to delegate authority to cabin crew and empower them to proactively deal with and anticipate passenger's diverse needs. Cabin crews are often provided with restricted autonomy at work, which is likely to lead to their sense of inability to perform tasks to expectations (Williams, 2003). Therefore, it is crucial to provide cabin crews with adequate job autonomy and flexibility in order to achieve a greater sense of control over work, as well as perceived personal accomplishment and satisfaction (Yukl and Becker, 2006).

Secondly, airline management need to strengthen the communication between management and employees. Internal communication between management and employees is positively associated with service excellence and organisational performance (Ruck and Welch, 2012). Organisations should not only ensure there is an ongoing, frequent communication among employees, but also ensure employees have easy access to management through open and supportive communication (Rapert and Wren, 1998).

Thirdly, airline management needs to pay more attention to satisfying employee's needs in order to enhance their job satisfaction. In particular, airlines should focus on the training and professional development of cabin crew to improve their skills and knowledge needed for superior customer service (Leong and Lam, 2016). Providing sufficient training to employees assists them in realising their strengths and weaknesses (Chen and Chen, 2012).

Fourthly, airline management should observe and acknowledge employee's efforts to

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4 enforce desired behaviours. Kim and Back (2012) mentioned that the more benefits  
5 cabin crews perceive from their employment, the more satisfied they are. Contingent  
6 reward behaviour from the airlines can contribute to developing high quality  
7 relationships between the airline management and employees (Czaplewski et al.,2001).  
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15 Lastly, this study is an initial attempt in the aviation sector noting the role of culture in  
16 moderating the influence of internal marketing on employees' job satisfaction.  
17 According to Craig and Douglas (2006), the boundaries of cultural dimensions are  
18 becoming blurring and the tendencies of global homogenisation are growing under the  
19 background of globalisation. However, this study implies that there is a requirement for  
20 airline management to increase cultural awareness concerning internal marketing  
21 practices to improve employee satisfaction and enhance their job performance.  
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## 32 **7 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

33 This study has some limitations that need to be addressed. First, this study was  
34 conducted with cabin crew from three airlines in the GCC region. It is noted that the  
35 three Middle Eastern airlines enjoy great oil advantages, as well as strong support from  
36 the local governments, which enables these three airlines only deliver full services in  
37 comparison to other American, European, and Asian airlines. Therefore, whether the  
38 results could be applied to other airlines are indeterminate. Future research will look at  
39 airlines from different regions and also a mixed of full services and limited services  
40 airlines. Second, a limitation was noted on the selection of the sampling technique and  
41 data collection method. In particular, the non-probability nature of the snowball  
42 sampling design may restrict the generalisability of the findings, while common method  
43 variance might be a concern due to the adoption of self-administered questionnaires.  
44 To minimise such a threat, the use of multiple data collection methods is suggested for  
45 future studies.  
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Tourism Review



**Table 1. Assessment of the reflective measurement model**

Constructs and Items	Loading	Cronbach Alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
<b>Authorised autonomy (AA)</b>		0.798	0.879	0.708
The airline allows cabin crew to express their opinions.	0.885			
Plans and decision making of the airline will be accessed by cabin crew.	0.785			
The airline authorizes me to flexibly deal with the passengers with diverse needs.	0.851			
<b>Internal communication (IC)</b>		0.798	0.883	0.717
There is an internal communication programme for all employees in the airline.	0.862			
Employees at all level understand the direction and key priorities of the airline.	0.741			
Messages I received are aligned with business wide communication.	0.928			
<b>Rewards (R)</b>		0.700	0.822	0.607
The performance measurement and reward systems encourage employees to work as a team.	0.791			
The management measures and rewards employee performance that contributes most to the airline's vision.	0.805			
The cabin crew who provide excellent service are rewarded for their efforts.	0.739			
<b>Value of needs (VON)</b>		0.772	0.865	0.681
The airline will attempt to find if the training I receive fit my needs.	0.856			
The on-board leaders often concern about my obstacles at work.	0.769			
In the event that I have special requirements, the airline provides flexible measure and help.	0.847			
<b>Employee satisfaction (ES)</b>		0.824	0.895	0.740
I am happy with the flight colleagues during assignments.	0.817			
I am satisfied with the opportunities my work gives me to interact with others.	0.901			
I am happy with the variety of activities my work offers.	0.861			
<b>Cultural Congruence (CC)</b>		0.738	0.842	0.644
The airline encourages attendance at training in cultural awareness	0.705			

The airline has an internal mission statement assessing a commitment to cultural awareness.	0.905			
The airline understands my culture and uses ethnic-specific communication channels.	0.733			

**Table 2. Inter-construct correlations and the square root of AVE**

	Authorized autonomy	Employee satisfaction	Internal communication	Internal marketing	Rewards	Value of needs
Authorized autonomy	<b>0.841</b>					
Employee satisfaction	0.47	<b>0.86</b>				
Internal communication	0.29	0.317	<b>0.847</b>			
Internal marketing	0.317	0.363	0.353	<b>1</b>		
Rewards	0.313	0.325	0.242	0.247	<b>0.779</b>	
Values of needs	0.625	0.566	0.258	0.277	0.157	<b>0.825</b>

Note: Square root of AVE is shown on the diagonal of the matrix in boldface.

**Table 3. Coefficients of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) and prediction variance (Q<sup>2</sup>) of the construct.**

Endogenous latent construct	Coefficients of determination (R <sup>2</sup> )	Prediction variance (Q <sup>2</sup> )
Employee satisfaction	0.132	0.087

**Table 4. Significance testing results of the structural model path coefficient**

Hypothesis	Path coefficient	T values	Results
H1: Internal marketing practice -> Employee satisfaction	0.363***	6.568	Accepted

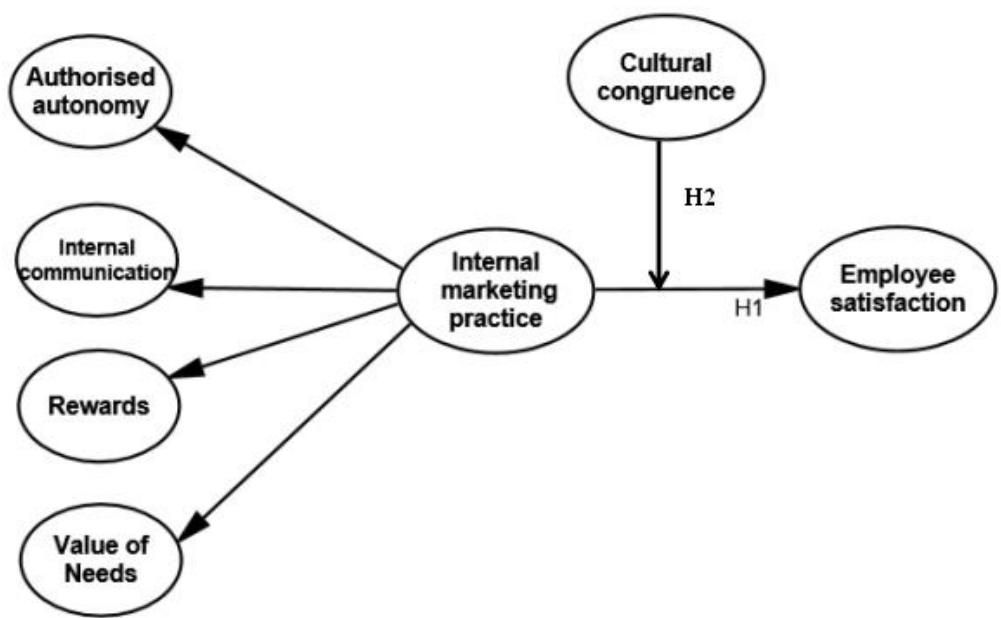
**Table 5. Results of multi-group analysis (PLS-MGA)**

	Group 1		Group 2		Group 1 vs Group 2			
	p1	se(p(1))	p2	se(p(2))	p(1)-p(2)	t value	Significance level	p value
Internal marketing practice -> Employee satisfaction	0.354	0.067	0.378	0.091	0.024	2.600	***	0.009
n	171		139					
H2: Cultural congruence positively and significantly moderates the relationship between internal marketing and employee satisfaction.							Accepted	

Note: p(1) and p(2) are path coefficients of Group 1 and Group 2, respectively; se(p(1)) and se(p(2)) are the standard error of p(1) and p(2), respectively. \*p<0.10. \*\*p<0.05. \*\*\*p<0.01

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Figure 1. Theoretical Model



Tourism Review