

## **Investigating the effect of internal marketing on customer orientation with the mediating role of environmental turbulence (case study: Melli Bank branches in Ahvaz city)**

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** Banking is a service-oriented and highly competitive industry that depends heavily on customer orientation for survival, and the success or failure of this industry revolves around its customers. Despite the intense competition between banks, a satisfactory tendency towards customer orientation is not visible from some employees who deal directly with customers. Contemporary literature and studies in the field of organizational marketing have strongly discussed the use of internal marketing program as one of the best ways to achieve employee customer orientation in an organization. The main purpose of this research is to investigate the effect of internal marketing on customer orientation with the mediating role of environmental turbulence in Melli Bank branches in Ahvaz city.

**Method:** The statistical population of the research is made up of all the employees of National Bank of Ahvaz branches, numbering 420 people. In order to calculate the number of samples, Cochran's formula was used as follows. The sampling method is simple random. The sample size was obtained using Cochran's formula for a limited population of 201 people. Therefore, 290 questionnaires were given to the sample members and finally 201 questionnaires were collected. In order to analyze the data, structural equation modeling has been used to examine the fit of the structural equation model.

**Results:** The findings of the research show that internal marketing has an effect on customer orientation (0/53) and environmental turbulence (0/62). Also, environmental turbulence (49/0) had a significant effect on customer orientation. Finally, environmental turbulence played a mediating role in the effect of internal marketing on customer orientation.

**Added value:** This research is the first study in the field of investigating the effect of internal marketing on customer orientation with the mediating role of environmental turbulence in Melli Bank branches in Ahvaz city. It is suggested that similar studies be conducted in other organizations to compare the results and check their generalizability.

**Keywords:** internal marketing, customer orientation, environmental turbulence, Melli Bank branches in Ahvaz city

### **Introduction**

With the development of technologies, technological advancement, is one of the fastestgrowing and developing in the financial services sector (Halimattussakdiah et al., 2023). The banking sector is an important foundation for economic development. Besides contributing significantly to the national GDP, this sector serves hundreds of customers through branches throughout the country and as a result of the proliferating public demand for receiving proper services, the banking sector will probably need more growth. Banking is a service-based and very competitive sector that depends on a customer-orientated approach for survival. Essentially, the success or failure of the banking sector is fundamentally evaluated by the quality of service that it provides to customers (Nebo & Okechukwu, 2017). Customer orientation is defined as an employee's ability to meet customer needs, as well as how much satisfaction it brings to do this. Customer orientation itself is a primary aspect of market orientation that places a double focus on organizational activities and actions and acts as a tool to implement marketing concepts. As an individual resource, customer orientation could serve as a barrier to bad outcomes from job demand and could contribute to accomplished service (Windarti et al., 2020). Customer orientation is so important for banking occupations; it can safeguard it from being non-existent, provide a constant customer cultivation section, and also can fortify for continued superiority (Yunqiu et al., 2020).

Even with existing or current financial institutions having some competitive advantages, there is some sign of a positive movement toward customer orientation, but this is not evidenced by some direct contact employees. However, researchers in academia have pointed out that the behaviors of service employees are integral to the pursuit of customer satisfaction in the service industry and the observed behaviors of some employees contact with service. Incredibly, it appears that the needs of customers in some of these banks are being taken for granted by frontline service employees, even with

competition being so intense. Some employees have been characterized as not friendly, rude, untrustworthy, deceitful, indifferent, repugnant, uncommitted, and sometimes filthy (Nebo & Okechukwu, 2017). Furthermore, some employees appear to be busy doing other work and not providing service to their customers immediately.

Although banks are strongly competing for customers, there is not a satisfactory trend toward customer orientation among some employees in the customer-facing roles. However, researchers who conduct academic studies have defined the behavior of these employees in the service industry as an important factor in customer satisfaction. It seems as if the needs of customers at some of these banks are taken for granted by the frontline service employees, even in the midst of tight competition. Some employees seem unkind, impolite, unreliable, dishonest, uncaring, hateful, or just not interested in the job and sometimes are spending too much time at their jobs to respond to the customers request for service (Nebo & Okechukwu, 2017).

The more significant challenge for bank managers is how to enhance the service employees' behaviors in providing services to customers. In an ever-increasing manner, there is growing focus of contemporary literature and research related to organizational marketing is the application of internal marketing programs, which have been potentially viewed as one of the best ways to produce job commitment and customer orientation behaviors of employees within an organization. Internal marketing is considered to be a broad and strategic approach, as it aims to treat employees as internal customers. It encompasses a set of managerial activities designed to motivate employees to achieve improved performance in the market, enhance internal marketing resources and achieve a competitive advantage (Kadic-Maglajlic et al., 2018). Internal marketing is a good approach to motivate, develop and retain employees to attain service quality and meet expectations of internal & external customers (Suprihanto et al., 2018).

By satisfying the internal customer, i.e., employees, through internal marketing, the bank is better positioned to satisfy the external customer (De Bruin et al., 2021). Research suggests that effort was made to understand the knowing of the customer orientation (internal or external) through internal marketing alone without looking at environmental turbulence as a mediator. Enviornment turbulent is one condition of the circumstances which bank managers need to understand for determining how to maintain performance and profits. Environmental turbulence describes fast and unpredictable change in the

environment. This is also seen as experiencing dynamic and complicated changes to the environment (Simamora & Sulistianingsih, 2021).

To further elaborate, environmental turbulence refers to an unpredictable context or uncertainty banks face when attempting to anticipate rapid changes in either customer wants or technological innovation. Market turbulence refers to the speed of change in both customer segments and customer wants, as well as the degree of unpredictability. Technological turbulence refers to the degree of changes in technology in the industry (Rajala & Hautala-Kankaanpää, 2023). The increasing levels of environmental turbulence, technological disruptions, and adjustments to the levels of customer tastes and aspirations have made it more difficult to provide customer service (Ojha et al., 2021).

Melli Bank is the second largest Iranian bank in terms of both age and size ranked second only to Sepah Bank among Iranian state owned commercial banks. This bank holds the most riches and assets compared to other banks in Iran. After Sepah Bank, Melli Bank has the most branches compared to other banks in the country. The bank needs the application of internal marketing strategies in the workplace, and an increased focus on its internal customers. Conversely, with the emergence of additional foreign competitors, external market orientation will become more significant .From a managerial standpoint and considering banks' attempts to offer better services to customers, Melli Bank must adopt a dynamic and strategic approach to customer relationship management and to appreciate the status of its customers. In order for Melli Bank to retain its position and achieve the targeted levels mentioned in the bank's strategic plan, it needs to develop programs that focus on enhancing internal marketing, customer orientation, and addressing the environmental turbulence. Based on the above, this study intends to investigate the effect of internal marketing on customer orientation from a new angle which has been overlooked by the literature so far. This study also intends to examine the mediating role of environmental turbulence. Therefore, the principal research question is formulated as follows: What is the effect of internal marketing on customer orientation with the mediating role of environmental turbulence in the branches of Melli Bank in Ahvaz city?

## Theoretical Foundations

Internal marketing is described as “the application of marketing philosophy and practices to those individuals who ultimately serve external customers,” based on a belief that the conduct of internal marketing behaviors will result in the engagement of employees and behaviors that are customer-oriented, apart from contributing to organizational profitability and value added, by motivating, empowering developing, and training employees through building competition and competencies (Olorunsola et al., 2022). Focusing on internal marketing can create positive customer outcomes for both external and internal customers. An organization learns more about its internal customers so that it may employ internal marketing activities that help deliver value to all internal customers (Lo Iacono et al., 2024). Internal marketing is widely viewed as a management technology designed to address challenges regarding internal services, the market, an organization’s desirable programs, and a customer focus (Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000). Internal marketing is a deliberate effort to overcome resistance to organizational change, sustain balance and harmony amongst the forces motivating employees to enact corporate strategies toward creating customer satisfaction (Papasolomou-Doukakis, 2002) .Internal marketing guarantees the well-being of employees because the effectiveness of internal marketing hinges on internal customers experience in the organization. If the internal marketing can develop the professional develop human capital so that they provide excellent service, customers will be happy (Nurwati, 2024). Many domestic research (Adibian & Madanloujibari, 2016; Pashaei, 2017; Doosti Khah & Maarefi, 2019; Gholami Qadikalayi, 2019; Shahabnia & Bagherzadeh Khajeh, 2021; Khandouzi & Arab, 2022; Danaeefar et al., 2023) and International researches (Yusuf et al., 2016; Nebo & Okechukwu, 2017; Park & Tran, 2018; Choi & Park, 2020; Sim & Young, 2021; Al Samman & Mohammed, 2021) have shown that internal marketing has an effect on customer orientation. Therefore, the first sub-hypothesis of this research is:

Sub-hypothesis 1: Internal marketing has a positive and significant effect to customer orientation in the branches of Melli Bank in Ahvaz city.

Internal marketing focus can enhance internal and external customer developments (Lo Iacono et al., 2024). Internal marketing entails establishing, developing, and sustaining a service culture and orientation within a firm that helps and supports the company with its objectives (Pavlidou & Efstathiades, 2021). Cunning marketers recognize that marketing actions and activities within companies are equally as important, or more important, than marketing activities happening outside the organization (Nurwati, 2024). Organizations are part of an outside environment which has become more turbulent over the years. Turbulent environments are demonstrated by changing customer needs and wants, relentless technological changes, and fierce competition. An environment is turbulent when market or technical changes in the industry cannot be predicted, thereby increasing risk and uncertainty in the planning process. Therefore, a turbulent environment creates an image for companies that there is urgency to be innovative and to act proactively (Durst et al., 2024) .The environmental continuum involves everything happening outside of the limits of the organization that stands a chance of impacting it. A vast number of unpredictable forces exist in the environment; instability of the forces results in uncertainty for the organization, and because of the uncertainty (Song et al., 2021), there is a degree of risk for organizational management and decision-making. In other words, it is a combination of influences on an organization’s performance that the organization has little or no control over (Mura et al., 2023) .Implementing internal marketing can lead to an improved situation for companies in response to changes in the environment and coping with a turbulent environment. Considering the findings from domestic studies (Meydan-Zad and Soltanpanah 2021, Malekooti Moghaddam 2021, Kahrizi and Jasemi 2022) and international studies (Hoekstra & Leeflang, 2023), we understand that it is evident that marketing whether it be in the external or internal marketing here plays an important role in environmental turbulence by either positively or negatively affecting

it. Therefore, the second sub-hypothesis, which we propose is as follows:

Sub-hypothesis 2: Internal marketing has a positive and significant impact on environmental turbulence in the branches of Melli Bank traces back in the city of Ahvaz.

Today's businesses operate in highly fluid and ever-changing settings. Unanticipated shifts in the external workspace have made older products and services obsolete, compelling organizations to improve (Sajjad et al., 2023). It is the managers' duty to recognize those changes and take action so they can take advantage of opportunities, or avoid the threats. They should, therefore, create plans to address both internal and external challenges and to operate in volatile environments (Shabbir et al., 2021). In this sense, technology change, for example, happens rapidly, and new industries can be created in the blink of an eye, and customers are willing to pay more to have the technically advanced products, unaffected by the availability of conventional alternatives. Thus, the organizations that want to operate successfully in such environments must accept an introductory position in technology, an evolving awareness of

customer needs, and customer orientation as a tenet for their organization (Kamau, 2019).

National (Jenab & Alameh Hayari, 2016; Najafi & Azad, 2023) and international (Pillai & Goldsmith, 2015; Dahan & Shoham, 2019; Ho & Plewa, 2020; Gyedu et al., 2021) research has confirmed evidence of a considerable impact of environmental turbulence on customer orientation. Therefore, the third sub-hypothesis of this research is stated as follows :

Sub-hypothesis 3: Environmental turbulence has a positive and significant effect on customer orientation in Melli Bank branches in Ahvaz.

From this it follows, since internal marketing has an effect on environmental turbulence (sub hypothesis two) and environmental turbulence has an effect on customer orientation (sub hypothesis three), the research's main hypothesis will be stated as:

Main hypothesis: Internal marketing has a positive and significant effect on customer orientation with environmental turbulence as a mediating variable in Melli Bank's branches in Ahvaz city.

The research model of the present study is as follows.

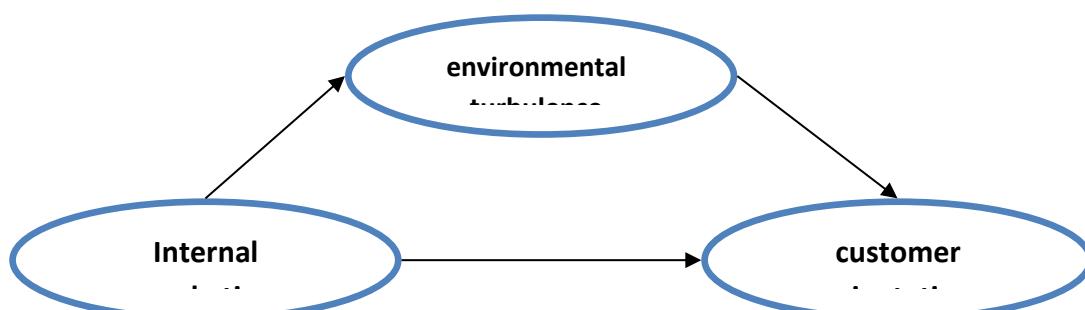


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Study (Source: Researcher)

## Research Methodology

This study is applied in respect of its purpose, given that it provides practical recommendations to the branches of Melli Bank in Ahvaz. In regard to data collection, it uses descriptive-survey method. Given this is look at the consequences of variables a causal method was adopted. The study is cross-sectional in terms of time. Further, a quantitative method was used to test the research hypotheses.

The statistical population of the study consisted of all employees of Melli Bank branches in Ahvaz totalling 420. Cochran's formula was used to calculate the required sample size resulting in  $n = 201$ . The sampling method employed was simple random. 250 questionnaires in total were distributed to members of the sample. The process of distributing the questionnaire followed the

conventions of: 10 minutes of time was allocated to the researcher for distributing the questionnaire during which the researcher briefly explained the questionnaire and handed it to the participant. In total, 290 questionnaires were distributed and finally collected after the participants deemed them complete to be analyzed (which was 210 questionnaires). To collect the data from the statistical sample for this research, we used a questionnaire, developed for the project. The questionnaire for the study consisted of two sections: the demographic questions and the specific questions. The demographic questions included gender, age, and years of work experience. The following were the questionnaires included in the specific question section:

**Table 1: Structure of the Research Questionnaire**

| Source                 | Number of questions | Question numbers | Indicators               | Variable type | Variable name            |
|------------------------|---------------------|------------------|--------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| Foreman & Money (1995) | 8                   | 8 to 1           | Development              | Independent   | Internal marketing       |
|                        | 4                   | 12 to 9          | reward                   |               |                          |
|                        | 3                   | 15 to 13         | Vision                   |               |                          |
| Hajjat (2002)          | 5                   | 1to5             | Customer Closeness       | Dependent     | customer orientation     |
|                        | 4                   | 6to9             | customer well-being      |               |                          |
|                        | 4                   | 10to13           | corporate transparency   |               |                          |
|                        | 4                   | 14to17           | continuous improvement   |               |                          |
| Hu et al (2018)        | 4                   | 1to4             | Technological turbulence | Mediator      | environmental turbulence |
|                        | 5                   | 5to9             | market turbulence        |               |                          |

In the current study, a five-point Likert scale was included for survey questionnaire responses. The surveys were obtained from reputable sources and have met the minimum validity requirements, and content validity was also established. In this study, the reliability of the questionnaire, or internal consistency, was assessed with Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients, using SPSS version 26 and thirty participants, were 0.843 for internal marketing, 0.869 for customer orientation, and 0.802 for environmental turbulence. The data was analyzed utilizing SPSS and LISREL software.

### Findings of the research

In terms of gender, there were 37 females and 164 males, making up 18.4% and 81.6% of the sample,

respectively. In other words, there were more males than females in the survey.

Looking at the age of respondents, we found that 5.4% of employees were aged 25 years or below, 22.9% were aged between 26 and 35 years, 42.3% were between 36 and 45 years, and 30.3% of bankers were aged 46 years and above. Our results show that the age of 36 to 45 years had the highest percentage.

In terms of experience, 17.9% of employees had experience of up to 10 years, 33.3% had experience of 11 to 15 years, 35.3% had experience of 16 to 20 years, and 13.4% had experience of 21 years and above. Our findings presented the case that the most respondents in the survey has many banking-years of experience.

Data were tested for normality using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Since there were different variables in this study, the outcome of the

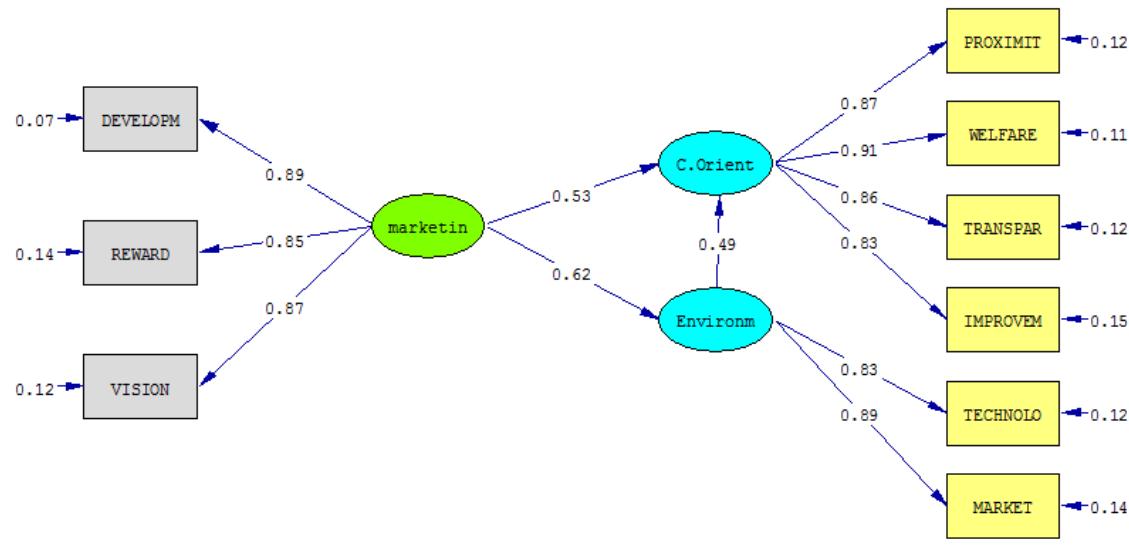
test is presented in the respective table that showed evidence for the assumption of normality.

**Table 2: Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for the Research Variables**

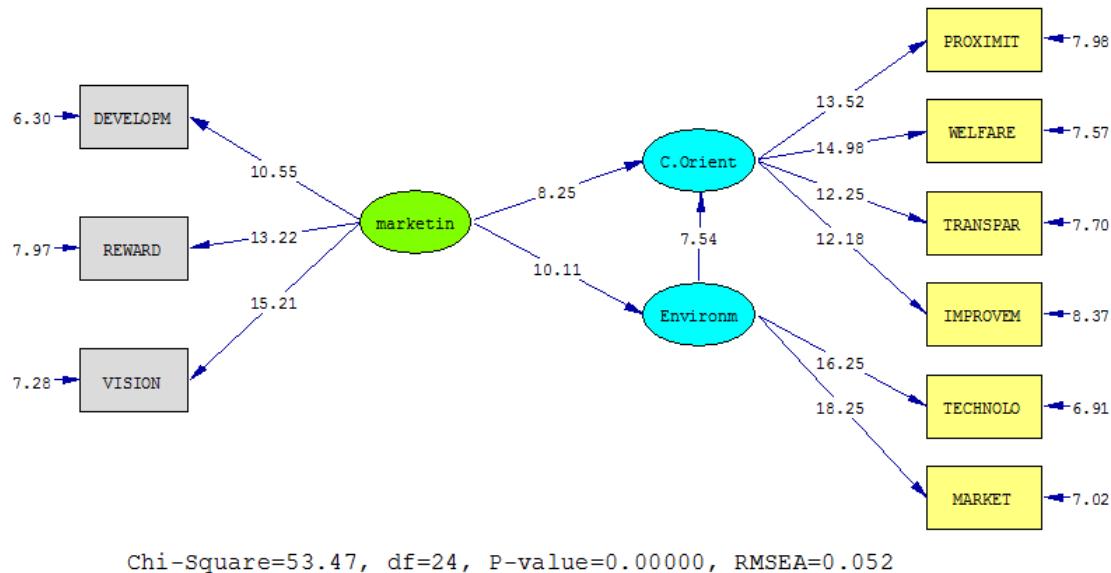
| Result           | Sig          | Z. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test | Research variables              |
|------------------|--------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Normality        | 0/200        | 0/925                      | Development                     |
| Normality        | 0/170        | 1/044                      | reward                          |
| Normality        | 0/095        | 1/125                      | Vision                          |
| <b>Normality</b> | <b>0/145</b> | <b>1/102</b>               | <b>Internal marketing</b>       |
| Normality        | 0/138        | 1/055                      | Customer Closeness              |
| Normality        | 0/175        | 0/965                      | customer well-being             |
| Normality        | 0/171        | 0/912                      | corporate transparency          |
| Normality        | 0/145        | 1/025                      | continuous improvement          |
| <b>Normality</b> | <b>0/200</b> | <b>0/925</b>               | <b>customer orientation</b>     |
| Normality        | 0/175        | 0/908                      | Technological turbulence        |
| Normality        | 0/155        | 1/001                      | market turbulence               |
| <b>Normality</b> | <b>0/200</b> | <b>0/992</b>               | <b>environmental turbulence</b> |

To check the research hypotheses structural equation modeling (SEM) and path analysis was performed, using the LISREL software, as shown

in Figures 2 and 3, in terms of standardized coefficients and significance levels.



**Figure 2: The Main Model in Standardized Form**



**Figure 3: The Main Model Showing Significance Values**

Prior to hypothesis testing, the model's goodness-of-fit was evaluated using fit indices:

**Table 3: Calculated Fit Indices of the Research Model**

| Test result      | Acceptable Range  | Main Model | Statistical Index Name |
|------------------|-------------------|------------|------------------------|
| model validation | $\chi^2 / df < 3$ | 2/227      | $\chi^2 / df$          |
| model validation | $P < 0/05$        | 0/000      | P-value                |
| model validation | $RMSEA < 0/09$    | 0/052      | RMSEA                  |
| model validation | $RMR < 0/09$      | 0/041      | RMR                    |
| model validation | $GFI > 0/9$       | 0/91       | GFI                    |
| model validation | $AGFI > 0/9$      | 0/88       | AGFI                   |
| model validation | $CFI > 0/9$       | 0/93       | CFI                    |
| model validation | $IFI > 0/9$       | 0/92       | IFI                    |
| model validation | $NFI > 0/9$       | 0/93       | NFI                    |
| model validation | $NNFI > 0/9$      | 0/91       | NNFI                   |

To evaluate the goodness-of-fit of the model, the goodness-of-fit test was performed. Considering the RMR, GFI, IFI, CFI, NFI, and RMSEA indices and their acceptable values indicated in Table (3), the model exhibits a good fit. The research hypotheses

are considered below. In table 6 it can be seen that the absolute value of the t-statistic was greater than a critical value of 1.96 (as for all the sub-hypotheses of the study). Therefore it can be concluded that all the sub-hypotheses are supported.

**Table 4: Results of the Sub-Hypotheses Testing of the Study**

| Result                  | (t-value) | Path coefficient ( $\beta$ ) | Direct path   |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------------------------|---|
| Hypothesis confirmation | 8/25      | 0/53                         | customer <input type="checkbox"/> Internal marketing orientation  |
| Hypothesis confirmation | 10/11     | 0/62                         | environmental <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Internal marketing turbulence                               |
| Hypothesis confirmation | 7/54      | 0/49                         | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> environmental turbulence<br>customer orientation |

To test the main hypothesis, the Sobel test was used. The results are as follows:

**Table 5: Investigating the Mediating Role of Environmental Turbulence in the Effect of Internal Marketing on Customer Orientation**

| Result                       | Sobel test | Indirect effect   |                              |  |  |      |          |      |           |  |  |       |  |      |  |
|------------------------------|------------|---|------------------------------|--|--|------|----------|------|-----------|--|--|-------|--|------|--|
| Hypothesis confirmation      | 4/287      | <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="3">Path coefficient (<math>\beta</math>)</th> </tr> <tr> <th>0/62</th> <th><math>\times</math></th> <th>0/49</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <th colspan="3">(t-value)</th> </tr> <tr> <th>10/11</th> <th></th> <th>7/54</th> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Path coefficient ( $\beta$ ) |  |  | 0/62 | $\times$ | 0/49 | (t-value) |  |  | 10/11 |  | 7/54 |  |
| Path coefficient ( $\beta$ ) |            |   |                              |  |  |      |          |      |           |  |  |       |  |      |  |
| 0/62                         | $\times$   | 0/49  |                              |  |  |      |          |      |           |  |  |       |  |      |  |
| (t-value)                    |            |   |                              |  |  |      |          |      |           |  |  |       |  |      |  |
| 10/11                        |            | 7/54  |                              |  |  |      |          |      |           |  |  |       |  |      |  |

As shown in Table (5), internal marketing has a significant impact on environmental turbulence ( $\beta = 0.62$ ,  $t = 10.11$ ) and, subsequently, creates an impact on customer orientation, as well as explains customer orientation ( $\beta = 0.49$ ,  $t = 7.54$ ). We tested the findings by using a Sobel test, which provides the Sobel test statistic of 4.287, and significance of 0.000. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that internal marketing has a positive and significant effect on customer orientation, through the mediating effect of environmental turbulence, in the branches of Melli Bank in Ahvaz.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to explore the influence of internal marketing on customer orientation through the mediating effect of environmental turbulence in Melli Bank branches in Ahvaz. Findings indicate that internal marketing has a positive and meaningful effect on customer orientation in these branches. These findings were consistent with the findings of Adibian and Madanoloujooybari (2016), Pashahi (2017), Doostikhah and Maarefi (2019), Gholami Qadikalaei (2019), Shahabnia and Bagherzadeh Khajeh (2021), Khandozi and Arab (2022), Danaeeefar et al. (2023), Yusuf et al. (2016), Nebo and Okechukwu (2017), Park and Tran (2018),

Choi and Park (2020), Sim and Yang (2021), and El-Samman and Mohammed (2021). According to social exchange theory, internal marketing can be conceptualized as a social exchange process between the organization and employees. The organization provides employees with appropriate incentives and/or benefits in order to elicit employee commitments and loyalty. Employees that are loyal and committed will better respond to customers' needs, thus enhancing customer orientation within an organization. From motivation theory, the utilization of internal marketing helps increase employee motivation through various rewards, training, and development for employees, thus creating a higher/more suitable field of satisfaction and a disposition for the employee to perform customer-oriented services for customers. Motivated employees put forth greater effort to be aware of what customers want and deliver superior services. From a Social Identity Theory perspective, internal marketing builds the organizational identity of employees, which increases their loyalty to the organization. Employees who have a stronger organizational identity are more likely to deliver superior services to enhance or preserve the organization's image and reputation. Internal marketing, according to the Service-Profit Chain

Theory, creates a positive culture and attitude toward customers that employees carry to customers to enhance service quality. Customer-oriented employees will put forth more effort to understand customer needs and to deliver superior services. Internal marketing, according to Service Quality Theory, builds service quality due to employees' improved skills and competencies acquired from training and other development initiatives. Employees with more knowledge and skills can better understand customers' needs and deliver higher quality services.

The internal marketing activity in Melli Bank's branch network in Ahvaz city, by providing employee motivation and commitment to the organization, caused them to be more capable of meeting customer needs and providing quality service to customers. This is consistent with the motivation theory, which states that employee motivation is one of the variables to increase customer orientation. Furthermore, the internal marketing in Melli Bank's branch network in Ahvaz city by providing an organizational identity to employees, it increased employees' loyalty to the organization. Indeed, from the standpoint of the social identity theory, employees with strong organizational identity put greater energy to support the organization's reputation and objectives through offering quality service to customers. Moreover, the internal marketing in this bank has helped to increase the positive culture and attitude toward customers' demands among employees, which has also improved the quality of service provided to customers. This is consistent with superior service theory, one of the variables for improving service quality is through employees' customer-oriented attitude. In short, the internal marketing activity in the branches of Melli Bank in Ahvaz have influenced the bank's customer orientation positively and importantly by providing impact of employee's motivation, identity, and attitude.

Additionally, according to the findings obtained, internal marketing has a positive and significant effect on environmental turbulence among the branches of Melli Bank in Ahvaz city. The findings of this research confirm research conducted by Meydanzad and Soltanpanah (2021), Malekooti Moghaddam (2021), Kahrezi and Jasemi (2022) and Hoekstra and Leeflang (2023). According to the Adaptation Theory, internal marketing by increasing the growth of employees' ability to adapt to environmental changes through developing potential skills and training can assist employees in coping better with environmental turbulence. Based

on the Social Capital Theory, internal marketing will create a higher quality in social networks, and build effective groups by creating strong ties and increasing intra-organizational relationships, will facilitate relationship networks that can cope with environmental change more successfully. The organizational flexibility perspective suggests that internal marketing may improve organizational flexibility in dealing with environmental turbulence because it improves employees' attitudes and skills, which in turn improves their responsiveness to change in the environment. The organizational learning perspective suggests that internal marketing may improve an organization's ability to respond and adapt to changes in its environments because it enhances learning among employees and fosters a learning culture. The organizational control perspective proposes that internal marketing encourages a sense of control and self-efficacy among employees, which may help them deal with environmental turbulence more easily.

In sum, these five theories suggest that internal marketing can help mitigate the effects of environmental turbulence on organisations by improving the capabilities of employees, aiding synergistic peer-to-peer level collaboration, improving the flexibility and learning of organisations, and helping employees feel a sense of control. Internal marketing can assist in all these areas by improving the skill and competencies of employees at the National Bank branches in Ahvaz and, hence improve employees' skill-level, flexibility, and ability to respond to changing environmental conditions. When the economic and financial conditions are so turbulent and challenging for banks, it is very important to have skilled and competent employee(s) who can adapt to new situations very quickly. Internal marketing can help improve employees' ability to cope with environmental disruptions through ongoing training, improve the technical and communications skills of employees. In addition, internal marketing can improve collaboration and communication among branch employees and contribute to developing strong social networks within the organization.

In chaotic situations where there is a need for greater coordination and cooperation among employees in an organization, as a network tends to be, their influence can mitigate the risk of disruptions on the organization's performance. Internal marketing facilitates coordination and cooperation between employees by providing them with tools and opportunities for interaction and

cooperation, potentially strengthening the internal social network. In the absence of these tools and opportunities, internal marketing can help contribute to the resilience of the employees as they face environmental disturbances by enhancing their control and self-efficacy compared to the other bank branches. By enabling the employees at the branch level to experience control and confidence within a chaotic situation, they can better cope with the situation presented to them at the branch level. If the employed internal marketing enhances the employees' sense of ownership and responsibility, they may be able to challenge themselves toward increasing their control and self-efficacy.

Environmental turbulence has an important and positive effect on customer orientation of Melli Bank branches in Ahvaz. The results of this study are in line with the results of studies by Jenab and Allameh Haeri (2016), Najafi and Azad (2023), Pillai and Goldsmith (2015), Dahan and Shoham (2019), Ho and plewa (2020), and Guido et al. (2021). In their overview of environmental adaptability theory, companies must adapt to the "environment" in which they operate to survive and expand. Environmental turbulence intensifies the pressure on companies to focus more on customers' needs, adjust their products and services to a new environment, and utilize the transformation to boost customer orientation in the business. Strategic fit theory also suggests companies must align its strategy depending on the change outlined in the environment.

Environmental turbulence makes companies review their strategies and put more focus on customer orientation. These opportunities could translate into enhanced service quality and enhanced customer satisfaction. In the resource-based view (RBV), organizations should manage their internal resources for the purpose of managing turbulent conditions. Among the organization's internal resources, human resources remain the most important. Environmental turbulence drives organizations to manage and invest more in training their employees and creating a culture that empowers employees to truly understand and know what their customers want. In addition, according to the system balance theory, organizations must achieve equilibrium in its three dimensions environment, processes, and people.

Environmental turbulence is creating pressure on organizations to take a stronger view of the customer dimension (as one element of the environment), and to emphasize their customer orientation to create balance across these

dimensions. Organizational adaption theory argues then, that for survival and growth, organizations must align to the surrounding social stimuli. Environmental turbulence urges organizations to emphasize their customer needs and an appropriate service delivery response to address such instability. Overall, environmental turbulence shifts the emphasis for organizations to prioritize customer orientation for their survival and growth, and this can be interpreted through a variety of theoretical approaches. Environmental turbulence could serve to be considered a challenge for the branches of Melli Bank in Ahvaz.

When the environment is unstable and unpredictable, it may force the branches of Melli Bank in Ahvaz to put forth more effort in satisfying their customers. In addition, the branches of Melli Bank in Ahvaz must exhibit more service flexibility, improve response time, and enhance customer service capabilities in similar contextual experiences with environmental turbulence. Environmental turbulence may also prompt the branches of Melli Bank in Ahvaz to endeavour with more competition. In similar situations as stated, the branches of Melli Bank in Ahvaz must adopt more customer orientations, offering their customers unique and quality service. This means they may end up better satisfying their customers with the possible outcome being the improvement in their bank performance for every branch despite being in direct competition with one another.

In summary, environmental turbulence could serve as a stimulant forcing the branches of Melli Bank in Ahvaz to embrace more customer orientation. It is a matter of meeting customer needs and their expectations for quality service in turbulent environmental conditions that will lead something positive or an important impact of environmental turbulence and customer-oriented behaviours from the branches of Melli Bank in Ahvaz.

In conclusion, internal marketing makes a significant and positive effect on customer orientation via the mediating role of environmental turbulence at the branches of Melli Bank in Ahvaz. The dynamic systems theory argues that an organization must be dynamic and flexible to react quickly to changes in environments that are turbulent and changing. Internal marketing, by enhancing employee empowerment and creating a customer-oriented culture, can create the basis for a business to react quickly to customer needs in times of environmental turbulence. The social capital theory emphasizes the relationships and interaction of people in an organization. Internal marketing can

improve customer orientation by enhancing relationships among employees or enhancing coordination; this is especially important in turbulent environments where coordination needs to be enhanced. The content-process theory argues that both content (strategy) and process (internal marketing) have significant impacts on organizational performance.

Internal marketing can be a process that promotes employee development and contributes to service delivery that is customer focused under conditions of environmental turbulence. Adaptation theory identifies that organizations will always need to adapt to the changing environment. Internal marketing can enable organizations to build a customer focused culture and empower employees, so that they can serve customers and make adaptations when they occur towards the changes during conditions of turbulence. In summary, these theories help to describe how internal marketing can be reflected in customer oriented behaviour under conditions of environmental turbulence by building employee capabilities and developing organization customer directed culture. Environmental turbulence is a mediating variable. The more powerful the internal marketing is applied to the Melli Bank branches in Ahvaz, the better they are going to be able to respond to customers' needs as they provide quality service when they are coping with conditions of turbulence. All of this will result in increased customer orientation and performance from the Melli Bank branches in Ahvaz. Therefore, internal marketing can have both positive and significant impact on customer orientation by improving the Banks capacity to manage environmental turbulence. Based upon these results, the following recommendation is presented:

- Training and empowering employees about internal marketing and nurturing a customer-focused culture.
- Developing and implementing motivation and rewards programs for employees to enhance attitudes and behaviors towards customer orientation.
- Providing clear and open internal communication about customer-focused goals, strategies, and action plans.

- Improving information and analytical systems to understand customer needs and customer behavior more clearly.
- Creating an adaptable and dynamic environment for employees to be creative and innovative about how they delivery customer service.
- Commitment to continuous improvement of banking processes and services based on feedback from customers.
- Developing a collaborative and interactive environment among different parts of the bank to better coordinate in delivering comprehensive services to the customer.
- Supporting risk-taking and embracing mistakes and errors among employees to foster creativity in solving customer problems.
- Providing a range of channels for communication with the customer (telephone, internet, face-to-face, etc.).
- Implementing loyalty systems and providing added benefits and privileges for valued customers.
- Providing employees with an expanded authority to fix problems and address customer needs.
- Creating a comfortable and pleasant physical environment for the branches to increase positive experiences and potentially satisfaction.
- Promoting a customer culture and customer thinking within the organization through training, motivation and participation of the workforce.

This study is limited in a number of ways. The limitation of time meant that the data may have been less than complete. There is a spatial limit as the research related only to the branches of Melli Bank in Ahvaz City, so cannot generalize the findings to other Banks. For another limitations, the data collection tools may have been limited and not sufficiently accommodated the fully exploration of all matters of the topic.

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