

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Internal Marketing Strategies in the Pharmaceutical Sector: A Systematic Review and Integrative Framework for Employee Engagement and Organisational Performance

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ABSTRACT

In the pharmaceutical sector, internal marketing strategies can play a significant role in ensuring that employee engagement aligns with the company's goals. The objective of this systematic review was to identify, categorise and evaluate the internal marketing strategies used by pharmaceutical companies, how they are applied internally and the likely effect on organisational outcomes. A systematic review of the literature was carried out in PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Cochrane Library, Embase, BioMed Central, PLOS, MEDLINE, Google Scholar, and JSTor databases published in the last 15 years (from 2011 to 2026). This review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, and 43 studies were included in the final analysis. The identified strategies were organised into a five-dimensional framework: employee rewards and engagement, workplace environment, support and culture, leadership strategies, HR systems and support, and training, development, and capacity building. These dimensions all interrelate with internal marketing practices, employee engagement, employee retention, service quality and organisational performance. This systematic review suggests that effective internal marketing strategies within pharmaceutical companies need to be holistic and contextually relevant, integrating employee-focused practices with business performance objectives. The identified framework should serve as a guide for pharmaceutical companies in developing integrated in-house marketing strategies that incorporate rewards, culture, leadership support, HR support, and ongoing training. This classification needs to be reviewed, tested, and adapted across various pharmaceutical environments, especially in LMICs, where resource scarcity, workforce insecurity, and delayed payments may affect the success of these strategies.

KEYWORDS

Internal Marketing Strategies; Pharmaceutical Firms; Employee Engagement; Organisational Performance; Five-Dimensional Framework; Systematic Review

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1. Introduction

The global pharmaceutical sector has historically been influenced by the ongoing challenge of enhancing access to essential medicines. The Alma-Ata and Astana Declarations of 1978 and 2018 are important historical events in the field of global health. This is in line with the active role played by governments all over the world in ensuring access to healthcare services and drugs that is based on equal rights (Gautier & David, 2022). These groundbreaking statements paved the way for the development of the World Health Organisation's essential medicines policy, which has been guiding national and global medicines policies since (Jenei et al., 2024).

Despite this, access to medicines remains highly politicised, as the desire for fair distribution often conflicts with the interests of global companies (Lexchin, 2024; Stacciarini, 2023). Conflicts between global public health aims and business motives of large pharmaceutical companies have been stimulated by the protection of intellectual property, attempts at regulatory harmonisation, and market concentration by market-leading companies (Gautier & David, 2022).

While international debates seem to have had a powerful impact on the pharmaceutical industry's external policy environment, they have focused far less on the internal dynamics of pharmaceutical companies. The understanding that exists regarding how

these firms move and coordinate their employees to reach customer satisfaction, excellence in services and sustainable performance is still far from fully understood. One key method in closing this gap is to implement internal marketing.

Some scholars like Grönroos (1985) defined internal marketing as a strategy to match employee satisfaction with the service quality that can be promised to customers; and others extended it to include staff training, staff reward and good communication, as in the case of Ahmed and Rafiq (2003). Varey and Lewis (1999) then elaborated on the notion of internal marketing as a set of organisational behaviours designed to ensure internal communication, employee engagement and the fit between internal marketing and external marketing goals.

While the theoretical justification of internal marketing is recognised, many companies face challenges in addressing the internal marketing concepts in concrete strategies, mostly because there is insufficient knowledge regarding its elements and lack of clear guidelines regarding its application (Khoulaf & Nouiri, 2023). The pharmaceutical Industry is struggling with challenges related to customer service and employees' satisfaction, recruitment and retention of employees and developing such collaborative work environment (Chandrika et al., 2021; Mafaz et al., 2024). In the increasingly competitive global business landscape, companies are likely to be pushing into making their personnel engagement initiatives work. However, in a more competitive global pharmacy segment, organizations are under mounting pressure to invest in their employee engagement programs. Most of these projects have been improvised and not properly coordinated, thereby reducing the capability of internal marketing to enhance service performance and organization efficiency (Alshamrani et al., 2023; Matloob et al., 2021).

This is especially the case in low and middle income countries (LMICs), where constraints like limited resources, lack of workforce and operational inefficiencies form other bottle necks encountered by pharmaceutical companies in these countries. In Ghana delayed pay, sub optimum employment and workers' discontent are big constraint in the internal marketing, for example. For instance, more than 300 pharmacists which were brought on since June of 2023, but as yet, not a single one of these pharmacists has received a pay check, and this has had an impact on morale, trust and productivity (Narh, 2025).

Narh (2025) also added that the problem with brain drain of several skilled people seeking better job opportunities in other parts of the world poses another labour difficulty to the sector's human resource base. Additionally, poor communication, rigid organizational structures and limited employee engagement opportunities are all barriers to collaboration and innovation. The industry's over-dependence on imported pharmaceutical supplies, coupled with frequent stock outages, high manufacturing costs, and safety concerns in the developing 24-hour economy in Ghana, worsens the challenge of fostering a motivated and customer-focused workforce.

There have been various studies on employee motivation, training, leadership and engagement, but they do not always classify these aspects as internal marketing strategies (Alshamrani et al., 2023; Kalyanamitra et al., 2020; Matloob et al., 2021; Sittisom, 2020; Tirastittam et al., 2020; Vizano et al., 2020). Rather, the studies focus on one or a few outcome measures—in employee satisfaction, for example, or service quality—but do not make the outcomes part of a holistic internal marketing system. Thus, the definition, implementation, and sustainability of the strategies of internal marketing within pharmaceutical organisations have not been understood properly. This disparity constrains both academic comprehension and its practical applications.

In view of these several limitations, it is necessary to review the existing knowledge in the field of internal marketing strategies of pharmaceutical companies to consolidate and structure it. This review process aims to systematically analyse the literature to obtain and classify internal marketing methods used in various situations, emphasise the main themes and gaps in the literature, and provide insights which can contribute to both the theoretical and practical aspects. This study seeks to further expand knowledge and provide practical implications to help build motivated, engaged and high-performing organisations within the pharmaceutical industry through internal marketing.

This review advances the internal marketing scholarship by summarising and organising strategies across the different pharmaceutical studies reported. The study's framework aids in a better understanding of the role of internal marketing strategies in the pharmaceutical sector for employee engagement, alignment of workforce practices with organisational objectives, and improving the quality and performance of services.

2. Methodology

This systematic review examined the internal marketing strategies employed by pharmaceutical companies. To enhance transparency and reproducibility, the PRISMA guidelines were used to identify, screen, evaluate, and include the studies.

2.1 Eligibility criteria

The studies included in the analysis involved internal marketing strategies or related employee-centred practices in pharmaceutical companies. The studies included in the analysis were published in English between 2011 and 2026 and presented empirical, conceptual, or review evidence on approaches to engaging employees, matching employee practices to organisational goals, or enhancing employee and/or organisational outcomes. These criteria ensured that the synthesis was pharmaceutical internal marketing-oriented rather than HRM- or marketing-oriented.

2.2 Information sources

PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Cochrane Library, Embase, BioMed Central, PLOS, MEDLINE, Google Scholar and JSTOR databases were searched to ensure that information was sourced from both health and social science databases and management and business databases. The use of multiple databases broadened the disciplinary coverage and reduced the risk of omitting pertinent studies on internal marketing strategies in pharmaceutical firms.

2.3 Search strategy

The search strategy included internal marketing, pharmaceutical companies, employee engagement, employee motivation, workforce alignment, HR practices, leadership, rewards, training, and organisational outcomes. Boolean operators enabled users to obtain a wide spectrum of results from databases by linking existing concepts and reducing the amount of extraneous records. The search terms were adjusted as needed to suit the database's indexing and terminology.

Search strings included combinations such as: ("internal marketing" OR "internal market orientation" OR "internal branding") AND ("pharmaceutical firm*" OR "pharmaceutical compan*" OR "pharmaceutical industr*" OR "pharmaceutical sector"); ("internal marketing" OR "employee engagement" OR "employee motivation" OR "employee retention" OR "job satisfaction") AND ("pharmaceutical firm*" OR "pharmaceutical compan*" OR "pharmaceutical industr*"); and ("reward*" OR "recognition" OR "leadership" OR "training" OR "human resource practice*" OR "workplace support" OR "organisational support" OR "internal corporate social responsibility") AND ("employee engagement" OR "employee retention" OR "job satisfaction" OR "organisational performance") AND ("pharmaceutical firm*" OR "pharmaceutical compan*" OR "pharmaceutical industr*" OR "pharmaceutical sector").

2.4 Selection of sources of evidence

Titles and abstracts were screened for eligibility, and the full texts of articles from the studies of interest were assessed. Screening was conducted independently by two reviewers to enhance consistency and minimise screening bias. No inter-rater reliability statistics were computed; however, disagreements were resolved through discussion and consultation with another reviewer.

2.5 Data collection process

A standardised form was used to ensure a consistent format for data collection across the studies. The form collected information on reported employee or organisational outcomes, the theoretical or conceptual basis, the internal marketing strategy, the author, and the year. This design facilitated multiple comparisons across various contexts, methods, and outcome measures.

2.6 Data items

Data were extracted, focusing on the variables required to classify internal marketing strategies and evaluate their effects in the pharmaceutical context. These include information on the study and its method, sample, theoretical or conceptual basis, internal marketing strategies, and key findings. The consistency in thematic classification was facilitated by carefully accounting for differences in the terminology used during coding.

The constructs were grouped during synthesis because they were conceptually similar, even though they had different names, measures, and conceptual lenses across the studies. This allowed the results of the studies to be compared while recognising the variability and limitations in reporting quality, methodological design, and national context.

2.7 Study risk of bias assessment

The risk of bias was assessed to evaluate the strength and reliability of the evidence. Randomised studies were assessed using the Cochrane Collaboration tool, and non-randomised studies were assessed using the Newcastle-Ottawa scale. Two reviewers evaluated the selection, performance, detection, attrition, reporting, and other potential biases and reached a consensus on their ratings through discussion or consultation with a third reviewer.

Risk of bias assessment was used to guide confidence in the findings from the various study designs informing the synthesis. Study findings with more robust sampling procedures, more rigorous analysis methods, and lower risk of bias were given greater credence, whereas those with less methodological detail, single-context designs, and higher risk of bias were given less credence.

2.8 Synthesis of results

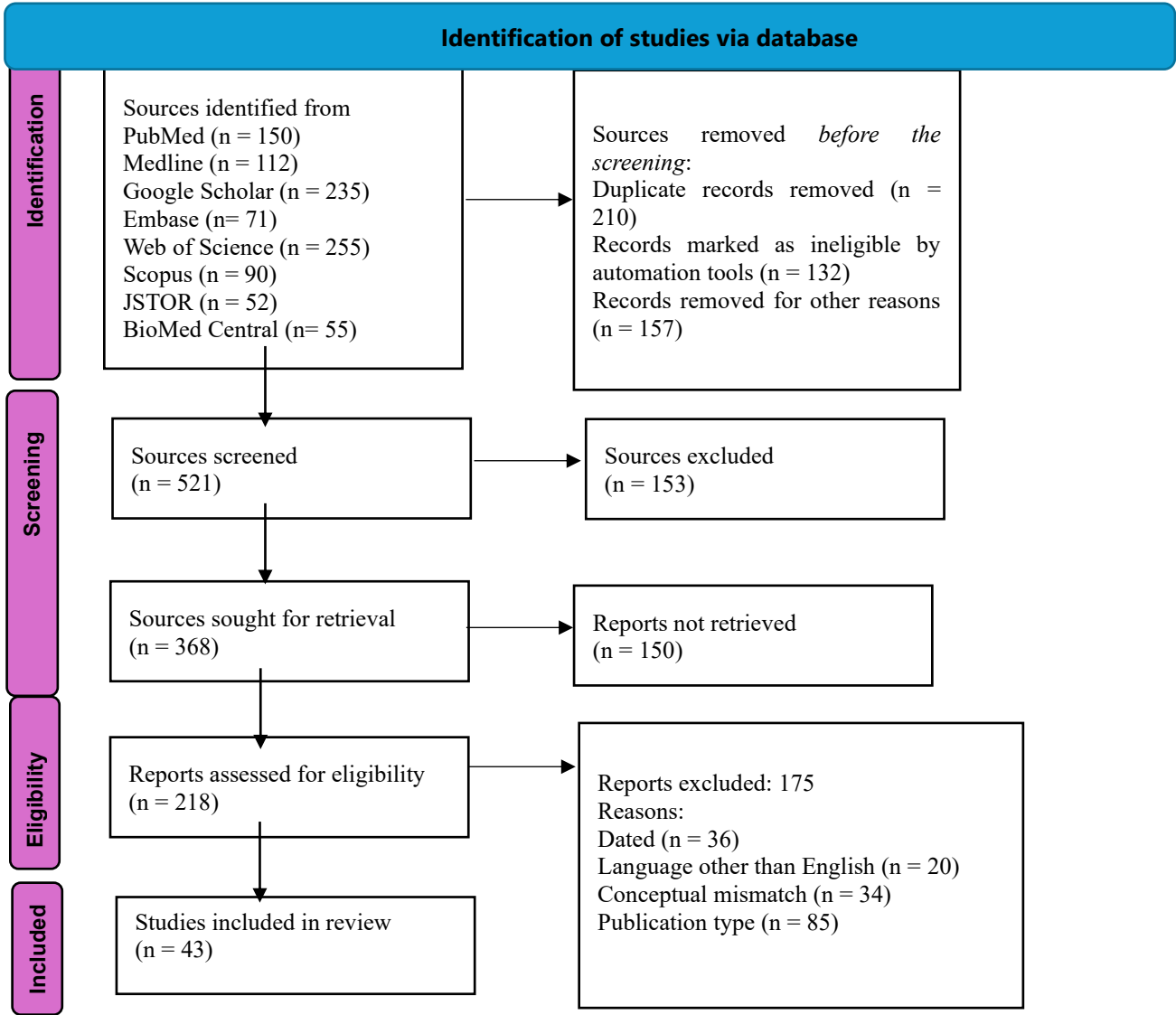
Owing to the diversity of the design, context, measures, and outcomes of the included studies, the findings were thematically synthesised. Thematic synthesis enabled the authors to identify common internal marketing strategies, compare their use across pharmaceutical contexts, and organise the disjointed evidence into the five dimensions of the discussion.

3. Analysis and results

3.1 Study selection

The analysis of the eight databases yielded 1020 records. After eliminating duplicate entries (210 records), 521 records were screened for eligibility. After eliminating entries without complete text and those considered unrelated, 218 full-text records were retained for subsequent analysis. Ultimately, 175 full-text items were excluded, resulting in 43 records being included in the thematic synthesis.

Figure 1: PRISMA Flowchart of the study selection process



Source: Author's own creation based on systematic review (2026)

3.2 Characteristics of studies

This systematic review synthesises the findings of 43 studies examining internal marketing strategies in pharmaceutical companies. The studies spanned 2011–2026, indicating a consistent increase in interest in this topic (Table 1). Most studies were published in 2025 (nine), followed by 2020 and 2026 (eight each), and 2023 and 2024 (three each). Two studies were conducted in 2011, 2019, and 2021. The individual studies were conducted in 2012, 2014, 2015, and 2017.

The research was geographically dispersed across multiple nations, underscoring the global significance of internal marketing in the pharmaceutical industry's marketing strategies. India had 11 studies. Bangladesh and Thailand each had four studies in their samples. Indonesia had three studies, and Pakistan had six studies. Ghana, Malaysia, and Vietnam each conducted two studies. Individual studies were conducted in Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Korea, and Portugal; however, four studies did not specify their national settings.

The 43 studies included in this work covered most quantitative research designs, typically involving structured questionnaires and statistical analyses. Qualitative, mixed-methods, conceptual, descriptive, and practice-oriented studies relevant to internal marketing in pharmaceutical companies were also included in the evidence base.

The inclusion of studies with varying methodological characteristics affected the synthesis's interpretation. Most studies used quantitative survey designs, which provide useful evidence of associations between internal marketing strategies and employee or organisational outcomes but offer limited support for causal inference, particularly due to the lack of longitudinal evidence.

Findings reported in the majority of studies across countries and methodological designs were interpreted with greater confidence, whereas those from conceptual or descriptive studies, single-context studies, or broadly designed studies were interpreted more cautiously.

Table 1: Study characteristics and TCCM synthesis of reviewed studies

Authors/Year	Method	Theory/Conceptual basis	Country	Findings
Ali and Akram (2012)	Quantitative study using data from pharmaceutical employees	Financial rewards, motivation, and satisfaction perspective	Pakistan	Financial rewards are positively associated with employee motivation and satisfaction.
Alshamrani et al. (2023)	Quantitative electronic survey with descriptive and inferential statistics	Employee retention determinants: motivation, work conditions, leadership, culture, and salary/benefits perspective	Saudi Arabia	Salary or benefits, work conditions, work relationships, company culture, motivation, and leadership were associated with employee retention.
Anis et al. (2011)	Quantitative survey analysed using structural equation modelling	Organisational commitment, supervisory support, compensation, job satisfaction, and retention perspective	Pakistan	Compensation and supervisory support are linked to organisational commitment, which influences job satisfaction and employee retention.
Annsen and Chandramouli (2025)	Descriptive study using structured questionnaires and statistical analysis	Quality of work life, organisational commitment, and productivity perspective	India	Quality of work life improves employee productivity and organisational commitment.
Diah et al. (2020)	Quantitative study using SEM/CFA	Investment in employee development; social and economic exchange perspective	Indonesia	Investment in employee development positively influences employee retention through social and economic exchange mechanisms.
Bagga and Kumar (2025)	Empirical study	Change readiness, employee engagement, and organisational commitment perspective	India	Employee change readiness is linked to employee engagement and organisational commitment.
Chandrika et al. (2021)	Empirical study/conference paper	Motivational factors perspective	Sri Lanka	Selected motivational factors influenced employee motivation, although salary and responsibility were not consistently significant.
Falola et al. (2020)	Quantitative survey analysed using SmartPLS	Workplace management initiatives and talent engagement perspective	Nigeria	Recognition, well-being, learning and development, and diversity and inclusion significantly influenced talent engagement.
Ferreira (2017)	Quantitative survey with descriptive analysis and structural equation modelling	Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation perspective	Portugal	Personal goals and acquired skills explained intrinsic motivation, while transparency, loyalty, and trust explained extrinsic motivation and influenced performance.
Haider et al. (2025)	Mixed-methods design using	Transformational and toxic leadership, job	Pakistan/India-linked	Transformational leadership improved job satisfaction and retention, whereas toxic

Authors/Year	Method	Theory/Conceptual basis	Country	Findings
	surveys, in-depth interviews, and SEM	satisfaction, and retention perspective	pharmaceutical context	leadership increased dissatisfaction and turnover intention.
Jo and Shin (2025)	Quantitative large-scale survey using PLS-SEM and multi-group analysis	Recognition, fairness, transformational leadership, engagement, burnout, and job satisfaction perspective	Republic of Korea	Recognition, fairness, and transformational leadership improved engagement, whereas workload and technology-related anxiety were linked to burnout and job satisfaction.
Kalyanamitra et al. (2020)	Quantitative survey study	HR practices, job satisfaction, and employee retention perspective	Thailand	Training facilities, benefits and compensation, and performance appraisal influenced retention through job satisfaction.
Kaur (2026)	Conceptual framework/literature-based study	Workplace spirituality, intrinsic motivation, and employee engagement perspective	Pharmaceutical industry context; country not empirically specified	Workplace spirituality and intrinsic motivation have been proposed as drivers of employee engagement in pharmaceutical and healthcare work settings.
Kishore (2026)	Descriptive literature- and practice-based study	Performance management, goal setting, appraisal, feedback, and employee development perspective	Pharmaceutical sector context; country not specified	Structured performance management practices support engagement, productivity, strategic alignment, and organisational effectiveness.
Kothari et al. (2026)	Quantitative survey using structured questionnaires, descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analysis	Training and development, employee motivation, performance, and organisational growth perspective	India	Training quality was strongly related to employee motivation and performance, thereby supporting organisational growth.
Nguyen et al. (2019)	Quantitative survey using reliability testing, exploratory factor analysis, and regression analysis	Transformational leadership, intrinsic motivation, and work performance perspective	Vietnam	Transformational leadership positively influenced intrinsic motivation, improving pharmacists' work performance.
Otoo et al. (2019)	Quantitative questionnaire survey using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling	Human resource development, employee performance, and organisational performance perspective	Ghana	Human resource development practices influence pharmaceutical industry performance through employee performance.
Rasheed et al. (2026)	Quantitative survey using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling	Leadership attributes, psychological empowerment, and employee engagement perspective	Pakistan	Feedback and delegation enhanced psychological empowerment and employee engagement, with empowerment partially mediating the leadership effects.

Authors/Year	Method	Theory/Conceptual basis	Country	Findings
Orya and Pakteen (2025)	Empirical study	Organisational climate, employee motivation, and job satisfaction perspective	Afghanistan	Organisational climate was examined as a factor shaping employee motivation and job satisfaction in pharmaceutical companies.
Osei and Ackah (2014)	Empirical study	Employee competency and organisational performance perspective	Ghana	Employee competency was examined as a contributor to organisational performance in pharmaceutical companies.
Rawal et al. (2024)	Quantitative survey of pharmaceutical employees	Job satisfaction, work environment, compensation, career development, culture, leadership, and work-life balance perspective	India	The work environment, compensation, career development, organisational culture, leadership, and work-life balance were identified as determinants of job satisfaction.
Sittisom (2020)	Quantitative questionnaire survey of employees in the pharmaceutical industry	Workplace environment, empowerment, recognition, and job satisfaction perspective	Thailand	The workplace environment, empowerment, and recognition were associated with employee job satisfaction.
Suksod et al. (2020)	Quantitative questionnaire study using SPSS and SmartPLS	Human resource practices and organisational commitment perspective	Thailand	Performance evaluation, job security, and organisational support strengthen employees' organisational commitment.
Sood and Painoli (2025)	Conceptual/literature-based study	Performance appraisal, employee motivation, compliance, and performance perspective	India	Contemporary performance appraisal models are discussed as tools for improving motivation, compliance, and performance in pharmaceutical organisations.
Sarkhel et al. (2025)	Empirical study	Operational excellence, employee engagement, and performance perspective	India	Operational excellence and employee engagement were examined as contributors to performance in the pharmaceutical industry.
Tirastittam et al. (2020)	Quantitative questionnaire survey of employees in the pharmaceutical industry	Work-related support, supervisor support, organisational support, and employee engagement perspective	Thailand	Work-related support, including supervisory, collegial, organisational, and social support, positively influences employee engagement.
Wajahat and Mahmood (2025)	Quantitative questionnaire survey analysed using SmartPLS and structural equation modelling	Transformational leadership, toxic leadership, job satisfaction, and employee retention perspective	Pakistan	Transformational leadership improved retention through job satisfaction, whereas toxic leadership reduced job satisfaction and retention.
Adeel (2026)	Quantitative questionnaire study using correlation	Human resource practices, job satisfaction, compensation,	Pakistan	Recruitment, training and development, performance appraisal, and compensation and benefits were associated with employees' job satisfaction.

Authors/Year	Method	Theory/Conceptual basis	Country	Findings
	and regression analysis	training, recruitment, and performance appraisal perspective		
Madhumitha and Hariharan (2025)	Mixed-method study using surveys, interviews/focus groups, and secondary data	HR policies, employee engagement, recruitment, training, compensation, performance management, and organisational performance perspective	India	HR policies are linked to employee engagement and organisational performance, especially through training, compensation, recruitment, and performance management practices.
Vizano et al. (2020)	Empirical study	Compensation, organisational commitment, turnover intention, and work satisfaction perspective	Indonesia	Compensation and organisational commitment were examined in relation to turnover intention, with work satisfaction considered an intervening variable.
Parvin and Kabir (2011)	Empirical study of job satisfaction factors among pharmaceutical employees	Job satisfaction, motivation, working conditions, pay, job security, fairness, and supervisor/co-worker relations perspective	Bangladesh	Salary, work efficiency, supervision, and co-worker relationships were identified as important contributors to job satisfaction.
Ali and Ullah (2023)	Quantitative survey of pharmaceutical employees using structural equation modelling	Laissez-faire leadership, talent management, and social exchange theory perspective	Bangladesh	Laissez-faire leadership positively influenced talent attraction, retention, development, and engagement among pharmaceutical employees.
Hafeez and Akbar (2015)	Quantitative survey of employees from four pharmaceutical companies using descriptive, correlation, and regression analysis	Training, employee performance, motivation, skills, and development perspective	Pakistan	Training was positively and significantly related to employee performance and development.
Alam et al. (2023)	Quantitative survey of pharmaceutical executives using mediation and moderation analysis	Green HRM, green training and development, job satisfaction, employee motivation, organisational commitment, and organisational performance perspective	Bangladesh	Green training and development positively influenced organisational commitment and performance, with job satisfaction mediating key relationships and green employee involvement strengthening the effects.
Rajan and Kumar (2024)	Empirical study	Skill gap, employee performance, capability development, and learning perspective	India	Perceived skill gaps were examined in relation to employee performance, highlighting the importance of continuous capability development in the workplace.

Authors/Year	Method	Theory/Conceptual basis	Country	Findings
Mathur and Gupta (2025)	Survey research using percentage and chi-square analysis	Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, performance-based incentives, and employee engagement perspective	India	Performance-based incentive systems were positively associated with employee engagement in pharmaceutical companies in Bhopal, India.
Khoulaf and Nouiri (2023)	Qualitative case study using semi-guided interviews	Organisational commitment, HRM, socio-economic approach to management, and performance perspective	Algeria	Work organisation, communication, HRM weaknesses, limited career development, appraisal problems and resistance to change were identified as constraints on organisational commitment.
Laxmana Sunand and Sirisetti (2025)	Mixed-methods study using surveys and interviews	Unitarist and pluralist industrial relations, employee perception, and organisational effectiveness perspective	India	Balanced industrial relations approaches support employee motivation, productivity, workplace harmony, and organisational effectiveness.
Leelavathi and Dhanalakshmi (2026)	Empirical study	Employee retention, satisfaction, organisational attachment, and workplace support perspective	India	Employee satisfaction, organisational attachment, and workplace support were identified as retention antecedents in Chennai's pharmaceutical sector.
Mafaz et al. (2024)	Quantitative online survey analysed using SmartPLS	Transformational leadership, employee motivation, and work performance perspective	Malaysia	Transformational leadership influences work performance, with employee motivation serving as a mediating factor.
Matloob et al. (2021)	Empirical study	Financial and non-financial rewards, employee motivation, and commitment perspective	Indonesia	Financial and non-financial rewards were examined in relation to employee motivation and commitment among pharmaceutical SMEs.
Moturi (2026)	Empirical study	HRM practices and employee performance perspective	India	HRM practices were examined in relation to employee performance in the pharmaceutical industry in Andhra Pradesh.
Ng and Selamat (2026)	Empirical study	Organisational engagement and Generation Y employee retention perspective	Malaysia	Organisational engagement mediates Generation Y employee retention in the pharmaceutical industry.

3.3 Results of individual sources of evidence

Previous conceptualisations of internal marketing have focused on internal organisational strategies designed to ensure that employee engagement aligns with organisational goals, particularly in employee development, reward systems, communication, and workforce alignment (Piercy & Morgan, 1991; Varey & Lewis, 1999). Building on this conceptual basis and the thematic synthesis of the included studies, this review mapped the strategies implemented by pharmaceutical companies into a five-dimensional framework: employee rewards and engagement; workplace environment, support and culture; leadership strategies; HR systems and support; and training, development, and capacity building.

Most research has investigated financial and non-financial rewards, recognition, and engagement, while others have concentrated on leadership styles, including transformational and laissez-faire approaches, as well as workplace culture, corporate social responsibility practices, and organisational support frameworks. Moreover, the impact of HR policies on staff retention and the

importance of training and continuous education for capacity building were also discussed. Such classification clearly identifies the variety of internal marketing activities in the pharmaceutical industry and provides a foundation for future research to test, develop, and expand the proposed industry-specific framework.

3.4 Thematic analysis

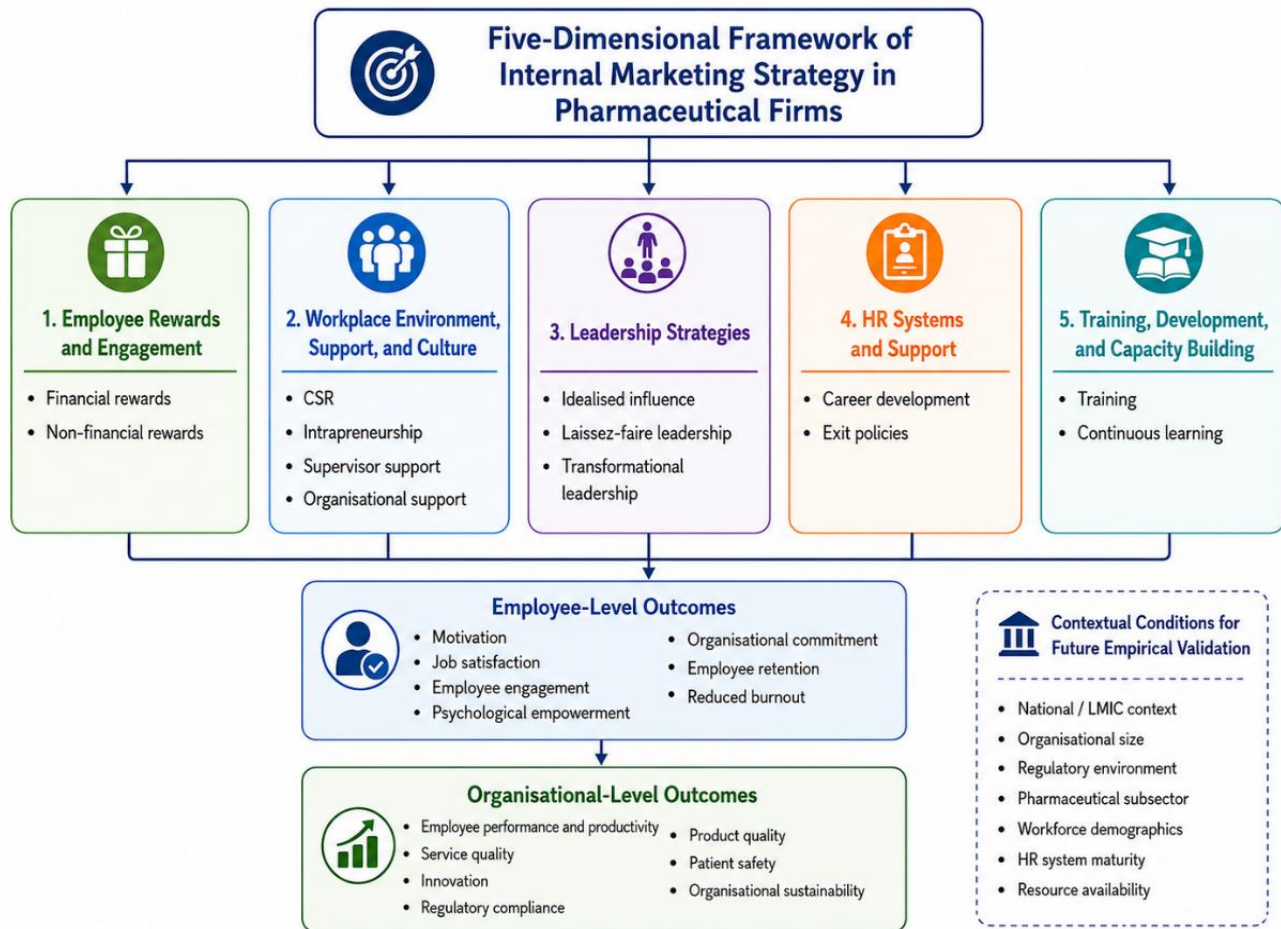
This systematic review used thematic synthesis to identify the internal marketing strategies employed by pharmaceutical companies. Five interconnected dimensions emerged from the synthesis: Employee Rewards and Engagement, Workplace Environment, Support and Culture, Leadership Strategies, HR Systems and Support, and Training, Development, and Capacity Building. These dimensions form the organising structure of the review and are used to categorise the strategies reported in the literature. Table 2 summarises the thematic analyses.

Table 2: Summary of thematic analysis

Themes	Related Concepts	Authors
Employee Rewards and Engagement	Financial and non-financial rewards	Ali and Akram (2012); Falola et al. (2020); Suksod et al. (2020); Alshamrani et al. (2023); Matloob et al. (2021); Sittisom (2020); Vizano et al. (2020); Parvin and Kabir (2011); Anis et al. (2011); Ferreira (2017); Moturi (2026); Kaur (2026); Ng and Selamat (2026); Mathur and Gupta (2025); Bagga and Kumar (2025); Madhumitha and Hariharan (2025)
Workplace Environment, Support, and Culture	CSR, intrapreneurship, Supervisor support, organisational support	Luu (2020); Tirastittam et al. (2020); Orya and Pakteen (2025); Rawal et al. (2024); Sarkhel et al. (2025); Jo and Shin (2025); Kaur (2026); Annsen and Chandramouli (2025); Laxmana Sunand and Sirisetti (2025); Leelavathi and Dhanalakshmi (2026); Bagga and Kumar (2025)
Leadership Strategies	Idealised influence, Laissez-faire leadership, Transformational leadership	Chandrika et al. (2021); Mafaz et al. (2024); Ali and Ullah (2023); Nguyen et al. (2019); Rasheed et al. (2026); Jo and Shin (2025); Wajahat and Mahmood (2025); Haider et al. (2025)
HR Systems and Support	Career development, exit policies	Otoo et al. (2019); Diah et al. (2020); Kalyanamitra et al. (2020); Sarkhel et al. (2025); Rawal et al. (2024); Adeel (2026); Kishore (2026); Moturi (2026); Leelavathi and Dhanalakshmi (2026); Madhumitha and Hariharan (2025); Sood and Painoli (2025); Annsen and Chandramouli (2025); Ng and Selamat (2026); Laxmana Sunand and Sirisetti (2025)
Training, Development, and Capacity Building	Training, continuous learning	Rajan and Kumar (2024); Hafeez and Akbar (2015); Osei and Ackah (2014); Alam et al. (2023); Sarkhel et al. (2025); Rawal et al. (2024); Adeel (2026); Kothari et al. (2026); Moturi (2026); Ng and Selamat (2026); Madhumitha and Hariharan (2025)

The framework (Figure 2) positions the five dimensions as interdependent internal marketing processes that affect employee and organisational outcomes. The impact of these strategies and the extent to which they are implemented are influenced by contextual factors, including resource capacity, staffing, organisational culture, and the regulatory environment.

Figure 2: Proposed five-dimensional framework of internal marketing strategies in pharmaceutical firms



Source: Authors' conceptualisation, informed by Piercy and Morgan (1991), Varey and Lewis (1999), and the thematic synthesis of the reviewed studies.

4. Discussion and conclusion

4.1 Employee rewards and engagement

Reward schemes and employee engagement have become key internal marketing dimensions. Still, the evidence reviewed indicates that the effectiveness of rewards depends on the nature of the reward and broader employment conditions. Ali and Akram (2012), Anis et al. (2011) and Adeel (2026) established financial rewards as the correlation between financial compensation and motivation, satisfaction, organisational commitment and retention, while supervisory support was correlated with financial satisfaction, motivation, satisfaction, organisational commitment and retention. However, it was found that where there is no supervisory support, compensation alone, as a financial policy, is not very effective (Anis et al. 2011).

However, Indonesia has the same situation, as evidenced in the research conducted by Matloob et al. (2021), which found financial and non-financial rewards as variables in determining employee motivation and commitment, and Vizano et al. (2020), which found there was a mediation between variables of compensation and organisational commitment, namely intention to leave. The findings suggest that monetary rewards are not mechanisms for commitment and/or satisfaction, but go together. Likewise, in Saudi Arabia, Alshamrani et al. (2023) found that salary and benefits are involved with retention, as well as working conditions, working relationships, organisational culture, motivation, and leadership do, too, indicating that there is a dependency between salary and the other organisational factors.

Results from the South Asian and Asian pharmaceutical scene also show that reward techniques fail. According to Parvin and Kabir (2011), in the context of Bangladesh, factors affecting job satisfaction are salary, work efficiency, supervision and co-worker relationships, which makes interpretation of salary as being mediated by co-workers' relationships established in the job site and supervision. Some motivational factors appeared to have an impact on the motivation of the pharmaceutical production employees in Sri Lanka, whereas other motivational factors remained inconsistent; thus, it could not be ascertained whether salary is the most critical motivational factor or not (Chandrika et al., 2021). Mathur and Gupta (2025) noted the correlation and

interdependent link between performance-based incentives and employee engagement, and Bagga and Kumar (2025) found that there is also a correlation between employee engagement and organisational commitment with respect to change readiness in India. Further, Madhumitha and Hariharan (2025) correlated HR compensation policies with engagement and organisational performance. Integrated, the research findings indicate that there is a need for financial motivators to be coupled with workplace relationships, workplace recognition and engagement and readiness for organisational change.

Other findings from the country analyses complement largely with a theme of compensation. In Nigeria, job security was also found to positively affect the organizational commitment, Falola et al (2020); job evaluation was found to positively affect the job satisfaction, Sittisom (2020); and empowerment and recognition were found to positively affect the job satisfaction in Thailand, Suksod et al (2020). Ferreira (2017) correlated personal goals with intrinsic motivation and transparency, loyalty and trust with extrinsic motivation, which influences performance in Portugal. For India, the differences found were between employee reward, employee performance, employee engagement, and employee job satisfaction (Moturi, 2026) and in Malaysia there was difference between organisational engagement and organisational employee retention of Generation Y employees (Ng & Selamat, 2026). Conceptually, Kaur (2026) suggested that engagement can be reinforced by integrating workplace spirituality and intrinsic work motivation. The pattern across countries indicates that the role of employee rewards is context-sensitive: monetary rewards have a direct influence, but the results seem more significant when accompanied by recognition, job security, trust, empowerment, and organisational engagement.

4.2 Workplace environment, support, and culture

The workplace environment, support, and culture were identified as the second internal marketing dimension in the reviewed studies and are the elements that influence the effectiveness of engagement-oriented strategies. Tirastittam et al. (2020) found that supervisory, collegial, organisational, and social support were all correlated with employee engagement, and Sittisom (2020) documented that the workplace environment, empowerment, and recognition were correlated with employee job satisfaction. Suksod et al. (2020) also found that organisational support and job security reinforce organisational commitment. These results indicate that workplace support is not merely incidental but a medium through which recognition, empowerment, and security are meaningful for employees in the context of the Thai pharmaceutical industry.

Evidence from Vietnam, Afghanistan, and India suggests that workplace culture is influenced by prevailing organisational challenges. In Vietnam, Luu (2020) found that internal corporate social responsibility practices positively affect the performance of pharmaceutical firms through proactive employee contribution, measured by employees' intrapreneurial behaviour within the firm. This indicates that ethical and purpose-driven practices may foster proactive employee contributions. In Afghanistan, Orya and Pakteen (2025) studied organisational climate in relation to employees' attitudes towards work and job satisfaction, suggesting that organisational stability plays a significant role in shaping employees' experiences within the organisation and that employees' positive attitudes towards the organisation could be associated with organisational climate. The correlations between work environment/organisational culture, employee and organisational outcomes, quality of work life, industrial relations, workplace support, trust, psychological well-being, satisfaction, retention, engagement, organisational commitment, and change readiness were attributed to Rawal et al. (2024), Sarkhel et al. (2025), Annsen and Chandramouli (2025), Laxmana Sunand and Siriseti (2025), Leelavathi and Dhanalakshmi (2026), and Bagga and Kumar (2025). The findings indicate that workplace support can effectively strengthen attachment, trust, well-being, and preparedness to remain productive during organisational change in the Indian pharmaceutical context.

Evidence from Nigeria and Korea also shows that cultural support extends beyond job satisfaction. In Nigeria, Falola et al. (2020) found that recognition, well-being, and diversity and inclusion affected talent engagement, indicating that inclusive well-being practices can strengthen internal marketing when employee well-being and belonging are key issues. In Korea, Jo and Shin (2025) found that recognition, fairness, and transformational leadership were significantly associated with engagement, whereas workload and technology-related anxiety were associated with burnout and job satisfaction. This contrast suggests that in more technologically demanding or structurally complex work environments, fairness, a manageable workload, and recognition could be as significant as conventional motivational techniques.

The evidence also indicates that the workplace environment, support, and culture influence the effectiveness of internal marketing by shaping employees' perceptions of the organisation's practices as credible, fair, inclusive, and supportive. The pattern across countries suggests that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to a supportive culture: in some countries, it is manifested in a supportive organisational culture and job security, while in others it is expressed through CSR, fairness, well-being, inclusion, trust, and readiness to change.

4.3 Leadership strategies

The results showed that leadership strategies became one of the internal marketing dimensions, whereas effective leadership depended on leadership behaviour and the work context in which it was used. Nguyen et al. (2019) and Mafaz et al. (2024) established correlations between transformational leadership and employee motivation and between transformational leadership

and work performance in Vietnam and Malaysia, respectively. Moreover, Mafaz et al. (2024) revealed that employee motivation mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and performance, and Nguyen et al. (2019) demonstrated that transformational leadership promotes work performance through pharmacists' intrinsic motivation. The results indicate that transformational leadership is more effective in enhancing employees' intrinsic motivation than a manager-led approach.

Research in Pakistan and Bangladesh also indicates that a leader's effectiveness depends on whether employees need direction, autonomy, empowerment, or protection from poor supervision. Rasheed et al. (2026) reported that feedback and delegation improved psychological empowerment and employee engagement in Pakistan, while transformational leadership positively contributed to job satisfaction and retention in both studies conducted by Wajahat and Mahmood (2025) and Haider et al. (2025). Toxic leadership is associated with dissatisfaction, turnover intention, and workplace instability. In Bangladesh, Ali and Ullah (2023) found positive associations between laissez-faire leadership and talent (attraction, retention, development, and engagement), suggesting that an autonomy-oriented leadership style may be beneficial when employees have the ability and autonomy to manage their work. This difference suggests that leadership approaches in pharmaceutical companies cannot be reduced to a single preferred approach; the degree to which they are effective is determined by the nature of the organisational context, with an inspiring approach more conducive to a context that requires empowerment, autonomy, and less protection from poor leadership, and a more safeguarding approach more conducive to a context that demands inspiration.

Findings from other countries highlight the importance of situating leadership within its context as an internal marketing strategy. In Sri Lanka, Chandrika et al. (2021) found that pharmaceutical workers in the production sector were motivated by recognition and leadership, suggesting that when recognition and support come from leadership, motivation can be enhanced. In the Republic of Korea, Jo and Shin (2025) determined that transformational leadership affected employee engagement and reduced employee burnout, and that recognition, fairness, workload, and technology-related anxiety were related to employee outcomes. In more complex or technically challenging environments, this means that inspirational actions are not the only factors affecting a leader's effectiveness; fairness, work overload, and burnout also matter.

4.4 HR systems and support

HR systems and support became a strategic internal marketing dimension, as they convert employee policies into retention, satisfaction, engagement, and performance. Otto et al. (2019) reported that human resource development practices affect the performance of the pharmaceutical industry through employee performance. Osei and Ackah (2014) studied employee competencies as factors affecting organisational performance. The results of this study in Ghana indicate that HR systems may be more effective at developing employee competencies and linking development to performance when addressing capability problems in the workforce.

In Pakistan, Adeel (2026) examined the relationships and correlations among recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, compensation and benefits and job satisfaction. Anis et al. (2011) concluded that compensation and supervisory support are correlated with organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and retention. These results suggest that HR support in the Pakistani pharmaceutical context is not restricted to administrative tasks but also involves fair staffing, appraisals, rewards, and supervisory management. In Indonesia, Diah et al. (2020) found that investing in employee development affects the retention process through social and economic exchanges. Vizano et al. (2020) examined compensation and organisational commitment and their relationship with turnover intention via work satisfaction. Indonesian data indicate that HR systems can facilitate employee retention when employees feel that their working relationship with the organisation includes a developmental investment and organisational commitment.

Kalyanamitra et al. (2020) noted that benefits and compensation, performance appraisal, and training facilities were correlated with job satisfaction, and that job satisfaction strengthened the relationship between these factors and retention in Thailand. In addition, Suksod et al. (2020) reported that performance evaluation, job security, and organisational support were correlated with organisational commitment, and that these factors strengthened the relationship between job satisfaction and retention in Thailand. In Malaysia, Ng and Selamat (2026) identified organisational engagement as a mediator in the relationship between Generation Y employees' retention and organisational engagement. The results point to the need for HR support to be tailored to workforce expectations: security of employment and appraisal are salient in one scenario, whereas retention systems, with engagement being more salient, are salient in the other scenario, which is the younger workforce.

HR systems in India have been discussed from broader perspectives, including career development, work-life balance, performance appraisal, retention planning, industrial relations, and quality of work life. Determinants such as career development, compensation, work-life balance, leadership, and organisational culture have been identified as factors affecting job satisfaction by Rawal et al. (2024), whereas Madhumitha and Hariharan (2025) correlated HR policies such as recruitment, compensation, performance management, and work-life balance with engagement and organisational performance. Kishore (2026) and Sood and Painoli (2025) highlighted that goal setting, appraisal, feedback, and fair performance evaluation are mechanisms for enhancing motivation, productivity, compliance, and performance. Other studies by Leelavathi and Dhanalakshmi (2026), Annsen

and Chandramouli (2025), Laxmana Sunand and Sirisetti (2025), Sarkhel et al. (2025), and Moturi (2026) also link HR support to retention, productivity, organisational commitment, workplace relations, and performance. The general outcomes of the above Indian findings indicate that HR systems are better suited as a holistic support system than as an appraisal, reward, or retention mechanism.

This evidence further suggests that HR systems are context-based. Where capability gaps are evident (Ghana), competency development seems to be a central element of HR systems, whereas in settings where retention and commitment problems are more evident (Pakistan, Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia), HR systems focus on appraisal, reward, organisational support, engagement, and developmental investment. This implies that HR support should not be considered a one-size-fits-all package in the pharmaceutical sector, but rather a strategic internal marketing tool tailored to the HRA's needs and expectations in each context.

4.5 Training, development, and capacity building

Training, development, and capacity building were identified as an internal marketing dimension, as several studies have linked employee capability development to employee motivation, retention, performance, and organisational outcomes. Hafeez and Akbar (2015) found that training was positively correlated with employee performance and development outcomes in Pakistan. Adeel (2026) examined the relationships between training and development, other HR practices and job satisfaction in the pharmaceutical industry. This implies that, in this context, training becomes a factor in internal marketing when it is linked to employees' perceived competence, satisfaction, and performance, rather than merely an HR process.

Studies in India place greater emphasis on skill gaps and career development. In India, Rajan and Kumar (2024) analysed the perceived skills gap and its correlation with employee performance, while Kothari et al. (2026) found that training quality was strong and directly proportional to employee motivation and performance. In line with this, Rawal et al. (2024) found that career development opportunities contribute to job satisfaction. Similarly, Moturi (2026) noted that HRM practices, including development-related practices, are associated with employee performance. In Ghana, Osei and Ackah (2014) found that employee competency was a determinant of organisational performance, and Otoo et al. (2019) observed that HRD practices contributed to performance in the pharmaceutical industry through employee performance. The results suggest that training and development are most effective when tied to performance requirements and workforce advancement, where skills and competencies are salient issues.

Other findings support the view that training is more than just skill acquisition. Alam et al. (2023) found that in Bangladesh, green training and development affected organisational commitment and green performance, with job satisfaction mediating some relationships and moderating the strength of effects in others. Diah et al.'s (2020) research in Indonesia showed that investing in employee development helped retain employees through social and economic exchange mechanisms. Kalyanamitra et al. (2020) found that training facilities, benefits and compensation, and performance appraisal were significant factors affecting retention through job satisfaction in Thailand. In Malaysia, Ng and Selamat (2026) found that organisational engagement is associated with employee retention among Generation Y, and Madhumitha and Hariharan (2025) found that training-oriented HR policies are correlated with employee engagement and organisational performance in India. The results indicate that training and capacity-building work should be tailored to the context; it can enhance internal marketing when it targets a particular workforce issue (e.g. skill deficits, competency building, employment retention, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, or performance for sustainability).

4.6 Implications for managerial practice

Managers can use the five-dimensional framework as a practical diagnostic tool to assess whether internal marketing practices are balanced across the five dimensions: rewards and engagement, workplace support and culture, leadership, human resource (HR) systems, and training. This is important because aligning these employee initiatives within a unified internal marketing system is more likely to sustain employee engagement, retention, service quality, and performance than the sum of its isolated parts.

The framework further proposes that HRM and leadership be treated as strategic internal marketing tools rather than administrative functions. Recruitment, appraisal, reward, career development, feedback, and recognition will therefore be more effective when they complement and support one another and when leadership behaviours such as fair supervision, delegation, feedback, and transformational influence are present.

Additionally, managers must adjust their internal marketing on a case-by-case basis, tailored to their employees' contexts and circumstances. In cases where pay systems are limited or delayed, non-financial recognition, communication, support, equity, and development opportunities may be more effective in maintaining trust and commitment. When retention, burnout, or a lack of skills is the primary concern, internal marketing should focus on job security, workload support, career progression, and capability development.

Therefore, internal marketing should be integrated into regular management processes, including staffing, performance measurement, training, leadership development, and retention. This integration is particularly relevant for pharmaceutical companies, as workers' motivation and skills can affect service quality, compliance, product quality, innovation, and patient safety.

4.7 Conclusion

The reviewed pharmaceutical studies were used to analyse internal marketing strategies, and a five-dimensional framework for internal marketing strategies was proposed. This framework comprises employee rewards and engagement, workplace environment, support and culture, leadership strategies, HR systems and support, and training, development, and capacity building. The evidence is organised across these dimensions to demonstrate that internal marketing is an integrated strategic system that links employee motivation, workplace support, leadership behaviour, HR infrastructure, and capability development to organisational outcomes in pharmaceutical firms.

The proposed framework expands on internal marketing theory by providing an organized, and systematic classification which can be tested, validated and compared in the pharmaceutical field. It also provides a foundation for linking marketing intervention levels to outcomes at the employee and organisational levels, which could be used for future theory development and empirical testing in the pharmaceutical domain.

4.8 Limitations

This systematic review had a few limitations. First, only selected academic databases and English-language publications were searched, which could have led to biases in database coverage and language. Studies published in other languages that were not indexed in the databases searched, or that were grey literature, such as organisational reports, theses, policy documents, conference materials, and unpublished industry studies, may have been excluded. While several studies used the survey approach and statistical analysis, some used conceptual, descriptive, or practice-oriented approaches, making comparisons on the same empirical basis difficult. In addition, the findings may not be generalisable to all pharmaceutical companies, given the national-level diversity in company size, regulatory frameworks, and pharmaceutical subsectors.

4.9 Recommendation

Pharmaceutical companies should adopt integrated internal marketing strategies that combine reward systems, employee recognition, supportive workplace culture, ethical leadership, transparent HR practices, performance appraisal, career development, and continuous training. Managers need to build more positive systems for compensation rather than strictly focusing on the monetary aspect, as extrinsic and intrinsic motivation would complement each other to a greater degree. Additional elements of internal marketing programs should also be tailored to the organisation, its employees, the workforce generation, the organisation's job roles, and regulatory requirements in the pharmaceutical industry.

More targeted research is required in the future. First, research needs to confirm, clarify, and expand the proposed 5-dimensional framework for pharmaceutical internal marketing strategies to improve conceptual clarity and comparability across settings. Second, beyond transformational leadership, other leadership styles, such as ethical, servant, distributed, laissez-faire and toxic leadership, should be explored, especially in LMIC pharmaceutical settings, where other aspects of leadership, such as supervision, autonomy, burnout and retention pressures, may be relevant. Third, research should be conducted in more resource-constrained environments to examine how CSR-involved internal marketing can affect the extent of engagement, commitment, and performance of these employees, as well as their well-being, fairness, and organisational support. Finally, a longitudinal and comparative study in Ghana, other African markets, Asia, and high-income pharmaceutical markets should assess whether internal marketing strategies can affect service retention, service quality, treatment adherence, innovation, and/or organisational performance, and whether these effects can be sustained.

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