
RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN INTERNAL MARKETING AND JOB PERFORMANCE MEDIATED BY PSYCHOLOGICAL OWNERSHIP AMONG FITNESS CENTERS' EMPLOYEES: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS USING PLS-SEM TECHNIQUES

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between internal marketing and job performance as the mediating variable of psychological ownership by focusing on fitness center trainers. The convenience sampling technique was used in the study. Data were collected from fitness centers engaged in business in Turkey. The research group consists of 177 fitness center trainers. The model test with Partial Least Squares (PLS) was used as the analysis technique in the study. The results support the model proposal that fitness center trainers' internal marketing experiences play a role in job performance both directly and indirectly through psychological ownership. Therefore, fitness centers should give importance to internal marketing to improve the experiences of their employees and obtain corporate ownership. This will increase employees' job performance, and, consequently, customer satisfaction will be positively affected.

Keywords: internal marketing; psychological ownership; job performance; fitness center trainers; PLS-SEM

INTRODUCTION

The sports and physical activity services sector worldwide is constantly emerging. Fitness centers in this sector have an important place. Fitness centers, which attract more attention day by day, offer services to people who want to have a healthier and ideal body (Kara and Yildiz, 2013).

In today's intensely competitive environment, fitness centers, as in other service sectors, must provide quality service to their customers due to competition. In order to increase the quality of service, fitness centers face the necessity of developing a set of strategies for the motivation of their employees (Leon-Quismondo *et al.*, 2020). The most important of these strategies is to achieve organizational success by increasing the job performance of employees. There is evidence that the survival, development, and increase in profitability of commercial organizations will be achieved through employees, who are the main source of service production (Yee *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, it is clear that for fitness centers to be successful, they must first focus on the work performance of their employees (Leon-Quismondo *et al.*, 2018). Job performance is the level of job performance revealed by the mental and physical labor of the employees. Employees' job performance indirectly affects organizational performance (Combs *et al.*, 2006).

Some antecedents are the sources for increasing the job performance of the employees. For instance, internal marketing (Chiu *et al.*, 2019) and psychological ownership (Md-Sidin *et al.*, 2010) are among these. Many studies emphasize that internal marketing is effective in increasing employees' psychological ownership (Kwon *et al.*, 2017). Internal marketing is a concept that aims to increase the motivation of employees by meeting their expectations of the organization. Psychological ownership is the psychological attachment of employees to their organization and becoming a part of their identity by identifying with the organization (McIntyre *et al.*, 2009).

Internal marketing, psychological ownership, and job performance issues can be considered important issues in the organizational context in terms of the existence and development of organizations in sectors with high labor intensity. We argue that these three issues should be examined in the fitness centers employees, who operate primarily as commercial organizations in the sports and physical activity sector, to maintain their existence and increase their market share. No study in the sports literature examines the links between internal marketing, psychological ownership, and job performance variables. Therefore, we believe that exploring the links between the three variables will contribute to the sports management and marketing literature. In this study, focusing on fitness center trainers, which aims to examine the relationship between internal marketing and job

performance by using psychological ownership as a mediating variable, first, the literature review is included, then the study methodology and findings are presented in detail, and finally the results are discussed.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Internal Marketing

Internal marketing is a concept that sees organization employees like customers and aims to increase the motivation and satisfaction of employees. According to internal marketing, customers are divided into two groups: internal customers and external customers. While external customers constitute the consumer group that the organization provides services to, internal customers constitute the employees of the organization (Gummesson, 1987). In this context, internal marketing refers to the application of the marketing approach developed for external customers to employees (internal customers) (Lings and Brooks, 1998).

According to the marketing approach, the relationship between the organization and its customers consists of an exchange. When the organization gives something (a product) to external customers, it receives something (a fee) in return. Similarly, there is an effective internal exchange between the organization and its employees in the internal marketing approach (George, 1990). Meeting the employees' expectations because of internal marketing activities, the organization expects high performance from its employees. While the employees' motivation is provided by the organization in internal exchange, employees are expected to focus on external customer satisfaction (Yildiz, 2014). The basis of internal exchange is that "internal relations" that do not work well for employees cannot create successful "external customer relations" (Grönroos, 2000). In summary, internal marketing includes activities focused on ensuring satisfaction by attracting qualified employees to the business, meeting their expectations, and creating customer focus in this process (Rafiq and Ahmed, 2000). Wagenheim and Anderson (2008) argue that employees whose expectations and needs are met will be more customer-oriented, which is an important element of providing better quality service to external customers. Rafiq and Ahmed (2000) divide internal marketing practices into various stages. In the first phase, the employees' expectations and needs are focused on; in the next phase, strategies that will ensure the motivation and satisfaction of the employees are implemented. Therefore, employee whose expectations and needs are satisfied will ensure their satisfaction by focusing more on the external customer; thus, the enterprise will reach a high level of quality in the products it offers.

There are some approaches in the literature regarding the characteristics of internal marketing. One of these is the approach of Foreman and Money (1995), consisting of vision, reward, and development dimensions. *Vision* in this approach includes sharing the forward goals of the company with the employees, rewarding the success of high-performing employees, and *development* refers to the training of employees in order to keep up with advancing information and technology. Foreman and Money (1995) argue that if vision, reward, and development are achieved, the motivation and satisfaction of employees will be achieved. On the other hand, Yildiz and Kara (2017), who carried out one of their recent studies, did not consider the dimensions of vision, awards, and development to be sufficient and focused on other features that would meet the needs and expectations of employees. Yildiz and Kara (2017) revealed eleven properties (for instance, appropriate workload and support, equal and fair, open and transparent communication) of internal marketing in their studies, and they argued that these would ensure the motivation and satisfaction of the employees, and this would increase the quality of the service provided.

Psychological Ownership

Today, intense competition between commercial organizations has made human resources even more relevant. Employees in an organization are seen as one of the most important elements of ensuring customer satisfaction. In order to be more effective and achieve strategic goals, organizations need to be emotionally close to their employees and show behavior beyond expectations. One of these behaviors is psychological appropriation, a phenomenon that has recently gained importance. Pierce *et al.* (2001) expressed psychological ownership as the employee's feeling of belonging to the organization without legal or official ownership. The psychological sense of ownership will reflect positively on some characteristics (emotions, attitudes, and behaviors) of the employees, which will provide some advantages to the organizations.

Job Performance

Employees' job performance is an important concept that directly affects organizational performance, especially in the service sector. Job performance is a concept that quantitatively and qualitatively indicates how much an individual doing a job achieves the goal of that job (Schermerhorn *et al.*, 2012). Capacity, willingness, and environmental factors are effective in the emergence of job performance (Blumberg and Pringle, 1982). These three elements determine the performance level. Therefore, high capacity, high willingness, and suitable environmental conditions are the sources of high performance.

Borman and Motowidlo (1997) divided job performance into two dimensions: task and contextual performance. Job performance is related to job descriptions and reflects the expertise and technical aspects of the job. Task behaviors are obligations to be carried out. On the other hand, contextual performance means extra work behaviors based on volunteering that are not the job itself and are not obligatory for not being included in the job descriptions. Contextual activities contribute to organizational effectiveness by shaping the organizational, social, and psychological environment. Both task and contextual performance are essential for businesses that want to achieve their strategic goals.

Relationships among Internal Marketing, Psychological Ownership, and Job Performance, and Research Model

Sectoral competition forces organizations to have employees who do not only do their jobs but also exhibit behavior beyond expectations. Therefore, this situation makes the factors affecting employees' emotions relevant. According to the internal marketing approach, employees are seen as the most important element of service production organizations (Cooper and Cronin, 2000), as they play a significant role in the formation of external customer satisfaction (Berry, 1995).

Therefore, internal marketing focuses primarily on meeting the expectations and needs of employees for the satisfaction and loyalty of external customers (George, 1990). Evidence in the literature shows that meeting employees' expectations and needs through internal marketing lead to positive emotional responses such as job satisfaction (Hwang and Chi, 2005) and organizational commitment (Chiu *et al.*, 2019). Psychological ownership, which is one of the emotional reactions of employees, can also be positively affected by internal marketing. There is no study in the sports literature that reveals the relationship between both variables. Therefore, the following hypothesis has been developed to determine the effect of internal marketing on the psychological ownership of fitness center trainers:

H₁. Internal marketing has a significant and positive effect on psychological ownership.

Although there are studies in other sectors regarding the relationship between psychological ownership and job performance, there is no study in the sports sector. Therefore, the following hypothesis has been developed to determine the effect of psychological ownership on job performance among fitness trainers:

H₂. Psychological ownership has a significant and positive effect on job performance.

Similarly, internal marketing can affect fitness trainers' job performance. There is little evidence in the sports literature for the relationship between both variables (Chiu *et al.*, 2019). Hence, the following hypothesis has been developed:

H₃. Internal marketing has a significant and positive effect on job performance.

Through internal marketing, fitness center trainers can own their organizations psychologically, and the work performance of the trainers with a high sense of psychological ownership is high. In other words, psychological ownership can have a mediating effect between internal marketing and business performance. The following hypothesis has been developed to find out:

H₄. Psychological ownership will mediate the relationship between internal marketing and job performance.

Figure 1 summarizes the hypothesized effects. This model shows the cause-and-effect relationship between variables: the effect of the independent variable on the mediator variable, the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable, and the mediator variable on the dependent variable.

METHOD

Sample Size and Procedure

In the study, the convenience sampling technique, one of the non-random sampling methods, was used. Data were collected from fitness centers engaged in business in Turkey. The research group comprises 177 (102 male and 75 female) fitness centers' trainers. The questionnaire forms were delivered to the participants via structured electronic communication and were collected again in the same way.

Measurement Instruments

In this study, three different scales were used to collect data. Details about the scales are given below:

Internal marketing scale: The IM-11 scale developed by Yildiz and Kara (2017) was used to measure internal marketing. This scale is one-dimensional and consists of 11 items. The participants responded to each statement using a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Statement examples include "This organization provides training and development programs to improve its employees' knowledge and skills," and "This organization provides career advancement opportunities to its employees." High values indicated high internal marketing.

Psychological ownership scale: This scale was developed by Van Dyne and Pierce (2004), and it is one-dimensional and consists of seven items. The participants responded to each statement using a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Statement examples include "This is my organization," and "I feel a very high degree of personal ownership for this organization." High values indicated high psychological ownership.

Job performance scale: This scale was developed by Sigler and Pearson (2000), and it is one-dimensional and consists of seven items. The participants responded to each statement using a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Statement examples include "I complete my tasks on time," and "I meet or exceed my goals." High values indicated high job performance.

Statistical Analysis

For the research model analysis, the structural equation model was developed using SmartPLS 3.2.3. Partial Least Squares (PLS), which is seen as a second-generation data



Figure 1. Theoretical model

analysis technique (Hair *et al.*, 2014), is defined as a general method that supports causality pathways among latent variables (Garson, 2016, p. 13). According to Henseler *et al.* (2016), PLS modeling is a variance-based method to estimate compound-based path models. The core function of PLS consists of principal component analysis and alternative least squares, similar to canonical correlation analysis. The PLS road modeling, with its modern look, is a fully equipped structural equation method that can predict both factor and composite models for structural analysis, repetitive and non-repetitive structural models, and perform model fit tests (Henseler *et al.*, 2016). PLS combines principal component factor analysis with multivariate regression to determine dependent and independent variables within the established model (Edvardsson *et al.*, 2000, p. 923).

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The gender distribution of the participants is as follows: 42.4% (f = 75) are female and 57.6% (f = 102) are male. The education status of the participants is as follows: 1.7% (f = 3) primary school, 10.2% (f = 18) high school, 67.8% (f = 120) bachelor, and 20.3% (f = 36) postgraduate. 37.3% (f = 66) work part-time whereas 62.7% (f = 111) work full-time. The income distribution is as follows: 4762.2±5758.49. The mean age of the participants is determined to be 28.71±7.57 years; their working years are determined to be 2.929±2.557 years (Table 1).

Measurement Model

Before confirming the structural model, which is developed depending on the hypothesis, the first step of PLS is to do a validity and reliability analysis of the variables of the model. Next, Outer Loadings, Average Variances Extracted (AVE = convergent validity), Cronbach’s Alpha (α), and Com-

posite Reliability (CR) were analysed to evaluate the measurement model. According to PLS analysis, it is expected that the values for Outer Loadings, Cronbach’s Alpha, and CR are under 0.70, and the value for AVE is under 0.50 (Alpar, 2010; Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair *et al.*, 2014). The analysis for the model was conducted in two steps. In the first step, Outer Loadings of the items were analysed, and IMS1 (0.537), IMS2 (0.625), and POS7 (0.199) were found under 0.70, which is the lower bound. In the second step, these items were excluded from the measurement model, and its analysis was redone. Table 2 shows the results.

Table 2 demonstrates that the range of Outer Loading scores of the included items is between 0.759 (IMS6) and 0.930 (POS2 and JPS6). Considering the values of CR and Cronbach’s Alpha, the values of the variables are all over 0.70, and it was seen that their variability and reliability are satisfactory. In addition, the scores of AVE, which is convergent validity, are over the lower bound of 0.50.

Table 3 depicts the discriminant validity of the measurement model obtained using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT).

According to the Fornell-Larcker Criterion in Table 3, every structure in discriminant validity is expected to be larger than the correlation among the structures of the square root of AVE (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The values in bold in the analysis of the Fornell-Larcker Criterion show the square root of AVE. Taking the results of the findings into account, the correlation between the structures of the square root of AVE is larger than other correlation values.

Another way to measure discriminant validity is Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) (Hair *et al.*, 2014). If all HTMT

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Groups	f	%	Total		S	Min.	Max.
Gender	Female	75	42.4	177	-	-	-	-
	Male	102	57.6					
Education	Primary School	3	1.7	177	-	-	-	-
	High School	18	10.2					
	Bachelor	120	67.8					
	Postgraduate	36	20.3					
Working Status	Part-time	66	37.3	177	-	-	-	-
	Full-time	111	62.7					
Age		-	-	177	28.71	7.57	18	50
Income (TL)		-	-	177	4762.2	5758.49	0	30000
Working time (Years)		-	-	177	2.929	2.557	0	12

Source: Yildiz, Polat, and Yildiz (2021)

Table 2. Construct validity and reliability second stage results

Scales	Items	Outer Loadings	CR	AVE	α
Internal Marketing	IMS1	-	0.949	0.673	0.939
	IMS2	-			
	IMS3	0.818			
	IMS4	0.871			
	IMS5	0.883			
	IMS6	0.759			
	IMS7	0.798			
	IMS8	0.858			
	IMS9	0.794			
	IMS10	0.791			
	IMS11	0.805			
Psychological Ownership	POS1	0.822	0.949	0.757	0.936
	POS2	0.930			
	POS3	0.873			
	POS4	0.902			
	POS5	0.819			
	POS6	0.867			
	POS7	-			
Job Performance	JPS1	0.777	0.951	0.764	0.938
	JPS2	0.793			
	JPS3	0.908			
	JPS4	0.895			
	JPS5	0.929			
	JPS6	0.930			

Source: Yildiz, Polat, and Yildiz (2021)

Table 3. Discriminant validity: Fornell-Larcker Criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Models	Analysis Type	Scales	Internal Marketing	Job Performance	Psychological Ownership
Measurement Model I	Fornell-Larcker Criterion	Internal Marketing	0.821		
		Job Performance	0.571	0.874	
		Psychological Ownership	0.660	0.402	0.870
	Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)	Internal Marketing	-		
		Job Performance	0.590	-	
		Psychological Ownership	0.675	0.392	-

Source: Yildiz, Polat, and Yildiz (2021)

values of the variables are under 0.90, the validity of the measurement model is accepted as discriminant (Henseler *et al.*, 2016). Considering the HTMT results in **Table 3**, it was found that all values are lower than the referent value of 0.90. As a result, bearing the findings in **Tables 2** and **3** in mind, the measurement was accepted as valid and reliable.

Structural Model

After the measurement model was found to be valid and reliable, the next step in PLS is the confirmation step of the

structural model. **Figure 2** shows the image of the structural model obtained after PLS analysis.

Figure 2 depicts that when the beta coefficient between internal marketing and psychological ownership is 0.660, internal marketing explicates psychological ownership with a value of 0.436 (43%). When the beta coefficient between psychological ownership and job performance is 0.402, psychological ownership explicates job performance with a value of 0.61 (16%).

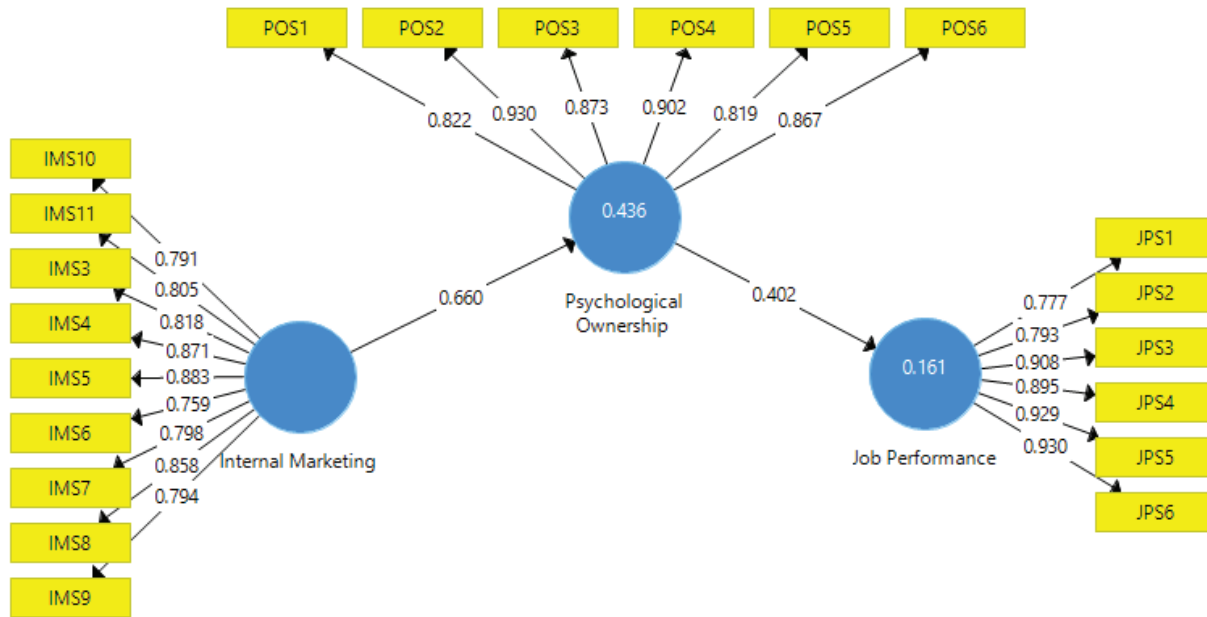


Figure 2. PLS Structural Model

To find the meaningfulness of the path correlation seen in Figure 2, it is necessary to determine their t values. Large samples provide more realistic results of the correlation of the path in the model to test the structural model and hypothesis. To reach large samples, a bootstrapping algorithm, which is the resample method, is needed (using 5000 resamples). Thanks to bootstrapping, internal and outer models could be produced. It is known that if the bi-tailed t-value is over 1.96, its meaningfulness is 0.05, and if it is over 2.56, its meaningfulness is 0.01 (Çokluk *et al.*, 2010; Hair *et al.*, 2014). Taking these into consideration, the meaningfulness of the structure of the internal model established according to the hypothesis was tested by the bootstrapping algorithm (Table 4).

Table 4 reveals that the t-values of internal loadings are all higher than 2.56, indicating meaningful results. The next step is to determine the meaningfulness of the outer model based on t-values. Table 5 shows the results.

According to Table 5, the meaningfulness of the path coefficient is 99%, as all t-values are greater than 2.56. The lowest t value is 13.621 (JPS2), and the highest t value is 76.512 (POS2). Based on these analyses, the results of the hypotheses formed before the structural model are presented in Table 6.

DISCUSSION

The current study was designed to analyze the mediator role of psychological ownership in the correlation between internal marketing and job performance via Partial Least Squares (PLS). In order to test the reliability and validity of a measurement model, a measurement model was initially formed. In the statistical processes, Outer Loadings, Average Variances Extracted (AVE = convergent validity), Cronbach's Alpha (α), and Composite Reliability (CR) values were examined, and for Discriminant Validity, Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Table 4. Internal loading path coefficients and T values

Results	Paths	Beta	t	p
Path coefficients	Internal Marketing Psychological Ownership	.660	19.928	.000
	Psychological Ownership Job Performance	.402	8.288	.000
Total indirect effects	Internal Marketing Job Performance	.265	7.050	.000
Specific indirect effects	Internal Marketing Psychological Ownership Job Performance	.265	7.050	.000

Source: Yildiz, Polat, and Yildiz (2021)

Table 5. Outer Loadings T-values

Items	Internal Marketing	Psychological Ownership	Job Performance	p
IM3	28.798			0.000
IM4	33.785			0.000
IM5	38.857			0.000
IM6	15.762			0.000
IM7	18.268			0.000
IM8	43.286			0.000
IM9	17.254			0.000
IM10	21.171			0.000
IM11	20.053			0.000
PO1		27.587		0.000
PO2		76.512		0.000
PO3		37.254		0.000
PO4		41.587		0.000
PO5		21.945		0.000
PO6		41.153		0.000
JP1			25.495	0.000
JP2			13.621	0.000
JP3			40.576	0.000
JP4			39.440	0.000
JP5			48.987	0.000
JP6			46.808	0.000

Key: IM = Internal Marketing, PO = Psychological Ownership, JP = Job Performance

Source: Yildiz, Polat, and Yildiz (2021)

Table 6. Summary of hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis	Hypothesis test result
H1. Internal marketing will have a positive effect on psychological ownership.	Accepted
H2. Psychological ownership will have a positive effect on job performance.	Accepted
H3. Internal Marketing will have a positive effect on job performance.	Accepted
H4. Psychological ownership will mediate the relationship between internal marketing and job performance.	Accepted

and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) were examined. In the first phase of measurement model analysis, which had two phases, the Outer Loadings of all items were examined, and it was observed that IMS1 (0.537), IMS2 (0.625), and POS7 (0.199) could not exceed the threshold of 0.70. Two items removed from the internal marketing scale can be said to have physical and financial qualities. The rest of the items on the scale seem to feature the behavioral qualities of the model. On the other hand, the only item removed from the psychological ownership scale is thought to stem from negative behavior. After removing the items under the threshold, the second part of the analysis was conducted. As a result of the second phase, Outer Loading scores were found between 0.759 (IMS6) and 0.930 (JPS6 and POS2); CR scores were found between 0.949 and 0.951; Cronbach Alpha scores were found between 0.936 and 0.939; and finally, AVE scores were found between 0.673 and 0.764 and were sufficient. When discriminant validity scores were evaluated, it

was observed that both the Fornell-Larcker and the HTMT criteria had an acceptable level of distinguishing. According to these results, it is accepted that the variables used in the measurement model are reliable and valid.

In the second part of the findings, whether the research model, which was formed in the frame of a hypothesis, was confirmed was analyzed. According to the obtained data, Internal Marketing has a direct, positive, and medium-level effect on Psychological Ownership ($\gamma_1 = 0.660$, $t = 19.928$, $p = 0.000$). Similarly, it is determined that Psychological Ownership has a direct and positive effect on Job Performance ($\gamma_2 = 0.402$, $t = 8.288$, $p = 0.000$). On the other hand, Internal Marketing has a total indirect, positive, and low level of effect on Job Performance ($\gamma_3 = 0.265$, $t = 7.050$, $p = 0.000$). Also, Internal Marketing has a specific indirect, positive, and low level of effect on Job Performance ($\gamma_3 = 0.265$, $t = 7.050$, $p = 0.000$).

It is a well-known fact that economic growth and better life standards encourage individuals to participate in wellness and healthy life programs. In the literature, there are many studies emphasizing that fitness centers are frequently preferred, and consumptions related to this area have increased (Korkmaz and Uslu, 2020; Lam *et al.*, 2005; Ma, 2011; May *et al.*, 2015; Pradeep *et al.*, 2020; Yildiz *et al.*, 2018). In addition, it is emphasized that the fitness sector is one of the sectors with the greatest increase in practitioners worldwide (García-Fernández *et al.*, 2016; Foroughi *et al.*, 2019). It is seen that the studies on fitness centers are generally focused on service quality, which is based on the perceptions of customers. The fact that employees in fitness centers are one of the significant factors in the process of evaluating service quality was supported in the studies in the literature (Chelladurai and Chang, 2000; Garcia-Fernandez *et al.*, 2012; Lam, 2000; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1998; Polat *et al.*, 2018; Sanz *et al.*, 2005).

In Hypothesis 1, the construct that “internal marketing has a significant and positive effect on psychological ownership” was examined. It is determined that internal marketing has a significant role in psychological ownership. It can be stated that applying the marketing activities of fitness centers that are conducted to protect the customer portfolio and increase the number of customers for their employees is a significant factor in securing the continuance of the business. Lings (2004) defined the process of applying the marketing techniques developed for external customers to employees as internal marketing. He emphasized that this strategy must be grounded in the fact that employees in a business have a significant role in customer satisfaction. Prioritizing fitness center employees and other external shareholders is thought to affect both ownership behavior towards the business and customer satisfaction.

In Hypothesis 2, the construct that “Psychological ownership has a significant and positive effect on job performance” was examined. It is seen that, as a psychological phenomenon, the notion of ownership was analyzed in the context of personnel in the literature. In these studies, it is revealed that they provide a common point of view in the context of the psychological effects that engage personnel in the business (Mayhew *et al.*, 2007; Pierce and Rodgers, 2004; Van Dyne and Pierce, 2004). Individuals who have psychological ownership get a feeling of affinity related to the target from the moment of feeling ownership related to various concrete and abstract targets (Dittmar, 1992). For example, in a fitness center, ownership can mean obtaining authorization as well as obtaining small but motivating requests that are demanded by the personnel. Pierce *et al.* (2001) express that ownership is a part of humanity and report that hu-

mans naturally develop ownership feelings towards material and nonmaterial objects. Moreover, it is stated that feelings of ownership have significant behavioral, emotional, and psychological results.

The performances of employees working in fitness centers, which require one-on-one and close attention from customers, have become part of the product. The existence of employees with the required skills and experiences alone is accepted as insufficient for business success in an intensely competitive environment. Business success is related to the skills and experience of the employees. In addition, the employees must have positive attitudes and have strong feelings towards their businesses (Yildiz, 2011). Today, the responsibility of business owners cannot be solely limited to authorizing their employees; at the same time, they should be aware of the situation and whether the employees feel psychologically empowered or not, since an employee who is psychologically well will probably feel ownership towards the business and have a high job performance consequently. In another study, Zhang and Bartol (2010) express that solely authorizing employees will not suffice; therefore, leaders should support them psychologically.

In Hypothesis 3, the construct that “Internal marketing has a significant and positive effect on job performance” was examined. The current research model presents results that support hypothesis 3. It is evident that the demand for individuals to go to fitness centers to live healthily has increased. There is a need for basic features such as effective environment design, equipment quality, and appropriate physical conditions to increase the service quality in the fitness centers (Ko; Pastore, 2005); in addition, there is a need for qualified fitness instructors in order to inform and direct the members of the fitness centers. The competence and effectiveness of instructors, as well as their attitudes and behaviors, are thought to be significant elements. Employee productivity is a significant factor in organizational performance and growth. More specifically, it is reported that customers’ perceptions towards service quality are affected by their interaction with employees in service institutions, where the employees performances are determiners of higher growth (Fong; Snape, 2015).

In Hypothesis 4, the construct that “psychological ownership will mediate the relationship between internal marketing and job performance” was examined. The current research model presents results that support hypothesis 4. The general assumption for fitness centers is the notion of consumer-driven marketing. However, it is important to understand the unexpected behaviors of employees in businesses that provide customer satisfaction to have sustainability.

Conclusion and Implications

The results support the model suggestion that the internal marketing experiences of sport center employees, directly and indirectly, have a role in job performance via psychological ownership. Therefore, fitness centers should attach importance to internal marketing to improve the experiences of their employees and obtain corporate ownership. This will increase employees' job performance and consequently customer satisfaction will be positively affected. The most important implication of the current study is that psychological ownership has a significant role in the correlation between internal marketing and job performance. Moreover, it can be said that the correlation between internal marketing and psychological ownership and the correlation between psychological ownership and job performance are important factors for fitness centers. In light of the results, it is suggested that giving importance to internal marketing, especially for employees, will affect job performance positively in the fitness sector. Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) can be found in a very limited amount of studies, especially in the sport management field (Cepeda-Carrión and Cepeda-Carrion, 2018; Koo and Lee, 2019; Sarstedt *et al.*, 2014). It is thought that the current study will contribute to the literature both with the analysis technique used and in terms of fitness centers.

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