

A Critical Exploration into the Impact of Internal Marketing on Sustainable Marketing Regarding the Role of the Mediating Variable of Green Marketing and Social Marketing

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Abstract: This study aims to investigate the mediating impact of green marketing and social marketing on the association between internal marketing and sustainable marketing. This research is applicable and descriptive-causal regarding the aim and data collection, respectively. The statistical universe of the research incorporates the employees of administrative, marketing and sales units of the pharmaceutical companies in Lorestan, Iran. Out of the entire sample, 55 individuals were selected using the stratified random sampling method. The required data were collected through questionnaires. Besides, the data were analyzed using the Structural Equation Modeling techniques (SEM) by PLS Software. The results of the research suggest that internal marketing makes a significant impact on social and green marketing. Also, green marketing makes a positive and significant impact on sustainable marketing. On the other hand, internal marketing turned out to be having no significant effect on sustainable marketing internal. Similarly, social marketing impact on sustainable marketing was not confirmed. Besides, the internal marketing impact, through the mediating variable of green marketing and social marketing, on the sustainable marketing was not verified in the sixth and seventh hypotheses.

Key words: Internal marketing, sustainable marketing, green marketing, social marketing, PLS Software

INTRODUCTION

The first marketing courses, known as “product marketing” were held in the University of Pennsylvania in 1905 (Belz and Peattie, 2010). This concept has undergone drastic changes over time and has experienced the marketing field with different changes. Marketing strategy, in particular has been subjected to many changes as well. In addition, the focus of marketing has turned into consumer-oriented status like customer’s needs; likewise, the expectations have changed. Various issues have been raised in the marketing strategy over time and the companies have been always trying to adopt miscellaneous marketing strategies to gain competitive advantage in the market (Charter *et al.*, 2006). Once, it was assumed that organizations and manufacturers are merely responsible for the shareholders and employees and that they are supposed to offer the best consumables to the customers with a low price but a high quality while the consequences of the products were ignored. Intense competition, population increase, scarcity of resources and environmental pollution caused new approaches to the organizations and management which resulted in commitment and social responsibility. In fact it could be

alleged that the introduction of this responsibility was deemed as a response to the environmental challenges and requirements. Graham and Katra believe that supporting the external environment is not optional but it is considered as an important part of the business process (Cateora *et al.*, 2002).

The current unsustainable condition of the human society is the result of an unsustainable development and growth in the past decades which merely aimed to increase the economic prosperity regardless of the ethics, environmental considerations, social rights and the quality of life. What is certain is that relying on the intellectual and applicable principles of the past will not only impair the current situation but also will increase the social, environmental and economic risks and will impose huge costs on the society and business. Moving toward an excellent society requires the consumers, businesses and governments to play their role towards the environmental, economic and social responsibilities (Belz and Peattie, 2009). Martin Bells considers the marketing of the 21st century as the sustainable marketing, since it includes concepts such as green but comprehensive marketing (Belz, 2006). As the evidence shows, companies comply with sustainability when this concept enters the employee discussion and accepted by

them (Jones *et al.*, 2008). Anyhow, the problem is that in line with achieving the sustainable development and realizing the ideals of this paradigm how is the position of the society and industry (i.e., the addressees of the paradigm) and why should we expect the industries and its peripheral communities to achieve the sustainability (Mahdiju, 2005). Regarding the fact that pharmaceutical industry is considered as a part of the chemical industry operating in the field of manufacturing the medicine and the pharmaceutical products, the design, application and the measures of the pharmaceutical companies play a key role in keeping the balance between the health and welfare of the society by reducing the impact of the pharmaceutical raw materials in the environment. Therefore, the permeation of the pollutants and the consequences of environmental pollution to this industry have necessitated heeding the sustainable marketing in this industry.

The theoretical fundamentals

Sustainable marketing: In 1987, Bertland brought the concept of sustainable development into focus and clarified that the previous approaches toward economic development, production systems and consumption patterns are environmentally and socially unsustainable. During the millennium change, the goals of the millennium and the evaluative report of the millennium ecosystem demonstrated that distancing the scourge of global poverty, on a planet which its fertility capacity has been damaged due to the damage done to the natural resources and systems has confronted many challenges (Belz and Peattie, 2009). Sustainable development is a way of progress for the humans and seeks to balance the economic prosperity through social justice and preserving the environmental quality.

Sustainability means creating and continuing the balance among the prominent environmental, social, political and economic factors of life. The purpose of sustainability is to prevent from the reduction of the available resources and facilities over time. The word “sustainability” stems from “Sustenerere” in which “Sus” means from the bottom and “Tenere” means keeping alive which emphasizes the durability. Sustainability, in a broad sense, refers to the ability of the community, ecosystem or any ongoing system to continue functioning in the infinite future, without weakening as a result of the diminishment of the resources that the system is dependent on Gilman.

Both public and private companies perfect the economic and social sectors of the government. Nowadays, they are reckoned as a solution to the concerns of the government in different fields such as environment, employment, health, labor and most

importantly, sustainable development from green marketing perspective. Heeding and meeting the components of the sustainable development are regarded as the customer’s implicit needs; hence, a concept titled as “sustainable marketing” is critical for all companies in the new millennium (Jones *et al.*, 2008). Sustainable marketing is briefly included in the word “ever” in which solutions to meet our needs have been considered:

- The environment-based, understanding the planet’s environmental limits and trying to meet our needs without jeopardizing the health of ecosystems and their ability to provide services
- Viable in terms of technical feasibility and economic competitiveness
- Ethical to promote greater social justice and equality or to avoid worsening the existing pattern of justice
- Relationship-based, drags the focus of marketing from economic transactions towards the relationships management among the businesses, customers and other stakeholders (Belz and Peattie, 2010)

The following figure shows the marketing concepts perfected with sustainable marketing. Moreover, it combines the common economic and technical viewpoint with the emerging concepts of relationship marketing and societal, ethical, environmental and inter-generation viewpoints in the sustainable development program. Since, modern marketing and relationship marketing are considered as confirmed concepts it focuses on environmental marketing concepts and societal marketing.

Societal marketing aims at meeting the consumer’s needs in line with preserving the long-term interests of the society and the corporate profitability. Since, consumers want to be different from others (the consumer’s wants often differ from what is best for society), the consumer’s long-term interests and immediate satisfaction are distinguishable. The optimized limit of a desired product is presumed as the ability of the product to provide the consumers with immediate satisfaction along with the long-term benefits for them. In other words, societal marketing is a process applying the marketing principles and techniques for creating, communicating and delivering value to influence the behavior of the target audiences which aims to provide benefit to the community (public health, safety, environment) (Kotler and Armstrong, 2008, 2010). The 1980’s can be introduced as the first stage of green marketing. Besides, the term “green marketing” was presented and discussed in this period (Grant, 2008). Green or environmental marketing was created due to increased consumer’s concern for the environment (Ottman, 2011). The environment

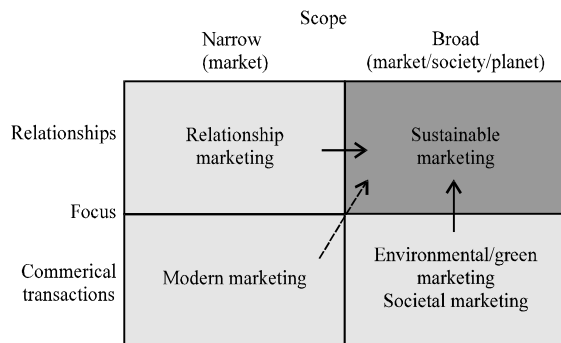


Fig. 1: Toward sustainable marketing (Belz and Peattie, 2009)

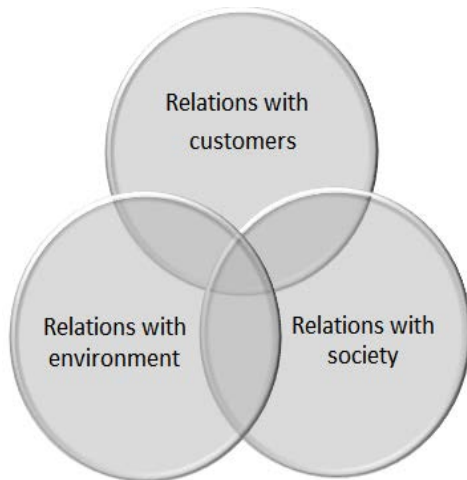


Fig. 2: The overarching theme of sustainable marketing (Belz, 2006)

preservation issue has made the consumers rethink the products they buy. Today, many consumers are inclined to pay a higher price for the products observing the environmental standards in order to protect the environment (Kotler and Armstrong, 1999) (Fig. 1 and 2). Some of the main features of sustainable marketing versus traditional marketing are as following.

Paying attention to the social-environmental issues: identifying and analyzing the environmental and social issues as the turning point of the sustainable marketing has been heeded throughout the process of sustainable marketing.

Being intersect oral: the sustainable marketing makes effort to explore ways so as to consider the environmental and social issues are in customer's needs equally.

Heeding the normative aspects: sustainable marketing is intended to create sustainable and profitable relationships with customers, environment and society. In this definition, it is clear that the social and environmental aims are taken under consideration along with the common objectives of marketing such as sales, market share, profit margins and etc.

Informational asymmetries: environmental and social products are often of reliable quality. The reliability and credibility are critical for sustainable marketing.

Transitional aspects: within the existing framework, there are a few economic incentives to try to encourage sustainability. However, many companies sow their interest and focus to achieve and develop the sustainability when the environmental and political considerations come into play.

Time: From the sustainable marketing perspective, establishing a long-term relationship with the customers, community and the environment is of a paramount importance. Therefore, long-term planning and foresight are the principles of sustainable marketing (Belz, 2006).

Internal marketing: Berry and Gronroos introduced the concept of internal marketing for the first in the 1980s. Katler asserts that organizations need to fulfill internal marketing in addition to external marketing. He defines internal marketing as following: the act of recruiting, training and motivating the employees successfully so that organizations can provide high-quality services permanently. He accentuates that internal marketing must precede the external marketing, since the commitment and promise of providing the best services to the external customers is meaningless unless the employees be fully prepared to provide proper services fitting the customers (Sanaee, 2006). In short, the evolution of the internal market in threefold form is stated as.

First stage-the employee's motivation and satisfaction: In the first stage of developing this concept, many studies as well as the pertinent literature focused on issues such as the employee's motivation and satisfaction. The main reason of such concentrations is the fact that the origin of the internal marketing concept is rooted in the quality of services and the employee's dissatisfaction can lead to undesirable fluctuations in the quality of the services. The main hypothesis existing at the heart of this approach emphasizes the notion that companies must have satisfied employees in order to have satisfied customers; since, human resources within the organizations are considered the most important market.

The second stage-customer orientation: The second stage of the evolution of internal marketing began with the studies of Gronroos. In fact, his main concern was that as line employees interact directly with customers, they are required to satisfy the customer's needs; since, the interactions between the salesclerk and the purchaser not only affect the consumer's purchase and repurchase decision but also provide the marketing opportunities for the organization. Naturally, exploiting such opportunities requires customer oriented employees. Therefore, the purpose of internal marketing is to create motivated and customer-oriented employees. Thus, in this view, it is not enough to have motivated employees merely but also their behavior must be encouraged toward customer orientation.

The third stage-the extendedness of internal marketing concept-strategy implementation and change management: The third stage of the development of the internal market has been introduced by many researchers stressing the internal marketing as a means to implement the strategies.

Vinter was one of the first researchers who introduced the potential role of internal marketing as a way of managing the employees toward the organizational goals in which the employees must receive the necessary trainings. In addition, not only should the employees perceive the value of the organizational plans but they also need to understand their role and position in implementing the programs. In fact, at this stage, the concept of internal marketing is clearly identified as an executive method. At first, this approach emerged in the works of scholars such as Philip and Tansuja. Then, Pierce and Morgan extended its application in implementing any kind of marketing strategy (Rafiq and Ahmed, 2000).

The components of internal marketing: In every organization, entire the necessary measures are taken so as to attract, retain and promote the customer's loyalty. In addition, the human resources management seeks to achieve the internal customer's commitment, job satisfaction and to attract the confidence of the administrators that it has been integrated with the internal marketing activities of the organizations. In general, the main components of the internal marketing of the organization can be explored from several different perspectives (Bansal *et al.*, 2001).

Job security: Job security is considered as one of the key elements of internal marketing. It involves equipping the

staff on the facet of acceptable job security. Any decrease in productivity or profitability may lead to transferring, retraining and changing the employees occupationally. As a way to prevent the loss of the employees, they may be reemployed in other sections. The studies demonstrate the fact that as the employee's job security increases, the satisfaction, loyalty and trust toward management increases as well.

Broad and diverse trainings: In a global developed economy, creating and developing the knowledge is deemed as one of the most important factors in achieving the competitive advantage in the global arena. Generally, training the employees is concerned with identifying and solving the problems, making necessary changes in the processes and methods of work and after-sales services. Based on the studies, it is evident that investing in education will bring out tangible results which lead to improving the attitudes and boosting up the skills in relation to the increase of the quality of services and the employee's satisfaction and loyalty.

Offering generous rewards: Offering higher salaries and premiums than the average level and the payment commensurate with performance and productivity is one of the implementation methods. According to the studies, it is manifest that the employees working in companies which offer higher salaries than the industry average are more satisfied and consequently more committed to the organization.

Sharing the information: In order to make relationships and share the information organizations must use different methods and establish the flow of information within the organization. The importance of the flow of information is to facilitate the decision-making and create a suitable mechanism for feedback.

Empowering the employees: Empowerment involves two aspects including the discretionary power and the expectations and responsibilities, on the other hand.

Reducing the class gap among the employees: By reducing the class gap, employees can easily express their ideas and this can lead to the increase of creativity, honesty, trust and job satisfaction. Two ways of reducing this gap can be stated as reducing the difference in salary levels within the organization and making organizational symbols in line with the organizational relationships on the basis of developing the culture of honesty, trust and organizational justice.

Since, internal marketing focuses on the appropriate internal marketing among the individuals at all levels in the organizations and offering the quality services to the customers is one of the concerns of the new millennium, internal marketing can be regarded as one of the critical approaches directing the employees toward the service orientation (Shafii, 2014).

The review of literature: Although, sustainable marketing, unlike other areas of management was less emphasized till the beginning of the 21st century this issue is, today, especially considered and has attracted many theories in the field of researching. Martin Belz considers the 21st century marketing as sustainable marketing, since it involves concepts such as green marketing but more comprehensively. In spite of the fact that the concept of sustainability was noted in the 13th century for the first time, it has been mostly used in the environmental literature from 70s onwards.

Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995) are one of the first scholars who explained the concept of sustainable marketing which led to combining the sustainable development with the governmental measures. Since, traditional marketing mainly takes into account the constant increase in consumption, the sustainable marketing goal is to promote the sustainable consumer behavior and offer the appropriate products with the aim of economic and environmental sustainability. However, the social dimension of sustainability is completely omitted.

Van Dam and Apeldoorn (1996) associate the sustainable marketing with the environment and even combine it with the environmental and green marketing. Besides, they consider it as a subcategory of the environmental marketing with the aim of promoting the sustainable economic development. In contrast, Ottman (2011) apply the “environmental marketing” and “green marketing” but understanding the environmental and social issues are complex.

Rosell and Moisander (2007) in their research titled as “The Ethical Dimensions of Sustainable Marketing: From Consumer Perspective”, presented a better understanding of sustainability and social responsibility in business performance and dealt with describing the common approaches related to the environmental ethics and social responsibility. Moreover, they expressed the three different approaches to the environmental and surveillance ethics that are consequentialism, conscientiousness and moral virtue. In this study, the social roles and responsibilities that the different

functions of market play in each approach were analyzed. Reutlinger (2012) explores the importance of sustainable marketing in four Finnish Swedish and German companies which were willing to cooperate through interviewing. The results showed that although the operations of none of these companies are not called sustainable marketing, these companies’ products are so compatible with the contents and the activities of sustainable marketing. Furthermore, both social and environmental aspect of the sustainable marketing are regarded as a part of the companies’ operations.

Hosseini *et al.* (2014) conceptualized the model of realizing the sustainable marketing in the automotive industry of Iran. Also, they designed the model of realizing the sustainable marketing through some of the qualitative methodological tools including questionnaires and in-depth interviews with the experts who are familiar with the issue. Their results showed that internal marketing, integrated cultural marketing, societal marketing, innovative marketing, pure marketing, strategy-based marketing, green marketing, ethics-oriented marketing and altruistic marketing are the marketing models affecting the realization of sustainable marketing in the automotive industry of Iran.

The literature review shows that much research has been carried out in internal marketing. For example, Gummesson (1991), Gronroos (2000) and Foreman and Money (1995) introduced relationship, education, training information, motivation and development of education or training the staff, recruitment, remuneration, development and providing insight as the key elements mixed with internal marketing.

Conceptual model and hypotheses:

- H₁: internal marketing makes an impact on green marketing
- H₂: internal marketing makes an impact on social marketing
- H₃: internal marketing makes an impact on sustainable marketing
- H₄: green marketing makes an impact on sustainable marketing
- H₅: social marketing makes an impact on sustainable marketing
- H₆: internal marketing makes an impact on sustainable marketing through green marketing
- H₇: internal marketing makes an impact on sustainable marketing through societal marketing (Fig. 3)

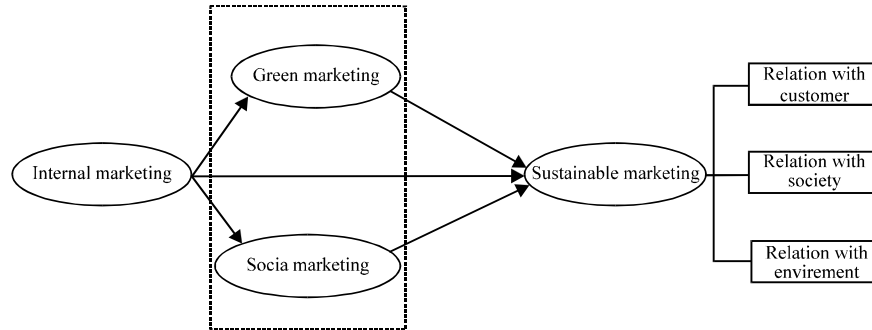


Fig. 3: The sustainable marketing model derived from Hosseini *et al.* (2014)

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Regarding the fact that we investigate the relationship among the factors, this research is applicable and descriptive-causal based on the result and aim, respectively. The Statistical universe of the research includes the employees of the administrative, sales and marketing units of the pharmaceutical companies in Lorestan province, out of which 59 individuals were selected, according to Morgan table, by the means of the stratified random sampling. At last, 55 questionnaires were returned and analyzed.

The main instrument of the research is questionnaire in which Likert 5-point scale was used. In order to ensure the validity of the assessment tools, the questionnaires were analyzed by the scholars and the experts of the pharmaceutical companies. In order to calculate the convergent validity, Fornell and Larcker proposed using the standard AVE. In the minimum AVE equaling 0.5, the indices are of a plausible validity. This means that a hidden variable can explain more than half of its indices (the obvious variables). Since, the AVE index is 0.5 for the whole research variables, the convergent validity of the constructs of the model is approved.

The validity of the tools unravels their reliability and compatibility in measuring a concept for the assessment of “the goodness-of-fit”. Three main methods used to assess the scale include the testing-the retest, the alternative (similar) forms methods and internal consistency method. Cronbach’s alpha is the most important indicator of the internal consistency. Cronbach’s alpha, correlation coefficients among various combinations are premised as two halves that indicate to what an extent the testing questions measure a univalent characteristic (Table 1).

Table 1: Validation research

Variables	No. of samples	No. of questions	Cronbach’s alpha	AVE	Composite reliability	R ²
Internal marketing	55	1-7	0.815	0.505	0.869	0.546
Green marketing	55	8-11	0.864	0.710	0.907	0.579
Social marketing	55	12-19	0.907	0.620	0.929	0.636
Sustainable marketing	55	20-28	0.909	0.549	0.911	0.696

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Table 2 and 3 concerning the demographic variables, the largest population the statistical sample (47.3%) ranges from 30-40 years old. The highest frequency refers to the bachelor's degree which makes up 58.2% of the sample frequency. In terms of the work experience, the majority of the statistical universe (43.6%) refers to a <5 year experience. Also, the male respondents constitute 67.3% of the sample and the rest are the female. In terms of income, the highest percentage (47.3%) involves the individuals with incomes between 200 and 350 dollars.

In Fig. 4, t-statistic value of the variables has been reported. The investigation of the associations as well as the conceptual model indicate that the research hypotheses are directional and of the same amplitude. In single amplitude hypotheses, the condition of confirming a hypothesis is that the t-statistic value needs to be >1.96 and <-1.96. According to the t-statistic value of 13.627 and 16.870 in the first and second hypotheses, the impact of internal marketing upon green marketing and societal marketing is approved. Besides, the t-statistic for the fourth hypothesis concerning the effects of green marketing on sustainable marketing was obtained 2.962 showing the significance and confirmation of the hypothesis in 95% level. Concerning the third and the fifth hypotheses with the t-statistic values of 1.308 and 1.443, it can be said that internal marketing and societal marketing do not make a significant impact on

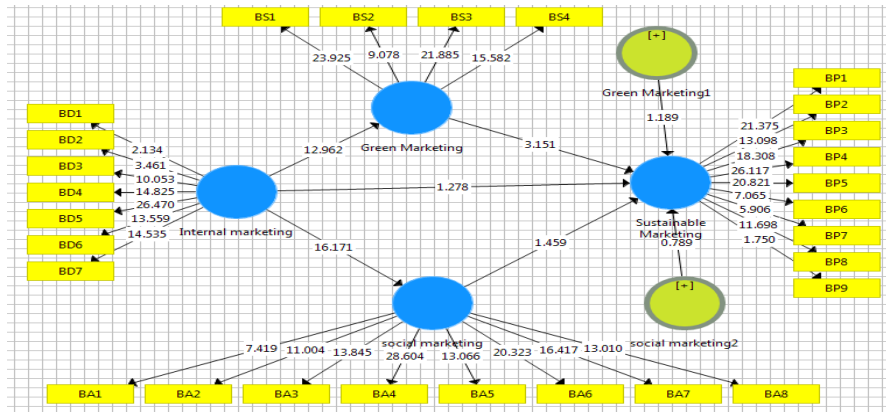


Fig. 4: The significance factor of T

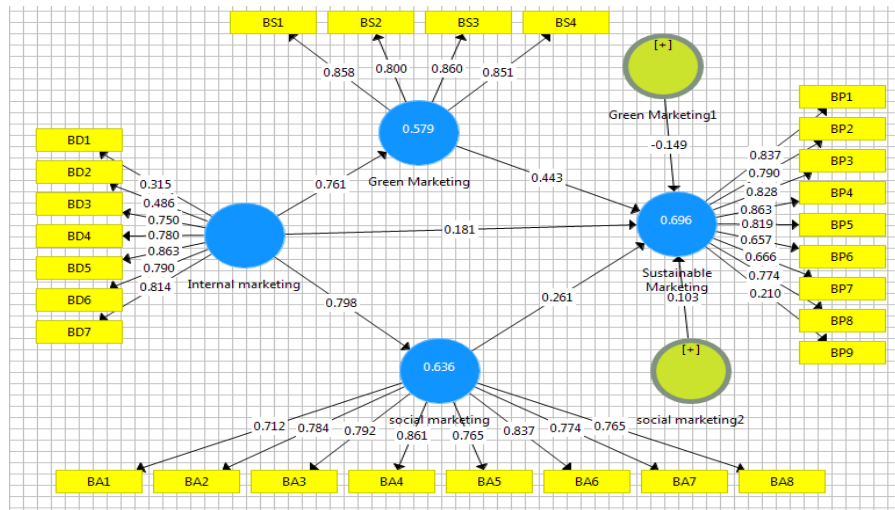


Fig. 5: The path coefficients along with the goodness of fit index (AVE)

sustainable marketing. Hence, the 3rd and 5th hypotheses are rejected. Respecting the 6 and 7th hypothesis, the t-statistic values of 1.090 and 0.717 show that internal marketing does not make an impact on sustainable marketing through green marketing and societal marketing; therefore, so the 6 and 7th hypotheses of the research are disappointed.

The numbers determined in Fig. 5 show the path coefficients representing the strength of the latent relationship between the two variables. The positive path coefficients indicate positive effects (direct relationship between two variables) of one variable on another variable; whereas, the negative sign indicates the negative impacts (inverse relationship) of one variable on another variable. The Standardized path coefficient between internal marketing and green marketing demonstrate that 76% of the green marketing changes are

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of the sample

Traits/Options	Frequency	Cumulative frequency
Age years		
Under 30	18	18
Between 30 and 40	26	44
Between 41 and 50	10	54
Over 50	1	55
Education		
Diploma	2	2
Associate degree	6	8
Bs	32	40
MA and PhD	15	55
job experience (years)		
<5	24	24
Between 5 and 10	19	43
>10	12	55
Gender		
Male	37	37
Female	18	55
Income		
Between 175-200	12	12
Between 201 to \$375	26	38
>\$375	17	55

impacted by internal marketing. On the other hand, the standardized coefficient between internal marketing and societal marketing suggest that 79% of the societal marketing changes are influenced by internal marketing. Concerning the impact of green marketing on sustainable marketing, the path coefficient equals 0.443 illustrating that 44% of the sustainable changes are impacted by green marketing. Other paths coefficients pertain to the rejected research hypotheses.

CONCLUSION

Today, the number of companies that recognize the importance of sustainability and its presence in their market strategy as an integral mandatory component is extremely increasing. This implies that with the advent of sustainability, the new millennium marketing has changed and involved greater expectations. According to these developments, the equation structure has mutated and the marketing destiny and sustainability have been linked to each other. This linkage is so strong that in some researcher's viewpoint, sustainability is one of the key elements of today's marketing. Besides, it can be concluded that internal marketing can start any change in today's organizational marketing system and obtaining the competitive advantage without the capable service-based employees (human capital) is unfeasible. As a result organizations must focus their efforts on developing and reinforcing a sort of organizational culture that cares for the employee satisfaction.

In this research, the impact of internal marketing on green marketing and societal marketing was confirmed (H_1 and H_2). This impact proves that the realization of a concept as green marketing and societal marketing in the pharmaceutical companies of Lorestan, heavily depends on the human resource's and manager's inclination. Provided that the concept is institutionalized among the human resources and within the organizational relationships, realizing this concept is feasible in this industry. The results of the present study are consistent with the findings by Shafii (2014). The confirmation of the green marketing impact on sustainable marketing (H_4) demonstrates that green marketing model needs not to be considered separate from the sustainability marketing concept because of its structures and dimensions. To put it simply, green marketing is strictly residing at the heart of sustainable marketing. The results of this research hypothesis are consistent with the results by Babin and Nicholson (2011) and Shafii (2008). Contrary to the research carried out by Shafii (2014) in which the impact of green marketing on sustainable marketing was not verified, this relationship was confirmed at the pharmaceutical companies of Lorestan, Iran.

The impact of internal marketing on sustainable marketing (H_3) whether directly or through the intermediary variables of green and societal marketing-on sustainable marketing was not confirmed (H_6 , H_7). This hypothesis is in line with the study by Shafii (2014) and inconsistent with the results of the study by Jones *et al.* (2008), Fry and Polonsky (2004) indicating the relationship between internal marketing and sustainable marketing. However, there is no direct or indirect significant relationship between the internal and sustainable marketing in the pharmaceutical companies of Lorestan.

In addition, the rejection of the impact of societal marketing on sustainable marketing (H_5) may be due to the lack of institutionalized societal marketing thinking in the studied companies or cultural issues of the organizations that are able to affect the attitude toward societal marketing.

According to the results and the aforementioned literature, pharmaceutical companies (as their social responsibility) must make attempts in addition to the therapeutic properties to increase the effectiveness of other features (to help the environment, reduce pollution, concern for other people and future generations) on buying the organic products increase. Since, the individual's awareness and sense of responsibility toward these issues is useful both for the environment and the profitability of the company. It is also recommended that environment-caring behaviors need to be created and improved in the companies so that they care more about the environmental and human factors in manufacturing their products. Issues related to the preparation, administration, distribution and consumption of drugs are considered as important factors in health, safety, economy and sustainable development in the country, many of which are rooted in the culture of medication. Planning and policy making by the drug and medicine authorities in order to reform the drug consumption structure, would difficult or even in vain without recognizing this culture and the factors influencing. Achieving and realizing the sustainable marketing, in addition to the producers, requires the participation of other official institutions. Thus, other institutions are suggested to get involved in the process and the realization of the sustainable marketing needs to be followed by their contribution. In this regard, the explicit recommendations is setting up and developing the institutions and associations supporting the society and environment and granting the sustainability awards to the companies implementing this concept in their businesses can accelerate developing this concept.

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