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THE IMPACT OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION ON BRAND VALUE CO-CREATION IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

The hotel industry, as one of the most important segments of the tourism sector, requires effective management of relationships with external and internal stakeholders. In this context, managers are constantly looking for new tools that can help them effectively develop relationships with employees and strengthen the brand value of organizations. High-quality employee relations bring a number of long-term benefits. In addition to increasing retention and loyalty to the organization, employees with positive relationships with superiors often act as ambassadors for the company in their community, helping to build the organization's brand and market positioning. Previous studies suggest that effective management of public relations, especially through internal and external communication, can significantly improve the image of tourism organizations. Previous research has also confirmed the importance of co-creation of value as an effective tool in the process of brand development. In this study, conducted in hotel organizations in Split-Dalmatia County in 2024, the research question focused on the relationship between satisfaction with internal communication and co-creation of brand value among employees in the hotel industry. The results show that satisfaction with internal communication is a significant and relevant factor in predicting employee engagement in co-creation of brand equity. The research highlights the importance of improving internal communication strategies and developing management practices, including the prevention of gossip within the organization, which was rated as the most critical point of satisfaction with internal communication.

Keywords: *employee satisfaction, internal communication, hotel industry, co-creation, brand value*

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism remains one of the most promising economic activities, as many authors predicted several decades ago (Holjevac, 2003). According to UNWTO (2024), the pandemic seriously threatened the tourism market, causing a loss of 2.7 billion international arrivals from 2020 to 2022. Revised data for 2023 (UNWTO, 2024) show that revenues from international tourism currently reach USD 1.8 trillion, almost as much as in the pre-pandemic period, testifying to the industry's rapid recovery. Although the COVID-19 pandemic caused significant losses in the tourism sector, available data show that it is an economic activity that experienced strong growth in the pre-pandemic period (Šimundić & Kuliš, 2016), and recovery and positive trends have continued after its end. As an industry that constantly attracts new investors and where competition grows daily, the importance of creating a quality brand for companies is clear. A brand in the hotel industry is not just a company's logo or slogan; it forms the basis of identity, the perception of quality, and the emotional bond that develops among guests who use hotel services. Managers in the hospitality industry use numerous tools to effectively manage organizations, and one of the most important is public relations management (Aikins & Adu-Oppong, 2015). As reported by Sawir *et al.* (2024), public relations (PR) is an important tool for management development and the creation of effective tourism policies. PR plays a key role in establishing and facilitating communication between different stakeholders, including local communities, tourists, and policymakers, ensuring the smooth uptake and implementation of tourism policies. Santoso and Negoro (2019) emphasize that PR is crucial for building and maintaining a destination's image and strengthening its attractiveness and competitiveness. It is also a tool that encourages stakeholder engagement and community participation in tourism development, leading to more inclusive and equitable outcomes. As Jakovljević (2012) states, public relations in tourism enable two-way communication between tourism providers and their potential guests, which helps create a positive image of destinations and attract visitors. This strategy helps build and maintain good public relations and promote tourism destinations through effective dialogue and interaction. Internal communication encompasses all processes that take place within an organization and enable the smooth functioning of operations and connections between employees (Gray & Laidlaw, 2002). Stronger connections between employees can increase the sense of belonging to the organization and directly influence the development of its competitive advantage (Gomes *et al.*, 2011). When analyzing the hotel segment specifically, Tomić (2016) emphasizes that the key role of public relations is to build trust and understanding of the hotel and the environment in which it operates. Internal communication is defined as a very important element of public relations, as it involves the inclusion of information about internal factors. These factors include information about the direction of the organization's management, the performance of individual departments, and the organization's profit targets, as well as external factors that influence its work, such as the state of the competition or changes in the market. Robbins and Judge (2007) note that the success of effective organizational communication lies not only in communication with the external public but also with the internal public. In these organizations, employees are recognized as the most important

internal stakeholders. In this sense, internal communication is increasingly emphasized as a key component of modern public relations management, with a focus on its strategic potential to strengthen organizational cohesion and employee engagement (Zerfass *et al.*, 2014). The internal public includes all internal actors involved in the functioning of the organization, including employees, management, part-time staff, interns, and other relevant participants in organizational processes. The field of internal communication management is an integral part of work that focuses mainly on the development of human resources and HR departments in organizations. Since PR professionals in organizations deal with internal communication on a daily basis (Cardwell *et al.*, 2017), they are aware of how actively it influences numerous other segments of public relations and marketing in general. Managing internal communication involves ensuring the proper dissemination of information within the organization and making sure that all employees are well informed, motivated, and engaged. In addition, good management of internal communication helps employees better understand the organization's values and goals. In this way, employees become more involved in shaping the brand and take on the role of ambassadors for the organization, representing it with dignity to the outside world and to the public.

In the modern communications environment, both public relations and the concept of co-creation are based on two-way communication as a basic prerequisite for successful management. In public relations, two-way communication is considered a professional practice as it enables information sharing, mutual understanding and alignment between the organization and its stakeholders. Similarly, co-creation requires the active participation of stakeholders in the development of value, products, services, or experiences. At the heart of co-creation is a partnership between the organization and its stakeholders that can only be achieved through open and two-way communication. Although public relations and co-creation differ in their immediate goals and operational frameworks, they share a need for active dialogue and mutual respect for perspectives. Such an approach not only contributes to greater public trust and loyalty but also enables the building of sustainable relationships based on mutual dialogue, transparency, and co-creation of value. Based on the assumption that two-way communication is important, this paper analyzes satisfaction with internal communication and its relationship with co-creation of brand value from the perspective of employees, who are considered important internal stakeholders in the process of creating corporate value.

2. LITERATURE OVERVIEW

Today's business models are increasingly based on concepts that involve the active participation of consumers in the process of creating services. Such an approach offers numerous advantages: on the one hand, the service is highly personalized and adapted to the individual needs of the consumer; on the other hand, consumers are emotionally involved in the service creation process and develop a stronger bond with the organization. The theoretical basis for this approach is provided by the service-dominant logic developed by Vargo and Lusch (2004), which views consumers not exclusively as passive recipients of services but as creators and co-

creators of value. According to Fuller (2010), co-creation is an innovative marketing strategy that combines organizational skills and consumer participation with the aim of improving products, services, and user experiences. It is a collaborative process between consumers and service providers that takes place at different stages of service development and is based on innovation. One of the main advantages of this approach is the active involvement of consumers, who may otherwise be dissatisfied with the finished service. To prevent such dissatisfaction, they are involved early in the service development process, which increases the overall quality of the customer experience. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) emphasize that co-creation is a shared process of value creation in which the consumer is given the opportunity to adapt the service to their own needs and actively participate in identifying and solving problems that arise during use. Such an approach creates a dynamic, dialogue-based environment in which new experiences are generated through open communication between the user and the organization.

Most existing research focuses on the role of consumers as active participants in the co-creation process, but this study raises the question of employees' roles in that process. Employees, especially those in direct contact with users, are important intermediaries in service delivery and have a significant impact on how the quality of that service is perceived. For example, reception staff, housekeepers, porters, drivers, and catering staff shape the user experience through their behavior and approach, contributing to the creation of added value. Previous studies have analyzed the importance of employees in adding value and integrating the service provided by an organization. According to Plé (2016), it is extremely important for employees to develop a strong sense of belonging to the organization, i.e., to identify with it on both a personal and professional level. One of the most effective ways to encourage this sense of identification is to involve employees in co-creating the brand value of the organization in which they work. Successful internal branding strengthens employees' identification with the organization, ultimately leading to higher levels of engagement, loyalty, and commitment to the brand (Lee *et al.*, 2014).

Previous research has demonstrated the importance and role of employees in shaping the perception of a particular brand in the hospitality industry. According to authors Xiong and King (2019), employees act as ambassadors who actively participate in positioning the organization image in the minds of consumers. Chung and Byrom (2021) state that the strongest brands are precisely those that have involved various stakeholders in the value co-creation process, including their own employees. In the context of the tourism industry, numerous studies confirm the positive impact of consumer involvement in brand value co-creation processes (Chathoth *et al.* 2013; Carvalho & Alves, 2023; Nangpiire *et al.*, 2022). There is a growing body of research that points to the importance of involving employees in these processes (Van Nguyen *et al.*, 2021; Bezova & Azara, 2021). As tourism is one of the activities in which consumers are actively involved in the creation of a service, co-creation plays a key role in the design of the final user experience (Grisseemann & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012). Therefore, an important question arises: as the link between value co-creation of value and consumer engagement in the interaction with the organization has been proven (Oyner & Korelin,

2016), the question arises to what extent employees – as a direct point of contact between the hotel organization and consumers – are involved in the co-creation of brand value co-creation and what impact this involvement has on the overall perception of the brand in the tourism sector. As communication is an important element of public relations and satisfaction with internal communication may be reflected in a number of other elements of the organization, one may ask whether there is a relationship between employee co-creation of brand value and satisfaction with communication within the hotel organization? As noted by Ravazzani & Hazée (2022) and Boukis & Kabadayi (2020), communication by external stakeholders is recognised as an important tool which can contribute significantly to the promotion of organizational co-creation. However, as some authors caution (Merrilees *et al.*, 2017; Boukis & Kabadayi, 2020), it is important to understand how communication through internal stakeholders works, i.e. how internal stakeholder co-creation can be linked to internal communication. Islam *et al.* (2022) go a step further and state that consumer involvement in the co-creation of value is a key strategy to improve organizational performance and create a strategic advantage. According to recent research, the key to an organization's success is employee engagement (Shettigar & Shiva Shankar, 2020). Active participation or engagement has become one of the most popular concepts in various social sciences, including psychology and organizational behavior.

Based on a review of previous literature, this study raises the question of the extent to which employees are involved in co-creating brand value within the organization. Employee engagement is increasingly associated with the concept of co-creation (Loureiro *et al.*, 2020), as co-creation implies the creation of value through the active collaboration of different stakeholders, including employees (Ertz, 2024). Based on these theoretical premises, the following research question is formulated and empirically tested in this paper:

RQ: *Is there a relationship between satisfaction with internal communication and employee involvement in brand value co-creation in hotel organizations?*

In addition to the main research question, this paper also considers several additional research questions that contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between internal communication and brand value co-creation in the hotel sector. Specifically, the study aims to answer the following:

- Can employee participation in value co-creation processes be considered a strategic organizational practice that contributes to improving organizational efficiency and creating competitive advantage?
- Do employees of hotel organizations actively participate in brand value co-creation processes?
- To what extent are employees in the hotel industry satisfied with internal communication in their organization?
- Which aspects of internal communication do employees perceive as the most effective, and which elements cause the greatest dissatisfaction?

- Is there a statistically significant correlation between satisfaction with internal communication and the level of employee involvement in co-creating brand equity in a hotel organization?

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted from early May to late July 2024 using an online questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent by e-mail to the official addresses of all hotels registered in Split-Dalmatia County, as listed in the database of the Split-Dalmatia County Tourist Board website. Of the 292 hotels in the database, 53 hotel companies responded (response rate: 18.15%). The survey used a questionnaire consisting of three thematic parts. The first part addressed the demographic characteristics of the respondents, while the other two parts were based on standardized and previously validated questionnaires. The demographic section included gender and age of respondents, the categorization of the hotel company in which they were employed, and their duration of employment in the hotel industry. The second part measured respondents' satisfaction with internal communication (Tkalac Verčić *et al.* 2007). The third part measured brand equity co-creation among employees in the hotel industry (Hsieh & Chang, 2016). The questionnaire contained 45 questions, and respondents were offered a 7-point Likert scale (where 1 means *I strongly disagree* and 7 means *I strongly agree*). The choice of scale was based on empirical and methodological recommendations from previous research (Symonds, 1924; Preston & Colman, 2000), which identified this format as the most suitable for reliable and valid measurement of respondents' attitudes. To gain deeper insight into specific aspects of satisfaction with internal communication, the questionnaire included eight subscales: satisfaction with company information, satisfaction with communication climate, satisfaction with media quality, satisfaction with communication in meetings, satisfaction with feedback, satisfaction with communication with superiors, satisfaction with horizontal communication, and satisfaction with informal communication.

The IBM SPSS statistical package, version 27, was used to analyze the collected data. In the first phase, descriptive statistics were applied to determine the arithmetic mean, standard deviations, and the minimum and maximum values of the subscales used in the study. To examine the relationship between satisfaction with internal communication and employees' co-creation of brand value, a correlation analysis was conducted using the Pearson correlation coefficient. When interpreting the results, the theoretical value of the correlation coefficient was considered, with +1 indicating a perfect positive relationship and -1 a perfect negative relationship. A p-value of < 0.05 was considered statistically significant (Rozga, 2006). Further analysis included regression analysis to examine the relationship between the variables under study. In addition, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to test the statistical significance of the model, i.e., to determine whether satisfaction with internal communication explained a significant portion of the variance in perceptions of employee co-creation.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

At the beginning of the data processing, the internal consistency of the scale was analyzed to determine how closely the individual variables within the scale were related to each other. In the study, all subscales demonstrated strong internal consistency, ranging from 0.93 (Satisfaction with communication with superiors) to 0.97 (Satisfaction with feedback), which is in line with Cortina's (1993) recommendations.

Of the total number of respondents, 65.38% were female and 34.62% were male. Regarding hotel categorization, 58.49% of respondents were from four-star hotels, 28.30% from three-star hotels, 9.43% from five-star hotels, and only 3.77% from two-star hotels. Most hotels (43.40%) have 1–49 employees, followed by 39.62% with 50–99 employees, 11.32% with 100–149 employees, and only 5.66% with 150 or more employees. In terms of respondents' work experience, the largest group (30.19%) reported 11–20 years, followed by (22.64%) with 21–30 years, 24.53% with 1–5 years, 18.87% with 6–10 years, and 3.77% with less than 1 year of work experience.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Category	Variable	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	65.38%
	Male	34.62%
Hotel categorization	Two-star hotel	3.77%
	Three-star hotel	28.30%
	Four-star hotel	58.49%
	Five-star hotel	9.43%
Number of employees	1–49 employees	43.40%
	50–99 employees	39.62%
	100–149 employees	11.32%
	150 or more employees	5.66%
Work experience	Less than 1 year	3.77%
	1–5 years	24.53%
	6–10 years	18.87%
	11–20 years	30.19%
	21–30 years	22.64%

Source: Authors

Analyzing the mean scores of responses related to brand value co-creation shows that, according to the data in Table 2, the highest mean score (5.54) was recorded for the variable concerning employee persistence in co-creation activities: *"I always persist in hotel brand value co-creation at my job, even when things are not going well."* The lowest-rated variable (mean = 4.54) was: *"When working on tasks that involve hotel brand value co-creation with my employer, I am fully focused on the task and experience a high level of engagement."*

Table 2. Attitudes towards participation in co-creation activities

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Err. of Mean Value	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max.
	Valid					
I find it challenging to create the hotel brand value.	53	5.02	0.19	1.37	1	7
I am inspired by my task of hotel brand value co-creating.	53	5.17	0.19	1.38	1	7
I am proud of the things I do to brand value co-creation in the hotel organization.	53	5.28	0.19	1.43	1	7
At my work I always persevere, even when things do not go well.	53	5.54	0.19	1.42	1	7
I can continue to work on hotel brand value co-creation tasks for a long time.	53	5.28	0.19	1.41	1	7
I am very resilient, mentally, when working on hotel brand value co-creation tasks.	53	5.09	0.21	1.49	1	7
When working on hotel brand value co-creation tasks, I forget everything else around me.	53	4.54	0.21	1.55	1	7
Time flies when I am working on hotel brand value tasks.	53	5.26	0.21	1.53	1	7
I get carried away when I work on hotel brand value co-creation tasks.	53	5.02	0.22	1.59	1	7
BRAND VALUE CO-CREATION ACTIVITIES		5.14				

Source: Authors

The following is a descriptive analysis of all subscales that form the components of satisfaction with internal communication. The results show that respondents are generally satisfied with the level of information they receive within their organization. They are least satisfied with the information available on turnover, profits, and the financial success of the organization (mean = 4.40), while the highest mean response score was for the variable related to the availability of information about work regulations.

Table 3. Satisfaction with corporate information

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Err. of Mean Value	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max.
	Valid					
Information about the work regulations	53	4.87	0.22	1.63	1	7
Information about turnover, profit, and financial success of the organization	52	4.40	0.26	1.85	1	7
Information about changes in the organization	52	4.81	0.21	1.49	1	7
Information about legal regulations that affect my organization's operations	52	4.85	0.23	1.65	1	7
SATISFACTION WITH CORPORATE INFORMATION		4.74				

Source: Authors

The highest standard deviation was related to the evaluation of information on the organization's turnover, profit, and financial performance (SD = 1.85), indicating that employees' satisfaction with financial information varies greatly. Conversely, the lowest standard deviation was found in the evaluation of information about work regulations (SD = 1.63). A lower deviation indicates a higher level of agreement among employees regarding work regulations. In other words, employees were more consistent in their assessment of how well informed they are about work rules, suggesting less variability in satisfaction with this information.

When analyzing the subscale assessing satisfaction with the communication climate, the variable with the highest mean response value was "Communication in the organization helps me feel like an important part of it", while the lowest-rated variable was "Communication in the organization promotes organizational values."

Table 4. Satisfaction with the communication climate

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Err. of Mean Value	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max.
	Valid					
Communication in the organization helps me feel like an important part of it.	53	5.38	0.22	1.58	1	7
Communication in the organization helps me identify with it.	53	5.24	0.22	1.62	1	7
Communication in the organization promotes organizational values.	53	5.17	0.24	1.76	1	7
Communication in the organization encourages the achievement of organizational goals.	53	5.36	0.23	1.64	1	7
SATISFACTION WITH THE COMMUNICATION CLIMATE		5.29				

Source: Authors

Looking at the descriptive statistics for satisfaction with the quality of communication media within the organization, mean values were slightly lower than those for the previous subscales. The lowest-rated variable was related to the effectiveness of communication media (written messages, intranet, verbal communication, etc.). Conversely, employees reported the highest satisfaction with the way others select communication channels for contact.

Table 5. Satisfaction with media quality

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Err. of Mean Value	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max.
	Valid					
Communication media (written notice, intranet, oral communication, etc.)	53	4.55	0.24	1.75	1	7
Possibility of communication via modern media	53	4.72	0.27	1.94	1	7
Quality of communication via modern media	53	4.74	0.25	1.81	1	7
Method chosen by others to communicate with respondents	53	4.98	0.21	1.52	1	7
SATISFACTION WITH MEDIA QUALITY		4.75				

Source: Authors

The greatest variability was observed for the variable satisfaction with the possibility of communication via modern media (SD = 1.94). This indicates that employees' attitudes toward this form of communication vary widely, reflecting a broad spectrum of experiences and perceptions regarding modern communication tools. Conversely, the lowest variability was found in satisfaction with the way others select communication channels (SD = 1.53), suggesting a higher degree of agreement among respondents on this variable. The analysis of satisfaction with communication in meetings showed slightly lower mean scores. The lowest-rated was "Organization of meetings in which respondents participate," while the highest-rated was "Receiving information important for doing work on time."

Table 6. Satisfaction with communication in meetings

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Err. of Mean Value	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max.
	Valid					
Organization of meetings in which respondents participate	53	4.36	0.25	1.79	1	7
Usefulness of information received in meetings	52	4.46	0.23	1.66	1	7
Receiving information important for performing work on time	53	4.74	0.21	1.54	2	7
Satisfaction with the duration of the meeting	53	4.43	0.23	1.66	1	7
SATISFACTION WITH COMMUNICATION IN MEETINGS		4.51				

Source: Authors

Within the feedback subscale, the variable “Information about the level of appreciation of respondents’ work within the organization” received the lowest rating. Conversely, the highest average score ($M = 4.55$) was recorded for “Satisfaction with information about the consequences of poorly performed work.”

Table 7. Satisfaction with feedback

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Err. of Mean Value	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max.
	Valid					
Information about the consequences of low performance	53	4.55	0.21	1.48	1	7
Information about the level of respondent’s contribution to overall success	53	4.28	0.25	1.84	1	7
Information about the level of appreciation of respondent’s work within the organization	53	4.13	0.25	1.85	1	7
Feedback on respondent’s performance	53	4.34	0.26	1.89	1	7
SATISFACTION WITH FEEDBACK		4.33				

Source: Authors

The greatest variability in responses was observed in satisfaction with feedback on work performance ($SD = 1.89$). Communication with supervisor was rated as a subscale with relatively higher mean scores. Within this subscale, the highest mean was recorded for the variable “Supervisor’s awareness of the problems that respondents encounter at work,” while the lowest mean was found for “Supervisor’s level of understanding of respondents’ problems.”

Table 8. Satisfaction with communication with superiors

Statement	N		Mean	Std. Err. of Mean Value	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max.
Level of supervisor’s understanding of respondent’s problems	53	0	4.53	0.24	1.75	1	7
Recognition of respondent’s capabilities by the immediate supervisor	53	0	5.11	0.24	1.77	1	7
SATISFACTION WITH COMMUNICATION WITH SUPERIORS			4.96				

Source: Authors

When analyzing satisfaction with horizontal communication, the lowest-rated variable was colleagues’ willingness to accept criticism, while the highest-rated variable was the success of communication with team members.

Table 9. Satisfaction with horizontal communication

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Err. of Mean Value	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max.
	Valid					
Availability of colleagues	53	5.45	0.19	1.42	2	7
Successful communication with team members	53	5.92	0.16	1.14	2	7
Results of communication with colleagues	53	5.55	0.17	1.26	2	7
Willingness of colleagues to receive criticism	53	4.68	0.20	1.46	2	7
SATISFACTION WITH HORIZONTAL COMMUNICATION		5.4				

Source: Authors

When analyzing satisfaction with informal communication, respondents gave the lowest ratings to the variable concerning the amount of gossip in the organization and the highest ratings to the usefulness of information communicated informally.

Table 10. Satisfaction with informal communication

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Err. of Mean Value	Std. Deviation	Min.	Max.
	Valid					
Number of decisions made on the basis of informal communication	52	4.67	0.21	1.48	1	7
Amount of gossip in the organization	52	3.73	0.24	1.70	1	7
Amount of time spent in informal communication	51	4.53	0.19	1.42	1	7
Usefulness of information transmitted informally	52	4.83	0.19	1.35	1	7
SATISFACTION WITH INFORMAL COMMUNICATION		4.45				

Source: Authors

The lowest standard deviation (SD = 1.35) was recorded for the subscale *usefulness of informally transmitted information*, indicating a high degree of agreement among employees. The highest variability (SD = 1.70) was found for the statement regarding the extent of gossip in the organization.

As a first step in testing the research question, a correlation analysis was conducted between all subscales of employee satisfaction and the variable of shared value creation. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to assess these relationships.

Table 11. Pearson's correlation coefficient: satisfaction with aspects of internal communication and brand value co-creation activities

Correlation	Brand value co-creation activities		
	Pearson c. correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Satisfaction with corporate information	0.434**	0.001	53
Satisfaction with communication climate	0.546**	<0.001	53
Satisfaction with media quality	0.337*	0.014	53
Satisfaction with communication in meetings	0.459**	<0.001	53
Satisfaction with feedback	0.410**	0.002	53
Satisfaction with communication with superiors	0.468**	<0.001	53
Satisfaction with horizontal communication	0.21	0.131	53
Satisfaction with informal communication	0.387**	0.005	52

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Authors

The results indicate that satisfaction with company information was moderately positively correlated with brand value co-creation activities among hotel employees in Split-Dalmatia County (the statistical significance of this correlation is $p < 0.01$, which means that the correlation is significant). Similarly, satisfaction with the communication climate showed a significant and moderately positive correlation with co-creation. Satisfaction with media quality demonstrated a weak but statistically significant correlation with brand value co-creation. Satisfaction with communication in meetings showed a positive correlation between satisfaction with communication in meetings and brand value co-creation activity. The statistical significance ($p < 0.001$) confirms the high reliability of this correlation. In terms of satisfaction with feedback, a correlation was recorded that is moderate and positive. With regard to satisfaction with communication with superiors, there is a moderate positive correlation between satisfaction with communication with superiors and value creation activity, which is highly statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Satisfaction with horizontal communication and co-creation show a weak and statistically insignificant correlation. The correlation between satisfaction with informal communication and brand value creation activities is weak but statistically significant. The data analysis shows that the subscales on satisfaction with communication climate, feedback and communication with superiors have a significant correlation with employee brand value co-creation in hotel organizations.

Analyzing the relationship between the total scores of the scale on satisfaction with internal communication and the scale on employee brand value co-creation scale revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between these two constructs.

Table 12. Pearson's correlation coefficient: brand value co-creation activities and satisfaction with internal communication

Correlation		Brand value co-creation activities	Satisfaction with internal communication
Brand value co-creation activities	Pearson Correlation	1	0.514**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<0.001
	N	53	53
Satisfaction with internal communication	Pearson Correlation	0.514**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<0.001	
	N	53	53

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Authors

In the next phase of the study, a regression analysis was used to further investigate the relationship between satisfaction with internal communication and the level of employee involvement in shared value creation activities. A moderately positive relationship was found between satisfaction with internal communication and co-creation activities ($R = 0.514$). According to the results of the analysis, satisfaction with internal communication explains approximately 26.5% of the variance in the brand's value co-creation activities ($R\text{-squared} = 0.265$), suggesting that satisfaction with internal communication has a significant impact on value co-creation activities.

Table 13. Results of linear regression analysis of the impact of satisfaction with internal communication on value co-creation activities

Model summary									
Model	R	Square R	Square R	Standard error of estimate	Statistics changes				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	0.514a	0.265	0.25	1.0510	0.265	18.357	1	51	<0.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), Satisfaction with internal communication

Source: Authors

The results of the ANOVA analysis used to analyze the relationship between the dependent variable — Co-creation of brand value and the independent variable — Satisfaction with internal communication — showed that the model using satisfaction with internal communication as a predictor of brand value co-creation activities is statistically significant ($F = 18.357, p < 0.001$ b). According to the results, satisfaction with internal communication has a significant impact on co-creation of brand value, as the model explains a significant part of the variation in the dependent variable, with a low p-value confirming that the data is statistically significant.

Table 14. ANOVA analysis of the impact of satisfaction with internal communication on brand value co-creation activities

ANOVAa						
Model		Sum of squares	df	Middle square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	20.276	1	20.276	18.357	<0.001 ^b
	Residual	56.332	51	1.105		
	Total	76.608	52			

a. Dependent Variable: Co-creation

b. Predictors: (Constant), Satisfaction with internal communication

Source: Authors

5. DISCUSSION

Co-creation is a tool used to create a link between those who provide services and those who use them. Although numerous studies focus on the co-creation of products and services with consumers, recent research (Carvalho & Alves, 2023) recommends involving employees as the main actors of value creation in co-creation processes (Chung & Byrom, 2021). Hospitality is a specific segment of tourism in which employees are not only service providers, but also determine the quality level of the service through the way they deliver and design it (Tuan *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, it is extremely important to determine how satisfied employees are with internal communication within the organization, as their level of satisfaction is difficult to separate from the way the service is delivered (Van Nguyen *et al.*, 2021). In a longitudinal study conducted by Chung and Byrom (2021), the importance of consistent brand management and internal brand co-creation with employees was analyzed using a case study approach in two five-star hotels. Their findings point to the importance of continuously involving employees in shaping brand strategy as a key factor in maintaining a strong identity. There is already research on co-creation in the hospitality industry, but it mainly focuses on different group of stakeholders—namely, the consumers or users of hotel services (González-Mansilla *et al.*, 2019). In contrast to previous research, this study investigates the relationship between satisfaction with internal communication and employee co-creation of brand value.

The research results indicate strong persistence among respondents in the processes of brand value co-creation, as the highest mean score among the statements on co-creation was recorded for the statement on continuous participation in these activities, even in situations where circumstances are unfavorable. With regard to the subscale of satisfaction with internal communication, respondents reported being most informed about work regulations in the context of company information (less so about turnover, profit, financial success, changes, or legal regulations). When looking at satisfaction with the communication climate, the highest mean value was found for the variable measuring employees' perception that communication within the organization helps them feel like an important part of it. In terms of the quality of communication media, respondents gave the highest score to the way management chooses communication channels, favoring less written communication

and communication via traditional or modern media. When measuring satisfaction with meetings, the highest value was recorded for the information employees receive in a timely manner, while the lowest value was for the variable relating to information about the consequences of poorly performed work. These findings are consistent with other studies in which satisfaction with feedback received the lowest mean values (Hošić, 2023). In communication with supervisors, the variable relating to the supervisor's awareness of the problems encountered by the respondents at work had the highest mean value. In the context of horizontal communication, the success of communication with team members was rated highest, while in the case of informal communication, the highest score was given to the usefulness of information communicated informally. The lowest mean score of satisfaction concerned gossip in horizontal communication, which is consistent with previous research (Borovec & Balgač, 2017; Vitalia, 2016). It is important to note that this variable was rated lowest not only at the subscale level but also in the research as a whole. The lowest rated subscale was the one related to satisfaction with feedback, which is also consistent with the above-mentioned research conducted with a different group of respondents—police officers (Borovec & Balgač, 2017). The highest-rated subscale was the one related to satisfaction with horizontal communication, specifically the variable on successful communication with team members, which is also in line with their research. Overall, respondents showed the highest satisfaction in the context of horizontal communication, i.e., communication with colleagues at the same level, as well as communication with superiors (vertical communication).

Increasing the quality of internal communication directly increases guest satisfaction and strengthens public relations, which is in line with previous research (Yildiz, 2015). The highest correlation with brand value co-creation was found in the subscale of satisfaction with the communication climate. After a deeper analysis of satisfaction with internal communication and employee co-creation, a regression analysis was conducted to answer the research question, which showed that satisfaction with internal communication explained approximately 26.5% of the variance in brand value co-creation activities ($R^2 = 0.265$), indicating that satisfaction with internal communication has a significant impact on co-creation activities. The ANOVA also showed that this model is statistically significant. It can therefore be concluded that the research question posed at the beginning of the study was confirmed.

6. CONCLUSION

Internal communication is an important public relations tool that controls the flow of information within an organization in both directions. As an important tool, internal communication contributes significantly to increasing employee satisfaction, which in turn impacts productivity, competitive advantage, and employee loyalty. At the same time, the concept of creating shared value is becoming increasingly important for building closer relationships with stakeholders and developing products and services tailored to consumer needs. Tourism is an extremely important industry, characterized by its resilience and dynamism, and is largely shaped by the way communication is managed in the provision of

services. Therefore, this research focussed specifically on the relationship between employee satisfaction with internal communication and co-creation in the hotel industry. The study found a positive, statistically significant correlation between the scales in most subscales, except for the one related to satisfaction with horizontal communication. Base on the results, it can be concluded that employees in hotel organizations who are satisfied with internal communication are more actively involved in the company's brand value co-creation activities. In addition, the findings show that satisfaction with internal communication is a significant and relevant factor in predicting employee engagement in co-creating brand value.

It is important to highlight certain limitations of this study, among which the sample size and the geographical limitation to one district stand out. As a guideline for future research, it is suggested that the sample be extended to other counties, which would allow for a comparative analysis of the results in relation to the different levels of tourism development in the Republic of Croatia. Furthermore, taking into account the different cultural influences of neighbouring countries on individual counties, it would be useful to investigate possible differences resulting from these specific regional contexts. It is also recommended to involve a wider range of respondents, including other internal and external stakeholders, in order to obtain a more complete picture of the research phenomenon.

The results of this study are considered relevant as they can help hotels improve their communication strategies, which could lead to greater employee engagement. The study can also provide clear implications for what specific training can be developed within organizations to increase teamwork, creativity, and organizational loyalty.

This research provides important guidelines for management structures in hotels in Split-Dalmatia County. Satisfaction with internal communication is an essential element for the successful functioning of an organization, and it forms an integral part of a comprehensive PR strategy. However, in this and previous research, the phenomenon of gossip among employees was recognized as a challenge. Previous research in various industries has shown that gossip can negatively impact satisfaction with internal communication. Therefore, it is recommended that management structures develop and implement effective strategies and tools to combat this phenomenon in order to improve the quality of internal communication and increase overall employee satisfaction in the workplace.

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UTJECAJ ZADOVOLJSTVA INTERNOM KOMUNIKACIJOM NA SUKREIRANJE VRIJEDNOSTI MARKE U HOTELSKOJ INDUSTRIJI

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SAŽETAK

Hotelska industrija, kao jedan od ključnih segmenata turističkog sektora, zahtijeva učinkovito upravljanje odnosima s vanjskim i unutarnjim dionicima. U tom kontekstu, menadžeri kontinuirano traže nove alate kojima mogu učinkovito razvijati odnose sa zaposlenicima te jačati vrijednost brenda organizacije. Kvalitetni odnosi sa zaposlenicima donose niz prednosti; osim što povećavaju povezanost i lojalnost prema organizaciji, zaposlenici s pozitivnim odnosima prema nadređenima često djeluju kao ambasadori organizacije u svojoj zajednici, čime dugoročno doprinose brendiranju i tržišnom pozicioniranju organizacije. Prethodne studije ukazuju na to da učinkovito upravljanje odnosima s javnošću, osobito putem interne i eksterne komunikacije, može značajno unaprijediti imidž turističkih organizacija. S druge strane, prethodnim istraživanjima potvrđena je i važnost sukreiranja vrijednosti kao učinkovitog alata u procesu razvoja brenda. U ovom istraživanju, provedenom 2024. godine na hotelskim organizacijama u Splitsko-dalmatinskoj županiji, postavljeno je istraživačko pitanje o postojanju povezanosti između zadovoljstva internom komunikacijom i sukreiranja vrijednosti brenda kod zaposlenika u hotelijerstvu. Rezultati istraživanja ukazuju na to da zadovoljstvo internom komunikacijom predstavlja značajan i relevantan faktor u predviđanju angažmana zaposlenika u sukreiranju vrijednosti brenda. Istraživanje ukazuje na važnost unapređenja internih komunikacijskih strategija i razvoja menadžerskih praksi, između ostalog i u smjeru prevencije ogovaranja unutar organizacije, koje je ocjenjeno kao najkritičnija stavka zadovoljstva internom komunikacijom.

Ključne riječi: zadovoljstvo, odnosi s javnošću, interna komunikacija, sukreiranje, vrijednost brenda

