Putting knowledge to work: the combined role of marketing and sales employees' knowledge and motivation to produce superior customer experiences

Peñalba-Aguirrezabalaga Carmela, Saenz Josune, Ritala Paavo, Vanhala Mika

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Carmela Peñalba-Aguirrezabalaga*
Deusto Business School, University of Deusto /
School of Business and Management, LUT University
Camino de Mundaiz 50, 20012 San Sebastián (Spain) /
Yliopistonkatu 34, 53850 Lappeenranta (Finland)
E-mail: carmela.penalba@deusto.es
Telephone: +34943326600

Josune Sáenz
Deusto Business School
University of Deusto
Camino de Mundaiz 50, 20012 San Sebastián (Spain)
Email: josune.saenz@deusto.es
Telephone: +34943326273

Paavo Ritala
School of Business and Management
LUT University
Yliopistonkatu 34, 53850 Lappeenranta (Finland)
Email: paavo.ritala@lut.fi
Telephone: +358408335852

Mika Vanhala
School of Business and Management, LUT University/
School of Management, University of Vaasa-Kokkola University Center
Chydenius
Yliopistonkatu 34, 53850 Lappeenranta (Finland)
Talonpojankatu 2B, 67701 Kokkola (Finland)
Email: mika.vanhala@lut.fi
Telephone: +358408335794

* Corresponding author

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper adopts a contextual approach to the knowledge-performance linkage by deepening into the role of marketing and sales employees' knowledge resources in the generation and delivery of superior customer experiences (CEs) and into the motivational antecedents of knowledge acquisition and development.

Design/Methodology/Approach: To gather information about the variables studied in this research, a survey was conducted among Spanish firms with at least 100 employees, resulting in a representative sample of 346 companies. Structural equation modeling (SEM) based on partial least squares (PLS) was then applied to test the hypothesized relationships.

Findings: Our results show that employees' motivation (and especially intrinsic motivation) affects CE both directly and indirectly through its influence on marketing-specific human capital. More precisely, customer knowledge and different types of marketing-related skills (creativity, targeting, problem solving, social media management, and communication skills) are the only constituents of marketing-specific human capital that significantly affect relative CE performance (i.e., performance vis-à-vis competitors), while product/service and market knowledge do not play a relevant role.

Originality: The results contribute both to the knowledge management (KM) and intellectual capital (IC) literatures by highlighting the motivational levers of human capital in the context of the marketing and sales function and the specific types of employee knowledge resources that induce superior CEs. Consequently, marketing and sales managers are provided with useful guidance to shape their human resource management policies and to establish their knowledge priorities.

Keywords: Marketing; Customer experience; Knowledge; Human capital; Employee motivation

Article classification: Research paper

1. Introduction

Recently, there have been calls for a more contextualized approach in the study of intellectual capital (IC) and firm performance (Kianto *et al.,* 2018; Peñalba-Aguirrezabalaga *et al.*, 2020) that would allow more accurate examination of the specific knowledge resources that need to be fostered in particular settings, beyond the broad categorization of such resources into human, structural, and relational capital. As a response to this call, the current study zooms into the knowledge resources relevant for marketing and sales employees (i.e., marketing-specific human capital; Peñalba-Aguirrezabalaga *et al.*, 2020) and into the role of motivation in mobilizing knowledge to produce superior customer experiences (CEs).

Executives in several industries have paid growing attention to the concept of CE in the last decade. One might even say that companies no longer compete on the quality of products and services but rather on the experience they deliver (Gorgoglione and Panniello, 2018). According to past research, CE plays a significant role in the cognitive and affective buying behavior of customers, thus acting as a key antecedent of customer loyalty (Roy, 2018). However, the study of CE as a type of performance that also deserves attention has been largely overlooked by the IC-performance literature. Customers interact with firms through myriad touch points in multiple channels and media, thereby inducing customer journeys (i.e., the path of sequential steps and interactions that a customer goes through with a product or service; Varnali, 2019) that are more complex than they used to be (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). Under these circumstances, knowledgeable employees become more relevant than even before, as it is more difficult for firms to create, manage, and control the experience and journey of each customer.

Given the involvement of marketing and sales employees in generating and delivering CEs, marketing managers must guide knowledge acquisition and development efforts in their domain, both in terms of "conscious" knowledge (e.g., knowledge about facts, characteristics, and trends) and "automatic" knowledge (i.e., skills, abilities, or know-how) (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). However, there is still a major research gap in the CE literature regarding the role of employees (and more precisely, their knowledge and skills) in providing a consistently positive CE (Harris *et al., 2000;* Lemke *et al.,* 2011; Waqas *et al.,* 2020). Consequently, marketing managers lack guidance to define their knowledge priorities and to adapt human resource management (HRM) policies and practices accordingly.

Regarding the latter (i.e., HRM policies and practices), motivation could play a critical role by boosting employee knowledge acquisition and development and by enacting other types of attitudes and behavior conducive to superior CEs. Without motivation, the ability (and knowledge) in itself is often insufficient for individuals to perform well in organizational contexts (e.g., Kim *et al.*, 2015). Past research has shown the relationship between motivation and work attitudes, such as organizational commitment (e.g., Castaing, 2006; Kim *et al.*, 2020), and between motivation and different types of behavior at work, such as organizational citizenship behavior (e.g., Kim, 2006; Barbuto and Story, 2011), innovativeness (e.g., Amabile, 1997; Ritala *et al.*, 2020), and learning (e.g., Noe *et al.*, 2010; Vanthornout *et al.*, 2014).

Accordingly, in this study, we develop hypotheses for the positive role of marketing-specific human capital (i.e., marketers' conscious or explicit knowledge regarding customers, product/services, and markets, as well as automatic knowledge or skills—namely, targeting, adaptive, problem-solving, creative, teamwork, communication, and social media management skills) on relative CE performance, as well as on the positive role of different types of motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic) on marketing-specific human capital and CE performance vis-à-vis competitors. In other words, we expect that, in addition to a direct antecedent role, motivation will influence relative CE performance by enhancing the acquisition of new knowledge and skills by marketing and sales employees.

Our research contributes to the knowledge management (KM) and IC literatures by proposing a more fine-grained approach to the study of the IC-performance linkage that considers knowledge specificities at the functional level (in this case, within the marketing and sales function), and the combined role of motivation and knowledge to produce superior performance (in this case, perceived CE performance). In practice, the results help to clarify the type of knowledge and skills that need to be privileged in recruitment and training programs within the marketing and sales function, as well as the motivational levers (i.e., intrinsic and extrinsic—i.e., identification, introjection, and external regulation; Gagné *et al.*, 2010) that best support successful performance in this domain (i.e., CE). This understanding can accordingly be used to shape HRM policies, eventually improving the way firms could generate superior CEs and satisfaction.

2. Theoretical Background
2.1. *The Role of Employees in CE*
According to Berry *et al.* (2002), offering products and services alone is insufficient: organizations must provide their customers with satisfactory experiences. Indeed, managing CE has become a top priority for marketing managers, scholars, and researchers (Klaus *et al.,* 2013; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016) due to its relevance for the competitiveness and success of firms (Waqas *et al.,* 2020; Witell *et al.,* 2020). After analyzing the major accepted definitions of the concept, Lemon and Verhoef (2016) concluded that CE is a multidimensional construct focusing on customers' cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial, and social responses to a firm's offerings during the customers' entire purchase journey. In other words, CE encompasses the total experience, including the search, purchase, consumption, and after-sales phases (Verhoef *et al*., 2009; Lemke *et al*., 2010), and it comprises the internal and subjective responses that customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company (Meyer and Schwager, 2007).

There are multiple elements by which CE is created (Verhoef *et al*., 2009). In their systematic literature review on the topic, Waqas *et al.* (2020) classified these antecedents of CE into three groups: attitudinal, firm-controlled, and context-based. The first group of drivers refers to customer psychological factors or mental states that could induce positive or negative CEs. Such factors could be rational, emotional, sensorial, physical, and spiritual (Gentile *et al*., 2007; Gorgoglione and Panniello, 2018). The second group includes elements that can be modified and controlled by the firm, such as the marketing mix, service quality, speed of service, and service personnel; and the last one refers to those variables that are not influenced by the firm nor by the customer (e.g., other customers' attitude and behavior). This study emphasizes the second group of antecedents in the process of building CE, i.e., the ones controlled by the firm. Among the array of potential enablers controlled by the company for CE delivery, the role played by employees deserves special attention (e.g., Harris, 2007; Mosley, 2007).

From this perspective, firms' creation of satisfying CEs hinges on the ability and commitment of employees. They have the formidable task of representing the firm and fostering CE through their actions (Harris, 2007). According to Mosley (2007), positive CE delivery depends on employees' knowledge and expertise, and on their ability to interact successfully with customers. "It is the employees who enact the attributes of the brand and whose actions ultimately foster CE—whether good or bad" (Harris, 2007, p. 102). Employees' role is important not only because they contribute to developing a positive service attitude but also because they evoke emotional values through a particularly distinctive style of service (Mosley, 2007). However, even if the importance of employees is recognized in generating positive CEs (see the awareness-raising articles by Harris and Mosley mentioned above), thus

far research has not systematically examined the role of employees in this regard (Waqas *et al.*, 2020).

Studies by Arnold *et al.* (2005) and Grace and O'Cass (2004) constitute a notable exception. In their analysis of retail shopping, Arnold *et al.* (2005) identified two major groups of factors influencing CE: interpersonal and non-interpersonal (e.g., product related). Most of the interpersonal factors identified in the study relied on the attitudes, behavior, knowledge, and skills of salespeople or service providers: interpersonal effort (i.e., being helpful), interpersonal engagement (i.e., being friendly and nice to the customer), problem resolution (i.e., solving customers' problems, possibly even "bending the rules"), interpersonal distance (i.e., avoiding being too aggressive or "pushy"), time commitment (i.e., spending considerable time assisting the customer or searching for a product), ethical behavior (e.g., not deceiving the customer concerning the price or terms of a product), and being knowledgeable and skillful (e.g., knowing differences among various brands or offerings). Likewise, in their study of the banking industry, Grace and O'Cass (2004) found that employee service (e.g., being willing to help, providing prompt service, never being too busy for the customer, being trustworthy, and being polite) was a key contributor to CE.

Despite this empirical evidence, to the best of the authors' knowledge, there are no studies that deepen into the types of knowledge, skills, and motivational levers that could enact marketers' adequate response to customers' demands (i.e., proposing the right solution for each client) and the kind of attitudes and behavior that make customers feel delighted. This constitutes an important research gap because it hinders marketing and sales managers from identifying the kinds of knowledge and skills that need to be promoted, as well as the HRM policies and practices that need to be applied.

2.2 Theoretical Underpinnings of the Knowledge and Motivational Antecedents of CE

To address the above research gap, we integrate two streams of literature as the theoretical background of the study: the intellectual capital-based view (ICV) of the firm (Reed *et al.*, 2006) and self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985). First, the ICV serves as a foundation to analyze the role of marketing and sales employees' knowledge in company performance (in this case, CE performance as compared to competitors). According to Reed *et al.* (2006), the ICV complements the knowledge-based view of the firm by focusing on the stocks and flows of knowledge embedded in an organization (i.e., intellectual capital) and their role in outperforming competitors. Within the ICV, knowledge resources are split up into three main categories: human capital (i.e., knowledge residing in the employees of the firm), structural or organizational capital (i.e., knowledge embedded in the company's structures and processes), and relational or social capital (i.e., knowledge residing in relationships, both internal and external to the firm). Human capital (which constitutes the focus of this paper) encompasses both employees' explicit or "conscious" knowledge (e.g., knowledge about facts, characteristics, and trends) and tacit or "automatic" knowledge (i.e., skills, abilities, or know-how) (Peñalba-Aguirrezabalaga *et al.,* 2020).

According to Wiig (1993), knowledge is the main force that determines and drives the ability to act intelligently. It allows the synthesis and evaluation of alternative solutions, the capacity for decision making, and the implementation of the chosen options (Wiig, 1993; Dalkir, 2011). Additionally, skills or know-how-based knowledge (Kogut and Zander, 1992) affect the quality of implementation of the selected action alternatives. Therefore, we examine the impact of marketing-specific human capital (i.e., all the knowledge and skills possessed by marketing and sales employees; Peñalba-Aguirrezabalaga *et al.*, 2020) on the generation and delivery of superior CE as compared to competitors.

Second, to understand the sources of employee motivation, we build on self-determination theory, which distinguishes intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as sources for

employee behavior (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Hofeditz *et al.*, 2017). Motivation is the level of an individual's motivational experience that involves certain mental processes that arouse interest and energize, direct, and sustain goal-oriented behavior when engaged in an activity (Cinar *et al.*, 2011; Silic *et al.*, 2020). Self-determination theory proposes two overarching types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic, that constitute a continuum (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Hofeditz *et al.*, 2017).

Intrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting, with the individual deriving spontaneous satisfaction from the activity itself. *Extrinsic motivation*, however, refers to doing something for instrumental reasons. These instrumental reasons can differ depending on their degree of internalization (Gagné *et al.*, 2010). At the low end, we have *external regulation*, which involves doing an activity to obtain rewards, such as a good salary, or to avoid punishments. Second, *introjected regulation* implies engaging in a behavior or committing to an activity out of guilt or compulsion, or to maintain self-worth. Third, *identified regulation* involves doing an activity because one identifies with its value or meaning and, finally, *integrated regulation* implies identifying with the value of an activity to the point that it becomes part of a person's habitual functioning and part of the person's sense of self. In practice, identified and integrated regulations are complex to distinguish (Gagné *et al.*, 2010). For this reason, only the former will be considered in this study.

Thus, we portray motivation as a bundle of various intrinsic and extrinsic components that affect marketing and sales employees' willingness to learn, develop, and perform toward firms' goals (Miao *et al.*, 2007). Based on this backdrop, we will study how the combination of human capital and employee motivation affects firm relative performance regarding CE.

3. Hypothesis Development
3.1 Marketing-Specific Human Capital as a Key Antecedent of Superior CE
Considering the earlier definition of CE, for organizations to compete by providing customers with superior CEs, they must control and exert a positive impact through the whole process of buying and receiving. According to Porter (1985), while all business functional areas contribute to the delivery of goods and services, marketing and sales play a key role in adding and creating value for customers. When marketers engage with customers, they act as brokers, transferring knowledge to them (Groza *et al.*, 2016). This is why the knowledge and skills of marketing and sales employees are highly important in providing positive CEs. Such knowledge and skills constitute a company's *marketing-specific human capital* (Peñalba-Aguirrezabalaga *et al.*, 2020). The latter includes several subcategories, discussed below.

First, employees' *customer knowledge* (i.e., knowledge about customer needs, expectations, satisfaction levels, personality, and behavior) enables marketers to satisfy customer needs more effectively than competitors do (Saxe and Weitz, 1982; Rapp *et al.*, 2006). According to Kotler and Armstrong (2018), "marketing is the process of engaging customers and building profitable customer relationships by creating value for customers and capturing value in return" (p. 53). Consequently, to fulfill their mission and provide constant, positive CE, marketing professionals must know the customer well.

Second, to build and maintain profitable customer relationships, companies should deliver superior customer value and satisfaction. As this depends on product/service performance that meets customers' expectations (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018), marketing and sales personnel must understand the firm's product/service specifications, applications, and customer use situations (Behrman and Perreault, 1982; Cravens *et al.*, 1993; Rapp *et al.*, 2006) to develop positive CEs. Together, these issues involve *technical knowledge* related to the products and services offered to customers. We expect that technical knowledge contributes to

CE through marketing employees' understanding of the technical and operational factors that drive CE.

Third, apart from having knowledge about customers and the company's offering, marketing involves serving a market of final consumers in the face of competitors (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). Thus, marketing professionals must have knowledge about the industry in which the company operates (Schillewaert and Ahearne, 2000; Rapp *et al.*, 2006) if they are to successfully differentiate and position their offerings in customers' minds. This category comprises *market knowledge*, which we expect to contribute positively to CE given the virtue of understanding the market in which the CE occurs.

Fourth, the above "know-what" knowledge or explicit knowledge is complemented with tacit or "automatic" knowledge (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Groza *et al.*, 2016). This refers to particular *marketing-related skills*, such as targeting skills (i.e., the ability to identify and focus on the right customers; Schillewaert and Ahearne, 2000), adaptive skills, problem-solving skills, communication skills, social media management skills, teamwork, and creativity, that are considered relevant for marketing professionals (Behrman and Perreault, 1982; Spiro and Weitz, 1990; Schillewaert and Ahearne, 2000; Rapp *et al.*, 2006; Piercy *et al.*, 2009; Guesalaga, 2016). We expect this know-how embedded in individuals to contribute to the generation and delivery of successful CE.

Overall, we expect that each of these four dimensions of marketing-specific human capital contributes positively to CE performance vis-à-vis competitors. Thus, the following hypotheses are formulated:

Hypothesis 1a: Marketing and sales employees' customer knowledge is positively related to CE performance in relation to competitors.

Hypothesis 1b: Marketing and sales employees' technical knowledge (i.e., product/service knowledge) is positively related to CE performance in relation to competitors.

Hypothesis 1c: Marketing and sales employees' market knowledge is positively related to CE performance in relation to competitors.

Hypothesis 1d: Marketing and sales employees' marketing-related skills are positively related to CE performance in relation to competitors.

3.2 Motivation as a Foundation of Employees' Marketing-Specific Knowledge

According to past research, both intrinsic and extrinsic types of motivation induce positive job attitudes, job engagement, and employee behavior (Cinar *et al.*, 2011; Silic *et al.*, 2020). One of the key behaviors for a company's employees to be competitive is knowledge-related behavior, which depends on employees' attitude toward the acquisition, generation, sharing, transfer, and use of knowledge. Previous research has demonstrated that individual motivation may stimulate knowledge-related behavior. For example, the meta-analysis performed by Colquitt *et al.* (2000) showed that motivation to learn influences knowledge and skill acquisition, and the transfer or use of these on the job. Likewise, Noe *et al.* (2010) linked motivation to employees' willingness to acquire new knowledge and learn in the workplace. According to Lee *et al.* (2016), motivated knowledge workers (marketing and sales employees in our case) help firms to create organizational value. For instance, marketing and sales staff can contribute to creating value through knowledge acquisition and application by, for example, gathering information on customers and competitors and using this type of "know-what" knowledge to help the firm outperform its rivals. Other authors suggest that motivation plays an important role in knowledge sharing between colleagues (e.g., Lam and Lambermont-Ford, 2010; Nguyen *et al.*, 2019), which constitutes an essential type of behavior for generating and acquiring new knowledge (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Indeed, motivation has also been seen as an antecedent to employees' innovative behavior (e.g., Ritala *et al.*, 2020) and

knowledge creation (e.g., Baldé *et al.,* 2018). Thus, it can be expected that employee motivation encourages employees' knowledge-related behavior and skills learning.

In this study, we focus on marketing employees' knowledge and skills, given their prominent role in providing positive CEs. According to Kadic-Maglajlic et al. (2018), satisfying customer needs and creating positive CEs depend on knowledge-related resources (e.g., knowledge of product/services, market information, and customer knowledge), the sharing of which among organizational members requires collaborative behavior. Thus, in this specific context, motivation can function as an engine for marketers to acquire, use, and share explicit knowledge about customers, products/services, and the markets where their organization operates to fulfill customer expectations. Moreover, according to a learning goal orientation (Lukoscheka *et al.*, 2018), motivated marketers will be more willing to learn and acquire indispensable tacit knowledge or marketing-related skills relevant for marketing professionals. In this vein, Pettijohn *et al.* (2002) showed that motivation and marketing skills, such as capabilities regarding sales presentations, need identification, suggestive selling, product knowledge, time allocation, and orientation toward assisting the customer, are significantly related to customer satisfaction. Higher levels of motivation lead marketers toward training and developing increased skills and ability to engage in customer-oriented selling.

Overall, we expect motivated marketing and sales employees to undertake greater efforts to master the required marketing-specific knowledge and skills. Therefore, we formulate hypotheses for the antecedent role of motivation regarding each type of marketing-related human capital:

Hypothesis 2a: Marketing and sales employees' motivation is positively related to customer knowledge.

Hypothesis 2b: Marketing and sales employees' motivation is positively related to technical knowledge (i.e., product/service knowledge).

Hypothesis 2c: Marketing and sales employees' motivation is positively related to market knowledge.

Hypothesis 2d: Marketing and sales employees' motivation is positively related to marketing-related skills.

3.3 The Direct Role of Motivation in Generating Superior CE

Motivation encourages marketing and sales employees to acquire the knowledge and skill sets necessary to become customer-oriented. The literature has demonstrated that employee motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, influences individual performance (Miao *et al.*, 2007; Gellatly *et al.*, 2020), and we expect this to hold for CE-related performance.

Motivation promotes other behavioral and attitudinal outcomes, such as more creative behavior, psychological well-being, organizational trust, commitment, and job satisfaction (Gagné and Deci, 2005); flexibility and open mindedness (Kantanen *et al.*, 2017); a positive approach to things, a creative mindset, and a less critical, more relaxed attitude in general (Pullins, 2001); and organizational citizenship behavior (e.g., Kim, 2006; Barbuto and Story, 2011). All these are critical for a successful performance and indicate that motivated employees originate positive attitudes leading to a positive overall work atmosphere (e.g., Lee *et al.*, 2016), which encourages them autonomously and voluntarily to search for novel ways of doing things or learn and apply new skills (Miao *et al.*, 2007). Ultimately, this will spark their enthusiasm to convert this satisfaction and energy into external customer satisfaction in their interactions (Kadic-Maglajlic *et al.*, 2018). Employees with positive attitudes and behaviors can work as a part-time marketer or as corporate ambassadors, preserving the firm's reputation and generating goodwill toward it (Helm, 2011). Or, as Grönroos (2001) put it, customers' experience depends on how they perceive their interaction with employees of the company. If

employees are motivated to treat customers well and make them feel important, they are more able and willing to give better experiences to customers (Hussinki *et al*., 2019).

Thus, in the context of this study, it could be argued that the more motivated marketers are, the better their attitude toward customers is, leading to improved CE (see e.g., Ahammad et al., 2015). On that basis, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Marketing and sales employees' motivation is positively related to CE performance in relation to competitors.

4. Research Methods
4.1 Sample and Data Collection

The target population of the research comprised Spanish companies with at least 100 employees. We established this threshold to guarantee that the companies had a well-established marketing function. We used the Sistema de Análisis de Balances Ibéricos (System of Iberian Balance Sheet Analysis; SABI) database (which contains the registered annual accounts of approximately 2,500,000 Spanish and Portuguese companies) to identify companies that met the criterion. The search resulted in 2,346 firms. Setting out from the above finite population, we calculated the minimum sample size needed to conduct a representative study as follows:

$$n_{fin} = \frac{n_{inf}}{1 + \frac{n_{inf} - 1}{N}} = \frac{400}{1 + (\frac{400 - 1}{2,346})} = 342$$

Where:

n_{fin} is the sample size for a statistically finite population.

n_{inf} is the sample size for a statistically infinite population.

N is the population size.

Since the calculation of the sample size for a statistically finite population draws from that of a statistically infinite population, we first calculated such a sample size, which was equal to 400:

$$n_{inf} = Z^2_{\alpha/2} * \frac{PQ}{e^2} = 2^2 * \frac{2.500}{5^2} = 400$$

In the previous formula:

$Z_{\alpha/2}$ represents the critical value corresponding to the standard normal distribution for the chosen significance level (in our case, 4.5%, which implies a confidence or security level in the inference of results from the sample to the whole population of 95.5%).

PQ is the estimate of the population variance under unfavorable sampling conditions (i.e., it is the maximum value that this variance could have).

e represents the maximum sampling error acceptable to researchers.

We then contacted the target population by phone, guaranteeing total confidentiality. To ensure that the proportions of company type represented those of the population (both in terms of size—large vs. mid-sized firms—and industry—manufacturing vs. service companies and high technology vs. low technology firms), we applied a stratified sampling procedure. The final sample included 346 companies that answered the provided email or phone-structured survey. To distinguish between business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) firms, we went through companies' responses about the types of clients they served. If they claimed to serve only corporate customers, we classified them as B2B, and if they claimed to serve only end-consumers or both corporate customers and end-consumers, we classified them as B2C.

The resulting sample composition was as follows: 178 companies were manufacturing firms, of which 116 were low-tech (87 B2B and 29 B2C) and 62 high-tech (40 B2B and 22 B2C), and 168 companies were service firms, of which 129 were low-tech (58 B2B and 71 B2C) and 39 high-tech (29 B2B and 10 B2C). Although the approach to the customer and the way to generate and deliver CEs could be distinctive depending on the type of industry (manufacturing versus service companies, high-tech versus low-tech firms) and type of customer served (businesses versus consumers), the role of marketing and sales employees (i.e., their knowledge, skills, and motivation) should still be relevant in all cases. For this reason, our sample included all kinds of manufacturing and service companies, high-tech and low-tech firms, and B2B and B2C companies, based on their degree of presence in the population (except for B2B and B2C firms, whose proportion in the population could not be known ex-ante).

Regarding respondents' profiles, 85.26% held a managerial role in the marketing domain, 6.65% were marketing and sales technicians or assistants, 5.20% were CEOs, 1.45% were salespeople, and the remaining 1.45% was unspecified.

The sample size obtained was sufficiently large to conduct a statistical study based on the partial least squares (PLS) structural equation modeling (SEM) approach. According to the level of complexity of the model to be tested (i.e., considering the number of predictors in the most complex regression of the model, which contained nine independent variables), the minimum R^2 to be expected (10%), a significance level of 5%, and a statistical power (i.e., the probability of finding an effect in the sample if it indeed exists in the population) of 80%, the minimum sample size was calculated and found to be 181 firms (Cohen, 1992). Thus, our final sample (346 companies) was well above the minimum threshold.

As we used the key informant technique to obtain data regarding all dependent and independent variables, there was a possibility of common-method bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). To determine the extent of method variance in the dataset, we conducted a full collinearity test specially conceived for PLS-SEM (Kock, 2015). The above test includes both vertical (predictor–predictor) and lateral (predictor–criterion) collinearity analyses. According to Kock (2015), if all the variance inflation factors (VIFs) resulting from a full collinearity test are equal to or below 3.3, the model can be considered free of common-method bias. The highest VIF in our model was 2.471, well below the 3.3 threshold. Therefore, our data did not feature common-method variance.

4.2 Measures

Our research model included one independent variable (motivation), four mediating variables (marketing-specific human capital components: i.e., customer knowledge, technical knowledge, market knowledge, and marketing-related skills), one dependent variable (CE performance in relation to competitors), and five control variables (size, industry [manufacturing vs. service], technology intensity [high-tech vs. low-tech], customer type [B2B vs. B2C], and educational background and experience). The independent and mediating variables focused on marketing and sales staff, which was signaled to the informants in a leading statement to each survey item category (see Table I for details). This allowed us to focus informants' attention on a particular subset among overall company employees aligned with our hypotheses. As mentioned in the previous section, informants mainly comprised marketing professionals, so they were likely well positioned to assess these aspects.

The scale used for *employee motivation* was based on the four dimensions suggested by Gagné *et al.* (2010) for the motivation continuum: intrinsic motivation, identification, introjection, and external regulation. Previous studies (e.g., Huber and Powell, 2000; De Voe and Iyengar, 2004) suggest that there is enough correlation between managers' perceptions and employees' self-ratings regarding their degree of motivation. Therefore, we think that

information provided by people in charge of the marketing and sales function will be sufficiently reliable to assess their employees' motivation and thus test our research hypotheses.

Regarding marketing-specific human capital components, we relied on newly developed and validated scales (Peñalba-Aguirrezabalaga *et al.*, 2020) devised based on existing literature on marketing and sales staff performance. *Customer knowledge* was based on Saxe and Weitz (1982), Sheth *et al.* (1999), Homburg *et al.* (2011), Trainor *et al.* (2011), and Mu (2015); *technical knowledge* was based on Behrman and Perreault (1982), Cravens *et al.* (1993), and Rapp *et al.* (2006); *market knowledge* was based on Schillewaert and Ahearne (2000) and Rapp *et al.* (2006); *marketing-related skills* were based on Behrman and Perreault (1982), Spiro and Weitz (1990), Schillewaert and Ahearne (2000), Rapp *et al.* (2006), Piercy *et al.* (2009), and Guesalaga (2016).

Finally, the scale used for *CE* performance regarding competitors was based on Verhoef *et al.* (2016). It should be noted that all items were measured with 7-point Likert scales (for more details, see Table I).

Marketing-specific human capital components, motivation, and CE constitute designed conceptual variables. In other words, they are abstractions or human-made conceptual "artifacts" (Henseler, 2017; Hair *et al.*, 2019). Here, the indicators or observable variables define or build up the conceptual variable. They do not cause it, but they make it up (i.e., it is a "definitorial" relationship). Thus, a composite measurement model applies (Henseler, 2017). In such a measurement model, constructs are obtained as a linear combination of their indicators without error terms, and each indicator enters the linear combination with a specific weight. These weights can be calculated based on correlations (mode "A" composites) or multiple regression (mode "B" composites). This choice will depend on the degree of collinearity of the indicators within a particular construct. If collinearity is high, this could cause problems in the estimation of indicators' weights in mode "B" composites. Under these circumstances, researchers should consider using mode "A" composites (Rigdon, 2016; Henseler, 2017).

As far as control variables are concerned (see Table I), company size may affect a firm's possibilities to generate superior CEs. The larger the company, the greater the possibilities of investing in different types of resources (Camisón-Zornoza *et al.*, 2004) that may help improve CE (e.g., communication resources, technological infrastructures, design resources, and support staff, to name but a few). Industry (manufacturing vs. service) could also affect relative CE. Service provision usually involves closer interaction with customers as compared to the delivery of manufactured goods, as well as continuous adaptation to their changing demands (i.e., higher customization degree; Kianto *et al.,* 2010). The above may increase the relevance of employees' knowledge and skills to provide superior CEs. Likewise, high-tech companies deal with more rapidly changing and complex products than low-tech firms (Schilling, 2010), which also stresses the need for a highly skilled and qualified workforce. Moreover, marketing and sales professionals differ markedly in B2B and B2C firms (Kotler *et al.*, 2006; Kotler and Armstrong, 2018). According to Kotler *et al.* (2006), B2C firms adopt a more systematic and professional approach to marketing than B2B companies, which could induce discrepancies in the perceived excellence or superiority of their CEs. Furthermore, in B2B settings, the buyer and the seller are often much more dependent on each other, which implies working closely with customers during all stages of the buying process, from helping customers define problems to finding solutions to supporting after-sale operation (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012). Finally, educational background (i.e., marketing-related training) and experience (both in terms of marketing and industry) are expected to be important antecedents of marketing-specific human capital besides employee motivation.

4.3 Statistical analyses

The proposed research model was analyzed with SEM based on PLS using SmartPLS 3.2.8 software (Ringle *et al*., 2015). We chose this method given the nature of the conceptual variables under study. As previously explained, our independent and dependent variables are human-made conceptual "artifacts," and thus a composite measurement model applies. Unlike covariance-based SEM, which adopts a common factor approach, PLS-based SEM relies only on composites (Rigdon, 2016). There are two stages in PLS-based SEM: (1) assessment of the measurement model and (2) assessment of the structural model. Conducting assessments in this order ensures that the constructs' measures are valid and reliable before attempting to draw conclusions about the relationships among constructs (Barclay *et al., 1995)*.

5. Results

5.1 Measurement Model Evaluation

In composite measurement, researchers need to analyze convergent validity to determine the extent to which the indicators making up a construct capture the essence of the conceptual variable they are intended to represent. According to Hair *et al*. (2017), this requires redundancy analysis. To perform this analysis, the survey included one indicator that summarized each conceptual variable under study to calculate the correlation between the composite and this summary indicator. Appropriate convergent validity requires a correlation of 0.707 or higher, which translates into 50% of the variance explained for the summary indicator (Hair *et al*., 2017). Good correlations (i.e., convergency levels) were found for all constructs in the research but one: market knowledge. As the correlation obtained in this case was closer to the established limit (0.692), no changes were made in the model (see Table I).

Potential problems in the estimation of indicators' weights due to collinearity are another aspect that must be considered. Ideally, VIF values should be below 3 (Hair *et al*., 2019). As Table I shows, several indicators in customer knowledge, technical knowledge (i.e., product/service knowledge), and CE performance in relation to competitors exceeded the threshold value of 3. Therefore, to avoid problems related to reversed signs for indicators' weights due to collinearity, a mode "A" composite was applied (i.e., correlation weights).

Finally, in mode "B" composites, the significance and relevance of indicators' weights should be assessed. For indicators with nonsignificant weight estimates, researchers should investigate whether composite loading estimates are statistically significant and consider dropping any indicator with nonsignificant weight and loading estimates (Benítez *et al*., 2020). Significance levels were tested with a one-tailed 5,000 subsample bias-corrected and accelerated (BCA) bootstrap (Hair *et al*., 2017). While indicators' weights show the relative contribution of each indicator to its construct, indicators' loadings show their absolute contribution (Benítez *et al*., 2020). As can be observed in Table I, although not all indicators' weights in mode "B" composites are statistically significant, all indicators' loadings are statistically relevant. Therefore, the decision was made to keep all indicators in the model, as their absolute contribution is at least statistically significant. Detailed comments regarding indicators' weights in mode "B" composites will be provided in the next section once the overall role of each independent and mediating variable has been clarified.

Table II shows correlations between constructs. As can be seen, none of them is too high, the largest one being the correlation between marketing skills and educational background and experience (0.660), which implies a shared variance of 43.56% between both constructs.

Table I. Measurement of model evaluation (1 of 3).

Constructs and measures	Item wording	Mean	SD	VIFs	Weights	Loadings
Control variables						
Company size	Natural logarithm of the number of employees	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Industry	1 = Manufacturing; 0 = Services	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Technology intensity	1 = High-tech; 0 = Low-tech	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Customer type	1 = B2B; 0 = B2C	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Educational background and experience Mode "B" composite Convergency: 0.799	To what extent do the following statements apply to your company? (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree) Our marketing and sales staff:					
EBE1	Have a Marketing and Sales educational background	5.317	1.536	2.442	0.216*	0.723***
EBE2	Have an updated knowledge of new marketing concepts, tools, and techniques (e.g., digital marketing, social media, etc.)	5.301	1.506	2.305	0.350***	0.708***
EBE3	Have an extensive professional experience in the marketing and sales domain	5.520	1.308	2.175	0.284***	0.833***
EBE4	Have an extensive professional experience in the industry	5.740	1.212	1.799	0.467***	0.769***
EBE5[+]	Have solid educational background and experience to perform their job	5.775	1.086	N/A	N/A	N/A
Motivation Mode "B" composite Convergency: 0.854	To what extent do the following statements apply to your company? (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree) Our marketing and sales staff:					
MOTIV1	Enjoy their job very much	5.488	1.147	2.866	0.381***	0.909***
MOTIV2	Strongly identify with the company	5.576	1.185	2.712	0.284*	0.882***
MOTIV3	Really want to succeed in their job	5.980	1.087	2.497	0.254*	0.848***
MOTIV4	Are very satisfied with their salary	4.665	1.319	1.381	0.268**	0.699***
MOTIV5[+]	Are highly motivated	5.281	1.265	N/A	N/A	N/A
Customer knowledge Mode "A" composite Convergency: 0.880	To what extent do the following statements apply to your company? (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree) Our marketing and sales staff have a very good knowledge of customers' …					
CK1	Needs	5.723	1.069	2.890	0.220***	0.840***
CK2	Expectations and/or performance requirements	5.630	1.071	3.154	0.207***	0.847***
CK3	Satisfaction levels	5.691	1.104	2.114	0.204***	0.801***
CK4	Personality	5.232	1.228	3.409	0.181***	0.850***
CK5	Behavior	5.338	1.192	3.899	0.195***	0.869***
CK6	Circumstances	5.268	1.196	2.802	0.184***	0.833***
CK7[+]	Overall, our marketing and sales staff know customers very well	5.581	1.125	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table I. Measurement of model evaluation (2 of 3).

Constructs and measures	Item wording	Mean	SD	VIFs	Weights	Loadings
Technical knowledge Mode "A" composite Convergency: 0.845	To what extent do the following statements apply to your company? (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree) Our marketing and sales staff:					
TK1	Know all the specifications of our products and/or services	5.916	1.081	4.381	0.245***	0.908***
TK2	Know all the applications and functions of our products and/or services	5.960	1.072	3.744	0.244***	0.881***
TK3	Know how our products and/or services differ from those of our competitors	5.783	1.154	2.471	0.259***	0.864***
TK4	Are able to detect causes of operating failure of our products and/or services	5.372	1.377	1.920	0.180***	0.772***
TK5	Keep abreast of our company's product and/or service developments	5.733	1.165	2.245	0.237***	0.840***
TK6[+]	Know our products and/or services very well	6.049	1.007	N/A	N/A	N/A
Market knowledge Mode "B" composite Convergency: 0.692	To what extent do the following statements apply to your company? (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree) Our marketing and sales staff:					
MK1	Have a lot of information on industry trends	5.695	1.098	2.592	0.209†	0.802***
MK2	Are well-informed about important events in our industry	5.826	1.047	2.772	0.369**	0.837***
MK3	Are knowledgeable about our competitors' activities	5.688	1.061	2.431	0.105	0.802***
MK4	Keep abreast of the marketing strategies of our competitors	5.035	1.253	2.033	0.511***	0.863***
MK5[+]	Are an excellent source of competitive information	5.291	1.223	N/A	N/A	N/A
Marketing skills Mode "B" composite Convergency: 0.820	To what extent do the following statements apply to your company? (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree) Our marketing and sales staff have excellent …					
MS1	Targeting skills (i.e., the ability to focus on the "right" customers or those with the highest potential)	5.503	1.128	1.802	0.323***	0.775***
MS2	Adaptive skills	5.765	1.048	2.379	0.028	0.730***
MS3	Problem-solving skills	5.843	1.042	2.522	0.248**	0.773***
MS4	Communication skills	5.776	1.075	2.243	0.138†	0.757***
MS5	Social media management skills (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, YouTube)	5.058	1.555	1.440	0.204*	0.613***
MS6	Teamwork skills	5.832	1.198	2.346	0.014	0.732***
MS7	Creativity	5.549	1.204	2.207	0.357***	0.834***
MS8[+]	Overall, our marketing and sales staff have a high command of the skills needed to perform their job	5.750	0.962	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table I. Measurement of model evaluation (3 of 3).

Constructs and measures	Item wording	Mean	SD	VIFs	Weights	Loadings
Customer experience performance in relation to competitors Mode "A" composite Convergency: 0.917	Compare your company performance vis-à-vis competitors (as perceived by customers) in the following fields (1 = much worse, 7 = much better)					
CE1	Customer experience during product/service search and selection	5.199	1.136	2.572	0.283***	0.841***
CE2	Customer experience during the purchase phase	5.341	1.043	3.447	0.319***	0.913***
CE3	Customer experience during the use phase	5.593	1.034	2.727	0.283***	0.873***
CE4	Customer experience during the aftersales phase	5.459	1.112	2.430	0.268***	0.836***
CE5[+]	Overall customer experience	5.544	0.993	N/A	N/A	N/A

[+] Summary indicator for convergent validity assessment. †p < 0.10, *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001, one-tailed test.

Table II. Correlation matrix.

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Company size	1.000										
2. Industry	-0.082	1.000									
3. Technology intensity	0.064	0.123	1.000								
4. Customer type	-0.063	0.206	0.095	1.000							
5. Education and exp.	0.074	-0.045	0.073	-0.093	1.000						
6. Motivation	0.115	-0.071	0.009	-0.058	0.499	1.000					
7. Customer knowledge	-0.009	0.073	-0.049	-0.046	0.582	0.450	1.000				
8. Technical knowledge	-0.012	-0.041	-0.095	-0.124	0.522	0.428	0.658	1.000			
9. Market knowledge	0.076	-0.050	0.030	-0.130	0.492	0.415	0.528	0.523	1.000		
10. Marketing skills	0.124	-0.069	-0.006	-0.059	0.660	0.540	0.572	0.495	0.529	1.000	
11. Customer experience	-0.005	-0.060	-0.035	-0.078	0.288	0.425	0.454	0.318	0.285	0.441	1.000

5.2 Structural Model Evaluation

Once the quality of the measurement model was guaranteed, the structural model was evaluated. First, a collinearity test was conducted to remove any potential bias in path coefficients due to critical levels of collinearity among the predictor constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2017). Analogous to the assessment of composite measurement models, VIF values should be below 3. All VIFs in our model were well below the established threshold, the highest one being 2.217. Therefore, collinearity in the structural model was not a problem in this research.

Second, we used a one-tailed 5,000 subsample BCA bootstrap to test the strength of the established relationships between constructs. Table III shows the results obtained. As can be observed, customer knowledge and marketing-related skills are the only constituents of marketing-specific human capital that positively and significantly affect CE. Thus, hypotheses H1a and H1d are accepted, while hypotheses H1b and H1c are rejected. Furthermore, motivation constitutes an essential driver in boosting all types of marketing-specific knowledge residing in individuals within the marketing function (both "know-what" [customer, product/service, and market-related knowledge] and "know-how" [marketing-related skills]).

Hence, hypotheses H2a, H2b, H2c, and H2d are accepted. Moreover, we find this effect to hold across different types and levels of educational background and experience. Finally, motivation affects CE both directly (thus, hypothesis H3 is accepted) and indirectly (through its input into knowledge acquisition in the workplace). Regarding control variables, educational background and experience are key antecedents of all marketing-specific human capital constituents.

Table III. Structural model evaluation.

	Effects	STDEV	t statistics	p-values	5%	95%
Direct effects on customer experience						
Size	-0.057	0.045	1.283	0.100	-0.132	0.015
Industry (manufacturing vs. service)	-0.051	0.049	1.036	0.150	-0.131	0.029
Technology intensity (high-tech vs. low-tech)	-0.011	0.048	0.233	0.408	-0.089	0.071
Customer type (B2B vs. B2C)	-0.046	0.049	0.934	0.175	-0.125	0.035
Customer knowledge	**0.303**	**0.076**	**4.006**	**0.000**	**0.179**	**0.429**
Technical knowledge (product/service knowledge)	-0.064	0.071	0.893	0.186	-0.184	0.049
Market knowledge	-0.046	0.066	0.692	0.245	-0.161	0.058
Marketing skills	**0.202**	**0.077**	**2.628**	**0.004**	**0.067**	**0.319**
Motivation	**0.226**	**0.065**	**3.490**	**0.000**	**0.123**	**0.339**
Direct effects on customer knowledge						
Educational background and experience	**0.476**	**0.060**	**7.933**	**0.000**	**0.375**	**0.571**
Motivation	**0.213**	**0.055**	**3.870**	**0.000**	**0.113**	**0.292**
Direct effects on technical knowledge						
Educational background and experience	**0.410**	**0.069**	**5.919**	**0.000**	**0.292**	**0.523**
Motivation	**0.224**	**0.064**	**3.473**	**0.000**	**0.117**	**0.325**
Direct effects on market knowledge						
Educational background and experience	**0.380**	**0.061**	**6.193**	**0.000**	**0.275**	**0.478**
Motivation	**0.226**	**0.066**	**3.434**	**0.000**	**0.107**	**0.324**
Direct effects on marketing skills						
Educational background and experience	**0.521**	**0.068**	**7.694**	**0.000**	**0.394**	**0.618**
Motivation	**0.280**	**0.066**	**4.218**	**0.000**	**0.168**	**0.384**
Indirect and total effects of motivation on CE						
Indirect effect via customer knowledge (1)	**0.064**	**0.023**	**2.850**	**0.002**	**0.033**	**0.109**
Indirect effect via technical knowledge (2)	-0.014	0.017	0.841	0.200	-0.045	0.011
Indirect effect via market knowledge (3)	-0.010	0.016	0.633	0.263	-0.042	0.012
Indirect effect via marketing skills (4)	**0.057**	**0.027**	**2.065**	**0.019**	**0.019**	**0.105**
Total indirect effect (1 + 2 + 3 + 4)	**0.097**	**0.032**	**2.998**	**0.001**	**0.047**	**0.148**
Total effect (Direct + Indirect)	**0.323**	**0.060**	**5.418**	**0.000**	**0.219**	**0.417**

Regarding the relative relevance of each of the elements making up mode "B" composites (marketing-related skills, motivation, and educational background and experience), indicators' weights (see Table I) show that creativity (0.357) and targeting skills (0.323) constitute the most relevant marketing-related skills, followed by problem-solving (0.248) and social media management skills (0.204). Adaptive skills (0.028), communication skills (0.138), and teamwork skills (0.014) are insignificant. For motivation, although all its dimensions are statistically relevant, enjoying work (intrinsic motivation) appears to be the most relevant (0.381), followed by strongly identifying with the company (identification: 0.284), satisfaction with salary (external regulation: 0.264), and willingness to succeed in the job (introjection: 0.254). Interestingly, for educational background and experience, having extensive professional experience in the industry (0.467) is more relevant than having extensive professional experience in the marketing and sales domain (0.284), and having up-to-date knowledge of new marketing concepts, tools, and techniques (0.350) is more relevant than having a marketing and sales educational background (0.216). In any case, all dimensions proved to be statistically relevant.

17

Third, the coefficient of determination (R^2 value) of the mediating and dependent variables was examined, representing a measure of in-sample predictive power (Hair *et al.*, 2017). The amount of variance explained for customer knowledge reached 37.3%, for technical knowledge 31%, for market knowledge 28.1%, for marketing skills 49.5%, and for CE 29.7%.

6. Discussion and Implications

Our study built on two literature streams: the intellectual capital-based view of the firm (Reed *et al.*, 2006) and self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Based on these foundations, we hypothesized that employee motivation is a key antecedent for creating superior CEs and that marketing-specific human capital plays an important role as a mediator in this process. Our results mainly support these hypotheses, but also demonstrate that not all marketing-specific knowledge and skills possessed are equally relevant in enhancing CE.

First, we found that marketing employees' motivation—and especially intrinsic motivation—directly influences CE performance in relation to competitors. This is in line with the expectations of the self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985) in that both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation affect employee behavior, and that there might be important differences among these motivation types in different contexts (Gagné *et al.*, 2010; Ritala *et al.*, 2020). Second, we found that motivation directly impacts the stimulation of individual knowledge-related behavior (marketers' human capital). This confirms the general expectations of marketing scholars (Noe *et al.*, 2010; Lukoscheka *et al.*, 2018) that motivation encourages knowledge acquisition in the workplace that improves performance (in this case, positive CE). Third, supporting previous research, our results show that the delivery of positive CE depends on employees' knowledge and on their ability to interact successfully with customers (Mosley, 2007). In particular, we found support for the mediating role of *customer knowledge* and *marketing skills*. The strong role of customer knowledge is supported by literature that views the customer as the center of marketing efforts (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018) and customer knowledge as a key part of human capital (Rapp *et al.*, 2006). The strong relevance of a variety of *marketing skills* is related to the need of marketing and sales employees to engage in customer interactions and provide improved experiences (Pettijohn *et al.*, 2002). This includes targeting—the ability to identify and focus on the "right" customers (Schillewaert and Ahearne, 2000; Rapp *et al.*, 2006)—as well as problem-solving skills (Day, 1994) and social media management skills (Guesalaga, 2016). Finally, our results show that marketers' creativity constitutes the most relevant skill to guarantee successful CE (e.g., Groza *et al.*, 2016). Conversely, we found no support for hypotheses regarding the direct effect of *technical knowledge* and *market knowledge* on CE performance. It might be that these are components within the broader marketing-specific human capital that contribute to the organizational performance, as well as to CE, in more indirect ways. We will leave this aspect for further research.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

Our results contribute to the IC and KM literature, where more contextual approaches to IC have been called for (Kianto *et al.*, 2018). Marketing is a specific context that focuses particularly on customer value creation (Kotler and Armstrong, 2018), which has also received recent attention in IC research (Peñalba-Aguirrezabalaga *et al.*, 2020). In this study, we adopted a contextual approach to human capital, demonstrating the organizational value of knowledge and skills possessed by marketing and sales employees. In particular, we found that marketers' knowledge about customers and specific marketing skills—creativity, targeting, problem-solving, and social media management—promote superior CEs. CE and customer value creation are key performance metrics among marketers and firms in general (Waqas *et al.,* 2020; Witell *et al.,* 2020); however, this type of performance has been largely neglected in

previous IC-performance research that has focused more on general performance metrics (Inkinen, 2015).

Our research also contributes to further clarifying the role of employee motivation in generating positive knowledge-related behavior (Cinar *et al*., 2001; Noe *et al*., 2010), showing that both types of motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic) function as an engine for marketers to acquire marketing-specific human capital. This result resonates with the research that has shown that motivation plays an important role in knowledge sharing between colleagues (Lam and Lambermont-Ford, 2010; Nguyen *et al*., 2019) and in creating new knowledge in general (Baldé *et al.,* 2018). Based on this, we advocate more attention to individual motivation as an antecedent to knowledge sharing, transfer, and creation behavior.

Moreover, our results demonstrate how marketing and sales employees' motivation also contribute directly to generating superior CEs. While motivation in general promotes the generation of employees' positive job attitude and behavior toward customers (Cinar *et al*., 2001) and influences individual performance (Miao *et al*., 2007; Gellatly *et al*., 2020), we found that intrinsic motivation (Gagné *et al*., 2010) has a particularly strong role in fostering CE performance. This resonates with findings in the creativity and innovation literature (Amabile, 1997; Ritala *et al*., 2020), where the role of intrinsic motivation is highlighted. This finding highlights a limitation of the extant employee motivation research, showing that even if intrinsic and extrinsic motivation have been treated as global constructs, they have distinct consequences (Miao *et al*., 2007). Our results underline that the different dimensions of motivation can have different consequences for customer value creation, calling for more attention to the motivation, compensation, and behavior of marketing and sales employees.

6.2 Managerial Implications

Since marketers act as crucial boundary-spanners and brokers between the firm and its customers, their motivation and human capital must be strategically managed to ensure superior CEs throughout the entire customer journey. Motivation promotes the generation of marketers' necessary customer knowledge and specific skills to ensure that they fulfill customer expectations and effectively become part of the marketing mix of the firm (Judd, 2003). Motivated marketers transfer their satisfaction and energy to customers in their interactions, and thus their motivation can be reflected in positive attitudes and behaviors toward customers (Kadic-Maglajlic *et al*., 2018). Therefore, companies should utilize different types of incentives and HRM schemes to ensure marketing employees' motivation. Moreover, according to our results, high motivation is not only linked to a good salary or identification with the company, but also to intrinsic motivation (i.e., enjoyment and interest in the work itself). Alternatively, if marketers are motivated because they enjoy their job (i.e., they are intrinsically motivated), their interaction with customers and subsequent experience will be even more satisfying.

Moreover, companies must be aware of the critical role that marketing-specific human capital plays in generating superior CE and stimulate a learning-oriented and knowledge-sharing environment to ensure that employees possess the required skills and knowledge for excellent customer performance. Based on our results, particularly customer knowledge—as opposed to more generic technological or market knowledge—is particularly important in understanding customers' needs and preferences. However, sufficient understanding of the customer can also be supplemented by high-level marketing skills, as our results demonstrate. For instance, the use of social media (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Twitter) has grown significantly among consumers (Guesagala, 2016). This highlights the role of marketing and sales personnel' abilities to utilize social media to influence consumer preferences and purchasing decisions (Michaelidou *et al*., 2011), as well as how to communicate with them and improve their experience (Wilson *et al*., 2011). Thus, firms should provide marketing-oriented IT tools (e.g., CRM, CE management software, customer journey tracking software, social

media management software, marketing intelligence software, etc.) as human capital infrastructural support to facilitate access to sources of information that guarantee the acquisition of required marketing-specific knowledge.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research
Like any study, this paper has some limitations that need to be addressed by future research. First, we analyzed the role of marketing-specific human capital without considering that employees in the marketing and sales function may play different roles in providing CEs. Thus, future studies could provide a more fine-grained picture of marketing-specific human capital by distinguishing the role of different types of marketing and sales employees in generating CEs. Second, survey responses were collected only from Spanish firms, and therefore findings may have been influenced by national characteristics. As the level of development of marketing-specific IC categories and constituents is likely to vary across cultural contexts (see, e.g., Sáenz *et al.*, 2017), future research could extend the analysis to other national contexts. Third, a key informant in each company reported the data collected through the structured cross-sectional survey. This allowed us to access firm-level perceptional data and test our hypotheses, but there may be limitations regarding the scope of informants' knowledge and the ability to draw causal inferences. Future studies could thus adopt different approaches to measurement and combine them with various ways of measuring CE performance. Fourth, considering that we found no support for the hypotheses that technical knowledge and market knowledge directly affect CE, future research could explore how these components within the broader marketing-specific human capital contribute to organizational performance, as well as to CE in more indirect ways.

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