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CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MARKETING AND ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE IN CROP PROTECTION INDUSTRY: CASE OF REALIPM LIMITED COMPANY IN KENYA

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Abstract: **Companies now face more challenges as the turbulence in the environment continues. Getting and maintaining loyal customers for higher organizational performance is critical for survival and growth. This study aimed at identifying the effect of the customer relationship marketing on organizational performance in the crop protection industry, with a case study of RealIPM Company. There have been prices adjustments due to competition, promotional material and rebranding and all this efforts are part of the processes that help in building long term relationships with the customers and by nature of it, it only serves as a short term strategy to attain competitive advantage. The specific objectives were to establish the effect of customer relationship processes, investigate the effect of customer loyalty and examine the effect of brand values on organizational performance. This study was anchored on commitment-trust theory, customer loyalty theory and brand values theories. The study adopted descriptive research design. The target population was 185 employees from which a sample size of 55 respondents was selected using stratified sampling technique. The instrument of data collection used was the questionnaires. Collected data was analysed using descriptive statistics carried out included the mean, median, mode and standard deviation. Inferential statistics were also carried out to enable generalization of the findings. Regression analysis and ANOVA were carried out. Qualitative data was presented in the form of descriptive notes while quantitave data was presented in the form of tables and figures. From the findings, customer relationship process, customer loyalty and brand value were found to have a positive and significant influence on organizational performance. A unit change in customer relationship process, customer loyalty and brand value lead to 0.768, 0.722 and 0.504 units of positive change respectively on organizational performance. It was concluded that customer relationship marketing is important for organizational performance and therefore the study recommends more investment on research and development on ways to make the relationship with customers to last as long as possible. In addition, the organization should express appreciation and reward employees as well as loyal customers through solid reward programmes. Channels of communication should also be widened to use of technology available for fast response and brand value growth. Organizations should also embrace the international standards and guidelines on production of quality products to gain brand value from their customers and be able to compete effectively.**

Keywords: **Customer Relationship Processes, Customer Loyalty, Brand Values, Commitment-Trust Theory.**

I. INTRODUCTION

As each day passes, the competitive environment in the business world becomes more turbulent. Companies now face a more serious issue not only on provision of excellent good quality products and services but also keeping the loyal customers. Tseng (2007) asserts that to be able to compete in such environment every organization must look beyond the typical marketing strategies and the traditional 4Ps of marketing. The development of relationship marketing has since become the key area of focus in staying competitive for most organizations and as well as in academics. Relationship marketing began to dominate the marketing field in the last decade of the 20^{th} century. During this particular period it was applied and practiced by many companies all over the world.

Although there are different approaches used to implement competitive advantage, Zineldin (2006) identifies three key basic requirements for developing and protecting this concept. These include; quality Improvement of products/services, customer loyalty and relationship. Both small and big firms need to create a long lasting relationship with their customers. This can be achieved through proper customer relationship marketing. This is a business process through which client relationships, customer loyalty and brand values are built and enhanced via marketing strategies and other related activities. The process allows organizations to develop long-term relationships with established as well as new customers to help in streamlining the corporate performance.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to the Kenya Flower council (KFC), biocontrol crop protection products usage has grown an average of 65 percent a year for the past five years. This is twice the rate of growth in Asian countries. According to Kenyan Economic report of 2015, biocontrol companies had worth sale of 3 billion Kenya shillings with Kenya biologics having a market share of 6.3 per cent, Koppert - 10.8 per cent, Dudutech - 22.9% and RealIPM 60% (Kenya Economic Report, 2015). Owing to globalization, imports of bio-chemicals are also threatening the biocontrol companies suggesting new strategies needs to be adapted for survival and growth of the local companies.

Both the locally produced and import products and services are very similar making competition in the industry more stiff. The companies have been faced with unrealistic prices adjustments, use promotional materials and rebranding to survive and maintain their market share. This effort is put to build long term relationships with the customers but unfortunately it is only serving as a short term strategy to attain competitive advantage. It eventually becomes imitable and affordable with time and other competitors adopt it to augment their service.

Considering the competitive nature of the crop protection industry the question that comes to mind is how to develop CRM to create intimacy and level of confidence that will promote sustainable growth and profitability. The problem is to develop long-term relationships with the established and new customers while enhancing organizational performance and ensuring positive return on investment. The question again will be how agrochemical could differentiate themselves from the competition and gain customer attention, patronage and loyalty and in the long-run enhance organizational performance. Technology, commoditization deregulation and globalization forever changed the face of competition (Joyner, 2002). Crop protection firms have understood the need to capitalize on the new technologies to gain advantage in competition by exploiting their customer base, brand value and customer loyalty in order to increase profits as there's direct link between the customers satisfaction and profitability.

CRM enables crop protection firms to analyze the customer profiles, to detect their needs and potential profitability areas and establish competitive advantage thus profitability. From the customer's points of view the competitions brings them various choices and increase their bargaining power. Today, customers are looking for various benefits from crop protection firms, cost effective products, better customer relationship services and cheaper products with better improved quality and this force firms to look for all means to satisfy customers before anyone else does.

From the literature reviewed (Magasi, 2015; Velnampy & Sivesan, 2012; Hanley & Leahy, 2008; Kehinde, Adegbuyi & Borishade, 2016; Alibhai & Ogollah 2015; and Waiganjo, 2012) none was done on crop protection firms. In addition, none has looked into the three tenets of CRM (customer loyalty, customer relationship process and brand value) together. This study aims to bridge this gap of knowledge. It also aims to assist the market leader, RealIPM, to maintain their position using CRM as a strategy to gain competitive advantage and ultimately increase performance.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The term relationship marketing was first coined by Berry (1983) in the context of services marketing. Relationship marketing is attracting, maintaining and enhancing customer relationships. In the mid-1970s Bagozzi began to seek understanding of the marketing activities as a link between the seller and buyer thereby forming a basis for subsequent conceptualization of relationship marketing. The conceptualization first appeared in the early 1980s in the research field of services marketing (Nielsen *et al*., 2003). CRM is replacing the traditional 4Ps of marketing (product, place, price and promotion). The dynamism in the market requires long-term relationships for stability, which is the essence of CRM (Velnampy & Sivesan, 2012).

Customer relationship marketing (CRM), incorporates commercial and client-specific strategies through employee training, marketing planning as well as relationship building. The origin of relationship-based approach to a firm's management emerged from academics and other stakeholders in the field of marketing, strategy formulation as well as supply chain management. Zineldin (2006) opines that CRM is a business process through which client relationships, customer loyalty and brand values are built and enhanced through marketing strategies. The process allows organizations to develop long-term relationships with established as well as new customers to help in streamlining the corporate performance. Four broad partnerships exists in the CRM including: customers partnerships, internal partnerships, external partnerships and suppliers partnerships (Godson, 2009). These partnerships operates as a system making CRM more of a process than an activity.

According to Jagadish (2002), energy crisis led to the stagflation and competition in industries such as electronics, steel, textiles and chemicals which made the industry to realize the importance of retaining customers. The management of services such as health care, telephones and power to keep record of the customer's transactions and interactions for the purpose of analyzing the quality of customer service was realized. This has eventually increased the scope to analyze and respond to customer needs and predict the outcome of any action towards the customers. The practice of business partnering as a way of offering consultancy and collaborating business to business customers with the ultimate purpose of improving outcome, has encouraged industrial marketers to opt directly for service key accounts.

The concept of relationship marketing was born within the field of service marketing as well as industrial marketing due to the paradigm shift. This shift occurred from a transaction level to a relationship focus, since marketing has matured from a narrow focus on volume and profit-maximization. The focus currently is on broad orientation with emphasis on establishing long-term customer relationships and managing strategic alliances with customers directly (Payne, 2005).

In the study on role of customer trust and commitment as a mediator for the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty, Thanban (2013) concluded that the main objective of CRM is to build customer loyalty. Lovelock and Wright (2002) said the main goal is to build mutually satisfactory long-term relationships for a firm to maintain its business. Gofton (2001) asserts that CRM is important to the organization, should be engrained into its philosophy and culture, and should be practiced by every employee in the organization and not some people. Four broad partnerships exist in the CRM including: customers partnerships, internal partnerships, external partnerships and suppliers partnerships (Godson, 2009). These partnerships operate as a system making CRM more of a process than an activity.

Acquiring new customers is five times costly (Kotler, 2006; Ndubisi, 2003) than maintaining the existing one. Retention is the objective of CRM as it increases profit rate over time and therefore contributing to performance of the firm. Service and interaction of customers with the organization's representatives if critical for service level measurement and ultimate loyalty. Keshvari and Zare (2012) looks at CRM as a long term strategy for an organization to manage and nurture its clients' interactions for higher sales prospects. Further, it is not only at the point of sale but in the whole organization where all the employees participate to increase satisfaction, support and retention of customers.

Practicing CRM has many benefits to the organization and the clients including lowering of marketing costs, enhancement of customer satisfaction, increasing customer loyalty and ultimately increasing customer retention (Bergeron *et al*., 2008). This may however be eroded by the turbulence in the environment which includes globalization, rise of competition, lack of product differentiation, low cost of switching to other products, rise in technology coupled with more sophisticated and knowledgeable customers. This calls for organizations to keep updating the CRM strategies in use for survival and growth. This study adopted definition of Zineldin (2006) and therefore investigated client relationships process, customer loyalty and brand values and variables of CRM.

Crop Protection Industry in Kenya:

Kenya's crop protection industry in made up of agrochemical and biocontrol companies. The agrochemical Companies include Syngenta, Monsanto, BASF and Bayer Crop Science while the biocontrol industry includes RealIPM, Dudutech and Koppert. Biocontrol is a small industry with 3% market share of the total pest control sector although this is growing fast. The crop protection industry is governed/regulated by Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service (KEPHIS) which is a government parastatal whose responsibility is to assure the quality of agricultural inputs. The industry is regulated by the Pesticides Control Product Board (PCPB) and Agrochemicals Association of Kenya (AAK) the umbrella organization in Kenya for manufacturers, formulators, re-packers, importers, distributors, farmers and users of pest control products (pesticides).

Disease and pests are major causes of crop losses mainly caused by reduced saleable quality, physical damage, losses of aesthetic value and increased costs of curative chemical. World population has been on increasing trend and changes in life style have also created higher demand for cut flowers over time. Higher demand has led to many suppliers wanting to fetch high prices offered by the market. Chemical use without regulation has led to degradation of environment, harmful to non-target beneficial natural environment, damage to non-target crop and human health. European retailers are pushing for reduction of synthetic chemical residue level in flowers because of the negative impact on their businesses as a result of adverse publicity associated with high pesticide use. Holistic preventive programme aims at using less of chemical based pesticides and more of biologicals in a routine prophylactic application of natural enemies and bio pesticides. Bio-products do not have knock down effect but are slow and sure if they are applied early and continuously all year round to give time for spores to build if they are not prevented from growing.

Background of RealPM:

Founded in 2003 by owners Louise Labuschagne and Dr. Henry Wainwright, Real IPM now employs 250 staff (both permanent and temporary) and has its headquarters in Thika, Kenya, where high quality predatory mites are produced under license from Syngenta Bioline. The biopesticides are produced in the laboratories in Thika. RealIPM has global rights to several isolates of Metarhizium under license from ICIPE International Research Institute. The biopesticides products are registered and marketed in Kenya, Ethiopia, Ghana, Tanzania, Mozambique and South Africa. RealIPM has a mission to develop low cost biological solutions and holistic RealIPM Programmes to proactively reduce the use of chemical pesticides. This is in line with their vision of supporting and offering bio-control consultancy services on real farming with bio-intensive IPM programmes and become the mainstream support to both large and small-scale farmers of any crop, in any country.

The products developed by RealIPM are mainly used by flower farmers that need to abide by international regulations where their produce is finally consumed. Kenya is the largest supplier to the EU representing 31% of their imports. The major market for Kenyan flowers is Holland with 69% of all the Kenyan flower exports through the Dutch auctions Dolan and Humphrey (2000). The Holland market just like other EU countries has strict standards that have to be met by all companies exporting to EU. One such regulation is in reduction of synthetic chemical residue level in flowers (EU Directive 2000/42/EC). The implication of this is that companies producing pesticides must reduce the level of synthetic chemical used in the production of chemicals/pesticides. Alternatively, the companies need to produce bio-products that can perform the same role without leaving any synthetic chemical residue (Pesticides Control Product Board). The major problem arising from bio-products is that the growers see it as a new concept and are slow in accepting. This has created competition between chemical based pesticides and biological pesticides. For the pest control industry players to survive it will be important to build mutually beneficial relationships that help in articulating respective industry and customer issues that lead to the development of effective products.

THEORETICAL REVIEW:

Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing:

Robert M. Morgan and Shelby D Hunt discussed commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing which says that two fundamental factors; trust and commitment, must exist for a relationship to be successful. Relationship marketing involves forming bonds with customers by meeting their needs and honouring commitments. Rather than chasing short-term profits, businesses following the principles of relationship marketing forge long-lasting bonds with their customers. As a result, customers trust these businesses, and the mutual loyalty helps both parties fulfil their needs.The commitment-trust theory draws its concept from the political economy theory. The theory argues that power wielded by one party in an exchange process can lead to the other party to behave in a certain manner. This theory assumes that trust and commitment overpowers all other contextual issues together with the exchange partner power which can be used to determine relationship success. Hunt and Morgan (1994), justified the role of being committed and trust in putting forward relationship marketing by insisting that they encourage marketers to work at preserving the relationship investments. Commitment to relationship according to this theory is the enduring desire to keep a valued relationship which can be well related to customer versus organization.

The relationship marketing orientation to the internal environment of the company is conducted through internal marketing. RealIPM Limited Company need to understand the essence of trust and commitment to gain a higher market share and retain the existing customers. There is need to determine and satisfy the needs of employees promotes their motivation and retention, and therefore the company will be in a better position to deliver a better quality of products and services necessary to the satisfaction of external customers. On the other hand trust as per this theory is the willingness to rely on a partner whom one can fully confide in. RealIPM Limited Company must be willing to rely on its customers and confide in them. This will give more confidence to the customers who in return will be loyal and ultimately increase the sales of the organization.

Customer loyalty theory:

The customer loyalty theory, which is further discussed by Reynolds (2016), as being based on the consideration of some demographic variables, was developed over years of research studying the habits of consumers. The theory attempts to define what drives loyalty in customers and can represent an effective tool for gaining and retaining your hard-won patrons. Business owners who witness repeat customers know on an intuitive level that customer loyalty is an invaluable commodity. Incorporating the precepts of the customer loyalty theory into daily dealings can influence the creation of more business.

Customer loyalty theory is and extension of the social exchange theory which was put forward by Thibault and Kelley (1959). The theory postulates that all human relationships are formed by the use of a subjective cost benefit analysis in comparison with alternatives that people develop relationships that lead to greatest profits. The theory further states that whenever in a relationship and the cost exceed the rewards people are likely to seek ways to dissolve such a relationship. Customer Relationship marketing theory maintains that consumers enter or establish relationships with organizations when they believe that the benefits derived from such relations will exceed the costs. This now is particularly in reference to the organizational performance since the termination of such relationships by customers will mean losing revenue and poor performance as the overall effect. In this study, both social exchange theory and customer loyalty theory will be used to illustrate how customer loyalty affects performance of an organization.

Conceptual Framework:

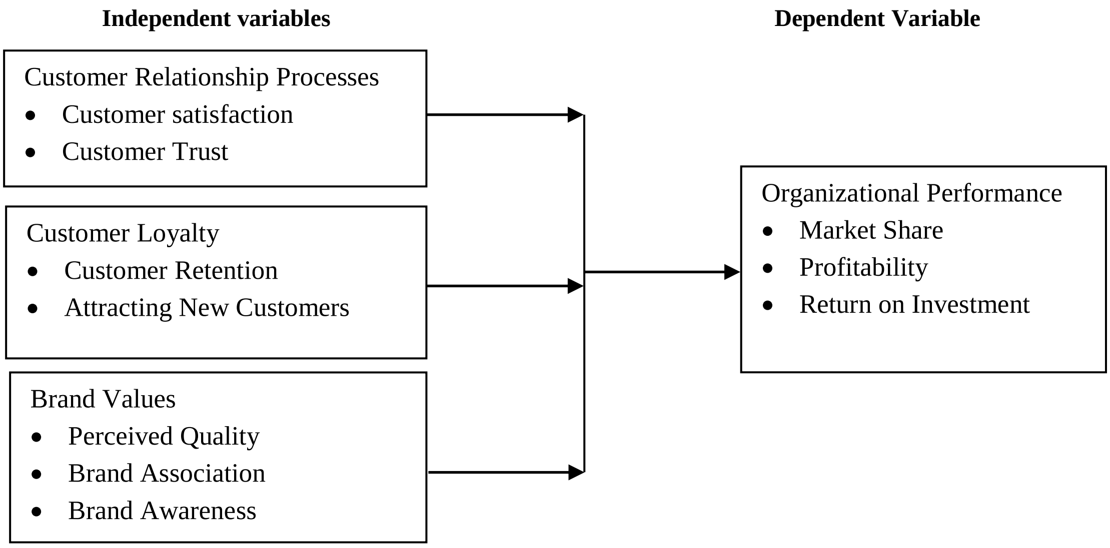

Fig 1: Conceptual Framework

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive research design. Target population was 185 employees working at RealIPM Limited Company in Kenya. Due to the nature of this study stratified random sampling technique was employed where departments formed different strata to allow representation of the whole organisation. Five key departments' strata include: sales department, quality control department, training department, production department and administration department. This design allowed for generalization of a larger population with a margin of error that is statistically determinable. The sample size was 30% of the target population in equal ratio to the five key departments. Questionnaire was used as a tool of collecting primary data. A pilot test was undertaken to examine reliability and validity of the questionnaire. From the result, the Cronbach alpha coefficients were all above 7.786 and therefore the questionnaires were declared reliable for generalization of results. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to run the analysis. Descriptive statistics in terms of means, standard deviations and mode were analyses to produce frequency distribution and percentages. Inferential statistics were analysed using regression analysis and ANOVA.

V. DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

Response rate of the questionnaires was 90%. Men were found to be more than women at 60%. Majority of the respondents (65%) had been with the organization for more than six years. In addition, all the respondents had post-secondary education either in tertiary institutions or university.

Descriptive Statistics:

The first objective of the study was to examine the effect of customer relationship processes on organizational performance in crop protection industry in Kenya. The main customer relationship process factors identified included long term relationships, the organisation treating each customer individually and uniquely, the organization genuinely building personal dialogues with customers, the organization creating highly personalised solutions for customers; the organisation builds customer trust and builds customer satisfaction.

From the responses given customer relationship process factors had an overall mean of 4.41 out of 5 implying it had an effect on customer relationship factors. The factor ‘the organisation is seeking to treat each customer individually and uniquely’ had a mean of 4.85 which was the highest mean among the factors investigated. The responses showed that customer relationships building both trust and satisfaction with the mean of 3.26 which is the lowest mean among the factors investigated. On whether customers want a long term relationship with the company the mean was 4.72. Whether the organisation genuinely builds personal dialogues with the customer has a mean of 4.5 and finally whether the organisation provides highly personalised solutions for customers has a mean of 4.72.

From the standard deviations, the customer relationship factors don’t seem to be so different as the highest deviation is 1.1. This shows that many of the respondents responded almost in a similar manner and there were no major deviations amongst them making the findings reliable. The findings deduce that the customer relationship process has a positive influence on the organizational performance. This corroborates Rao and Perry (2002) in their states and stages theories where rise of relationships is is termed as evolutionary process over a certain period of time and can be attributed to organizational performance.

The second objective of the study was to determine the effect of customer loyalty on organizational performance in crop protection industry in Kenya. The main factors identified as customer loyalty factors were customer retention, the need to satisfy customers, attracting new customers, creation of loyal customers, appreciation of loyal customers and reward to employees. From the responses customer loyalty had an overall mean of 3.369 out of 5 implying that it had an effect on organizational performance in crop protection industry. From the responses, reward to employees who develop and retain customers had the highest mean of 3.5. This was closely followed by seeking to retain existing customers with a mean of 3.443 followed by need to satisfy customers’ needs at mean of 3.409. Attracting new customers had a mean of 3.284 while involving employee staff to create loyal customers had the least mean of 3.25. It is important to also note that the standard deviation was 0.971 which shows closeness of the respondents views on customer royalty as a contributor of organizational performance. This corroborates Grewal and Levy (2014) that customer loyalty can be maintained if a firm develops value-based strategies for retaining loyal customers and provide outstanding customer services. It can be concluded that RealIPM have strategies to maintain its customers and is interested in achieving and maintaining their customers.

The third and final objective was to examine whether brand values built through marketing strategies affects organizational performance in crop protection industry in Kenya. The brand value factors identified for examination were brand quality, the level of awareness, complaint of customers, addressing customer complaints, and the level of association with the brand. From the responses given brand value factors had an overall mean of 3.6 out of 5. This indicates largely agreement on the effect of brand value on organizational performance. The standard deviation is also low (0.931) showing similarity of the views of the respondents.

Brand quality meeting customer needs had the highest mean of 3.807 was followed by level of association with brand at 3.761. This was followed by the level of awareness of the brand at 3.375, followed closely by frequency of customers complains on the brand at 3.727. The question of whether respondents were informed of customer complaints had the lowest mean of 3.33. The findings confirm those of Caroline (2012) where contemporary and strategic approaches are said to create the brand management which then is able to boost the brand value in the long run and ultimately able to raise organizational performance. This is done through brand owner’s creation, maintenance and distribution of the brand.

Inferential Statistics:

The correlation coefficient (R) between CRM and organization performance was 0.706 which depicted a strong positive relationship. The coefficient of determination (R Square) of 0.499 indicated that the model explained 49.9% of the variation or change in the dependent variable (organizational performance). The rest (50.1%) is contributed by other factors not considered in this model.

Regression Coefficients – CRM and Organizational Performance:

Table 1 shows the coefficients that explained the relationship between CRM and organizational performance in the crop protection industry in Kenya. The Beta coefficients indicated the extent to which a unit change in the independent variable (CRM) caused a change in the dependent variable (organizational performance). The Beta coefficients were positive indicating that a unit change in the independent variable leads to a positive change the dependent variable. This means that a unit change in customer relationship process, customer loyalty and brand value lead to 0.768, 0.722 and 0.504 units of positive change respectively on organizational performance. The table also indicates that all the variables are significant as their p-value was less than p=0.05. We therefore conclude that CRM had a significant positive relationship with the organizational performance of the crop protection industry in Kenya. This corroborates with the findings of Kurniati *et al.*, (2015) who found that CRM had positive significant relationship with corporate image which eventually could lead to higher performance. It also agree with Al-Hersh *et al.*, (2014) who found CRM having a positive significant relationship with market share.

Table 1: Regression Coefficients

Indicator	B	Beta	Std. Error	T	Sig.
Constant	2.881		1.267	2.274	0.025
Customer Relationship Process	0.768	0.688	0.87	8.788	0.000
Customer Loyalty	0.722	0.701	0.72	8.652	0.001
Brand Value	0.504	0.497	0.96	6.785	0.021
a:Dependent variable : Organizational Performance					

From Table 1, the regression model linking CRM and organizational performance in crop protection industry can thus be completed with the findings where β_1 is 0.768, β_2 is .722, and β_3 is 0.504. The estimated organizational performance is thus achieved using the equation below

$Y = 2.881 + 0.768X_1 + 0.722X_2 + 0.504X_3 + \varepsilon$

As stated above, α is 0.05 which is above the obtained p-values on figure 1. This means that the model is significant and therefore we can conclude that CMR has a positive effect on organizational performance of the crop protection industry in Kenya. These findings corroborate Bean (2009) who found that customer relationship processes can revolutionize the way an organization performs. It can help to be more competitive, ensure that the organization has the ability to turn more new clients into repeat clients and create cooperation among the various departments. In addition, Warren, Govert and Michele (2003) also found that customer relationship marketing can work well with the performance of agricultural organizations such as crop protection industry. The findings also confirms commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing by Hunt and Morgan (1994) which justifies the role of being committed and trust in putting forward relationship marketing by insisting that marketers should work at preserving the relationship investments for organizational performance growth.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES SUGGESTED

Based on the study findings and presentations, the study recommends that customer relationship marketing needs to continue identifying and improving customer relationship processes and factors that have impact on organisational performance. As part of customer relationship process, RealIPM will need to invest more on research and development on ways to make the relationship with customers to last as long as possible. The organisation will need to keep treating each customer as an independent individual with unique characteristics, understanding their needs and building genuine personal dialogues with them. The recommending also goes to organisations to try to create highly personalized solutions for customers and to earn or build their trust.

On customer loyalty, the study recommends involvement of staff to create customer loyalty. This is because they are the ones handling the new and existing customers and only motivated staff will make an impact. Another recommendation comes in terms of expressing appreciation and rewarding employees as well as rewarding loyal customers through solid reward programmes.

On brand value, the study recommends that organizations should have better ways of managing the quality of its brands. Getting regular feedback from the customers and regularly communicating with them should be encouraged. Channels of communication should be widened to use of technology available for fast response. Organizations should also embrace the international standards and guidelines on production of quality products to gain brand value from their customers and be able to compete effectively.

The study recommends further research on other marketing strategies in customer relationship marketing like brand positioning to improve performance. This is because this study shows only 49.9% is explained by CRM. Research should also be carried in the whole industry for generalization of the results.

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