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The Intervention of Organizational Characteristics in the Relationship between CRM and Organizational Performance in the Nigerian Insurance Industry

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ABSTRACT: The main objective of this study is to find out if organizational characteristics intervene in the relationship between CRM and organizational performance in the Nigerian insurance industry. Relevant literature was reviewed and a model consisting of fourteen variables was conceptualized and tested by means of empirical data collected through a questionnaire. A total of one hundred and eighty (180) copies of questionnaires were administered, one hundred and forty nine (149) copies were duly completed and returned. This represents a response rate of 82.78%. Partial correlation was used to test the hypothesis.

Findings show that organizational characteristics (companies' image and branch network) intervene in the relationship between CRM and organizational performance in the Nigerian insurance industry. The study also shows that the strength of the intervention of companies' image is stronger than that of branch network. The study recommended that insurance companies should pay attention to their companies' image and branch network as these constitutes the 'tangibles' which customers can use to judge the likely performance of the organization.

Keywords: *Organizational characteristics, CRM, Organizational performance, Insurance industry, Companies' image, Branch network*

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian insurance industry operates in an unpredictably fast changing environment in terms of customer, competition and market share. In order to survive in the dynamic business environment, the relationships form the differentiating factor in view of the similarity of services. The quality of the relationships differentiates one organization from another. Also, because relationships determine the future value of an organization, there is a need to keep a relationship score card that describes the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of the relationships (Achumba, 2006). In the current era of hyper competition, a very slight difference exists in the services provided by the major players in this industry. In such a scenario, as the services offered by these companies are homogenous and the boundaries between the offerings of major players in the industry are becoming increasingly blurred, a customer is unlikely to be overly impressed by the attributes of an offering. Hence, financial service providers should seek to find differentiating factors for their products. Organizational characteristics then become an important differentiating tool. Organizational characteristics tend to give an organization, distinctive or comparative advantage over competitors, because it enables them to display a uniqueness that cannot be easily copied by competitors.

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Adopting CRM effectively tends to give an organization distinctive or comparative advantage over competitors, because it enables effective communication with the customers and know what they need and want. It also highlights the reasons why they continue to patronize the organization's products and services, why some leave the organization, and the strategies to use to manage such relationships effectively. When long-term relationships exist between organizations and customers, the distance between them becomes shorter and the organization benefits from repeat purchase and the goodwill of the customer (Jackson, 1985; Gronroos, 1990).

Building an enduring relationship with customers is important to the survival of the insurance industry. Insurance companies can increase their profits by maximizing the profitability of the total customer relationship over time, as this is more effective on the long run than getting 'all' profit from any single transaction at the expense of a long term relationship with the customer or concentrating scarce resources on attracting new customers (Fagbemi and Olowokudejo, 2011). It has been established that it costs a company more to attract new customers than it does to retain existing ones (Achumba, 2002; Bose, 2002).

Although several researches have been carried out on the relationship between CRM and organizational performance in both developed and developing nations, there is a paucity of research involving organizational characteristic. In order to fill this gap, this paper seeks to find out if companies' image and/or branch network, which are two major organizational characteristics found to affect performance in developing countries, intervene in the relationship between CRM and organizational performance. The paper is in five sections. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. The next section presents a review of relevant literature. Section III describes the methodology used in this paper. Section IV contains the analysis of data and presents the results while Section V contains conclusions and recommendations.

Literature Review

Global changes have brought new trends, directions and new ways of doing business as well as new challenges and opportunities to financial institutions. The Nigerian insurance industry of the 21st century has entered a new era as personal attention is decreasing because of the use of technology which has replaced human contact in many application areas. Operations have changed with the advent of information communication technology, in all financial institutions, the world over. The automated teller machines (ATM) displaced cashier tellers, internet replaced the mail, credit cards and electronic cash replaced traditional cash transactions and interactive television will eventually replace face-to-face transactions (Shekhar and Gupta, 2008). But even though, the advent of ICT enhanced access to remote areas and easier payment modes, an upward mobile insurance company will pay attention to its branch network and companies' image. Dauda (2010) confirms that only about 62% of Nigerians were educated as at 2005. UNICEF (2008) also found that only 28% of Nigerians are internet savvy while Adeleke, Ibiwoye, and Olowokudejo (2012) report a high rate of cybercrime in Nigeria. All these make it almost impossible for all Nigerians to take advantage of technology. The implication of these is that a reasonably high number of the insured and potential insured with purchasing power could still need to have branches located near them for accessibility. Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2012) also pointed out that customers of intangible products like insurance services will generally rely on tangible attributes of the products they want to purchase. Companies' image is one such tangible attribute.

Different ways must be analyzed to meet customer needs (Shekhar and Gupta, 2008). Every organization is unique as all organizations use their own particular blend of approaches and methods to manage and sustain high performance. In order to compete with newly increasing competitive pressures, financial institutions must recognize the need of balancing their performance by achieving their strategic goals and meeting continuous volatile customer needs and requirements.

A review of literature reveals several ways to assess business performance. A firm's performance can be measured using financial measures (e.g. profitability, sales growth, etc.), operational indicators (e.g. market share, branch network, and companies' image, etc.), stock price or a combination of factors (Dawson and Watson, 2005). While financial performance measures have been dominantly used in the past, non-financial measures have not enjoyed the same widespread use. Different authors such as Neelankavil and Comer (2007) and Kaplan and Norton (1992) have debated about the most important metrics of measuring performance within companies. But Kirby (2005) argued that there is no single factor or metric which guarantees organizational success. Rather, high performance is a composite of many things. For instance, companies seen as highly ethical and with a reputation for caring and for social responsibility may have an edge in improving their organizational performance (Weber, 2005). Several authors (Oyeniyi and Gelade and Young, 2005; Fagbemi, 2006; Abiodun, 2008; Shaker and Alsadi, 2010; Fagbemi and Olowokudejo, 2011) have adopted the use of Increased Profit, Increased number of Customers, Customer satisfaction and Customer Retention as a measure of performance.

Customer Retention simply means keeping customers and not losing them to competitors**.** (Gronroos, 2004). The goal of customer relationships management is to convert first-time or occasional buyers into loyal, long term customers thereby reducing or totally eliminating customer defection and where there had been defection, management is to reinitiate valuable customer relationships, which have been already terminated by searching out such 'lost' customers, select valuable relationships and attempt to regain them in an effective, efficient and systematic way, Michalski (2004). Retention, if well managed leads to increased profitability.

Niraj, Gupta and Narasimhan (2001) demonstrate the use of company’s profitability to determine the success of CRM. They assess the performance of service industries using their net profit and concluded that generally organizations can be assumed to be performing better than competitors if their profit after tax is higher than that of competing firms. Zeithaml (1999) also discovered that profitability in the service industry is improved if effort is made to attract, maintain and retain customers that are found to have a high economic value. But the profitability objective of the organization is easily achieved when the customer is satisfied.

Customer satisfaction measures how well a company's products or services meet or exceed customer expectations. These expectations often reflect many aspects of the company's business activities including the actual product, service, company, and how the company operates in the global environment. Satisfaction with the product, interpersonal satisfaction, satisfaction with the price of the offering, and satisfaction with vendor performance are independent variables that have direct effects on overall satisfaction. But Organizational characteristics which are the aspects of an organization that can be identified, usually in relation to performance, usually play a vital role in the CRM-organizational performance relationship.

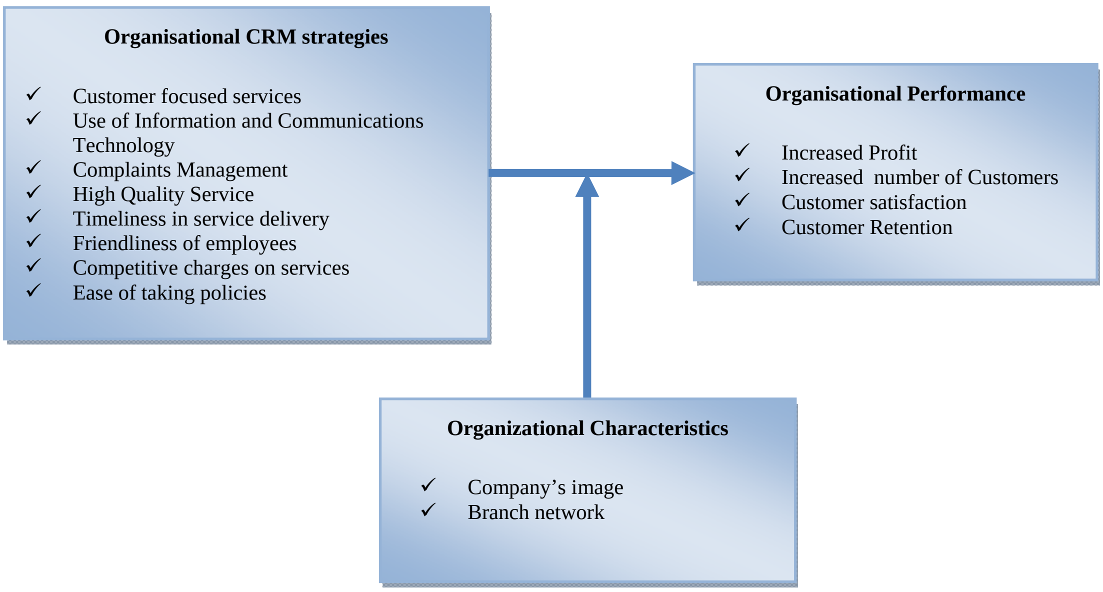
The trend towards consolidation of branches in very large branch networks has implications for both customers and the insurance companies. Consumers in developing countries have traditionally relied most heavily on branches to access financial services.

Prior research suggests that these customers face something of a trade-off in light of the growth of very large branch networks. It also suggests that, larger organizations and organizations that operate in multiple markets tend to charge higher fees and offer lower deposit rates than smaller, single-market institutions (Hannan, 2002, 2004; Park and Pennacchi, 2004; Hannan and Prager, 2004, 2006), with the implication that branch-dependent customers could face additional costs as branches are increasingly consolidated into the large branch networks of these organizations. According to Dick, (2003) depositors value geographic reach (having branches in many states and municipalities) and local branch density (having many branches of an institution in a given area) when selecting a depository/ financial institution the scope and scale of large branch network are qualities that many customers value because large branch networks offer the convenience of many possible points of contact with the institution and, potentially, the ability to avoid usage fees by staying within the insurance companies’ own network.

RESEARCH METHOD

Organizational performance was the dependent variable in this study. Researchers have offered a variety of measures of organizational performance. Subjective measures were used rather than objective measures as subjective measures can capture a wide concept of business performance. Phillip (1981) recommends that researchers should ask questions relating to business performance as straight as possible in order to remove or reduce ambiguity in response. Similarly, Fredrickson and Mitchell (1984) suggest that when there is sufficient disagreement in the responses of multiple respondents, such data should be discarded. Venkatraman and Ramanujam (1986) however pointed out the need to use multiple respondents to assess business performance in order to improve construct validity. A mix of the customers and staff in this case.

Venkatraman and Ramanujam (1986) pointed out that neither primary nor secondary data is superior to the other. According to Ford (1979), questionnaire data tend to tap more emergent phenomena compared to institutional records. Hence, we have decided to use the structured questionnaire to gather data for this study. Two variables of organizational characteristics - companies' image and branch network were used and a set of questions used to measure if these variables intervene in the relationship between CRM and organizational performance. Five Likert questions were asked to ascertain the impact of companies' image on organizational performance and two questions were also asked to ascertain the impact of branch network on organizational performance (figure 1).



Source: Researcher, 2009

Figure 1: A model of the relationship between customer relationship management and organizational performance

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data Analysis

The responses are discussed in tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Responses on company's image

	Responses *(n =288)*
Scandal free organization	
Never	5(1.7%)
Seldom	7(2.4%)
Uncertain	47(16.3%)
Sometimes	58(20.1%)
Always	161(56%)
Advertisement in the national dailies	
Never	10(3.5%)
Seldom	24(8.3%)
Uncertain	37(12.9%)
Sometimes	151(49%)
Always	30(23.3%)
Standard of services rendered	
Never	7(2.4%)
Seldom	5(1.7%)
Uncertain	59(20.5%)
Sometimes	74(25.7%)
Always	135(46.9%)
Social Responsibility	
Never	9(3.1%)
Seldom	15(5.2%)
Uncertain	81(28.1%)
Sometimes	90(31.3%)
Always	79(27.4%)
Image around the country	
Never	3(1.1%)
Seldom	5(1.7%)
Uncertain	47(16.3%)
Sometimes	63(21.9%)
Always	160(55.6%)

Source: *Field survey, 2010*

Table 2: Responses on branch network

	Customer *(n = 149)*
Location of branches in every state in Nigeria	
Never	13(4.5%)
Seldom	13(4.5%)
Uncertain	98(34%)
Sometimes	72(25%)
Always	77(26.7%)
Accessibility to customers	
Never	4(1.4%)
Seldom	7(2.4%)
Uncertain	23(8%)
Sometimes	58(20.1%)
Always	189(65.6%)

Source: *Field survey, 2010*

Company's Image

Two questions were asked to determine people's perception of companies' image. The responses to these questions are presented in table 1.

I. Scandal free organization: Most of the respondents (76.1%) believe that their organizations are sometimes or always scandal free. 16.3% of the respondents are uncertain while 4.1% claim that their organizations are never scandal free.

II. Advertisement in the national dailies: Over seventy percent (72.3%) of the respondents claim that they always or sometimes advertise the services offered by their organization in the dailies, 12.9% claim to be uncertain about the advert situation of their company, while 11.8% claim that they seldom or never advertise.

III. Standard of services rendered: Most (72.6%) of the respondents believe that their services are always or sometimes of international standard. 12.9% are uncertain, 4.1% chose 'seldom or never'.

IV. Social Responsibility: The respondents were asked if their organization undertake community development projects in their environment. Their responses show that 58.7% of the respondents believe that their organization always or sometimes undertake community development projects in their environment. 28.1% chose 'uncertain' and 8.3% chose 'seldom or never'.

Image: When asked if their organization has a positive image around the country, 77.5% answered in the affirmative, 16.3% were 'uncertain' and 2.8% have chosen 'seldom or never'.

Branch Network

Customers usually appreciate personalized conveniences such as neighborhood branches, located in places that are within their reach. Two questions were asked to determine the organizational characteristics of the selected financial institutions. The responses to these questions are presented in table 2.

I. Location: Responses show that 51.7% of the respondents claim that their organization have branches in almost every state in Nigeria. 34% claim to be uncertain while 9% chose 'seldom or never'.

II. Accessibility: Most of the respondents (85.7%) are of the opinion that their organization always or sometimes locates their branches where it will be easily accessible to them. 8% are however uncertain if their organization locates branches where it will be easily accessible while 3.8% chose seldom or never.

Hypothesis Testing

A hypothesis was used to test whether organizational characteristics intervene in the relationship between CRM and organizational performance in insurance companies. The Hypothesis, H_0 is stated below:

H_0: Organizational characteristics do not intervene in the relationship between CRM and organizational performance in the Nigerian insurance industry.

The partial correlation was used to test the significance of two organizational characteristics variables - branch network and companies' image. Using each of these variables as the control variable the results from the analysis are presented in tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Partial correlation to test the intervention of companies' image between CRM and organizational performance relationship

Control Variable			customer retention	customer satisfaction	Increase in profit	Increase in market share
companies image	customer focused service	Correlation	0.256*	0.269*	0.319*	0.367*
		P-value	0.009	0.001	0.007	0.017
	ICT	Correlation	0.188*	0.31*	0.292*	0.367*
		P-value	0.015	0.006	0.001	0.017
	complaints management	Correlation	0.18*	0.32*	0.427*	0.615*
		P-value	0.007	0.001	0.005	0.007
	high quality service	Correlation	265*	0.8*	0.627*	0.71*
		P-value	0.026	0	0.012	0
	timeliness in service delivery	Correlation	0.218*	0.295	0.637*	0.260*
		P-value	0.033	0.425	0.042	0.033
	Friendliness of employees	Correlation	0.217*	0.289*	0.311*	0.353*
		P-value	0.027	0.11	0.005	0.029
	competitive charges on services	Correlation	0.172	0.191	0.354*	0.442*
		P-value	0.46	0.122	0.005	0.004
	ease of taking policies	Correlation	0.192	0.059	0.401	0.181
		P-value	0.081	0.291	0.081	0.097

Source: *Field survey, 2010* * Correlation is significant at the 0.05level

Table 4: Partial correlation to test the Intervention of branch network between CRM and organizational performance relationship

Control Variable			customer retention	customer satisfaction	Increase in profit	Increase in market share
companies image	customer focused service	Correlation	0.311*	0.343*	0.298*	0.197*
		P-value	0.002	0	0.002	0.016
	ICT	Correlation	0.245*	0.356*	0.430*	0.278*
		P-value	0.018	0.001	0.004	0.024
	complaints management	Correlation	0.264*	0.377*	0.276*	0.381*
		P-value	0.009	0	0.003	0.003
	high quality service	Correlation	0.356*	0.470*	0.351*	0.0231*
		P-value	0.002	0	0.016	0.005
	timeliness in service delivery	Correlation	0.327*	0.392*	0.432*	0.562*
		P-value	0.002	0.002	0.008	0.004
	Friendliness of employees	Correlation	0.311*	0.381*	0.371*	0.483*
		P-value	0	0	0.001	0.003
	competitive charges on services	Correlation	0.317*	0.319*	0.440*	0.461*
		P-value	0.003	0.001	0.023	0.003
	ease of taking policies	Correlation	0.313	0.221	0.163	0.23
		P-value	0.064	0.072	0.079	0.124

Source: *Field survey, 2010* * Correlation is significant at the 0.05level

Holding Companies' Image as the Intervening Variable

The p values of the computed partial correlation between customer focused service, Information and communication technology, complaint management, high quality service, friendliness of employees, timeliness in service delivery and the four variables of organizational performance are less than 0.05 Also the p values of the partial correlation between competitive charges on services and 'increase in profit and increase in market share are all less than 0.05. This signifies that there is a significant correlation between these variables. However, the p values of the computed partial correlation between timeliness in service delivery and customer satisfaction; between competitive charges on services and both customer retention and customer satisfaction and between ease of taking policies and the four variables of organizational performance are greater than 0.05 thus signifying no significant correlation between these variables and the organizational performance variables.

Holding Branch Network as an Intervening Variable

The p values of the computed partial correlation between customer focused service, Information and communication technology, complaint management, High quality service, timeliness in service, friendliness of employees, competitive charges on services and the four variables of organizational performance are less than 0.05, signifying that there is a significant correlation between these variables. On the other hand, the p values of the partial correlation between ease of taking policies and the four variables of organizational performance are all greater than 0.05. This signifies that there is no significant correlation between this variable and the organizational performance variables.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study set out to examine if organizational characteristics intervene in the relationship between customer relationship management and organizational performance in the Nigerian insurance industry. The CRM variables of this study are Customer Focused Services, Information and Communication Technology, Complaints Management, High Quality Service, Timeliness in Service Delivery, Friendliness of Employees, Ease of taking policies, Competitive Charges on Services. The organizational characteristics variables are companies' image and branch network and the two organizational performance variables are customer satisfaction and customer retention, increase in profit and increase in market share.

Analysis to identify the organizational characteristics that intervene in the relationship between CRM and organizational performance confirm that both companies image and branch network intervenes in the relationship between all the CRM variables and the organizational performance variables (except ease of taking policies) in the insurance industry. This is because potential customers of an intangible product, like insurance, which also usually runs for several years (e.g. life insurance) generally rely on the tangible attributes of the product such as companies' image and branch network before they commit themselves to a relationship with a company and also, because insurance services, in most cases have perfect substitutes, therefore they can easily get the service desired from other competing firms and also because it is almost impossible to separate a service from the service provider, they tend to compare companies based on what they can see, their previous service experience (Bolton et al., 2000) and that of 'significant others'(Johnston, 1995). Therefore, organizations should recognize the importance of the image they build for themselves and the spread of their branch network to the survival, growth and enhanced performance of their organization.

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